



The Romanian Institute of  
Orthodox Theology and  
Spirituality, New York

## *Symposium*

**Unity in Diversity:  
Can We Live Together  
in an Apocalyptic World?**

*The Thirteenth Ecumenical Theological  
Symposium*

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**The Romanian Institute of  
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Editors:

Theodor Damian, George Alexe

Assistant to the editor and designer:

Claudia Damian

Text revisions: Gale Bellas Papageorge

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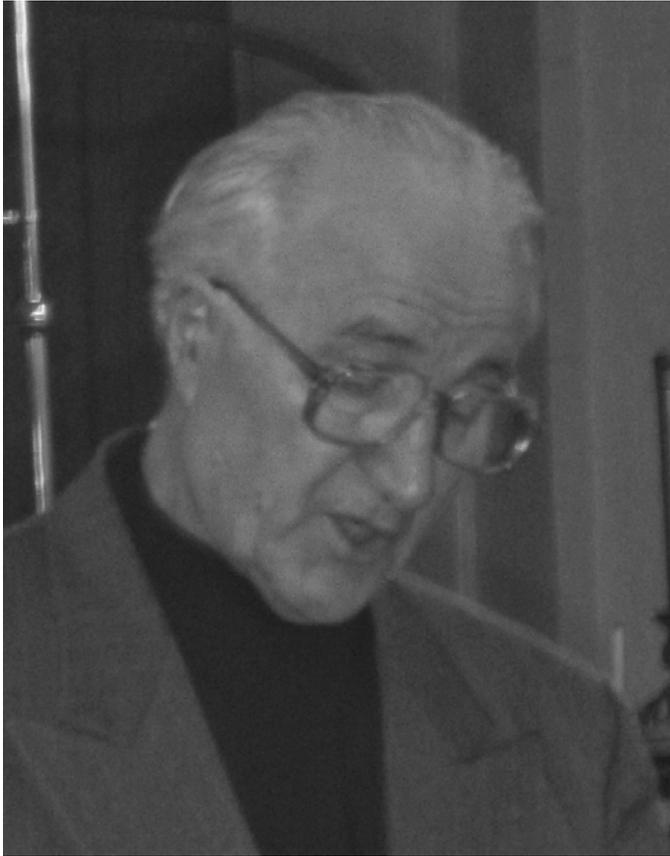
From the left: Elisabeth Mellen, Theodor Damian, George Alexe, Richard Gallo, Steven Cresap, Mihaela Albu

## **Preliminaries to the 13<sup>th</sup> Ecumenical Theological Symposium**

The current symptoms of the Western post modern culture, religion and art, especially American, intensively indicate in their actual development the presence of a kind of influenza that might be called the apocalypticism syndrome. Professor Walter Wink of Auburn Theological Seminary, New York City, has already pointed out in his essay *Apocalypse Now?*, that we are currently living in an apocalyptic time disguised as normal. Also philosopher Gunther Anders clearly stated that we are moving into an apocalyptic mode when we no longer find ourselves asking “How shall we live?” and ask instead, “Will we live?”

Hopefully, the answer to these existential questions will proclaim unanimously the ultimate solution “Unity in Diversity” that will be academically debated in our Symposium, in correlation with the fundamental interrogation: “Can we live together in an apocalyptic world”?

We certainly believe that apocalyptic religious and secular thinking concerning the end of the world, and at the same time its renewal, is transcended and given full meaning by the spiritual, theandric unity of God’s creation, as it is expressed in the biblical narratives and in the writings of major theologians and philosophers in past times and today.



George Alexe

## **Toward a Theandric Restoration of the Divine Unity of the World in the Light of Its Secular and Biblical Apocalypse**

The spreading panic over the apocalyptical syndrome of postmodern American mentality seems to be a rather cyclical millenary phenomenon, if not a “phenomenal” melodrama that is fictionally performing the ending of the world as it is depicted in the most virulent forms of credulity and incredulity of the inevitable eschatological terror still in progress.

Nevertheless, we have to be confident that this melodrama of apocalypticism, worldly display of violent emotions, sensational incidents or other terrifying events through art, literature and particularly film and television, will not end in a real cosmic tragedy. Regretfully, instead of contributing to the restoration of the divine unity of the world, this apocalyptical syndrome of our postmodern era is anthropocentrically multiplying the diversity of the human precarious unity.

Of course, panic-stricken individuals must acknowledge that these millenary apocalyptic rumors and imaginary eschatological signs, which are dramatically predicting the end of the world, have always failed. At least up until now.

For instance, some years ago, the presumed eschatological ending of the world, apocalyptically predicted for the beginning of the second millennium, did not happen. Why then, did it not happen and when will happen? Nobody knows, and consequently, much pandemic panic has throughout the millennia, created an enduring atmosphere of secular apocalypticism, which is reaching its height in our day.

This kind of “apocalypticism” has already become an anthropocentric worldview equally competing and challenging other religious and secular worldviews. Is this Western apocalypticism horrifying us? Theoretically, the answer is no, since we do not even know its ultimate meaning. However, practically, the answer is yes, because of the many global uncertainties and eventual suspicions about the relationship between the immanent and the transcendent. It is well known that life's meaning in the Christian Apocalypse, as Nicolas Berdyaev says, “is never revealed in an endless time; it is to be found in eternity.”<sup>1</sup>

Obviously, life's tendency in the secular apocalypticism appears to be the non-being, and this meaningless nonsense is totally different from life's meaning revealed in Apocalypse and underlined by Nicolas Berdyaev. In fact, the non-being has nothing to do with the destiny of the man created according to the image and likeness of God. That is why, in the secular apocalypticism, an endless life has no meaning as it has in the Christian Apocalypse, where the life in time is triumphantly transcending into the eternal life, through the victory over death by resurrection.

At each Divine Liturgy, we are solemnly confessing our Christian orthodox faith, as it was ecumenically formulated by the Holy Fathers and approved in Anno Domini 325, at the First Ecumenical Synod of Nicaea, also called the Nicene Creed, particularly concerning the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, the last judgment, the resurrection and the eternal life. For their apocalyptic and eschatological significance, and not only for the benefit of this paper, I will recall here these three articles of the Nicene Creed:

“And He shall come again with glory to judge the living and the dead, Whose kingdom shall have no end.

I look for the resurrection of the dead.

And the life of the world to come. Amen.”<sup>2</sup>

Contrary to the postmodern apocalypticism worldview, there is a mystery of the world's ending, yet unrevealed. This

eschatological ending of the world implies what the Christian Apocalypse is revealing as being a new earth and a new heaven. This is exactly what Saint John the Divine is testifying in his Revelation: “And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea.”<sup>3</sup>

Indeed, there will be an ending of the world, but *when* and *how*? A consolatory answer to these questions is poetically given by Joseph Addison Alexander, who rightly said: “There is a time, we know not when / A place, we know not where; Which marks the destiny of men / To glory or despair.”<sup>4</sup>

To our theological satisfaction, a prestigious answer to the question stated above is given by Mircea Eliade’s erudition and analytical skills, through the studying of the structure and function of primitive mythologies, especially the eschatology and cosmogony, concerning the end of the world in the past as well as in the future, also including the Judaeo-Christian apocalypses.<sup>5</sup>

In a clear distinction from the cosmic religions, Eliade is rightly concluding that for the Jewish and Christian religions, the end of the world is part of the Messianic mystery: “For the Jews the coming of the Messiah will announce the end of the world and the restoration of paradise. For Christians, the end of the world will precede the second coming of Christ and the last judgment.”<sup>6</sup>

It must not be forgotten that the first coming of Jesus Christ too was a part of the Messianic mystery, because this divine mystery that has been eternally hidden and unknown by the angels, was made known to the world, at the fullness of time, through the Holy Virgin Mary, the most blessed birth-giver of Jesus Christ.

The same divine mystery will be triumphantly revealed in the glory of the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. “But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone”.<sup>7</sup>

Certainly the postmodern apocalypticism of our time has abnormally created an eschatological tension in the world, which was alarmingly increased by the recent natural catastrophic

disasters as a kind of global reminder that the end of the world is closer than ever.

But we always have to keep it in our minds that we know only moderately the modalities in which the world might be apocalyptically destroyed, but we do not know the eschatological date of this cosmic event, for it is a part of the Messianic mystery. However, it requires a new fullness of time, a new spiritual reorientation, a new renewal of the world, and especially a new equilibrium between spirit and nature, between immanent and transcendent, in order to theandrically restore the divine unity of the world upon which the human unity in diversity could be established again in union with God. Only then will the expectation of the end of the world and the imminence of the last judgment decrease the eschatological tension so intensely promoted by the new apocalypticism and millennialism of our postmodern era.

Unfortunately, as Mircea Eliade has remarked, “Eschatological and millennialist mythology recently reappeared in Europe in two totalitarian political movements. Although radically secularized in appearance, Nazism and Communism are loaded with eschatological elements: they announce the end of the world and the beginning of an age of plenty and bliss.”<sup>8</sup>

Moreover, in his book about millennialism, Norman Cohn is apocalyptically presenting an eschatological scenario in which the National-Socialism and Marxism-Leninism are performing “The final, decisive battle of the Elect (be they the ‘Aryan race’ or the ‘proletariat’) against the hosts of evil (be they Jews or the ‘bourgeoisie’); a dispensation on which the Elect are to be most amply compensated for all their sufferings by the joys of total dominion or of total community or of both together; a world purified of all evil and in which history is to find its consummation.”<sup>9</sup>

*Quod erat demonstrandum!* Both, the apocalypticism and mythical millennialism are much older than we believe. They precede all ages of the world, but it is only in our postmodern era that the destruction of the divine unity of the world and that of the

natural unity of the human race are anthropocentrically and dramatically jeopardized, particularly in the last three or four centuries. The consequences are abominable. Romulus Vulcănescu, one of the greatest Romanian philosophers, has stated that modern life is not only a period of the time, but also a spiritual structure. Briefly, some of his conclusions deserve to be mentioned here. For him, the modern world is losing the existential sense of its totality, while man is losing the sentiment of transcendence by adapting his life to the immanence, organizing his technical effort to realize his terrestrial happiness. The theological conception of existence is replaced by the naturalist conception of life. God is substituted by the modern man who pretends from now on to be saved by himself, mastering nature.

All his pertinent remarks are culminating in his belief that they have contributed to the destruction of the spiritual unity and its transformation into an atomized society, into a voluntary association of limited interests. Also, losing the sense of existence is depriving the man of the expectation of the end. Instead of transfiguration in God, man is waiting for his salvation through the culture and the elimination of his sufferings. In conclusion, Romulus Vulcănescu underlines the fact that “our age” is distinctive of the modern age through the intensity of its aspiration toward totality and by its pretension to reestablish the unity of the society that was dispersed by democratic individualism into an immense number of arithmetic individualities that in their intimacy, are seeking the reestablishment of spiritual unity.<sup>10</sup>

By analyzing the “End of the World” in modern art, Mircea Eliade is surprisingly re-evaluating the myth of the end of the world in contemporary art. He is testifying that artists understood that a true new beginning can come only after a real end. “And, the first among moderns, the artists have set themselves to destroying their world in order to re-create an artistic universe in which man can at once live and contemplate dream”.<sup>11</sup>

## NOTES:

1. Nicolas Berdyaev, *The Destiny of Man*, First Harper Torchbook edition published 1960, Harper & Row, New York and Evanston, p. 250.
2. *Service Book of the Holy Eastern Orthodox Catholic and Apostolic Church (According to the use of the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of New York and all North America)*, Fourth Edition, 1971, pp. 110-111.
3. “The Revelation of St. John the Divine,” Chapter 21: 1, *The Holy Bible*, Authorized King James Version, Oxford University Press, London, New York, Toronto, p. 1254.
4. *New American Standard Bible*, The Open Bible Expanded Edition, Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville, Camden, New York, 1985. *See: Guide to Christian Workers*, p. 1376.
5. Mircea Eliade, *Myth and Reality*, (Translated from the French by Willard R. Trask), Harper Torchbooks, Harper & Row, New York and Evanston, 1968, p. 54.
6. *Ibidem*, p. 65.
7. *New American Standard Bible*, Matthew 24:36; Mark 13:32, pp. 989; 1015.
8. Mircea Eliade, *Op cit.*, p. 69.
9. Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium*, New York, 1957, p. 308, apud Mircea Eliade, *Op cit.*, p. 69.
10. Mircea Vulcănescu, *Logos și eros. Creștinul în lumea modernă*, Paideia, București, 1991, pp. 41-84.
11. Mircea Eliade, *Op cit.*, p. 74.



Elisabeth Mellen,  
moderator

Theodor Damian (r.) with one of the  
Symposium's guests



Doru Tsaganea (r.) and  
George Alexe

Richard Grallo (l.),  
Theodor Damian and  
Bert Breiner





Richard Grallo

## **Learning, Functional Interferences and Personality Dynamics: Towards a Unified Theory**

### *Introduction*

This paper will focus on aspects of *unity* and *diversity* in the human person, and in particular it will be a summary of some of the work I have been doing for a number of years as a psychologist.

The intent of this work has revolved around three clusters of questions:

(1) How is it that we humans learn? What is happening when we learn going on there? Is there any kind something of a unity of structure, a unified and integrated structure of cognitive processes?

(2) In contrast, how can human learning be interfered with and distorted? So we frequently find ourselves with a great *diversity* of errors, misconceptions and misunderstandings, not only in this age but it seems in any age.

(3) How does this dynamic of learning and its interferences with learning affect the *development* of what a person ultimately becomes? Also, how does it affect the *functioning* of personality?

### *Learning*

The first set of questions pertains to how we, as human beings, learn. Here I draw extensively, but not exclusively, on the work of Canadian philosopher Bernard Lonergan, and in particular his work on *cognitional structure* (Lonergan, 1958, 1967).

What Lonergan affirms, in this part of his work, is that as we develop our mind seems to repeatedly go through a *spiraling ascent* through different *levels of consciousness*. Each level consists of cognitional activities clustering around a coherent *intention* (Byrne, 1995). For example we might start out by being quite *attentive* to whatever might be going on in our world: This represents a first level of consciousness, the level of experience. But that can change.

We can start *raising questions*. We can start seeking out meaning in our world. We can engage in brainstorming. We can seek out possibilities. And when we do that we have lifted our consciousness beyond the level of simply experiencing our world, and we are into a new way of thinking. Lonergan called that the *level of intelligence*, a second level of consciousness. When we do that we can come up with many ideas, a number of which can be quite attractive. Our intention is to seek meaningful possibilities – it is to arrive at an understanding. However, this can easily get out of hand, so that we wind up with a great many ideas, sometimes a confusing array of possible answers to our question. In addition, we do not know which of them are likely to be true.

And so we need a third level of consciousness, often referred to as *critical thinking* or *reason*. Lonergan refers to it as a *level of reflection*. What happens on this level is that we that level does is to attempt to figure out which of the ideas we have come up with happen to be true, or at least which happen to be more probable than not. There is a whole art to this. These days in many colleges and universities there are entire courses designed to teach critical thinking. It certainly is a challenge, because we as human beings are easily deceived.

A fourth level of consciousness comes about when we are no longer concerned with the true and the false, the real and the unreal. Instead we intend to find out what is *worthwhile*, what is *good*. According to Lonergan what we are attempting to do is to extract value from the world, and to clarify those values. This is the *level of deliberation*.

There is some controversy as to whether Lonergan suggests that there is a fifth level of human consciousness, a *level of loving*, wherein we select, from those things we regard as valuable, and those things that we regard as so valuable that we wish to import them into our life (Dunne, 1995; Vertin, 1994). For many, that loving can be of persons, (e.g. spouse, children, neighbor), of a vocation, or a religious type love. Whatever the outcome of that debate over a possible fifth level, it is clear that we do not just clarify values and make judgments about them, we go on to make decisions and to choose what we regard as worthwhile.

All of these levels of consciousness involve deeper kinds of awareness, with each level of consciousness adding on something that the previous levels did not. To use mathematical language, each level of consciousness proceeds through *operators* and *integrators*. The operator is what stirs things up and moves consciousness forward, and it is frequently the *question*. The integrator is the unification brought about by achieving the intention for that level. Each higher level of consciousness does not destroy what came before, but may overcome its limitations, place it in a larger context and move to integrate prior material to achieve an added intention.

This is only a sketch of *cognitional structure*. Its nature and implications have been studied in depth by Lonergan himself (1967) and many of his colleagues and students (e.g. Flanagan, 1997; Meynell, 1991; Tekippe, 1996). Although at present, however, there is a need to bring this knowledge into contact with the findings of contemporary empirical psychology (Grallo, 2006).

### *Interferences with Learning*

What about *interferences with learning*? How is it that this *spiraling ascent of mind* can be interfered with? Elsewhere, with others, I have identified seven types of functional interference affecting different levels of consciousness and

attacking specific cognitive operations: (1) restriction of experience, (2) bias, (3) defective use of language, (4) prejudice, (5) indecision, (6) impulsivity and (7) other progress defeating habits (Grallo & Breiner, 2001; Grallo, Breiner & Aquilino, 2001).

This paper will consider only one: *bias*. Lonergan paid a great deal of attention to bias and its deleterious effects. Bias here is defined as a refusal to admit into one's consciousness relevant further questions or insights. Bias then is a block to the natural spiraling expansion of consciousness, and it may involve a contraction of consciousness (Lonergan, 1958, 1972). Think about the power of that. Some relevant questions could assist us in growing into a more perfected human being, but we often block them. Some insights could assist us in developing a better community, but we often block them. This can have very serious personal or social consequences.

Bias can operate in individuals, in groups and in humans generally. Psychologists conducting psychotherapy confront bias in the individual quite a bit. Clients often experience a fear of development (Peck, 1978), and refuse to improve because of the change that development requires. Goethe once remarked: "Everybody wants to be somebody, and nobody wants to grow". For persons such as this there are areas of their lives that are roped off, and excluded from attention and examination by all manner of so-called "defense mechanisms" (Freud, 1966; Adler, 1982a, 1982b; Horney, 1950).

This can also be observed on a group level: that groups of various sorts will raise up barriers to further relevant questions and insights. They hold that there are certain things that cannot be discussed, when in fact if we were to discuss them, it might actually result in better relations with one another and in better policies (Lonergan, 1958). This sort of thing is often played out in organizational and political contexts. For example, Argyris (1993) has studied in depth how many organizations suffer from a wide discrepancy between their public relations materials (what they say they do), and their actual practice (what they do).

Further, this discrepancy is un-mentionable within the organization, and the rules that make it un-mentionable are also covered up. To the extent this proceeds in the life of an organization, bias is operating.

Bias can also operate on a global level: virtually all humans can suffer from shortsightedness whereby they fail to examine the long term consequences of their actions. One example of this is noticeable in the United States with our emphasis on instant gratification and “let’s get it done now” policies. This is very different from other cultures such as some of the Native American cultures which consider policies in their possible impacts on generations to come. Such practice would be a cultural overcoming of that *general bias* of shortsightedness.

### *Personality Development & Functioning*

Hence we have in the human being a natural tendency to grow and to acquire knowledge, propelled by the *desire to know*. This can be observed in young children: at three years old, without training, they start *asking questions*. On the other hand, there are these *functional interferences* with development. We have only considered one here, *bias*; there are six others. Functional interferences distort development. Functional interferences can be supported by the social environment and can take root in the individual.

If both the impetus to growth and interferences with it are operative in persons, what kinds of personalities result? In all ranges of functioning, we certainly end up with *different* personalities – a well known phenomenon. In some humans, for example, we find people who are very good at coming up with new ideas: they operate well on the second level of consciousness. Often, however, they are not very good at implementing those ideas. There are others who are not very good at coming up with ideas, but who are very proficient at building consensus. There are others who excel at getting things done, but function poorly in

getting consensus. There are others who are skilled in human relations, while not being particularly original (Adams, 1986).

Again, what kinds of personalities result? At the extremes of poor functioning, we regularly encounter distorted and lopsided personalities – a regular part of the human condition. They have been assigned various labels throughout history and they come in many varieties (American Psychiatric Association, 1994). For most of these, their favored styles of responding to problems have become so rigid and so defended that it does not serve them well in the wide variety of situations they are likely to encounter in contemporary life. Because these response styles are habitual they are likely to encounter the same type of difficulty each time their environment does not match their response style (DiGiuseppe, 2006).

Within the human person, then, there is both *unity* and *diversity*. There is a unity of structure in consciousness, rising to higher levels of functioning in at least four levels of consciousness. However, there is also diversity, and diversity of different types. There is diversity in what can be known, associated with the immensity of the universe. There is another type of diversity brought about by the functional interferences, resulting in a huge array of errors, mistakes and misunderstandings. Finally, there is a huge diversity in personalities, resulting from the dialectical operation of principles of growth and their functional interferences. The result is a being who vacillates between being attentive and inattentive, intelligent and unintelligent, reasonable and unreasonable, responsible and irresponsible, loving and unloving. The result is also a being who may perform better at some levels of consciousness than others, employing a definable *problem solving style*.

None of this occurs in a mechanistic way, but in accord with changing probabilities in the person and her environment.

## Conclusion

On the general questions we began with, much remains to be done. For example, there is need for a mapping out of a *unified theory of problem solving* (UTPS) that will (a) include *cognitional structure* and (b) add the six other specific interferences to what is known about *bias*, and relate these explanatorily to the operations of cognitional structure within the levels of consciousness. What also remains to be done is the drawing out of specific implications and applications of this *unified theory of problem solving* (UTPS) for diverse fields, such as psychology, education, counseling and management. One promising line of research in this area might be an examination of *problem solving response styles* in conjunction with UTPS.

As these projects proceed they will assist in the ancient advice to “know thyself” – in the self’s unity and diversity.

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Some of the  
guests of  
the  
Symposium



Eva Miron, Theodor  
Damian, and Theodor  
Mazur (the host of the  
Symposium)

George Alexe and  
Daniela Anghel



Minerva Bucur Radu and  
Theodor Damian







Mihaela Albu

## **National Identity and European Diversity**

### **A Case Study: Romania**

**(In Constantin Noica's and Mircea Vulcanescu's Estimations)**

In the contemporary world, when one of the most common concepts is globalization, it seems paradoxical to speak about "national identity," but it is also obvious that with Europe divided into various countries, each nation belongs both to a specific culture and to the culture of the old continent.

By definition, "*national identity* refers both to the distinguishing features of the group, and to the individual's sense of belonging to it." (...) In common usage, terms such as *nations*, *country*, *land* and *state* often appear as near-synonyms, i.e., for a territory under a single sovereign government, or the inhabitants of such a territory, or the government itself; in other words, a *de jure* or *de facto* state. In the English language, the terms do have precise meanings, however, in daily speech and writing, they are often used interchangeably and are open to different interpretations. In the strict sense, terms such as *nation*, *ethnos*, and 'people' denominate a group of human beings. The concepts of nation and nationality have much in common with ethnic group and ethnicity, but have a more political connotation, since they imply the possibility of a nation-state."<sup>1</sup> Throughout history, every nation<sup>2</sup> tries to define its own characteristics in comparison to others. "In Europe, especially since the late 18th century, the idea of nation assumed a fundamental political significance, with the rise of the ideology and philosophy of nationalism. Nationalists saw a 'nation' not simply as a descriptive term for a group of people, but an entity entitled to sovereignty, if necessary by the destruction of non-national states."<sup>3</sup>

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Mihaela Albu, Ph.D., is Professor of Comparative literature, State University of Craiova, Romania, Editor in chief: *Lumină Lină/ Gracious Light*.

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Even though the idea of a modern nation is more or less a recent creation (barely two centuries old) contemporary nations are more and more interested in defining their specificity, their main characteristics that could mark the limits between themselves and others.

Romania has a recent history as a modern nation, winning its independence in the second part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century; the process ended, however, after the First World War, in 1918. (Between the two world wars, among other important philosophical, ethical, and political ideas, one of the issues very frequently approached by the Romanian thinkers and writers<sup>4</sup> was the issue of redefining the national identity).

*What does it mean to be a Romanian? What are Romanian values? How do Romanians understand the world?* These questions are only a few from the multitude of which great thinkers attempt to answer. Thus, the interest in defining the Romanian identity became manifest at all levels of cultural social, political life - in literature, philosophy, sociology, and politology.

CONSTANTIN NOICA<sup>5</sup>, perhaps one of the most significant of the Romanian thinkers interested in the definition of Romanian identity, gave an acception to the concept of national identity (and of nationalism), understanding it as a “returning to the mystery and as a recognition of the mystery.” In his opinion, the two main conditions of nationalism are: 1) To acknowledge that the mystery is here, close to us, in the middle of our world, in the core of all the things; 2) To realize that you do not light the mystery with your own mind, but it brightens itself by the action.

Regarding the philosophy of nationalism, in 1938, Noica asked some relevant questions to his readers about the meaning of nationalism, about what the nations did to enhance their borders instead of eliminating them. He also asked why people are not together in the United States or Europe. Let’s remember that these questions were asked in 1938, the period that – for historical reasons - was marked by an obvious interest in defining Romanian identity, especially because Romania was a young state with minorities, and for this reason, had some problems of ethnicity.

Starting from a different direction, with the concept of the *Eternal Romania*, Constantin Noica surpasses the biological level of nation when he explains such expressions as: “Romanu-n veci nu piere” (The Romanian is eternal) or “Romanul are sapte vieti” (The Romanian has seven lives) and puts the accent on the life of our spirit. In his book, *Sentimentul Romanesc al Fiintei (The Romanian Sentiment of Beingness)*, Noica discovers a Romanian “special feeling” of the human being revealed by the preposition *întru*. It comes from the Latin *intro*, and is enriched in Romanian with *în spre* (to, toward). “Actually, our peculiar understanding of beingness is, maybe, the result of the peculiar meanings of *întru*, that came to seemingly express the beingness *from within*, suggesting that «to be» means «to be into /*întru*/ something», that is to be, but not fully, in something, to rest but also to aspire, to close oneself but also to open oneself.”<sup>6</sup>

In his opinion, Romanian civilization developed *întru* (into, within) the space around the Carpathians, and it did not migrate like the Hellenic civilization or colonize others like the Anglo-Saxons. Due to its existence *întru* two “worlds,” two civilizations (the Orient & the Occident) and not *between* them (as it is usually considered), the Romanian civilization, in Noica’s opinion, can be open to modernity, having at the same time the capacity to preserve the old values.<sup>7</sup> In his enterprise of understanding the Romanian identity into the deepest strata, Noica created a special philosophy using the language, namely the old Romanian expressions, which have as a base the verb “to be.” Having more and particular forms in Romanian, unfortunately these expressions can not be translated; they are a characteristic of Romanian language, they can be a key to open the gateway toward the specificity of the Romanian identity from the point of view of the perception of the human being.

Nevertheless, the interest in the definition of the Romanian identity can be found as a main point on many other thinkers’ and writers’ agenda, especially in the interwars period. Among them, one of the most significant personalities, who unfortunately died in the communist prison, an exemplary character for Constantin

Noica himself, was MIRCEA VULCANESCU.<sup>8</sup>

Vulcanescu's philosophical attitude towards the national identity concept, and his attempt to define the Romanian specificity can be found in his fundamental study *Dimensiunea romaneasca a existentei (The Romanian Dimension of Being)*, written between 1940-1944. His study is, as he mentions, "a phenomenological description of the idea of being in the Romanian thinking."<sup>9</sup> The author explains that his analysis is in principle oriented toward the linguistic configuration and the structure of the main symbols of the Romanians. Thus, Vulcanescu gives a special meaning for the adverb "there, over there". For example, the Romanians who used to live in Transylvania before 1918 (the year of national unification), were named "our brothers from over there" as they also name their dead relatives "those from the over there." The distinction between *here* and *there* is made by different criteria than those used in other cultures. Thus, the world of here includes things that "used to be" but "they are no more" and also things that "could be" but "are not yet." In this way, things happen simultaneously both in the concrete, definite and in an eternal dimension. The dimensions of height and width are applicable also to heaven and hell; and, of course, heaven is not situated "here," but "there."<sup>10</sup> The reason for such a study is found in the idea that each ethnic collectivity has its own way of seeing and understanding the world. "Each forms for himself a certain idea about the world and about man based on the dimension in which being is projected in himself."<sup>11</sup>

In Vulcanescu's opinion, a first characteristic of the Romanian dimension of being is that "it is considered in his entirety, it is considered a unity, a totality."

Today his "Last Word," is still well known, which is his deposition at the communist trial on January 15<sup>th</sup>, 1948, when he recognized he was, as his mentors Nicolae Iorga and Vasile Parvan taught him, "a nationalist,<sup>12</sup> but not a chauvinist." He says, "I always considered the nation as a unity based on the unity (harmony) of the territory, of blood, of the customs and fate".

In his enterprise of finding the identity of Romanian culture, Mircea Vulcanescu defines the dimensions of Romanian identity from an anthropological and ontological point of view. Thus, he presents a theory of "temptation" as possibilities of being, as stimuli with minimum resistance. In this sense, he finds several such "temptations" for Romanian spirituality and its becoming. First of all, the basic temptation is *the Dacian* one, followed by *the Roman temptation* (that gave us the sense of laws), *the Byzantine* temptation (that provided our politics and spirit of brightness, tolerance and wisdom, but also the spirit of intrigue, and robberies.), *the Slavic* temptation (that gave us the sense of religiosity, and at the same time, excessive enthusiasm), *the French* temptation (that gave us the easiness of expression, and the spirit of imitation). Other temptations are *the German*, *the Jewish*, *the Hungarian*, *the Balkanic* (Greek-Bulgarian) and the last one is considered *the Gypsy* temptation (that gave us nerve, affection, noisy expression, and charm).

“Though some of the data has changed a little during the last 50 years, due to the modifications in the Romanian mentality caused by communist behavior and cultural politics, as well as by urban life”, considered Mihaela Alexandra Pop in her pertinent analysis regarding the Romanian identity, “these identity dimensions remain basic”.

Together with Constantin Noica, Mircea Vulcanescu enriched the space of the cultural knowledge in the field of Romanian identity. Both used the level of language in their presentations to follow the way identity is constructed. Their books brought a special contribution to the analysis of Romanian identity.

#### NOTES:

1. Cf. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nation>.
2. Nations are defined by a limited number of characteristics, which apply to both the individual members, and the nation. The first requirement for the definition is that the characteristics should be *shared* - a group of people with nothing in common, can not be a nation. Because they are shared, the national

population also has a degree of uniformity and *homogeneity*. And finally, at least some of the characteristics must be *exclusive* - to distinguish the nation from neighbouring nations. All of the characteristics can be disputed, and opposition to secessionist nationalism often includes the denial that a separate nation exists (cf. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nation>).

3. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nation#Nationalism>.

4. Among the the Romanian philosophers, writers, historians the most important are: Constantin Noica, Mircea Vulcanescu, Lucian Blaga, Nicolae Iorga, Constantin Radulescu Motru, Emil Cioran, Mircea Eliade.

5. Constantin Noica (1909-1987) was a Romanian philosopher and essayist,. His preoccupations were throughout all philosophy, from epistemology, philosophy of culture, axiology and philosophic anthropology to ontology and logics, from philosophy history to systematic philosophy, from antic to contemporary philosophy, from translating and interpreting to critics and creation.

6. Constantin Noica, *Sentimentul romanesc al fiintei*, Humanitas, Bucuresti, 1996, p. 7.

7. cf. Constantin Noica, *ibid.*, p. 7.

8. Mircea Vulcanescu (1904-1952) was a philosopher, sociologist, economist and professor of ethics. He was Prof. Dimitrie Gusti's assistant and took part in many monographic research travels. He was one of the main figures of the Criterion Association of the interwar "young generation". Between 1937 and 1944 he was interested in the elaboration of an ontological model of the Romanian man which was published in: *The Romanian Man, The Dacian Temptation, Real Existence in Romanian Metaphysics* and *The Romanian Dimension of Being*. During the Second World War he controlled the finances of the country in Ion Antonescu's government. Afterward, he was judged and condemned to eight years of prison by the communist power. He died in prison at Aiud. \*cf. Mihaela Alexandra Pop, *An Ontological Definition of the Romanian National Identity*, in *Cultural Heritage and Contemporary Change*, Series IV, *Eastern and Central Europe*, vol. 24, ed. by Magdalena Dumitrana (<http://crvp.org/book/Series04/IVA-24/contents.htm>)

9. Mircea Vulcanescu, *Dimensiunea romaneasca a existentei (The Romanian Dimension of Existence)*, vol. 3, Editura Eminescu, Bucuresti, 1996, p. 165.

10. *Ibidem*, p. 176

11. *Ibidem*.

12. By now, at least two distinct meanings of this term (nationalism) have been delineated. The first meaning identifies nationalism with the deep feeling of love for the nation, of solidarity with all the members of the same community. However fluid in respect of the definition, the nation is a "proteus" as Herder

said and concentrates in itself a plurality of meanings, that generate a large register of life experiences and feelings, sublimated in what was called nationalism.

In its second meaning, nationalism is identified with an exacerbated ethnic or national identity, with jingoism and intolerance of other ethnics. In analogy with religious fanaticism and it has been called an "imperialism", a "will of power", a manifestation of violence. which, in some cases, has lead to dictatorship (cf. Marin Aiftinca, *Spirituality and Social Problems: Universalism and Nationalism, in Cultural Heritage and Contemporary Change*).



The Holy Trinity Uncrainian Orthodox Church in Manhattan, where the Symposium was hosted by V. Rev. Fr. Tudor Mazur, dean.



Gale Bellas

## **The Trinity as a Model of Unity in Diversity in the Philosophy of M.M. Bakhtin**

In his book, *The Orthodox Way*, Bishop Kallistos Ware explains the Trinity in the following manner:

There is in God genuine diversity as well as true unity. The Christian God is not just a unit but a union, not just unity but community. He is tri-unity: three equal persons each one dwelling in the other two by virtue of an unceasing movement of mutual love. (Ware 27)

Similarly, when describing the Trinity, St. Gregory of Nyssa writes:

The distinction between the persons does not impair the oneness of nature, nor does the shared unity of essence lead to confusion between the distinctive characteristics of the persons. Do not be surprised that we should speak of the Godhead as being at the same time both unified and differentiated. Using riddles, as it were, we envisage a strange and paradoxical diversity-in-unity and unity-in diversity. (Ware, 31)

When we speak of models of unity in diversity in today's society, it must be stressed that perhaps the answer is not one where man can only rely on himself to be at the head of the model, implementing and passing down laws that attempt to govern mutual love and respect for others. As Bishop Ware and St. Gregory of Nyssa suggest, this model is only one that can be governed by God with God at the center. Today's governments and society search for utopic man-made solutions to this problem

of diversity, pluralism and respect for others by implementing their own rules and theories into place.

Two very important philosophers who spent their life studies devoted to this idea of diversity and unity are Martin Buber and Mikhail Bakhtin. Both philosophers also recognized the need for our connection with God, and divine love, truth and inspiration to govern our relationships of self and other. Martin Buber's best-known work, *I and Thou*, focuses on the way humans relate to others and to their environments. According to Buber, in the modern world, we frequently view both objects and people by their functions rather than by their personhood. Doing this is sometimes good: for instance, when doctors examine us for specific maladies, they view us as organisms. Scientists can learn a great deal about our world by observing, measuring, and examining.

Unfortunately, we frequently view people in the same way particularly those who are different from us. Rather than truly making ourselves completely available to them, understanding them, sharing totally with them, really talking with them, we observe them or keep part of ourselves outside the moment of the relationship. We do so either to protect our vulnerabilities or to get others to respond in some preconceived way, to get something from them. For Buber, all such processes are called "I-It" relationships.

It is possible, notes Buber, to place ourselves completely into a relationship, to truly understand and to "be there" with another person, without masks, pretenses, even without words. Such a moment of relating is called "I-Thou." Each person comes to such a relationship without preconditions. The bond thus created enlarges each person, and each person responds by trying to enhance the other person. The result is true dialogue, and true sharing.

Such I-Thou relationships are not constant or static. People move in and out of I-It moments to I-Thou moments. Ironically, attempts to achieve an I-Thou moment will fail because the process of trying to create an I-Thou relationship objectifies it and

makes it I-It. Even describing the moment objectifies it and makes it an I-It. The most Buber can do in describing this process is to encourage us to be available to the possibility of I-Thou moments, to achieve real dialogue. It can't be described. When you have it, you know it. Buber maintains that it is possible to have an I-Thou relationship with the world and the objects in it as well. Art, music, poetry are all possible media for such responses in which true dialogue can take place.

Buber then moves from this existential description of personal relating to the religious experience. For Buber, God is the "Eternal Thou." By trying to prove God's existence or define God, the rationalist philosophers automatically established an I-It relationship. Like a person we love, we can't define God; we can't set up preconditions for the relationship. We simply have to be available, open to the relationship with the Eternal Thou. And when we experience such an I-Thou relationship, the moment doesn't need words. In fact, the most intense moments we experience with another person take place without words. The I-Thou relationship changes the sharers, but it does so naturally, sometimes almost imperceptibly. For Buber, it is possible to have an I-Thou relationship with God through I-Thou moments with people, nature, art, and the world.

As Buber suggests, after our redemption from Egypt, we as a people encountered God. We were available and open, and the Sinai moment was an I-Thou relationship for an entire people and for each individual making it possible for us to make ourselves available for the I-Thou experience with the Eternal Thou. We must come without preconceptions or conditions and without expectation because that would already attempt to limit our relationship partner, God, and thus create an I-It moment. If we try to analyze the text, we again create an I-It relationship because analysis places ourselves outside of the dialogue as an observer and not a total participant. To summarize, Buber establishes that each individual possesses the same I-thou relationship within him or herself as he or she has with God. Without others we do not exist.

Twentieth century Russian Philosopher, Mikhail Bakhtin whose writings were mostly done during the early formative years of the Soviet Union, has been recognized for his modified application of Buber's "I-thou" model to dialogical relationships between self and other. His theory of dialogism ascribes the building of identity to the interactions we have with others, particularly in our communication with others. His model, however, takes Buber's I-thou model one step further, christianizing it, if you will, by using the idea and model of the Holy Trinity as a basis for our relationships with others. His dialogic model of communication in his renowned study of language *Discourse in the Novel* suggests that all human dialogue and interaction can be diagramed in the shape of a triangle or triad. The self stands at one point and connects to the other at the base, with both connecting to a third entity. Although Bakhtin never identifies the third entity, it is almost certain based on particular scholar's beliefs such as Katerina Clarke and Michael Holquist that this third entity connecting self and other and watching over this dialogic relationship is God (the word of God, divine truth and love). For Bakhtin, God is always present in all of our relationships with others. Whether or not we are conscious of God's presence and/or Word and tap into it in our relationships with others is a different story. It is something we must be aware of and at the same time, it is a force beyond the human beings and their comprehension.

It is my belief that Bakhtin, an orthodox Russian, has fashioned his paradigm of human interaction and communication, on the model of the Holy Trinity. In his dialogic model, Bakhtin is suggesting that human beings are called to reproduce the same mutual love, reciprocity and interdependence that exist in the Trinity, which inherently means that we are called to fight against the opposite in our interactions with others, which would be oppression, injustice and discrimination. Bakhtin believed that the rational models of thinking that societies and people adopt, directly impact the way that people view the world, self and other. Therefore, adopting the Trinitarian model as a way of dialogue

and interaction would truly bring about a change in the way we view the world and others, acknowledging the workings of the Holy Spirit and Divine Love in all of our relationships.

This model can be applied to people living in society. Their identities and well-being are interdependent on one another. Like Buber, Bakhtin believes that each person can only become a real person through his or her relationship, dialogue and interaction with others. As Bakhtin states, “we begin to live only when we enter into genuine dialogic relationships with others and with the ideas of others.” Likewise, love cannot exist in isolation. Self love is the negation of love, and Egocentricity is the death of true personhood. For Bakhtin, the opposite of a truly dialogic relationship in which we truly allow ourselves to be shaped and interdependent in a relationship of love with the other (as found in the model of the Holy Trinity) is a monologic relationship – much like that of Buber’s I-it relationship as opposed to an I-thou relationship. In a monologic relationship, we objectify the other rather than truly connect. For Bakhtin, our use of language has a great deal to do with whether or not we objectify others. How do we enter into true dialogue with others? Do we really listen and recognize what they are saying or do we drown out their voices with our own voices and preconceived notions of other. In this sense, language can either be inclusive or exclusive, and therefore, act as either a great oppressor or a great equalizer. As a result, the model for Bakhtin in how we communicate with other is not “myself and other,” but “myself, other and another,” another being God, which represents divine truth and love.

The conclusion is that we should all recognize and allow this model of mutual respect, reciprocity and love that is found in the Holy Trinity, but also in our own essence if we are made in the likeness of God, to govern our relationships with others. It is the most precious element of our human relationships. Egocentricity is perhaps what we are warned against as the single thing that can damn us forever as we become disconnected from ourselves and others and from our own salvation. St. John Chrysostom says that it is not possible for a man to be saved unless he is concerned with

the salvation of his neighbor. This statement by John Chrysostom brings us to the ultimate question particularly while living in what many believe to be an apocalyptic world. Do we dare to hope for the salvation of others or do we not engage with them because we believe they will not be saved because of their faith or actions. In *Acts*, Chapter 2, St. Peter calls us to understand that our salvation is dependent on our relationship with others in this world. When describing Pentecost, he says,

All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Everyday they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all people, and the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

Hence, Bakhtin's dialogic model encourages a modern day application of this reoccurring theme found in scripture that has been reiterated throughout the centuries. The invincibility of divine love and reciprocity as that found in the Holy Trinity in whose likeness men and women are made seems to still be the most propitious and significant argument for the idea of universal hope for unity in this world as well as in the next.

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Alina Feld and  
Steven Cresap

Th. Damian,  
Vicky  
Malczanek,  
and Cornelia  
Grosaru



Celebrating together





Steven Cresap

## **Apocalypse WOW!**

### **The Aesthetic Value of Catastrophes and Terror**

One fascination shared by everyone is apocalypse. In Western culture apocalypse comes in both secular and religious forms. Whatever form it takes, and whatever interpretation may be placed on it, any apocalyptic narrative has an automatic aesthetic value. This fact about the appeal of apocalypse poses a problem for both aesthetics and ethics, not to mention theology and cultural anthropology.

I want to focus on how apocalyptic narratives have permeated our culture. If there were a single, visible emblem for modern culture, it might be Oskar Schlemmer's 1920's-era "Scheme for Stage, Cult and Popular Entertainment." Not only is the scheme itself modernist in design (abstract, eccentric, multidimensional), it is modern in what it tells us. This is a world in which high forms are reduced and low forms elevated. High Mass becomes a sort of striptease and striptease a sort of mass. Aside from differences in stage mechanics (transubstantiation in the one case, incarnation in the other), both forms have the same dramaturgical essence. Apocalyptic narratives originated in the high forms of religious cult activity, but today in the post- and post-postmodern periods, apocalypse has trickled down into the low forms: movies, games, comics, etc. And apocalypse, or at least events which appear apocalyptic, appear outside of art and entertainment. 9/11 is the best example of a "real world" apocalyptic event, due to its association with what Huntington and many others consider to be a civilizational war. The German modernist composer Karlheinz Stockhausen called 9/11 "the

greatest work of art in the cosmos,” deftly catching the apocalyptic overtones of that event and the fact that, indeed, the terrorists did fashion the event partly for its aesthetic qualities: its symbolism and its perceptual impact. And the response on the part of the current administration was another sort of artistic apocalypse: the shock and awe of the large-scale bombing of Afghanistan and Iraq, which indeed brought down regimes that would have seemed to many living under them to be coextensive with the world.

It’s perhaps no surprise that religious apocalypse has appeal, because it has a long tradition. As W.V.D. Wishard noted, forty-eight million Americans believe that the end of the world will happen in their lifetime. Example: the *Left Behind* series of novels by Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins, adapted into a series of movies in theaters and on DVD’s - that has sold six million copies amounting to \$100 million in consumer spending. The latest installment, *Left Behind: the World at War*, features Satan as Secretary General of the United Nations. In line with fundamentalist doctrine, *The World at War* portrays progress toward peace in the Middle East as a sign of approaching Armageddon.<sup>1</sup>

What is more surprising is the current popularity of secular apocalypse. asteroids, global warming (which might trigger another Ice Age), mutating viruses, etc. People have had to live with end of the world scenarios ever since Hiroshima. I’ve experienced apocalyptic events twice, ironically through classroom windows: once as a student at Lake Worth High School in Florida, when in October of 1962 I watched a train carrying tanks heading south. The other time was on 9/11, which I also witnessed from my classroom. So it is really no surprise that apocalyptic thinking has moved from the religious tradition to popular entertainment and common experience. Currently attitudes toward apocalypse seem to be polarized between those who believe we should ready ourselves for rapture and those who believe that we should prepare rockets to deflect asteroids. I once had an Islamist student who ridiculed the Western assumption that

through technology we will somehow be able to fend off the end of the world. A subgenre of apocalypse narratives is a combination of the secular and religious: a typical trope is the conversion of skeptical technocrats into believers in some manifestation of the supernatural.

Apocalyptic narratives, both religious and secular, can be divided into globalist (end of the world) and regionalist (end of a particular city or civilization, or civilization itself). Confusion about the extent of destruction often leads to blurring of the distinction between regional and global. The destruction of a particular community or region has often been confused with the end of the world. This confusion accounts for one of the most notorious parts of the Sodom and Gomorrah narrative, the scandalous consequence of Lot's daughters' mistaking the destruction of the cities of the plain for the destruction of the human race.

It is not surprising that of all varieties of apocalyptic narrative the most common is city-destruction, since it is more or less natural for city-dwellers to identify their particular locale as equivalent with civilization and even the world. And as a matter of mythological and historical record, while the decline and fall of entire civilizations is never as sudden and complete as an apocalyptic narrative requires, there have been cases of the more or less sudden and complete destruction of cities: Sodom and Gomorrah, Persepolis, Carthage, Pompeii, etc. Some of these have been natural disasters, others uricide, whether intentional or not.

But why, then, are we fascinated and not just appalled by apocalypse? Most apocalyptic narratives have a hopeful outcome, at least for a few people. But one need not consider oneself to be among the elect to get a thrill from the idea of the end of the world. Even the notion of total apocalypse seems, in certain circumstances, to afford certain kinds of aesthetic pleasure. In his *Enquiry* of 1757 Edmund Burke posed a question about the aesthetic value of such events: "I believe no man is so strangely wicked as to desire to see [London] destroyed by a conflagration

or an earthquake . . . But suppose such a fatal accident to have happened, what numbers from all parts would crowd to behold the ruins?"<sup>2</sup> Burke's explanation of why we take pleasure in destruction relied on defining a distinct aesthetic category apart from beauty: this is what was called the sublime, although the term has lost this original meaning today. As the theory was developed by Longinus in the ancient world and by Baroque and Augustan critics in the early modern period, the sublime did not seem to require catharsis, like pity and fear. With its full development by Burke and Kant, the sublime appeared to carry the possibility of working in a morally beneficial way, as when, because of our admiration for a hero who confronts tragic circumstances, we desire to emulate him. An example would be the widespread admiration for Rudolf Giuliani's apparent defiance of personal danger when he walked around ground zero. A quasi-Platonic chain of *mimemai* or imitators is set up, and the result is a positive aesthetic experience – the sublime is pleasurable – which is also a moral tonic. Burke called it emotional exercise and Kant called it transcendence, but in both cases the result for witnesses of sublimity is empowerment: the audience becomes as sublime as the object it is contemplating.

Of course, if it is the case that sublime events are empowering, this can only be so when other aspects of the event are somehow discounted or defused. One cannot gain aesthetic pleasure from a sublime object if one feels actually threatened by it. When I witnessed 9/11, I was fascinated by the sight of the burning towers, but also afraid. Perhaps to get a purely aesthetic reaction one would have to go overseas, to a "neutral" audience – but one wonders where such an audience could be found. Even if one was in favor of jihad, and appreciated the symbolism of the event, it is evident that the pleasure 9/11 afforded to so many was mixed with its political meaning. So it is next to impossible to distill a purely aesthetic reaction to events such as these.

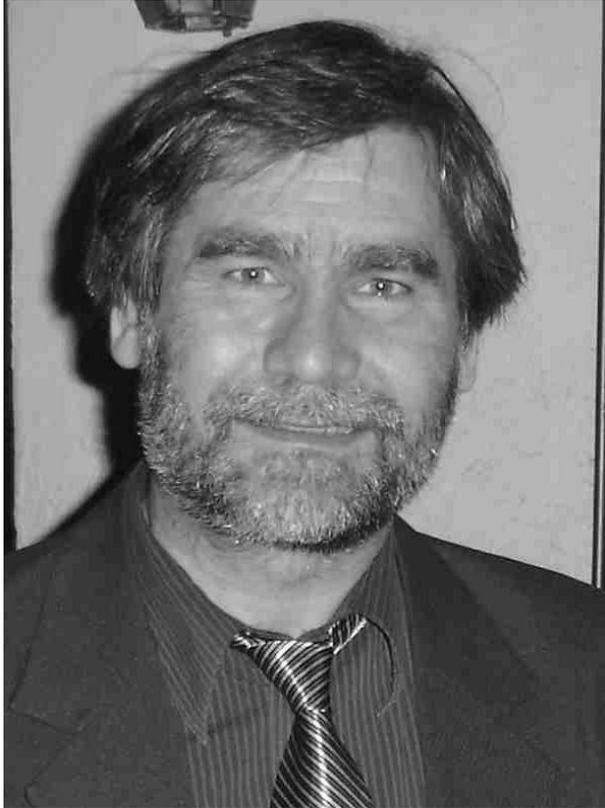
Nevertheless, I would propose that our recent experiences with terrorism and the war on terror casts doubt on the theory of the sublime. Apparently, the 9/11 terrorists did not know of the

theory, or assumed that the whole range of negative effects of the act – its political symbolism, the financial damage it caused, the loss of life and property, etc. – would cancel its aesthetic value. Terrorists and governments alike use the sublime (“shock and awe”) not to excite or empower the enemy but to defeat him.

There is a dark side to the sublime: identification may mask masochism. From admiration to hero-worship to fandom, sublime objects are as likely to induce feelings of smallness and powerlessness as they are to instill moral behavior. Conservatives have been attracted to the sublime because of its implicit challenge to secular humanism: the sublime restores humankind to its putatively proper – and subordinate – status in the cosmos, including especially the social cosmos. Aw at one’s “betters” is akin to awe at any superior power, and as demeaning.

#### NOTES:

1. Rob Walker, “God Is in the Distribution,” in *The New York Times Magazine*, Nov. 13, 2005, p. 38.
2. Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, ed. J. T. Boulton, Notre Dame: U. of Notre Dame Press, 1968, p. 48.



Theodor Damian

## **The Day of the Lord: The Apocalyptic Dimension of the Old Testament Prophets' Warnings**

*Dies irae, dies illa  
solvet saeculum in favilla  
teste David cum Sybilla*

*Tuba mirum spargens sonum  
et sepulchra regionum  
coget omnes ante thronum.<sup>1</sup>*

(attributed to  
Tomaso de Celano, cca. 1250)

### *Introduction*

In his celebrated work *The Theology of Hope* Juergen Moltmann defines eschatology as “something in which we migrate and which is in migration with us.”

One major component of this definition is the movement, the dynamism; another one is the unknown. Eschatology is “something”, we don’t know what, but it is. Then, we have to talk about the unknown and the impact it has on man’s daily life and on his or her destiny.

As paradoxical as this task may be, philosophers and theologians alike are seriously engaged in approaching the issue, interpreting it and trying to make sense of it, just as when they approach ontologically another paradox, death, a phenomenon also unknown in its essence.

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Rev. Theodor Damian, Ph.D., is Professor of Philosophy and Ethics, Metropolitan College of New York; President of the Romanian Institute of Orthodox Theology and Spirituality.

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There was one category of theologians in the Old Testament times who approached the field of eschatology with great emphasis and intensity: the prophets.

They were God's messengers, elected by God, sent to the people of Israel to constantly remind them of their obligations towards the One who gave them a special status in the midst of other peoples.

When other means used to bring the people of Israel to obedience were exhausted, God used eschatology, and in particular its apocalyptic dimension<sup>2</sup>, as a tool.

Eschatology, which has Apocalypse as a main component, generally refers to the last things, to the last judgement, to the end of the world and the effective beginning of God's kingdom. It brings then bad news and good news.

Because eschatology also relates to the eternal life, to the first new realities, to the new type of existence offered by God, reason for which it is also called the eighth day of the world's creation, it does not generate pessimism and despair.

### *Aspects of Eschatology*

The study of the Old Testament prophetic books' eschatology reveals, as indicated, that it has two dimensions: a temporal one, concerning this life on this earth and an atemporal one, concerning the life to come and the kingdom of God.

Besides God, there are also three categories of players in the eschatological drama: the people of Israel, all the nations, the entire cosmos. All these participants are connected to the eschatological realities in both of their dimensions temporal and atemporal.

For each participant in this drama, according to the prophetic writings there is a period of waiting. The most emphasized waiting though is that of Israel who is expecting a savior, in the limits of the temporal, supposed to bring, through a revolution, freedom and prosperity to his people.

But the other nations are waiting as well. In the first dimension of the eschatological realities the nations will come to know Messiah as the Son of God; in the second dimension the nations will also be judged. As J. Blaw writes, they cannot be excluded from the kingdom, because just as God created them and is their king, in the future, the prophets reveal, the God of Israel will be the God of all nations as well.<sup>3</sup>

The Universe will also be part of the eschatological events. In regards to the temporal dimension, the prophets speak of nature's reaction to the divine and human interventions, of partial cataclysms, and, as for the atemporal dimension, they speak of a total renewal of God's created order.

### *The reason for the threats*

The apocalyptic prophecies in the Old Testament are basically threats that God is using in order to bring His people to total faithfulness.

The fact of being chosen gave the people of Israel advantages and status and it was supposed to keep this quality carefully and be fully aware of its position *coram Deo* (before God) and *coram mundo* (in the world).

As chosen, the people was in a certain type of dependence on God which implied obligations toward God as well. When these obligations were fulfilled God appeared as a loving father to them, and when they were disregarded He appeared as a distant king who had to be feared.

Very often the situation was where God's love and providence, His interventions in the life of Israel were not given due attention, the people being too busy with its own needs, oppressions, injustices, and other crises or problems; for this reason it didn't even think of the cause of these problems, which was people's going away from God's will. That was the job of the prophets to make the connection between cause and effect, to conscientize the people of where they were and where they had to

be. In other words, this type of apocalypticism intended to reveal how God's providence for people and people's faith and obedience to God is relevant in particular for times of crisis in human existence.<sup>4</sup>

The stronger the sin the stronger the threats. One of the things the prophets did was to emphasize the moral character of the Law, of God's commandments. Submission to the law would give people's actions and life moral value and would bring it into God's communion.

Disobedience to the law, immorality, sin, would have consequences on both dimensions of human life: horizontal, concerning human relationships, and vertical, concerning man's relation with God. Sin deforms God's image that man is. To persevere in immorality implies losing the true knowledge of God and misusing the gifts generously offered to man, through which he or she does the necessary good works for salvation.

Indeed, the criteria for salvation in the prophetic books, according to Rudolf Schnackenburg,<sup>5</sup> are always represented by the good works that form the moral constitution of each person. Often even spiritual qualities such as faith and hope, because of their concrete implications for the daily life, are considered good works. Obedience to the Decalogue, which contains both commandments of spiritual but also of immediate practical, concrete character, is considered good work.

It is the prophets' constant insistence on this issue that indicates how important good deeds were in God's eyes, and that explains God's anger with Israel when it did not fulfill its obligations, and His recourse to the apocalyptic threats as often delivered through the prophets.

### *Dies illa*

The prophets, as chosen among the chosen people, with an enlightened conscience, were aware of the scaring hostility Israel showed towards God. Sin is hostility towards God and time spent

in sin is considered human time, and this will come to an end when the divine justice will appear.

Then, at the end of the time of men Yahwe's day will start, the day of the Lord. In that day, the real face of sin will be uncovered and made known to all, as well as the gravity of disobedience to the divine commandments.

The day of the Lord, *dies illa*, as an apocalyptic event, reveals and hides at the same time,<sup>6</sup> and is at once a treat and a promise concerning the eschatological fulfillment of God's kingdom. But it is first of all a day of reprimand and of punishment rather than a day of promise. It is the perseverance of a life lived in sin that will make that the threats and the divine anger receive such a vast and dreadful dimension, that even the universe in its entirety will be affected.

All the threats make reference to the future of Israel and even to the whole of humankind. That is why according to the prophets, man's life is always framed in the atemporal, eschatological perspective of the day of the Lord. In order to determine Israel to return to God and follow the law, the prophets turned that day into the culminant point of their preaching.

They gave that day a very somber perspective by using a variety of images comparisons, figures of speech. That day, the day of the Lord is harsh, merciless, furious and full of revenge, great and dreadful as no other until then, a day of darkness and thick fog, of desolation and destruction, which will devastate the earth and kill the sinners.

That day will be a day of fear and trouble, veiled and somber, of constraint and humiliation, a day of cries and screaming, of chaos, great lamentation, a day of shame, of cold and freezing. That is the day of the judgment and only God knows when it is going to happen.

However, it is portrayed in a very dynamic terminology as if it is imminent, at the door, and threatening. It is spoken of in the present tense: that day is terrible, behold, it is coming, the fury is coming, the time of trouble and torture. The day of the Lord is coming, it is approaching, ever faster, one can hear it coming,

alas, what a day! The anger of God will manifest with evidence. This is how it looks in Ezekiel's vision:

“An end! The end is coming on the four corners of the land. Now the end is upon you and I shall send My anger against you; I shall judge you according to your ways and I shall bring all your abominations upon you. For My eye will have no pity on you, nor shall I spare you, but I shall bring My ways upon you, and your abominations will be among you; [...] An end is coming; the end has come! It has awakened against you; behold, it has come! Your doom has come to you, o inhabitants of the land. The time has come, the day is near [...] I will repay you according to your ways, while your abominations are in your midst [...] Behold the day! Behold, it is coming! Your doom has gone forth” (7: 2-10).<sup>7</sup>

This is the day of the Lord because here His almightiness will be manifest, there will be no confusion as to who is the judge. Lordship implies power and His power will be uncontested, but it also implies justice and dignity, that is why He will keep and fulfill His promises: the sinners will be destroyed and the righteous will be saved. Consequently, everybody will see and participate in the day of the Lord, no one will be exempt from knowing Him even through the many troubles: “As a shepherd cares for his herd in the day when he is among his scattered sheep, so I will care for My sheep and will deliver them from all the places to which they were scattered, on a cloudy and gloomy day” (Ezekiel, 34: 12).

In order to show the power of God's lordship in a stronger and more convincing way the prophet describes with vivid details how the nature will also be affected in that day: “And it will come about on that day when Gog comes against the land of Israel that My fury will mount up in My anger; and in My zeal and in My blazing wrath I declare that on that day there will surely be a great earthquake in the land of Israel; and the fish of the sea, the birds of the heavens, the beasts of the field, all the creeping things that creep on the earth, and all the men who are on the face of the earth will shake at My presence; the mountains also will be thrown

down, the steep pathways will collapse, and every wall will fall to the ground” (Ezekiel 38: 18-20).

Laments and tears will be useless in that day, they will not save the sinners from God’s anger. All of them will be brought before God and punished, as the prophet Zephaniah warns: “In that day [...] I will search Jerusalem with lamps and will punish the men who are stagnant in spirit, who say in their hearts: The Lord will not do good or evil” (1: 10-12).

It is interesting to notice that in one of his Messianic prophecies Isaiah speaks of one year of God’s mercy, therefore, a long period of time which will extend between the first and the second coming of the Lord, but the vengeance, the judgment is only for one day, and that will be only at the end of the human time, which means that as terrible as that day will be, the mercy of God reigns until then in order for everyone to have a chance to repent and turn back to God: “The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring the good news to the afflicted; He has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and freedom to prisoners, to proclaim *the favorable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of God*” (61: 1-2) (emphasis added).

As mentioned earlier, the prophets speak of God’s justice in relation to men’s morality, to their bad or good works: “For the day of the Lord draws near on all the nations; as you have done it will be done to you. Your dealings will return on your own head” (Obadiah 1:15) (See also Zephaniah 1:7; 1: 14-15; 1: 18; 2: 2-3; Zehariah 14:).

Man’s acts will not be considered at the judgment of God only for what they represent in themselves, but also for their implications. That is why, in some interpretations, after the personal judgment after one’s death, there is going to be a last judgment at the end of the world. Sometimes consequences can be even worse than what produced them. Jeremiah talks about the fruit of one’s deeds: “I, the Lord search the heart, I test the mind, to give to each man according to his ways, according to the result of his deeds” (17: 10).

The expression “that day” as the day of the Lord indicates a significant point which requires heightened awareness on the part of man. The expression is used about 90 times in the prophetic books just in order to strengthen and make clear this message: there is a time of men where they can do whatever they want, and if they do wrong they have a chance to repent and fix their wrong doings, and there is a time of God when only God will be at work and men will not be able to do anything. And since nobody knows when the day of the Lord will be, the message is that *hic et nunc* is where and when man can work for his or her salvation and win the kingdom of God.

In that day even God’s majesty will have a terrifying effect on people. Nobody will be able to stand His unapproachable glory; Isaiah uses a very plastic language to describe the moment: “And men will go into the caves of the rocks and into the holes of the ground before the terror of the Lord and before the splendor of His majesty when He will arise and make the earth tremble” (2:19).

God’s resentment will manifest towards the sinners in multiple forms, and that appears as normal and expected reaction vis-a-vis man’s iniquities: “So, also I will make you sick, striking you down, desolating you because of your sins” (Michah, 6:13). The sinner will be, in Amos’s vision “As when a man flees from a lion and a bear meets him, or goes home, leans his hand against the wall and a snake bites him” (5:19).

The gravity of man’s sin in God’s eyes is indicated by the sharpness of the language the prophet uses to describe the punishment: “And I shall appoint over them four kinds of doom, declares the Lord: the sword to slay, the dogs to drag off, the birds of the sky and the beasts of the earth to devour and destroy” (Jeremiah 15: 3).

After the judgment there will, evidently, be much less people on earth because the unjust will no longer be around. As Isaiah puts it: “I will make mortal man scarcer than pure gold and mankind than the gold of Ophir” (13:12). And the remaining ones will live as a new people of God in a renewed universe equivalent

to a new creation, “For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth and the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind” (Isaiah 65: 17).

One of the images frequently used by the prophets to illustrate the intensity of God’s anger, but also the intensity of the suffering of sinners in their punishment is that of the fire: “And the strong man will become tinder, his work also a spark; thus they shall both burn together, and there will be none to quench them” (Isaiah 1: 31). Or in Ezekiel’s vision: “I shall pour out My indignation on you; I shall blow on you with the fire of My wrath, and I shall give you into the land of brutal men, skilled in destruction; You will be fuel for the fire; your blood will be in the midst of the land, you will not be remembered, for I, the Lord, have spoken” (21: 31-32).

As dreadful as it will be, the Judgment in the day of the Lord will be inevitable; it will be like an existential necessity because of the logic behind it: everything has consequences; evil brings about evil, good brings about good: *abyssus abyssum invocat*. For all injustice there must be a day of justice; that is only natural: “Let justice run down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream” (Amos 5: 24).

### *Conclusions*

This short overview is indicative of the fact that one of the main aspects of the Old Testament prophetic books is eschatology in both its dimensions, temporal and atemporal, that is, with its practical implications for people’s daily life, and with its future perspective.

The prophets were sent to Israel in order to reprimand, conscientize, show, advise, convert. This type of activity had in view Israel’s submission to the divine law and will, and was done in light of their eschatological visions.

Eschatology is the “place” where God and man are supposed to meet: God acts to help man realize the right way of

living, man acts toward God, in particular when he or she gets the message. Out of his love for people God reveals Himself in many ways so that everybody can come to the knowledge of His will. But it seems that regular types of revelation do not help to fulfill God's goal. Then, out of the same love, God recourses to an unusual, strange, extraordinary way to reveal His divine will: the apocalyptic, where the good is to be noticed through fear and all that it generates.

The close connection between eschatology and the kingdom of God is evident. Eschatology is anchored in the kingdom and is fulfilled in it. It starts on earth and gives to the earthly life the perspective of the kingdom. Eschatology, with its apocalypse which also has this double connotation, that is, it refers to the ending of a world and the beginning of a new one,<sup>8</sup> is meant to prepare God's people for His kingdom.

The role of the Old Testaments' prophets can be seen from several points of view. But essentially, they are moralists, in the positive sense of the term. They intend to conscientize people of the moral value of belief in the supreme God in which each one is called to participate, that is, to live in God.

This aspect of the prophecies might seem to have a theoretical aspect only, but in reality it is powerfully rooted and with profound implications in the concrete, daily life of the people.

To each participant in the Eschatology there is a time of waiting, I said at the beginning of this essay. This waiting generates hope and the hope, faith and these are the landmarks that demarcate the way to the kingdom and that help the people of God stay on the way. As for the apocalyptic day of the Lord and the message it implies, one can only think of the difference, in terms of spirituality and morality, between the people of the prophets' time and our world today and the conclusion is not hard to take: considering the moral confusion in our contemporary society, the preponderance of the artificial over the natural<sup>9</sup> as, for instance, the crisis related to genetic engineering as discussed by Francis Fukuyama's book *Our Posthuman Future*,<sup>10</sup> we still need

prophets, even the same ones, with their sharp tongues and harsh message, to make us ever more aware of God's will for us and the way we need to follow in order to become not people of the world, but people of God, all like one advancing towards the kingdom with joy and doxology, the way St. Augustin advises:

*Sing to the Lord a new song  
Sing as the traveler does  
He sings and advances  
He sings in order to strengthen his powers  
You too, sing in order to empower yourself  
in the right faith and in the sanctity of life.*

#### NOTES:

1. The day of wrath, that day/ [which] will reduce the world to ashes/ as foretold by David and the Sybil// The trumpet scattering a wondrous sound/ among the graves of all the lands/ will assemble all before the Throne.
2. In this paper I am using the term "apocalypse" not in the neutral sense of revelation in general, but in its negative connotation, as revelation of the final destruction of the world according to the biblical prophecies.
3. J. Blaw, *L'apostolat de l'Eglise*, Paris 1968, p. 60.
4. Paul D. Hanson, *Old Testament Apocalyptic*, Abingdon Press, Nashville, 1987, p. 73.
5. Rudolf Schnackenburg, *Règne et Royaume de Dieu*, Paris, 1965, p. 57.
6. Mgr. Jean de Saint-Denis, "Commentaire du livre du Prophète Ezéchiel", in *Présence Orthodoxe*, special issue, Paris, 1974, p. 107.
7. For all biblical citations I have used the New American Standard version published by the American Bible Society, New York, 1991.
8. Thomas J.J. Altizer, *The Contemporary Jesus*, State University of New York Press, New York. 1997, p. XIV.
9. Fr. Mihail Stanciu, "The Sign of the End of the World: The Chaos" (in Romanian), in *Lumea Credintei [The World of Faith]*, June 2005, Bucharest, pp 35-36.
10. see: Richard John Neuhaus, "The Public Square: The Posthuman Future", in *First Things*, Nr. 157, Nov. 2005, pp. 62-63.



Gregory José

## **Aspects of the Apocalyptic World: Tsunamis, Hurricanes, Tornadoes, Mudslides, and Their Aftermath in the New Millennium**

### *Introduction*

In so far as the frequency of occurrence of apocalyptic events is concerned, the year 2005 has certainly turned out to be one for the record books. World-wide, twenty five storms struck land while four major ones with at least the force of a category four hurricane landed in the U.S. In New Orleans, hurricane Katrina killed at least thirteen hundred people, caused fifty two billion dollars in property insurance, led to an unemployment rate as high as twenty seven percent, and kept public schools closed for more than three months (*New York Times*, Nov. 15, 2005). With hurricane Rita following closely on the heels of Katrina, the southern gulf states of Louisiana, Mississippi and Texas had their oil installations seriously damaged. Oil prices soared to more than three dollars per gallon for regular gasoline and it seemed that it could crest at over four dollars per gallon. The implications for grain and other commodities appeared grim as well. What caused this unprecedented wrath of nature and what can local and national commodities do about it?

Thoughtful people, particularly those of many religious faiths have speculated as to whether this indeed are the last days. After all, in the Gospel of Apostles, Jesus Christ foretold the future of the world in apocalyptic terms when Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked him about signs indicating that the end of the world was near. He replied:

Don't let anyone mislead you because many will come in my name, claiming to be the Messiah. They will lead many astray. And wars will break out near and far but don't panic....Nations and kingdoms will proclaim war against each other and there will be earthquakes in many parts of the world, and famines. (Mark 13)

### *Defining apocalypse*

Derived from the Greek word, *apokalypsis* (to uncover), refers to “symbolic imagery, and the expectation of an imminent cataclysm in which God destroys the ruling powers of evil and raises the righteous to life in a messianic kingdom” (*Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary*, 1972). If the apocalypse has a frightening ring to it, there is a simpler term, disaster which one can use in its place. Disaster has many varying definitions and purpose, but it is commonly agreed that it must have the following characteristics: “Involves the destruction of property, injury, and/or loss of life; has an identifiable beginning and end; adversely affect a relatively large group of people; is “public” and shared by members of more than one family, is out of the realm of ordinary experience, and psychologically, is a traumatic enough to induce distress in almost anyone, regardless of premorbid function or earlier experiences” (Saylor, 1993).

Each of the above dimensions of the historical as well as recent disasters discussed in this paper has most, if not all, of the above features and that becomes clear as they are discussed one by one.

### *Tsunamis*

Tsunamis may be described as a series of waves that are created when water in a lake or the ocean is rapidly displaced on

a huge scale. From a historical perspective, tsunamis have been called tidal waves because as they approach land, they turn into violent onrushing tide rather than cresting waves formed through wind action on the sea. Tsunamis may be triggered by a variety of natural events such as volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, explosions, landslides and even the effect of large cosmic bodies like meteorites crashing into the ocean. Their impacts can range from catastrophic to virtually unnoticeable. In fact, scientists theorize that it was a tsunami caused by a falling meteorite that led to the extinction of dinosaurs about a million years ago.

The term tsunami is derived from Japanese in a combination of two words “tsu” meaning to harbor and “nami” which refers to wave. Actually in Japanese, tsunami can be used for both singular and plural, but in English, an “s” is usually added to form the plural. There are no measurements yet found to prevent the occurrence of tsunamis and even predicting them is very difficult at best. However, there may be warning signals of imminent danger from an on-going tsunami. As in the Kamakura Japan incident as well as the case with residents of Ache in Indonesia, any sudden receding of the ocean from the coast could be a sign that a tsunami is on its way. Also, the nervous or frantic behavior of animals nearby from an onrushing tsunami could be another sign of danger. An incident of this kind was first recorded in Lisbon, Portugal. No one is sure why animals, unlike human beings, have this extraordinary capability to sense danger, but oceanographers speculate that this may be due to their ability to sense subsonic waves portending imminent danger. Finally, some regions of the world with high risks of tsunamis like Japan and the west coast of the United States have developed sophisticated early warning alarm systems. If some unusual activities are detected by sonar equipments at the bottom of the ocean, alarm bells will go off so that people can run very fast to higher grounds.

## *Tsunamis, Past and Present*

Even though it appears that tsunamis are a recent phenomenon, the fact is that they have been with human beings for a very long time. For instance, as far back as 1650 B.C., an eruption took place in the volcanic Greek Islands that created a tsunami, which devastated the north coast of Crete some forty five miles away. In 1607, there was an eruption in the Bristol Channel in England and Wales. The Vancouver Island in Canada suffered an eruption in 1700, while Lisbon, Portugal witnessed one in 1755. The Krakatau explosive eruption occurred in 1883 and the tsunami of New Found Land, Canada happened on November 18, 1929. Even including the Indian Ocean eruption in 2004, the most powerful eruption in history was the Great Chilean Earthquake in 1960 which recorded 9.5 on the Richter scale. It resulted in a tsunami which devastated Chile more than any other natural catastrophe in its history (Killer Waves, video recording television/Thirteen WNET production, October 2005).

## *Tornadoes*

Tornadoes are described as “a violent rotating column of air from a thunderstorm to the ground” (ASPA PA Times, October 2005). More than a thousand tornadoes have been recorded in the United States taking nearly one hundred lives and injuring at least two thousand people seriously.

Normally, the season when they occur most is from March to May, they often threaten the northern part of the United States in the summer months. They come in many forms and shapes as one of nature’s most ferocious forces, their most violent types can cause severe loss of lives. Whatever lies in their way for up to fifty miles can be wiped out in minutes. Also, they are said to be capable of setting off winds with speeds of nearly three hundred miles per hour. Just as the Richter scale is used to measure the

severity of an earthquake, the Fujita damage scale is used to categorize or rank the formidable strength of tornadoes.

The following is a highlight of the ranking system:

F0: (less than 73mph) – causes light or minor damage.

F1: (73 – 112mph) – causes moderate damage.

F2: (113-157mph) – causes considerable damage.

F3: (158- 206mph) – causes severe damage.

F4: (207-260mph) – causes devastating damage.

F5 (261-318mph) – causes astronomical damage.

An F5 tornado does not occur frequently, just as a category five hurricane is a rare event, but when it does, it can completely remove well-constructed buildings from their foundations and turn cars or trucks into debris which can be blown off hundreds of yards.

### *Description of Landslides*

Last, but by no means the least of the nature's most destructive furies are landslides or mudslides. They can be called debris flows, and they all happen as a consequence of the movement of masses of rock, earth or debris through slopes. Debris flows usually run through channels. Mudslides are said to be caused by disturbances in the natural stability of a slope following heavy rains or after volcanic eruptions and earthquakes. Besides, they can be created by rapid accumulation of water in the ground.

Area where excessive human tampering with the land has ravaged vegetation is particularly susceptible to mudslides. Such was the case when Mudslides followed in the wake mudslides followed in the wake of hurricane Stan in October of 2005 in Guatemala killing fifty two people and virtually burying the towns of Qua and Piedro Grande. Hundreds of houses were destroyed and the peoples' staple crops of beans and potatoes were severely

damaged. This put some peasant farmers and their families in food jeopardy because they lost as much as seventy five to one hundred percent of their crops. In spite of this serious threat to food security of the people, their government's response was characteristically slow. So, slow government action to mitigate peoples' deprivations caused by nature is a universal phenomenon.

### *Aftermaths of Nature's Calamities*

Nature's apocalyptic events may seem to happen like bolts from the blue skies, but all disasters occur in predictable phases (La Greca, et al, 2002). There are pre-impact preparation phase, impact phase, the recoiler or aftermath phase and the post impact phase. It is true that some of the events are "acts of God" about which little or nothing can be done to prevent them from happening, but there is much that can be done to mitigate their horrendous impacts if the right policy choices are made while planning and coordination are effective and effective (Weiss, Carol H., 1972).

As people viewed the description in the eyes of those trapped on rooftops and awaiting rescue or those holding out signs that read: "help, we are dying of hunger and thirst in America," all they ask is why? How can the government spend billions of dollars a week on Iraq, which turned not to be treat it advertised to be, but cannot do anything for four days about plight of its people at home? Some found it easy to blame it on rampant but hidden racism. Perhaps a better explanation is class or economic disparity which made the plight of the people living in the 9<sup>th</sup> ward of New Orleans almost predictable. It was no accident that more well-off residents live on higher grounds while the poor confined to the lowlands did not have the wherewithal to flee for their lives. Above all, role of a flawed urban policy needs to be examined on this issue. It is a maddening policy for the federal government not to have built the levees for a mere four billion dollars in the 1980s because the same repairs today will cost more than eighty five

billion dollars, although the President promised that no resources would be spared in rebuilding the city, it is doubtful that Congress is in the mood to allocate such vast at a time when the budget gap is yawning and while a foreign war rages on.

As Ernest Burgess suggests in his concentric zone hypotheses, where people find themselves in our cities is not an accident, but the results of conscious choice of elite economic and political leaders (Palen, 2005). Burgess carves out special arrangements in urban areas into five zones or concentric circles. The first is the Central Business District followed by a zone of transition inhabited by first immigrant settlements. The third zone is occupied by working class dwellings while the fourth accommodates middle class residential homes. The fifth is that of commuters. The location of the 9<sup>th</sup> ward residents in New Orleans is not difficult to guess on such a diagram.

### *Strategies for Survival*

To avoid repetition of tragedy of the Gulf States in future, local authorities should not wait until the eleventh hour to request federal assistance, and if they do, the federal government must move urgently. Local authorities should implement their evacuation plans with dispatch once meteorological evidence mounts about impending danger. If Mayor Ray Nagin had commandeered school buses to move his people out, not only would he have saved many lives, but those buses would not have been destroyed by flood waters. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) seemed to have handled disasters better, prior to its merger with the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). A way must be found to give it the kind of autonomy to make its decision making under the gun faster and more efficient. People who know next to nothing about emergency management should never again find themselves at the head of this vital organizational because of political connections. The response by ordinary Americans to this crisis was heartwarming, but the

best time to give charities may be before disasters strike, because they need money and time to plan. As a generous people, Americans should not grow weary of giving. In fact, this age demands the rekindling of America's cherished volunteering spirit.

### *Conclusion*

A prominent observer once described as waning, our communities' inclination to work together (Putnam, 2005). The handwriting is all over the wall in our decreasing interactions in community organizations like schools and churches or even playgrounds. The collapse of community and the death of what is called social capital abroad are more worrisome. Recent surveys have clearly shown that Americans are less inclined to give aid to disaster victims if the catastrophe occurs abroad (*New York Times*, November 4, 2005). We ushered in a new millennium a few years ago, but all is not well with the humanity, thanks to natural and man-made calamities. Human beings everywhere must redouble their efforts to act on their best natural impulse, which is to reach out to one another with love and understanding. The choice is stark: we either live together or perish together.

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