

THE NEED FOR TRANSCENDENCE

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Abstract. About transcendence, human reason itself speaks, taking into account the fact that reality itself is inconceivable. Yet once aware of that, it helps man to re-enter the house of being, to cultivate the ontological hope in the possibility of returning to the origin, to place the soul at the top of the hierarchy of any values, to see in history and in the continuous present its definitive role, because, as Saint-John Perse says, recalling Hegel, "there is no other history than that of the spirit." Hence the need to discern between what passes and what remains, between Heraclitus the Ephesian and Parmenides the Eleatic, therefore between the permanence of passing and the permanence of the essence, of being. The logic of transcendence should not need lawyers to argue in its favor. Man only needs to realize that his soul, his consciousness, are a piece of the transcendent, a constitutive, structural, ontological, transcendental element, hence his longing for the transcendent as in a kind of *abyssus abyssum invocat*.

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Introduction

Seeing the situation of the contemporary world, of the Western world in particular, we rightly ask ourselves how it came to this. Collective and individual aggressiveness, relativization of values, existential confusion, exacerbated individualism, indifference to the suffering of the other, as a person or as a group, perversion of conscience, abandonment of principles, unapologetic opportunism, subjective interpretation of what the common good means, ideological radicalization, hatred, intolerance, resentment, rancor, poisoning of interpersonal relationships, disintegration of the family, loss of faith, addictions and vices transformed into virtues, uncontrolled liberalism, narcissism, conflict and political instability, corruption, victimization, etc.

One of the main causes of this decline, according to the observations of many analysts, is the secularization of society, where the Christian faith, the Church, was pushed from the center to the periphery, becoming, from an influential and normative institution, a private and optional choice. And when God becomes an individual option, the place from which man removed him must be filled with something else, usually with a false ego, in the sense of man's moving

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from modesty to arrogance, and of the well-known expression “full of self”. But the cult remains. Having moved from theocentrism to anthropocentrism, man continues the act of worship, only now it is about the cult of the self, the cult of the human person.

As the Church no longer has a normative function in society, people formulate their own norms according to the vision of the world and life that they embrace. The statistics on religious affiliation are evocative in this sense. According to one of them, in the second decade of the 21st century, the number of Americans, for example, identifying as Christians fell from 75% to 63% and 3 in 10 identify as “none”, meaning they are either atheists or agnostics, or other types of “none”.

With local variations the situation is similar in other countries in Western Europe. For instance, most people in the Netherlands today have never visited a church, and one in 10 of those who still identify as Catholic say they don't believe in God, according to the Catholic Archbishop of Sydney, Australia, Anthony Fisher, who wrote about the situation in the Catholic Church.² Speaking of another place, the Basque country in Spain, he reports that there the men are “delivering their wives to Church each Sunday and waiting for them in a bar.”³

Post-Christian society and modern technology

The separation between church and state and church and culture, in particular after Enlightenment, which led in the West to a full-blown secularism that intended to abolish religion altogether, determined some social theorists already by the 1930's to begin speaking about a post-Christian society. This type of secularization went hand in hand with the process of disenchantment⁴ where people were encouraged to find enchantment in something else.

When God is killed, as Nietzsche reported in the madman's story through which the German philosopher in fact criticized man's position *coram Deo*, before God, God's place is taken by an idol, and in Nietzsche's telling, this idol is man himself, who is then incapable of doing God's job. The metaphor is clear: man wants liberation from the divine authority considering it too restrictive for his current views about life and world and that leads him to a false existence, one of dream and irreality, as Simone Weil put it.⁵ In this context one can ask whether the emancipation from God and from religion was indeed one from dream and irreality and the beginning of a real existence, or exactly the other way around.⁶

² Anthony Fisher, “The West: Post or Pre Christian?”, in *First Things*, Nr. 330, February 2023, p. 20.

³ *Ibidem*, p. 24.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

⁵ Simone Weil, *Waiting for God*, Harper and Row, New York, 1951, p. 159.

⁶ Theodor Damian, *Implicațiile spirituale ale teologiei icoanei [The spiritual implications of icon theology]*, Eikon, București, 2003, p. 20.

The philosopher Emil Cioran described this situation in sharp words. “Man,” he says, “accumulates irreality and delights himself in falsity, in an irrational tendency towards gigantism. What throws us into action is our debility and inadaptability.”⁷

The war against God is madness. It is not by mistake or happenstance that Nietzsche chose a madman to talk about the killing of God. Disenchanted with who he is, man wanted to assume an identity that did not fit him, like wearing expensive and beautiful clothes that are in fact too tight. Today this kind of desire for a new identity is found in the hope placed in technology. As Alexander Dugin writes, in Michael Millerman's presentation, “the history of liberalism is one of false liberation from collective identities and extended sources of authority, culminating in man's attempt to liberate himself from gender identity and human identity in favor of cyborgs, artificial intelligence networks, and products of genetic engineering.

To be free in the liberal way is at last to liberate the human being from himself. Individual freedom leads to the destruction of man.”⁸ The cyborg as man's dream of acquiring immortality, of reaching bodily transcendence by becoming a virtual being altogether reflects, in a sense, Plato's disdain for the physical body considered to be the soul's prison and from which the soul has to escape.

We already live in a form of metaverse as more and more of our lives, labor, leisure time, spending, wealth, happiness and relationships go online. They will exist online.”⁹

Technology is becoming the “iron cage,” to use Max Weber's expression, from which it is more and more difficult to escape because it makes us feel good. As the saying goes: the most dangerous prison is the one in which you are made to feel good. You will never want to get out.

Looking at our lifestyle today, Theodor Adorno states that we are living in “the false, and there is no right living in the false.”¹⁰ It looks like we are condemned to living in the false.

The cyborg enchantment for a new identity and new existential condition represents a major target in science and technology. “It raised the expectation in

⁷ Emil Cioran, *The Temptation to Exist*, transl. from French by Richard Howard, Quadrangle Books, Chicago, 1970, p. 15.

⁸ See Michael Millerman, “Alexander Dugin explained,” in *First Things*, Nr. 330, February 2023, p. 46.

⁹ Mary Harrington, „Surviving the Metaverse,” book review for *The Metaverse and How it Will Revolutionize Everything*, by Matthew Ball, Norton, New York, 2022, in *First Things*, Nr. 330, February 2023, pp. 51-52.

¹⁰ See Claire Richters, “Glimpses of Light from Enlightenment's Prison,” book review for *A Precarious Happiness: Adorno and the Sources of Normativity*, by Peter E. Gordon, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, IL, in *The Hedgehog Review*, Vol. 26, Nr. 1, Spring 2024, p. 155.

some quarters that cutting-edge research in brain imaging, simulation capacity, and artificial neural networks will soon make possible the transfer of an individual's entire mental life - thought, sensation, memory, emotion, psychology - from his physical brain to an exceedingly complex computer file" [...] that is "mind uploading," "the perennial dream of achieving immortality."¹¹ Of course, a hard problem remains, and that is called consciousness!

As one can see, the consumption society dominates man, it consumes him physically and in particular spiritually. In life's problems, man looks for help to machines, becomes dependent on them to the point of reification. In this phenomenon of dehumanization, technology becomes idol and the idol becomes monster, as Abraham Heschel warns.¹² This dehumanization, in Nicolas Berdyaev's view, brings man to bestialization, a process that will end in the deification of the bestial.¹³

The loss of the mystery

The illusion of a new existential enchantment by which man abandons his objective reality produces "a fracture of being," as Cioran puts it,¹⁴ and is explained by A. Dugin when he writes about the essential difference between man as an individual and man as a human person: "The individual is the product of subtraction of the personality from the human being, the result of liberation of the human unit from any bonds and collective structures."¹⁵

Individualism, which, according to Robert Bellah's report in the bestseller *Habits of the Heart*, published in 1985, became a main feature of life in America already in the last decades of the 20th century, generating many types of crises, is a departure from man's ontological destiny. The ontological structure of man is trinitarian as he was made in God's image, the tri-une God's image, whose main characteristic is loving communion.

The Western civilization's decline, which mirrors the revolt against God, the abandonment of the sacred or the chasing of the sacred from the profane, the demythologization of God and of the Bible, and the loss of Tradition, of the mystical tradition as well, and in particular due to modern rationalism and the misperceived irreconcilable conflict between religion and science, caused man to lose "the mysterious ground of existence" that Heidegger believed we are capable to be moved by.¹⁶

¹¹ Martha Bayels, "The Character of Tragedy," in *The Hedgehog Review*, Vol. 26, Nr. 1, Spring 2024, pp. 62-63.

¹² Abraham Heschel, *Who Is Man*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, CA, 1965, p. 86.

¹³ Nicolas Berdyaev, *The Fate of Man in the Modern World*, Ann Arbor Paperbooks, The University of Michigan Press, Michigan, 1963, p. 27.

¹⁴ Emil Cioran, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

¹⁵ Michael Millerman, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

¹⁶ Martin Heidegger, "The Fourth Political Theory," cf. Michael Millerman, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

Thus, man has become a prodigal son who has lost his direction and the sense of existence. This wandering now leads him directly to a desert of despair that can only have two endings: suicide (as in Nietzsche's madman who killed God) or returning home, to God, because, as Pavel Florenski warns, ultimately, there will be no other choice for humanity but Holy Trinity or madness.

Going back to God implies a conscious restoration of the mystery, a re-enchantment of the world, a return to the un-demythologized traditional values, with constant awareness not to fall into traditionalism, as Jaroslav Pelikan warns when he defines Tradition as the living faith of the dead and traditionalism as the dead faith of the living.

We speak of modernity as generally beginning with the Age of Reason, in the Middle Ages and augmented by Enlightenment, when the major disenchantment with religion took place. Yet from the disenchantment point of view, modernity actually began with Adam and Eve being disenchanted in paradise by Satan who portrayed to Eve the Edenic existence, where man represented the untainted image of God, as an injustice. Thus, Satan stirred in Adam and Eve's hearts a feeling of disenchantment about their condition and about God, leading them into disobedience and based on a kind of inner revolt, asking themselves why weren't they equal to God. Not happy with who they were, with their identity, they wanted to be like God. So, Satan enchanted them with an illusion which led to the fall from their existential condition in paradise.

Therefore, the solution of man's estranged condition is the return to the sacred, to God, to the origin. It is in its origin that the power of a thing lies, according to Mircea Eliade, that is the mythical time, *illud tempus*, the time of the sacred, which can be reached through rituals that re-connect (re-ligo, religion) man with God.

The axiological confusion

What Satan did to Adam and Eve was to plant in them the seed of pride, of vanity that led to questioning the original order of the world and to wanting to order it according to their own desires and understanding, as if they understood the world, the universe. That was their sin, as sin is defined by the Church Fathers as an error of thinking. That was the first axiological confusion, which is mirrored in our society today, where each one wants to order the world according to his own ideas. *Quot capita tot sensus*, the Latin saying goes (as many heads, so many opinions).

In such pluralism, based, among others, on an ever more subjective notion of human rights, confusion is to be expected. As Joseph E. Davis writes, with "the normative pluralism of our situation, it is hard to achieve stability or practice

consistent truthfulness where so many other values, often incompatible, are in play and none can necessarily claim precedence over the others.”¹⁷

It appears that Descartes was right when he considered that less laws and rules will bring more stability in a society.¹⁸ Less rules would allow people to see better the essential, the common denominator, that is the common good in a society. The confusion of values makes one live in illusion, like in the patristic example where Avva tells his disciple: Light is reflected on a wall. Don't venerate the wall! Pay attention to the light.¹⁹

The issue of values is also related to education, and one place where that is evident is the school curricula, from grade education to the university, where disciplines belonging to humanities, including classical languages, for example, are taught less and less, with a visible tendency of their elimination from the study programs in the detriment of character formation and of a solid general culture. As Michah Mattix observes, “education, now, understands itself primarily as a problem solving and knowledge acquiring enterprise. It trains students in the use of a single voice. Such an education is barbaric, no matter how developed it may be.”²⁰

That single voice is represented by science and technology in particular. Yet these fields, without the balance of humanities, are vulnerable, just like Einstein said about science and religion: science without religion is lame; religion without science is blind.

When Emil Cioran wrote that “the mode of knowledge man chose is an offense, a criminal intention toward creation before which he stands as its self proclaimed destructor,”²¹ he referred to the primordial situation when God forbade Adam to eat from the tree of knowledge. Yet that bad choice can be seen as an echo in the type of knowledge man chooses today.

This situation has direct and powerful implications on the moral order in society, on the values man chooses and how he chooses them. A paraphrase of a Romanian proverb would say: tell me what values you choose and I will tell you who you are.

The relativization of values and moral decline, where God is no longer the supreme value, allowed man to also lose his place in the top of the hierarchy of values as being the image of God. In other words, man is no longer the supreme value after God. He was replaced by what man does, desires, creates. The

¹⁷ Joseph E. Davis, “The Basis of Everything: The Fragility of Character in a Truth-Challenged World,” in *The Hedgehog Review*, Vol. 26, Nr. 1, Spring 2024, p. 90.

¹⁸ René Descartes, *Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy*, Fourth Edition, Hackett, Indianapolis, IN, 1998, pp. 10-11.

¹⁹ Anthony DeMello, *One Minute Wisdom*, Double Day, New York, 1986, p. 33.

²⁰ Michah Mattix, “The Integrity of Poetry,” in *First Things*, Nr. 330, February 2023, p. 30.

²¹ Emil Cioran, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

machine, for example, is becoming more important than man. Or, if man is important, that is in the sense of his ego and less, or not at all, in the sense of special appreciation and consideration of man as human being, of humanity.

That decline is partially reflected in situational ethics, where whatever one does is justified by the context, by the situation. That is similar to some cases in the process of confession, where one goes to the priest and is supposed to tell one's sins and wrongs, and while doing that, starts explaining each transgression in its context in order to offer extenuating circumstances and receive less penance or get an easier absolution.

It is also like knowing precisely the divine commandment "you shall not lie," formulated simply, clearly, strongly as well, and the liar would say: yes, but ... in that particular situation...; and then, there is another situation, and so on, ... and this is how lying becomes a habit. That is one way in which the reversal of values happens when a new normal arrives. For example, in today's world, truth is no longer a generally accepted moral categorical imperative, which is why the term post-truth society or age is now in use. That determined William Damon, a psychologist teaching at Stanford University, to write that we live in a dysfunctional period of social change in which an essential commitment to truthfulness no longer seems to be assumed,²² the sociologist Joseph E. Davis to state that in contemporary life "the evidence of growing dishonesty is overwhelming,"²³ or James C. Rahn to express concern about the moral order in American life: "In America today," he writes, "there is no coherent, much less operative ethics within either the public sphere or private life."²⁴

The seriousness of the human situation

If someone were to paint a picture or make a diagram of the history of human civilization and try to interpret current realities, taking into account the historical context and possible future perspectives with special regard to the worrying discrepancy between morality and technology, including the fantastic possibilities of AI, he or she would have more than enough reason for alarm.

That is why Abraham Heschel expresses himself so bluntly when he speaks of the frightening seriousness of the human situation.²⁵

In equally blunt terms, Emil Cioran, observing "man's thirst for adventure and infamy,"²⁶ draws attention to the weakness of human nature, especially in the

²² William Damon, *The Death of Honesty*, Hoover Institution, January 12, 2012 (<https://www.hoover.org/research/death=honesty>).

²³ Joseph E. Davis, *op. cit.*, p. 90.

²⁴ James C. Rahn, „The Necessity of Networks: The Case of William Wilberforce and the Clapham Sect,” in *The Hedgehog Review*, Vol. 26, Nr. 1, Spring 2024, p. 114.

²⁵ A Heschel, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

²⁶ Emil Cioran, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

struggle with the self and the consequences of this. "As long as we are incapable of conquering our deficiencies," he says, "we have no choice but to cultivate them and enjoy them,"²⁷ leaving the reader to realize for himself where the cultivation of defects, imperfections, sins in theological terms, can lead, and what the final outcome may be.

Of course, the future can only be gloomy, considering how the world is structured into "the miserable and the rich," as Eminescu put it in a poem, and looking at the tendency of the few rich who can buy everything for themselves, compared to the rest of the world, who receive what they need by the portion, just as much as those who have will decide to allow them. Therefore, the future, with all its promises, is completely uncertain, even for those who imagine that they can buy it. In this context, the words of the American businessman Arnold H. Glasow are meaningful: "The trouble with the future is that it usually arrives before we are ready for it."

This state of insecurity combined with modern man's fear of death and the impossibility of overcoming existential contrasts brings us back again and again to the fundamental question: Who is man? In this sense, the philosopher and theologian Abraham Heschel also asks: "Isn't our entire civilization built on a false interpretation of what man is?"²⁸

Where, when and how did the idea, the tendency *to have* to the detriment of *being*, take root in the human soul, or rather, took possession of the human soul, or how did we reach the existential confusion, where *being* is understood by *having*?

Without answering this question, in his work *To Have or To Be*, Erich Fromm offers interesting reflections, but without seeing a light at the end of the tunnel, because he says skeptically: "in order to understand a thing, man must have it; and having it, he destroys it."²⁹

That is why Oscar Wilde said that there are only two tragedies in the world: one consists in the fact that man cannot obtain what he wants and the other in the fact that man obtains. This, in the end, is the real tragedy.³⁰

The illusion

And another tragedy is when man identifies himself with what he has and with what he does, not understanding the qualitative existential difference between these things and as such losing his royal dignity of origins. Thus, becoming profane, always external or marginal to things, even if he falsely

²⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 138.

²⁸ A. Heschel, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

²⁹ Erich Fromm, *Avoir ou être*, R. Laffont, Paris, 1981, p. 35.

³⁰ See A. Heschel, *op. cit.*, p. 87.

identifies with them, he ends up being an agent of disintegration. When he manages to enter them, he does so like a worm that enters a fruit and destroys it.³¹

This situation leads Karl Barth to exclaim: "Man, as we know him in this life, is an impossibility. This man, before God, can only die."³²

The vain sensation of omnipotence makes the man separated from the Almighty live in illusion, to indulge in appearances and then even to believe that they define him. Instead of living as if he were to die the next day, he lives as if he were immortal. Appearances deceive not only others, but even himself. They actually hide his vulnerability, his weaknesses, his inner poverty. And when you have lost the authentic and ultimate meaning of your existence, of destiny and destination and you go through life like a "messenger who has lost the message,"³³ life is lived sideways, or as Victor Frankl says, man lives in an "existential vacuum."³⁴ Such a situation makes another philosopher conclude that "man is absurd,"³⁵ and hence, of course, the absurdity of our world foreseen by Nietzsche when he portrays the courage of the shamelessness of killing God or by Jean Paul Sartre (*No Exit*) when he warns about the consequences from which there is no escape when man without God builds a false destiny that leads him to a wrong destination.

Although an atheist, Sartre writes this play about an essential theological concept, namely hell, an existence in a state of total and irreversible separation from God, which confirms A. Heschel's conclusion that "the opposite of the human is not the animal, but the demonic."³⁶

The remaking of the image

Theologically speaking, the cause of the human drama must be sought in the beginning. Something happened sometime, somewhere. Man, made as a deiform creature, endowed with freedom of choice, aroused the envy of the devil. The devil, suggesting to man to break God's commandment by eating the forbidden fruit, advising him that in this way he would be like God, thus pushing him towards a false divinization, actually caused his dehumanization.

Being the image of God, man had the consciousness and the awareness of the ultimate belonging ("Our Father who art in heaven"), a consciousness rediscovered in man by the divine Logos incarnate in history. This belonging is

³¹ Cioran, *op. cit.*, pp. 36-37.

³² Karl Barth, *The Word of God and The Word of Man*, translated and with a new preface by Douglas Horton, Harper, New York, 1957, p. 140.

³³ A. Heschel, *op. cit.*, p. 119.

³⁴ Victor Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*, Third Edition, A Touchstone Book, Simon Schuster, New York, 1984, p. 111.

³⁵ Diogenes Allen, *Philosophy for Understanding Theology*, John Knox Press, Atlanta, 1985, p. 249.

³⁶ A. Heschel, *op. cit.*, p. 101.

the only one that gives meaning to existence because it is its basis. The exit from the image, a fracture in being, as Emil Cioran would say, can only survive partially, in an illusion of existence, as the part cannot survive separated from the whole, that kind of path leading to total extinction, like a spark that jumps out of a flame.

So, if we know the cause, we can think of a solution. In this case, as the cause has to do with religion, the solution must also come from there. In other words, the restoration of the image of God in man, the reestablishment of human existence on the eternal values that relate to the knowledge of God and submission to the imperatives of the relationship with Him, are meant to free man from the embarrassment of his present condition. Embarrassment because “we are the greatest miracle on earth and yet we do not understand it.” “Religion,” says Abraham Heschel, “depends on what we do with this ultimate embarrassment.”³⁷

This is embarrassment, because we are an unanswered question, because we don't understand the "why" of things, our existence being an extraordinary thing, a miracle in itself, because we received as a gift a life for which we paid nothing, or as Bryan Magee says, we are given all “these possibilities [...] without our fully understanding them. We are awe stricken by our situation. We are so small in everything compared with what there is, and so ignorant. Mystery surrounds us on every side. And our destiny is not in our hands [...] We cannot explain life itself or within life, consciousness and love.”³⁸

The logic of transcendence

In the universe and in our lives, if we look closely, everything speaks of transcendence. Our world has no value except in its relationship with the transcendent.³⁹

This relationship humanizes man, maintains him in his authentic condition and has the implicit effect of humanizing his world. Otherwise, as a philosopher warns, existence without transcendence is a way of being where things become idols, and the idols – monsters,⁴⁰ and these, in the end, will devour those who created them, will devour their worshipers.

About transcendence, human reason itself speaks, taking into account the fact that most of reality is “unconceptualizable” for us,⁴¹ or rather, reality itself is inconceivable. Once aware, it helps man to re-enter the house of being, to cultivate the ontological hope in the possibility of returning to the origin, to place the soul at the top of the hierarchy of any values, to see in history and in the

³⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 113.

³⁸ Bryan Magee, *Ultimate Questions*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, 2016, pp. 46-47.

³⁹ Theodor Damian, *op. cit.* p. 137.

⁴⁰ A. Heschel, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

⁴¹ Bryan Magee, *op. cit.*, p. 85.

continuous present its definitive role, because, as Saint-John Perse says, recalling Hegel, “there is no other history than that of the spirit.” Hence the need to discern between what passes and what remains, between Heraclitus the Ephesian and Parmenides the Eleatic, therefore between the permanence of passing and the permanence of the essence, of being.

The logic of transcendence should not need lawyers to argue in its favor. Man only needs to realize that his soul, his consciousness, are a piece of the transcendent, a constitutive, structural, ontological, transcendental element, hence his longing for the transcendent as in a kind of *abyssus abyssum invocat*. Theologically speaking, as man is the image of God, the great abyss calls the small, or the small yearns for the great, for the source. Therefore, as long as this tendency is natural and logical, opposing or even ignoring it is unnatural or, better said, against nature.

In this sense of the ontological tendency towards God, St. Augustine also expresses himself: “You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and my soul is restless until it rests in you.”⁴² But the search for God would not take place if God were not already in man. That is why the patristic adage says: you cannot go towards God if you do not already depart from Him; or also Blaise Pascal in the dialogue that God has with him: “You would not seek Me if you had not already found Me.”

The longing for God

The longing for God and the restless search are beautifully and poetically illustrated by Lucian Blaga: “Where are you Elohim / We wander troubled and unwillingly / Through the elements of the night we spy on you / We kiss the star under our heels in the dust / And we ask about You, Elohim // We stop the sleepless wind / And we test you with our nostrils, Elohim / We stop strange animals through spaces / And we ask them about You, Elohim” (*Ioan is torn in the wilderness*).

Longing implies a past, lived experience. You cannot miss something you have not seen, heard, or experienced. We miss a place because we have been there; people, because we have had dealings with them; a piece of music because we have heard it once and liked it. In general, longing is associated with positive states of mind: pleasure, joy, peace. You don't miss a terrible suffering, a degrading experience, just as you don't miss death because you didn't experience it.

This longing characterizes human life, it is felt, directly or indirectly, more or less consciously, in a vague, indefinite or more concrete form, a fact that, again, confirms man as a religious being, as Mircea Eliade explains.

⁴² Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, Penguin Classics, New York, 1961, p. 21.

The longing for God is also based on the fact that after the primordial fall, out of His love for man, God did not throw man into chaos, into non-existence, into the nothingness from which He made everything, nor at an unbridgeable distance, abolishing the possibility of any contact, but, on the contrary, instead of throwing him out altogether, He *settled* him (!) *near the place* from which he was expelled, as the Scripture states: “And expelling Adam, he *settled* him *near* the garden of Eden” (Genesis 3, 24, emphasis added).⁴³ One should note here the meanings of the expression “to settle”: tenderness, care, love. And He placed him *nearby*, that is, however, somewhere close, in order to reaccept him as soon as the conditions for reintegration were met, but also for him to keep the longing for origins, for God, burning.

So, man is compatible with transcendence because he is the image of God in his spiritual part, as the great philosophers of the world affirm, from Parmenides and Plato, passing through Jesus Christ and Paul of Tarsus, to contemporaries. We have something within us from beyond us, as Maurice Merleau-Ponty also observes when talking about language when he says that although it transcends us, we still speak. It also happens with our existence: we are part of the Being beyond us. We are mortal and yet we share in Being. According to the reflection of the English philosopher Bryan Magee, “we humans are partially in this world and partially not. The fact that the self is not found in Nature may explain the widely held conviction that a self is not an object or a thing, and therefore cannot be justifiably treated as such,”⁴⁴ which also confirms the highest dignity of the human being.

Dwelling on the transcendent

The transcendent dimension of the human person also emerges from a conversation between Bishop Theophilus of Antioch (2nd century) and an atheist who, contesting the existence of the soul, also asked for evidence of the existence of God. To this, the Bishop says: Show me your man (in you) and I will show you God.

He who does not believe in God, nevertheless has Him in the depths of his being, which is why Jesus Christ said it in general: “The kingdom of God is within you” (Luke 17:21). It must only be discovered, but one cannot discover it when one is scattered abroad. For the one who discovers it, however, God becomes the center around which he gravitates and on which he bases his life, the transcendent source of the meaning of existence.

He who believes advances, pushed by his own courage of faith, towards ever new possibilities as Emily Dickinson says meaningfully: “I dwell in possibility”. But the believer would say even more: I dwell in the transcendent, or,

⁴³ See: Brenton English Septuagint; Blue Letter Bible; Septuaginta-die-bibel.de; Biblia sau Sfânta Scriptură, București, 2008, 2023.

⁴⁴ Bryan Magee, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

I live in the Resurrection, contrary to the Heideggerian concept of *Sein zum Tode* (existence towards death), yet transfigured for the Christian into *Sein zur Auferstehung* (existence towards Resurrection).

However, even *Sein zum Tode* is sometimes interpreted not as a fatality, not as a condemnation, but as a possibility for a new beginning, for a re-rooting in Being,⁴⁵ a process also understood by Maurice Zundel when he said that “man is not yet, he must become. This is the primary objective of our hope.”⁴⁶

Theologically speaking, however, *becoming* is a way towards the origin, towards God, but through people, a fact which takes us into the territory of morality, the man next to me being my transcendence as Roger Garaudy writes:⁴⁷ “I do not define myself fully except in relation to the other person, to all people in the totality of their history and culture.”⁴⁸

So, everything is relationship, and any relationship is an encounter that gives new meaning to life, of course, the encounter with God, the great encounter, being the one that gives life its full, total meaning.

In today's world, however, although metaphysics is the profound source of morality, this is not a main concern in academic circles, observes the American professor James C. Rahn.⁴⁹

The secularization of society is considered to be one of the causes of this uprooting, due to which the narcissism, the individualism of modern man has become an increasingly visible characteristic. Reflecting on this, Simone Weil demanded imperatively: “Let man empty himself of his false divinity.”⁵⁰ Hence the need for authentic self-reflection or inquiry according to the Socratic advice, but also the Pauline exhortation, the need for kenosis, of emptying, of detachment from the fabricated personality and the return to the one created in the image of God. This type of becoming will transform the mirror man, in which he always sees only himself, into the window man, through which he always sees others and God, according to the inspired metaphor of Martin Luther King, and will lead to an expansion of morality, just as technology is expanding, otherwise we need to question where it will get without the compulsory and necessary moral dimension.

Conclusion

As Walter Brueggemann says, it is time to realize that it is vitally necessary for us to make that the praise, the doxology, our obligation and delight,

⁴⁵ Michael Millerman, *op. cit.*, p. 44.

⁴⁶ Marc Donzé, *La pensée théologique de Maurice Zundel*, Editions du Tricorne, Editions du Cerf, Genève, 1980, p. 73.

⁴⁷ Roger Garaudy, *Parole d'homme*, D. Laffont, Paris, 1975, p. 148.

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 53.

⁴⁹ James C. Rahn, *op. cit.*, p. 115.

⁵⁰ Simone Weil, *op. cit.*, p. 159.

to have them become the ultimate vocation of the human community⁵¹ because, as A. Heschel also notes, if the world will perish, this will happen not due to a lack of information, but due to man's lack of appreciation for his neighbor,⁵² for the image of God present in every person. It thus draws our attention to the need for Spirit and spirituality, because matter awaits the transfiguring action of the spirit⁵³ or, as St. Augustine warns, "he who is not spiritual even in his flesh becomes carnal even in his spirit".⁵⁴

We believe what we want to believe, but then we become what we believe. That is why it is important what we choose, it is important to pay attention to the divine advice for us to choose life (Deuter. 30, 19), that is, the path to the royal dignity of the human person, to its fulfillment in God. And even if sometimes this path seems difficult or impossible, Christ specifies that He is the way, that with God nothing is impossible, or as a patristic saying puts it, when the way seems impossible to you, make the impossible a way.

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⁵¹ Walter Brueggemann, *Israel's Praise: Doxology against Idolatry and Ideology*, Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1989, p. 1.

⁵² A. Heschel, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

⁵³ Anoushka von Heuer, *Le huitième jour ou la dette d'Adam*, Jean Luc de Rougemont, Genève, 1980, p. 6.

⁵⁴ Cf. Paul Evdokimov, *Les ages de la vie spirituelle*, Desclée de Brouwer, Paris, 1964, p. 137.

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