

Gheorghe Holbea

Mircea Vulcănescu. Christianity as daily experience and eschatological expectation

Abstract

With broad implications, Mircea Vulcănescu's work and personality can represent a means of historical and sociological investigation of the interwar cultural period and a rich source of information concerning the environment and the mind-set of the Romanian youth. Likewise, the importance of knowing the personality and the work of Mircea Vulcănescu results from the fact that he was one of the leading representatives of the age, through whom an authentic Romanian cultural model imposed and perpetuated itself. Obviously, this was supported by the elements that defined the Romanian identity: space, language and the orthodox faith. Still, Mircea Vulcănescu did not stop at the level of a simple admirer, neither was he an index towards the Romanian linguistic identity, but he became more attached to a perennial transnational value: Orthodox



Rev. Lect. Dr. Gheorghe Holbea is Vice Dean of the Faculty of Orthodox Theology "Patriarch Justinian", Department of Systematic Theology, Practice and Sacred Art University of Bucharest, Romania

Christianity. For him, being part of the Orthodox Church meant having an identity that surpassed the cultural trend of the age, and the article puts forward a series of novel texts and reflections of a martyr. In the postwar conditions, the path of Mircea Vulcănescu was predictable.

Keywords

Christianity, cultural trend, sociological implications, technocracy, political environment, communism, martyrdom,

1 Introduction

It cannot be argued that the theological interests of Mircea Vulcănescu, huge personality of the Romanian inter-war period, have been thus far ignored. There is actually a volume published by Humanitas Publishing House and entitled *The Daily Good Lord. Studies on Religion*. The volume has been edited by the main editor of the vulcănescian writings, Marin Diaconu, who also wrote the introductory study: “Mircea Vulcănescu – philosopher of religion”.¹ Diaconu confirms that “alongside the philosophical, sociological, literary-cultural and economic subject matters, the religious subject matter is central to Vulcănescu’s spiritual interests”, but, despite this fact, there has not been thus far a solid and well-deserved reception of his

¹ Mircea Vulcănescu, *Bunul Dumnezeu cotidian. Studii despre religie (The Daily Good Lord. Studies on Religion)*, Ed. Humanitas, 2004. It must be noted that not all of Vulcănescu’s theological writings are integrated in this volume. One of the most important texts, namely “Spirituality”, is missing. The text has been published in *Tiparnița Literară* (1928) in a shorter version compared to the one from the manuscript. Lord willing, we hope to reconstitute as soon as possible to the reading public, integrally, this writing of a rare spiritual depth.

theological writings and, ultimately, of the Christian dimension of his intellectual activity, neither in the lay academic environment, nor, with one notable exception, in the orthodox theological environment. Until now, studies dedicated to Vulcănescu have rather stressed the philosophic component of these theological writings, or, sometimes, the sociological component of his writings about the popular religion of the Romanian village. As a result, Romanian culture, recent history and, more important for us, spiritual culture, are deprived of a *complete* Mircea Vulcănescu. The assertion may seem audacious, but our hypothesis – which cannot be developed here, but will merely be supported by some general guiding arguments – is that, in Vulcănescu’s case, the Christian concern is not merely one of Vulcănescu’s central concerns, but constitutes the very core of his personality. Moreover, his theology is not, in its essence, speculative, but existential, rooted in the experience of the Church and of patristic culture, constituting a coherent, well-rounded, conscious, living orthodox perspective which is used to judge all the phenomena of contemporary society and is practiced in his daily life. For this reason, the drastic separation between Vulcănescu the sociologist, the economist, the philosopher and Vulcănescu the theologian is often artificial. Behind all his important writings, from all areas, we encounter a subtle but persistent orthodox perspective/judgment on the world and its processes. In sociology, he himself confesses how he has avoided the neo-Kantian voluntarism, characteristic for D. Gusti, in order to opt for an Aristotelian-phenomenological view, more akin to the Church’s way of understanding², in economy, the broad

² Mircea Vulcănescu, *Opere. I. Dimensiunea românească a existenței* (*Works I. The Romanian Dimension of Existence*), Ed. Fundației Naționale pentru Știință și Artă, Bucharest, 2005, in: “Nevoia de unitate a spiritului meu mi-a impus sinteza. Între Dimitrie Gusti și Nae Ionescu” (*The Synthesis Has Been Imposed by my Spirit’s Need for Unity. Between Dimitrie Gusti and Nae Ionescu*), p. 758.

perspective regarding the structural transformations and the effects of the Great Depression contains also an influence from N. Berdiaev³, in the bibliography of his ethics seminars which he held as an assistant lecturer one can find the Holy Fathers of the Church, in his polemical writings, the preference for the Romanian village is intrinsically connected also to the preference for the orthodox rural world⁴, and his most quoted and best known work, “The Romanian Dimension of Existence”, is (above all) a recomposition of the popular orthodox ethos that cannot be adequately understood outside of theology.

2 Mircea Vulcănescu as confessor of the Orthodox Tradition

What is perhaps even more astonishing in Vulcănescu’s case is the fact that, despite his encyclopedic and multilateral culture, his Christianity has not been intellectualized, neither has it been transformed in a vague, relativistic, religious “humanism”. Knowing very well Catholic theology (he knew Jacques Maritain personally⁵, as well as other theological personalities among which we enumerate Alberte Dartigue⁶ and Pierre Maury⁷),

³ Mircea Vulcănescu, *Spre un nou medievalism economic. Scrieri economice (Towards a New Economic Medievalism. Economic Writings)*, the conference “Spre un nou medievalism economic” (*Towards a New Economic Medievalism*), p. 50.

⁴ Mircea Vulcănescu, *Opere. II. Chipuri spirituale. Prolegomene sociologice (Works. II. Spiritual Images. Sociological Prolegomena)*, Ed. Fundației Naționale pentru Știință și Artă, Ed. Univers Enciclopedic, Bucharest, 2005, in “Cele două Români” (*The Two Romanians*), pp. 682-687.

⁵ Maritain, Jacques (1882-1973): French theologian, converted from Protestantism to Catholicism, who has distinguished himself especially through the revival of Thomism.

⁶ Dartigue, Albert: Protestant theologian, author of several writings on Christian themes, participant at congresses of the Association of Romanian Christian Students (ASCR).

Protestant theology and being informed about, and sometimes even deeply involved in, the inter-confessional Christian debates from the first part of twentieth century, Vulcănescu is an Orthodox Christian confessor of the orthodox tradition, very careful and critical with regard to any reformist innovation, resolutely rejecting the westernizing influences from the Church. Thus, his writings are all the more precious as his orthodox anti-modernism does not originate from an ideological neurosis or from an immovable rigidity, but, quite on the contrary, from a profound discernment accompanied by the most generous humaneness, Vulcănescu confessing the Truth but preserving, at the same time, Love. This is only one of the reasons why we need Vulcănescu today. Only if we enumerate the themes concerning which he expressed his views do we have a clarifying image with regard to the degree in which his writings are relevant for today's world: the relation between the Church and the modern secular state⁸, the problem of the inter-confessional organizations⁹, the differences between Orthodoxy, Catholicism and Protestantism¹⁰, the

⁷ Maurry, Pierre (1890-1956): French Protestant theologian, participant at congresses of ASCR.

⁸ Mircea Vulcănescu, "Gânduri despre starea bisericii românești în statul laic" (*Thoughts Concerning the Condition of the Romanian Church within the Secular State*), in: *Bunul Dumnezeu cotidian (The Daily Good Lord)*, op.cit., pp. 344-356.

⁹ Mircea Vulcănescu, "Confesionalism și interconfesionalism în viața Federației Asociațiilor Creștine Studentești din România" (*Confessionalism and Inter-Confessionalism in the Life of the Federation of Christian Student Associations from Romania*) and "Conferința Sud-Estului European" (*The Conference of the European South-East*), pp. 159-173.

¹⁰ Mircea Vulcănescu, "Deosebiriile dintre Luther și catolici. Din perspectiva unui ortodox" (*The Differences Between Luther and the Catholics. From the Perspective of an Orthodox*), "Ortodoxia și apusul, după Berdiaev" (*Orthodoxy and the West, According to Berdyaev*), but also other references in the already quoted works, the theme of the

relation between tradition and the reformist enticements¹¹, the relation between Orthodoxy and the University¹², Christianity and the crisis of the young generation¹³, Christianity and the Christian in the modern world¹⁴. Paraphrasing the author, the writings about Nativity represent an outline for a “theology of joy” of a rare sensibility.¹⁵ In essence, we are dealing with the testimony of a Christian, immersed in both the lay and the spiritual culture, who feels and crosses the crisis, with apocalyptic nuances, of the modern age, reflects upon it, and foresees salvation through the return to the Orthodoxy of his ancestors.

differences between the Orthodox East and the Catholic or Protestant West being recurrent in Vulcănescu’s thought.

- ¹¹ We are dealing here with the series of articles triggered by the failed reform of the Church calendar from 1929: Mircea Vulcănescu, “Infailibilitatea bisericii și failibilitatea sinodală” (*Church Infallibility and the Fallibility of the Synod*), “Între catolicism și erezie sau urmările dogmatice ale rătăcirii sinodale” (*Between Catholicism and Heresy or the Consequences of the Synod’s Errancy*), “Netemeinica scrisorii sinodale” (*The Baselessness of the Synodal Letter*), “Pascalia și nedumerirea ortodocșilor” (*The Church Calendar and the Perplexity of the Orthodox*), “Între Afredon și Matei Vlastare. Sau o apologie protestantă la adresa Sinodului” (*Between Afredon and Matei Vlastare. Or a Protestant Apology Addressed to the Synod*), “Răspuns Prea Sfințitului Vartolomeu” (*An Answer to His Holiness Bartholomew*).
- ¹² Mircea Vulcănescu, “Filosofie științifică, Universitatea și Ortodoxie” (*Scientific Philosophy. Orthodoxy and the University*), in *Opere I. Dimensiunea românească a existenței (Works I. The Romanian Dimension of Existence)*.
- ¹³ Mircea Vulcănescu, “Cuvinte pentru drum” (*Words for the Road*), “Revizuirea de conștiință. Cuvinte pentru o generație” (*The Revision of Consciousness. Words for a Generation*).
- ¹⁴ Mircea Vulcănescu, “Creștinul în lumea modernă” (*The Christian in the Modern World*), republished in: *Bunul Dumnezeu cotidian (The Daily Good Lord)*, op.cit.
- ¹⁵ Mircea Vulcănescu, “Gânduri pentru Nașterea Domnului. Însemnări pentru o metafizică a Bucuriei” (*Thoughts for Nativity. Notes for a Metaphysics of Joy*) and “Crăciun 1935” (*Christmas 1935*).

A return which is practically a reconversion. Mircea Vulcănescu, lover of the tradition and of the faith, as it was lived, during his time, in the Romanian village, is, paradoxically, a case of conversion to Orthodoxy. This fact is essential if we want to understand his Christian evolution and, likewise, if we want to understand better our own recent history. Born in a family which, following an old labeling procedure, we may classify as “petty-bourgeois”, with a father who was a religiously indifferent public servant, but with a mother who was an active member of the Society of Orthodox Women, Vulcănescu grows up, during his childhood, in a Christian atmosphere and close to the Church. But beyond this micro family environment, the urban society of prewar Romania had been affected by a strong secularization and by alienation from the people. The fault, later observed by Vulcănescu the sociologist, that separated urban from rural Romania, also had an impact on the Church, which had been submitted to the modernizing reforms of the 19th century and which had been, somehow, exiled from the public sphere, not so much as a ritualistic, solemn presence, decorating the great public festivities, but as a living organism, as Christian presence in the city and in the public or academic affairs. Orthodoxy was seen as a retrograde, anachronistic phenomenon which was unable to say anything interesting or relevant from an intellectual point of view and, even less so, from a political point of view. Let us not forget that the urban bourgeois society of the Old Kingdom was gibed by I.L. Caragiale for reasons which included its secularization, the famous dramatist bemoaning “the abandonment of our orthodox churches especially in the Capital and in the big cities”.¹⁶ Moreover, the school itself had become an environment that favored atheism through the exposure of students to Darwin’s ideas or to the geological evolutionist theories. Vulcănescu himself notes the phenomenon when he

¹⁶ I. L. Caragiale, *Notițe critice (Critical Notes)*, *Universul*, 7.1.1900.

recalls “the grim atheism from which no high school student had been able, I think, to escape, since the high school curriculum was placing in an unsolvable conflict, in the fourth grade, the Bible and Geology”.¹⁷ In another place, he recalls how the readings from the *Origin of Species* had transformed him into a “materialist and a naturalist”.¹⁸ Deeply significant are also the observations which, a little later, he will make with regard to the student atmosphere from the London of year 1921, where he found himself on the occasion of a student Congress: namely, the fact that British public opinion – of that time, nota bene – did not view Christianity as being *separated* from the aspects of daily life, as it was the case in the urban Romania of that time (AV)! Unfortunately, a great deal of analysis and reflection is still needed, concerning the cleavage produced within Romanian society by the abrupt modernization operated by the 19th century political elites, in order to understand how it was possible to arrive at the situation in which a young Romanian student, born in a country Christianized by the Apostle Andrew, would experience such a “culture shock” In fact, as he will note in 1924, the presence of a student Christian movement in universities was, at the beginning of the twenties, something extremely unusual:

“for the one used to the characteristics of university life in our country, a Christian movement of a religious, not political, nature seems to be no less than a miracle”.

Further, he noted that “about three or four years ago, if somebody would have made a profession of faith in the University, he would have certainly been ridiculed (this has actually been the case)” (AV).

¹⁷ Mircea Vulcănescu, “Nae Ionescu. Așa cum l-am cunoscut” (*Nae Ionescu. As I knew him*), *Opere I (Works I)*.

¹⁸ According to some handwritten notes found in the Archive of the Vulcănescu family. From this point onward, any reference to, or quotation from, Vulcănescu, that is based on the Archive, will be marked by the initials A.V.

The crisis of the modern age and its disorienting transformations brought by the first world war, the need for a deeper sense of life's meaning have kept however the young Vulcănescu on the path of a Christian quest, despite the atheist doctrines to which he has been exposed and the secularized environment. This is how he ends up activating in the Association of Romanian Christian Students (ASCR), a small but pretty influent student society which, initially, had been sponsored by the YMCA (Young Movement Christian Association) through its Bucharest branch.¹⁹ If, in the beginning, among others due to the influence of the environment, his Christianity is neo-Kantian, of Western-Protestant inspiration, gradually, with the ardor of the convert, he rediscovers Orthodoxy or the Church. On the one hand, his return has represented the fruit of an authentic personal quest, stemming from disaffection with the Protestant form of Christianity²⁰. On the other hand, it has represented the fruit of the formative contact with Nae Ionescu²¹ and with members of

¹⁹ It is worth mentioning that, in the void left behind by the secularization process, the Protestant organizations – here at a student level – have acted with perseverance in the youthful milieus from the Romania of that period. Uprooted from the tradition and alienated from the Church, the young were not always able to distinguish foreign ideologies from authentic Christianity.

²⁰ In a paper presented at one of the last Congresses of the ASCR (Braşov, 1931), entitled “Poziția spirituală a întâiului ASCR” (*The Spiritual Position of the First ASCR*) (AV), Vulcănescu describes this first stage of religious quest and the way in which the spontaneous rapprochement to the Church took place.

²¹ A detailed account of the influence exerted by Nae Ionescu on Mircea Vulcănescu can be found in: “Nae Ionescu. Aşa cum l-am cunoscut” (*Nae Ionescu. As I knew him*), *Opere I (Works) I*, pp. 473-485. We quote a few fragments: “In this time, in which we were rediscovering, not without a certain pride, on our own, and not without circumvolutions and errancies, between heroic pessimism and a type of idealistic metaphysics of values, a Christianity which seemed to us authentic because it was not learned, Nae Ionescu stood therefore in front of us,

the Russian exile community²², whom he has encountered both at the ASCR Congresses as well as during his studies in Paris. This return to the Church is impelled also by a traumatic personal experience: one day, the boat in which Vulcănescu was together with a few friends capsizes on the Pasărea lake (they were roaming towards the monastery with the same name). Vulcănescu, the only one who knew how to swim, manages to save three of the five persons who were in the boat. The dramatic circumstances acquaint him with the experience of despair, with the awareness of one's powerlessness to save through one's powers alone, and the healing will come precisely through immersion into the religious experience²³. The environment of the ASCR is, especially in the first part of its existence, effervescent. It is an environment in which the young seek to be *complete* Christians (in fact, the term used programmatically by the ASCR is that of "Integral Christianity"), that is, to live a Christian life from all points of view, not just, as

ready, confessing an intransigent Christianity, a Christianity as it has always been, a monkish Christianity, steadfast on its radical and realistic positions, nurtured from the authentic sap of the tradition of the fathers, and he was probably judging us with certain interest, given the fact that he always concerned himself with us; but harshly, given the fact that he was always chiding us polemically."

²² Described in "Confesionalism și interconfesionalism în viața Federației Asociațiilor Creștine Studentești din România" (*Confessionalism and Inter-Confessionalism in the Life of the Federation of Christian Student Associations from Romania*), *Bunul Dumnezeu Cotidian (The Daily Good Lord)*, p. 163: "that which has represented the authentic bolt, which has caught the spirits in the longing for Orthodoxy, has been the meeting with the Association of the Russians at Băile Herculane. The deepening of their spiritual experience has awed some but has convinced the most."

²³ In that period he noted a few thoughts: "because you suffer, you will have to get closer to the suffering of others. To comfort them. To understand them. You will have to take upon yourself the burdens of others. You will have to do your duty. You will have to give to others the taste of life."

they saw around them, a life in which the Church is present only on some important occasions (baptism, funeral, etc.). This explains why the ASCR Congresses include lively discussions regarding the harmonization of one's profession (or one's job, one's specialization, as we call it today) with man's Christian calling, regarding the way in which relationships between young people should be lived, regarding the nature of marriage and how it should be lived, regarding the way in which one can be, at the same time, a patriot and a Christian, regarding the relation between Christianity and the political power etc. In other terms, we are dealing with subjects relevant for everyday life, problems which had to be understood, clarified and lived in a Christian spirit by the young men and women of that period. For example, in one of the letters sent from Paris to the ASCR members back home, Vulcănescu was evoking the trauma caused by the rigors of specialization which, in a way, mutilate the human person:

“life today is so made that we are the slaves (in the true meaning of the term) of our specializations. I myself (since I am in Paris) live this experience. I also realize how poisonous this slavery is for the soul. It is strange, from the very beginning, Christianity has been for me a call addressed to the whole soul, against specialization” (AV).

In another letter, he argues that “the soul of the ASCR member is built, I believe, on the foundation of a need to cast aside the official mask that is imposed on you by the status of specialist in the articulated mechanism of this age” (AV).

With regard to the return of the ASCR members to the Church and living in the Church, the same Vulcănescu was asking, in a letter to the future priest Alexandru Popescu:

“I would be very grateful to you if you could manage to procure for me a few prayer books that are common in our Church in order to make a choice. I know that there are in our prayer books extremely beautiful kontakia

and troparia. I also picked up some from the few books I found in the library. But, you see, in the library of a layman, there are too few prayer books, and this is something shameful for the layman.”

Orthodox liturgical and prayer books were requested in order to be used in the ASCR Congresses instead of the “free” prayers which, under protestant influence, were said initially by the members of the association. But, this renaissance of the Christian spirit among some studious youngsters was not limited to those specialized in the technical disciplines or in the humanities. Even in the orthodox theological milieu of that time, teaching, under the influence of reforms and westernization, had become scholastic and stodgy, leaving the impression that the dogma of the Church was something intellectual, theoretical, and abstract. That is the reason why, when coming into contact with the ASCR, a theology student was going to confess:

“I know, since I was in the fourth grade at the Seminary, all the depths that you are discovering with toil – said once a seminarian, member of the ASCR, to the other members – but *never did I know what spiritual purpose they may serve and why, for example, do I need in my daily life* (my emphasis) the truth contained in the dogma of the incarnation of God”²⁴.

Through this testimony we notice, in fact, not only a desire to live life under the authority of ethical commandments or of a Christian morality, but the desire to gain access to the life of the Church, where dogma and tradition are no longer perceived as compelling limits, but as demarcations of a community grounded in Love, Love being precisely that which makes possible authentic inner freedom and plenary life, guarding

²⁴ Statement evoked by Vulcănescu in “Poziția spirituală a întâiului ASCR” (*The Spiritual Position of the First ASCR*) (AV).

them at the same time from the dangers of delusion or unfruitfulness, as Vulcănescu notes in the same manuscript. The doctoral studies in Paris, that have taken place between 1925-1928, have equally represented though, despite the rigors of academic life, an occasion to intensify the spiritual experience and spiritual interests. Thus, he is very active in the Circle of orthodox studies from the Romanian Church in Paris, in the circles of the exiled Russians, as well as in the circles of inter-confessional dialog between Orthodox and Catholics led by J. Maritain, where he always presents the dogmas of the Church as far as certain themes are concerned. A few examples of conferences held in these circles: "The Holy Virgin in the Orthodox Church", "The Church Teaching", "The Sources of Orthodox Teaching: Holy Scripture and Holy Tradition, as they are viewed in the Orthodox Church of the East", "The Orthodox Conception of the Church", etc. Unfortunately, more detailed notes – unpublished – have been preserved only from the last conference. From the conference drafts, one can clearly deduce the fact that Vulcănescu was already deeply immersed in the patristic literature. At the same time, he is engaged in a rich correspondence with the Bucharest members of the ASCR, whom he sometimes admonishes, in his gentle style, for neglecting participation in the Church Sacraments (services, confession, communion) and for the superficiality with which they assumed the orthodox faith, which, in the meantime, had turned from an anachronistic religion into a real cultural fashion among the students (due to the ever greater success of professor Nae Ionescu), superficiality which, on the other hand, was accompanied by a growing ideologization under the influence of other radical student movements of that time. He translates into French, together with Anina Pogoneanu, his first wife and a leading member of the ASCR, the Akathist to the Mother of God, Vulcănescu being enthusiastic for the meanings discovered in the Church akathists dedicated to the Holy Virgin. Likewise, in Paris, he also begins to think about becoming a priest, a thought that he himself confesses in a form completed

for the psychology laboratory of professor Rădulescu Motru: “at the age of 23 [that is in 1927 – *my observation*] I thought of becoming a priest” (AV). Upon his return to Romania, from a professional point of view, Vulcănescu will become something completely different from a priest: economist in the service of the Romanian state, advancing gradually from the position of an expert that elaborates studies to that of a decision maker (head of the Public Debt Department, head of Customs, and during the world war undersecretary of state). A “bourgeois” specialization, yet, one which did not alter his Christian vocation, and which, in the end, will represent the reason why he became a martyr in the communist prisons.

Apart from Christianity understood as plenary and, at the same time, as daily life, Vulcănescu’s theology is marked by the discovery of the importance of orthodox eschatology. The particular sensitivity, manifested as far as this aspect is concerned, is first and foremost explained by the contact with the Protestant type social Christianity, whose eschatology is immanent and which expects the realization of the Kingdom of the Father here and now, in this history²⁵, and with the Catholic type of Christianity, where immanentization takes place, this time, through the Antichristic transformation of the Church in the Leviathan (“terrestrialization”), namely in a state institution, in a worldly, dominating kingdom²⁶. But this stress on orthodox eschatology which, without separating this world from the afterworld, confesses the realization of the Heavenly Jerusalem, and therefore the perfection and fulfillment of a life foretasted (only) in the Church, at the end of the history of this age, has also another sense for Vulcănescu. The interwar period

²⁵ Mircea Vulcănescu, “Nae Ionescu. Așa cum l-am cunoscut” (*Nae Ionescu. As I knew him*), *Opere I (Works) I*, p. 476.

²⁶ Mircea Vulcănescu, “Gânduri despre starea bisericii românești în statul laic” (*Thoughts Concerning the Condition of the Romanian Church within the Secular State*), in: *Bunul Dumnezeu cotidian (The Daily Good Lord)*, p. 351.

is one of the most troubled from the history of mankind and has been marked by what some observers have called the “secular religions” of communism and fascism, totalitarian “religions” which, in fact, are expressions of a chiliastic type of heretical eschatology²⁷, that promise, thus, “heaven on earth”. It is a disconcerting historical period, in which mankind, after the fiery trial of the first world war, was rushing, blindly, toward the second, being dragged, at the same time, into the totalitarian-millenarian experiments from Germany and the USSR. Christian themselves were not immune to such temptations: some, even from our country, were seeing in the utopia of Bolshevik communism a fulfillment of the messianic promises evoked at vespers (*the rich have become poor, and have suffered hunger...*), others were attracted by the myth of a pure Aryan kingdom established on earth, or, as in our case, by the myth of a Romania like the sun in the sky. In fact, Vulcănescu treats Nae Ionescu’s rapprochement to the Legionary Movement, rapprochement that he never reciprocated, precisely from the perspective of a hypothetical contradiction between the orthodox vision of the professor, who had never preached “salvation through politics” and had always firmly distinguished between the kingdom of this age and that of the age to come, and the legionary myth.²⁸ Already since 1924, Vulcănescu noted that the ASCR was grounded in the belief that “salvation from all the evils through which humanity passes cannot come from any reform, no matter how wise [it may be]” (AV). In another place, in a conference held while he was head of Customs (an occasion for him to refer

²⁷ See, in this sense, Alain Besançon, *A Century of Horrors: Communism, Nazism and the Uniqueness of the Shoah*, trans. Ralph C. Hancock and Nathaniel H. Hancock, ISI Books, Wilmington: DE, 2007, for an analysis of Communism and Nazism from the perspective of the first heresies of the Christian era.

²⁸ Mircea Vulcănescu, “Nae Ionescu. Așa cum l-am cunoscut” (*Nae Ionescu. As I knew him*), *Opere I (Works I)*, 536-537.

ironically to the position in which he found himself, that of a *publican* who was holding a conference on spiritual themes) he points:

“(...) the first thing which we have to say unequivocally is that: Christianity is a religion, not a system of social organization. Consequently, it cannot be opposed, as social theory, to another social theory. Its purpose is not terrestrial. It does not seek the organization of earthly happiness. That Christianity also contains an earthly morality is perfectly true. But this is not its purpose. (...) For us, Christianity is not a teaching for the ordering of this world, because it is much more! For us, Christ is not a social reformer. He is the savior of the world. He is the God above the world, He who saves the world by descending into it and by becoming one with it. This is what it means to be a Christian. Confessing that Christ is God incarnate for the salvation of the world.”²⁹

These thoughts, together with others, will be resumed and developed in 1940, immediately after the outbreak of the second world war, in the conference “The Christian in the Modern World”, in a very profound manner and with striking prophetic accents. We mention here only a few ideas, as the text of the conference deserves a separate analysis. Vulcănescu distinguishes between the Christian world of the Middle Ages and the modern world, with all that differentiates them structurally and essentially: the theocentric, organic and hierarchical world devolve, especially in the West, which passes through the Catholic schism and the Protestant rebellion, into an anthropocentric, fragmented world, the unity of the spiritual community being shattered. Through this Luciferian overturning, man becomes the demiurge of his own world,

²⁹ The Conference “Religia și viața socială” (*Religion and Social Life*), published in: *Manuscriptum*, nr. 1-2 1996, dedicated a special Issue to Mircea Vulcănescu.

replacing God, believing in the utopian possibility to build his own heaven, and therefore to obtain salvation through his own forces. Gradually, the attributes of divinity are transferred from God to society or the state: “the replacement of God by the Leviathan, the institution of the collectivity-God as replacement for God the Father and the Creator”.³⁰ In a period of modernity in which “totalitarian aspirations” are felt most strongly in the history of humanity, and in which social experiments (Vulcănescu also evokes Huxley’s dystopia, *Brave New World*, mentions the soviet experiment and suggests – we are, however, in 1940, Romania being allied with Germany – the Nazi one)

“Christianity is forced to take attitude against contemporary totalitarianism, authoritarian and tyrannical, which substitutes the apocalyptic effigy of the Leviathan to the authentic loving community of the Church of God”.³¹

As indicated by Vulcănescu, in front of the modern world, the Christian doesn’t have any alternatives:

“he has to renounce its spirit and to confess everywhere its placement in the proper place”, and: “the deepest and most plenary Christian reaction in front of the modern world is abnegation of the modern world”.³² The closing is equally categorical: “We must not delude ourselves. The time that comes is not a time of triumph for Christianity. As neither was the one that departs. (...) The powers of those that enter in this apocalypse are numbered. Nothing more dangerous than to enter

³⁰ Mircea Vulcănescu, *Bunul Dumnezeu cotidian (The Daily Good Lord)*, pp. 83-84.

³¹ Idem, p. 87.

³² Idem, p. 88.

into it naively and without knowing what awaits you!".³³

It is justified to consider "The Christian in the Modern World" as one of the two *testament-writings* of Vulcănescu, the other being "The Romanian Dimension of Existence". Both have been finalized in the years of the world war; if one of them represents a testimony of living Christian faith, the other represents a testimony concerning a community (the world of the ancient Romanian village) that presents an image of man, and a type of human living, which come closest to the Christian calling assumed by the author. It is not at all accidental that Vulcănescu opposes the Romanian idea of kingdom (namely of political organization), "which is not that of a forceful, oppressive dominion, but that of a community of sense and humaneness"³⁴, to the totalitarian and apocalyptic Leviathan described in "The Christian in the Modern World". The last subchapter from the *Romanian Dimension* is in fact equally prophetically entitled "The Absence of Fear in the Face of Death". Indeed, an absence of fear that Vulcănescu has carried till the ultimate consequence, his martyrdom, crowned by his last sigh, while lying on the hospital bed in Aiud: "Do not avenge us" ...

³³ Idem, p. 89.

³⁴ Mircea Vulcănescu, "Dimensiunea Românească a Existenței" (*The Romanian Dimension of Existence*), *Opere I (Works I)*, p. 1051.