

A new version of religion, the megalopolitan one

*How the overcrowding society interact with traditional local religion.
Secularization, the new messiah*

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ABSTRACT

Globalization, migration, and an increasingly complex connection between nation and culture, have prompted a renewed recognition of religion as a major social, political, and cultural force. For the main-stream religions [in-power in each State] this has come as both a shock and a challenge facing the long-held presumption about the oneness of religious faith. The new form of establishment that the megalopolitan life brings challenges religions both to coexist, to coop, and to reconsider their values and methods in order to be kept significant and trustworthy for the civil life. Whoever do not adjust is doomed to vanish, and we have seen so many examples from which nowadays religions should learn some.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The concept of 'overpopulation' drives many questions and double the problems. Leaving aside the dilemma whether there is or there is not a real issue to confront with, we will focus on the things that are most obvious and unquestionable. We cannot stand for one side of the doubt whether the overpopulation is the new plague for the Earth and its inhabitants, or merely a myth. We cannot say that this phenomenon brings only disadvantages since the advantages are also visible and qualitative

quite significant (e.g., the technological developments in many different aspects are growing exponentially, following a non-linear pathway, more likely an arithmetic progression, a parable aiming up[1]). Now, without further delay, I prefer to analyze a glitch that comes along with overpopulation over religion, or more precisely, to the religiousness.

II. OVERPOPULATION AND OVERCROWDING VS INDIVIDUAL CONSCIOUSNESS

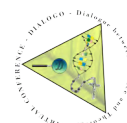
We have heard that "the menace"

of overpopulation was strongly denied by many voices, but one aspect is most certain about this issue, overcrowding. While the archaic society was used to have stability in the spreading of social groups, in the distribution of the workforce and the tasks of each social actor, the new social organization completely eliminates these concepts, ruining the understanding of all the social values and their hierarchy. 'Before times' the human society, even unequal scattered in the lands, had somehow figured out all its values in a pyramidal hierarchy. The stability of the 'traditional' hierarchy was ensured by two unambiguous processes: on the one hand, the society produced the necessary elements for the individual, which were provided to him under certain conditions because he was indispensable for society. On the other, the individual relied with whole confidence on the social organization, which had created the comfort and the psychic stability he needed to work and give to his society all his resources [fruits of his work, energy, knowledge, skill, time]. It was a Barter Agreement in which both were involved and both in benefit since both worth a lot for the other part. Now, the realm of overcrowding gives a decreasing importance to the individual, which is no longer indispensable to the group, the society, since the nearest truth in this social organization is that each individual can be easily replaced without hurting the group. On a larger scale, the group has similar importance to the human society, with same non-"value" of replacement: when either an individual or a group, or even a small society disappear from the big picture, nothing should suffer and the line of progress should not get deviated from its path. It should have been predictable for human society as it is obvious and discovered to all other species: The group is beyond the individual, and the society above both individuals and group. Therefore, as seen to all other species, the very nature of their survival lies on the

same pattern that is inexorably put in act with same mean always: overpopulation. It is thou the very 'plan' of survival for every species: to exponential multiply so that they overcome the menace of self-destruction and to ensure that society's continuity in progress. What differ us – humans – from all other species with similar behavior of overpopulating land is that they already know that 'rule' and, in large part, each individual of those species is aware of it and has accepted it by being ready for personal sacrifice and its replacement. For us, humans, this is still unacceptable, and always the individual consciousness struggles to find its importance/ prerogative in the plenitude of the species [2], moreover the thought of replacement is unbearable.

III. TRADITIONAL RELIGIONS AGAINST MODERN SOCIETAL ORDER

How was it 'before times'? There was a time when all people were raised with the idea that everyone meters, that each of humans has a certain role in life and, for that matter, each counts in the society. From head to toe (rom. "de la vîdică până la opincă") all individuals self-proclaimed as countable; the king was rightfully unexpedible, but then the worker had same impression that he counts as well for his involvement, the peasant too was raised to believe in kind. That was the reason of so many riots and rallies in which the individual consciousness of self-importance was socially displayed and [mostly only] self-proved. In the animal society the wicked individual is either cast off, left behind or eaten so that the society can survive and move on; no remorse or second thoughts are involved in the act of individual's replacement. The one that makes the most difference in this regard between the human species and the other species is Religion. This is which elevates man to a level of maximum importance and which, although always taking the collective



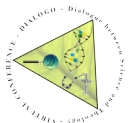
form in behavior, it always exaggerates the role of the individual through his personal relationship with the divinity. The majority of religions emphasizes the importance of personal development, personal spiritual enhancement that can lead to unknown and inexhaustible benefits to society. These basic principles are the core of every religion, whether it is a cenobite, monastic, or hermit society. In fact 'the people' (as a society, a group, or a mass) has really no importance what so ever in any religion from certain point of view [soteriology]. For example, when left powerless led by the religious leaders, the people is nothing but a flock that count in numbers facing other [religious] groups; but when standing against the religious leaders' desires "this crowd/mob is cursed" (John 7:49). In other circumstances all the religious acts and rituals prove that it is the individual that counts and not the society. By rituals that display one's role in God's iconomy, by the core teaching of religion – redemption – which is personally given to each individual, by the role and function that is given to certain individuals to have personal encounter with God and become His voice [as priests, prophets, or other chosen role] the hierarchy of values is all the same: individual over society, one vs many. The theology behind this principle is too large and has no relevance here. Even in religions that prove mostly as societal ones – as Mosaism, Christianity, or Mohammedanism – the individual's preference over society is proved with specific acts and theology [e.g. Christianity Protestant movements changed the status of priesthood given to all and each individuals, empowering each one as opposed to the few leaders; similar conduct can be found to all other religions that place individuals in direct contact and relationship with divinity]. Whenever this theology of 'personal encounter' enacts, the idea of replacement is no longer a value to be consider. That is why 'religion'

is considered to be the creed of the weak/meek, and it usually starts as a movement against social oppression of individuals [Christianism over Slavery, Protestantism over Black people's oppression, "Muslims must combat oppression and injustice wherever they are found, even though it is the oppression of the individual against himself, the oppression of society against itself, or the oppression of the government against its constituents"[3] etc.]. Every new movement inside any religion had started with same aim and motivation: of bringing man (individual) once again in the full attention, beyond the Church[4] (group)'s interest and empowerment. With each religious reform the reason is to replenish the meaning of what an individual is and means in God's eye that is more valuable than the whole Church (Luke 15.3-7).

IV. THE METROPOLITAN LIFE PROVOKES WITH A NEW RELIGIOUS LIVELIHOOD

A. Before that, religion was safe from commination

The new era of societal organization is thus marked by this reality made by the overpopulation phenomenon, overcrowding. Before the metropolitan life the organization and meaning of life was a lot different, characterized by the stability and sentiment of safety in all the life sectors. Everyone knew his place, duty and job, so that was "the time of crafts/professions", when everything, including religion [N.B.: mark the singularity], has its own place and reason in the individual/society's course of things. There were no interference between the sectors of social life, and everyone was sure about his path. Religion(s), each one in its local perimeter, was also safe from confusion or any commination of losing value/values. But the population raised its numbers and [this is] not equally spread,



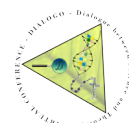
leading to overcrowding in the regions with most things to offer and to get, and that was not always [about] the places where food was produced. Capitalism, industry and the over-technologized society define the new era in which everything known before had to adjust to survive and “stay on the market”. Things that were once onward, now lose their interest and pole-position, and are now entering through the back-door, accepting any level of importance or attention they can get from the ‘consumers/customers’ just for gaining some resources. This is no longer a closed market, where every ‘craft and craftsman’ got its earning without any challenge or fearing. That era of traditions and common sense was never about marketing and gaining position in the population’s preference; as for the religious existence...this was mostly about unconditional trust and imposing rules, dogma and unrefined dominance. Now, on the contrary, it is everything about contesting for the top positions in the population’s interest, therefore it is all about marketing and market strategies, and nothing [again] about demanding or pretending a common sense authority. While this “secular menace” was indeed felt as a threat by the traditional religions, since they were never used to compete or be disobeyed, on the other hand the population took this marketing new rule as an opportunity to lose the imposed religiousness of their back for good. This megalopolitan way was a cold shower for all religions that offered them an expediency to rethink their strategy of preaching and reaching people’s interest; someones embraced the adjustment policy and “aggiornamento”. [5] For others this Aggiornamento/openness was only a sign of corruption of allegiance, of weakness and inauthenticity. But sooner or later each religion will face same menace and embrace same adjustment technique for survival benefit; for now only religions in regions with strong traditions and religious

authority ignore this market rule. However, people travel more, learn more, trade more; these habits eventually bring knowledge “forbidden”/unwanted closer than it is kept, so that in time all inhabitants would like to see how their religion answer to this challenge.

B. Religion(s) had to adjust to survive

What are the features of this metropolitan life? Globalization, congestion of multi-alternatives, incorporating as many options as possible, these are the main features life is now determined. There is no room for singularity and time for quality; the only concern is now quantity in the rush of the procession. Imagine a woman taking care of the meal for a three-person family; she has enough time to make all look delicious and to display it in kind. Now, the same picture but with twelve children; time for delights and treats is obviously non-existent. Assuming that she will cook no less delicious, as much as she would like to do it for pleasure and to make all exquisite, she simply has to make her effort four times higher just to feed them all. Same happens within a megalopolitan society; as much as we would like our life to take the same old path of serendipity.

Consumerism and consumption are other key-words in all the speeches old, traditional societies have for nourishing their flock against ‘the plague Capitalism and over-industrialized cities’ bring. In spite of their struggle to reject the change and the loss of empowerment over their people in all directions [food, history, teaching, learning, jobs, religion], there was nothing to be done against this new social order. And this is not because it has a secret, powerful weapon or means more sophisticated to convince the crowd it is better, but because of the overpopulation and its overcrowded disposal; numbers over singularity. More people need more



job-opportunities, more and chipper food to earn/get, and no old society could ever offer or obtain them for a rising number of people. [6] The safety of a life-job is gone and people have to undergo a readjustment and reconversion, to leave their stable 'job for life' that is no longer stable and enough for rising in numbers families, and work in new sectors of the City; to have two or three jobs to keep the welfare of their families etc. So the consumerism is only an adjustment tool with which all the people gathered in a megalopolis find bare necessities at a fair price and with discretion. The fear of hunger displayed in the beginning of this new era is no longer a concern due to the food industry genetics; but there are always consequences coming next.

Without these readjustments, so many sectors of the public life and even societies were threatened with destruction, and therefore retired from the public's attention. What about religion?

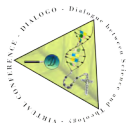
c) Religion or better, secularization?

However, this non-adjustmentness policy of religions is taken as another type of religious war, a cold one, but still a fight that society has to push far from the civil life. Step by step, secularization was no longer an option but a must, and since religions – adapting or not to the megalopolitan life – showed improper conduct to all people, believers or agnostics, – either adapting and losing credibility, or non-adapting and losing respect – Religion is taken by all as a rupture, a cleavage between the people/flock and religion/leadership. Entering the marketing competition Religion is viewed as a humanly doing and nothing about divinely inspired gift, therefore people broke up with religion in so many kinds due to their disappointment. Some by indifferentism, by losing faith, others by readjusting the value of faith. The later ones either go agnostics and nullifidian, or reformat, or leveling up the religiousness by going either “religiously

unaffiliated” (NONES) or “Spiritual but not religious” (SBNR). These are forms of large people protest against religious mistakes and unethical conduct, without care for people, in hypocrisy and disrespect for everything religion taught for centuries. Secularization was never a demonic project to make people lose faith in God, but a legitimate reaction of humans to defending their religious believe. To make myself clearer: secularization was stigmatized by religious leadership because it makes them losing in numbers and, therefore in profit, but from the other end of the bridge the secularization secures faith in itself, without religion's bad influence. It is like a vaccine that takes issue with organized religion as the sole or most valuable means of furthering spiritual growth, and reassure everyone's possibility of touching divine's interest. Secularization is 'the new Messiah' that demands religion(s) rethink its policy, to reform the ancient, unfair and obsolete way of relating people to divinity, and to lose continuing hegemonies of oppression[7]. Secularization helps civilians from losing every consciousness of sacred, divine, and religiousness, since 'the organized religion' holds nothing sacred anymore for it loses either the traditional teachings in the face of the new, reinvented religion, or the respect for people by disregarding its needs, its demands for an updated sanctity.

V. WHAT ARE THE DEMANDS FOR THE NEW RELIGION?

The main concern of the megalopolitan society for its people is to offer a variety of things for each need, so that the overcrowded population, so diverse and inhomogeneous, can get satisfied in any demand and with multiple assortments. Picture a mega Mall or a hypermarket in which anybody can find any product, each from several producers, meeting the most demanding tastes and the basic needs, the



refined wishes and the survival instincts as well. Not just a shelf with everything, but shelves where each product is multiplied in a variety of shapes, packaging, qualities and prices. This is the mark of the Megalopolitan life, an evening spend in a Mall, where each family member visits each one's taste shops, watches different preferred movies, and sits at the same table with a variety of food from a mega-diverse food-court. Within this picture religion is not any different, for the people in the Megalopolis come from different culture background, with diverse beliefs and traditions, gathering habits so various. In the first stage of development of the Megalopolitan life, the problem was to bringing these varieties of beliefs all together in the City. That because it gathered so many people with as much as many beliefs. It started with considering all denominations and religious manifestations equal to get approval by the State and free to manifest among their adepts. That was by far not acceptable for the main-stream religion, whose voice was always and everywhere, regardless the religious hue it has, equal vehement against 'the others'. The exchange between the civil society and church had to stop and to drastically change its proportion; the old routine where the Church intervenes in any political debate and resolution with a decisional interference had to end. So, the second stage of the Megalopolitan order was to lose the religious-crazy and get the civil society out from the Church's influence, so that they can coexist under the Metropolitan dome without ever fearing again for confessing everyone's faith. In this regard the rupture between State and Church was irrevocable and categorical pronounced, and the legality of each religion has been legalized. The resistance to change and to [accept] the new of any previous society was the main concern to overcome in order to fulfill the first stages' requirement. The civil society was now threatened by a new and

not-to-be-ignored menace: religious fight for supremacy and uniqueness. Therefore, a third stage was needed, in which a systematic program was developed to cope religious leaders and important voices from every religion and convince them of the categorical and fundamental needed truths that:

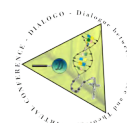
- All religions are entitled to exist and manifest equally;
- There is no such thing as absolute truth / universal truth, therefore we cannot claim a single, true religion[8];
- There is no objective criteria to establish a true or false religion, therefore we have to give same chance to all;

A. How can we determine which religious path to choose or support?

All that emerge from the previous premises are hard to be denied:

- that religions are internally diverse;
- that religions exist in time and space, and are constantly interpreted and reinterpreted by believers;
- and that religions are collections of ideas, practices, values, and stories that are embedded in culture[9].

The truth is that there is no expert that can point us to the single, truly divine religion vs all others. Because of that, there are ultimately no moral absolutes, no authority for deciding if an action is positive or negative, right or wrong. It is absolutely a matter of choice as much as it is of fate (of being born/raised into a religion or another). As a conclusion, in the megalopolitan society there are no religion [or anything else, any other product or service] that should be favored in spite of others, and this is for the better, both for the civil society – for having peace and untroubled cohabitation between all religious beliefs – as well as for all religions that coexist. We will see



how come such de-balancing [for the main stream] can have a positive influence on religion(s).

B. Apostasy or free market trade

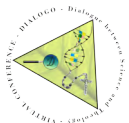
This new order/establishment has been branded by the mainstream, it has been demonized and taught as evil's work in the latest times before the Apocalypse. It was taken as the worse scenario of apostasy, and not by a certain religion/denomination, but by all, by turn, in the places each earned and prevailed. But once again we have to emphasize that the wheel once set on the course, it cannot be stopped. So, the Megalopolitan order brought all together in one place and it has to change the rules of the game for all its inhabitants. Distracting from the apple of discord, the State said that a fair chance for all religious manifestations is by far beneficial to everybody. The State will have the branches of the company's leadership; the society will have its "Mall multi-branded" variety of spirituality and religiousness; the civilians will finally sleep carefree, taking out the concern that a new religious conflict will begin somewhere. Even inside each religion would be beneficial for the small, new-emerged once will have fair chance to convince, while the old ones, main-stream ones will have the opportunity to rediscover themselves and their values they have been built on, values that usually fade in time and with generations/now is the time for all to display its best, to live or die just by its fault. In a free market trade there is no room for scams, errors, and deceivings. While the monopole [a certain religion had on its surrounding market] is gone, only a quality, high branded religion can survive and prosper. The civil society was thrilled on this and did not engage to take sides in the State vs Church recalibration partnership for they had another important advantage in this: no religion would ever again impose its principles and dogmas on anyone; trust and

eneration would simply have to be gain – ontogenetically speaking, it all returns to the beginning, in the times of apostles/preachers with passion and dedication for their sermons. We have to remember that each religion gain adepts in the beginning not by deceiving, oppression, bigotries and imposing, but with dedication, self-sacrifice, in a free competitive market. The Megalopolitan organization gives back to religions and their followers the opportunity to prove themselves true and right.

CONCLUSION: WHAT THE REACTIONS ARE?

But this three-stages challenge was not the only issue religion(s) had to deal with. Instead, they had also face another, worse, and more feared one: people's interest. For several, complex set of reasons, religion lost its appeal to the population and the flock is drastically changing sides, trend, and numbers. This three stages intervention of the State brought to people's attention things that are not exactly wanted-to-be-know about religions. Either revealing unspoken truths of some religions, things placed under oblivion because of the wrongness of them, or for the reaction others have under the pressure of being placed in the 'free market confrontation', people lost appetite for religion [as public institution], or start research for a more fit able one.

What we are talking about?! Well... Comparing the-first-to-enter-these-changes societies with those that undergo them now [or not yet], we cannot remark that the reaction of those old-school societies is always in-defense, always to demonize the new 'menace' of Capitalism [e.g. Communism, Fascism, Church, rooted belief] in order to keep their flock safe away from these changes, and self-seeking excuses not to preparing people for these changes. Therefore, instead of confronting the reality and counterbalancing it with



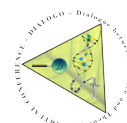
internal adaptation measures, the old religious societies only accuse the new societal order of humanity's destruction and disfiguration.

So, what are the main, visible attributes of the old-school religions/societies? Always in denial of a parallel existence, in denial of a possible otherwise true and way of religiosity, in denial of otherness. [10] This leads to the impossibility and incognizance of adaptation. The forcing to look at many religious paths made main-stream religion(s) to formulate some answers. These are almost the same: since the conservation of the flock and the decrease of its number is too alarming and out of the question, next means arrives - conversion of the whole world to your own faith by any means so that you can save the world to its destruction by atheism and faithlessness. "This is obviously too idealistic and unattainable for mere human power"[11]. All these attempts place religion under the reign of ridiculous, force people to cleave in those who believe 'no matter what, for no reason, just because', and unbelievers, doubters and skeptics. Since this fails on a large scale, a new method come to help, "world religions unification, not by conversion but by universal agreement"[12]. Lots and lots of projects, paid by governs with certain interests, grow in this direction. Either esoterically [in public teachings the contradictions would have to be ignored and the agreements (especially in morality) highlighted], or esoterically, trying to expose an esoterically truth that there is a hidden, unwritten, mystical "common core" supposedly equally present in all world religions. In order to do that, everyone would have to become a mystic and see through the illusion that religions contradict each other.[13] Another tool in the new-age confrontation religion has is to consider pluralism with tolerance; each remain within his faith, but, in turn, respect and understand other religion. The biggest advantage in this lies in the relative ease:

we need not find or even seek truth, only decide to tolerate other's opinions. [14] And most people already accept this ideal in theory. The 'disadvantage' is that it seems like indifferentism, and mostly became hypocrites in acts and thoughts

The assertions here are not by far only suppositions that aim to distort the reality of the religious phenomenon in the present days, but conclusions made out of the obvious facts. What is obvious nowadays is the increasing percentage of the population who report having no religion, and this cruel reality is not at all a result of a concerted campaign against religion, but of the mistakes, religions made all along disappointing the ones they were supposed to serve. For example, irreligion in New Zealand has doubled from 20.2% at 1991 census to 41.9% in the 2013 census[15]. In Australia, with a smaller speed, still the trend follows the same path, and irreligion has grown from 22% in 2011 to 29.6% in 2016. In UK from 12.87% in 2001 to 25.7% in 2011. Moreover, the examples can go on and on in the entire world for tones of reasons. Another similar trend of losing faith in the religious establishments is to be found in Russia [2012 survey, 43.5%], Albania [52%], Denmark [61%], or the Czech Republic [75%], the highest. The other end gathers Romania 2.4%, Thailand [0.27%], or Bangladesh [0.1%]. In the United States in 2014, 22.8% of the American population does not identify with a religion, including atheists (3.1%) and agnostics (4%)[16]; this is probably the most stable, relatively flat history of losing faith in a religious institution in the past 23 years. Alternatively, a more notable prove of the resistance to secularization can be found in countries like India where 99.76% of Indians are religious while 0.24% did not state their religious identity (2011 Census).

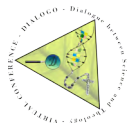
According to a report by the American Physical Society, religion may die out in New Zealand and eight other Western



world countries. If current trends persist, those stating no religion will outnumber those who state a religious affiliation by the 2026 census. I would not go so far with predictions for it is more than proved that religiosity – as a human ideal and behavior – was ever present in the human history and it is always needed. Therefore, ‘predictions’ like the above mentioned, that “Religion may become extinct in nine nations in the near future”[17] even proved by the reality of the present trend cannot become a reality that defines humanity. This discrepant contradiction should be accompanied by the clear distinction between religion and religiosity. Being non-religious is not necessarily equivalent to being an atheist or agnostic. The term nones is sometimes used in the U.S. to refer to those who are unaffiliated with any organized religion. This use derives from surveys of religious affiliation, in which “None” (or “None of the above”) is typically the last choice. Since this status refers to lack of organizational affiliation rather than lack of personal belief, it is a more specific concept than irreligion. [18]

(ENDNOTES)

- [1] The rate of technological progress nowadays and the years to come literally places all the human history under a shadow of development. In the light of these rapid growth of development our first six thousand years had shown a flat lined for progress (no progress), when in fact, eighteen to twenty years out, technological advancements will be 4,000 times more advanced than today. Online source: <http://theemergingfuture.com/speed-technological-advancement.htm>.
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- [17] <http://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-12811197>
- [18] <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Irreligion>.

a Fulbright scholarship and I spent the summer California and 4 other States in USA, gathering data and understanding how religious pluralism is possible at a high level of involvement; in the same time I made friends from many different countries and religions that are now involved in this project or another, helping in his endeavor.

BIOGRAPHY



Ciocan Tudor Cosmin, born in Constanta/Romania in 1977, I have attended several theological and psychological schools (BA, MB, PhD), obtained my PhD in Missiology and Doctrinal Theology in 2010. I was ordained as orthodox priest in 2002. High-school teacher from 1998, then Professor assistant and Lecturer from 2012, I have written more than 30 papers on theology and psychology, along with 4 single author books in the past two decades.

In 2013 I have started a multidisciplinary program aiming to engage scholars from different fields into friendly and academic debates with theology and in the same year a Research Center was founded in Ovidius University with researchers from 11 fields. In less than 1 year I manage to gather people from around the globe around this idea and so we have started Dialogo Conferences project. In 2014 I received