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Ionut Adrian GHIBANU¹

Abstract

A distinctive sign of human being, verbal communication is the only and original way of expression man was endowed with by his Creator. A political being par excellence, i.e. gifted with the power of communication, with the desire for communion and need for solidarity, man uses verbal language in order to express themselves and bond with their fellow people. Nowadays, public discourse has deepened its possibilities of attracting, seducing and supporting the achievement of the most various human interests, but as it strayed from the moral religious principles, it lost its substance and became an empty shell and an extremely efficient means of manipulation. Professional ethics is that which should underlie public relationships among a variety of socio-professional categories, correct slippages and provide a model of what coming out in the public space should be, because the estrangement from moral principles always leads to personal failures and catastrophes of human civilisation. The rupture between morality and religion, or, better yet, ethical foundation without religious principles leads to a personal and professional relativisation, which is not at all useful, and to the exclusively economical and financial prioritisation of human activities. This is obvious, particularly at the political, public level, but also in terms of public discourse in general. This study aims to thoroughly research these aspects, in terms of fulfilling this immediate need for the thirst for the truth, for identifying the causes of the immorality of public discourse endeavour and its remediation. The need for morality, authenticity and truth is increasing, because, as falsehood is publicly manifested, the desire for justice and public honesty also emerges.

Keywords: *discourse; ethics; morality; truth; public.*

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1. Introduction

This article deals with the ethical and moral issue of contemporary public discourse, especially that regarding the concrete national situation. We easily notice that public discourse is often false, misleading and without substance, serving petty and obscure purposes. Whether we talk about political, social or cultural discourse, we note that what they lack is a coherent axiological system. [1: 21] First of all, we should remark that mass media, in particular, lack a specific law that should correct their slippages, while political discourse is hyperbolised by empty promises, by the intention to accede to or keep power, without considering the main goal of any public dignity – serving the common good, development, prosperity and truth [2: 42]. Secondly, the absence of ethical principles is obvious in public discourse, in that it justifies almost anything, from corruption to the lack of patriotism, to masked atheism or evident materialism. In approaching this presentation, I believe that the lack of morality of public discourse comes from a precarious moral education of that who uses it, from the inexistence of fundamental ethical reference points, particularly religious, from the increase of the degree of secularisation of hope that was once eschatologically substantiated [3: 55]. The secularisation of society has gradually led to the weakening of religious principles, which used to vouch for a behaviour and a discourse that were once ethical, leaving room for relativity, tolerance to lies and wish to capture the attention and public power only out of the exclusive desire for gain and glory [4: 185]. As we can see, the need for ethics, morality, honest discourse and people with moral characters is a general desire of our society and of the global one. Therefore, in order for one to have a proper, moral, public discourse, one needs moral leaders of opinion that are responsible for the trust invested in them, whether it is the media space, the political, cultural or social one.

2. Theoretical Background

The need for the ethical foundation of public discourse emerges from the specialised scientific literature, in terms of the public manifestations of some leaders of opinions that are still considered to have a moral authority or as regards the desires of society, often surveyed through different sociological means. Here we have in mind the public discourse within the political sphere, where slippages are most obvious. Here, any idea, concept or issue is very easily and unscrupulously justified and, worse,

people who once, in some period of their life, supported a certain position, in another period take a totally different stand. Whether it be theologians, philosophers, journalists or politicians, they have expressed their desire and complied with the need for a radical renewal of our society, demanding that our public paradigm be fundamentally changed. As we have previously said, the lack of morality of public discourse is viewed as an educational, particularly moral, shortcoming. The absence of authentic morality has entailed the creation of fake public personalities promoting only small material interests. The second problem is that the secularisation of religious hope has initially led to the split between morality and religion and then to the relativisation of the ethic, which has produced the situation today [5: 20].

Another issue related to our topic is the fact that the absence of a legislation that should be quite restrictive on the slippages within the public space, especially on hypocrisy, lie and immorality, promoted directly or indirectly, has caused the disappearance of that critical sense of what is called the public opinion. The politicisation of polarisations in the social, cultural and media spheres has led to the emergence of partisanships supporting ideological and materialistic interests, which has transcended any border of morality and common sense. From Andrei Pleșu [6: 18] and Gabriel Liiceanu [7: 35], to Mihai Șora [8: 27] or Dan Puric [9; 45], from Father Galeriu [10: 99] and Sorin Dumitrescu [11: 21] to Ion Rațiu, Corneliu Coposu or Doina Cornea and to Father Stăniloae [12] and Ioan Alexandru – all have stressed upon the urgency of an axiology that should renew Romanian public discourse. Worldwide, it is to be noticed that beyond ideologies or conflicts of redesigning the spaces of influence of the great powers or of multinational companies guided only by the concept of profit at any cost, resources and outlets, there is a wish for a renewal of public discourse which has led to many discussions on such topics that expose the hypocrisy of contemporary public discourse. Voices such as those of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn [13: 33], Vaclav Havel [14: 76], Miłosz Czesław [15: 78] or Mario Vargas Llosa [16: 56] expose the double-standard language of the so-called superior economic or state interests, which falsify public discourse depending on the interests of the moment. Revolutionary events, more or less conducted from the post-Soviet space, have revealed a world dominated not by the sincere desire for democracy, prosperity, freedom and the better of the human being, but only by the fulfilment of strictly materialistic interests. Just as today, under the guise of democracy and freedom, many fundamental human rights are limited, or under the pretext of tolerance, Christians, in particular, are being religiously persecuted in traditionally Christian countries or in the Middle or Far East.

3. Argument of the paper

Zoon politikon – man has the vocation of communication and communion ingrained deep inside, ever since Creation. [17: 97]. In time, many have amazed and delighted us with the beauty of their expositions, but mostly with the practical and concrete experience of the moral principles they have invoked. Contemporaneity shows us numerous public discourses, often alluring and beautiful, which in most cases have one important ontological flaw: they are not based on ethics, have no moral principles and are far from the truth. Our world is convincingly and shingly wrapped up, cultivates the show, but is devoid of moral firmness, of professional values and of faithfulness to the truth. For two millennia, those with innocent blood on their hands have been wondering, with false profundity: What is the truth? And it is precisely the truth that they have massacred through deceit, delusion, lie and many other petty interests! [18: 29]

The main idea of this study is that we need morality because we rely on the religious premise that man is created as just, good and eager for truth; thus falsity, deception and lie are nothing more but the tools of evil, both in personal and in public life, and the need for renewal is great because it comes from the depths of the human being, from its ontological fundamental matrix. Therefore, no one can say that they have been willingly drawn by immorality, for, deep inside, man is a good, beautiful and moral being and this is, in fact, the model of life that is worth following [19: 55]. All of us realise that we are in a desperate need of models, of authentic models, of real people that should be sincere, honest and responsibly engaged in doing good and in being guided by the truth. Measure and balance are such necessary virtues in our personal and public lives and in their absence excesses of all kinds, tension, conflict and so on ruin, little by little, the ship of our existence, making it unbearable. Balance and measure are actually one's concrete means of manifestation and expressing one's love for their fellow creatures.

4. Arguments to support the thesis

The arguments supporting the abovementioned ideas are as follows: public discourse needs ethical foundation, for it must serve the common good [20: 54]. Man is fundamentally good deep inside and has the sense of truth inscribed in his intimacy, therefore the desire for good, truth, beauty and morality is an ontological necessity. It is true only and only if we ground morality on the religious axiology, which is, in fact, the only one that can

confer force, objectivity and viability on it. The contemporary world is increasingly embraced by this ethical spirit, by the need for truth, justice, correctness and honesty. It somehow seems to be a revenge, over time, of the 1960's/1970's! Another argument is that prosperity, social harmony and peace can rely only on truth and justice. The honesty of public discourse also becomes apparent in the opinions expressed by the civil society, naturally when it is not infested by some materialistic interests in the form of research grants, scholarships or other such projects [21: 64]. It is important that, despite any restrictions, people communicate their message, while the simple, natural and authentic inner desire to serve the truth exists and comes out. The people of our time realise that the lack of moral education leads to the emergence of immoral behaviours, to moral and material corruption and to poverty, to the restriction of rights and poor education of the younger generation, which seriously endangers the future of our country and of our world. Family, Church, School, Media and society as a whole have the duty to contribute to the improvement and moral renewal of our world, for without this there can never be peace, justice, harmony, truth or prosperity [22: 185].

5. Arguments to argue the thesis

The main counterargument of the above endeavour is related to the fact that not all people connect ethics and moral with religion or a certain religion, and the objectors argue that more often than not, in the name of religion, abuses have been made and truth has suffered! Today many of the social dissenting movements have their own political, economic and social interests, which is fully dealt with by the daily media, and this seems to be true, at least in part. Another counterargument is that sometimes it is not the thirst for truth that leads to coalitions of what appears to be the authentic public opinion, but the various ideological controversies, well politically supported and argued! [23: 29] Furthermore, many personalities disputing the current view of the contemporary world and life, in which falsehood and immorality are everywhere, are also ideologically, politically, socially and even economically engaged and this might seem to affect their apparent objectivity and moral efficiency [24: 55]. In some countries, religion and religious institutions have supported either left-wing ideologies (see Central and South America, with the Catholic Church) or consumerist ideologies (in the North American space, with religious groups that emerged from the Reformation); also, in the interwar period in Europe, they backed some

extremist right-wing or left-wing movements! Moreover, we should take into account that there can be objectivity only in relation to an axiological system, which in its turn is necessarily bound by a religion or an ideology. *Tertium non datur!*

6. Dismantling the arguments against

The above are, of course, the most important counterarguments and they can be easily dismantled, naturally as they can just as easily be developed. But, if we were to argue against them, we would clearly see that, for instance, by not relating morality and ethics to a religious system means to relativise them in a way that escapes any real ideological control and to bring them into the space of fast, frequent and substantiated metamorphoses, which would diminish their credibility! [25: 23] We must admit that the movements of social and moral renewal, though supported by certain interested groups, often call a spade a spade, and without someone's support they could not exist and manifest themselves! Ideologies confront and the battlefield is the space of our personal and public freedom; it is up to our education, training, strength and exercise of virtues to know to discern between what is correct and what is not, between what is true and what is false, moral and immoral [26: 57]. The fact that some people or some religious institutions have collaborated with one ideology or another does not mean that religion itself or those particular religions, denominations, cults or churches have officially adopted one ideology or another! It would be completely false to believe that! [27: 22] They are not considered to be infallible and sometimes some error is from time to time acknowledged. The most rigorous and objective axiological moral system is provided by religion, for the system of rewards and punishments, here and in eschatology, quashes any excess and moral slippage, at least at the level of intentionality!

7. Conclusions

The conclusions must state the reasons of supporting the thesis proposed. As we have seen so far, the need for a public discourse based on moral values is a stringent urgency of contemporaneity, for, as the ethical slippage has worsened, the sense of good, honesty and morality accompany the aspirations of our contemporaries [28: 56]. We find in scientific philosophical, ethical, theological and public relations works that the need to relate to some ethical principles and to a rigorous moral system is a sine qua non ambition. That is why, this study aims to emphasise this desideratum, by

presenting the level of expectancy, the main guiding ideas, the arguments, counterarguments and also the dismantling of the latter. It is a certainty that in order for us to exist and live in peace, justice, solidarity and harmony, we need a moral regularisation of public discourse, a marginalisation of excesses and an improvement of the pro-social and moral education. Along with the presentation of the contemporary paradigm, of the status of contemporary ethical discourse and of public expectation, as well as of the solutions proposed, all this represents a genuine element of novelty of my study.

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