
FREEDOM AND IDENTITY IN THE IDEOLOGICAL CONTEXT OF THE CURRENT GLOBALIZED SOCIETY[†]

Adrian Lemeni*

*University of Bucharest, Faculty of Orthodox Theology, Str. Grigorescu nr. 98, Sector 1,
Bucharest, Romania*

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Abstract

The identity crisis of the present world cannot be understood using only an economical, sociological and political scale, and evading the exigencies of the religious dimension. The crisis of personal and community identity reflects in a crisis of perspective that cannot be surpassed by amnesia towards the fundamental references of the religious traditions. It requires assuming a structured memory by defining religious experiences in order to investigate the deep support of identity and freedom. There is a mutual relationship between freedom and identity, whereas freedom and religious freedom in particular are realities cultivated by promoting a certain type of identity.

Authentic freedom is accomplished through a life shared in Spirit and Truth, assumed through a spiritual way of thinking and being. Spiritual freedom is not transfixed through institutionalized patterns and ideological schemes, but it is the freedom that follows from worshiping in Truth and sharing the Spirit of Truth. The Holy Spirit does not cancel the freedom of men, but it transfigures it, directing it towards God's will and thus fulfilling it.

Keywords: freedom, identity, ideology, globalization, truth

1. Introduction

The current international context constitutes a background allowing the encounter of various cultural and religious traditions. Cooperation in order to strengthen dialogue, constructive valorised by testifying about the common values is not an endeavour encouraging the homogenization of specific identities or syncretism. In the same time, under the current conditions when is highlighted an interpersonal unity reinforced by different ideologies, the effort

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* E-mail: adlemeni@hotmail.com

to bring back and value the sacrament and the dignity of the individual is compulsory.

The identity crisis of the present world cannot be understood using only an economical, sociological and political scale, and evading the exigencies of the religious dimension. The crisis of personal and community identity reflects in a crisis of perspective that cannot be surpassed by amnesia towards the fundamental references of the religious traditions. It requires assuming a structured memory by defining religious experiences in order to investigate the deep support of identity and freedom. There is a mutual relationship between freedom and identity, whereas freedom and religious freedom in particular are realities nurtured by promoting a certain type of identity.

The cyber revolution associated to today's spectacular technologies and the global society bring serious challenges for assuming any kind of identity. In a world that goes through an irresistible globalization process, what meaning can any kind of identity have?

The fluidization of the society, introducing a virtual culture dominated by the media where the change in the relations between companies and state and labour flexibility build a new society where globalization is not a merely economic phenomenon. The globalization process requires, first of all, a serious analyze of the part-whole report, what is specific and what is universal, including a cultural and religious introspection.

The question is: in today's world assuming a cultural, spiritual or comportamental identity remains a peripheral or reprehensible act? Is there something wrong in the desire to manifest identity, in exercising the right to otherness? How can one reconcile globalization with the amount of existent distinct identities in today's world? In order to answer these questions one needs a sociological approach, but a more comprehensive approach must also reach the theological perspective of this challenging reality: how should one express identity in a globalized society, what is the power of identity in a world seen as a network society?

We can talk about a personal identity, but we can also talk about the identity of various social groups. Identity is an expression of cultural characteristics that define the social group at a given time. Identity expresses a meaning for the existence of the social group and it sets priorities for that group. The social design of identity has several facets. According to sociologists like Sennett, Anderson, Gellner and Calhoun [1], there is an identity of legitimacy introduced by the institutions that lead the society, rationalizing their own domination over social actors.

We can also talk about a resistance identity of the groups disadvantaged or stigmatized by a comfortable majority. In this type of identity is created a sort of identity politics. There is also identity-project where certain social groups who are in a given situation try to create a new social identity. The dynamics of identities allow them to convert from one into another: for example, a resistance identity becomes a project identity to transform further into a legitimacy identity that imposes its own view in society.

In a social process characterized by such dynamics one will have to identify the true identity and to what extent this identity can convert into a fundamentalist position. What can be understood by fundamentalism? According to the renowned sociologist Manuel Castells, fundamentalism consists "... in building a collective identity by identifying the individual behavior and the one of the social institutions with the rules derived from the Law of God, explained by a well-defined authority that mediates between God and humanity" [1, p. 24].

It's interesting to see the particularities of religious fundamentalism in the current era. In order to do that, we will follow Castells' sociological analysis on the Islamic fundamentalism. Although the very word *Islam* means unconditional obedience to Allah, there are many experts who show that Islam should not be considered fundamentalist in its structure.

Although the primacy of the Qur'an religious principles remains a constant in Islamic societies, these societies and their institutions can have a pluralistic understanding. There are Islamic societies where the prevalence of the religious authority over the political authority is formal. There are many Muslims who believe that Shari'a (the Law of God established by the Qur'an) is not completely rigid, but it is only a guide for the believers, adjustable to the historical and social context.

The Islamic fundamentalism has no tradition despite his followers' attempts to find its roots in history, justifying it through sacred texts. Islamic fundamentalism is more of a tendency to reconstruct a cultural identity with religious and political implications without a historical tradition. Castells mentions: "The politicization of the sacred, the sacralization of the politics and transforming the legal prescriptions of Islam in social devotion are means put in the service of their own politics, a identity politics whose means are invented. This movement is an ultramodern trend." [1, p. 28]

2. Declining freedom by choosing the insignificant and the artificial

The consistent nurturing of insignificant things, promoting an absolutism of the passing ones and confiscating an authentic life through virtual environment generated by current technologies represent significant risks in misappropriating true freedom. The current ideology of consumerism nurtures a predilection for insignificant, for nonessential, reversing the axiological hierarchy. The consumerism that reduces man to an animal who consumes provides recipes for a general happiness, deceives through false ideals (once met, they increase the disillusion), imposes a totalitarianism of the meaninglessness, of a nothingness presented in fascinating shapes detrimental to essential realities. For the contemporary man is increasingly difficult to stay focused on depth and consistency and to shape and nurture a clear conscience.

Lucidity and a consistent option for what is essential become undesirable and uncomfortable realities for an ideology of consumerism that generates a culture of nothingness and meaninglessness, packaged and

presented in a tempting manner. The awareness of the absurdity of existence and the predilection for nothing are expressions of nihilism. The thirst and the option for nothing express the tendency towards parodying the divine creation.

Nihilism, by consistently nurturing the nothingness will strengthen the illusion of millenarianism, to bring about a new earth and a new man, through which the earthly paradise will be established. The illusion of this earthly paradise made by the autonomous power of the man diverts the eschatological perspective of Christianity. The eschatological tension expressed in the Bible in the words *already* and *not yet* is substituted by focusing exclusively on the material and biological realities. The man acts as if God and eternity would not exist.

From this perspective, both life and freedom are confiscated, being promoted surrogates of life and freedom. *“On the new nihilist earth all human energy will be devoted to worldly concerns. Both the environment and every element of it must be used for the cause of “production” and remind people that their only possible happiness is in this world; in fact, must be established an absolute despotism of the worldly concerns. The artificial world built by people who want to replace the last vestige of the divine influence upon this world and the last remnant of faith in people promises to become so all-encompassing and omnipresent that it would be completely impossible for people to see, to imagine or even hope for anything else would be beyond it.”* [2]

In the paradigm of the information society in the contemporaneity, the space is integrated into a technological flow that reduces the intensity of life at the expense of the artificial. The space becomes a place to build a gear with sophisticated mechanisms, reducing the person to a cog in a technological and artificial system. The integration process is diffuse constant and quasi-present in the fields of the existence. The joy of spontaneity, the naturalness of act of life, are seized by the formalism and rigor of frameworks imposed on behalf of system efficiency.

Thus, space, as an environment of life and communion par excellence is declined, becoming a network, a reticular configuration with a various constraints. Surprises and the unexpected of the existence are artificially removed by excessive organization, trying to organize reality to the last detail. The eventful space of life is substituted by the tech space of the artificial. Basically, the integration of tech space leads to a reality understood as a sequence made by AI logic, an ongoing sequence of computational algorithms.

Cyberspace is increasingly replacing the authentic space, the artificial system made by excessive industrialization increasingly substitutes concrete life. Space becomes a projection of multiple ideologies that artificially increase the desires and needs of people in the post-industrial world.

The man constantly connected to *cyberspace* and the reticular space of the technological system becomes prisoner of an environment alien for his profound and legitimate aspirations. He is increasingly passive, learned to only respond to stimuli, to make his objectives and ideals of life what is promoted

by mass-media, becoming dependent and powerless in face of the contemporary ideological roller. Life is stripped of its authenticity, becoming a succession of patterns integrated into an artificial universe.

Critical reflection, the characteristic of true culture, a living and spontaneous intelligence of a mind that goes beyond conventional and formalized thinking are diluted in the space of the technological universe. Shapeless logic operating in a technicist gear produces and tautological reproduces conventional existential patterns, obsessively nurturing a predilection towards formalism, insignificant and outward. The space of the existence is striped of the horizon of meanings of the pondered thoughts, spoken words and lived gestures.

3. Freedom and truth

If it is reduced to libertinism, to the manifestation of its own fallen and affected by sin will, freedom is no longer directed towards Truth. Genuine freedom involves sharing the Truth and life to the world. The Saviour says: “I am the Way, the Truth and the Life” (John 14.6) and “you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (John 8.32). Only knowledge and indwelling in Truth shatters the delusions offered by false freedom understood and lived as autonomy from the living God. The conscience of the contemporary world, influenced by nihilism, secularism and consumerism, is no longer centred in its relation to the Truth. In the context of the current relativism, the reality of the Truth seems obsolete and inappropriate. The search and orientation towards Truth, which involves an existential effort and consistency, are inconvenient for the public opinion anesthetized with various ideological surrogates. In the contemporary ideological context are mixed various ideological tendencies that nurture spiritual and material comfort, obscuring the Truth.

Nihilism as a significant ideology structuring contemporary mentality implies a growing alienation from Truth and nurturing error and imposture through diabolical cunning, so that lie looks like truth, and deception is presented as authenticity. Nihilism has penetrated so much in the minds and hearts of contemporary people that relativism eroded even those solid truths that had structured a way of life lived as existential certitude over several generations.

The truth unveiled as the revelation fulfilled in Jesus Christ protects us from the idolatry of the concepts and ideologies, shows us that this Truth deals with Life that cannot be exhausted by concepts and ideological patterns. Freedom lived through the experience of the Truth, Christ, reveals itself in the power of life of the faith. Christ remains a scandal for the mind confident in its own reasoning and it becomes a life event for who opens towards faith.

The Lord Jesus Christ is the Truth. He says to Pilate: “the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth” (John 18.37). But this Truth is a Person, the Son of the living God Who reveals the sacrament of the Persons and of the communion of the Holy Trinity. For a mindset confident in

the power of dialectical reasoning, that sets the truth through objective criteria, associating the truth with a person in a stumbling block.

The freedom given by the sin is false, deceptive. It is misleading, creating various illusions. To sin means basically to forge something in the profound order of creation. Freedom lived as own wish practiced according to the logic of sin is a lying and falsifying existence. The devil is a liar and the father of his own lies through which he lures people.

Jesus Christ, the Saviour, shows that He cannot be received by a cunning and deceiving heart. Lord Jesus Christ tells the scribes: "Why is my language not clear to you? Because you are unable to hear what I say. You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies." (John 8.43-44)

Contemporary ideologies are a real factory of illusions and delusions. In this context, freedom is claimed and alleged. But freedom is experienced as an illusion. True freedom is a vocation of the human dignity, a divine gift that makes the man into a special creation. This vocation must be permanently assumed and properly used.

When we are left only with the logic of claiming freedom, we claim it without living it. Denis de Rougement states: "*Freedom is not a right but a risk that must be taken every moment. They claim it because they are no longer free. The mere fact that they have started to demand it unconditionally and without a great and defining purpose, proves that they made themselves incapable of freedom. Otherwise, they would have affirmed it, choosing the real reasons to leave over their own lives. Without conditions, freedom is a ghost announcing the worst calamities.*" [3]

Freedom assumed as a structural vocation of the human dignity involves the option and consistency of the truth. Otherwise freedom becomes a lever a false and evil existence. "*Human freedom consists in its power, unique in the world, to follow the order - or cheat. If follows the order of Creation, one's freedom grows and the power to choose masters even wider areas. If cheats in order to win what tempts him at a given moment, he loses other opportunities, loses freedom, and that only prey is what binds him. "What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?"*, says the Gospel. *The pact with the devil consists in winning the world with the price of our soul and our shadow, the price of our free faculty to create. As long as you make efforts to keep yourself in the truth, you keep your complete faculty of telling the truth or lying. But once you lied, you are tied by that lie and the truths themselves will serve that lie.*" [3, p. 109]

4. Freedom as an expression of the spiritual experience

Authentic freedom is accomplished through a life shared in Spirit and Truth, assumed through a spiritual way of thinking and being. Spiritual

freedom is not transfixed through institutionalized patterns and ideological schemes, but it is the freedom that follows from worshipping in Truth and sharing the Spirit of Truth. The Holy Spirit does not cancel the freedom of men, but it transfigures it, directing it towards God's will and thus fulfilling it.

Freedom is a characteristic of the Spirit. Saint Apostle Paul confesses, "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom" [2 Corinthians 3.17]. The Holy Spirit does not reign, it does not impose its will over others, but it is the One through which values the sacrament of the individual. A person's freedom means releasing one from the will to control, the tyranny of the sin, because sin is the one that subjugates, divides and alienates us from God, ourselves and others.

Through Christ we have gained freedom by overcoming sin and death, requiring a consistent life in Christ through the Holy Spirit in order to not return to the condition of slaves of the sin. Saint Apostle Paul warns us: "Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery" (Galatians 5.1).

Freedom as a spiritual experience is an expression of communion. True freedom is not selfishly and discretionary imposed at the expense of the freedom of others, but it is the foundation for their ministry. Genuine service is based on genuine freedom. One who is his own master, freed from the conditionings of the sin, can really help his fellow man. "You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love." (Galatians 5.13)

The experience of freedom as a spiritual experience shows that it is fulfilled through Christ. Authentic freedom proves to be a safeguard against the illusions proposed by autonomous and secular humanist ideologies. Freedom does not mean accommodating the divine Truth to the secular mentality of the modern society, but assuming the demands of a freedom lived in Spirit and Truth. In this perspective, a Christian is a witness of the freedom lived in Christ as Life of the world. By stating this, I shall end with the statement of theologian Alexander Schmemmann: "A Christian is one who, wherever he looks, he finds Christ and enjoys Him. And this joy transforms all his plans and programs, all his human decisions and deeds, transforming his whole mission into the sacrament of the world's return to Christ, the Life of the world." [4]

References

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- [3] D. de Rougemont, *Partea diavolului*, Anastasia, Bucharest, 1994, 79-80.
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