

“Christian Culture” and the Contemporary Romanian Social Life

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THE KEY term of this paper, as reflected in the title, is “Christian culture.” The way one understands the concept determines a specific perspective. Despite its apparent clarity, the interpretation given by contemporary analysts may lead us to specific conclusions as a diagnosis of the present, as well as a prospect for the future. There are two main paradigms one can easily identify. A first one describes Christian culture as one of the multiple forms of culture, accepted as part of a legacy, individual as well as communitarian, manifested in specific circles (generally ecclesiastical, or connected with them), studied together with some other cultures. A second one, proclaimed and supported for a long time in European history, describes culture in terms of Christianity, recognizing the role of the Gospel in the construction of the cultural and social life. This second perspective is less accepted and even banned in contemporary times.

Culture, a Possible Semantics

FOR A CLEAR analysis, it is necessary to resort to the dictionary in search of the meaning of “culture.” Firstly, the *Cambridge Dictionary* defines the concept as “the way of life, especially the general customs and beliefs, of a particular group of people at a particular time.” In the *Romanian Explanatory Dictionary*, a more detailed definition is provided:

the totality of material and spiritual values created by humankind and the necessary institutions for the communication of these values; possessing a wide range of knowledge in various fields; a set of activities and patterns of behavior specific to a given social group, transmissible through education.

The first definition seems to have a limited application to a specific group of people, proposing therefore a quite subjective and variable content of culture. The latter enlarges its relevance and application to wider area, indicating a specific common substance for culture in its diversity, based on human life in general.

Three levels are present in the definition of culture given above, illustrating its complex and extensive application. Firstly, it points to a set of values gathered over time,

transferred from one generation to another. Thus, it reflects a dynamic existence, called tradition, as a depository, not in an archaeological sense, but connected with life itself in its dynamic evolution. It also reflects the institutions established in order to apply it. This first level has a retrospective-synthesizing character. The key expression here is “communitarian dimension.” The second level refers to an individual assumption of this set of values, as personal and permanent becoming, within and conditioned by them, in a specific context, geographical and historical, and in a dialogical variant with the society to which it belongs and which generates it. The third level corresponds to its transmission by means of education, which becomes a way of communicating culture. It is here that one may find its pedagogical component.

I will argue that there are mainly two components of culture: a substance—a nucleus, a set of founding values, a common substrate—and its manifestations, which occur in various areas of human life (arts, literature, science etc.). There is a mutual dynamics between the core of culture and its fields of manifestation, an interaction of various intensities, which may, however, escalate into conflicts, even destructive competitions. The obvious and immediate effect could be the change, even the reversal of roles, to the point of isolating areas that could have once played a founding role. This way, what was once generally accepted, playing a central role, could today very well acquire niche value or even be banned. The core area seems to be disputed and insecure.

This rapid, unpredictable and profound change is quite obvious in today’s society. The various fields of culture meet and carry out a dialogue, but not always from equal positions. That is why the encounter between them and the changes that this situation implies, when they do not occur organically, but forcibly, might turn into cultural and religious aggression. This can take place starting from a reductive understanding of what culture means—“as an abstract reality, as a mental-intellectual structure, as a kind of independent mechanism from which certain elements, certain concepts can be extrapolated, certain values, certain meanings to replace them with others.”¹ In these situations, we can speak about real cultural dramas, which may also cause essential changes in anthropology.² This occurred in the totalitarian regimes, and yet the postmodern capitalist regimes are no strangers to this danger.

Christian Culture and the “Recent Man”³

REGARDING THE addition of “Christian” to culture, I will argue the second position evoked in the introduction. “Christian culture” is not simply a specific culture, among various other types, but it is a fundamental component of the large concept of culture, visible or diffuse (in contemporary terms, secularized forms).

For a long time in history, Christianity has been referred to as a substance of culture, sometimes manifesting its original role in a destructive hegemonic form, at least in certain specific geographies and theologies. Different sectors of culture reflected a certain path depending on the founding value of the Gospel. This is true for the arts, education, printing, philosophy, music and so on. But this relationship gradually changes with the

advent of modernity. The Christian message loses its central place and becomes one of its forms of manifestation. This direction finds its maximum development in contemporaneity, when religion seems to be isolated from the public to the private space (or virtual space, as a new category), a reality described by the concept "privatization of faith."⁴ Culture must be "liberated" from the religious element. This is the thesis often proclaimed in the public space. The construction of such a vision seems to be based on an "ungrateful reaction" to the founding role of Christianity and an intentional amnesia underpinning the "recent man," without memory and tradition, religious or cultural, in general. In this regard, I will quote V. Ivanov, who describes this tendency and identifies certain effects that this change might have:

Forgetting tries to organize itself on the basis of radical denial of spirituality, at a material level, counterfeiting true culture, which is the organization of spiritual memory. After all, those who predict oblivion undermine religion, while, on the other hand, the destroyers of religion are, inevitably, in terms of culture, iconoclasts and falsifiers.⁵

It is not my intention to adopt an offensive or even a defensive attitude, but rather to argue the precarious assumption of the Gospel in social life, coming closely to the Romanian area. I will make a short 'methodological' retrospective commencing from this premise—one might find in history a cultural signification of theology and, the other way round, a theological signification of culture. In other words, one might find a cultural conditioning of theology and a cultural role of theology. That is the presence of a spiritual perspective upon world and life, in general, given by the "divine light," which used to give "the clarity of the mind." Early modernity had this very idea in the mind when describing the transformation as "Enlightenment" and "Renaissance," both originally Christian concepts. It is also true that at that very stage culture and spirituality seem to have divorced, following different paths.

The Gospel had at the core of its substance the resurrection of Christ (the Son of God), a dogma that used to be an epistemology of life and living, generating a specific culture, which we referred to as "Christian culture." In its original meaning, this teaching described a methodology on two levels—cataphatic and apophatic—that is, something which can be understood and expressed and something mysterious, accessible to be experienced and less to be communicated. World and life meant facts, but also mystery, natural revelation and its correspondent knowledge and superrational revelation (spiritual) and its specific form of knowledge. Later on, the declaration of God's death, while making the cross the final state, had concrete repercussions in culture. The Author disappeared, so the mind consecrated gods instead of Him, by the fear of the voids, manifested in different atheistic ideologies. In this time, an antitheological perspective was generated, based on the transformation of God's identity—"I am Who I am" (Gen. 3:15) in "I am Who I am not," by declaring God's death.

Paradoxically, even this antitheology bases itself on a theological (Christian) perspective, by means of antithesis. It is a semantic condition given by the "obsession with sense." At this very level, one can grasp the logocentric character of culture, based on the cataphatic dimension of the word. Thus, even in a secularized understanding, culture

shows its theological foundation. Everything is constructed “on sense,” that is “theologically.” Thus, the development of culture and social life, in general, in Europa Christiana is conditioned by the Gospel, validating its Christian origin, but also pointing to some serious ulterior differences. Culture, in a secularized application (on the “dogma” of the death of God) reflects the cataphatic sense of the human world and life (natural knowledge), while the Christian culture, cataphatically and apophatically expressed, brings the human to completion (natural and spiritual knowledge). Everything down in the world is an icon of the spiritual realities, up in God’s Kingdom, including the human element. So, it is not simply about imitating, but more about “iconizing” the original reality.

Assuming Christian Culture in Romanian Social Life in Recent Times

THERE ARE two recent periods that I will refer to regarding Romanian social and ecclesiastical life. We have the communist regime (1945–1989), manifestly atheistic and anti-ecclesial, and the period following the Romanian Revolution of 1989, which seems to split into two different stages.

Christian culture during the communist regime mainly showed discernment. The gospel intensively illuminates in the middle of darkness (Jn. 1:5). During that time the distinction between good and evil in terms of moral behavior was well represented, not so much quantitatively, but rather qualitatively. The facts were a matter of choice—to collaborate with the regime so as to have a comfortable life, or to stand firmly in faith and moral behavior until the point of facing punishment, prison, and even death (martyria).

To live with and within Christian culture during that time meant to be able to intuit signs, symbols, phrases colligated with life, read in an ultimate sense. That is, in between life and death. There were three essential questions: “How can man behave in difficult times?” “How could man know what is good and bad?” and “What about suffering? Is it an ultimate reality?” It was all about significations, but especially about facts. The Romanian society during this period brought together both behaviors—collaborators with the regime (evil) as well as martyrs in both senses (confessing and dying for the faith). Christian culture manifested itself in denouncing the evil and proclaiming the Cross amid harsh living conditions, in the numerous prisons⁶ and in daily social life, “in a hidden way” (Col. 3:3). One may speak about Church life, manifesting itself partially and under restrictive conditions, and more about Christian life, spiritually orientated in private, occasionally, in the Church, or in a ‘disguised’ way in the social area.

The visible challenge of that time or any difficult period was the courage to paradoxically follow “a Mortal God,” mirroring the philosophical and ideological proclamation of God’s death. The cross and death were not to be admired, but to be followed.⁷ And this was a way of living that we call “Christian culture.” Moreover, one may find the “Christian variant” of the “new man,” “new life” and “new world,” announced by the

book of Revelation (21: 1–5), face to face with the “new man” and the “new world” proclaimed by the Marxist ideology. Similar concepts, but with a completely different content and orientation. The ideological “new man” was an anthropological-social construct, while the biblical “new man” goes towards a Person—the God-Man Jesus Christ, and from here the theanthropic construction of life. In this project of creating the “new man” and anticipating by that the “new world,” each person becomes part of the divine renewal, when, in the end, evil will be defeated. During this period a specific literature was produced, describing the spiritual experiences lived out especially in prisons, but not exclusively there.⁸

One may observe here the deep and the “serious” character of Christian culture. It was lived out mostly implicitly, but also explicitly, by strong personalities, facing suffering and death. In fact, the very content of Christian faith is suffering itself. This is why it is not at all commercial, entertaining, or comfortable. For the Church and for Romanian social life, this period reflects Christian culture as a way of survival, the metaphysical orientation was the necessary component of life, which strengthened humans to face the absurd times they were obliged to pass through.

The second period, following the fall of the communist regime, as mentioned above, brought with it, in the first phase, an explicit opening towards religious life and the Church. The social movements of 1989 were accompanied by Christian songs and prayers—“Our Father,” “God is with us,” “God exists,” “we’ll die and we’ll be free,” “freedom, we love you, either we’ll be victorious, or we’ll die” were shouted out on the streets. This was the dominant direction throughout the first two decades following this historical moment. The major religious reforms were correlated with the introduction of the discipline of Religion in the school curriculum, the reestablishment of the Greek-Catholic Church, the financial support for priests and non-clerical employees by the state, the construction of numerous churches and social institutions run by the Church. Then there was an extensive process involving the publication of religious books, the founding of theological seminaries and faculties, religious foundations and schools, and the organization of a large network of pilgrimages in and outside the country. All along, politics was visibly oriented in favor of the Church institution and its representatives. It was quite fashionable to see politicians next to Church leaders attending great festivals. This was the visible explicit manifestation of Christian culture, which went along with the implicit Christian behavior. If before ’89 religious knowledge was scarce, acquired in the family or in the social rural space, lacking any religious education, the period that followed offered the possibility of confessionally studying Religion in school. This was doubled by different catechism programs run in the Church. So, theoretically, one can observe a generous access to Christian culture by all these means.

The second phase of this period is marked by a change of direction, generated by the different influences of progressive nuances, manifestly against the Christian perspective. This reconfiguration seems to be of great interest especially for the young generation, which feels it necessary “to free” itself from tradition, old customs, religious or cultural discrimination, in the name of “a new society,” presumably honest and pure, freed from any political adultery, associated with the former political regimes.

There is a serious change of mentality underpinning the concept of culture which is nowadays reaching Romania. Regarding the area of interest for this paper, this sub-period proclaims “a culture of freedom” or, as a consequence, “the democratization of culture.”⁹ One can identify here a shift between culture as quality, achieved by education, individual and social progress, in a way attributed to the elites, to culture as a way of life, with everything it entails. This latter variant refers to quantity, belonging to the masses. In a way, this culture has the duty to accommodate or even to entertain the people. In the same framework, one proposes the concept of “free culture,” in the sense of offering it without any struggle, not inestimable, but “without a price,” that is, without quality. The same marketing drive towards the mass of the people, promoting a quantitative perception. This may reveal an “axiological disorder,”¹⁰ as Teodor Baconschi puts it. In the same line, its “global” vestment is visible day by day, systematically neglecting or denying its specific dimension. Occasionally, it may also serve a specific ideology, making propaganda by means of the mass-media. Lastly, I will add a new contemporary proposal regarding culture. It is about “culture as information,” hence the “infomania” and the “news culture” developed in the public square, accessible to everybody. Because of its quantity and rapid movement, of the lack of truth criteria paired with the weak interest to verify it on the side of the receptor, one may easily conclude that “news is a vehicle for human error.”¹¹

The religious component is not very often present within what we might define today as culture, but rather, occasionally, the attitudes reflect a visible opposition regarding its presence in its formulation—literary, artistic, musical, and so on. It is no longer “fashionable,” because of its formulated objective criteria in reading and living out the individual or the social life. In this context, I will mention three challenges regarding Christian culture and faith in the public space as they occurred in the last years in Romania.

The first one took place in 2006. It was about the initiative to remove the icons from the public schools. After the fall of the communist regime, instead of the president’s picture, icons were introduced in public schools. It was a victory of what we referred to as “Christian culture.”

The second moment to mention is the project to eliminate Religion from the curricula of public schools in 2014. There was a long discussion as to whether students should learn Religion confessionally, the History of Religion, or even Ethics instead of it. Again, a victory of a democratic society that was highly Christian-oriented after ’89 was put into question. This initiative reflected the change in mentality—Religion was no longer associated with life, in general (religious, ethical, and ethnic), but was seen as a field, next to other social domains, present in the school curricula. Finally, by the will of the majority of parents, it remained as part of the core curriculum, with students having the possibility to renounce studying it following the submission of a written request.¹²

The third one is well represented in the campaign against the modification of the Constitution by referendum which took place in 2018, regarding the definition of the family in traditional terms, “between a man and a woman.”¹³ Despite the fact that the majority of the population is still “traditionally” oriented regarding this topic, after a

strong politicization and a confusing journalistic campaign, the initiative failed because of the low turnout.¹⁴

These examples help us understand the transformation of the Romanian mentality regarding "Christian culture" in a visible, public way. And yet, this external manifestation extends its effects in reference with inner life as well and the capacity of discerning things. Christian culture mostly presupposes or presupposed a kind of "methodology" and a specific set of instruments to read reality and to interpret it. What is visible more and more in this framework is not simply the lack of a minimal religious education, but rather of the elements necessary to interpret life. It is also true that culture, throughout time, tried to take place of religious culture, and it partially managed to do so in the past. But, unfortunately, in our days, it is even more difficult for it to read the signs of the present, because of its transformation and association with all it presupposes, "the culture of life" as a mass-reality, without any clear axiological principles to define its essence.

The aim of my paper in this context is to indicate the role that "Christian culture" and its specific "methodology" may play in (post)modern times. Our contemporary society urgently needs "objective criteria" for interpreting and constructing life, presumably the transcendence of the world and life. I will call it, more specifically, "spiritual culture."

The Necessity of Recovering Christian Culture in Today's Social Life

AFTER THIS long diagnosis of the Romanian contemporary mentality and social life, the next section of this paper will be dedicated to a prognosis, in the sense of prophetically trying to offer some directions from the perspective of maintaining, recovering and proposing a "Christian culture" as a means of reading and interpreting life; if not presumably confessional, at least accepted as spiritual, in the broader sense of the word.

We are invited to accept both dimensions of culture, high and low, in order to achieve a more complete image of the meaning of this concept and its possible role in nowadays society. On one hand, culture means message, proclamation, education, intellectual position, high standards, deep understanding and orientation. On the other hand, culture means ethnicity, language, customs, behavior, profession. This latter signification comes closer to the meaning of world and life, in general. A balanced position will take into consideration both senses as two dimensions of one reality, necessarily interconnected. It is about transformation and progress, from bottom to top, but at the same time it has to reflect and affect life, from top to bottom. Culture means information and formation and consequently, concrete life. The high level creates an intertexture for the mentality of and about life and, finally, for life itself.

Christian culture reflects what European identity is. The nations of the European Union are historically Christian and the very idea of Europe is the result of Christian civilization.¹⁵ This is reflected in behavior, language, music, arts, architecture, stories, folk traditions or ethics. In fact, the European story is a "spiritual drama impelled by

religious convictions, not by geography, economics or technology,²¹⁶ despite the fact that “the framers” of the EU Constitution refused to remember Christianity in the text as foundational for Europe’s life and its development. Unfortunately, it is no longer a visible part in the future of Europe, but it has also been taken out from its very past.

The role that Christianity played in the past and in understanding history reflects the basic role Christian culture might have had. It is impossible to understand literature, arts, music, architecture or other areas without being initiated into Christian culture. It is not about being religious at this point, but one refers to contents of knowledge, “cultural contents,”²¹⁷ what we might call “religious literacy” so to be able to grasp meanings in the culture and civilization we live in. It is about being educated in Religion, as theoretical knowledge. One refers here to basic religious education, part of a general cultural formation that shouldn’t be discriminatory for anybody, but rather necessary for any honest and complete education.

The next level at which Christian culture might be localized in nowadays society will be described as “Christian texture” in the structure of the mentality, on one hand, and, on the other hand, as “spiritual knowledge” in interpreting the world and life. It is firstly about accepting Christian insights regarding the order, the functioning of this world and a specific anthropology that stands at its basis, and, secondly, it refers to a recourse to Christian instruments for interpreting life, personal as well as communitarian. One can grasp here the historical dimensions of culture, the heritage, with an implicit role and, occasionally with an explicit one as well, and yet part of daily life, reflecting its dynamic character. Then, a second perspective, oriented towards the construction of the future, generates a specific understanding of the world and of life, consonant with the past, panoramic and holistic, which may bring to the “actual man” a deep orientation towards the future.

We come to the specific case of the contemporary Romanian situation. Retrospectively, one can clearly assert that the Romanian society displays a prominent religious character and, implicitly, it is tributary to a Christian culture. Ten years ago, at the last census, almost 100% of respondents declared themselves Christians (among them, more than 86 percent Orthodox). This means Christian culture also has to do with the present times. Thus, so as to understand Romanian history, one is invited to pursue a religious education that encompasses knowledge of Church history, architecture, arts, behavior, customs, and so on. I call that a “necessary level of cultural literacy about Christianity.” Likewise, as it has to do with the present, one needs to be introduced to Romania’s typology of life, to Christianity in particular. There is an ongoing growing tendency to import models in pedagogy, psychology, sociology, and so on, without, unfortunately, taking into consideration Romania’s particularities in all these matters. Therefore, overlapping or even superimposing any foreign paradigms, presupposing “new postmodern ideologies,” without locally adapting them, in particular, to the religious key of reading reality, might bring difficulties in their application, radical transformations, painful clashes, or even social catastrophes. Europe is based on unity, but always in diversity, which means respect for specificity. The Christian culture of the Romanians, despite the

visible secularization present today, is part of the different sectors of life in both forms, high, reflecting orientation, as well as low, referring to organization.

It would be useful to mention, at this point, the Romanian diaspora¹⁸ and the influences it has in Western Europe. More than four million Romanians now reside in Italy, Spain, Britain, Germany, France and other European countries (and on all five continents).¹⁹ Leaving Romania, they took with them their specific culture, ethnicity, and religious beliefs. Thus, we have four Orthodox Metropolitan Sees, four archbishoprics, ten bishoprics, nine representative centers and communities, 1,337 parishes and 1,245 clerics,²⁰ not to mention the ecclesiastical structures of the other confessions. The Romanian culture, high and low, gets into contact with different ethnic and religious communities and, occasionally, penetrates the local cultures. In a way, one can appreciate its transnational and interreligious character. Its specific character is clearly visible, a Latin culture intertwined at its origin with the Byzantine faith, West and East together in a mixture that may transform itself into a new and fresh offer for the social life of Western Europe.

Christian Culture and the Spiritualization of Society

THE LAST point to deal with has a prominent theological character connected with the so-called "theological transformation" that Christian culture might bring in society nowadays, in general, and in the Romanian area, in particular. At a first reading of reality, this issue might be interpreted as obsolete, superfluous and un-natural, in the sense that it goes against the general contemporary trend in mentality and action. One can easily spot an anti-ecclesial and anti-clerical attitude in nowadays society, especially coming from the young generation, and a scarce interest regarding religious practice. It is not about a lack of religious interest, but rather an allergic reaction at the religious practice(s) and institutions.²¹ One may identify at this point the necessity of restarting religious life, regardless of the Christian confession involved, and, in consequence, the renewal of the Christian message, adapted to contemporary needs and preoccupations, proclaimed in an accessible language of the time, with an immediate application.²² The Christian message and Christian culture lost their freshness and actuality mostly because the incapacity of real communication and true reflection of the problems experienced by people.²³

In this frame, I will further argue the place that the "Christian offer" might have in creating a new vision regarding life and the world in nowadays mentality, overlapped with the new situation of contemporary society. To be theologically precise, I will call "Christian culture" as its core—"spiritual culture"—so as to respond to the contemporary accent given to religion, in general, and Christian life, in particular. Spiritual culture does not want to break into the profane culture, to manifest certain hegemonic tendencies, and yet, it offers its resources, methodology and tools in order to achieve a holistic understanding of reality. It may bring about a "spiritualization of culture."²⁴ Its methodology may bring depth, freshness, a panoramic and organic understanding, overcoming

the material instruments, “through an inspiring enlightenment, the fruit of a spiritual intuition that presupposes congeniality with the Spirit immersed in the becoming of the world.”²⁵ This way, spiritual culture becomes “the testimony of the victory over fragmentation, atomization, separation, and isolation.”²⁶

I will highlight three important effects this reality may have in our society. Firstly, what comes out from this perspective is the generation of “an inner habitus,” “a texture in within” that may re-establish the process of knowledge in the ancient paradigm of the “perception of reality” by means of mystery.²⁷ We might call this methodology a “deepening of mystery as a horizon of the interpretation of reality.”²⁸ Secondly, it communicates the metaphysical sense of the world and life in perceiving reality—an “obsession with sense/signification.” This expresses the logocentric dimension of culture; everything is constructed on signification. And thirdly, spiritual culture is able to outline new semantics for the arts, literature, music and lifestyle, in general, offering the “measure of quality.”²⁹ The new man’s reconstruction has to start from these theological presuppositions.

This leads us to the practical conclusion that recognizing and creating a space for Christian culture in Romanian social life means, on one hand, respecting its history and, finally, its identity, Christian since its inception. One can identify here a necessary continuation of its existence until today. On the other hand, in order to understand the Romanian mentality, manifestations and outlook on life, one has to take into consideration Christian culture, at both levels—information and formation.

Finally, regarding the foreign attitude, one has to pay attention to the specific Romanian identity in Europe. By its accession to European Union in 2007, Romania proved to be open to the common democratic values at the very basis of this structure. But, at the same time, its existence and lifestyle prove a continuity of identity given by Christian culture, implicitly and explicitly. In this paradigm, Romania may bring an important contribution to progress in Europe, in its native territory, as well as in the diaspora, well represented in Western Europe.

Conclusions

THE QUESTION expressed throughout this paper reflects the eventual and potential association of “Christian culture” to the “recent man,” in particular with reference to the Romanian people. There is a continuous discussion in the contemporary agora regarding the concept of culture, in both its variants—high and low—and, going further, a continuous polemic when it comes to Christian culture. In a “culture of protest” against tradition, and implicitly, against European history, Christian culture is timidly proclaimed by its supporters and, at the same time, it is aggressively challenged by means of reductive, contextual and incomplete interpretations, by the “progressive parties,” in the process of (re)creating the “new man.”

The theological perspective proposes the creation of the “new man” and, consequently, the “new world,” by means of Christian culture (Bible and tradition), be it

high, something to be achieved (the new creation, *kaine ktisis*), and low, reflecting daily life, permanently open to progress (in all its sectors) and change. It means information, obligatory for taking part in the history and identity of Europe, as well as formation, in the ethical sense. Christianity is part of culture and, at the same time, culture is conditioned by the Christian message. This mutuality is well expressed in Romanian social life. Finally, this local reality might be an important input Romania can give to the European contemporary reality: one identifies a conversion—the recent protester may become the new man, respecting and, occasionally, living out the presumably Christian culture.



Notes

1. Marko Ivan Rupnik, "Lectura spirituală a realității," in Tomáš Špidlík and Marko Ivan Rupnik, *Teologia pastorală: Pornind de la frumusețe*, translated by Ioan Milea (Târgu-Lăpuș: Galaxia Gutenberg, 2007), 40.
2. In the case of major changes, one can observe a real danger regarding identity (individual, of societies or even of nations), while questioning fundamental categories and concepts such as ethics, esthetics, religion or epistemology. All these will affect emotions for a long time, the affective life and the spirit in general. For details see Diana Câmpan, "Rostul bun al culturii din pridvorul Bisericii," in *Biserica Ortodoxă și provocările viitorului*, edited by Mihai Himcinschi and Răzvan Brudiu (Alba Iulia: Reîntregirea, Aeternitas; Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2020), 309–316, here 310.
3. Horia-Roman Patapievici, *Omul recent: O critică a modernității din perspectiva întrebării "Ce se pierde atunci când ceva se câștigă?"* 6th edition, illustrations by Mircea Cantor (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2020).
4. Mihail Neamțu, *Bușnița din dărnămaturi: Insomnii teologice în România postcomunistă*, 2nd edition (Iași: Polirom, 2008), 379.
5. V. I. Ivanov and M. O. Gersenzon, *Corrispondenza da un angolo all'altro*, edited by Nilo Pucci (Piombino: Aktis, 1991), 43.
6. See the different types: correctional and for conversion to the communist ideology—Suceava, Pitești, Gherla, Târgu-Ocna, Târgșor, Brașov, Ocnele Mari, Peninsula; for the extermination of political and intellectual elites—Sighet, Râmnicu Sărat, Galați, Aiud, Craiova, Brașov, Oradea, Pitești; labor camps—Canalul Dunăre-Marea Neagră (Peninsula, Poarta Alba, Sălcia, Periprava, Constanța, Midia, Capul Midia, Cernavodă, etc.), work colonies at Balta Brăilei; transit prisons—Jilava, Văcărești; investigation prisons—Rahova, Malmaison, Uranus; women prisons—Mărgineni, Mislea, Miercurea-Ciuc, Dumbrăveni; prisons for minors—Târgșor, Mărgineni, Cluj; hospital prisons—Târgu-Ocna and Văcărești 12.
7. See the distinction Søren Kierkegaard makes between admirers and followers, as disciples of Christ: "The admirer never makes any true sacrifices. He always plays it safe. Though in words, phrases, songs, he is inexhaustible about how highly he prizes Christ, he renounces nothing, gives up nothing, will not reconstruct his life, will not be what he admires, and will not let his life express what it is he supposedly admires. Not so for the

- follower. No, no. The follower aspires with all his strength, with all his will to be what he admires. And then, remarkably enough, even though he is living amongst a ‘Christian people,’ the same danger results for him as was once the case when it was dangerous to openly confess Christ. And because of the follower’s life, it will become evident who the admirers are, for the admirers will become agitated with him. Even that these words are presented as they are here will disturb many – but then they must likewise belong to the admirers.” Søren Kierkegaard, *Training in Christianity*, quoted in *Bread and Wine: Readings for Lent and Easter* (Maryknoll, NY: Plough Publishing House, 2003), 59–60.
8. I will mention some authors and titles belonging to the memorial literature: Nicolae Steinhardt, *Jurnalul fericirii* (1991), Richard Wurmbrandt, *Cu Dumnezeu în subterană* (1994), Iuliu Hossu, *Credința noastră este viața noastră: Memorii* (2003), Dumitru Bacu, *Pitești, centru de reeducare studențească* (1963), Paul Goma, *Gherla-Lătești* (2008), Dumitru Bordeianu, *Mărturisiri din mlaștina disperării* (1992), Ioan Ianolide, *Întoarcerea la Hristos: Document pentru o lume nouă* (1982), Virgil Ierunca, *Fenomenul Pitești* (1990), Viorel Gheorghiuță, *Et ego—Sărata, Pitești, Gherla, Aiud: Scurtă istorie a devenirii mele* (1994), Octavian Voinea, *Masacrarea studențimii române în închisorile de la Pitești, Gherla și Aiud* (1995), Eugen Măgirescu, *Moara dracilor: Amintiri din închisoarea de la Pitești* (1994), Neculai Popa, *Coborârea în iad: Amintiri din închisorile României comuniste* (1999), Aurel Vișovan, *Dumnezeul meu, Dumnezeuul meu, pentru ce m-ai părăsit? Reeducarea de la închisoarea Pitești* (2006) and others.
 9. Mario Vargas Llosa, *Civilizația spectacolului*, translated by Marin Mălaicu-Hondrari (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2016), 23–27.
 10. Teodor Baconschi, “Cultura gratuită,” in *Darul desăvârșit: Gânduri despre civilizația creștină* (Iași: Doxologia, 2018), 173–176.
 11. Teodor Baconschi, “Știrile ca vehicul al erorii umane,” in *Cetatea sub asediu: Însemnări despre credință, rațiune și terorism* (Iași: Doxologia, 2016), 296–301.
 12. See two opposite positions: in favor—not studying Religion is “a cultural error”: Adrian Papahagi, “Religia în școli,” in *Creștinul în cetate: Manual de supraviețuire* (Iași: Doxologia, 2017), 175–187, 186; against—“The subject Religion does not make you more ethical”: Mircea Miclea, “Orele de Religie nu sporesc numărul credincioșilor,” accessed 10 January 2021, <https://transilvaniareporter.ro/opinii/mircea-miclea-orele-de-religie-nu-sporesc-numarul-credinciosilor/>.
 13. Article 48, line 1.
 14. Beyond any pessimistic or triumphalist positions, there were some balanced positions of Christian intellectuals such as Teodor Baconschi, Adrian Papahagi, Mihail Neamțu, or Sorin Lavric. See also the intervention of Bishop Ignatie Trif: “Biserică, referendum, resetare,” in *Maladia ideologiei și terapia Adevărului* (Huși: Horeb, 2020), 39–46.
 15. Despite the fact the European Union leaders refused to mention the Christian presence, historically or presently, in the Constitution.
 16. Robert Louis Wilken, “The Church As Culture,” *First Things*, April 2004, 31–36, here 31.
 17. Papahagi, “Religia în școli,” 182–183.
 18. The migration severely affected the social and the religious life of the Romanians. Specific vocabulary has been generated in this frame as localization, dislocation, glocalization. Cf. Vasile-Octavian Mihoc, “Identitatea religioasă ca narațiune în spațiu în constantă reconfigurare,” in *Biserica Ortodoxă și provocările viitorului*, 165–196, here 166.

19. For details see "Talent Abroad: A Review of Romanian Emigrants," accessed 20 January 2021, <http://www.oecd.org/fr/publications/talent-abroad-a-review-of-romanian-emigrants-bac53150-en.htm>.
20. A recent book has been published by Basilica Publishing house regarding the Orthodox presence in the diaspora: *Diaspora Bisericii Ortodoxe Române* (Bucharest: Basilica, 2021).
21. See the concept 'believing without belonging': Grace Davie, "Believing Without Belonging: Is This the Future of Religion in Britain," *Social Compass* 37, 4 (1990): 456–469.
22. Postmodernity proclaims a syncretic religiosity, dispersed, extemporaneous, difficult to systematize, in between occultism and irrationality, paganism and diluted Christian elements. This expresses "the wish of the postmodern individual to construct and personalize his own religion": Gabriel Noje, "Biserica Ortodoxă și provocările religiozității postmoderne," in *Biserica Ortodoxă și provocările viitorului*, 221–233, here 224. This phenomenon is assimilated to 'a super religion' and, as a consequence, to a 'super culture,' formed of fragments borrowed from different religions, relativized according to individual options, without considering its eventual divine origin. For details see Dumitru Popescu, *Hristos. Biserică. Misiune: Relevanța Misiunii Bisericii în lumea contemporană* (Galați: Editura Arhiepiscopiei Dunării de Jos, 2011), 104. At the same line, one may find expressions like 'religious bricolage' or 'religion as a candy store,' see: Nicolae Achimescu, *Religie, modernitate și postmodernitate* (Bucharest: Trinitas, 2013), 434.
23. For a panorama of the contemporary situation, see my analysis: "One can identify in the mentality of the time a shift in understanding religion, in general, and Christianity in particular. It seems that there is a 'fatigue,' a 'weariness' of the contemporary man towards a set of beliefs/values, proposed and interpreted dogmatically, and understood in the version 'liberated' from their initial metaphysical meaning. The paradigm shift is generated precisely by this reaction. Inspired religion seems to gradually turn into a religiosity, otherwise characteristically conditioned human, with which contemporary man can get used more easily and quickly. Religion is transformed and dissolved into a free spirituality, which is rooted in a form of religiosity, even partially dogmatically expressed, and yet without being circumscribed to it. One identifies here a kind of 'allergy' to a dogmatic expression of religiosity, towards any kind of institutional organization, in favor of a freedom to understand the feeling of religions and its subsequent manifestation. This transformation of understanding is often associated with an 'open,' postmodernist, universalist-progressive, and in a way 'reparative' view of the Church's supposedly hegemonic-dogmatist position over specific periods of time, in history and in a certain geography. Our century, as André Malraux would say, continues to exist in a religious format, but, especially, in its spiritual component, even mystical, beyond the ambiguity of the term. The spiritual seems to be the component of the much 'lighter' religion, freed from the bonds of dogma, of institutionalism, and read in an inclusive, slightly ecumenical key, of relative and apparent acceptance, contextual, but also syncretist-globalizing, and, in particular, accessible to those who want it, regardless of their social status or cultural background—as 'spiritual culture.' Spirituality or mysticism can be confessional, but they can also be non-confessional, beyond the borders of faith communities, on the grounds that it reflects and proposes experience, as a constant of social-religious life. Thus, the paradigm of 21st century religiosity seems to be linked to a personal, un-institutionalized, a-dogmatic practice, which, through its presupposed freedom, seems to be attractive and tender in the face of the search for the Absolute, in response to questions

- on the human condition.” See: † Benedict (Vesa) Bistrițeanul, “Sarcina mistică a Teologiei ortodoxe și religiozitatea omului actual,” in *Biserica Ortodoxă și provocările viitorului*, 41–56, here 48–49.
24. See here the relation between the cultural signification of Theology and the theological signification of Culture.
 25. Rupnik, 54.
 26. “Paștele culturii,” in *Teologia pastorală*, 472.
 27. There are many interventions on the role of mystery as a ‘methodology of reading reality,’ but I will mention here only one essential work: Dostoevsky’s *The Idiot*. This novel reflects the intersection between two mentalities—exact scientific knowledge and theological knowledge, which is always spiritual. Unamuno speaks about it in terms of full method, epistemology, aesthetic, logic, ethics, and religion; which is to say, a whole economy of the eternal and the divine, a whole hope in the irrational absurd. Cf. “Doi nebuni exemplari,” accessed 10 January 2021, <https://razvan-codrescu.blogspot.ro/2008/02/don-quiote-i-prinul-mkin.html>.
 28. Rupnik, 37.
 29. Constantin Noica asserts: “Culture is similar to an ongoing Medicine. I do not refer to culture as taking care of oneself, but about culture as identifying the maladies of reality of any kind, without any attempt at recovery. You only highlight the precarious dimensions of reality and give them a name...” *Jurnal de idei*, text established by Thomas Kleininger, Gabriel Liuceanu, Andrei Pleșu, and Sorin Vieru (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1991), 230.

Abstract

“Christian Culture” and the Contemporary Romanian Social Life

There is an ongoing debate and process regarding the place of Christian culture within the European identity. Challenging individual and institutional positions urge theology, in particular, to re-evaluate the role Christianity might have in the contemporary cultural landscape, in both dimensions, high and low. As a result, one finds it necessary to repropose Christian culture in an adapted current form so as to reflect the dilemmas and issues of the context, proving its validity nowadays. The analysis is developed in a theological key, in three important sections: after a conceptual analysis, the paper dwells on the relation Christian culture–profane culture in the European framework and, finally, the discussion is applied to the Romanian space. The conclusion highlights some possible inputs the Romanian situation may offer to the contemporary European context.

Keywords

high and low culture, Christian culture, recent man, Romanian identity, spiritualization of culture