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Desacralization and Resacralization in Mircea Eliade's Vision

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Abstract

Desacralization is an ongoing process, a process with a history, a complex process, taking place on many levels and with different consequences, most of them negative in religious terms. Mircea Eliade believes that man and the human society cannot be desacralized absolutely and forever, there may be occultation of the sacred in the profane, but we cannot speak about the total absence of the sacred. The scholar hopes that no religious behavior, no matter how old, can disappear completely. In Eliade's view, human fulfillment, the creative and comprehensive affirmation of man can be achieved only within the relationship with the sacred and in a society shaped according to the religious principles. Dominated by an optimistic attitude, M. Eliade expressed his confidence in the creative power of the human spirit and in the human success that will keep the creative freedom and power at all times and he also says that the desacration of the world will be followed by a period of resacration.

Keywords

Mircea Eliade, desacration, resacration, sacred and profane

I. The Process of Desecration - Historical Review and Contemporary Reality

In his study *The Sacred and the Profane* Mircea Eliade attempts to answer, in an allusive manner, to two questions: to what extent “profane” can become “sacred” in itself (sacration process) and to what extent a radical secular existence, without God and without gods, can be the starting point for a new kind of “religion”? (the resacration process). This release of the problem means opening new horizons that modern man abandoned a long time ago, when the European culture took an irreligious, secular direction when it began to turn axiologically only to the visible, to the here, falling into immanence.

M. Eliade and other “specialists in the sacred” had much to contend with the hostility of those devoted to the positive sciences, triumphant at the time, to impose the reflection on the sacred and to make understood that human behavior for which the sacred represent the principle (αρχή) in the meaning of a pre-Socratic ontology, as the beginning and existential substrate.¹ The exile of *homo religiosus* in the world of *homo tehnicus* coincided with M. Eliade’s exile in the West, where he was considered a messenger of the East, as it was stated by Thomas Altizer, but where was exposed to the most infamous blackmail, that of the civil death.

Desacration is an ongoing process, already having a history of its own, but that turns out to be very complex, taking place on many levels and with many consequences, most of them negative in religious terms.² When we talk about desacration, we refer mainly to the contribution that science and

¹ See Viorel Colțescu, *The History of Philosophy Vol. I. Old, Medieval and Modern Philosophy*, Brumar Publishing House, Timișoara, 2006, p. 67.

² Professor Nicușor Nacu shows that during this long process of desacralization “The Category of the sacred knew a criticism so fierce that, now, after centuries of constant action of emptying of the sacred meanings that entails, we face a *puzzle* in which we are required to extract the parts that could reveal its content. In the rational consciousness, the sacred has no right to exist as a *totally different* reality because, by a gradual denial of the religious, it was deprived of its components that suggest the structure and origin of the transcendent. This deconstruction process is long and difficult to grasp, because such an achievement was operated on an extended period of Western philosophical thought”, cf. Lect. dr. Nicușor Nacu, *Phenomenological Alternatives for an Onto-Theological Recuperation of the Sacred. Prolegomene to a Possible Investigation*, in the year book of *The Faculty of Orthodox Theology „Patriarhul Justinian” from Bucharest*, University Press, Bucharest, 2008, p. 551.

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modern technology have brought to this process, and to other secularization influences, as we shall see below.

In the nineteenth century we could witness a process that is present now and in modern times, that of the secularization of culture, process that, in the previous centuries, also affected the secularization of science, as special cultural domain. They were both based on religious considerations, starting from a purely religious basis, however, they got “just by doing this, to the secularization that has finally forgotten their own religious origin. That being so, the two processes that have created a secular science and a secular culture not only went in similar ways, but were associated in a common effect”.³ The secular character of modern culture cannot be explained unilaterally and direct only by the modern science of nature. Through an association with a culture that meanwhile has become secular, the secular science was not just the preserve of a few specialists. If the nature and culture represented places of hierophany (nature as a manifestation of divine wisdom and power, and culture as a self-representation of the divine spirit), “the dialectics of the hierophany finally produced the secularization of the natural science and technical molding of nature, and the secular understanding of culture and of the cultural practice, this way, bringing religion into its threshold”.⁴ This explains M. Eliade's attitude towards contemporary culture, he has accumulated culture, making himself its depository, but he dynamited it from within, as Paul Barbăneagră says.

In the history of this process, which Eliade does not present in a systematic evolution, its origins can be traced, though, not long ago, more precisely after Isaac Newton, when everything was abandoned and changed by the fantastic industrial and technical-scientific progress, when the world itself became the subject of scientific analysis. Ioan Petru Culianu presents in a very plastic way the position of the balance in favor of science and the demonizing of any aspirations towards totality by following the difficult path of initiation:

“The Europe of the adepts of Plato and Pitagora, the Europe of the magicians, alchemists, Kabbalists and hermetics was de-

³ Richard Schaeffler, *Religious Creativity and Secularization in Europe from the Enlightenment to the Present*, in Mircea Eliade, *The History of Religious Beliefs and Ideas. From the Great Geographical Discoveries to the Present*, Vol. IV, Coordinated by Ioan Petru Culianu, Polirom Publishing House, Iași, 2007, p. 421.

⁴ R. Schaeffler, *Religious Creativity...*, in M. Eliade, *The History of Religious Beliefs...*, p. 421.

feated by a Europe of Galileo, Descartes and Newton... According to E. Garin, it would have been quite possible for science to have followed this path (the path of initiation), and in this case, today, instead of technicians, we could have magicians. But quantitative science has gained at the limit, and the other possibility was sentenced to ridiculous and oblivion, as happens with the losers”.⁵

Eliade says about the positive and desacralized science, which cancelled and turned into mockery transcendence and any reference to the sacred, that “it reduced the world to Mendeleev’s table” and its destiny is the culmination of “the atomic apocalypse”. The atomic bomb - the maximum negative achievement of science - is the natural result of the desecration of the cosmos and the replacement of «a humble attitude in relation to God with a paranoid monologue, man considering himself free to enrich, to transform the world, not understanding that the “enrichment” impoverishes the human world of the most important feature of creation: the sacred».⁶

However, M. Eliade does not see only the dark and pessimistic shades of the desecration, as a kind of slow dissolution of humanity, degradation of the human civilization, but ignores the reaffirmation of the benefits the process of secularization and desecration brought to contemporary civilization, just because they are sufficiently obvious to all. The scientist shows that the desecration of the cosmos initiated by Judaism and perfected by Christianity made possible the objective scientific study of nature and the advancement of knowledge in general. On the other hand, the Romanian scientist remarks the religious particularity of the historical period we are experiencing because the previous religious changes (the religiosity of the gatherers, of the hunters, and of the agrarian period) assumed the change of the type of religiosity with another, which involved the change of the entire mythological complex, symbolical and ritual, but nowadays, things are different because: “the problem is the total desecration of both the cosmos and the human society. Until now, something similar never happened in history.”⁷ History hasn’t known such a dramatic desecration, because

⁵ I.P. Culiănu, *Romanian Studies. I. The Ghosts of Nihilism. The Secret of Doctor Eliade*, Trad. by Corina and Dan Petrescu, Polirom Publishing House, Iași, 2006², p. 223.

⁶ M. Eliade, *The Meeting with the Sacred*, Vol. by Cristian Bădiliță și Paul Barbăneagră, Echinoc Press, Cluj, 2001, p. 101.

⁷ M. Eliade, *The Meeting with the Sacred*, p. 30. The present desacralization, a feature of our contemporary societies, is seen, by M. Eliade, as a camouflage of the sacred in

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the present desacration does not mean the replacement of a spirituality with another, but the absence of any form of religiosity, which would be a monstrosity.

M. Eliade detects another phenomenon that he does not include in the wider process of secularization, but he places it in its antechamber, constituting itself as a precursor and as a sign of secularization. It is the resistance to a sacred perceived by humans as ambivalent: attractive and repulsive, beneficial and dangerous at the same time, resistance which appears in the very heart of the religious experience. This *resistance* is manifested especially when “man is seen in front of a total request of the sacred, when he is asked to take the supreme decision, to completely and eternally embrace the sacred values or to maintain an equivocal attitude towards them”.⁸ In the view of the existential metaphysics, this resistance is equivalent to a flight from the sacred authenticity. The Romanian scientist warns that it may happen that, this resistance to the confiscation of all life by the sacred to occur even within the churches that

«frequently have to defend man against the excesses of religious experiences, against the mystical experiences, especially against the risk of an annihilation of the secular life. These cases of resistance... betray, to a certain extent, the attractions of “history” that tends to gain an increasing importance, especially in the “evolved” religions, the human life values, among which must be placed, on the front position, the ability of this life to be in history and to make history».⁹

In the evolved religions that the scientist referred to, among which he placed Christianity, from the very beginning, the dilemma appeared from the pages of the New Testament: how much does Christianity belong to this world, to history, and how much should it belong, starting from here, to the kingdom of God,¹⁰ a dilemma which will be expressed, later, in the

the profane. The study and the understanding of traditional myths and symbols allow the revealing of the fundamental existential meanings and, therefore, the challenge of the inner transformation of the one interested in the manifestation of the sacred.

⁸ M. Eliade, *A Study of the History of Religion*, Trad. by Mariana Noica, Humanitas Publishing House, Bucharest, 1995², p. 358.

⁹ M. Eliade, *A Study of the History of Religion*, p. 358.

¹⁰ We select for this purpose a few verses of the Gospel of John: “If the world hate you, ye know that [it hated] me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the

writings of the apostolic fathers¹¹ and which will be expressed, in a plastic manner, by St. Augustine by the image of the two loves (the love of the self, leading to the oblivion of God and the love of God leading to self oblivion), giving rise to two cities: *civitas Dei* and the *civitas terrena*.¹² Lately, this double affiliation seems to have taken human life only towards *civitas terrena*, which lead to the fall in history, seen as a fall from the sacred.

In Eliade's vision the loss of the religious landmarks is equivalent to the dehumanization, to the dissolution of the person who keep intact those instincts meant to change it into *capax Dei*, but which, diverted from their purpose, will drag it now in the opposite direction, which demonstrates, once again, the persistence of religious character of the human being.¹³

world, therefore the world hateth you." (John 15: 18-19); "I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine... And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to thee. Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we [are.] I have given them thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil" (John 17: 9, 11, 14-15).

¹¹ The *Epistle to Diognetus* depicts the status of the Christian who lives in this world as if he did not belong to it, but bringing into the world a piece of the reality of the Kingdom: "1. The Christians are distinguished from other men neither by the earth on which they live, nor by language, nor by clothing... 5. They live in the countries where they were born, but as strangers; take part in all, as citizens, but endure all things as foreigners; any country is their home, and any homeland is their foreign country... 8. They are in the flesh, but do not live according to the flesh. 9. They live on earth, but are citizens of the heaven. 10. They obey the laws of the state but, by their way of life, they overcome laws. 11. They love everybody, but are persecuted by all. 12. Nobody knows them, but they are condemned; they are killed, but they gain life" (*Letter to Diognet* V, 1-17), cf. *The Writings of the Apostolic Fathers*, Trad. by Rev. Dr. Dumitru Fecioru, Biblical and Mission Institute Press of the Romanian Orthodox Church, Bucharest, 1995, pp. 412-413.

¹² Aureliu Augustin, *About the City of God*, vol. I, Trad. de Paul Găleşanu, Editura Ştiinţifică, Bucharest, 1998.

¹³ Desecrated man is seen by Eliade as being reduced to the condition of a termite: "After a long mythological period and a short historical period, we are on the threshold of a biological age (a economical one). Man will be reduced to the condition of a termite, of an ant. It is impossible to believe that he will succeed. But for several generations, or perhaps several thousand years, men will live like ants", cf. M. Eliade, *Journal. Vol I (1941-1969)*, Edited by Mircea Handoca, Humanitas Publishing House, Bucharest, 1993, pp. 353-355.

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In an article entitled *Inferior Mystics* appeared in his youth work *Fragmentarium*, M. Eliade, even if he refers to the deviations that may occur in the mystical experience, his observations can be extended to the whole religious reality. His concern was related to the fact that man regularly returns to “lower forms of mysticism” as, extrapolating, we can say that man returns periodically to lower forms of religiosity.

«When you cannot, or you think you cannot, get “lost in God” – you get lost in alcohol, in opium, or in a collective hysteria. “Mysticism” remains; because the instinct of man to surrender, is as powerful and organic as his instinct of preservation. You have to get out of yourself, in a way or another. And when love can no longer save you - you are saved by the alcohol, the opium or the cocaine». ¹⁴ In the same context of an existence which is progressively secularized, M. Eliade stated that: «The gods do not die - said the humanists. They do not die but they get older, they become vulgar, they reach the cruellest forms of decay - in man's consciousness and experience, of course. You do not believe in Dionysus, but you keep getting drunk and this drinking is sadder and sadder, more and more vulgar and hopeless. Some travellers, returning from Soviet Russia, talk about the “mysticism of the tractor”, which replaced the Orthodox or the sectarian mysticism... when you cannot lose yourself in the Holy Trinity - you get lost in the “mysticism of the tractor”». ¹⁵

The conclusion reached by Eliade is that opposing to the religious phenomenon does not mean its disappearance from man's conscience, but his mockery, his transformation into a lower creature. Religion remains as a constant of human life, it cannot be taken out the human being, since it is an ontological component and not an inherited one.

Although the contemporary religious reality is unique, and the danger towards which humanity is going, is a huge one, Eliade does not lose hope for a future resacration. And this hope is fuelled by the discovery of *Homo Religious* typology and the revival of a cosmic religion in which, again, man will relate to the cosmos in a religious way. In this respect, Arșavir Acterian said:

¹⁴ M. Eliade, *Fragmentarium*, Humanintas Publishing House, Bucharest, 1994, pp. 154-155.

¹⁵ M. Eliade, *Fragmentarium*, p. 155.

“It seems that in the recent vision of Mircea Eliade the traditional religions tend to disappear by dissipation and dryness, their place being taken by a cosmic religion in which the sacred would reveal itself through a sieve of the phenomena that reattach us to the cosmos”.¹⁶

II. The Process of Resacration – the Basis of Eliade’s Optimism

II.1. Initially unrecognized religious structures

To Eliade, desacration does not seem to be irreversible. An example in this respect is the hippy movement, which he studied closely and which he says, has found a thing that was lost from the time of the prophets: the cosmic religiosity, and the meaning of life as sacramental epiphany. For them, nudity and sexuality had a ritual value, not a psychological one. “They found in love, not an orgiastic pleasure, says Eliade, but the release of their complexes of inferiority and guilt. Similarly, music, poverty, serenity gained, for them, a spiritual value. They rediscovered nature as an epiphany of the sacred”¹⁷. Referring to this protest movement against the contemporary *establishment*, M. Eliade brought into focus the “crisis” that Strindberg referred to in his *Inferno*, exorcizing it and concluding that the new generation is ready for something new, is suitable for the reception of the “unseen world” and at the end of the book states that religion will not disappear, but will return in other forms.¹⁸ At the end of his considerations on Strindberg’s book, Eliade asks whether the contemporary hippies can be assimilated to those who dream of a “new religion” and are struggling to approach the “unseen worlds”, if such artificial, mechanical, superficial ecstasies can be accepted as being of the “initiation” type - as those induced by drugs – or even the type of those in the *Inferno*. The Romanian scientist considers the young hippies as representatives of a cosmic religion, the *avant la lettre* type, developers, pioneers of a spirituality that will dethrone the traditional one, sometime, realizing that spiritual metamorphosis intended to demonstrate that *Homo Religiosus* is a permanent

¹⁶ Arșavir Acterian, *Cioran, Eliade, Ionescu*, Edition by Fabian Anton, Eikon Press, Cluj-Napoca, 2003, p. 51.

¹⁷ M. Eliade, *The Meeting with the Sacred*, p. 30.

¹⁸ M. Eliade, *Journal. Vol II (1970-1985)*, Edition by Mirca Handoca, Humanitas Publishing House, Bucharest, 1993, pp. 29-30.

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typology of history. On the other hand, we have one of the ideas dear to Eliade, namely, the eternal return, in this case, to a kind of spirituality to which we resonate more – to the cosmic religiosity.

M. Eliade makes a comparison with Christianity, which at its beginning was not regarded as a religion, but as an atheism, which was quite normal for the Greco-Roman polytheistic mentality, as Christians refused to offer sacrifices to the Roman gods or to the king considered divine, and concludes that

“We do not have to identify with the religious structures at birth with the later ones: that is, the great universal religions. Judaism, Christianity, Buddhism, Islam started out as the beliefs of a handful of people, for generations. It is possible that something analogous to happen today, too. Perhaps not in the traditional sense, Judeo-Christian, as we usually understanding, i.e., in a form already known”.¹⁹

The unexpressed conclusion is that the disappearance of religion does not automatically mean the disappearance of religiosity. The same conclusion was expressed by Eliade in another interview with Paul Barbăneagră in 1986, in which, remembering the situation of the Christians at the beginning, considered atheists as they did not offered sacrifices before the statues of gods and they did not repeat the traditional myths etc., he said that it is possible that one day, we'll see some events, considered absurd, and that will be a new expression of the sacred experience. In this case, those events will not be immediately recognized as religious.²⁰

With the possibility of deciphering of the religious, mythological, spiritual values hidden or obscured in common objects or events, life becomes richer and more passionate. Professor Ugo Bianchi recognizes Eliade's extraordinary ability to interpret religious facts, not forgetting any of the manifestations of the sacred, no matter how absurd it would appear to man today.²¹ This fully-sacred-existence

“really deserves to be lived - as M. Eliade said - for the world that opens, this unknown or hidden world, full of magic, full of hope, is close to us, is no longer opaque, we are no longer

¹⁹ M. Eliade, *The Meeting with the Sacred*, p. 31.

²⁰ M. Eliade, *The Meeting with the Sacred*, p. 43.

²¹ I. P. Culiianu, *Romanian Studies. I. The Ghosts of Nihilism. The Secret of Doctor Eliade*, p. 213.

built inside, we do not find ourselves in a city with thick walls, we do not feel locked in a cell, for everything is a symbol, and everything is certainly opened to something positive because it transcends the human”.²²

This vision, so bright and optimistic, speaks about Eliade’s inner world (fully consistent with the scientific concerns of the scientist, between the scholar and the man Eliade, there has never been any divorce) and about the triumph of *homo religiosus*, who runs through historical eras, always remaining the same: *Homo Religiosus semper idem*.

II.2. The Persistence of Homo Religious and Eliade’s Optimism

The status of the human being is closely related to the fundamental experience of distinguishing between sacred and profane. Eliade did not believe in the possibility of a total irreligious man.²³ In this respect, the historian of religions will notice that the oldest documents show that, since the origin, religious symbolism was present in man’s life: for example, the colour of ochre, with which the corpses were painted, symbolised blood and life, the position of the body in the tomb heading East etc. There were no primitive societies that did not distinguish between sacred and profane.²⁴ In contemporary, where it seems that we could identify a man who wants to be irreligious, M. Eliade notes that we cannot meet a pure profane existence, that “whatever the degree of desecration of the World, man, who chose a secular life, fails to abolish completely the religious behaviour.

²² *Sacred Architecture Geography. Mircea Eliade and the Rediscovery of the Sacred*, Films by Paul Barbăneagră, Trad. by Mihaela Cristea și Marcel Tolcea, Polirom Press, Iași, 2000, p. 199.

²³ In the fundamental theology that statement constitutes an argument called the *consensu gentium* (by consensus of all nations) or historical argument to prove the existence of God from the universality of the idea of God, idea present to all nations and in all ages. Among the illustrious predecessors of M. Eliade’s we mention Plutarch and Cicero. The first, at the beginning of the second century. AD. Said: “Look at the face of the earth. You’ll see, perhaps, cities without reinforcements, without laws, you will encounter people who do not know writing and the use of money, but a nation without God has not been seen yet, “and in the first century BC. Cicero also showed that “There is no nation, so backward and savage, not to believe in God, even if He is not known”, cf. Rev. Prof. Dr. Isidor Todoran, Archid. Prof. Dr. Ioan Zăgărean, *Dogmatic Theology. Handbook for the theological seminars*, Biblical and Mission Institute Press of the Romanian Orthodox Church, Bucharest, 1991, p. 46.

²⁴ M. Eliade, *The Meeting with the Sacred*, p. 43.

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Even the most desacralized existence still retains traces of a religious re-valuation of the World".²⁵

For the modern man, concerned about the recovery of the historical, cultural, religious past of mankind, it is very important to understand its significance and the past is concentrated mainly in the religious conceptions. The history of religions has demonstrated its utility when it showed that what is seemed strange behaviour, apparently illogical,

“did not come from a pre-logic thinking, from an immature thinking, as Lévy-Bruhl believed. The Paleolithic and Neolithic man was not a being devoid of the sense of existence, was not a savage. Through his expressions of religious myths and rites, he had a sense from the very beginning”.²⁶

As such, a dialogue between archaic societies representatives and representatives of Christianity, or even of post-Christianity may not seem illogical over centuries, because the one who speaks is the same *Homo Religiosus*. This proves the existence of a continuity and, hence, a solidarity between different religious human manifestations that, since the beginning of history, behaved like a coherent, logical, total and complete being.²⁷ And Th. Altizer agrees that M. Eliade in addition to facilitating a dialogue between two different forms of culture, the Western and Eastern ones, rather puts in relation the archaic and the modern man. In a final analysis, such a dialogue is reduced to a meeting between the sacred and the profane, and the Romanian scientist's hope is that the modern man will be reborn through the contact with the archaic sacred.²⁸ Bringing them together, over time, in a dialogue will lead modern man, who largely lost his sacred landmarks, to reconsider the set of values in which he believes and to which he refers permanently.

M. Eliade proves to be in harmony with biblical text referring to creation and brings one of the most beautiful evidence about the “very good” creation of God (cf. Genesis 1: 31) and one of the strongest evidence that this discipline brings about the *homo Religiosus originalis*. At the same time, the persistence of the religious man, the continuity and solidarity

²⁵ M. Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, Trad. by Brândușa Prelipceanu, Editura Humanitas, Bucharest, 1995, p. 23.

²⁶ M. Eliade, *Journal. Vol I (1941-1969)*, p. 46.

²⁷ Cf. M. Eliade, *Journal. Vol I (1941-1969)*, p. 47.

²⁸ Th. Altizer's analyses of M. Eliade's work see also Ionel Jianu, *A Monography of Mircea Eliade*, in „Romanian Life” 3 (1965), pp. 132-134.

between historical stages of humanity demonstrate, indirectly, another fundamental assertion of Eliade, that the sacred is an element in the structure of consciousness and not a stage in the history of consciousness. The direct consequence arising from here, which was expressed in the *Foreword* of his work *The Sacred and The Profane*, is that the disappearance of religions not automatically implies the disappearance of religiosity, the secularization of religious values being a reversible phenomenon, and eventually repeatable.²⁹

On the other hand, M. Eliade is in agreement with Jung's idea of the archaic survivals in the modern man's unconsciousness.³⁰ In a testimony in the *Journal*, we find that there are regions of the human being that are not subject of such a pronounced secularization: «If "diurnal man" is desacralized, "Night Man" is still related to the areas of mystery».³¹ In this respect, Eliade will indicate those parts of the human being that cannot be religiously decontaminated. It is about the sedimentation or withdrawal of the religious feeling in the unconscious areas of psychic life, Eliade having as an ally C.G. Jung, who says that the unconscious is always religious.³² Modern man carries within himself the paradox of existence, at two different, parallel, mutually incompatible levels: "on one hand, the historical level, organized according to a scheme of adapting to an alienating situation, and on the other hand, the mythical level, i.e. the profound mental structure organized according to a symbolic scheme".³³ In other words, modern man lives according to the sacredness saturated structures existing in the unconscious, even if, on a conscious level, he manifests himself as a secular man. On one hand, the historical man continues to live unconsciously under the same category as the pre-modern man, and on the other hand, his unconscious life is structured in an implicit initiating scheme in contact with history.³⁴ This schizophrenia gives rise to strange shapes of

²⁹ M. Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, pp. 8-9.

³⁰ I.P. Culiianu, *Mircea Eliade à la recherche du Graal*, In „CNAC – Magazine”, May-June 1987, pp. 8-9.

³¹ M. Eliade, *Journal. Vol I (1941-1969)*, p. 409.

³² Idem, *Mephistopheles and the Androgin*, Trad. by Alexandra Cuniță, Humanitas Publ. House, Bucharest, 1995, p. 13.

³³ I.P. Culiianu, *Romanian Studies. II. The Sun and the Moon. The Poison of the Adoration*, Trad. by Maria-Magdalena Anghelescu, Corina and Dan Petrescu, Polirom Publ. House, Iași, 2009, p. 136.

³⁴ I.P. Culiianu, *Romanian Studies I. The Ghosts of Nihilism. The Secret of Doctor Eliade*, p. 220.

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rudiments of religious behaviour to the people who declare themselves free from any religious "limitation".

We find that there is a continuity and therefore, a possibility of dialogue between the two human types, between the archaic religious man and the contemporary secular man,³⁵ but the difference is that, the initiatory trials of the archaic man, the death and resurrection scenario present in the myths and updated by ritual, which he consciously lived (in wakeful mode), modern man is experiencing in dream.³⁶ I. P. Culianu shows that

«The deep structure of the psychic life of the individual is regulated by the same *patterns* which were once paradigmatic models of human existence "archetypes" and that were sent, with piety and fear, in the whispered language of myths. Relationships are obviously reversed: what constituted the super-consciousness of a clan is the unconsciousness of an individual or of a group».³⁷

Therefore, we can say that modern man cannot live a life completely desacralized, even if he wants the release of any sacred landmarks because sometimes he acts on the unconscious. M. Eliade regains modern man's existence in the world, always giving him a mythical model. And from this point of view Eliade's optimism is justified.

³⁵ In an entry in his diary, recorded on 3rd January 1963 Eliade wrote: "The objection (of Thomas Altizer) that I do not write the book in which " I have a dialogue with the representatives of modern consciousness (Nietzsche, Freud, Marx, etc.) "I replied as follows: All these illustrious authors that are admired by Tom, are Westerners... I try to open windows to other worlds to the Westerners - even if some of these worlds have collapsed ten thousand years ago. My "Dialogue" is with other parties than those of Freud and James Joyce: I try to understand a hunter from the Paleolithic, a yogi or a shaman, a farmer in Indonesia, the Africans, etc. and communicate with each of them", cf. M. Eliade, *Journal. Vol I (1941-1969)*, p. 446.

³⁶ M. Eliade gives us an example in this respect, when it refers to the fairy tale, the images it generates and those symbols that come from the depths of a life with a purpose (fully sacred) of the archaic man, but who doesn't find his correspondence in the universe of modern man: "A fairy tale is not addressed to a secular, waken consciousness: it exercises its dominion over the deepest parts of the psyche, nourishes and stimulates the imagination. The initiatory symbolisms of fire and crafts, death and resurrection by fire, of being born on the anvil etc. are clearly attested in the myths and shamanic rituals. Similar images, born of fairy tales, act directly on the listener's psyche, even if he did not consciously realize the primary meaning of a symbol or of other", cf. M. Eliade, *Cretors and Alchemists*, pp. 108-109.

³⁷ *Romanian Studies I. The Ghosts of Nihilism. The Secret of Doctor Eliade*, p. 221.

Rediscovering the sacred, equivalent to us, with the statement “God is dead!” aims to give impetus to the younger generation in the fight against nihilism. Hence the optimism that should characterize the younger generation, “not a naive optimism, bourgeois or romantic, but the faith in a world that is just beginning to be known in its ultimate values”.³⁸ M. Eliade advocates of human religious experience which opens new perspectives, giving the opportunity to know the levels of existence, reality, obscured or inaccessible before. In this way the world will no longer appear as opaque, meaningless, tragic, even more than that, such an opening will mean the beginning of an era of extraordinary creativity, hitherto unsuspected. But not only the younger generation is required a healthy optimism, Eliade reveals himself to be an optimist, because he said he was waiting for such a state:

“I am waiting for an era of cultural creativity unique in the recent history of the last three centuries of the Western world i.e. of the planet... We can call it optimism, but I think it is rather realism. It does not seem that such a discovery of the *Homo Religiosus* can remain without existential, creative and culture consequences. Sterility, boredom, the idea of decadence, the end... I think will be abolished simply because the spiritual openings to other worlds, to other imaginary universes cannot remain fruitless, without effect. It might therefore be said that I am optimistic”.³⁹

Eliade’s optimism caused by the discovery of the cosmic dimension of the sacred has something in common with the optimism of the Romanian peasant whose Christianity (Orthodox) is ecumenical by its nature, but it broadens even beyond *æcumene* by the cosmic dimension that it contains. From this point of view, too, M. Eliade remains bound to the religious characteristics of his people. For him, the bright and optimistic character of the religious conception gathers its strength from the light of the personal religious conviction.

The good news that Eliade brings to us is that a society cannot be absolutely desecralized and it cannot be desecralized forever, there may be occultation of the sacred in the profane, but we can never speak about the

³⁸ *Sacred Architecture and Geography. Mircea Eliade and the Rediscovery of the Sacred*, p. 199.

³⁹ *Sacred Architecture and Geography. Mircea Eliade and the Rediscovery of the Sacred*, p. 200.

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total absence of the sacred. The scientist hopes that no religious behaviour, no matter how old it is, can not disappear completely, a spiritual crisis or a certain syncretism inspired by despair can refresh any deity. Here's what he says in this regard:

«The only society in which man can truly accomplish himself is the theocentric society. To the extent that a society forgets God, it gradually alienates until it gets to suicide itself. But, in fact, there is no total oblivion of God ...“If anyone would achieve such a society, would trigger in a generation or two the madness of people and its overthrow. We live in a society that has not yet reached this critical point, but I think it is going towards it”».⁴⁰

From the quotation above we deduce that human fulfilment, the creative and comprehensive affirmation of man can be achieved only in relationship with God and in a society shaped by the religious principles. And I think this should be the starting point of the dialogue between the theological meditation and the religious reflection proper to the history and to the philosophy of religion. This is the point of convergence between the two disciplines. This quotation also warns humanity against the danger brought by the oblivion of God, which is equivalent to a collective suicide. If living with a purpose is proper to the religious living, the lack of a purpose is the specific to the contemporary man who lost his religiosity, who is permanently torn by his spiritual crises, crises of the age in which he lives.

Even if the industrial civilization seems to asphyxiate, to crush the contemporary man, Eliade doubts that he will degrade so much that he will disappear, at a time, completely exhausted. At the same time, he expresses his confidence in the creative power of the human spirit and in man's success that will keep his freedom and power of creation under any circumstances, cosmic or historical.⁴¹

And related to Eliade's optimism conveyed not only by his work, but also by his person we can mention the testimony of Paul Barbăneagră that, after filming the movie with Eliade showed it to his two friends, E. Ionescu and E. Cioran, who were very excited, especially since Eliade had died in the meantime.

⁴⁰ M. Eliade, *The Meeting with the Sacred*, p. 84.

⁴¹ M. Eliade, *Journal. Vol I (1941-1969)*, p. 346.

«At the end of the projection Cioran, a little angry, said: “Even after his death, Mircea gives us the lesson that we has given all his life: to desperately believe in better”.⁴² In the last scene of the film, Eliade’s optimism has an almost tragic resonance. He identifies himself with a kind of invisible wing that allows him to rise above reality that provides him a new perspective unknown to us». ⁴³

Another issue, less analysed, represents Eliade’s great spiritual opening in the presence of religions, his extraordinary tolerance, his lack of appetite for the dark aspects of religions, for the religious conflicts and all kinds of fanaticism, clear expressions of a bright optimistic vision. The occultation of the shadowy zones of the past history of the world religions does not betray the lack of scientific objectivity, but Eliade’s optimistic faith, his positive attitude in any circumstance that led Emil Cioran to find in the “*Debuts d’une amitié*” that “Everything that is negative, everything inciting to self-destruction, both physically and spiritually, was and is always stranger to him”.

The conclusion is that M. Eliade was congenital, clinically optimistic. He thinks that if *homo religiosus* will be rediscovered, it is impossible, in relation to the present vacuum, this revival of the true man, of the total man, not to conceive an era of unprecedented creativity. But P. Barbăneagră doubted this “if”. In his optimism, M. Eliade sees the predicted human renewal era not far, in front of us, and he sees the actual *homo religiosus* growing among the contemporary ruins.⁴⁴ We don’t know, however, the time horizon he had in mind, so we could refer to the truth of his prophecy. But there is the beauty of his thought, of his aspiration towards the good of mankind and the affirmation of man as a biological species and creator of eternal values of spiritual beauty.

⁴² The same Cioran, in his *Admiration Exercises. Essays and Portraits*, made some remarks like: “Everything negative, everything that incites to self-destruction on the physical and spiritual level, was and still is foreign to him. From here comes his unfitnes for resignation, for remorse, all feelings involving impasse, decay, lack of future”, cf. E. Cioran, *Admiration Exercises. Essays and Portraits*, Trad. by Emanoil Marcu, Editura Humanitas, Bucharest, 2003, p. 134.

⁴³ M. Eliade, *The Meeting with the Sacred*, pp. 79-80.

⁴⁴ M. Eliade, *The Meeting with the Sacred*, p. 99.

III. Conclusions

Desacration is a complex process, which already has a history of its own and that is present on multiple levels, with positive social consequences, and negative religious ones. Mircea Eliade's problem is whether a radical secular existence without God and without gods, can be the starting point for a new kind of religiosity. The answer he gives is still optimistic, since man cannot be secularized completely and that in the most secularized societies and the most secular people still preserve a religious behaviour. The good example in this sense is the hippies movement, which Eliade studied considering it a new type of religious manifestation, a cosmic one.

According to Eliade, the secularization of the Western societies is not the last word in the matter of religion, which may be followed by a resacration, by a re-evaluation of certain religious behaviours, by the plenary manifestation of *homo religiosus*. These ideas represent the basis of his attitude marked by a healthy optimism, Eliade remaining until his death an incurable optimist who taught us the fundamental lesson: the faith in the sacred and the return of the contemporary man to a religious behaviour. This is one of the fundamental legacies of the scientist.