

## THE SOCIO-CULTURAL CONTEMPORANEITY AND ITS INTERACTION WITH CHRISTIAN MORALITY

**PhD. Candidate Fr. Andrei Alexandru GRIGORESCU,**

Faculty of Orthodox Theology, "1 Decembrie 1918" University, Alba-Iulia,  
ROMANIA

Email: [andreialexandrugrigorescu@gmail.com](mailto:andreialexandrugrigorescu@gmail.com)

### ABSTRACT

*In the midst of a secularized ethos, the rejection of moral reference points often results in a misguided sense of liberation. This article delves into the conflict between Christian Orthodox morality and secular ethics, emphasizing the detrimental consequences of sidelining the Church's guidance. The modern individual may unknowingly stray into moral abysses, oblivious to the erosion of ethical foundations. The postmodern conception of freedom, which emerges from the rejection or avoidance of axiological alignment with the life of the Church, it is far from being liberating, leading to profound imbalance. The article extends its scrutiny to the contemporary globalist ideology, which contributes to the erosion of the ontological significance of human existence by downplaying the role of religion. It is also emphasized the urge of reestablishing a plenary connection with the Church's moral framework as the antidote to the perceived moral atrophy and the unfulfilling nature of a seemingly boundless but directionless postmodern freedom.*

**Keywords:** morality; ethics; secularization; liberty;

### INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary socio-cultural context, the individual grapples with profound tension, encountering difficulties in achieving genuine moral ideals. This obstacle partially stems from the process of secularization, which has diminished the influence of Christian moral traditions on the public ethos. The religious dimension of morality has been progressively marginalized, propelling morality towards a self-declared autonomy, in which it reaffirms an independent tradition apart from the religious framework<sup>1</sup>.

The modern individual, aspiring to absolute moral independence, often disavows the religious ethical foundations that have served as guidance for many generations, suggesting that the Church, as a divine-human institution, should lean more towards humanity, granting greater heed to creation than to the Creator<sup>2</sup>. The result of this paradigm shift is a sense of alienation and disorientation, as despite one's desire to adopt an ethical stance, the individual no longer benefits from that traditional moral framework to guide them. Thus, the contemporary individual is in a continuous process of searching and redefining their values, confronting the challenges that autonomy and moral relativism bring to their ethical sphere.

Father Professor Nicolae Achimescu believes that contemporary secularized morality is the product of confusion between good and evil, so that permissibility is transfigured into law, acquiring normative status. However, Christian morality distinguishes itself from this

<sup>1</sup> Oliviu-Petru BOTOI, „Raportul dintre Religie și Morală în educația paideică a educației tineretului contemporan”, în *Altarul Reîntregirii*, nr. 1, (2016), p. 552.

<sup>2</sup> Pr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru POPESCU, *Omul fără rădăcini*, Editura Nemira, București, 2001, p. 14.

view, as moral truth cannot be instituted by majority consensus<sup>3</sup>. This distinction underscores the ongoing tension between secular and religious values in defining and understanding morality. While secularized morality leads to relativism based on predominant social norms, Christian morality anchors its principles in a transcendental and immutable framework, denying the possibility of ethical determination through mere human conventions.

In this endeavor, we aim to articulate a conceptualization of the existential crisis confronting the contemporary individual, ensnared in the contradiction between their aspiration toward authentic moral fulfillment and their reluctance to conform to established precepts or norms. This modern delineation of freedom, perceived as a complete absence of restrictions, appears to have a paradoxical effect, inducing imbalance and unfulfillment in the individual's life.

## 1. CHRISTIAN MORALITY AND SECULAR ETHICS

In the light of secularization processes, the concept of morality calls for reinterpretation. It is imperative that this reassessment be conducted through a perspective that blends traditional moral essence with the specificities of the postmodern era, so as not to succumb to excessive relativism or nihilism. This entails recognizing the importance of ethical foundations, even in a society marked by pluralism and cultural diversity, while simultaneously avoiding unjustified prescriptions<sup>4</sup>.

Morality and ethics are often differentiated based on their nature and field of application. Morality has roots in religious traditions and is profoundly influenced by the specific doctrines of a faith; it “relies on the acceptance of the idea that the good is the purpose of the world's existence - because God created it out of His own goodness, and acceptance requires faith, it follows that morality is religious in character”<sup>5</sup>. In this sphere, moral norms and principles are often seen as straightforward imperatives, derived from religious or divine precepts. For instance, the commandment “thou shalt not kill” in Judeo-Christian traditions establishes an absolutist moral framework regarding the sanctity of life<sup>6</sup>. From this perspective, religious morality has a high normative character, based on a set of rules or commandments considered inalienable and universal within the Christian community. This does not mean that morality is completely intransigent, but it gives it significant resilience to change or reinterpretation.

In contrast, ethics deals more with moral reasoning and the justification of norms. In ethics, norms are not necessarily absolute but subject to critical examination, debate, and possible revision. Although ethics may incorporate traditional moral wisdom, including religious wisdom, it also allows for the adaptation or reinterpretation of principles in the face of new ethical challenges. Thus, while morality may be based on a belief system that establishes what is “good” or “bad” in a transcendental sense, ethics engages in a deliberative process to determine what should be considered “good” or “bad” in various

<sup>3</sup> Nicolae ACHIMESCU, „*Secularizarea moralei*”, în vol. *Religie, modernitate și postmodernitate*, col. Media Christiana, Editura Trinitas a Patriarhiei Române, București, 2012, p. 414.

<sup>4</sup> Pr. Alexandru ARION, *Întâlniri cu realitatea – repere pentru dialogul contemporan dintre teologie și cultură*, Editura Cetatea de Scaun, Târgoviște, 2017, pp. 17-20.

<sup>5</sup> Sfântul NECTARIE de la Eghina, *Morala creștină*, trad. în limba română de Diana CĂRBUNEANU, Editura Doxologia, Iași, 2013, p. 116.

<sup>6</sup> V. G. LIPOVETSKY, *Amurgul datoriei. Etica nedureroasă a noilor timpuri democratice*, Editura Babel, București, 1996, pp. 66-67.

contexts and situations<sup>7</sup>. Ethics constitutes a vast territory encompassing a multitude of approaches and theories, each with its own criteria for evaluating moral behavior, demonstrating a tendency to distance itself and explore alternative modes of existence. This highlights the idea that ethics is not a unitary and unchanging construct but rather an amalgamation of perspectives that may propose varied solutions to the same moral dilemmas. Such an approach raises questions about the issue of individual freedom. Philosopher Fernando Savater emphasizes that unlike other beings, humans benefit from the privilege of free will, thus having the possibility to select their own moral norms<sup>8</sup>.

Throughout the development of philosophical and theological thought, the interaction between ethics and morality has sparked intense debates, with a notable example being the work of Saint Thomas Aquinas. In his work, the “Summa Theologica,” Aquinas created an impressive synthesis between Christian theology and Aristotelian philosophy, aiming to demonstrate that divine revelation and human reason are not antagonistic but can coexist in a reciprocal dialogue.

Aquinas integrated Aristotelian ethics into a theological structure, offering profound insights into virtues and morality. Before him, ancient philosophy had a significant impact on defining the notions of ethics and morality, with Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle playing essential roles in this evolution. Socrates, through his philosophical dialogues, emphasized the importance of introspection and self-knowledge as the foundations of morality. Plato developed this idea, asserting the existence of Forms or Ideas, which are transcendent realities that function as archetypes for entities in our world. In this vision, ethics and morality are grounded in a higher metaphysical reality. Aristotle, Plato's disciple, in his works “Nicomachean Ethics” and “Eudemian Ethics,” approached morality from a more humane perspective, focusing on the idea of “eudaimonia” or the highest common good. For him, virtues, both moral and intellectual, are key elements for achieving an authentic and meaningful life<sup>9</sup>.

However, in the contemporary era, we witness a shift in the perception of ethics and morality as the influence of philosophical and religious traditions on public and private thought seems to wane. Factors such as the increasing influence of secularization, cultural and ideological diversity, or the complexity of ethical issues in a secularized world contribute to this evolution. The decline of traditional authority, whether religious or philosophical, in the ethical domain raises questions about the stability and coherence of moral norms. This not only raises a series of questions regarding ethical relativism but also underscores the need for a reassessment of morality in current conditions. In a world where ethics is increasingly influenced by cultural pluralism and fast information exchange, adapting or reinventing traditional frameworks for understanding morality becomes a major challenge to cope with the realities of a rapidly changing world.

In contemporary secularized society, individuals tend to evaluate moral concepts not through the lens of Christian teachings but rather interpret and apply them according to their own desires and satisfactions. The transformation of the moral order has reconfigured how

<sup>7</sup> V. G. LIPOVETSKY, *Amurgul datoriei...*, p. 67.

<sup>8</sup> Fernando SAVATER, *Etica pentru amator*, Editura Timpul, Iași, 1997, p. 35.

<sup>9</sup> Pr. Dr. Dorin Octavian PICIORUȘ, *Lumea postmodernă și depersonalizarea omului*, Editura Teologie pentru azi, București, 2005, p. 312.

society and individuals understand and apply principles. This change indicates a reassessment of norms and values that previously guided human behavior<sup>10</sup>.

The decline of religious morality and the rise of a “reckless” ethics reflect the anxiety of a cultural and ethical transition moment. In this context, there is emphasized a movement from a moral system anchored in tradition and religious dogma towards an ethical system that seems to be more fluid, more adaptable, but also potentially more volatile. The change in paradigm suggests not only a secularization of morality but also a diversification of ethical criteria. If religious morality provided a well-defined and absolute normative framework, based on divine prescriptions and ancestral traditions, modern ethics is influenced by pluralism, relativism, and pragmatism. Thus, the modern individual faces the challenge of navigating through an ambiguous ethical landscape, where norms are not so clearly established or universally accepted, everything being related to one's own pleasure<sup>11</sup>.

## 2. THE MORAL DECLINE IN POSTMODERNISM: A PURSUIT FOR LOST MEANING

Contemporary society is marked by multiple crises that manifest at various levels, from political and economic to cultural ones. However, what often remains understated is the profound moral crisis unfolding beneath these aspects. We are witnesses to an era where superficiality and formalism dominate, where deconstructivism and the excessive autonomy of the individual promote a mentality of supreme being in the absence of divinity. This way of life, which ignores traditional moral structures, places the secular individual in a labyrinth of uncertainty and unfulfillment. The contemporary paradigm seems to suggest that true fulfillment comes from eliminating all restrictions and prejudices, ignoring the fact that often these moral frameworks have functioned as essential guides in the search for meaning and purpose in life.

In a context of ethical and moral transition, the moral crisis can be understood as a manifestation of ontological dislocation, a crisis of the existential foundation of humanity. This type of crisis is not just a symptom of the decay of traditional norms but also of the inadequacy of contemporary ethical models to respond to the fundamental needs of human consciousness and society. Ontologically, the crisis suggests a disintegration of meaning, coherence, and finality that in the past were provided by established ethical and moral systems. Confronted with this disintegration, modern consciousness becomes vulnerable to nihilism, to the sense of futility or lack of meaning. This condition is exacerbated by the fact that contemporary society is often dominated by advanced forms of technology and consumerism, which can diminish the transcendental or spiritual dimensions of existence.

Thus, the ability to recognize the gravity of the situation and to act accordingly may be atrophied. To the detriment of engaging in a deep investigation of the causes and solutions, the postmodern individual may be tempted to approach the crisis through a form of denial or avoidance, thus exacerbating the human condition and diminishing the chances of moral and ethical recovery or reorientation. Such a diagnosis suggests the need for a new collective commitment to explore and implement ethical and moral models that are robust enough to navigate through the complexities of modern life but also flexible enough to encourage innovation and adaptation. This duty entails interdisciplinary and intercultural

<sup>10</sup> Anastasios YANNOULATOS, *Ortodoxia și problemele lumii contemporane*, Editura Bizantină, București, 2003, p.191.

<sup>11</sup> Zygmunt BAUMAN, *Etica postmodernă*, Editura Amarcord, Timișoara, 2000, p. 214.

dialogue, where resources from philosophy, theology, social sciences, and even natural sciences can be mobilized to address the contemporary ontological crisis.

Religion, in the context of contemporary society, is often regarded as an outdated habit, and the modern man seems to be subjugated by epistemological and ontological paradigms that glorify a reconfigured pattern of humanity, one that claims to exercise unlimited freedom without constraints. This evolution reflects a profound axiological crisis, manifested by a detachment from the traditional value system, a process facilitated and amplified by postmodern discourses. Under the guise of an apparently unrestricted freedom, these contemporary narratives promote a set of ideologies that can be perceived as fundamentally antithetical to traditional moral precepts, doctrines that include radicalized feminism, proposals for the deconstruction of the family institution, autonomy in matters of sexual orientation and gender identity, as well as a general reluctance, if not hostility, towards conventional moral norms<sup>12</sup>.

This situation is an effect of secularization, which has resulted in the diminishing influence and prevalence of religious tradition in everyday life, so that “religion becomes a universal ethos, an antidogmatic attitude that constitutes not only the presupposition of hermeneutics but also of democracy itself. Precisely by developing its own secular vocation, Christianity can become a universal religion and can favor the renewal of civil life”<sup>13</sup>.

In the postmodern era, the thesis is advanced that religions are equivalent from a moral perspective, suggesting that their origin lies in human reasoning, not in a transcendent principle. Thus, the idea of a divine origin of religion is rejected, arguing instead that man conceptualized it and divinity itself. This postmodern perspective refuses to recognize the Revelation specific to the Judeo-Christian tradition, which culminates in the Savior Christ, and proposes a religious egalitarianism, placing Christianity on the same level as other religious traditions. Another defining aspect of this era is the adoption of an integrative discourse, which blurs the distinctions between truth and falsehood, between salvific orthodox doctrine and heresy, this being manifested even at the ecclesial level<sup>14</sup>.

We are witnessing a reinterpretation and sometimes even a subversion of the notion of correctness. Traditional religious morality, which has served as the foundation for many societies over the centuries, is now subjected to intense pressures and faces significant challenges in the postmodern era. Postmodernism, with its roots in secularization and sometimes seen as an extension of Marxist principles, brings contradictions and ambiguities to correctness. We live in an era where traditions and established norms are often questioned, and relativism seems to dominate discourse. In addition to this, we are witnessing an accentuation of individualism and a rejection of any transcendental authority, creating an environment where the traditional limitations of human behavior are often seen as restrictive. Thus, the individual is tempted to follow his impulses without deep reflection on the moral consequences of his actions<sup>15</sup>.

The twentieth century was marked by the emergence and consolidation of various ideologies that had a profound impact on social and cultural structures. Although ideology

<sup>12</sup> Pr. Dr. Doru COSTACHE, „Antropocentrismul modern și oferta antropologiei eclesiale. Elemente pentru misiunea Bisericii”, în *Analele Universității din Craiova*, nr. 10, (2002), p. 231.

<sup>13</sup> Santiago ZABALA, „Introducere: O religie fără teiști și atești”, în vol. col. Richard RORTY, Gianni VATTIMO, *Viitorul religiei. Solidaritate, caritate, ironie*, Editura Paralela 45, Pitești 2008, p.14.

<sup>14</sup> Pr. Conf. Univ. Dr. Gheorghe PETRARU, *Teologie Fundamentală și Misionară. Ecumenism*, Editura Performantica, Iași, 2006, p. 231.

<sup>15</sup> Constantin C. PAVEL, „Tragedia omului în cultura modernă”, în colecția *Impasuri și semne*, coord. Christos YANNARAS, Editura Anastasia, București, 1997, p.19.

often presents itself under the auspices of correctness and the promotion of freedom, it can actually represent a serious obstacle to ethics and morality.

This apparent paradox is fueled by the fact that radical ideologies, especially those with an authoritarian or dictatorial character, are intrinsically incompatible with universal ethical principles. Ideology, in these conditions, proves to be not only a mechanism for organizing society but also a tool for nullifying ethical and moral nuances and complexities. It can impose a monolithic vision of reality, one that excludes the need for critical reflection and constructive dialogue on ethics and morality. Thus, in a context where authoritarian ideologies can suppress or even eradicate ethical traditions and moral norms, a rigorous examination of the relationship between ideology, ethics, and morality becomes imperative<sup>16</sup>.

Twentieth-century ideologies, such as fascism, communism, and Nazism, developed their own ethical systems which, under the pretext of defending specific values or rights, defied and violated the fundamental rights of man. Nazism, under the guise of promoting living space for the Aryan race, as described in “Mein Kampf,” denied and suppressed the rights of other ethnic groups. Communism, likewise, was responsible for numerous abuses, including political crimes and spiritual persecutions. In the contemporary era, we are witnessing the emergence of more subtle yet equally influential ideologies. These ideologies promote values such as human rights, globalization, and mass leadership, but in reality, they can lead to the manipulation of these by a small group of individuals with their own interests. Economic globalization, under the auspices of the new world order, seems to consolidate this trend, as the major resources of the planet become increasingly concentrated in the hands of a small number of people. It is crucial to understand and analyze these dynamics to ensure that the fundamental rights of the individual are not sacrificed in the name of larger interests or a distorted ideological vision<sup>17</sup>.

The fundamental needs of human beings, such as physiological ones, underpin any action and decision, directly determining their receptivity to any form of control or influence. Control over these essential resources allows for the manipulation of individual and mass will. In the context of postmodernism, man is often portrayed as the center of his own universe, perceived as a “god without God,” disregarding the existence of God<sup>18</sup>. This presupposes an unrestrained freedom, without consequences or responsibilities towards others, which can lead to an extremely selfish attitude and exploitation of those around them.

Under the influence of globalist ideology, there is a tendency to view religion as anachronistic and as an obstacle to human “progress.” Such a viewpoint can lead to the marginalization or even persecution of practitioners of these religious traditions, as they are seen as barriers to a so-called “evolution” of society and the individual. The postmodern individual faces a crisis of their essential freedom and identity, a degradation of the ontological sense of existence that makes man, as Romanian philosopher Petre Țuțea asserts, “a poor speaking rational animal who comes from nowhere and heads towards nowhere”<sup>19</sup>. Through his statement, he underlines a certain despair and a loss of meaning in human

<sup>16</sup> Pe larg în Pr. Prof. Dr. Leon ARION și Lect. Dr. Alexandru ARION, „Globalizarea, gigantică mutație civilizațională”, în volumul *Religia în societate la început de secol XXI. Tendințe europene*, Editura Valahia University Press, Târgoviște, 2006, pp. 39-53.

<sup>17</sup> Olivier CLEMENT, „Despre secularizare”, în *Teologie și viață*, nr. 5-8, (2002), p. 15-20.

<sup>18</sup> Pr. Prof. Ilie MOLDOVAN, *Darul sfânt al vieții și combaterea păcatelor împotriva acestuia*, Editura I.B.M al B.O.R., București, 1997, p.25.

<sup>19</sup> Petre ȚUȚEA, *Între Dumnezeu și neamul meu*, Editura Anastasia, București, 1992, p. 55.

existence, presenting man as an ephemeral entity, devoid of a clear and defined purpose. This “poor speaking rational animal” finds himself in an apparently indifferent cosmos, without a clear source of origin and without a defined destination, a bleak vision highlighting the destabilizing effects of a society that removes spiritual and transcendent values in favor of a purely materialistic and immediate view of reality.

A society that departs from God or isolates Him in the realm of “utopian philosophies,” denying His influence on collective conduct, is one that autonomously rejects its source of life. This underscores the spiritual danger in which the community finds itself when God is eliminated or marginalized from its value and moral structure, leaving room for purely human interpretations of the meaning and purpose of existence<sup>20</sup>.

The concept of freedom, in its current understanding, is brought to an extreme degree of intensification. Paradoxically, society often evolves unaware that it is under the influence of a neo-Marxist ideology. One of the major issues contemporary society must address concerns the phenomenon called the “clash of civilizations,” a masterful concept expounded by Samuel Huntington in his emblematic work of the same name. Unfortunately, the ideal of tolerance is often eclipsed or even sabotaged by extremist factions rooted in various global cultures. Globalization, with all its potential to unify, has also generated profound transformations in the structure and dynamics of civilizations and cultures, both in the East and the West. The Western individual, who in the modern era distanced himself from traditional spirituality and adopted a secularized position, surprisingly finds himself susceptible to Eastern fascination and seduction. Thus, starting from the sixth decade of the last century, we witness an effervescence of cultural revolutions manifesting on multiple levels of society<sup>21</sup>.

The Oriental Mysticism has been assimilated and adapted in various ways within the Western cultural context. For instance, yoga, despite capturing widespread interest among contemporary populations, is often approached without a deep and authentic understanding of its essence and intrinsic meanings. This superficiality in adoption demonstrates an effort to integrate exotic elements, yet, at the same time, a potential misunderstanding or simplification of Eastern practices and philosophies.

The contemporary individual tends to be characterized more by a syncretistic approach than by a profound commitment to authentic spirituality. In this direction, the aesthetics of “form without substance,” as well as the emptiness of content, represent concepts that significantly influence and shape him, suggesting potential superficiality or diversity in approaching the spirit and human values in the modern era.

The abandonment of Christian moral principles has not found an adequate substitute within atheistic and free-thinking paradigms, as human essence is undeniably moral, and superficial approaches fail to satisfy this intrinsic need. Western culture is inexplicably drawn to the spiritual and moral practices of the East, without requiring intensive proselytism. Offering unrestricted freedom, the individual feels an inner void, facing dilemmas of non-achievement and stagnation. Immersed in daily turmoil, there is a loss of identity, transitioning from the status of “person” to that of “individual.” In this light, the Western postmodern man, although perceives freedom as an inalienable right, is often a prisoner of his pleasures. He is under the illusion that technological progress has ensured a superior standard of living, but in reality, indulges in reckless consumerism. Thus, one of the

<sup>20</sup> Placide DESEILLE, *Nostalgia Ortodoxiei*, Editura Anastasia, București, 1995, p. 276.

<sup>21</sup> Pr. Prof. Dr. Leon ARION și Lect. Dr. Alexandru ARION, „*Globalizarea, gigantică...*” p. 247.

main causes of the depletion of earthly resources can be attributed to this widespread consumerism, rather than uncontrolled population growth<sup>22</sup>.

An individual uprooted<sup>23</sup> from his fundamental spiritual sphere, granted absolute freedom over sensory experiences, inevitably becomes vulnerable, being exposed to manipulation, especially through the media, in the current context. Reiterating the concept of the “clash of civilizations” in the postmodern era, we observe that significant transformations have occurred in the Eastern sphere as well, both spiritually and morally, as well as in the field of technology. Thus, in the context of current geopolitics and cultural diversity, reconciling civilizations seems a monumental challenge. The notion of “unity in diversity” becomes a difficult ideal to conceptualize and, even more so, to achieve, even in light of the progress of globalization<sup>24</sup>.

Today, we can identify a profoundly postmodernist society deeply influenced by consumerist ethos, where superficiality comes to dominate the value palette. The spiritual deficit leads to erosion, if not outright elimination, of fundamental moral values. Ethics imported from outside, lacking anchorage in a deep religious tradition, proves inadequate in meeting the authentic needs of contemporary man. The culture of the present is undeniably shaped by the predominant ideology within society, reflecting a symbiosis between epistemological paradigms and behavioral manifestations of individuals. Culture and civilization can be defined as what we sow, but the problem arises when we cultivate sin, migrating unquestioningly to a “perverse culture”<sup>25</sup>.

Instead of contributing to the development and ennoblement of human beings, today's culture seems to be more of a factor of disruption and erosion, humanity being “directly and constantly exposed to the culture of death”<sup>26</sup>. In the postmodern era, the absence of spirituality is supplemented by selfish, consumerist tendencies, and a simplistic approach to reality; there is also a decrease in the morality of the contemporary individual, whose existence is outlined in a deconstructivist context. Despite access to extensive freedom and countless opportunities, man feels drained of content and struggles to (re)discover himself. In a search for transcendence, he desires connection with God but resists integration into a religious community. This mentality efficiently aligns with the directions of a new order, making the New Age movement appear as a response to the modern man's attempt to find meaning and fulfillment in spiritual and moral planes<sup>27</sup>.

In the current context marked by syncretism and unregulated freedom, the contemporary individual falls prey to an illusion of spirituality, convinced that he is boundless. In tandem with this perception of freedom, tolerance is often misunderstood, facilitating and promoting a hedonistic lifestyle, devoid of a clear purpose. This ephemeral existence thus becomes an end in itself, bypassing the essential destiny of human existence. We observe a trend of dilution of ties with cultural heritage and alienation from ancestral values. Postmodern society, with its deconstructivist tendencies, harshly criticizes traditions and moral norms, perceived as archaic relics and sources of prejudices. This postmodernist

<sup>22</sup> Georgios MANTSARIDIS, *Globalizare și universalitate, himeră și adevăr*, Editura Bizantină, București, 2002, pp. 25-29.

<sup>23</sup> Expression of the Pr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru POPESCU, *Omul fără rădăcini*, Editura Nemira, București, 2001.

<sup>24</sup> Dominique SOURDEL, *Islamul clasic*, Editura Meridiane, București, 1975, p. 207.

<sup>25</sup> Jerom. Rafail NOICA, *Cultura Duhului*, Editura Reîntregirea, Alba Iulia, 2002, p.15.

<sup>26</sup> Pr. Conf. Dr. Mihai HINCINSCHI, „Cultura Evanghelică”, în vol. *Omul de cultură în fața descreștinării*, Editura Reîntregirea, Alba Iulia, 2005, p.294.

<sup>27</sup> Mirel BĂNICĂ, *Locul celuilalt – Ortodoxia în modernitate*, Editura Paideia, București, 2007, pp. 31-33.



pseudo-cultural current denigrates the notions of “Christian” and “cultivated,” indicating a departure from the fundamental values that underpinned the construction of Western civilization. In this light, we may suggest that we are nearing the end of a cultural era. Future generations may view the pre-postmodern period as a golden age, an idyllic period compared to the complexity of the present<sup>28</sup>.

## CONCLUSION

Achieving moral and social fulfillment represents a significant challenge, considering the concessions often necessary to integrate into the predominant societal matrix. Resistance to the ethical precepts of postmodernism can lead to the ostracization of the individual from the community; however, the spiritual tenacity and moral integrity inherent in the authentic Christian individual can serve as a guiding light amidst the darkness of the world.

Thus, man discovers his authenticity and purpose not as an isolated individual but as a relational entity, as a dialogical being. In this sense, true fulfillment can only be attained through mutual communion with fellow human beings, highlighting the dual nature of man as both rational and inherently personal. Therefore, profound fulfillment, both moral and spiritual, manifests in the social context<sup>29</sup>, as the individual is never closed in on oneself but open to the bond of love with others. In the image of the Trinity, transcending nature, communion does not mean living alongside each other but living through one another, according to the words of Christ: “As you, Father, are in me, and I in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me” (John 17:21). This is why the Holy Trinity has been portrayed as the structure of supreme love, and this is also why the mission of the Church is to surpass rationalistic systems and to bring love, justice, goodness, and philanthropy into interpersonal relationships among members of society. In short, we could say that the Holy Trinity forms the basis of the Church's social program in the world in which we live. This is another relevance of Orthodox theology for the contemporary world.

In the current context, secularized society promotes an ethical vision of human existence detached from traditional restrictions and free from preconceptions. The absence of the spiritual dimension not only attenuates the moral foundation of the individual but also aligns him with contemporary models, distancing him from his authenticity and existential essence. In a society dominated by hedonism, commercialism, and utilitarianism, the supreme value of pleasure has been elevated to alarming levels. In this paradigm, the individual has turned the pursuit of pleasures into a type of faith, and money has become a divine simulacrum, a euphemistic idol. The disastrous consequence of this hedonistic “religion” is the propulsion of the individual into the abysses of depression, despair, and spiritual as well as physical alienation<sup>30</sup>.

The desacralization and moral decline undoubtedly manifest as results of the transformations that have taken place in the sphere of human reasoning, will, and affectivity. The contemporary mind is subjected to constant evolution, necessitating a profound reassessment of the essence and particularities of moral responsibility.

<sup>28</sup> H.-R. PATAPIEVICI, *Omul recent. O critică a modernității din perspectiva întrebării „Ce se pierde atunci când ceva se câștigă?”*, Editura Humanitas, București, 2001, p. 85.

<sup>29</sup> Olivier CLEMENT, *Adevăr și libertate. Ortodoxie în contemporaneitate. Convorbiri cu Patriarhul Ecumenic Bartolomeu I*, Editura Deisis, Sibiu, 1997, pp. 118-144.

<sup>30</sup> Andrei PLEȘU, Gabriel LIICEANU, Horia PATAPIEVICI, *O idee care ne sucește mințile*, Editura Humanitas, București, 2014, pp.101-102.

Post-modern ethics, characteristic of the secularized individual, seems to operate a reversal of traditional values: the fundamental essence is lost in favor of an excessive focus on details and particularities. In such a framework, ethics becomes predominantly utilitarian, evaluating actions more based on their immediate results than on intrinsic principles or their essential value. The change in paradigm, in the absence of solid ethical principles, risks leading society to an unacceptable threshold of morality, where the meaning and value of life become increasingly unclear, and towards profound nihilism, where nothing has absolute value or perpetual significance<sup>31</sup>.

The Church has the duty to counteract these ideologies that distance the human being from its true mission. The dominant conceptions in contemporary society may be tempting for the current believer, but, as Saint Apostle Paul reminds us: “All things are lawful for me, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be mastered by anything” (1 Corinthians 6:12). The Church, being the “pillar and foundation of truth” (1 Timothy 3:15), possesses the capacity to provide the individual with salvific solutions to all the dilemmas they face.

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<sup>31</sup> Pr. Ștefan FLOREA, „*Christian Ethics and the Ethics of Contemporary Man*”, în *HEC Forum*, 2008, 20 (1), p. 71.

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