

Deacon Caius Cuțaru, „*Homo religiosus*” in Mircea Eliade’s vision, Cluj University Press, Cluj-Napoca, 2013, 375 p.

The work „*Homo religiosus*” in Mircea Eliade’s vision was presented by Father Deacon. Caius Cuțaru as thesis in the History of Religions, under the scientific leadership of Prof. Univ. Ph.D. Nicholae Achimescu at The Faculty of Orthodox Theology “Dumitru Stăniloae” of Iasi. The paper analyzes how the Romanian scientist saw the religious man, of all times and of all places, especially in the archaic societies. *Homo religiosus* proved to be a constant presence over time, from Paleolithical to the modern and great monotheisms, leaving many traces of his passage through history.

One of the great merits of the Romanian scholar was that of saying that the religious dimension of the human being is a constant, an element of his conscience and not something acquired over time due to an evolutionary process. By linking religiosity to conscience, M. Eliade strongly internalized human religiosity, throwing bridges towards the theological anthropology, which talks about the man, the image of God, called be His likeness in a permanent dialogue made possible by the very act of creating (homo Capax Dei).

In Eliade’s view, the religious man is reported, through faith, to something greater than himself, he believes in an “absolute reality” that transcends him and generates him. This transcendent object of human aspirations, was called with the generic term “The Sacred”. The man is like a sacred reality that is at a different ontological level in comparison with the world and with himself. However, the sacred is manifested in the world, and the Romanian scientist will invent the term *hierophany* to speak about the concrete manifestation of the sacred, now homo religiosus’ object of experience.

Eliade’s whole work is not driven towards the religious phenomenon itself, nor towards religion or religions or even the manifestation of divinity, but towards the religious man, the human being caught in one

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of his most noble dimensions, the religious being. The salvation of man is always a target of Eliade’s approach, born of the generosity and bright character of his being. From this we infer the deep humanism that animated the Romanian scientist all his life, trying to make the man sensitive and responsive to the contemporary secular manifestation of the sacred. The final step was the birth of a new man, the foundations of a new humanism which will be based on the typology of *homo religiosus*.

The paper is structured into two distinct yet interconnected parts, the first part (p. 25-215) takes into account the way in which Mircea Eliade presents the religious man, and the second part (p. 215-337) attempts to show the extent to which the Romanian scholar was himself a *homo religiosus* and to which spirituality he belonged to with his whole being. In the first part, the author makes the profile of Eliade’s religious man, putting together the pieces of a puzzle, pieces gathered from the scientific and literary work of the historian of religions, in the absence of a work dealing with this topic. Although having planned, M. Eliade was not able to write a book about the religious man. In the second part of the paper the author had to overcome a task as difficult as it tried to enter the intimacy of the historian of religions, capturing those aspects that ultimately determine the extracting of conclusions about his religiosity.

Structural detailing the work, we must show that the two sides are constructed symmetrically, each with three chapters. The first chapter of the first part is an introductory and presents a history of the problem of *homo religiosus* (*status quaestionis*) to previous theologians and historians, such as Friedrich Schleiermacher, Max Müller, Rudolf Otto, Nathan Soderblom Gerardus van der Leeuw (p. 27-40). The most consistent part of the chapter covers Eliade’s methodology with his historical, phenomenological and comparative orientation. It surprised the whole debate upon the historical method in M. Eliade’s and R. Pettazzoni’s works, and clarifies Eliade’s origin and specific methodology (p. 40-69). It stresses the importance and originality of Eliade’s methodological approach, the religious phenomenon is studied religiously. The last part of the chapter deals with the now famous dispute upon the lack of method in M. Eliade, during which, the admirers and the detractors of the scientist rank on irreconcilable positions (p. 69-86).

In the second chapter the author enters the *homo religiosus* specificity, i.e. the permanent reporting to the sacred, religious category made known

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by M. Eliade. The sacred ontology appears as a reality of a different order than the natural forces, and the specific of *The History of Religions*, which aims to rediscover the religious man, whose behaviour desecrated opposes human behaviour in contemporary society. The conclusion reached was that, man, whatever he does, may not be non-religious and the sacred is the spiritual climate, the atmosphere that envelops all the elements involved in the religious phenomena. The religious man is called by Mircea Eliade: *the perfect man, the total man*. Only by referring constantly to the sacred, man expresses his true dignity, that of being religious (p. 86-105). Defining the sacred, Eliade was not entirely original as one can identify several influences. The first dependency would be the manner in which his master, Nae Ionescu, was referring to divine, the influence of R. Otto, of E. Durkheim or the Indian vision on how to define sacred (p. 105-113). Another concept is the hierophany, as a manifestation of the sacred, analyzed in the second chapter (p. 117-129). In the last chapter the author refers to the presence of the fantastic in Eliade’s work, considering it as an intimate link of the literary and scientific, being, in fact, another facet of the same test of decryption the religious human behaviour (p. 138-170). The chapter concludes by presenting Eliade’s vision concerning the modern process of desecration, but also his faith in a subsequent Resacralization (p. 170-185).

The last chapter of the first part (p. 185-215) specifies the elements of *Homo religiosus*, those which guide his life. The old man’s mythological universe contains many myths of origin and the end of the world, and myths that explain the origin of different human occupations. M. Eliade gives us a new understanding of the myth and mythic consciousness. Starting with him, myth has no longer been understood in the romantic way of the previous centuries, as a fantastic story as an invention, but as a vital story, full of reality, of truth. This is one major contribution of the Romanian scientist in *The History of Religions*. Regarding the rite, it can not be separated from mythological stories that it mediates, therefore, it is not presented separately by Eliade. The rite makes the mythological stories appear within the religious community. But *Homo religiosus* is also a *homo symbolicus* his whole existence being full of archaic images and symbols. Therefore, when the secularized modern man no longer recognizes the symbolic significance of various objects or daily events, its function is taken over by the image. Hence the power of images to influence the human

Deacon Caius Cuțaru, „*Homo religiosus*” in *Mircea Eliade’s vision...*” psyche and the human preference for modern secular image. According to Eliade the symbol reveals the deepest aspects of reality and makes obsolete any other means of knowledge. For the historian of religions, the symbol is the key of a non-reductionist interpretation of religion.

The second part of the paper sees M. Eliade as a *homo religiosus*. The first chapter (p. 217-272) depicts the scientist’s characteristic traits, most notably sincerity, simplicity, goodness, generosity, gentleness and modesty almost monastic, traits mentioned by all who knew him. This chapter also provides the various testimonies about Eliade’s religiosity. Although expressed by people close to the Eliade family, these claims are characterized by a marked heterogeneity and the fact that the historian of religions was very discreet about his own feelings and preferences regarding religion.

His life is seen through the prism of a permanent initiation, from the first experiences from childhood and ending with the painful experience of exile, seen as a desperate attempt to retrieve inside the center (p. 226-272). The early childhood experiences are defining for the following stages. In this itinerary, the author stopped upon other significant moments of existence, such as the birth of the adolescent stage, the significance of the Indian life and becoming a professional scholar, his political and cultural commitment, the period during which sympathized with the Iron Guard movement. The first chapter ends with Eliade’s initiation during the exile.

The second chapter of this part (p. 272-319) attempts to outline the profile of Christian M. Eliade, surprising his attitude towards Christianity and Orthodoxy, with preference for a Christian cosmic manifestation of the Romanian peasant, and noticing a certain reluctance to the official Christianity and its historical component, the ecclesial one. In the first chapter the author referred to “Orthodoxies” in M. Eliade work, as it could not have been established the existence of a uniform reporting of the Romanian scientist to Orthodoxy. We can notice how the Romanian scientist’s faith falls in his private side of life, being deprived of its community size, which, from what is known, Eliade would have tried only on rare occasions. “I do not claim to be a good Christian” is Eliade’s testimony about himself, not claiming that he was ever a practicing Christian, a Christian very involved religiously. Therefore, neither the author considers that Eliade would have been a good Christian due to the fact that there is no evidence of his involvement in the life of the Church. Treating issues of the cosmic

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dimension of the Romanian Christianity in this section of the book (p. 287-298) we must refer to the fact known that the Romanian scientist felt a great affinity with popular Christianity, specifically south-eastern Europe, a Christianity that retains its cosmic dimension. The second chapter also contains critical remarks against a secularized theology, the one of the “death of God” promoted by Protestant theologians in the West. From this point of view, Eliade brought great service to Christian theology, making a spiritual preparation for the re-Christianization of the desacralized West (p. 298-319).

The last chapter of the book (p. 319-337) wants to open the reception of Eliade’s work within the dimensions of universal culture, including him among the great personalities of the last century. The relationship between culture and religion is captured in a privileged mode, but a special place is dedicated to Eliade’s anti-cultural approach, with the mention that, his attitude is against the contemporary culture that put God out the center of its concerns. Compared to a secularized culture, Eliade acts as a Trojan horse, burning it from the inside after he armed himself with its the most beautiful expressions. However, Eliade is part of Romanian culture that has served with the greatest devotion, refusing any creative writing in a language other than Romanian. Eliade proved to be a very good reader of the signs of the times in which he lived.

The paper ends with a consistent chapter of conclusions to each of its sections. In conclusion, the author has successfully shown that Mircea Eliade remains a first class personality for the world religions history of the twentieth century, being one of the top experts in this so generous field of culture. For all these issues, as well as those you will find after reading, I recommend this book.

Rev. Ph.D. Lucian Farcașiu