

IS CHRISTIANITY STILL UP-TO-DATE? AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL ARGUMENT

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ABSTRACT

*In a world dominated by newness, the question we start with is inevitable: is Christianity still relevant today? For believers and religious affiliates, the question is superfluous; but it falls to them to deliver valid answers, even to such rhetoric. Where will they build their argument from? From a God whom the opposing camp has long since disqualified? We believe that one of the common, valid premises for effective dialogue and constructive criticism is the human being itself. Man is the immediate reality, impossible to neglect, which is the concern of both believers (a being destined to fulfilment through deification, legitimised as a person by God) and non-believers (a being legitimised by itself). The evolution of this being becomes the control lamp of ontological truth and implicitly contains the answer to our question. We have analysed, comparatively, two vectors, two potential directions relevant to human evolution. The first is described in two landmark works of literature, *The Abolition of Man* and *The Brave New World*, and the other through a summary of the orthodox Christian anthropological paradigm. In the case study I have developed, I have come to the conclusion that in the manner in which man undergoes a rationalistic immanent reductionism, becoming merely nature, he becomes himself a piece of nature and seals his demise through dehumanization, becoming himself an idol without consciousness. At the same time, if he empowers his inner, spiritual universe and tries to establish himself in the mystery of the personal God by relating correctly to nature, i.e. to the nature within him, he will find himself in the position of the saint who has risen above nature by the spiritual discipline of instincts. Here true reason and full freedom are revealed. So, despite hostile social pressure, Christianity is not only relevant today but, along the lines of this argument, necessary.*

Keywords: *Man, nature, idols, saints, conscience, reason, modernity, social pressure;*

INTRODUCTION

The questioning that marks the title of this study does not aim to delineate partisanship for or against Christianity nor to deepen fault lines but, rather, to facilitate the finding of valid answers at the round table of research and objective questioning, free from resentment and prejudice. What prompts us, however, to initiate this approach is an already entrenched social paradigm, visible as a hallmark of contemporary society or as a civic reflex, manifested in the form of a direct hostility to faith. This is felt, generalised, by what Brett C. Hoover recalled: „social pressures among young people have more recently turned against religious affiliation”¹. The above question is claimed both from within Christianity

¹ Brett C. Hoover, „Evaluating the Moral Framing of Disaffiliation: Sociological and Pastoral Perspectives of the Rise of the «Nones»”, in: *Religions* 2021, 12 (6), 386, pp. 1-2, <https://www.mdpi.com/2077-1444/12/6/386>.

and from without. If we place ourselves within, we will be tempted to talk about God, using reference to Him as the ultimate argument. In this situation, however, our interlocutors, positioned outside, will consider our argument irrelevant, because their logic, which starts from premises alien to divinity, does not allow itself to be penetrated by what they have already long since disqualified. Why have they done so? Because the supreme value for them is no longer God but man, and all valid arguments come from this register. The validity of this geography of debate is attested to by C.S. Lewis in his book *The Abolition of Man*, where its mechanism is clearly shown: „It is the difference between change from within and change from without, between organic and surgical. ... There is a difference between true moral progress and mere innovation”². It should be noted that objective criticism has a very good chance of being constructive, whereas hostility can only be barren and blind³. Based on these considerations, we have decided to use the reverse argument, in the sense that we reach God from the bottom up, from man. It is, if we may say so, a kenotic approach; aware that God assumed our condition through incarnation, becoming true man, we are convinced that, starting from man, we can reach God. So our argument is anthropological in nature because, by talking about man, we draw the same starting line in the debate and, on the other hand, by not being positioned on the outside, we have managed to calibrate a constructive dynamic that compels us to identify the final answers.

1. RETROSPECTIVE - THE DYNAMICS OF A MUTATION

„Instead of taking advantage of the new freedoms, ... [people] set out to lead virtuous lives. ... The threat of a healthy society seemed very plausible then”⁴. It is worth remembering that in the first millennium before Christ mankind passed through what Karl Jaspers called the „axial age”⁵ or the „axial period of history, ... [in which] personal consciousness pierces the sacralized collective, the philosophical question arises, the concept opposes the myth, and the prophecy of immanent sacredness”⁶. This is the context that promotes „the free individual and his capacity for rational thought, moral action and personal belief”⁷. It is the time of „Confucius in China, Buddha in India, Zarathustra in Iran, Socrates and Antigone in Greece, the great prophets of Israel in the Middle East”⁸. If man has been empowered, God has been projected „beyond the world, ... identifying him only with the good”⁹. We are talking about a period between 800 and 200 BC, which required a conceptual and even axiological settling. In the midst of this crystallisation process, biblical revelation is situated between two extremes, namely between „the Asian East, where man loses himself in the divine, and the ancient West, in which the restlessness of the individual is castrated. ... [The biblical revelation proposes] a personal God, who can no longer be confused with eros and the cosmos, and man, created in His image, called to become a unique, incomparable person. ... [called] to difference and communion”¹⁰. In the new spiritual geography created

² Clive Staples Lewis, *Desființarea omului*, Humanitas, București, 2023, p. 46.

³ C. S. Lewis, *Desființarea omului*, p. 47.

⁴ Clive Staples Lewis, *Sfaturile unui diavol bătrân către unul mai tânăr*, Humanitas, București, 2021, p. 180.

⁵ Diac. Ioan I. Ică Jr, *Canonul Ortodoxiei. Sinodul VII ecumenic. 2. Definitivând dogmatic orthodoxia*, Deisis, Sibiu, 2020, p. 1128.

⁶ Olivier Clement, „Creștinătate, secularizare și Europa”, in: Ioan I. Ică jr și Germano Marani, *Gândirea socială a Bisericii*, Deisis, Sibiu, 2002, p. 507.

⁷ Diac. Ioan I. Ică Jr, *Canonul Ortodoxiei*, p. 1128.

⁸ O. Clement, „Creștinătate, secularizare și Europa”, p. 507.

⁹ Diac. Ioan I. Ică Jr, *Canonul Ortodoxiei*, p. 1129.

¹⁰ O. Clement, „Creștinătate, secularizare și Europa”, pp. 507-508.

by the era to which we refer, Christianity and Europe stand in the middle, as an absolute axiological synthesis, both theologically and anthropologically, in what may be called „the mystery of the Other inscribed at the heart of Unity”¹¹. In the Asian hemisphere, „the universe is reborn in the divine, ... [in] the Semitic hemisphere [Judaism and Islam] the encounter between man and God [is achievable, almost exclusively and unilaterally, through] man's submission to the Law”¹². Out of this synthesis achieved by Christianity is born modernity, which „uses and makes use of the truths that remain of the ancient treasure of Christianity”¹³, by parasitizing the very premises that created it¹⁴. We are contemporaries of a social construct, modernity, for which political Christianity is „both vector and victim”¹⁵.

This parasitic dynamic of modernity in relation to the axiological system that generated it can be seen, with the naked eye, in the concept of the human self and legitimacy. Modernity has produced a kind of critique based on the „reconstruction of the genesis”¹⁶ about man and his ontological springs. It is the strategy denounced as „disguising the origin of borrowed things”¹⁷, such as the modification of certain virtues (love becomes benevolence, hope becomes optimism, the Decalogue is replaced by human rights), resulting in a set of counterfeit values, whereby the origin of these contents is no longer sought in God but is passed „under the yoke of «man»”¹⁸. Ernest Bernea identifies the principles of the new type of society: „the principles of the modern ... converge towards one result: the disfigurement of man. Culture has been transformed into propaganda and entertainment, good into material success, beauty into perverse refinement. Economics and politics ... have only subjected [man] to increasingly difficult conditions. Science and industrial morality ... have closed to man the paths to a life proper to his nature”¹⁹. If we refer to man, he is „forced to be «modern», ... he can no longer legitimize his humanity because he no longer has firm references which were the hierarchical cosmos or the personal God, against which he defined himself”²⁰, man being sufficient to himself, making „a criterion of himself”²¹. The scheme proposed by Remi Brague shows us a man of antiquity defined as soul with reference to nature, a man of Christianity defined as person with reference to God and a man of modernity, defined as self/ego, without a precise reference²², modernity ends up, in essence, „consuming meaning without creating meaning”²³.

The new human type reveals itself to us as an unhappy creature, a mutation, „a self isolated in its individual self-referential interiority”²⁴; is, if you like, an „implosion [of the human, in which] the place of the believer, who owes a debt of love to God and his fellow men, and that of the citizen, who owes a debt of patriotism and civic-mindedness to nation

¹¹ O. Clement, „Creștinătate, secularizare și Europa”, p. 508.

¹² O. Clement, „Creștinătate, secularizare și Europa”, p. 508.

¹³ Gilbert K. Chesterton, „Is Humanism a Religion”, in: Remi Brague, *Modern cu moderație. Timpurile moderne sau inventarea unei înșelăciuni*, Editura Spandugino, București, 2022, p. 21.

¹⁴ R. Brague, *Modern cu moderație*, p. 19.

¹⁵ Diac. Ioan I. Ică Jr, *Canonul Ortodoxiei*, p. 1129.

¹⁶ Clive Staples Lewis, *Ferigi și elefanți și alte eseuri despre creștinism*, Humanitas, București, 2021, p. 133.

¹⁷ R. Brague, *Modern cu moderație*, p. 23.

¹⁸ R. Brague, *Modern cu moderație*, p. 23.

¹⁹ Ernest Bernea, *Criza lumii moderne*, Predania, București, 2011, p. 47.

²⁰ Diac. Ioan I. Ică Jr, *Canonul Ortodoxiei*, p. 1126.

²¹ R. Brague, *Modern cu moderație*, p. 24.

²² R. Brague, *Modern cu moderație*, p. 25.

²³ R. Brague, *Modern cu moderație*, p. 22.

²⁴ Diac. Ioan I. Ică Jr, *Canonul Ortodoxiei*, pp. 1129-1130.

and state, has been taken ... simply by the individual with his subjective desires, feelings and conceptions, which have become the supreme value and the sole criterion of thought and behaviour”²⁵. These mutations are felt as an existential drama, as a drift of the human being who has lost the reflex to seek his compass: „The great drama of the contemporary world is centered elsewhere than in the economic and political crises, ... in the intimate nature of man, in his horizon, in the spirit that governs him and makes him what he is. ... Who would have imagined ... that man would reach the state of denial of his own nature and that his world of values would be overturned ...?”²⁶.

The consequences include the collapse of fertility, the birth of ideologies and the abandonment of moral references²⁷. It must be said that Christianity promotes, par excellence, a culture of life²⁸, and this is proven sociologically and historically. To exemplify, we bring to mind the golden age of religious affiliation in the U.S., which is closely linked to the Baby Boomer generation (’46 – ’64): „Existing data do indicate that affiliation and participation in traditional religious institutions reached a provisional peak in the early postwar period, from the late 1940s into the early 1960s, especially among young people. This occurred alongside other markers of social stability (such as marriage rates and fertility) after decades of economic depression and war. Cold War opposition to atheistic communism played a role—traditional religion was patriotic—as did the postwar rise of the «new» Evangelicalism associated with figures like Billy Graham (Putnam and Campbell 2010, pp. 82–90)”²⁹.

An „anthropology of freedom understood as a process of realization of the person in an attitude of conflictual competition with God” has taken shape.”³⁰. This is why any moral reference anchored in providence is perceived by the new human type in a distorted manner, as a serious compromise and an injury to his dignity. Beyond constraining us, the One who intentionally created us free guides us. As an example, our understanding of the Pauline verse «All things are lawful for me, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful for me, but not all things I build up» (1 *Corinthians* 10: 23) has a much deeper meaning than a particular divine preference for a particular pattern of human conduct: „the boundary that separates good and evil [permissible and impermissible] ... is none other than that which separates life from death”³¹.

The horizon of a healthy society becomes a threat to a self-drunk world. The „solution” sought calls for the implementation of a two-way reductionism: either towards nature, as an emptying of the world of the spiritual through its immanentization and disembodiedness; or towards a pseudo-spiritualization of it: „As far as devils are concerned, the human race can make two equally significant but opposite mistakes. One is not to believe in their existence. The second is to believe in it, and to bicker with devils to too great and harmful an extent. They themselves rejoice in both errors and will greet the materialist, as well as the magician, with equal delight”³².

²⁵ Diac. Ioan I. Ică Jr, *Canonul Ortodoxiei*, pp. 1126-1127.

²⁶ E. Bernea, *Criza lumii moderne*, pp. 45-46.

²⁷ Diac. Ioan I. Ică Jr, *Canonul Ortodoxiei*, p. 1127.

²⁸ Diac. Ioan I. Ică Jr, *Canonul Ortodoxiei*, p. 1154.

²⁹ B. C. Hoover, *Evaluating the Moral Framing of Disaffiliation*, p. 2.

³⁰ Arhimandrit Teofil Tia, *Preoție misionară și pastorală contextuală*, Editura renașterea, Cluj-Napoca, 2014, p. 295.

³¹ R. Brague, *Modern cu moderație*, p. 220.

³² C.S. Lewis, *Sfaturile unui diavol bătrân către unul mai tânăr*, p. 9.

2. THE ABOLITION OF MAN AND HIS BRAVE NEW WORLD

The above subtitle is a literary borrowing and refers to two landmark books by two great authors, CS Lewis and Aldous Huxley. Obviously, it is no secret that we are referring to the books *The abolition of man* (1943) and *Brave New World* (1931/1932). Although, chronologically, *The Abolition of Man* is written after A. Huxley's *Brave New World*, the thread of events and the projections it makes anticipate what in Huxley is already happening, so they create the continuity of a plausible imaginary; it is exactly the ball at the net of our discussion. As the title suggests, *The Abolition of Man* unfolds a casuistry in which man, a tripartite composite of mind, chest and belly, amputates his depths to eliminate what would make him vulnerable in his ideal of mastering nature. The result is a new type of human who becomes a victim of his own ego; from master of nature he becomes a piece of it, from the one who was set on mastering it completely, a poor being assimilated to the point of disintegration by the game he had in his sights. If Lewis draws a jaundiced conclusion, of man collapsed under the burden of his own ambitions, Huxley opens up the prospect of a future mastered by the new human type, man already dismantled but continuing his life in the inertia of a world that no longer belongs to him at all. This is why his novel is part of the dystopian literary type, because the new society meets all the conditions of a world opposed to utopia. Specific to this world is the loss of intelligence and emotion, the cancellation of the individual/person, and much more.

The absolutization of rationality is used as a tool in the dissolution of the affective: „Anyone can «dissolve» the feelings by a flat rationalism, ... [and] a hardened heart does not provide infallible protection against a weak mind”³³. In Huxley the feeble mind is perpetuated by sophisticated genetic engineering, genetic determinism and propagandistic inoculation from the embryonic stages of conception, where children are „decanted” and not born, where the great laboratory is called the „Hall of Social Predestination”. The objective is a highly advanced technological one: „What man has bound, nature can no longer unbind”³⁴. Embryonic propaganda is meant to imitate not the work of water, which „can pierce even the hardest granite but, [rather] like wax droplets for seals, liquid droplets that stick, encrust, embed themselves in the matter on which they fall”³⁵. In the new world there is no longer a place for principles of life built on values, or on coordinates such as „right feelings” or „hierarchical affections”³⁶; here everything is done according to new principles: „the secret of happiness and virtue: to like what you are forced to do”³⁷. Conscience is no longer a landmark but, on the contrary, becomes a mark of the primitivism of the old man, because now it is desired to cut off „the parasitic growth of emotions, religious consecration and inherited taboos, in order to make room for «real» or «fundamental values»”³⁸, obtaining instead „all the advantages of Christianity and alcohol, without any of their disadvantages”³⁹. They „know how to manufacture consciousness and decide what kind of consciousness they will manufacture”⁴⁰, because, in their opinion, eliminating the affective part necessarily leads to guaranteed happiness, to: „permanently satisfied people”⁴¹, which is why it takes personal

³³ C. S. Lewis, *Desființarea omului*, pp. 19-20.

³⁴ Aldous Huxley, *Minunata lume nouă*, Ediția a III-a, Editura Polirom, Iași, 2011, p. 27.

³⁵ A.Huxley, *Minunata lume nouă*, p. 34.

³⁶ C. S. Lewis, *Desființarea omului*, pp. 19-20.

³⁷ A.Huxley, *Minunata lume nouă*, p. 21.

³⁸ C. S. Lewis, *Desființarea omului*, p. 33.

³⁹ A.Huxley, *Minunata lume nouă*, p. 59.

⁴⁰ C. S. Lewis, *Desființarea omului*, p. 58.

⁴¹ A.Huxley, *Minunata lume nouă*, p. 47.

pride in the fact that „no effort has been spared to ... lighten emotional life”⁴² and fully justifies the existence of a „College of Affective Engineering”⁴³. The success of this department will be that „values [become] simple phenomena of nature. Value judgments will be produced in the learner within the programming”⁴⁴.

Lewis masterfully expresses himself using a plastic comparison, in which we see birds teaching their chicks to fly, on the one hand, and a farmer treating the chicks as he pleases, without their being aware of the ends that are required to be achieved: „the old system consisted in a kind of propagation - people passing on humanity to other people; the new system consists only in propaganda”⁴⁵. The consequence Huxley draws: „we are all owned by everyone else”⁴⁶ and this would be, in the new axiological system, the definition of the good: „«the good» ... means what is useful for the community”⁴⁷. Lewis's remark is shockingly true: „With a creepy simplicity, we excise the organ and claim function. We create people without chests and expect them to be full of virtue and enterprise. We deride honour and are surprised to find traitors among us. We chastise and demand that the fucks be productive”⁴⁸. With apostolic courage, he defines man thus: „Chest - Charity - Feeling - these are the indispensable connecting factors between the cerebral man and the visceral man. One might even say that it is this intermediary element that defines man as man: for through his intellect he is but spirit, and through lust he is but animal”⁴⁹. An animal driven by instincts is a creature incapable of knowing inner fulfillment and balance. This is a logical deduction based on proven facts: „Our instincts are at war. ... every instinct, if you obey it, claims to be satisfied at the expense of all others”⁵⁰. Value judgments originate neither in instincts, because then we should recognize the value of feelings, nor in ideologies: „The human mind has no more power to invent a new value than it has to invent a new primary color”⁵¹. The only source of value lies in the springs of the inner man. In the absence of this, all attempts to reconstruct the genesis of values end up being denounced as attempts to arbitrarily tear fragments from their „participating context to the whole and amplified in their isolation”⁵².

Man's victories are ambivalent because „every new power gained by man is also a power over man. ... In every victory, man is both the triumphal general and the prisoner behind the triumphal chariot”⁵³. In line with Huxley, Lewis clearly affirms the ambivalence and failure of human success, by stripping the creature of dignity and the characteristic notes of the human person: „The last men, far from being the heirs of power, will, of all men, be most at the mercy of the great planners and programmers, and the power they themselves exercise over the future will be minimal. ... Man's power to transform himself into whatever he wishes means ... the power of certain men to transform others into what they first desire”⁵⁴. Huxley marks the drama of such a scenario: „Men are happy; they get what they

⁴² A.Huxley, *Minunata lume nouă*, p. 49.

⁴³ A.Huxley, *Minunata lume nouă*, p. 71.

⁴⁴ C. S. Lewis, *Desființarea omului*, p. 57.

⁴⁵ C. S. Lewis, *Desființarea omului*, pp. 27-28.

⁴⁶ A.Huxley, *Minunata lume nouă*, p. 45.

⁴⁷ C. S. Lewis, *Desființarea omului*, p. 32.

⁴⁸ C. S. Lewis, *Desființarea omului*, p. 31.

⁴⁹ C. S. Lewis, *Desființarea omului*, p. 29.

⁵⁰ C. S. Lewis, *Desființarea omului*, p. 38.

⁵¹ C. S. Lewis, *Desființarea omului*, p. 45.

⁵² C. S. Lewis, *Desființarea omului*, p. 44.

⁵³ C. S. Lewis, *Desființarea omului*, p. 55.

⁵⁴ C. S. Lewis, *Desființarea omului*, pp. 55-56.

want and never ask for what they cannot get”⁵⁵. Lewis's observation is masterly: „Unrestrained by values, Nature masters the programmers and, through them, all humanity. At the moment of its fulfilment, the conquest of Nature by Man turns out to be the conquest of Man by Nature. ... Whenever Nature seemed to back down, it was really a tactical retreat. ... What we thought were hands raised in surrender were actually her arms opening to embrace us forever. ... Nature seems to be spatial and temporal, ... the universe of quantity, as opposed to the universe of quality; of objects, as opposed to consciousness; ... is that which admits of no value, as opposed to that which has and perceives value; the unity of efficient causes ... as opposed to final causes. ... We reduce things to Nature precisely so that we can "conquer" them. ... Once we have given up our souls, that is, ourselves, the power thus conferred will not belong to us. ... It lies in Man's power to treat himself as a 'natural object' and to treat his own value judgement as a raw material which scientific manipulation can alter to suit itself. ... If man chooses to treat himself as a raw material, that is what he will be: and not raw material manipulated by himself ... but by raw appetite”⁵⁶. Bernard, one of Huxley's characters, asks his interlocutor, Lena, „Wouldn't you like the freedom to be happy in another way? For instance, in your own way?”⁵⁷. It unmasks the soul, the chest of man that opens the coordinates of the inner man. Lewis denounces the reductionism operated by man by extirpating the depths and gives the final hint: „For the sages of old, the cardinal problem was how to make the soul conform to reality, and the solution was knowledge, self-mastery and virtue. The problem shared by magic and the applied sciences is how to make reality conform to man's desires: the solution is a technique ... ready to do things hitherto considered repugnant and unpious - such as digging up and mutilating the dead”⁵⁸. All these conquests become meaningless because they amount to nothing more than „a betrayal of man's nature and spiritual destiny”⁵⁹.

3. HUMAN NATURE, IDOLS AND SAINTS

*„Freedom is the understanding, self-controlled movement of the soul. That is why unnatural animals are not free. For they are carried by nature and do not carry it. Therefore neither do they resist natural lust, but as soon as they are seized by a craving they rush towards its fulfilment. But man, being rational, is led by the flesh rather than carried by it. ... Man is the being who disposes of himself, freely taking account of laws, but not being wholly subject to a law, like the things and animals which constitute nature. Man is, in a certain sense, above nature, making it an instrument of his will and being able to fill it with the divine Spirit and his altogether superior freedom, which strengthens our freedom. Only when man makes himself the slave of the passions does he become a mere piece of nature or less than nature”*⁶⁰

St. John the Ladder tells us that man's mission is to „subdue the flesh and the senses”⁶¹, which means that man was created by God „with a mixture of freedom and necessity”⁶², from which we understand that „man can rise in spirit above the sinful nature,

⁵⁵ A. Huxley, *Minunata lume nouă*, p. 233.

⁵⁶ C. S. Lewis, *Desființarea omului*, pp. 64-66.

⁵⁷ A. Huxley, *Minunata lume nouă*, p. 98.

⁵⁸ C. S. Lewis, *Desființarea omului*, p. 71.

⁵⁹ E. Bernea, *Criza lumii moderne*, p. 46.

⁶⁰ Pr. Prof. Dumitru Stăniloae, în: *Filocalia*, Vol. 9, Humanitas, București, 2011, pp. 49-50.

⁶¹ Sfântul Ioan Scărarul, „Scara Dumnezeiescului urcuș”, în: *Filocalia*, Vol. 9, Humanitas, București, 2011, p.

52.

⁶² Sf. I. Scărarul, *Scara Dumnezeiescului urcuș*, p. 52.

that he can overcome the evil habits that have become laws of nature, that he can become free from them. ... Man can develop either towards the full dominion of freedom or towards his full domination by necessity”⁶³. We do not seek to abolish man through a reductionism that takes away his dignity, but rather we propose „the perfection of the nature through the greatest possible participation in God”⁶⁴. „Any good that violates and forces consciences is converted into evil, and this is, according to Berdiaev, the «nightmare of enforced good» in which human freedom ... is neglected”⁶⁵. Freedom is manifested by will and not by instinct, because will is characteristic of the person, of self-consciousness, and instinct is characteristic of nature. St Maximus Confessor affirms the existence of a „gnomic” will, characteristic of the human person, different from the „natural” will. On these grounds the saint states that „sin originates in the personal and not in the natural dimension of human existence”⁶⁶. If man submits to the urges of nature, abdicates the genuine use of freedom and allows himself to be swept away by "the flood of the immediate experiences of the senses”⁶⁷, exploiting the weakness of nature.

For an understanding of the freedom with which man is endowed, we must bring to mind the natural affections, of which the Church Fathers speak to us. They represent the „passive aspect of our nature, [which is] entirely of the nature and not of the will. ... These are: craving for food, pleasure in food, fear, sorrow. ... They are necessary to our nature, helping to preserve it”⁶⁸. At the same time, they represent „the aspect of animality [of being and precisely because] from animal traits, they become diabolical traits, through the spiritual element that colours them”⁶⁹. It's a kind of „transfer of spiritual energy to the lower biological plane”⁷⁰. In order to counteract this tendency, we need to discipline the biological through the range of ascetic exercises combined with active participation in the Holy Mysteries that Orthodoxy puts at our disposal. The more the biological is prominent, the more our humanity fades. Conversely, the more we discipline the nature within us, the more we inscribe or establish ourselves on the vertical axis of our existence, „in the state of our heart, in our interior dispositions or in our interior work”⁷¹. Our huge asset is the Incarnation of the Son of God. By assuming human nature integral, apart from sin, Christ inaugurated the restoration of the flesh: „In the wilderness, resisting the temptations of the lure of pleasure, He gave us the power to overcome all that comes from that lure; in the time of Passion and on the cross, showing Himself steadfast in the face of the temptation to flee from pain, He gave us the power to escape the passions that come from that lure. But also in the miracles that Christ performed, His body played a particularly important role. ... The miracle is accomplished not only by the command of Christ's divine will and by the almighty energy which is His own as God, but also by the voice and touch of His human body”⁷².

⁶³ Sf. I. Scărarul, *Scara Dumnezeiescului urcuș*, p. 52.

⁶⁴ Preot Profesor Doctor Dumitru Stăniloae, *Spiritualitatea Ortodoxă. Ascetica și Mistica*, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1992, p. 46.

⁶⁵ Paul Evdochimov, *Iubirea nebună a lui Dumnezeu*, Editura Anastasia, București, 1992, p. 21.

⁶⁶ Preot Profesor John Breck, *Darul sacru al vieții*, Patmos, Cluj-Napoca, 2001, p. 48.

⁶⁷ C.S. Lewis, *Sfaturile unui diavol bătrân către unul mai tânăr*, p. 15.

⁶⁸ Pr. Prof. Dr. D. Stăniloae, *Spiritualitatea Ortodoxă*, p. 61.

⁶⁹ Pr. Prof. Dr. D. Stăniloae, *Spiritualitatea Ortodoxă*, p. 62.

⁷⁰ Pr. Prof. Dr. D. Stăniloae, *Spiritualitatea Ortodoxă*, p. 64.

⁷¹ Sfântul Teofan Zăvorățul, *Viața lăuntrică*, Sophia, București, 2011, p. 167.

⁷² Jean-Claude Larchet, *Semnificația trupului în Ortodoxie*, Editura Basilica a Patriarhiei Române, București, 2010, p. 57.

The rationalism by which, as we have seen in Lewis, an attempt is made to filter and argue a natural, immanent reductionism of the human person, is a replication in historical multiplicity of what Arianism tried to do, namely to „drive God out of Christ”⁷³; this time, it is to drive God out of the fabric of every man's being and thereby abolish man. The equation has its logic: „Satan's whole struggle against Christ has but one aim: to destroy the God-man, to drive God out of the human body, out of matter, in order to master it completely”⁷⁴. Satan fights for it, and his effort is recorded by the apostolic testimony telling us that he «walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour» (1 *Peter* 5: 8), aware that „nothing is naturally on [his] side”⁷⁵.

The most important dimension of the person is the inner dimension. The Apostle Paul would say: «I rejoice in the law of God after the inner man» (Romans 7: 22). That is why the stake of man's loss is the amputation of his inner universe. This is how, if we are to refer also to the abolition of man, a new human type can be born, characterised by „zero-dimensionality, ... an empty potentiality”⁷⁶. This depthless man has diluted to the point of dissolution moral values and the possibility of fulfilling his ontological program of image and likeness. He, as we find him embodied by Ulrich, the character of Robert Musil's novel, „Is a man without self. ... Nowadays there are millions of such people What he thinks about anything will always depend on a certain possible context - nothing is, for him, what it is; everything is subject to change, in flux, part of a whole, of an infinite number of wholes presumptively adding to a super-whole of which he knows nothing anyway. So any answer he gives is only a partial answer, any feeling is only an opinion, and he never cares what anything is, only "how" it is. ... Ulrich felt himself capable of any virtue, as well as any crime. ... [is] neither bad, nor good, nor villain, nor honest man, nor hero, nor insect”⁷⁷. Thus perishes the person, the man bearing the image of God, and we are born the aniconic man, or idol. He is a mutilated, counterfeit creature, according to the above, a being fallen into „his absolutism and [the false] divinities he has created for himself: property and capital, the god-state, pan-sexualism, etc.”⁷⁸. Absorbed, seized by this new reality invested by man with the power to condition him, man has „destroyed his capacity for self-determination, [instituting no less than a] self-idolatry”⁷⁹. Self-idolatry of the person subscribes, de facto, to a reversal of optics, from God to man: „The easiest thing is to turn their eyes from Him to themselves”⁸⁰. The same Lewis states that the only source of legitimacy for humans is God, and when humans become disconnected from this, the inevitable result is precisely the idolization of their own being; a vicious circle of existential ignorance: „All is holy when the reins are in the Lord's hand. But they are ruined when people forget God and make a carved image of themselves”⁸¹.

Michel Henry notes the mutation that tends to confiscate the value of the person, a value that Christianity alone restores in integrum: „The decisive intuitions of Christianity, [because] ... in the midst of the generalized mental confusion, it alone can tell us today what

⁷³ Arhimandritul Iustin Popovici, *Omul și Dumnezeu-Om*, Editura Deisis, Sibiu, 1997, pp. 148-149.

⁷⁴ Arhim. I. Popovici, *Omul și Dumnezeu-Om*, p. 147.

⁷⁵ C.S. Lewis, *Sfaturile unui diavol bătrân către unul mai tânăr*, p. 114.

⁷⁶ Ovidiu Pecican, *Românii și Europa Mediană. Contribuții la tipologia culturală a Europei*, Polirom, Iași, 2021, pp. 84-85.

⁷⁷ O. Pecican, *Românii și Europa Mediană*, p. 84.

⁷⁸ E. Bernea, *Criza lumii moderne*, p. 47.

⁷⁹ Pr. Prof. J. Breck, *Darul sacru al vieții*, p. 47.

⁸⁰ C.S. Lewis, *Sfaturile unui diavol bătrân către unul mai tânăr*, p. 27.

⁸¹ C.S. Lewis, *Marea despărțire*, Humanitas, București, 2021, p. 95.

man is. ... [Christianity unmasks the anthropological lie] of making us believe that man is reduced to something that feels nothing and does not feel itself, to what the Apocalypse calls «the idol» that «can neither see nor hear nor walk» (*Revelation 9: 20*), to waves of particles and chains of acids. ... People treated mathematically, computationally, statistically, ... reduced to «brains». ... Not any god can save us today, ... but the One who is alive”⁸².

Perhaps what I have said so far is arousing the outrage or, on the contrary, suspicion of readers. But to those who may feel disappointed, we say that all is not lost. Our great argument is twofold: on the one hand, the Incarnation of Christ and, on the other, the image of the Creator which we bear as a seal. The wax imprint of propaganda I mentioned in the previous chapter cannot leave marks so deep as to cancel out the imprint of the Cross. It is what we hold inwardly, as an „internal report of transcendence”⁸³. By virtue of this inner calling, we are in fact restoring the true centre and source of our legitimacy: „We depend only on souls. Not only on the instability of others' souls, but also on the unpredictability of our own soul. In spite of all the rules we invent, it is not on them that we depend, after all. For it is the unseen part that, in the first and last instance, decides everything”⁸⁴.

There is, however, a fear of those who would wish for the abolition of man, and this fear is precisely the manifestation without rest of the divine image in us; a new human being, a full one: the saint. This is, in fact, the ultimate stronghold that should be conquered in the effort to abolish man: „A corrupt saint ... [is] more to the liking of Hell than a mere tyrant or a debauched”⁸⁵. It depends only on us what vector, what dynamics and what spiritual metabolism we embrace, because: „Great and delicious sinners are made of the same material as the horrible phenomena that are called great saints”⁸⁶. A comprehensive definition of the saint can be found in Ernest Bernea's brilliant book *An Appeal to Simplicity*: „The saint is the greatest innovator of souls and times. ... The saint opens a path of ascent ... to this creature forgotten in its own wandering, lured by the hidden calls of an as yet untamed land. Holiness is a permanent rebuke to man's decadent inclinations. Holiness fixes a bright, highest point in the sky of our spirituality, by which the price of life here is raised. The saint is the man for whom meaning means the conscious and voluntary living of a permanent and perfect reality. ... The saint here lives permanence; he fights and overcomes the clay in man. ... The saint is defined by ... participation in divinity. ... where the saint appears, the new man appears, the true man”⁸⁷.

Is the saint necessary? Is it the version of human nature that has found its true and complete fulfilment? But is he also a social necessity? We will argue with two examples. I recently reread an article in *Dilema Veche* about a film: "A hidden life". The article is called „*The need for saints*”⁸⁸. The film is based on the case of an Austrian farmer, Franz Jägerstätter, and shows the journey of a common man who refuses to join the Nazis because he sees Nazism as a pact with the Antichrist, with the devil. Franz soon comes to be despised by people and even condemned, including his family; the only person who will stand by him is his wife Franziska. He ends up in prison, where he has encounters with Dostoyevskian-

⁸² Michel Henry, *Eu sunt Adevărul. Pentru o filozofie a creștinismului*, Deisis, Sibiu, 2007, pp. 351; 353; 361; 368-369.

⁸³ Horia-Roman Patapievi, *Partea nevăzută decide totul*, Humanitas, București, 2019, p. 43.

⁸⁴ H.R. Patapievi, *Partea nevăzută decide totul*, p. 295.

⁸⁵ C.S. Lewis, *Sfaturile unui diavol bătrân către unul mai tânăr*, p. 117.

⁸⁶ C.S. Lewis, *Sfaturile unui diavol bătrân către unul mai tânăr*, p. 177.

⁸⁷ Ernest Bernea, *Îndemn la simplitate*, Vremea, București, 2006, pp.102-104.

⁸⁸ Andreea Vlad, „*Nevoia de sfinți*”, in: *Dilema veche*, nr. 819, 31 octombrie – 6 noiembrie 2019, <https://www.dilemaveche.ro/sectiune/film/articol/nevoia-de-sfinti>.

inspired characters, such as an icon painter, who speaks of the power of seeing the divine behind the injustices and ugliness of the world. Franz's quest is thus projected onto the picture of a world in decay. The film says: „This is what happens when a world dies. People survive, but their lives die. Their reason for living disappears”; „Are we no longer able to see evil?” Franz wonders. One conclusion of the film is this: „We've had two thousand years of failure, we need a saint”. And the second reflection comes precisely from our midst, a native Christian people: „I note that the heart of this people has hardened; the people have become hard of hearing, for what they do not want to hear; they have closed their eyes, for what they do not want to see; they have closed their minds to everything that could either accuse them or bring them out of their lethargic complicity with evil and insensitivity. They are perfect: their conscience fully coincides with the number of justifications necessary to enable them to be effective in mischief; ... [we awaken] mutual hatred. ... Only a saint can save him”⁸⁹.

CONCLUSIONS

Subject to scientific reductionism today, man is only possible as a son of God, as a saint, and not as a son of a chemically determined biological life. It is not man reduced to his appearance but man conscious of his own self that the saint reveals to us. What did the saints understand that modern humanists do not? That God delivers Himself to us; He has His offensive moment and this presupposes our receptivity. In this way, the divine becomes the mobilizing limit. The saint captures the decisive insights of Christianity into such fundamental questions as man and his purpose. The "need for saints" is a social reality, a question that contains its own answer and is delivered to us as an alternative to the generalized mental confusion.

We have tried to reach God starting from man, and we believe we have succeeded precisely because we have forced the ultimate meanings of the human creature. We have instrumentalized man as the common starting point in our debate and the aisles we have marched down have revealed the reality of a paradox: the more he moves away from the God in him and closer to nature, as a mere piece of it, man alienates himself from himself and becomes the artificer of an anthropological mutation and lie in which his freedom is broken; the more he escalates his vocation as son and legitimate heir of eternity, as the human potentiality of the image of God in him, the more man fully asserts himself as a person destined to communion and endowed with unique, unrepeatable value, not subject to the perishability of nature.

Modern man legitimises himself through himself, becoming his own exclusive and absolute reference point. A drift that makes him guilty as the executioner of his own path. The Christian legitimises himself through God, who gives him powerful inner springs and establishes him in the perspective of interpersonal communion between man and his Creator.

The stake is marked by a break in level: we believe in the Man who, as God, inaugurated, in the beginning, the time of this world.

⁸⁹ Horia-Roman Patapievic, *Politice*, Humanitas, București, 2006, p. 63.

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