



## Studii și Articole

### *Culture and counter-culture in the religious space. Benchmarks for the education of young missionaries*

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**Abstract:** *As it is also stated in the title of this essay, I intend to defend the culture and also to present the possible failures of major religions in their mission. Faith has been the starting point for the culture, for it appeared as a response of the human being at the call of heaven. In order to be a clear answer given by the man, it must act as a vector, to ascend the human being to heaven. The Greeks called it kalokagathia, which is the good, the truth and the beauty. But Christians see it deeper and talk about the Way, the Truth and the Life. Culture and counter-culture appear in all great religions, starting in the Orient and ending with the monotheistic religions today. As a form of counter-culture we can talk about violence, about the horizontality of the service or the religious anthropocentrism. They must be overcome and young people raised on the vector of a culture that unites heaven and earth.*

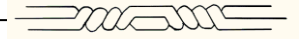
**Keywords:** *mission, religion, counter-culture, kalokagathia.*

The theme that has been brought up can be interpreted in several keys. For some, the phrase *counter-culture in the religious space*<sup>1</sup> is an expression of insubordination and

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challenge, allegedly targeting the obedience to authority, which is false. If we were to be honest, there are counter-culture and para-culture elements even in the religious space and I tend to give a few examples in my study. Especially because this counter-culture or para-culture exists in other religions as well.

First of all I would like to deliniate the expression the *sacral/religious space*. What can it be? There are many opinions regarding this space, which can be seen as polarized or split between *the sacred and the profane space* as Mircea Eliade does. His expression does not appear to be inconsistent, for all religions have this division between the sacred and the profane space<sup>2</sup>. The wall, the circle or the square appear permanently, defining the boundaries between the two spaces. Building Rome began through a fratricidal sacrifice: Romulus kills Remus for not having entered the gate, but jumped over the ditch, as if he was not initiated. There were therefore two spaces: the sacred (the citadel) and the profane (beyond the citadel).

The Shamans have the same perception when they build those stoned circles in which they retire for trance. The religious space deliniates from the profane space through walls. The temple represents the clear boundary between the sacred and the profane space. All these are analyzed by Mircea Eliade in his book, showing the hiatus that has been created as time passed between the two spreading areas.

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<sup>1</sup> See David Platt, *Because We Are Called to Counter Culture: In a World of Poverty, Same-Sex Marriage, Racism, Sex Slavery, Immigration, Persecution, Abortion, Orphans, and Pornography*, Tundale House Publisher, Illinois, 2015.

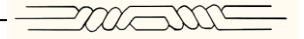
<sup>2</sup> „Every sacred space, said Mircea Eliade, implies a hierophany, an irruption of the sacred that results in detaching a territory from the surrounding cosmic milieu and making in qualitatively different” in *The Sacred and the Profane, The Nature of Religion*, trad. Brândușa Prelipceanu, eidt. Humanitas, București, 1995, p. 26.

But there appears the theological opinion, which creates out of the two spaces two circumstantial divisions, though not real. From the Christian perspective, the space was re-blessed by Christ's sacrifice, so that there are no sacred and profane places for the entire earth was given the ability to return to the Paradise condition. The world tends to be oriented towards this trend being subordinated by the man. The man should lead the creation to *the new heaven and earth* condition again. Obviously not alone or autonomous, but in synergy with God. The expression *to guard and work the Garden of Eden* had as a goal to take care of and work the creation in order to make it ready again for the Paradise. In other words, even after the fall the responsibility of taking care of the creation has not stopped. It always remained as a holy and clear but unconscious presence for most of the people. The world has become sacred through Christ and the man just needs to realize it, and when he does then everything will become sacred<sup>3</sup>.

Another division that could be part of the optics of theology is the one that sees the world divided into a profane space, but not atheist and a religious or sacred space. The latter is divided into an ecclesial space and institutional one. More specifically, everyone is blessed and so there is no absolute desecrated or atheist space. This is a forgery. Even an atheist is revealed as a man preoccupied of faith, of the presence of God and as such he is a fighter under the tension of the sacred reality. In regards to the distinction between the Christian ecclesial space and the institutional one, things can be explained: we know where the institutional Church is, but we do not know where the eventful Church is. The dimensions, featuring the gracious sacredness of the Church of Christ, are and remain an unknown for the wind blows where it wills. We can emphasize, however, the place of the institution but not the grace of ecclesial space. The world is

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<sup>3</sup> Dumitru Popescu, *Omul fără rădăcini*, București, Edit. Nemira, 2001, p. 22-23.



sanctified through Christ not only in the area of the institutional church, but the entire creation is blessed through the ontological recapitulation of the world. The world seen as a creation is sacred in virtue or potentiality but its actual sacredness represents the synergy between man and God. The fact that we are not aware of the creation's sacredness makes us divide the creation between sacred and profane, between pure and impure, although the whole world received chance of being blessed through Golgotha. In other words, the entire space is sacred, but its perception may exist or not. It depends on us whether we notice or not this sacredness of the world. Through Christ the whole world is *opened to Paradise and able to reach the heavenly state*.

A second problem arises: what is the culture? What are the criteria of a true culture?

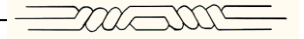
The classical Greek speaks about three criteria: the truth, the good and the beauty, namely about *kalokagathia*, as the foundation of the culture. The aspiration towards the truth, the beauty and the good is the first stage of the ascent to heaven, but it needs something more in order to accomplish this vectorial exceeding and rising of the culture. *Homo capax infiniti* demonstrated that through his culture the infinite can be expressed in the finite. As such, the culture is the expression of the infinite in the finite and all religions have demonstrated this aspiration from the bottom up towards God. More specifically, if the revelation means revelation from top to bottom of God towards humanity, the cult represents the conscious religious answer from the bottom up, from the human towards the Divine. And the culture is the more or less aware answer of this aspiration. If *kalokagathia* only reverberates horizontally, it leads nowhere. If it rises, then it becomes valuable and important for the man defined par excellence as the being of the ascent.

The art must rise and rise the man. If everything is *kalokagathia* for *kalokagathia*'s sake, meaning art for the art's

sake, then the horizontality is kept. It has mountainous forms but does not rise up to the sky. It is just a *cultural landscape* with higher landforms but ... it does not go to Metaphysics, meaning that it never goes out of materiality, be it diaphanous.

But do we seriously ask today if a metaphysical culture exists? Or what the Metaphysical means in culture? The answer is yes, it exists, but it is stifled by the culture of materiality, of horizontality, of consumerism or even the grotesque. What we see today exceeds or rather changes the vector of kalokagathia. It is an orientation towards minus-value counter value and not towards the infinite value. We can talk about *a culture of senses and sensuality*, where the normality is exceeded by perversion. More specifically, if the perversion meant a phase of the abnormality, today it has become the cultural line, considered as an adjustment to the requirements of the third millennium, where the normality no longer occurs. It is *homophobic*. The world slowly loses its perception of the normality spectrum. On the contrary, you are homophilic by promoting the non-normality moral alteration in the third millennium, which is not part of the divine creation and the relationship that God left as as procreational normality. It is the illogical logic of the third millennium.

Every religion is marked by the rising sense of the culture, but also by a parallel culture that does not ascends and that I dare to call *the religious counter-culture*. The only perennial culture is in the religious sphere. The epopees of the religious literature are tremendous works of art of the infinite divine, compressed in finite expressions in order for the messages to be understood. Kalokagathia from the "Hindu gospel" as Mahatma Gandhi Bhagavad Gita calls the depth of the pursuit of The One in The Upanishads and the union with him, are the infinite human aspirations.



Analyzing in more depth the Hindu polytheism, more and more voices tend to emphasize that in fact it is rather a monotheism of multiple manifestations. The Hindu deities are only some pre-final stages before the union of the self with the Supreme One, the unique Divinity, which obviously does not resemble the biblical description of God but it is still a unity. The polytheist Hindu gods are actually divine attributes having separate names and mythology associated, but the Divine is unique.

In other words, the unique Oriental *illo tempore* God was iconically manifested in polytheistic variants. So the gods are icons of a certain God. Losing the revealed data, these deities who were actually attributes, obtained various forms of manifestation of love, justice or terrifying demonic. It is a world seeking the divine perception, dividing it on traits (positive or negative), which they then worship as separate deities.

The Orient's chance is to return to the unique God they left from: Hindus returning to Dyaus Pitar (God the Father of the beginnings); Buddhists to rediscover Sunyata as the divine fullness and not as *empty Nirvana*; Confucianists to return to Tien, the unique sky as the icon of the unique God, projected in the Taoist harmony of yin-yang and all other variations of immanent infinite experienced in the social and moral life.

Unfortunately, in the world of *ahimsha* there appeared the counter-culture of violence that destroyed the image of the Hindu as a non-violant religion. Fighting the radical Islam in Punjab, the latest anti-Christian aggression, they all litter the Islam towards losing the appellation as a non violent religion.

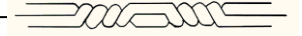
To the *Muslim world*, we can conclude based on the binomial cult-culture that the Muslims, after conquering the great cultural centers of the time (Ahtiohia, Jerusalem, Alexandria, Babylon or Byzantium), have become exporters of classical philosophy in religious patterns. The Europeans have not

discovered Aristotle yet when Avicenna, Averoes and others commented and explained his doctrinal landmarks through his philosophy.

Then, the Eastern-Western synthesis was conducted during the Ottomans, when former Constantinople, now Istanbul, was the most courted Mediterranean port in Europe. There were brought here products and ideas and many of these traditions were then taken in the Wallachia. But not about the trade I would like to talk, but especially about the Christian Anatolian influence on the Islamic mentality. The Muslims, after taking over Anatolia, were influenced by the Christian asceticism and gave birth to the Sufism movement, based in Konya (former Iconium). The Sufism, with all its forms (from the whirling dervishes from Anatolia to the Sufis incantations by the music from Pakistan and India), represents the most beautiful form of seeking the union between a Muslim and Allah, through the music, through harmony and inner prayer.

In this equation the man becomes a point of connection or presence of the divine holiness (the Christian thesis), that through its dancing rotation with one hand raised to the sky and the other towards the heart becomes an *axis mundi*, an axis of the creation that rises to God .

Unfortunately, these trends have been repressed by the radical and anti-iconic Islamism and also by the Kemalist atheism from the early twentieth century. Today the iconic salafismul iconic destroyed any Sufist manifestation. Such an Islamism could not be violent, as required today by the Wahabi radicals. The Sufism, as a branch of the *Christian sophia*, was a pursuit of the iconic presence of God, but which today, radicalized by the rigorous Islam, remains distant from the creation and the man. The world see through Islamism is divided into two parts: *the house of the peace or of the Islamism (dar al islam) and the house of the war (dar al harb)*, where the *Kaffirs (the faithless)*



will be permanently persecuted as enemies of the Allah. In the Sufist Islamism, there is no such a warlike image, but a complementary one. They took over from the Christianity the idea that God is true, *poured love*, and not a theoretical cold and distant love. The radical Islamism turned God into *redeeming love*, based on the idea *I love the one who obey me and who did not obey I will destroy* by way of my religious fanatics. Therefore a counter-culture of violence has been created, that terrorizes not only the ones that are not Muslims (kafir) but also the Muslims that want a religion of peace and love in Islam. These would like to see in violent verses of the Quran allegorical expressions, directed not against the man, but against the sin. Or, the radical Salafist Islamism replaced the evil with the man that does follow the islamism and reached a high rate of violence both among Islamism and the rest of the world. It seems that 85% of crimes with religious arguments are radicals in the Muslim world and therefore they should take no offense if they are accused by the rest of the planet for being a tough religion that tends to killing other people. There are also examples of peaceful Muslims and our Dogrogea is a great example, but one of the few examples that reinforces a rule that becomes clearer. It creates therefore a counter-culture of the religious violence in Islamism, which can be very damaging for all, that no one would ever look at this faith with confidence but with fear.

Now we should consider another religious culture: that of *Judaism*. The Jewish ethnicity was the one called to receive and keep the revelation. Through them we received and kept the truth about the true God. Here is the question that arises: do all the Jews were the chosen people? Is it the symbolic figure of 7,000 unknown men in Elijah's time, the amount of those who kept like a red thread this authentic discovery of God in history? These are questions that have different answers. The prophets tried to be guidance stones to people struggling with the recalcitrant those,

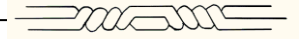


who wanted anything but keeping the truth. These anonymous turned after the coming of the Christ in *laos tou Theou*, the ecclezial people through Christ.

The Jewish counter-culture arose when the talion law mentality defeated the revelation feeling. The existent tensions are the consequences of a Semitic mentality Semitic (Jewish-Arab), where nobody respects anybody, but each is the only one important. Such a counter-culture that has no respect for the others, as it is exclusive.

Finally, can we talk about counter-cultural elements in the Christian area? Probably there are, but only where there are no authentic Christian manifestations. Christ Reformed the creation, the human consciousness and the culture as well. Since Him the world changed completely. It inherited a different mentality. The world was called through the sacrifice of Christ and His presence to dialogue with their Creator. And the dialogue between God and the world creates culture. It is the sublime form through which the creation can answer to the call of the creator. The culture, in response, has its roots in the pleading dialogue with God. A culture that does not lead to heaven does not rise, does not accomplish but destroys, because it gets out of the man his vocation of being excelsior, the only being in the creation that has this meta-existential call. Even if the culture does not reach the theology and does not call its sublime as God, whatever it would call it, it must ascend, raise the human and convert it into a vector. Even if this vector is sometimes sinusoidal, however it is a rise towards the transcendent and not a permanent horizontality or even a demonization, meaning a descent into evil. Ultimately the art is called to ascend the humanity to God, to that defines the exquisite existence.

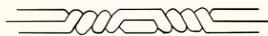
Among the possible counter-culture elements we could mention *the horizontal religion*, turning it into a here and now (*hic et nunc*) without any transcendent projection. In other words



it means transforming the faith and the Church in a society of social aid, a Red Cross with clergy, who are only concerned about social horizontality. For many people in mass media this should be the Church's mission at the beginning of the third millennium. It would be great for the consumerist world if the Church only had the social problems in its job description. Meaning to hide behind it the human helplessness, that should be well covered to avoid disturbing the explosion of light and pleasure of the consumerism. Or the missionary side of the Church is creating the transcendental consciousness, longing and drive towards the sky. The immanent care derives from the transcendent and not vice versa.

Another element that does not create the transcendental culture in the Church is the liturgical anthropocentrism and preoccupation with insignificant details. This sideslip start from a perfectionism that God does not ask in the liturgy. The liturgical perfectionism destroys and the transcendental attention and makes a show out of the sacred mystery. It is a picture of a counter-mission and in terms of relationship it is a liturgical counter-culture.

The Christian radicalism leads as well to the opposite reaction state. More specifically, when there is a requirement of a punitive canonism, who only sees in Christianity a contentious and punishing religion, that sees everywhere the hell and barely sees the heaven, we can talk about a counter-mission, leading to reactions like atheism or militant humanism. The atheists appear when the religion fails to empower them through the agape appearance. The love cannot be seen because of the canonical frown. Everything becomes very stiff and sober. Or this is why God is called love, because He loves and His love is full of joy and forgiveness. The message of the resurrection, be glad is lost through this canonical accuracy.



In conclusion, the culture serves its purpose when it becomes vectorial through the sky. If it becomes flattened, horizontal or demonical it turns into a counter-culture. The world of the third millennium is unfortunately infected by counter-cultures, so there is no need for some religious flavors. The cult and the culture have the same semantical root and their detachment from the transcendent means abandoning their mission. The young missionaries need this intertwining between the cult and the culture in order to find this common language. The language linking the two terms can only be within the scope of the transcendence as some kind of syndesmos of a rise the world needs. The loss of the sacral speech leads to the loss of the connection between the cult and the culture, the loss of the man's rise towards God in order to reach the transcendent sublime.