

Modernity versus Postmodernity in a Local-Regional Variant Pastoral Reflection Paradigms

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OUR WORLD is experiencing huge mutations, which we must first be aware of; secondly, we must approach them creatively, cleansing them of anything that can be harmful; thirdly, we must fertilize them by the transfiguring power of God's grace. In this research, we will focus on some postmodern mutations that perplex all representatives of traditional modern culture and can paralyze any social and pastoral actions that do not take into account the internal mechanisms at play in our world.

Postmodernity is a new era in human history, defined by the following coordinates: 1. post-industrial society; 2. centralization of information and communication (the transition from the "Gutenberg revolution" to the television image and that of virtual existence, centered on the computer);¹ 3. new types of relationships between a man and a woman (with all that feminism entails); 4. the tension between globalisms of all kinds and local cultural identities;² 5. a new relationship of a person with his/herself (through self-awareness mediated by self- (psycho) analysis; 6. relativization of values and certainties under the hypnosis of nihilism (the parodic approach to history); 7. experiential religiosity, typically postmodern.

The priest must do everything to know and "read" the surrounding reality from the church perspective, to see it "with the eyes" of God, interpreting the cultural tendencies at play "in a spiritual way," in order to explore their positive potential and inhibit the negative dynamics. For this, on the one hand, it is necessary to know the positive tendencies of today's culture (identifying the operating logic in contemporary society), and, on the other hand, it is necessary to identify in advance (and quantify) the possible aggressions against Christianity; the analysis will help him to assess the shortcomings of contemporary Christianity, the degree of maturity of the laity and the regenerative potential of pastoral action.³ The Church must respond with "firm pastoral care" to the "fragile thinking" (the logic specific to contemporary Western culture seems explicitly inspired and guided by the philosophical current of "fragile thinking")⁴ in culture.

1. The Prestige Crisis of “Patriotism”

CONCEIVED BY the Church as a form of extension of people’s love, unfortunately, patriotism has often become aggressive nationalism, an affirmation of extremism (and even chauvinism), as a form of expressing hatred of one’s fellow human beings. For 2,000 years, the Church has been fighting to spread the love of one’s fellow human beings in the world, regarding “nationalism” as a legitimate form of spreading love, and not a form of limiting it. So today, the Romanian people are at the opposite pole: we have reached a collective self-contempt, we are in a crisis of self-esteem, caused overwhelmingly by the inability of the economy to develop properly and in record time.

The Romanian priest carries out his pastoral activity in a cultural space with a vast Christian-Orthodox history: “Deep Romania.”⁵ Deep Romania is a spiritual Romania, of discreet people who live through God, who have turned around their lives, who have returned to God, who have discovered the Church as a “force” capable of transfiguring their destiny. This “deep Romania” is the opposite of the “5-o’clock-news Romania.”⁶

It is not necessarily folkloric, pășunist [from “pășune” = pasture], it is not only rural, but also urban, consisting of small craftsmen, small entrepreneurs, segments of the liberal professions, the priesthood, teachers. Deep Romania is the Romania of honest people who stubbornly refuse polarizations and extremisms. It is the Romania that cannot be seen, that is ignored, not presented in the news. Going toward this Romania of suffering, joys, and Christocentric freedom, we leave the horizontal plane of false dilemmas and discover what the real priorities are. Then we start from concrete realities, “in the field,” not from false priorities.⁷

The Romanian spirit can be characterized—as Priest Dumitru Stăniloae said—by a balance of maximum amplitude of the “content” and a formal “elasticity.” This balance is a continuous act of consciousness and will, which is not specific to mediocrity, which, with subtlety and self-control, leads to continuous progress. The conscious and voluntary maintenance of this balance is achieved through reasonableness, and this, tempering the many extravagant tendencies, manages to maintain the collective health of character. Through it, the Romanian people have learned not to allow themselves to be enslaved by reckless passions or adventures in a passionate sense. Thus, a “moral order,” generating mental comfort, would be specific to the Romanian collective unconscious, in opposition to the individualistic West that does not sympathize with personal balance and is contrary (or indifferent) to social cohesion.

“Deep Romania” is the Romania to be found deep under the confusing asperities, conceptually described by Father Dumitru Stăniloae and secretly existing—in our opinion—in the European Romania of the third millennium. It is the resource from which the parish priest of our times can start. Father Stăniloae proposes a personalistic and liturgical conception of the cosmos, developed in the spiritual sense of Byzantium, especially that of St. Maximus the Confessor, in which the universe was enriched and defended by the people’s mutual love and the Christian liturgical spirit that conforms to the cosmic rites.

For the Romanian, the surrounding nature, the country, the whole universe was deeply personalized, being a festive familial environment, favorable to happy communion and meetings with loved ones (that is, happy and truly successful interrelationships). Contrary to this conception, Western religious thinking would focus only on “anthropological exclusivism.” That is why colonial imperialism is based on a tendency to take over a territory by force, in order to exploit it economically, thus losing the intimate connection and the innate capacity for communion with a nature that man ought to protect and elevate together with himself.

Pastoral care involves working with the fallen, degraded man, a victim of the evil in the world, and not with an idealized one. The idealized man can function as a paradigm, as a landmark of reflection, but not as a reality that is constantly embodied in everyday life. Nor should the decadent, destroyed man, totally crushed under the pressure of evil, constitute the working model, but must also be reduced to a paradigm of maximum failure, something to be avoided at all costs, the anti-pastoral model.⁸ The priest works with a cultural “aggregate” of synthesis, the model commonly encountered in everyday life, the man waiting (consciously or not) to be spiritually re-modeled according to the Christic paradigm. The pastoral work of the priest is very important because the restoration of Romania must (and can) start (only) from the Church.

2. Postmodernity Comes with an Offer of Permissiveness and Anti-Authoritarianism

OUR SOCIETY is marked by a so-called “new morality,” resulting from a different vision of values and the world than the traditional one, generated over several centuries of Christianity. Today, secular culture is based on the legal culture of human rights: “Not the rights of the real individual, compensated by duties, but abstract rights, elevated to an absolute status, before which there is nothing else.”⁹ Gradually, the individual has felt liberated from his national, social, and religious affiliations.¹⁰

As a result, the predisposition to sacrifice¹¹ has been greatly attenuated, almost to the point of disappearance. The individual ends up asking with outrage: “What can my country do for me?” (not “What can I do for my country?”), as if, in the past, individuals had done too much, and now compensation is demanded, and the collectivity must be silent in front of the individual who was excessively used, instrumentalized in the past.¹²

So, the sense of national belonging has become enormously dulled: the individual, his rights, and his needs prevail in the individual-country relationship. The country must be in his service, not he in the service of the country.¹³ And if the country cannot meet his needs, he leaves it and fulfills his needs in another country. Religious affiliations have also been affected by the great mutations.¹⁴

The postmodern man wants to get rid of any constraints imposed in the name of the collectivity. The new culture puts society in the service of the individual, the latter representing an insurmountable horizon.¹⁵ Inevitably, this falls into the category of excesses. From one extreme to the other. If communism (with its failed modernity) tyrannized

through its obsession with collectivity, our age is no less tyrannical on account of its obsession with the individual.

Computer communication has increasingly taken the place of the classical media specific to the modern world. This metamorphosis has profoundly changed the type and quality of the culture transmitted. Christianity, born as a “religion of the word,” of the “Book” and of the historical-religious memory passed on through generations, is nowadays in contact with radically different communicative structures, which have plunged our inherited formative-pastoral capacity into a crisis. In order to be truly aware of the difficulty of acting on today’s multiple cultures, it is useful to carefully analyze the mass culture and the impact of the new forms of communication on contemporary mentalities.

Nowadays, the web space is an extremely effective means for pastoral intervention. The media have long been agents of production and transmission of mass culture that have greatly conditioned conscience, revolutionized values and mentalities, so that at first, the family, school and churches felt threatened in their traditional way of educating the younger generations.

The “computer and audio-visual” generation is deeply marked by the electronic world in which young people grow up with ease and familiarity. In fact, the audio-visual perception, the integration of the affective and the imaginary, intuition and reasoning by analogy are the fundamental characteristics of the intuitive, global, artistic “new culture,” in which “tasting” precedes “understanding,” and sometimes replaces “learning.” We are witnessing a new way of being and thinking. And in order to characterize the relations between two generations, one ascending and one descending, the mind’s eye sees two ships crossing in the distance, emitting mutually undeciphered signals, rather than the image of a traditional battle.

This new cultural universe, in which the senses and the affectivity, the abundance of information and the fragmentation of reflection predominate, leaves adults with a sense of loss of the power of concentration and a spread of superficiality, together with increased passivity, a loss of the critical sense and reasoning they were used to.¹⁶

The web universe can certainly be a producer of culture, but also a revealer of today’s collective consciousness with its typical values, tastes, and aspirations. Here is a new uncultivated pastoral “perimeter” and another type of civilization that challenge responsible Christians.

3. “Dogmatic” Concepts in Postmodernity: “Tolerance,” “Discrimination”

ANOTHER MANDATORY reference in postmodern culture is tolerance. Its preeminence is indisputable, non-negotiable: it is invoked in the speeches of politicians, philosophers, and teachers. It is a landmark in the press. Permissiveness, which has become an ideology, encourages the violation of all taboos. The right to revolt and blas-

pheme has become universal, it is ubiquitous, and—in addition—it has become a “moral requirement.”

*To overthrow, to change, to innovate, to challenge, these are the slogans that must be followed. It is not subversion that scandalizes, but stability, continuity. If it should survive, conservatism does not do it as a creed, but as a sin!*¹⁷

The apogee of contestation has reached a paroxysm that would have been unimaginable in the past:

*Difference is more than a right, it does not even have to be called as such. Since everything has the same value, no detail about age, sex, origin, belongingness to a country, culture or religion should hinder the project that any individual makes for his life. To differentiate¹⁸ according to any criteria would mean to practice discrimination!*¹⁹

Many European states have conformed to the new culture and have turned the new “requirements” of culture into laws. This is because these tendencies, imperatives, even “intransigencies,” we might call them, are not content to “float in the air,” but impose, entail practical applications. So, certain public bodies have been set up to act in the desired direction.²⁰

4. Radical Mutations Have Taken Place Within the Institution of the Family

THE INSTITUTION of the family has moved from the traditional family to “unconventional” forms of cohabitation. This mobility has also generated the crisis of the “traditional” family: the disappearance of the extended patriarchal family and the current quantitative predominance of mono-nuclear families (with only one child), with the perspective of uncontrolled multiplication of non-nuclear families (without any children); subsequently, there has been a massive emergence of the “single” family, a galloping increase in the rate of abortions, divorces and, in general, a high level of familial and social pathologies; In addition, urban crime rate, the ethical-formative indifference of the school (and many others) provide a framework for the axiological chaos thus created.

More and more, alliances are established between children and parents, with the “father-friend” and the “mother-friend,” who do not forbid their children anything, according to the slogan of the '60s: “It is forbidden to forbid!” Father-friends and mother-friends have established a relationship of equality with their children. Slowly but surely, the authority in the family has disappeared; in the past, conventions had the same goal: to mark the hierarchical relationship between generations.²¹ But when it comes to education, is it possible to travel permanently by negotiation? The family has become a “kingdom” of the child-king, to whom we owe infinite “respect.” In the past, respect was due to adults, and now the relationship has been reversed.²² From the family, new norms and practices have

permeated into society: etiquette has disappeared, addressing everyone by their first names and a casual dress code regardless of the situation have become widespread. The “sprawling generation” includes specimens that do not sit down, but throw themselves down, then trickle down against the back of the chair. Sprawling is the postmodern reaction to the traditional parental imperative: “Sit up straight!”²³

5. Nonconformist Expression of Violence

THERE IS NO restraint anymore, only neglect. The vocation of being a “punk” is also born in the family: aggression is trivialized. People are always on edge: behind the wheel, on the bus, in the shops, at the doctor’s. Insults are uttered for no apparent reason, and are sometimes accompanied by obscene gestures. A journalist’s conclusion: there are “savages” in suits and ties among us!²⁴ In addition, punctuality has become optional.

Previously, modernity operated the transition from agricultural civilization to the post-industrial, digital civilization. The type of “work” has changed radically. It has gone from the preeminence of agricultural work to the industrial one, to finally reach the “third sector,” specific to the computer era. These changes have had profound consequences for religiosity. Suffice it to think of what the harmonious birth and development of Christianity meant for it in the context created by a rural civilization, in syntony with nature and the cosmos. Religious art, time, liturgical worship, the need for heavenly protections against natural disasters, intellectualist theology, etc.—they are realities that have entered a deep crisis caused by the radical change of lifestyles,²⁵ specific to postmodernity.

For the European Christian, the transition from a situation of generalized pauperism to a high standard of living (which degenerated into consumerism) and the subsequent collapse of the framework of ethical and religious values involved radical mutations.

6. The Disappearance of the Principle of “Authority”

THE SCHOOL has become a “temple” of a new pedagogy, overstating the rights of the individual and despising his duties. The adults have overwhelmingly abandoned any attempt to enforce rules and civilize the public space. A climate has prevailed in which there are no more rules: no one can define them and no one dares to mention them.²⁶ Teachers are confused because students no longer perceive their authority as more justified than their own.²⁷

In other words, no authority relationship is accepted, “Who are you to impose on me what to do and how to behave?”—it is the students’ reaction. To forbid seems to be an attack on the person, and not an invocation of the general interest. In other words, there is a contorted mutation: it is not that one authority replaces another, but the very principle of “authority” disappears, with teachers, judges, police officers, priests, owners, etc. in its wake.²⁸

Postmodern learning has become anti-hierarchical and non-authoritarian, compelling, seductive and instantaneous; the slogan would be, "The light of knowledge nourishes, does not oppress!" The structure of classical education was hierarchical and authoritarian, in the sense that certain visions ordered from the top had to be respected and learned. Compliance was rewarded, the rebellion of different thinking was discouraged, independent attitudes disavowed.

Postmodernity comes with a different perspective: an independent position always hides a relevant aspect, ignored by the majority; therefore, this should not be underestimated either, if we fight for an enriching holistic vision. Also, the rebellion of different thinking hides some different accents, which can be very useful in new cultural contexts: so, different thinking is not an enemy, but a friend in other situations, structurally different from the current ones.

Then, hierarchical and authoritarian thinking is one that highlights the needs of the moment, doing the thinking for us, proclaiming current priorities, but it is a corporate, inflexible thinking, which can be cumbersome, tense, unfocused on the essential in new contexts. Therefore, the new pedagogical paradigm promotes the principle of equal opportunities, an anti-hierarchical, anti-authoritarian principle. This means tolerance for the impartial ones and for those who think differently, as their thinking hides a resource that can be used in the future. Students and teachers regard each other as people, not as social statuses and roles. They are not generators and receivers of information, but together they build a science that is useful to all. Their interaction gives rise to complexity.²⁹

This belief of today's pedagogy has made the relatively rigid structure, with a mandatory curriculum and an inflexible curricular path, to be relativized. Some knowledge can be acquired in multiple ways, through fertile debates on current issues of interest, the opinion that there are several ways and means of teaching a given topic becoming predominant, and the structure of education must be relatively flexible.

In the old paradigm, only the teacher was a "transmitter" of knowledge: the instructive-educational flow was one-way; in the new paradigm, the teacher ceases to be a "transmitter" of information, and—likewise—the student ceases to be a receiver of content. The teacher becomes more human, the teacher himself learns from the students, thus establishing reciprocity of continuous learning in the teaching process. The teacher is sometimes amazed by the insight of the students, by their intuitions, by the vanguardism of their ideas, and the students are fortified in their intuitive discoveries by the teacher's life experience, his overall vision, his emotional balance. It was often pointed out in the past that the father confessor confesses himself during the confession, that the minister sanctifies himself by ministering, that the preacher enriches himself by disseminating teachings from the height of the pulpit. And this reality is confirmed today by psycho-pedagogy.

In addition, in the new context, the belief that all knowledge must be acquired at the same pace by all, that uniformity is a universal rule, that progress must be prescribed, articulated in every detail, has entered a crisis. The focus placed on the right age for certain activities and the separation of ages has dissolved. Therefore, the new pedagogy aims at integrating the ages, being very flexible. The student is no longer automatically linked to certain topics according to his age, but what matters to a huge extent is his IQ, his life

context, the practice to which his own past has subjected him, his specific life experiences; the pace of progress in what concerns school subjects can vary greatly.

In his weekly catechesis, the priest can constantly see how true this principle is: how many believers appreciate, for example, the work *Immitatio Christi*? This work is suitable for a certain spiritual age, and if the recipient has not reached a certain spiritual age, he cannot understand the message of the book. The same is true for the Patericon. Instead, what matters to a huge extent is the thirst for spiritual advancement of the beneficiary of a catechesis.

Consequently, if the institutions or ideas that deviated from the general beliefs used to be disavowed, disapproved, stigmatized, in the new paradigm, if the deviations are in a constructive sense, they are promoted as part of the creative process.

Postmodernity favors a new type of society, a fragmented, individualistic, emotional one, seduced by the ephemeral and consumerism, exhausting itself in the immanent. These phenomena express and lead toward a type of society that is an easy prey to egocentric models, with the prominent social hegemony of economic rules, with a tendency toward the ephemeral and consumerism. The credibility of religion has been attenuated by the current consumerist model, which confines Western man to the narrow logic of two principles (“to consume more in order to produce more” and “to produce more in order to consume more”), tending to stimulate *ad infinitum* man’s material needs in order to satiate him with material goods to the point of annihilating any spiritual aspirations; thus, spiritual and religious questions are no longer asked.

Under such circumstances, it is extremely difficult to pay attention to the Christian religious discourse. Religion does not provide instant gratification, as postmodern man expects. Material well-being, on the other hand, brings about immediate bodily satisfactions.

7. “Mutation”—Perceived As a Value in Itself

THERE HAS also been a transition from sedentary lifestyle and “territorial fidelity” to radical, multifactorial mobility. The population has experienced such an intense multifactorial mobility (urbanism, emigration, tourism), as well as social mobility (starting from humble birth and reaching the highest social levels) that the traditional structure of the territory (the country, the city, the means of communication, the space, etc.) on which the religious (parish and diocesan) life and the traditional organization (few property owners and few educated people, many poor and illiterate) had been based for centuries have been shaken to the core.³⁰

Postmodernity has come with a new mentality. It is generally believed that in order to make the student work, it is necessary to offer him amusement.³¹ Boredom would be one of the reasons for students’ suffering, and therefore the cause of violence during breaks. In addition, the teachers’ “authoritarianism” would mean the humiliation of students. No constraints, only pleasure! As a result, there are no longer grades (or there are only “rigged” grades, all of the students deserving 10!). There is a tendency to bring everyone to the level of the poorest student.³²

We have experienced a transition from a static, “settled,” stable world to a new world, in which “mutation” is conceived as a value “in itself.” Since today’s culture is radically oriented toward “mutation,” conceived as a value in itself, everything that used to refer to a static world (habits, social control, gerontocracy, order) is inexorably overturned by phenomena that are dynamic, such as fashion, public opinion, permissiveness, etc. Given the fact that religions are essentially entities based on a collective memory, i.e. tradition, from which they extract their prescriptions for any type of collective action (legal, artistic, ritualistic, liturgical, devotional, familial, pastoral, ecclesial), active in previous cultures (such as the rural and working class ones), we must admit that the new culture risks causing the collapse of the entire pre-existing structure (the traditional one). Pastoral care has the task of making a remedial, corrective and hallowing intervention.

8. Prioritizing the Person over Educational Performance

HOW DO we identify the charisma that leads to the salvation to each of us? The metamorphosis of the old pedagogical paradigm has also led to a very important mutation: a transfer from efficiency, success (well quantified, carefully calibrated, and rigorously dimensioned), performance, to the person, to the human being that generates performance. In other words, the priority of the self, of personal value, of identity is proclaimed. It is not knowledge that matters, but how much a person has changed while absorbing it. The word carries energy, as does the thought. How much has certain knowledge changed a person for the better? Postmodern pedagogy is much more attentive to the person than to the information itself, emphasizing the self rather than the informational message. The content can only be declared “valuable” insofar as it substantially reshapes the person, not as an autonomous repository.

Therefore, the inflexible preoccupation with norms, with didactic strategies and intervention techniques (specific to traditional pedagogy) has been replaced by the preoccupation with the individual’s performance within the limits of his own potential. Everyone has his own charisma, talents, gifts, which must be put to work. So, the interest for testing the external limits, for exceeding the identified limits predominates. The goal is growth rather than following a once-functional methodological framework. Therefore, we suggestively call the new orientation in pedagogy beyond the norms.

The purpose of education and spiritualization is to identify in each man the hallowing charisma, a charisma that, once activated, will reshape that man’s whole future, carrying him on the paths of salvation, turning him into a hub of life (for a certain existential perimeter), involving innumerable hallowing energies in the people around the subject; salvation is not only an individual enterprise, but also a collective, community, social one. In fact, throughout its history, Orthodoxy has placed great emphasis on this truth of the communal dimension of salvation. This means that each “social plot” has an epicenter that generates holiness, grace, goodness, and this epicenter is the priest in a sacramental sense,

but in other respects it can be any of the believers who have identified their own charisma and activated it.

Postmodernity seems to be spreading a strange “prestige of delinquency.” Should the school have any other role than that of instructing, training, polishing, preparing for life? And yet, we see in students a galloping regression of civility. Thousands of frauds are practiced in everyday life (traveling without a ticket, fake medical leaves of absence, fake health cards, etc.). Delinquent behaviors have become quite common. This is because the individualistic morality of “I, and only I!” triumphs in society.³³

All these mutations constitute the backbone of the psycho-emotional universe of the postmodern world in its firm distance from the previous, modern world. All need to be approached pastorally and corrected by a gentle but firm observance of the requirements of bimillennial Christian doctrine. Only a philosophical-Christian orientation of the Romanian culture can guarantee a bright future for our society.

Therefore, we hope that theological reflection will soon point out some pastoral emergencies and formulate some methodological directions in order to avoid new crises in tomorrow’s society and to guarantee an upward linear evolution, which will generate a general climate of harmony,³⁴ peace, self-esteem, collective mental comfort and economic prosperity.

Conclusion: New Ways of Communicating Faith

WE HAVE a pastoral obligation to express love in a permanently new way, regardless of which paradigm we follow: modernity or postmodernity. The priest has a duty to constantly discover new ways of communicating the faith. Believers from all corners of the country, in turn, regardless of generation, must learn to discern the values in their culture. They must discover how to nourish themselves and how to nourish others within the Church, in order to reach a mature faith, corresponding to the complexity of today’s world.

The plurality of experiences gives rise to a certain pastoral wisdom about how faith should be communicated today. Talking about God effectively in our world involves gathering all pastoral experiences and using them. We communicate God indeed, when we are not limited to words only in order to express ourselves. In order to communicate the faith today, we must constantly give priority to expressing love in a new way.

The Church considers that the man it aims at and who must be helped to evolve toward his maturity and full humanity, regardless of the culture or civilization in which he was born, is a value of incomparable dignity, created in “the image and likeness” of God. He can be formed and can mature only by assimilating the absolute values proposed by the Church. The very future of man depends, above all, on the conception of himself and of his destiny that he acquires, and it is precisely at this level that we find the decisive and specific contribution of the Church.

Man is the only creature God wanted for himself. Contemporary postmodern man, the product of the germination between the culture of the Enlightenment and the remi-

niscences of medieval Christian civilization, seems to be hesitant, oppressed by his own past, anxious about his future. "His needs would be to strengthen himself in freedom, to grow in responsibility, to act in solidarity."³⁵ Yet, this cannot be accomplished without the essential factor called "love," which has its origin in the Church.

More than conceptual clarity, we need to stay in touch with converted lives, with existences that have been transformed by the experience of meeting God. God does not cease to speak to humanity, not only through prophets and saints, but also through changing the lives of some people, through changing the personal and communal, parish life, nourished by the fullness of life in Christ.



Notes

1. The internet is the most surprising innovation in the field of communication technology. It can be used in a harmful manner, requiring constant vigilance on the part of the Church. It is not only about the morality of its use, but also about its completely new consequences: the loss of the "specific weight" of the information, the flattening of the messages (which are reduced to pure information), the absence of inherent reactions to network messages from those responsible, the effect of mistrust regarding interpersonal relationships. However, the enormous possibilities of the internet can undoubtedly provide significant help in spreading the Gospel, as demonstrated by some promising ecclesiastical initiatives that open up pastoral horizons for action. The question is: How can we not be present and not use the information networks whose screens fill the houses, in order to convey the values of the gospel message in this medium too? Cf. Pontificio Consiglio della Cultura, "Per una pastorale della cultura" (Rome: Città del Vaticano, 1999), 12.
2. The "global village" is a fast, anarchic, polychromatic, interconnected world which affirms its uniformity to the detriment of local cultures, promoting the mutual knowledge of geographically distant cultural and religious spaces by removing them from the anonymous regional and declaring them legitimate forms of plurality belonging to the human cultural heritage. The global village standardizes: the streets, the clothes, the TV programs, the music from the discos, the movies, the drinks; they all become similar, thus undermining and diluting local identities, which can no longer be kept "in their pure form." The super-communication via the internet mediates the inferior problematization, often through a tragic disturbance, which comes from the encounter with the other, with the other culture, with the other religious ethos. We can speak of the phenomenon of man's "disinsertion" from the immediate reality, and the gradual loss of the sense of objective reality. Cf. Vasile Vlad, "Nihilismul postmodern și apofatismul creștin: O încercare de dialog," *Tabora* (Cluj-Napoca) 3, 6 (2009): 14.
3. "It would be very wrong to look at the presence of the Church in today's world according to the medieval paradigm, even if, within the Church, some consider this perspective to be realistic and opportune. Some wonder: Don't restoring the sense of transcendence and regaining the preeminence of the person over the structures mean a repetition of the medieval cultural-civilizational experience? The realities of the contemporary world are profoundly different. There have been acquisitions of modernity that have become irrevers-

ible, such as the pluralism of cultures and visions of life, the awareness of autonomy and the 'secularity' of social life, etc. These realities make impossible the cultural homogeneity typical of medieval Christianity, which was based on the coincidence between the universe of faith and the socio-political reality. Moreover, the awareness that the Church has its own nature and mission has matured to such an extent that the medieval way of perceiving Church-world relations has become obsolete." Cf. Bartolomeo Sorge, "I cristiani nel mondo postmoderno: Presenza, assenza, mediazione?" *La Civiltà Cattolica* 134, 2, 3189 (1983): 249.

4. The preeminence of the fragment and the fragmentary over the whole and the totalizer seems to be a product of this type of thinking. This mutation is realized against the background of the imposition of "fragile thinking", of superficial values, of precarious affiliations. All this, in contrast to the emergence of the "digital society," which, with its "artificial intelligence," opens new horizons towards a new and unique "strong thinking." Today, cognitive and value logic is beyond good and evil, the logical and the illogical, because the hunger for the ephemeral and the thirst to "possess" and "experiment" have become insatiable, while at the theoretical level the "indifference culture" is taking precedence. Hence, the exasperated "permissiveness" that characterizes postmodernity, in which all values seem to be in a crisis, causing the most vulnerable categories to behave inappropriately: young people and women, as well as the educators of the previous era: the family and the school. Cf. Paul Poupard, "Fede e cultura nei mutamenti del nostro tempo," *Il Regno-Documenti* 7 (1986): 220.
5. "Romania's depths are amputated, especially at the top. We have some cultural 'heights' without any depth. Therefore, Romania is stuck on the horizontal of false dilemmas: we are told that if we do not want to unite with Rome, we must then be united with Moscow. That if we do not want the capitalism of global multinationals, we are communists. That if we no longer want communism, we must witness the demystification of our national history and the mockery of great authors. There is a constant slipping toward the extremes: either cosmopolitan, with a hybrid identity, new-age-ist, uprooted, consumerist, or illiterate, a member of the secret police, a national-communist." Cf. "De la letargie la liturghie: Un dialog despre normalitate: Interviu realizat de Paul Siladi cu Mircea Platon," *Tabor* 3, 1 (2009): 90.
6. 5-o'clock Romania is exactly the opposite: it is a superficial Romania, concocted by television, newspapers, a weak education system, the emigration of parents forced by economic circumstances to leave their children in order to support them. This Romania is created by the false political-economic-intellectual elite. This Romania is enslaved to passions and instincts, it is the Romania of horizontal "falls." The priest must be the one who prepares thoroughly the re-"birth" of deep Romania. How? Mircea Platon gives us a metaphorical answer: "Romania stumbles over trifles. We live lazily, in old dilemmas, ontologically bent from the spine of dignity. We lack the courage to choose the dynamics of the paradox. We are the victims of a false choice, which we stubbornly keep contemplating, because it is horizontal; because we can recline to one side. Because we know that crucifixions (and only) crucifixions are vertical. Deep Romania is the one we received through Baptism in the Orthodox Church. It is the one we carry with us, the one we see with the corner of our eye and love with the corner of our heart. It is the edge of truth from which freedom comes. It is an icon in a corner of the room. Deep Romania is not 'on the screen,' but in

the ground. In the dust from which we are made, into which we will return and which is destined for Resurrection.” Ibid., 91.

7. Ibid.
8. The Romanians’ defining traits of generosity and harmony, obtained “through extraction” from the warm environment in which they lived, have faded away, because nature has been systematically/chaotically and angrily destroyed. The environment has begun to smile crookedly, as is the greedy grin of those who have destroyed the forests, contaminated the water and polluted the air, making people, animals, and plants sick, and played “God” through genetic mutations, modifying the cultures that represent the everyday food of the Romanians. The well-known saying “The forest is the Romanian’s brother” has become devoid of any meaning and contradicted by the actions against forests taken by the postmodern Romanian. Overwhelmed by the aggressions of the new way of relating to reality (hungry, distorting, deadly), the national being has managed to survive, but it has not survived triumphantly as it ought to have happened, if the picture outlined by Priest Dumitru Stăniloae had had granite stability and disarming fidelity to reality. Cf. Nicolae Leasevici, “Adevăr și exagerare în reflecțiile despre spiritualitatea poporului român la Părintele Dumitru Stăniloae,” *Tăbor* 4, 4 (2010): 14.
9. Jean Sévillia, *Corectitudinea morală: Căutăm cu disperare valori*, translated by Alina-Daniela Marinescu and Paul Marinescu (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2009), 14.
10. Why did this mutation occur? There were many excesses in the past: the two world wars meant the death of tens of millions of people, taken to war in the name of the “common interest,” of the homeland, of the collectivity. Today, on certain landmark dates, the cemeteries of the unknown heroes, be they Russian or German, witness festivities in praise of the soldiers from both camps, although they killed each other. Time has healed the wounds and proved their death superfluous. Then, the collectivity asked the ultimate sacrifice from them. So today, the individual refuses to be “enlisted,” sacrificed for alleged collective needs, for the public good, for the good of others, for the good of his descendants.
11. “In fact, if there are no cognitive certainties or ontological validity of options or renunciations, what’s the point of sacrifice and involvement? If the Christian eschaton is uncertain, why not be content with an aesthetic exploitation of the present?”—the postmodern man wonders. See Piersandro Vanzan, “Quali linee e soggetti per una nuova evangelizzazione del mondo postmoderno?” *La Civiltà Cattolica* 139, 2, 3309, 4 (1988): 250.
12. We remember that, indeed, during the communist regime, the same thing happened: the individual had to constantly yield to collective interests: sacrifice for the common good, hours on end when the electricity was cut off to favor large industrial consumers, hunger in order to favor exports, to pay the foreign debt, sacrifices in order to build the People’s House, etc. The individual was constantly sacrificed for the “common good.” Later on, action was taken to dismantle private agricultural property and include it into collective agricultural cooperatives. So, in postmodernity, the individual is no longer willing to make any sacrifices on behalf of the collectivity, and expresses this unwillingness in a rebellious, totalitarian, neurotic manner.
13. Social affiliation has also been enormously “damaged.” In the 1960s, the industrialization and urbanization involved large population movements, when farmers became workers in factories, villagers became townspeople living in blocks of flats, and there was an unprecedented cultural uprooting. Thus, the “social codes” slowly disappeared. A person’s social identity became fluid. In addition, more recently, this social “lability” has been accentuated

- through continuous job mobility, through the almost perpetual “professional reconversion,” through the absence of long-term loyalty to any job. Cf. *Sévilla*, 27.
14. The definitive abandonment of the native village, the contact with people who live and express their faith differently, the differentiated and hyper-abundant religious offer in the urban environment, the invasion of new religious movements, religious and confessional pluralism, greatly expanded their religious offer available to the individual. The individual has a wide range of alternatives, so he chooses, discarding his religious “heritage,” i.e. the religion acquired at birth, thanks to his belonging to a certain cultural context.
 15. *Sévilla*, 14.
 16. Poupard, 218.
 17. *Ibid.*, 15.
 18. According to the dictionary definition, “to discriminate” means “to differentiate.” And it is “to differentiate” that has become immoral. Cf. *Sévilla*, 16.
 19. Hence, the situation—ridiculous for the advocates and supporters of modern culture—when a mother in Germany refused to have the sex of her son stated in the birth certificate, claiming that it is he who should choose it when he grows up! It is as if an obvious biological identity can be negotiated. So German law has complied, approving that a third possible option should exist for registration in the Registry of Civil Status. “Undifferentiated” sex—the third option.
 20. “The official transposition of this semantic and conceptual upheaval is the creation, in 2005, in France, of the High Authority Against Discrimination and for Equality” (*HALDE*), responsible for monitoring any discrimination related to physical appearance, age, sex, sexual orientation or origin. Having as a starting point a good abstract intention (reparation of individual injustices), this authority will develop a policy that will lead to the desire to erase any differences, which is practically impossible, and will lead to the denial of the principle of non-difference (to differentiate has become abusive!). Because “everyone deserves everything, as they wish”—this is the absolute rule! *Sévilla*, 16.
 21. The rules of politeness have constantly evolved: children used to be taught how to behave, when to keep silent (not to speak uninvited), to respect the elders and their superiors, or how to behave at the table.
 22. In a certain cultural environment, the word “respect” expresses a balance of power: the one who demands respect announces not that he wants to be respected, but that he has the means by which he can be respected by others. In traditional settings, it was self-evident that we owed love to our child—infininitely more than respect—but that in the name of love you must also impose some constraints. The child is too young to know what is really useful to him, perceiving as negative everything that is somewhat uncomfortable. That is why education must help him to face the uncomfortable with a lot of courage, and not to perceive it as negative. *Sévilla*, 20.
 23. *Ibid.*, 28.
 24. *Ibid.*, 29.
 25. The preeminence of technology over ethics seems to be a dogma of post-industrial civilization. Postmodern reasoning postulates the principle according to which “everything that is technically possible would be morally legitimate as well.” As a result, if atomic explosions are possible, they are also legitimate (even if they cause serious imbalances in the ecosystem); if genetic manipulation (or engineering) is possible, it is also legitimate from a practical point of view (even if it can have monstrous repercussions for human beings).

- In past eras of humanistic culture, the answer would have been different, because there was in the consciousness of humanity a preeminence of the being and a metaphysical thinking that prevented certain dehumanizing slips. Today, on the other hand, the scientist and the technocrat advance unhindered in their experiments, simply because they live in a culture in which metaphysics has atrophied (that is, the *forma mentis*, capable of perceiving the being beyond the phenomenological and the absolute beyond the relative, has dissolved). Cf. Vanzan, 245.
26. "What surprises us—looking at the atmosphere during a school break—is the fact that no rules have been followed for a long time. The students smoke, although smoking is forbidden, hats are no longer taken off, no one can punish a jostle or a fight! Teachers are overwhelmed by this civic decay . . . civilization is learned. It's an endeavor that both teachers and students have given up." Cf. Sévillia, 18.
 27. After discipline has been outlawed, the reforms are also radical in terms of the content of education: the student must be the author of his own knowledge?! However, do students have the value orientation to achieve this? Can we claim that they are already formed, rooted axiologically, when this should be the product of the pedagogical approach? A pedagogical slogan reads, "We must not train in order to pass on knowledge, but in order to teach someone how to learn!" Yes, but this kind of education has produced people who can read, but do not know what is worth reading. That is, it has dulled any sense of value, it has leveled everything while losing the criteria.
 28. What is certain is that behind contemporary postmodern official pedagogy there is an ideology. Today, we seek to avoid constraints at any cost, even if the price paid for it involves giving up any selection, any form of elitism, opening the way to mediocrity. Thus, schools have become "temples" of the new pedagogical ideology, in a continuous reformulation and reformation. The problem is that before noticing the disasters or the benefits of the new positions, they are reformed further, continuously, without knowing then which decision has had a positive effect, which a negative one, because they are intertwined. Sévillia, 19.
 29. Here, we can highlight an enriching nuance for both Orthodoxy and Protestantism, born (or made visible) after centuries of controversy: Orthodoxy has always stated (through elementary catechisms) that three things are necessary for salvation: grace, faith and good deeds, while Protestantism has emphasized *ad nauseam* the principle of "sola fide," only the faith is sufficient, for it will bring grace. The current reconciling position is that good deeds are necessary because they reshape a heart, that is, they radically change a man's inner being; they are not to be taken separately from man, as a force that would press God to save someone because they have accumulated good deeds. Obviously, they cannot become an instrument to oppress, to coerce God. However,—and we ask from the classical perspective of Protestantism—who can restore himself inwardly, renew himself, be filled with love, without good deeds? This is how this nuance has settled a centuries-old interfaith conflict, revealing that both denominations were right in a sense when they maintained a doctrinal truth, but also that their positions met the needs of a particular historical and cultural, axiological and moral context.
 30. Silvano Burgalassi, "Evangelizzare la cultura: utopia o realtà possibile?" *Aggiornamenti sociali* 49, 6 (1998): 487.

31. “Slowly but surely, spelling has been sacrificed. It has been “baptized,” pejoratively described as a “random method of writing,” which is a clear proof of sovereign indiscipline and lack of any vigilance in the written presentation of ideas.
32. In France, one-third of fifth-graders cannot read and count. Following a dictation test based on the 1970 correction criteria, 56% of high school students under examination obtained 0 (zero) points in 2006. Cf. Sévillia, 19.
33. The culture of the Enlightenment believed that man had the inner resources to enable him to act according to the principle of love, without resorting to religion, without appealing to God. However, the Church warns that this claim of rationalist humanism has been explicitly refuted by the events of the last centuries. In the age of secularization, trusting exclusively in his own strength and refusing any dependence on God, man—more so now than in the past—has become a slave to his lowest and most ferocious instincts, outlining the physiognomy of that being called “homo brutalis” by philosophers. Man, renouncing the principles of reason, has allowed himself to be tyrannized by the passions of pleasure, power, wealth, domination, aggression, and violence. Cf. Burgalassi, 477.
34. Therefore, the overall picture of today’s world is a mosaic. The priest is responsible before God for a certain “plot,” that is, for the parish for which he was ordained, and not for the whole ensemble. As a result, he must focus all his attention on knowing the cultural universe specific to his own parish, which, in the countryside, overlaps with a village or a locality. The first duty of the priest is, therefore, to know the local culture of his parish. After fulfilling this first task, he has to do a corrective reading of reality, i.e. to make a selection between the values proclaimed at the local level and the pseudo-values that dominate in the local public space: he must eliminate prejudices, create an increasingly deeper attachment to Christian values, strive for the Christian vision of the world and life to become dominant in his parish. He works with an already existing cultural environment in his parish, which can be very toxic to spiritual life or, on the contrary, it can be beneficial to its development.
35. Sorge, 249.

Abstract

Modernity versus Postmodernity in a Local-Regional Variant: Pastoral Reflection Paradigms

Our research is intended to be an exercise in lucidity and a plea for true values, the only ones that can bring peace, harmony, and prosperity to contemporary society. The transfer from modernity to postmodernity has also been achieved in the Romanian space of life and culture, and the duty of the Church is to demonstrate its roots in the present, when it comes to pastoral interventions, and to exercise its ability to guide the culture and civilization of our time in the direction desired by God.

Keywords

postmodern mutations, permissiveness and anti-authoritarianism, tolerance, hypertrophy of revolt, pastoral paradigms, late modernity