

BOOK REVIEW

SOCIAL PHENOMENA IN CULTURAL DIALOGUES

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Nicu Gavriluță, *Viața, un ritual inițiativ. Interviu și dialoguri culturale*
[*Life, An Initiatory Ritual. Interviews and Cultural Dialogues*], Iasi,
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The volume *Life, An Initiatory Ritual. Interviews and Cultural Dialogues*, written by Professor Nicu Gavriluță, appeared in 2020 at a prestigious publishing house: Junimea in Iasi. The author summarizes in his speech a series of leitmotifs found in other published works: the condition of **the religious man** capitalized in the new social context (Gavriluță, 2013), the explanation of the meaning of life in relation to certain beliefs: globalization, multiculturalism, technology, myth, ritual (Gavriluță, 2015), or the updating of the idea of **political correctness** (Gavriluță, 2018) through concrete social examples.

Thus, life encapsulates these motifs as forms of self-testing in a labyrinth (or several) of initiation. Inspired by the writings of authors such as Mircea Eliade and Ioan Petru Culianu, life is transposed into a ritual that takes place according to the rules established by the labyrinth. If in a Greek sense the labyrinth has the role of keeping closed the mythological creature (the Minotaur), the one that could produce disharmony and social imbalance, in this work the labyrinth has a new connotation: in the center of the labyrinth is the perfection of the individual, and the route is from the outside to the inside, from ignorance to knowledge, from imbalance to balance, from material life to spiritual life... This initiatory ritual is discovered through the 12 works (introduction, 9 interviews and 2 cultural dialogues) which excellently synthesize the author's motivation, the existing social problems and the directions of postmodernity as forms of initiation.

The beginning of the work is one that presents the professional genesis of the author, transposed through an intergenerational comparison, the generation of current students and that of 1987, representing the year in which a destiny in the field of philosophy and sociology was chosen. The admission to studies, the presence of new technologies in the lives of young people, globalization,

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internationalization and acceptance of multiculturalism, all under the auspices of the transition from a communist government to classical democracy, are genuine tests of the labyrinth, forms of initiation and intellectual formation. The author admits that he had the “chance of an inspired choice” (Gavriliuță, 2020, p. 8) and his studies in philosophy and sociology represented a “modus vivendi”, an aspect that is hardly encountered in the postmodern present determined by the social and material pressures to which the current graduates are subjected.

The transition from the personal plane to the societal one is achieved through elements that characterize alchemy, both in the material plane, by combining resources in order to obtain the alchemical gold, and in the spiritual plane through the path to perfection and immortality of the alchemist: “I want to say that if in the athanor the elements are purified and, sometimes, the alchemical gold is reached, then there are other strange combinations in the body and mind of the alchemist.” (Gavriliuță, 2020, p. 16). The Athanor (the furnace of fire) is also transposed into the plane of the religious man, and the motif of the labyrinth is found through the alchemist's attempts to reach the utopian finality: the *philosopher's stone*. Inspired by the writings of Carl Gustav Jung, the author compares the stages of life (prenatal, birth, childhood, adolescence, adulthood, etc.) with four main phases of the alchemical process (nigredo, albedo, xanthosis, rubedo). The representations of alchemy are transposed in the stages of life towards “inner purification, the attainment of perfection”. The fire register is found as a process for perfection and knowledge. Through fire, impure metals become pure. Through *the fire of life*, *impure* man becomes pure (spiritual).

The discursive repertoire also remains at the level of the individual, and in a secular, global, multicultural world, a question arises in regards to the degree of acceptance and tolerance of the different one towards the majority. Professor Nicu Gavriliuță emphasizes the necessity of accepting the one next to us, an aspect that is achieved through love: “Acceptance makes way for the different, sometimes the deeply different one, thanks to the miracle achieved by Christian love” (Gavriliuță, 2020, p. 69).

Family is part of the individual's life, and the postmodern challenges are plenty: the appearance of the transgender, cloning, redefining the parents, etc. All this essentially converges towards a spiritual crisis (or Cristianophobia), which is based on the economic crisis, the social crisis, the epidemiological crisis. The solution offered by the author is to return to Christian knowledge. The author places scientific objectivism in the background and presents another inner *self*, that of *homo religiosus*, stating the following conviction: “the older I get I understand that the absence of “sacred fire” in our soul and the replacement of God with fetishes can kill us” (Gavriliuță, 2020, p. 78).

All these aspects happen in an international macrocosm, and globalization is an irreversible phenomenon, especially in the economic, political, informational fields. There is a question of a conflict between the local and global cultural space. Local/national cultures are based on language and religion, fundamental elements in the definition of an individual. The author states, however, that Western/European

values should not be neglected, but also taken over at the expense of local/national values. The key to survival is a return to the sacred: “Global society needs more national spirit and a soul in order to survive in the future. For the West, this soul is given by Christianity” (Gavriliuță, 2020, p. 97).

Life as a ritual of initiation is also found in the condition of the citizen during the pandemic period, where the key element is *the adaptability* to the new social norms generated by the state of emergency. Nicu Gavriliuță presents a series of social and emotional transformations of individuals. Inner balance must be achieved “by praying to God, taking care of family and ourselves, working and, above all, trying to give spiritual meaning to our lives.” (Gavriliuță, 2020, p. 94) *The negative of the daily newspaper* is diminished by the return to spiritual valences, which are the last solution given by the author (Gavriliuță, 2017). This manages to diminish the effects of the secular religion of *safety*, where isolation in one's own home, physical and social distancing can ensure apparent medical and social security.

Excessive technology is a catalyst contributing to the emergence of secularism. It reaffirms the important role that classical religions have in explaining the new directions of technology in relation to the individual and his spiritual condition. The author brings to the fore a series of current problems, both socially and politically, culturally, administratively.

In order to solve some social problems, a professional outfit is needed. Professor Nicu Gavriliuță's dialogue is continued in a double hypostasis: that of his own example of professionalism and dedication, through the awards obtained in the field in which he operates and that of the character who projects an image of the future generations of professionals, by characterizing today's students. “We want quality people” seems to be the social desideratum, the one that is achieved through the internalization of moral, social, high values (Gavriliuță, 2020, p. 137). The author goes through a *check list* of the current social needs among young people, the emphasis being placed on the need for identity values, to the detriment of the material ones. These values found under the umbrella of humanistic culture have a soteriological force of “salvation”. The culturalization of the individual is the chance of the modern man to live “the fullness in time and eternity in history” (Mircea Eliade).

Towards the end of the work, the author transposes the condition of the current man through the global postmodern issues. It urges in the pandemic context to an even more thorough experience of the elements important for life, and this can be achieved through the functions of the holidays. The global, intercultural framework is completed by analyzing *black lives matter* social movements and the *woke movement* in the context of racial discrimination. Although a follower of multiculturalism and the acceptance of the different one, Professor Nicu Gavriliuță does not encourage *politically correct* social movements by vandalizing statues, changing some names, closing some institutions, etc. All this is part of the identity and history of a nation (with positive and negative

aspects) and must be assumed as such, and “the rewriting in a politically correct manner of history is an act of utopian construction”.

Thus, in a manner that characterizes his writings, Nicu Gavriluță manages, like a circular novel, to place the individual, both at the beginning of the work and at the end, through the route of the labyrinth of social problems understood as forms of initiation towards spiritual perfection.

References

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