

# BETWEEN PERSON OR DEPERSONALIZATION IN THE VIRTUAL SPACE

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## **Abstract:**

The world that computer science proposes to the man of the third millennium is ambivalent: one can create the state of beauty and interpersonal help through the IT technique, one can also fulfill thoughts that you never hoped to be achievable. You can see, you can know places and people with their traditions. You can do a lot ... But at the same time you can degrade yourself morally by falling from your dignity and moral beauty, drugging your life with the illusion of sensual happiness or easy gain. In other words, good and evil are put before you in the world of computer science today and tomorrow. The IT world appears as a divine commandment: life and death I have put before you, blessing and curse ... choose .... And man chooses. The mission of our world is to realize the beauty that must be chosen. The divine is everywhere and can be easily discovered. But the evil is the same and it is often more appetizing. It all depends on us. This is what I tried to capture in the analysis of my study.

**Keywords:** *Computer, conscience, consumerism, Christianity, the third millennium.*

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The world created by God was from the beginning dialogical, and man was a partner of God in the paradisiacal space, feeding on the dialogue with the Creator. The dialogue with God was in fact the food of heaven in the presence of God, and enjoying the fruits of nature was in fact another possibility to initiate a dialogue with the creation. The graceful dialogue<sup>1</sup> was not a simple conversation between two people but it was in fact an increasingly deeper structuring of the human personality. The man strengthened himself in spirit in this dialogue that highlighted his personality.

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1 „The Logos was the divine intelligent principle of the cosmos within nature, which provided connectivity and form to matter” (Judith L. Corey, *Light from Light. Cosmology and the Theology of the Logos*, Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 2016, p. IX.

Without this state of personality or person strengthened in grace, man could not overcome his status of a created animal, even if God had breathed a “breath of life” towards him. The human being had to grow in grace and this was done in dialogue with God. Man as a person exceeds the animal level which, no matter how evolved, cannot have that graceful personality. The animal cannot therefore become a person. The animal remains an animal even if it has reason, feeling or will. He also needs grace, freedom<sup>2</sup> and ability to dialogue. He reacts based on feelings and instinct, without yet having a dialogue.

I had once learned in the seminary that man has the attributes of the soul: reason, feeling and will, and through them he differs from any animal. Without them, man remains a mere biological being, like any animal being. Over time, I realized that the animal also has reason, feeling and even will, obviously to a greater or lesser extent. For example, a dog’s loyalty to his master cannot be surpassed by a man’s loyalty. And then what does the human soul have in addition to the animal, so as we can make a clear distinction between the two?

The human soul has the ability to receive and give grace. Man through his soul is pneumatophore and giver of grace. Nature receives but does not offer grace. Man, on the other hand, can receive grace and also share it. Then man has the freedom that gives him the chance to say YES or NO to eternity and dialogue with God. The soul makes man dialogical with God, because „everything is created after the image of the Logos”<sup>3</sup>. No animal could initiate this dialogue, for the animal expresses itself through shouts or articulations based on impulses. Only with man did God enter into the dialogue from the beginning of creation.

God has remained in dialogue with man and creation through divine providence even though man has no longer participated in it. However, the graceful dialogue of providence has remained even after the fall of man, and through it revelation was transmitted in the history of mankind until the coming of Christ. In other words, grace hasn’t disappeared from creation, even if man has no longer been able to receive it. The presence of grace, freedom, and the dialogue with God created what we call the *human*

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2 Ioan-Gheorghe Rotaru, *Om-Demnitare-Libertate*, Cluj-Napoca, Editura Risoprint, 2019, pp. 201-215.

3 Judith L Corey, *op.cit.*, p. 55.

person. Man is a *Who*, not only a *What*, not a mere biological being, and this state makes him receptive to the dialogue with God and capable of it. Through this position of personal being, man was entrusted by God with ruling the creation and ensuring its path to perfection.

Even after the fall of man when the creation suffers because of him, it remains dependent on his personality and his strength to receive grace, even if grace no longer had the abundance it had in paradise, but it was only sporadic. Through Christ, grace becomes “grace upon grace,” in the same parameters of heaven. Through grace, man becomes a dialogue with the whole creation and all feel and respect him in this gracious presence. The human person imposes himself not by force, but by the state of gracious syndesmos, the link with God, who sees in man the perception and the image of the perfection of creation.

No other religion verticalizes humanity as well as Christianity. They all speak highly of the human being, but everyone has their own perception of man, far inferior to the Christian one. In these Eastern religious thoughts, man is a substance that awaits liberation and the union with a universal Self through successive reincarnations. Can this be happiness? For the followers of this thought, it may be so, but for the one who feels that the happy man can only be personal, it means nothing<sup>4</sup>.

Or can you be happy when you are told that you will disappear at the end of your asceticism and cycle of reincarnations? That nirvana, which means extinction, awaits you. Or your life and eternity means a constant struggle with the others in order to defeat them? Why? Could this be true eternal life? Really? Honestly? Fighting the other (pre-Columbian, Scandinavian, Greco-Roman religions, etc.) and then being rewarded in those warrior paradises (Tlanocan, Whalhall, the Elysian Plains, etc.) are the things that designate me as a man of eternal happiness? Human strength and sensual reward? (Even Islam has this type of paradise that rewards the shahids or martyrs killed in the battle with the crusaders).

I say that it is too little for what the revealed God offers to the human person in eternity. Through the state of human person, God called man to the original dialogue and offered him the verticality in front of the whole creation. Man is the only being called to dialogue with God. And

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4 Nikolaos Matsukas speaks of “person-to-person communion” as a concrete form of transmitting divine love (*Teologia Dogmatică și Simbolică*, II, București, Editura Bizantină, 2006, p.382).

this dialogue is man's permanent responsibility before the Creator, Who called him *syndesmos* between the seen world and the Heaven. The dialogue responsibility makes man in turn a mentor of the dialogue with the world. More specifically, man can find the means of dialogue with creation, with each element, because this dialogue is not verbal, but gracious. The grace of the divine providence helps man to contribute to the preservation of the telos of the creation, of its meaning towards perfection.

Man dialogues gracefully with creation, and through this ineffable language the divine power is reverberated from man to the world. And the world recognizes man again as a pillar of guidance, through which it is also saved. "New heaven and new earth" does not mean another world, but this one, which is renewed by the divine grace. The world is therefore called to become what it was before the fall: a world in which God is truly present.

So man regains his primary mission namely to be a dialogical being again. From the beginning of the third millennium one can notice an introversion of humanity in this virtual space. People are taught to enter or hide in their own selves, trying to communicate with the rest of the world from within. Withdrawal itself is not the best option, because it actually represents the man's fear of otherness, creation and even self.

Retreating into a pseudo-dialogue behind the screen makes face-to-face communion disappear. You do not feel the mystery of the other and you cannot share his state of soul. Man is made to become eucharistic, that is, to receive communion and to give communion. From the beginning of his creation, he fed on the divine Logos, waiting for the real christic communion. Not only did the man receive the Eucharist, but he also fed his neighbour from his soul and logos. People share their thoughts and feelings, imitating the way God, through logos, shares his revelation.

But something is needed in this process of communication and communion: face-to-face presence. God gives Holy Communion to man only in his presence, not from afar. Everything can be done only when the two are present next to each other. So it is in the human relationship. For example, education cannot be successful in front of a screen, but face-to-face. The screen can only be an adjacent tool during the face-to-face educational process. The world of the screen, because it basically means virtual work, is a space without faces, without communication and communion, but only a transmission of information. Transmitting information is one thing whereas communing through communication is something else.

A man, who is used only to transmitting information, slowly loses his state of communion, because he no longer has that face-to-face relationship. The moment we are just the people of the screen we lose our existing humanity. It may seem like a harsh statement but it is true. We become at most false mirrors. And not even mirrors, because the mirror reflects the man as he is. The virtual society, without the real communion of souls, distorts man's relationship with the other or with the others.

We live in a permanent competition. The expression "competition" seems to me to be the most destructive form of relationship between people. God did not create humans to be in a competition with one another. Competition means overtaking the other, at best, or destroying the other, at worst. But many times these extremes have come together and created monstrosities. No, God created humanity to be complementary and synergistic, following the trinitarian model. The persons of the Holy Trinity do not compete, because there is only one God. In the trinitarian action everything means complementarity in grace. This is what people are asked to do: to be complementary and not disjunctive or competitive. The screen means competition. The world is tired of constantly competing.

The young child is educated to be in a competition all his life (the first prize, college entrance, best paid job, highest special pension, etc.). Competition has also led to progress, some say, but especially to wars. I don't know how much progress the competition has led to, but I'm sure that complementarity brought more progress than competition. I am referring to that complementarity based on an authentically religious conscience, in which man feels, as St. Paul says, that he works not as for men, but as for God (Colossians 3:23). Such a consciousness of the sacred in man would have led to much more progress. People worked out of conscience for God, producing values.

Competition has often led to dishonest rivalries and even death. Let's remember that big companies swallow up small ones in unfair competition. Let us remember the states that along their entire history competed and conquered each other becoming empires then they were conquered by other great empires and history repeats itself. People live their whole lives in competition with each other. What does politics mean? A competition on a simple slogan: "get down so I can climb". This is what competition has meant most of the time. A constant struggle with the other. Or complementarity through the sacred conscience means to assume your needs and

those of the other, to feel the secret or pain of your brother as if it were yours. Assuming the other means a co-soteriology, together-ascending to eternity passing through life after the example of the merciful Samaritan.

No one is left behind, no one is overtaken by the competition, but everyone feels that he has support in his neighbour. The neighbour is not only from the spatial proximity, but especially from the soul. This is how we can become the neighbour to people we have never seen and will never see. The IT world<sup>5</sup> can create this bridge between people, beyond geographical distances. People can become, with the help of multimedia systems, a large, cosmic family that can transmit their beauty from one end of the world to the other. Then we could really talk about human multiculturalism. We could finally create a database on human beauty.

We have whole libraries about human ugliness, about the history of fighting and assassination, about crime and political hypocrisy. It would be ideal to have a promotion of the beauty of the world, starting from architecture, to interpersonal relations, to deep religious practices, etc. There are so many beautiful things that the world has accomplished in history and they are not known to us. The virtual world can help us see all these spaces, where we may never go to during our life. It is a gift that the IT world can make to humanity. The virtual world can be the projection of human happiness, to which man tends but does not reach. It is the facilitator of the smile and joy of the people who need this optimism. There is too much talk about the consequences of stress, which is actually the state of tension and pain in which we live. A smile and optimism can be a solution, a rehabilitation of people's health and a way out of the tension of universal stress. The virtual world can be a medicine for the mental rehabilitation of people. But it can also be the other way around: depression, addiction and loneliness.

There are many pathologies in the virtual world that have already come to the psychotherapists' attention. The virtual world creates obsessions and addictions that are illusory. The happiness of the internet does not hold, because it is based only on the illusion of perfection. It is very

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5 „In the society we live in there is a computer pressure that some feel and use with all the benefits that flow from it, including intellectually, others feel it and advertise it, ag-gressing their comfort, and others do not realize it, not yet touched by it ... Today we live a shock of the future ...” say Mariana and Mircea Leabu în their articol, „Educația în zorii mileniului al treilea. Încercătura etică”, în vol. *Etică și integritate în educație și cercetare*, col. Instituții și politici publice, București, Editura Tritonic, 2018, p. 47.

easy to go from ecstasy to agony and people have felt this mental oscillation more than once. At a first glance, the attraction towards the virtual world is realized most quickly by the empiricism and sensualism of the body. It may be seen, felt, it is pleasant and lures people. But it is only an illusion that is followed by the bitter taste of loneliness.

We can only be fulfilled in the sacrifice of Christ, which He accomplishes in His body and then we accomplish it in our body. This “virtual fulfillment” exists in the Christian world. In other words, the expression “virtual world” is also found in the Christian and IT perimeters. This is the virtual world offered by the IT techniques: it can be the beauty we long for and which can be fulfilled in our dreams when beauty becomes reality. More specifically, when the IT world is a search for beauty and holiness, the virtual is waiting to be realized. The virtual world can be so close to us by living it. But the virtual world becomes beautiful when the virtual extends into ... virtue. The mystery of beauty becomes the mystery of virtue.

Then the virtual world can give us what is part of our definition: dialogue. In the virtual world man can enter into dialogue with the world, with those who want to speak, communicate and consume the depth of the logos. People need to speak, to convey logos to the reasons of the world. The world is made up of divine reasons, as St. Maximus the Confessor says, that is, of those *logoi* that structure existence. Sharing our logos means becoming creators as God created the world through the Logos. People can be created through logos. It just has to be clean and holy. Only that logos creates, not the logorrhea or the chatter, which destroys. The world is full of the noise of chatter and empty words but not of the creative logos.

But the virtual world can give us this chance to transmit and reverberate the logos from human to human, in fact from God to human and then between us. The crimes, wars and dramas of the world started from the lack of logos or dia-logos between people. Without words, people became disjunctive and adversaries. Without words, people entered destructive competitions. The great struggles took place when... the competitive silence appeared. Beauty is a dialogue of light towards Light. People did not reach for the swords when they talked, but only when the word between them disappeared. Therefore, in the Middle Ages, the cannon was inscribed with the Latin expression *ultima ratio*, i.e. the last argument after the argument of the word fell silent. And unfortunately there were many



the *ultima ratio* in history, in which the man was silent and the cannon spoke. Why? Because the words weren't used. The virtual world can bring the word back and unite the great distances of the world.

People of different cultures, religions and thoughts can speak beautifully, dream beautifully, look beautiful and become beautiful. It is the chance of the virtual, intelligent world that can transform society and humanity into a world waiting for heaven. Heaven is felt from here or it is not felt at all. Heaven may be in you or you may never feel it. And we make heaven here if ... we want to. The virtual world can create dreams and dreams can become reality. It can transmit images and they can materialize in everyone's life. These images can be beautiful and dignified, they can create sublime conscience and they can create a world of people's openness through kindness. Unfortunately, people are attracted to nothing, games and illusions, even war and sex. A way of thinking too telluric and ephemeral. But to create this mentality that transforms the virtual world into the world of beauty, we need a sacred consciousness, which I do not know to what extent we have ever had in history.

It is about the consciousness of human sacredness, of the fact that we are not biological beings, on an ephemeral horizontality, but we are on the vector of a cross that becomes a ladder and through which we are eternal. The consciousness of sacredness makes us feel everything as something beautiful, received as a gift, but which has to be shared. People of the sacred conscience feel that everything is a gift and that the gift should be passed on. The beauty of the world actually means the eternal beauty expressed through the virtual world. It is the dream of eternity that has become ephemeral but ascends to eternity. The virtual world can bring beauty between people, but at the same time it can take it away.

This requires the spiritual maturity of those who access this virtual world. Such maturity can reap the nectar, leaving aside the poison, as St. Basil the Great said. Perhaps a rational world could censor the harm that virtual poisons cause to the minds of children and adults. If you want, you can do it, but it is often said, falsely, that people can choose freely from the huge amount of multimedia offers. But the carnal attraction has been and is and will always be one of the most attractive offers. This requires education, a permanent work with the human spirit, to bring him to that spiritual maturity through which he can control and separate good from evil.



## The man's face in front of the computer

In order to provide these answers which are so necessary for the rediscovery of man in front of the computer, we must define him as an icon of God. What are we? Icons of the divine image, sprinkled in matter, on our way back to heaven. We live the mystery of God sometimes without knowing it. We carry His image in us and we do not know that we have it, believing that it is our image and only ours. Even the man in front of the computer is a face and the divine face must transmit light. The moment we become aware of this light, everything we do becomes light, even the message of the virtual IT.

People need beauty even if they are very easily attracted to the shocking and ugly things. Unfortunately, the rating increases due to this attraction towards shocking matters. And yet, man in his depth remains beautiful and seeks beauty. Therefore, God says that we know how to give good gifts to our children, that is, to look for beauty for ourselves and for those around us. But the gift is not only given to the one next to you, but has a cosmic reverberation. The gift also gives its effect, especially through the digital world because it can build or destroy. Therefore, great attention is needed to see what we post and what we transmit, because these thoughts and images can help or destroy. The mission with the help of the IT world is fantastic, but it can also be terribly destructive. The world chooses. But the fate of an entire world depends on its choice.

In **conclusion**, genuine discernment is needed in distinguishing between good and evil in the virtual world. This virtual world is very attractive and many are interested in accessing it, but it depends on everyone's conscience. It is necessary to educate the human conscience, to raise it to authentic values. Spirituality and culture, which twin and support each other, can offer the chance for humanity to return to its Christic depth.

People need this agapic understanding of Christ, even if some deny Him, because without this sacrificial love, the world has no positive meaning. To get out of the horizontal and biological state of existence, to create a vectorial experience to heaven, people need a culture of sacredness, and this came through the incarnation of Christ. The moment we understand that this Incarnation was the most important gift, given to us by God, the greatest gift given to humanity, then we will feel the responsibility to give to humanity what we received. And the virtual world can be a gift to people.

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