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SECULARIZATION, CONFESSIONAL IDEOLOGY, AND SOCIETY

Abstract. Social life is the keystone of the existence of a human and a people and, by extension, of an entire civilization. In this essay I will try to present the way in which religious affiliation has influenced the historical evolution of society and interpersonal relationships. Therefore, after analyzing the relationship between the Christian denomination and the capitalist economy in the context of the secularization process facing the peoples of Europe, I will present the consequences of the desacralization of the world for the spiritual health of modern humans and the consequent sociological implications which tend to create faults in the contemporary world. Communion is replaced by separation, solidarity by individualism, and the inner emotional balance of human beings is jeopardized by the spiritual chaos that seems to condemn the whole society to loneliness and disintegration.

Keywords: secular society; Christian confession; desacralization; state; capitalist ethics.

INTRODUCTION

The organization of a society has always been determined by the civilization that accompanied it. Thus, the evolution of mankind has occurred naturally, with the progress and degree of the political, social, economic and also religious development. Since the end of the fourth century, with the separation of the Western Roman Empire, centered on the religious but also political authority of the Pope of Rome, from the Eastern Roman Empire, with the political and religious center in the new Rome, Constantinople, important mutations in the lives of the component populations have occurred. In the West, if at first all eyes were on Rome, with the emergence of the Carolingian

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Empire in the ninth century, and later in the Middle Ages of the great colonial empires, and the reform movements within the Church, the political and religious authority of the Pope lost some of its importance and began to take centrifugal forms, the Pope remaining more like a symbol of the unity of the Christians from all the former territories of the Western Roman Empire. In the East, the lives of all peoples were massively influenced by the Byzantine Empire, the light of the world and of world civilization, until the fall of Constantinople in 1453, after which, for almost 500 years, they were under the sign of the Ottoman Empire's Crescent.¹ The world is changing radically after the great geographical discoveries and the technological revolutions that bring unprecedented progress and favor the emergence of the national States that have gone through two world wars to reach today's territorial configuration.²

Forms of leadership have followed one another in history, until today when we can generally speak of two types of social organization, capitalist and socialist, of course each with its more radical or more flexible variations, depending on the history and specifics of each people.

OCCIDENT VERSUS ORIENT

The French Revolution, the Enlightenment, the cultural and technological revolutions left their mark on the much faster development of the countries of Western or Central Europe compared with those of the East.

One of the major causes of the progress known today is the diminishing role of the Catholic Church in the lives of those peoples, although initially this was the institution that contributed most to the European culture and civilization. It supported art, contributed to the development of higher education, helped the development of civilization in all its forms. All the great European universities of today have appeared under the 'umbrella' of the Church, directly or indirectly, with its financial help or that of the kings, princes or members of the Christian aristocracy of the time. This was the case with Oxford and Cambridge in Great Britain, Bologna and Padua in Italy, Sorbonne in France, Salamanca in Spain, Coimbra in Portugal and Heidelberg in Germany.

¹ Lucian Boia, *Occidentul. O interpretare istorică* [Occident. A historical interpretation] (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2013), 39–41.

² For details, see Boia, *Occidentul*, 83–133.

However, sociology largely links, as we shall see, the development of the Western society to the Protestant reformation, which it considers to be closer in structure and mentality to the change in the economic paradigm and the development of science, technology and their implications for the construction of a society focused on the natural evolution of man and less on spiritual realities.³

The countries of Eastern Europe, where the Orthodox faith is an important part of their history and development, have been a long time under the rule of the Ottoman Empire. Therefore, the politics and diplomacy of these peoples, the economic relations, education, language, as well as culture as a whole, and also everyday customs, such as food or clothing, were influenced by the way of life of the Ottoman society.⁴ One thing has not changed, namely the Christian religion, or to be more precise, the Orthodox faith,⁵ perhaps because the headquarters of the ecumenical patriarchate, the most important center of Orthodoxy in the world was in Constantinople. There was also some influence in many sectors of social life from the other two great empires nearby, namely the Russian Tsarist Empire and the Habsburg Empire.

On the one hand, the Tsarist Empire, despite having the same Orthodox faith as most nations in the Eastern Europe, had a negative influence on the political, social, economic or cultural life of the latter. The tendency towards permanent territorial expansion, the desire for domination manifested by preventing the development of a local intelligencia and the Russification of the the names and languages of the nations, the excessive control over State institutions at central and even local level, imposing of a policy of intimidation against any initiative of autonomy, banning the Christian symbols (with the transformation of the Tsarist empire into a communist one) in order to destroy their national identity led to the cultivation of a social system based on distrust over the State and the law, denunciation, fear, lack of initiative and the restriction of any fundamental right.⁶ All these, brought about by a nation that claimed to be a friend or partner but became instead an adversary and at certain historical moments a ruthless enemy.

³ Igor Cașu, "Politică, societate și cultură în Sud-Estul și Vestul Europei: studio comparativ [Politics, society and culture in the South East and Western Europe]," in *Imperii. Naționalisme și sisteme politice* [Empires. Nationalismes, and political systems] (Chișinău, Moldova: CEP USM, 2009), 95.

⁴ Andreea Lupsor, "Ce am moștenit de la otomani?" *Historia*, accessed March 15, 2020, <https://www.historia.ro/sectiune/general/articol/ce-am-mostenit-de-la-otomani>.

⁵ Cașu, *Politică, societate și cultură*, 96.

⁶ Teodor Cotelnic, "Rusificarea Basarabiei sub dominația Țaristă [The Russification of Bessarabia under Tsarist rule] (1812–1918)," *Philologia* 67 (2015): 47–59.

On the other hand, paradoxically as there was no religious compatibility between Catholics and Orthodox in Eastern Europe, the peoples of the East inherited from the Habsburgs and later from the Austro-Hungarian Empire order, discipline, education, regulation of the property, the rules of coexistence and observance of the laws. The influence of the Western Catholic and Protestant world also being felt in the competitive spirit, in the commercial and cultural mobilities.⁷

Therefore, the Eastern European civilization is largely a mixture of native and adopted elements, the native elements being intertwined with those from the Ottoman Empire, especially in the South and to the North of the Danube; with those from the Tsarist Empire, especially in the extreme Eastern area; and with those from the Habsburgs and Austro-Hungarians in the more Western or Northern provinces of this great European region.⁸ The fact that the countries of Eastern Europe gained their independence only during the nineteenth century largely explains the gap between the Eastern and the Western civilizations in almost all spheres of activity, except the religious one, where, as we shall see, the situation is different. In Eastern Europe, the daily lives of peoples have remained largely centered on the faith and the relationship with the Church because over time it has been the only hope for the preservation of national identity and survival, while in the West there has been a clear separation (sometimes too abrupt) between the Church and the State which has led to remarkable scientific, technological, economic and cultural progress, but with incalculable costs for the spiritual health of the contemporary world.⁹

What both Westerners and Easterners should learn is mutual respect, without emphasis and historical vanities, and to understand that all civilizations and cultures have their charm and mystery and must be valued as they are. The interaction and collaboration between such very different cultures is what gives rise to unique, powerful and immortal works or creations.

⁷ Florina Pop, “Moștenirea habsburgică a Ardealului. De ce e Transilvania altfel: ‘Aici este o Europă în miniatură’ [The Habsburg heritage of Transylvania. Why Transylvania is different: ‘This is Europe in miniature’],” *Cluj-Napoca*, February 14, 2015, accessed February 10, 2020, https://adevarul.ro/locale/cluj-napoca/mostenireahabsburgica-ardealului-e-transilvania-e-altfel-aici-europa-miniatura-1_54df326a448e03c0fd99b24f/index.html.

⁸ Lucian Boia, *Românii și Europa. O istorie surprinzătoare* [Romanians and Europe. A surprising history] (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2020), 7–25.

⁹ Dumitru Popescu, *Teologie și Cultură* [Theology and Culture] (Bucharest: EIBMBOR, 1993), 69.

SECULARIZATION OF SOCIETY AND ITS IMPLICATIONS
FOR HUMAN RELATIONS¹⁰

The progress that modern Western society has made compared to previous forms of social organization is indisputable, but like any process of change, it also involves a series of collateral losses. The excessive and accelerated rationalization of all activities in the life of the modern Western human being, from economics, to law or justice, to science and culture has produced important changes in his mentality and way of thinking. Traditional principles, generally based on the connection of human beings with the religious or spiritual heritage of past generations, have been replaced by strategic calculations and analyzes, empowerment of functions and the execution of tasks, the dynamics of pragmatic economic relations and the management of the present through rigid and impersonal laws and norms of coexistence and conduct. The whole life of man is turned upside down, the inner harmony becoming a luxury that almost no one can afford anymore.

However, this massive process of rationalization of all the activities of modern man, beyond the aspect of improving his standard of living and living conditions, has led to a level of depersonalization of the social relations. The whole of his life, which had no lack of personal communication and the belief that at least before God all are equal and each must be appreciated for what he really is, is replaced by formal and impersonal relationships between those who rule and hold the power, whether economic or political or in any other sphere of activity, and those who become mere functionaries, whose rights, despite the existing laws and the belief in the institutions of the State, are most often ignored or even ravished. The power of money dictates the rhythm of daily life as a whole and shapes the social and moral system that governs the contemporary world.¹¹

The formal, systematic and universal law, meant to regulate the relations between people and to protect everyone from the abuses of the “powerful“, turns into an impersonal instrument that imposes itself in front of the local customs, traditions inherited from generation to generation, and the personal relationships that give stability, strength and identity to a community or

¹⁰ For this, see especially Mircea Mandache, “Procesul de secularizare și modernizare a societății europene [The process of secularization and modernization of European Society],” *Revista Română de Sociologie* 10, no. 1–2 (1999): 27–38.

¹¹ Dumitru Popescu, *Hristos, Biserică, Societate* [Christ, Church, society] (Bucharest: EIBMBOR, 1998), 79.

a nation. Basically, there is a kind of leveling of consciousness and an amputation of the spiritual life of the modern human. Christian morality is replaced by a social ethic without divine support, an ethic built in the image of today's society focused not on the indisputable but virtual perennial values, but rather on the concrete, material ones, of fulfilling an ideal of happiness on earth, with all its imperfections.¹² A utopia born out of a reaction of contestation of the "so-called utopia" proposed by the Gospel, namely the kingdom of heaven.

This process of rationalization, which has the effect, as we have already mentioned, of *social depersonalization*, has mainly two major consequences which completely change the way of life and thinking of the modern Western man.¹³

Firstly, it is about the transfer of the Christian religion from the public sphere, to the personal one, which coincides with the process of desacralisation of the world.¹⁴ In other words, the supreme values of the traditional life of society cease to exist, their place being taken by personal mystical experiences, or by the mysterious spirit in which people meet in small groups or congregations that want to reproduce the mystery of the divine transcendence from the communal Liturgy into "pneumatic" or private ecstatic states of being. This phenomenon of generating spiritual confusion by eliminating the differences and identity traits of a nation ultimately leads to an atrophy of the sense of social co-responsibility and a leveling of values and an equalization of the individuals in a modern world where the mystical meaning of the sublime is replaced by the hyperbolization of reason.¹⁵ More specifically, there is an empowerment of the religious sphere and experience or, in other words, an isolation of it within the personal concerns of human individuals.

Secondly, the place of religion is taken over entirely by science and the State. Science, through its discoveries, largely demystifies and annuls the Christian principles, transforming faith into an anachronistic ideology, and the State, which has appeared, historically, in the context of the rationalization of Western societies, through its laws and forms of manifestation, takes over the role of the institution of the sovereign, but also of the hierarchy and the administrative structure of the church. The fact that Western society today

¹² Popescu, *Teologie și Cultură*, 101–3.

¹³ Popescu, *Hristos, Biserică, Societate*, 70–71.

¹⁴ For this, see Radu Carp, "Religia în sfera publică sau în afara ei? [Religion in the public sphere or outside it?]," *Romanian Political Science Review* 12, no. 1 (2012): 25–30; Mandache, "Procesul de secularizare," 32.

¹⁵ Popescu, *Hristos, Biserică, Societate*, 60–70.

largely denies its Christian roots is nonsense because there only has been a continental European consciousness since Christianity emerged.¹⁶ The desacralisation of politics led to the birth of the secular and civil society as a plural space of free association in the name of vocation and rights and created faults in the Western society.¹⁷ The State is endowed with a diversified bureaucratic apparatus that alienates the employees because it is no longer about a person who hires, but an impersonal institution that, despite the constitutional provisions that should protect the rights of its citizens, can violate them without answering to anyone.¹⁸ Is it a hidden/disguised way to control and manipulate the population or a democratic legitimacy? It is hard to answer.

What is certain is that, although contemporary modern society has known – especially in the last half century – extraordinary scientific and technological progress, unprecedented economic development and a revival of culture and art in all its forms, it also faces, due to the massive rationalization of human life, a depersonalization of interpersonal relationships and a narrowing to the point of near extinction of the spiritual concerns. The main reason is a well-known one, namely: the disinterest of society towards the human beings, towards their needs and aspirations, and the interest only in their work and activity.¹⁹ The human being is no longer of interest by himself, as a creature and image of God in the world, but only as an instrument put at the service of the economic effectiveness of society. Traditions and the sacred are regarded as nothing more than perhaps relics of history that can be studied neutrally, coldly, without feeling, because the modern Western society itself is governed by reason and is based on calculation, efficiency and effectiveness. This is, however, a marginal understanding of the existence of the modern human beings because they do not need only material things, which can be useful and can generate comfort, but certainly can not meet their spiritual needs because the human being is a dichotomous being and needs to have a balance between body and soul.

¹⁶ Alexandru Paleologu, *Moștenirea creștină a Europei* [The Christian Legacy of Europe] (Cluj-Napoca: Eikon, 2003), 65–66.

¹⁷ Cătălin Raiu, “Europa are nu doar o tradiție creștină venerabilă, dar și structuri politice născute din sau prin raportare la creștinism [Europe has not only a venerable Christian tradition, but also political structures born of or related to Christianity],” *Sinteza*, December 19, 2019, accessed March 30, 2020, <https://www.revistasinteza.ro/catalin-raiu-europa-are-nu-doar-o-traditie-crestina-venerabila-dar-si-structuri-politice-nascute-din-sau-prin-raportare-la-crestinism>.

¹⁸ Popescu, *Christ, Church, Society*, 70.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 71.

CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN SECULARIZATION, CAPITALISM,
AND CHRISTIAN DENOMINATION

The process of the secularization of society²⁰ also depends to some extent on the degree or form of manifestation of religious sentiment and the fidelity towards the traditions and customs of the communities or nations. Thus, while in *Western Europe*, where the Church has ceased to be an important institution in human life, there has been a process of rapid secularization of society simultaneously with the development of capitalism and its new economic relations,²¹ in the *East* the changes occurred much later and with great difficulty precisely due to the paternal relations between the Church and the community, in which the Christian tradition, the family and the local customs are much more important than material gain. Therefore, in the *West* there is a gradual replacement (in France even abruptly, with the revolution from 1789) of the institution of the sovereign and the power of the Church with the State and its democratic laws (which were intended to establish the power of the people's freedom to decide on their lifestyle) and with an economy based on *work ethic* and the right of association and social dialogue.

Max Weber, one of the most important sociologists in history, said long ago that the development of the modern capitalist societies has its origins in the Protestant reformation because the most dynamic entrepreneurs, businessmen, great industrialists and merchants are Protestants, the Catholic Church being considered a drag on progress because they argued that Salvation is obtained through fidelity to the Church (of course only to it), and not through economic, earthly and material activities. Later, under the pressure of the economic effectiveness of capitalism, of the process of change and development of science, art, politics and law that regulates the relations between people, it was to change its opinion. Weber believed that the Puritan ethics of Protestantism encouraged, or even defined, the trait of the particular economic behavior.²² This is how the conscience and professional ethics that cultivated work, economic pragmatism, abstinence and the refusal of luxury and excesses of any kind, appeared. This almost monastic way of life, but in society, is beneficial in a way because it establishes correct rules and

²⁰ See in detail about the process of secularization in Albert Luchini, "Ideologies, croyances religieuses," in *Encyclopedie de la sociologie* (Paris: Larousse, 1975); Larry Shiner, "The Concept of Secularization in Empirical Research," *Journal for the Scientific of Religion* 4, no. 2 (1967): 207–20.

²¹ Mandache, "Procesul de secularizare," 31–33.

²² Popescu, *Hristos, Biserică, Societate*, 72–73.

norms of conduct, but through the rigidity and the professionalization of the work it will ultimately lead to the promotion of a dangerous individualism and loneliness of the person in the midst of the community. This capitalist ethic changes the character of social and communal relations, in the sense that the human beings no longer submit, as was natural, to the divine authority, having in God, and in faith in Him, the guarantee of their salvation, but they will submit to a human authority.²³

What is interesting is that, although the modern capitalist society almost completely excludes God, arguing that a human being alone can decide what to do with his life, in the end subjects them to a binary choice that can be fatal, namely: either accept fatalistically that his destiny has already been written, and that he can no longer change anything (which coincides with the doctrine of predestination), or live every moment enjoying fully what the earthly life can offer him, being convinced that nothing awaits him beyond,²⁴ which, of course, shows the tumult, disillusionment and disappointment that the person in question experiences, no matter how rich, famous or strong he may be.

In contrast, in the Eastern European countries, dominated by the faith and the Orthodox Church, things progressed more slowly. The Eastern culture specificity imposed a moral rigor intertwined with a kind of spiritual bigotry, which mocked the hardships of life and, approached the border between belief in immortality and the hope of an easy transition from an earthly to a heavenly existential plan. In other words, although the Orthodox peoples of Eastern Europe did not participate in a very large number in the liturgical life of the community (of course, there are exceptions, but we will not talk about it here) they were very attached to the traditions of their ancestors and kept them faithfully and this gave them a kind of communion and continuity with history.

The majority Orthodox societies, often considered by the Westerners to be less willing to accept rules or legal norms that affect their social and emotional balance, cultivate the communal spirit and solidarity based on the Christian customs inherited from generation to generation. Family relationships are very important especially in the rural areas where the tradition involves the coexistence of several generations in the same house or in different houses in the same yard, the young taking care of the older ones. Those who do not follow these customs are often repudiated or marginalized by the

²³ For details concerning Weber's sociology with a direct reference to relations between capitalism and Protestant reform, see Michel Lallement, *Histoire des idées sociologiques*, vol. 1, *Des origines à Weber* (Paris: Nathan, 1993), 199–235.

²⁴ Popescu, *Hristos, Biserică, Societate*, 73.

community because the unwritten law of co-responsibility is more important than the written one. Therefore in such communities we can speak more of a Christian morality and less of a social or professional ethic.

This way of living, characterized by inter-relationship between people is, without a doubt, a projection in our world of the image of the interpersonal relationship within the Holy Trinity.²⁵ The majority Orthodox society, with all its imperfections, opposes the capitalist individualism which it identifies with the fall of humanity into sin, breaking the communion with God and imposing on mankind a social model built on an unstable moral structure in which the economic or material component predominates at the expense of the spiritual. That is why secularism, which is dependent on individualism, had difficulty entering the countries with Orthodox populations. However, with the opening of the borders, after the fall of communism, these countries also faced the offensive of the current of desacralisation of life.

This has led to a radical change in relations between people, especially in urban areas, where the influence of Western neo-liberalism is very strong through the many multinational companies that create areas of cultural collision between the local staff and the representatives of the new wave of so-called European emancipation.

SECULARIZATION AND (DE)SACRALIZATION OF THE WORLD

In the countries where the social life is still marked by reminiscences of the Orthodox Christian tradition, even if its influence is not as deep as in the past, one can see a certain opposition to both the sacralization of the world, ie the domination of the world by the Church, as well as secularization which, as is well known, represents a complex and long-lasting process of spiritual disfigurement of humanity.²⁶ If the *sacralization* of the world induces the danger of imposing a divine physiognomy of the world almost in a pantheistic way, because any exaggeration can trigger an inverse reaction, then *secularization* confuses the transcendence of God with His absence from creation, from the seen world. Both cause significant damage in the life of the human being because they distort their psychosomatic face and distort their purpose.²⁷

²⁵ Popescu, *Teologie și Cultură*, 17–18.

²⁶ Dumitru Popescu, *Omul fără rădăcini* [The man without roots] (Bucharest: Nemira, 2001), 15.

²⁷ Popescu, *Hristos, Biserică, Societate*, 76.

In general, in the Eastern popular mentality, the accumulation of material goods was not an end in itself, but only a means by which human beings reached as high as possible a spiritual state. That is why also the interpersonal relationships in the community were an extension of those in the family because they were all animated more by the cultivation of the spirit than by the ephemeral happiness of the body. Or in the secularized world, where the rationalization of life requires a radical change in the social paradigm, humanity is forced to break with any tradition, be it popular, artisanal or ecclesiastical, and invited to take part in a seemingly voluntary economic race that, in the end, turns them into a slave of their own irrational desires and immerses them in the materiality of the seen world. The confusion of the means with the purpose, the appearance of the phenomenon of ruthless economic or professional competition, the compression of time by the exhausting haste and the fear of not being as productive as the others, brings to the pack the fear of failure, anxiety and alienation of the soul. In the end, human beings collapse both physically and spiritually. Gradually they lose the ability to communicate, including within the family; life begins to become a burden; he/she is afraid of their own reflection; he/she feels more comfortable in dialogue with the TV than with a real person; he/she measures his/her emotions artificially by relating to imaginary situations; they constantly create an *alter ego* to replace themselves in moments of deep sadness and disappointment.²⁸

This process of spiritual decomposition of the modern human being occurred simultaneously with the *desacralisation* of the world, broadly speaking. When human beings have never seen any trace of divinity in their life, when – due to the scientific and technological progress – they thought that they ruled the world,²⁹ although they were shown countless signs by which they could realize how small and powerless they are in confrontation with nature, then they discover the huge emptiness in their soul but have lost both the tools necessary to regain their former state and the image of the target they should be heading towards.³⁰ The continuous desacralisation that humanity faces tends to transform the community into individuals who are at risk of not knowing themselves; personal communication into virtual or online communication; and communion into a final and irrevocable separation. In fact, despite a natural reluctance of

²⁸ Konrad Lorenz, *Cele opt păcate capitale ale omenirii civilizate* [The eight deadly/capital sins of civilized humanity], 2nd ed., trans. Vasile Poenaru (Bucharest Humanitas, 2001), 39–41.

²⁹ Boia, *Occidentul*, 97–98.

³⁰ Viktor E. Frankl, *Teoria și terapia nevrozelor. Introducere în logoterapie și analiza existențială* [On the Theory and Therapy of Mental Disorders: An Introduction to Logotherapy and Existential Analysis] (Bucharest: Editura Trei, 2008), 15.

scientists, there is no denying that, among other causes that led to the social crisis of today's modern world, were also those of a theological nature.³¹

THEOLOGY AND SOCIOLOGY AND/OR RELATION BETWEEN CONFESSION AND SOCIETY

In the view of sociologist Max Weber, those who best adapted to scientific and technological progress, investment in industry and the capitalist economy in general, were the Protestants because, through its structure, the Protestant Church meets the individualism and rationalism of the capitalist society. Unlike Catholics, who understood the meaning of their existence only through fidelity to the Church and less through consistent professional activity, Protestants freed themselves from this burden of dependence and of ecclesial coercion, and settled in a vertical relationship with God, individually. Protestants supported the Enlightenment as a direct reaction to the Catholic Church's policy of domination over all spheres of social activity, and therefore proclaimed the autonomy of humanity and the world from God.³²

Max Weber sees a direct link between the theory of predestination from the Protestant Church and the evolution and efficiency of the capitalist economy. More clearly, Protestant Christians have embarked on a mad race for the accumulation of earthly goods as a pretext and proof that they are chosen by God and therefore predestined to salvation. In this sense predestination supports and cultivates individualism and destroys communion in society.³³

This theory also clarifies to some extent the interest of the Protestant world (in all its versions) in the Old Testament which speaks of the relationship between "divine election" and earthly wealth, which it also considers blessed.³⁴ The same is not true for the Eastern world, where the life of human beings and communities, despite the growing secularization of society, is centered on the narrative memory of the Gospel of Christ which does not urge the accumulation of earthly goods but the acquisition of heavenly treasures. Although they do not consider wealth to be evil in itself, they disapprove it, because it enslaves the human soul, distances them from God, and condemns them to

³¹ Ioannis Romanides, *Teologia Patristică* [Patristic Theology], trans. Gabriel Mândrilă (Bucharest: Metafraze, 2011), 216–17.

³² Popescu, *Hristos, Biserică, Societate*, 80.

³³ Lallement, *Histoire des idées sociologiques*, 232–35.

³⁴ Popescu, *Hristos, Biserică, Societate*, 80–81.

loneliness and destruction. Moreover, in the Orthodox view, humanity's salvation and the right to the eternal happiness, to which everyone aspires whether religious or not, is achieved only in communion and communication with others, to the extent that there is a fully assumed co-responsibility.

Capitalist societies are generally characterized by a culture of competition, not solidarity. One of the characteristics of the social ethics in the capitalist economy – if not the most important! – is the obligation of everyone to exercise their profession in a regime of continuous competition. It is no longer the human being himself who matters, but only what he/she produces; the person is no longer important, but only the result of his/her activity. Any means that can be used to achieve a better result, under minimum investment conditions, is deceptively transformed into a value in itself. In other words, the power of freedom of decision is replaced by the dictatorship of utilitarianism that has a destructive effect on both men and women and society as a whole.³⁵

Mostly Orthodox societies have a different pace of life and a different way of understanding professional responsibility, work ethics and the danger of depersonalizing relationships between people. In the Eastern world there has always been a respect for work and profession, but they did not make a goal out of them, but rather gave them to God and to the neighbor. Thus, at least in antiquity, no activity began or ended without a prayer or the sign of the cross, and there was an inseparable link between a person's private earthly property and the rightful Owner of the whole world, who is God. If the Western mentality regarding responsibility has an individualistic character, based on the theological basis of predestination, the Eastern one has a communal character. More specifically, while in the West the human being has assumed an autonomous way of life, in which their life is focused exclusively on the development of an individualistic professional ethic that broke the theory of the social co-responsibility, in the East the emphasis was not only on the profession, but also on one's relationship with God and the fellow human being. This created a sense of solidarity and social and personal "protection."³⁶

In the Western mentality, the impression of a detachment from the 'retrograde' religious ideology was created in order to acquire the earthly happiness in which human beings submit the nature to their own interests to the point of disfigurement. God recedes into the background; prayer is considered a sign of helplessness; social life is rationalized and standardized according to the rules of the market economy; the world loses its mystical and mysterious meaning

³⁵ Lorenz, *Cele opt păcate capitale*, 38–39.

³⁶ Popescu, *Hristos, Biserică, Societate*, 83.

turning into a space of experiences which are often traumatic for the contemporary human being.

In the Eastern mentality, however, regardless of the degree of secularization or desacralisation of society, humanity does not face nature, but tries to purify and transfigure it, because it is destined to become the new heaven and new earth, God's kingdom.³⁷ God does not recede into the background; prayer does not disappear from each person's life, even if the relationship between its public and private manifestation changes, in favor of the latter; social life is extremely active; and the religious component still plays an important role in preserving the communal spirit.

CONCLUSIONS

History shows us that changing the world and the way it works has a very strong emotional and social impact on the human being and his/her relations with divinity, nature or other fellow human beings. The evolution of society, in all its components, is a continuous process in which both elements of progress and regression are found. It is a process similar to the one of nature that was summarised in an exemplary way, more than two centuries ago by the famous chemist Antoine Lavoisier, when he wrote, "nothing is lost, nothing is won, but everything is transformed."³⁸ *On the one hand*, it is noted that starting with the development of science, technique and technology, human beings have gained greater control over their imperfections and an ability to use nature in their favor; *on the other hand*, they have gradually lost contact with God, declared themselves the master of nature and, here and there, disfigured it, isolated themselves from their fellow human beings, and created their own imaginary world in which they lost their identity and chance of happiness. This process of spiritual alienation of the modern human being depends on several factors, among which the most important is the economic one, but also the religious one should not be disregarded.

From certain sociological studies the idea that the Protestant reformation had a significant impact on the organization and the development of capitalist society in Western Europe came to light. The process of capitalization itself brought many material benefits to the people, but spiritually it was a failure.

³⁷ Ibid., 76.

³⁸ For his short biography, see <http://www.maxioms.ro/autor/antoine-lavoisier> (accessed June 17, 2020).

There has been a depersonalization of social relations and an alienation of the people from themselves, with disastrous consequences on the fundamental institutions, such as: family, school, church.

The only one who can cure the society of the disease of loneliness, of the economic and political pragmatism in which social and professional ethics have replaced Christian morality and disfigured, to the point of destruction, the contemporary world, is the human being. He/she is the one who must rediscover their personal dignity, not one closed in on themselves, but one open to other people through love, justice, kindness and acts of mercy and help. They are the one who must return to the true human values and rediscover the inner emotional balance between soul and body,³⁹ giving each one the respect they deserve because any illness and any suffering, of any kind, is half cured if the person themselves creates and develops their own spiritual antibodies. A spiritually healthy person can induce the same state also in the community to which they belong, and by working together to an entire society.

The trauma and disorder of this world can be counteracted only by developing strong personal relationships at the mental, psychological, emotional level. This process cannot ignore the personal and communal character of the Christian teaching. Only by relating to the vitality of practical evangelical Christianity will the contemporary human being be able to oppose the ferocious capitalist ideology that condemns them to a life of loneliness and disorientation, in uncertainty and insecurity.⁴⁰

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³⁹ Popescu, *Teologie și Cultură*, 28.

⁴⁰ Dumitru Stăniloae, *Reflecții despre spiritualitatea poporului român* [Reflections on the spirituality of the Romanian people] (Craiova: Scrisul Românesc Press, 1992), 17.

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SEKULARYZACJA, IDEOLOGIA KONFESYJNA I SPOŁECZEŃSTWO

S t r e s z c z e n i e

Życie społeczne jest fundamentem egzystencji człowieka i – rozszerzając – całej cywilizacji. W artykule zostaje przedstawiona droga, poprzez którą przynależność religijna wpływała na historyczną ewolucję społeczeństwa i relacji międzyludzkich. Po analizie relacji pomiędzy wyznaniem chrześcijańskimi i ekonomią kapitalistyczną w kontekście procesów sekularyzacyjnych, zostały ukazane konsekwencje desakralizacji dla duchowego zdrowia współczesnego człowieka i socjologiczne implikacje tworzące błędy współczesnego świata. Wspólnota jest zastępowana przez separację, solidarność przez indywidualizm, a wewnętrzna duchowa równowaga człowieka jest zagrożona duchowym chaosem, który zdaje się skazywać całe społeczeństwo na samotność i dezintegrację.

Słowa kluczowe: społeczeństwo świeckie; wyznanie chrześcijańskie; desakralizacja; państwo; etyka kapitalistyczna.