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POLITICS AND RELIGION. CHALLENGES AND IDEOLOGICAL OPENINGS

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Abstract: Review of Sandu Frunză, *Între moartea politicii și moartea lui Dumnezeu. Eseuri despre literatură, religie și politică* [*Between the Death of Politics and the Death of God. Essays on literature, religion and politics*], (București: Editura Tritonic, 2016).

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Sandu Frunză is an authority in ideology research nowadays, and his books (*O antropologie mistică. Introducere în gândirea Părintelui Stăniloae* (1996, 2016), *Iubirea și Transcendența. O introducere la problema spațiului median al experienței religioase în Iudaism și Creștinismul Răsăritean* (1999), *Experiența religioasă în gândirea lui Dumitru Stăniloae. O etică relațională* (2001, 2016), *Fundamentalismul religios și noul conflict al ideologiilor* (2003, 2015), *Filosofie și iudaism. Un răspuns la întrebarea „Ce este filosofia evreiască”* (2006), *Dumnezeu și Holocaustul la Elie Wiesel. O etică a responsabilității* (2010), *Comunicare etică și responsabilitate socială* (2011), *Comunicare simbolică și seducție. Studii despre seducția comunicării, comportamentul ritualic și religie* (2014), *Advertising constructs reality. Religion and advertising in the consumer society* (2014), *Etica și administrația publică sub presiunea eticii* (2015)) are under the sign of a beneficial rationalizing posture which, beyond the constitutive balance and natural call on method and rigorousness, is capable to finely delineate multiple phenomena, concepts, connections that are relevant for the spiritual and symbolic geography of today's world.

The recent book *Între moartea politicii și moartea lui Dumnezeu* [Between the Death of Politics and the Death of God], subtitled *Eseuri despre literatură, religie și politică* [Essays on literature, religion and politics] (Bucharest: Tritonic, 2016) brings together essays on the link between religion and politics, configuring a space of tense ideation and theoretical reflection, not at all at ease, on the contrary polemical, in which the ideological wording stresses on the necessary dissociations of the two notions. The essayist notes, rightfully so, that a remarkable benefit of modernity is “the laicization of political action the separation of the political power from the religious power”, a separation regarding especially the governing issue, and considers several essential constituents (institutional construction, judicial framework construction on lay principles, public morality on ethical, not theological, principles etc.). On the other hand, although Sandu Frunză finds the distinction between the private sphere and the public one to be beneficial, he deems that religion “must not (and cannot) be chased away from the public space in as much as politics must not be alienated from the individual's daily choices”.

The chapters of Sandu Frunză's book (*Etica politică - între etica biblică și mitologia morții lui Dumnezeu, Perspectiva lui Fundoianu asupra relației dintre iudaism și creștinism în lumina reflecțiilor sale privind gândirea lui Martin Buber, Elemente pentru o nouă conștiință iudaică, politică și culturală, Secularizarea ca ieșire din eshatologie, Provocări actuale ale alianței dintre religie și politică, O perspectivă mitico-simbolică asupra politicii, Creștinism, politică și reafirmarea subiectului relațional*) highlight the need for such debates on the complex, paradoxical, fluid relationships between religion and politics, relationships frequently mined in time by incongruence, misunderstandings or aporetic emphasis. In the chapter *Etica politică - între etica biblică și mitologia morții lui Dumnezeu* [Political ethics - between biblical ethics and death of

God mythology] the author indicates the benefits imposed by the approach, finality and structure of the religious phenomenon upon human symbolic architecture, while also arguing the way crises in individual or community existence may be explained and potentially defused by articulating religious symbolism. This way, the death of God myth impacted the articulation of a political ethics of multiple significances in contemporary times. Such approach is initiated by Sandu Frunză in this chapter, by use of theories, concepts and up-to-date hermeneutical codes: he connects effectively the death of God symbolism in contemporary Judaic theology and philosophy with the construction of a political ethics positioned between biblical ethics and the traumatic experience of the extermination of the innocent in the 20th century.

The chapter *Perspectiva lui Fundoianu asupra relației dintre iudaism și creștinism în lumina reflecțiilor sale privind gândirea lui Martin Buber* [Fundoianu's view on the relationship between Judaism and Christianity in his reflections on Martin Buber's thinking] succeeds in placing Fundoianu's work and emblematic personality in the context of the 20th century philosophical-theological thought, in line with exemplary authors like Martin Buber or Franz Rosenzweig. Fundoianu is in this context, as the author says, "a symbol of violence inflicted upon the innocent and of the capacity for suffering in the name of personal and family values". Actually, the permanent dialogue between religion and ideology in terms of a philosophy of existence, as in B. Fundoianu's work, is rendered in the chapter *Elemente pentru o nouă conștiință iudaică, politică și culturală* [Elements for a new Judaic, political and cultural consciousness]. As the author argues, it is clear that between Fundoianu's biography and his work there is an unavoidable correspondence, the two sides or dimensions of his personality always proving congruent in revealing a paradigm of "the Jewish existence under cultural pressure from the political and the religious". Sandu Frunză's assertions are necessary as regards the social and political phenomena in totalitarian systems, the spiritual crisis so often commented upon in contemporary philosophy, paying special attention to analogical reflexes or to correspondences between religious thinking and the political ideology expression in ideas construction today. Certainly, the individual existential demarche carries, as Sandu Frunză warns, the mark of community experiences. The author of the present book proposes a viable model for these correlations and convergences, a model pertaining to modern Judaic consciousness by valorizing ideational structures exemplified by B. Fundoianu. The dilemmas and aporias of secularization should consider firstly the registers of such metamorphoses through the angle of the Eliadean dialectics of the sacred and the profane, from secularization at the political level to secularization in the public space or at the level of individual perception. Current cultural contrasts between globalizing pulses and national identity resources, laicization disputes, communication crises, the retreat of Christianity and of

Christian religious imaginary in front of other sacrality forms, all these phenomena might find a solution in a more active presence of Christianity in the public space and in the political sphere, while still, the globalizing space we live in, which supposes permeability, rapid convergence, strategies and fast forms to adapt, “Christianity also plays on religions’ market in a permanent competition with all the other religions”.

In the chapter *Secularizarea ca ieşire din eshatologie în societatea construită pe comunicare* [Secularization as a way out from eschatology in the communication-construed society], the author examines “the seduction mechanisms” displayed by the new “metamorphoses of the sacred” that may be perceived as strategies to assimilate innovative symbolic universes at play through “the reconstruction of postmodern subject”. On the other hand, the book demonstrates the way in which social structures are reshaped by certain manipulating communication strategies as well as by what the author calls “symbolic publicity instrumenting” that focuses on and multiplies narratives “mediating the daily presence of the sacred in the relational subject’s life in postmodernity”. Religious crises, individual or collective, do not affect, the author assures us, “the presence, manifestation and effective action of the sacred” whose metamorphoses, dualities and plural perspectives are “a way in which postmodern individuality is redefined to assume transcending and transcendence”. The essayist emphasizes the need “to cultivate a symbolic conscience of the world” while naturally consecrated are “the new alliances between religion and politics and religion instrumenting to secure success in politics”, so that “laicizing the public space supposes valorizing the rule of law, its functions and representatives to promote public good.” A possible solution, applied and synthesized in the chapter *Provocări actuale ale alianţei dintre religie şi politică* [Current challenges of the religion-politics alliance], is the symbolic imaginary reconstruction under contemporary challenges in the globalizing communication era in which we live. The recovery of the symbolic significance of the *Book* should be performed both in the private existence sphere, in the individual destiny register, and in the wider frame of community existence. The essayist manifests a radical repudiation of any absolutism that would claim “total submission of the whole man before transmitted revelation”, that would create “an unfavorable register to the Book Religions”, leading ethical monotheism in an aporetic stage, a crisis or symbolism scandal stage. Such a crisis situation is all the more difficult to solve that the “religious truth” is correlated with “religious truth” is correlated with some claims in the political sphere, the most obvious case being that of religious fundamentalism that fetishizes the word of the holy Writing, with tragic consequences on those who do not accept fetishism and have to suffer violence forms “religiously motivated, totally alien to the religion they use as a structure or justifying authority”.

The chapter *O perspectivă mitico-simbolică asupra politicii* [A mythic-symbolic perspective of politics] shifts emphasis on the role of political communication that may determine, nuance and re-symbolize certain new forms of political pragmatism. We however note that this communication type preserves “a great number of forms typical of symbolic communication in traditional societies”. The author valorizes the social analyses proposed by Vasile Sebastian Dâncu, noting that public space is no longer shaped by intellectual elites, depositaries of values and shapers of symbolic conscience, but it is rather confiscated by show figures and television stars, or by communication specialists in virtual space. In Sandu Frunză’s view, this phenomenon leads to unprecedented breaks in or coagulation of political space, and also has a “prevalence of feelings, mythical stories, mystical experiences to the detriment of rationality, civic participation and ideologies”. One needs to note, however, that these ideological components are perceived in terms of a mythic-symbolic mindset that associates them to the behavior and solidarity type typical of tribal groups which entered the postmodern political stage. In the chapter *Creștinism, politică și reafirmarea subiectului relațional* [Christianity, politics and the reassertion of the relational subject], the essayist opines that in the Western civilization, built on communication resources and strategies, Christianity may be “a regulating factor in a real split of religion from politics”. The stand that the author takes in this chapter derives from his view that existential solutions proposed by Christianity in the postmodern era prove that “religion must not be politics, and politics need not be religious”. Nevertheless, because postmodern existence appears as a geometrical space of interferences continuously reconstructing themselves in the effort to recover the relational subject, this subject is constantly discovered by “affirming original structures at the convergence of relativism and absolutism”.

Sandu Frunză’s book *Între moartea politicii și moartea lui Dumnezeu* [Between the Death of Politics and the Death of God], subtitled *Eseuri despre literatură, religie și politică* [Essays on literature, religion and politics] imposes in its entirety an integrating vision on the complex relations between religion and politics, against the background of an ideological stage on which complementarity, ideatic tensions and symbolic representations depict a space of globalizing communication. Refined analyses, theorizing vocation, effective arguments – are just a few of the qualities of a thoroughly documented and rigorously structured book, in all its components and articulations.

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