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The equivalence of religious facts. Transferring meanings from Eliade to Culianu

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In the early 90's, after the fall of the Communist regime, Ioan Petru Culianu was received as a disciple of Mircea Eliade. Readers saw Culianu only as a follower of Eliade, especially in Romania, where Eliade became very famous, with almost nothing new to say. When things settled down after the shock of his death, analysts and exegetes revised his oeuvre, more or less critically. Most of these specialists agreed that far from being merely an adherent, Culianu is the author of a significant oeuvre; and his approach is completely different from Eliade's. In any case, there is one important point where their visions converge: this article calls it "the equivalence of religious facts". The present study delimits and analyzes this idea from Eliade's texts and its meaning, it examines the way it is transferred in Culianu's viewpoint, and which are (or could be) the consequences of such a view.

Key-words: *Mircea Eliade, Ioan Petru Culianu, equivalence of religious facts, religious peace*

1. Introduction

Eliade's scientific work is for sure criticizable; however, as some books proved (e.g. Rennie 2007) parts of it are still inspiring; it is also true that it cannot be purely and simply ignored or totally denied (David 2011b). What is more, Eliade was not only a scholar of Religious Studies. He was also an author of fiction and a philosopher (without a philosophical system, obviously). As a matter of fact, in Romania, Eliade studied Philosophy at the University of Bucharest. His approach to and meditation on religion was predominantly philosophical. So, beside religious studies' scholars, it is conceivable that literary theorists and philosophers of religion could also (re)discover his work and usefully reflect on his thinking.

Out of Eliade's scientific works this article delineates an aspect noticed by few writers, thinkers and scholars, but otherwise neglected, and not developed as it deserves. One of Eliade's ideas, central in his writings, is that all religious facts have the same "value" or importance; in other words, as much neutral as

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possible, they are all *equivalent*. By "religious facts" Eliade (1992b: 21) understands all the so-called "sacralities": myths, rituals, religious ideas, beliefs, objects, divinities, symbols, etc. Eliade treats all these religious facts in the similar way, giving them an equal status.

Matei Călinescu (1978, 80) observed "his [Eliade's] great spiritual openness and his profound tolerance". Emil M. Cioran (1986, 86) asked himself after Eliade's death: who was Eliade? "I think I can answer that: he was a spirit opened to all values exclusively spiritual". And sometime prior he had already stated: "he [Eliade] equates all religions", refusing to prioritize (Cioran 1993, 124). Ioan Petru Culianu wrote in *Mahaparinirvana*: "Mircea Eliade had left a disposition that he [Nathan Scott] should administer him the Extreme Unction, as a sign of fraternity between races and religions. [...] His death itself spread peace." [our trans.] (Culianu 1995, 288-289)

In an anthology also dedicated to Mircea Eliade shortly after his death, the historian Neagu Djuvara reveals a personal literary experience and writes about Eliade:

> I owe him partially the thirst that came over me to enter a little the mystery of the other worlds that are surrounding us and which remain unknown to us. He has struggled continually so we could exit our European egocentrism and discover India, China, Pre-Columbian America, and Africa… Somehow, this enthusiast for 'ultra-pre-history' was also very modern in thought. [our trans.] (Djuvara 1986, 131)

At the end of his dense exegesis, Bryan Rennie writes: "Eliade's system cannot support the valorization of any exclusive religion, but rather of religion itself, of religiousness, which he perceives to be a human universal. His thought is inherently, almost *a priori*, pluralist" [original emphasis] (Rennie 1999, 282), so that it is finally *pro-democratic* (Rennie 1999, 196).

In his *Afterword* to a collection of articles written by Ioan Petru Culianu, Eduard Iricinschi (2003, 205), unaware of the viewpoint expressed by Bryan Rennie, talks in similar terms about Eliade's preface to *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (1986), to which he was the Editor-in-chief: "The Preface of *The Encyclopedia of Religion* insists on the same theme of democratization of religious fact."

This is quite accurate. As it will be seen in what follows, Eliade's attitude concerning religion/s is explicitly democratic. Nevertheless, to exclude any confusion between the political term "democratic" and Eliade's attitude regarding religious facts this paper uses a neutral term, namely "equivalence".

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2. Mircea Eliade on the equivalence of religious facts

What does Eliade himself have to say on this matter? This paper will review some of Eliade's writings to delineate more precisely the idea of the equivalence of religious facts.

In his first volume of essays, *Solilocvii*, published in 1932, Mircea Eliade (1991h, 59) makes a remark worthy of investigation; it is maybe a little cryptic at a first sight, like a paradox in the sense of some Biblical passages: "The religions, if there was more than one, they would be the *same*; but because it is *one*, they are different" [our translation]. And further, the explanation which may lead us to think of an extreme relativism, but in fact is only the equivalence of the faiths:

> And the unity of 'religions' could be clearly seen when every man will have his own way to get close to God, when the Supreme being will directly reveal Himself to everybody, without the precedence of tradition or of collective experience [our trans.] (Eliade 1991h, 59)

Two years later, he would complain about how "depressing [was] this opacity [of the Westerner] for the understanding and justification for zones of culture other than ours" (Eliade 1991g, 50).

In his early years, Eliade had an egalitarian conception of all cultures, regardless of their size or of the degree of value ascribed to them by the Western world: "cultures or civilizations are not in a relation of inferiority or superiority. It is absurd to say that the Australian-Asian civilization, for example, is inferior to the Indian civilization and this one inferior to the Mediterranean civilization" (Eliade 1991g, 86-87).

As any philosopher, Eliade operates with his own concepts (Sacred, Hierophany, Sacred-Profane Dialectics, and so on). We will not discuss here whether Eliade's concepts are true or false: Eliade's theory is internally homogenous, so what is important for this analysis is how Eliade operates with these categories. For example, talking about the subject of the symbolism of the Center and about the *Axis Mundi*, the Cosmic Tree, and so on, Eliade's conclusion confirms the hypothesis of this article:

> After the Syrian book *The Treasure Cave*, Adam was created in the center of the Earth, in the same place where later Jesus' Cross has been raised. [...] It is precisely affirmed that the human redemption - through the Passion of Christ - was possible due to a return to the 'center', exactly as all the traditions affirm [our trans.] (Eliade 1991a, 502).

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In other words, even though it is about the Christian tradition or about the faith of a forgotten tribe, for Eliade it is symbolism which put them on equal footing. This is not a blasphemy, as a (more or less fundamentalist) Christian believer might consider.

Eliade has long meditated on religious issues, more on Christian ones when he was young, and after the Indian experience, on religion in general. Not only India contributed to his openness, but also the *Criterion* episode. *Criterion* is the short name for "Criterion Association of Arts, Letters and Philosophy". It was designed for art exhibitions, cultural performances, and predominantly for conferences on subjects of all kind:

> Freud, Gandhi, Lenin, Ch. Chaplin, Mussolini, Proust, Gide, Bergson, Picasso, Stravinsky, the contemporary Romanian novel, Romanian and American modern art, American culture, Asia seen from the Occident, etc. The conferences were actually veritable symposia with five-six speakers situated on different positions regarding the subject… [our trans.] (Antonesei 2007, 53).

People from the most diverse domains were invited to speak; even if they had totally opposed cultural, spiritual and even political preoccupations. Although it lasted for only two years (1932-1934), the Criterion experience was a really democratic one.

> The members [of Criterion] came from different cultural backgrounds (literature, philosophy, journalism, painting, choreography, etc.); [...] Criterion's members had very different spiritual (and political) perspectives. [...] The Association was an example of intellectual cooperation, of open dialogue, of genuine confrontations of opinions. [our trans.] (Antonesei 2007, 41)

Eliade did not change his egalitarian conception after the closing of the Criterion Association. In 1939 he was still affirming the equivalence of religious facts:

> *Any* religious act no matter how 'primitive' it is (ritual, worship, liturgy, etc.), is an attempt to recreate the cosmic unity and to reintegrate the human. Because in *any* religious act a paradox is reached, the 'coincidence of opposites' is fulfilled. [our trans., emphasis added] (Eliade, 1991e: 361)

In another volume published in 1943, Eliade made a declaration of faith worth remembering:

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> There is solidarity among humans; and in their spiritual destiny, not only on low levels, in their instincts and economic interests. [...] If we interpret the *Parsifal* episode, we can say that the entire nature suffers from human indifference toward the central question. So, solidarity would extend not only to the whole human community which we belong to, but even to the cosmic life... [our trans.] (Eliade 1991b, 265)

It is altogether accurate that Eliade should quote examples from various places on Earth, but this can also be seen as evidence of his vision of the equivalence of religious facts. For example, Eliade (1991f, 15-17 and 19-21) mentions together documents from the Mesopotamian and Sumerian culture, from the Altaic peoples, or from Egypt, Iran, Babylon, Judea and India. Also, from this perspective, one can understand the statement of beliefs around the New Year about the return of the dead, namely that these beliefs are "almost universally widespread" (Eliade 1991f, 53), without ignoring, because Eliade is not so naive, that "there are, and we would be tempted to write that there *have to* be significantly differences" [our trans., original emphasis] (Eliade 1991f, 61).

From now on Eliade will continue to affirm unequivocally this idea of religious equivalence, in worldwide circulation books published during his exile in France and in the United States of America, not as before World War II, in a language ignored by the rest of the world, such as Romanian.

Eliade's clearest statement about providing "equal validity" to any religious document, namely what we called here the equivalence of religious facts, can be found in *Traité*. At the beginning he states:

> We are in the presence of a huge documentary and heteroclite material: a Melanesian cosmogony myth or a Brahman sacrifice have the same right to be considered as well as mystic texts of Saint Theresa or of Nichiren, or an Australian totem, a primitive rite of initiation, the symbolism of Borobudur temple, the ceremonial costume and the dance of a Siberian Shaman, the sacred stones encountered almost everywhere, agrarian ceremonies, myths and rites of the Great Goddess, the establishment of a king in ancient societies or superstition of precious stones and so on [...] each category of documents (myths, rites, superstitions, etc.) are nonetheless equally valuable if we want to understand the religious phenomenon. [our trans.] (Eliade 1992b, 22)

In the end, the same conclusion:

> *anything* can be the symbol or may play the role of a symbol, from the most rudimentary kratophany (which 'symbolizes' in one way or another, the magical-religious power incorporated in a certain object), to Jesus

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> Christ who, from one point of view, can be considered a 'symbol' of the miracle of divinity incarnation in man [our trans., original emphasis] (Eliade 1992b, 408)

One of Eliade's main ideas that he returns to too many times, is that of the necessary dialogue between cultures, especially between the Occident which assumes the primacy and superiority and which functioned for a long time on the principle "convert or kill" (Dourley 2010, 18 and 166), and the other cultures; this dialogue is so necessary today, when the civilizations "clashed" (Huntington, 1997) more than ever:

> [T]he Western culture, if it does not want to become provincial, has to establish a dialogue with the other non-European cultures [...]. We must not forget that all these cultures have a religious structure that means they appear and constitute themselves as religious valorization of the world and human existence. [...] Therefore, it is important not only to know the religious values of other cultures, but mainly to put ourselves in their perspective and see ourselves as we appear in their eyes. [our trans.] (Eliade, 1991d: 155)

This is actually the most democratic way to understand other people: to put yourself in their shoes and see the world through their eyes. This is the simplest way people can accept each other, in spite of their differences; in this respect individuals can understand each other and live in peace.

These ideas which express so clearly the conception of the equivalence of religious facts will be resumed by Eliade in most of his writings (Eliade 1994, 21, 112, 147, 194-196, 205, 218; 1992a, 13, 37, 168, 186, and so on); even in his most specialized works (like Eliade 1997, 12; 1993b, 309). It would be useless to quote them all here. Only one more, taken from his opus magnum will be enough; Eliade's *History* completes his work of a lifetime dedicated to the study of religion. In this oeuvre Eliade affirms from the first paragraph his main idea of equivalence of religious facts: "for the historian of religions, any manifestation of the sacred is important: any rite, any myth, any belief or divine figure reflects the experience of the sacred [...]" [our trans.] (Eliade 1991c, 9).

Briefly, it can be said after reviewing all these quotations that throughout his life Eliade believed in the human spirit and in its profound unity. That includes the shady period of his early thirties, when he opted for a questionable political orientation, and also wrote several articles in support of this choice (Eliade, 2001), which cannot be ignored nor exaggerated. As Dan Petrescu (2003, 418-423) reveals in his ironic and insightful style, before his exile, Eliade was an enthusiast and an exalted person; it is no wonder that his articles are full of contradictions and exaggerations. But, at least on the matter at hand, Eliade's

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oeuvre proved to be constant and coherent. After the Second World War, along with maturity, sagacity helped Eliade become the figure that people would get used to, that of an elderly erudite expert in many religious aspects. From his position, once so popular, he assumed that his books would succeed to transmit his belief in a complete equivalence of religious facts, which meant, in other words, a fully and continued understanding among all people.

3. Ioan Petru Culianu's point of view

Anyone who read Culianu's books on dualistic Gnosis, Renaissance's Magic or ascension of the soul, will notice his maximum specialization and efforts to reach exhaustiveness. Unlike Eliade, Culianu did not like generalization, regardless of the fact that he was an erudite who used comparative methods too; and, also an encyclopedist, maybe "one of the last encyclopedists of the history of religion" (Iricinschi 2003, 201).

Philosophically, if Eliade can be considered an ontologist, Culianu – certainly without ignoring ontology – was more attracted to epistemology. Methodologically, Eliade's theory is phenomenological and morphological, and only towards the end (Eliade, 1976, 1978, and 1983) a combination of phenomenology and history; Culianu's first research interest in Religious Studies was historical, but in his last decade of life it changed into a cognitive approach; he also tried to integrate in his studies other scientific theories, e.g. Einstein's theory of relativity or Mandelbrot's model of fractals (see David 2014). There is also another important difference between these two scholar's theories, as Aurel Codoban (2002) reveals in an illustrative article: Eliade's most important concepts are the Sacred, and its manifestation in the world; Eliade named it "hierophany". For Culianu, important was kratophany, which is the manifestation of power.

> If we attempt to concentrate the difference between Eliade and Ioan Petru Culianu in a short formula, we could say it is about a different perception of the sacred: as form and as force, as 'power', namely about the difference between hierophany and kratophany in the manifestation of the sacred. (Codoban 2002, 93-94).

The author is right except for one aspect, essential in fact: Culianu's preference for kratophany is obvious, but it is not related to the sacred, as explained in the above quotation: it is about power in itself. We believe that Codoban's article did not insist enough on this aspect, but it adequately showed that Culianu's point of view is not at all similar to the *tremendum* of Rudolf Otto (2006).

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Culianu did not use the term "sacred", except when he was very young (Culianu 2012, 166-189), no more than twenty-five years old, and still slightly under the influence of Eliade's work; or, justifiably, when he was talking about Eliade's thinking. Culianu used "power" in relation to "religion", and the "State". For example, in one of his main books (Culianu, 1994) dealing, among other subjects, with Kratophany, the word "sacred" appears only when Culianu quoted Giordano Bruno. And in his study (Culianu 1996b) that focuses exactly on this matter, i.e. power, Culianu relates it with "religion" not to reveal the "power of religion" but the relation between religion and power. Culianu overturns the classical perspective, and analyses what power is in itself, and discusses the role of Religion as an ally of the individual in his/her fight against the norms (maintained by the State). Culianu also preferred the phrase "specialists of power" instead of Eliade's expression "specialists of the sacred": Shamans, Mystics, Yogi, Ascetics, Sufis, and so on; this does not mean that power equals the sacred, but it denotes that some exceptional individuals could surpass the norms of society; by their status they had (as a matter of fact, they won) the *power* to exceed the norms (Culianu 1996b, 185-187).

Religion is (or, in the Western society was) the one which provides and preserves the rituals. Some of them are rituals of compensation (others are rituals of integration), which signifies they help people abolish the norm periodically and as a result to feel that individuals also have the power, at least for a while; but all this happened in a controlled environment. Little by little the role of Religion was taken by the State, which no longer provided compensation rituals. The State proved to be incapable of managing the situation, so the result is the most unfortunate one: "the power which in pseudo-specific societies [i.e. traditional or archaic societies] the individual had to lose and regain ritually *has returned today to the condition of pure aggressiveness.*" [our trans.] (Culianu 1996b, 219)

What is Religion, in Culianu's view? This is not an easy question to answer, because the author himself did not give a concise and clear answer. Anyway, it can be inferred from his books and articles. As it was said, in his last studies Culianu's approach to religion changed, from a historical to a cognitive one. Starting from Eliade's idea of the autonomy of religion, Culianu (2002) states (and he assumed that Eliade would also agree with this) that religion is an autonomous *system*:

> The *system* means that all phenomena which refer to a single unity are linked and integrated in a complex structure that generates them. By being a mental process, this system goes on the path created by the computational rules of the mind. [...] *Autonomous* opposed *heteronomous*; it means that religion, in its origin and function, is not the secondary product of other systems (for example, of economy, or of society); it does not depend on them and does not generate them. [our trans.] (2002, 339-340)

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The primary level that generates religion is also the simplest; the rules of generating are in fact very simple. For example, reincarnation, a belief that is shared by many individuals and societies, in many places: regardless of the fact that "their conceptions are different, they all start from a similar premise, *an inevitable premise*, we can say" [our trans.] (Culianu 2002, 344), explicitly we have a body and a "soul" separated from the body. This immediately raises the question of the relationship between the body and the soul. The possibilities are: 1. The soul exists before the body; 1'. The soul does not exist before the body; 2. The soul is created; 2'. The soul is not created.

Different people preferred different combinations of these premises: but whatever their choice is, there are only four possible combinations (1 and 2; 1' and 2; 1 and 2'; finally 1' and 2') (Culianu 2002, 345). These dual elements that form doctrines of the soul could be seen as the bricks in a construction; in general, that is the way the religions are composed too. Culianu himself uses the phrase "intellectual bricks" to exemplify his ideas better.

> Metensomatosis, Creationism, and Traducianism are not only the three main doctrines the scholar stumbles upon all over late antiquity; they are necessarily three of the most common logical solutions to the question of the relation between mind and body. As such, they are atemporal and ubiquitous. (Culianu 1992, 56-58)

All these "intellectual bricks" form what Culianu named "ideal objects". They are systems of ideas "operating in a logical dimension and cannot go beyond their (generally quite simple) premises. Systems are fractalic in nature, that is, they tend to produce solutions ad infinitum according to (simple) production rules. And they interact with each other in quite strange ways, forming other systems whose general pattern of uncanny complexity may be called history." (Culianu 1992, 7) Religions, although some of them more complex than others, concludes Culianu (1992, 19), are nothing else but "a combination of *ideal objects*"; even the most complex system (i.e. religion) starts from few premises (one couple is actually enough, affirms Culianu) then multiplies continuously in time (i.e. human history). Culianu extensively illustrated his theory in his last three books (Culianu 1992, 1996a, Eliade and Culianu 1993).

So, if religion is a process started by the human mind and transmitted in time from one mind to another in a complex way, following a simple set of rules, and because the human mind is structurally (biologically) the same in all humans (what is more, it is unmodified since *homo sapiens*), the logical conclusion is that there are no profound differences between religions. This leads us to the affirmation of the equivalence of religious facts. Culianu (1992, 267) states this idea in a more nuanced and subtle way:

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> Early Christian theology and Western dualism were 'ideal objects' or systems in a logical dimension, having nothing intrinsically to do with the games of power that were played in their name, which belonged to other dimensions of reality. How the interaction of systems took place in history is another story.

A story Ioan Petru Culianu wanted to write about in his next books; he also planned to develop his theory and to test its applicability in science too, but he was forcibly stopped by the misuse of an individual power. The conclusions of his book are also indicators of his future projects, and as such deserve an extensive quotation:

> Among ideal objects, or mind games played with ideas, it is thus predictable that not only religion but also philosophy and science are [...] built according to the same binary principle. [...]
>
> Among this book's conclusions are also others that should be explored further. One is that mind games [ideal objects] have necessarily similar mechanisms (because the way the mind works and its capacity have remained unchanged for at least sixty thousand years), and therefore systems that have been sufficiently run in time would tend to overlap not only in shape but in substance. With complex data at hand, we should be able to demonstrate that portions of the map of the Buddhist system would overlap with portions of the Christian system with portions of German idealism with portions of modern scientific thought, because all systems are infinite and tend to explore all possibilities given to them. Accordingly, when sufficiently extended, their maps of reality would certainly coincide. [our trans.] (Culianu 1992, 268)

The author also adds:

> [F]rom a systemic perspective [...] there should be no contradiction among religions either, for where data of sufficient complexity are available, religions can be shown to correspond not only in operation (which is the operation of the mind) but likewise in the territories of reality they explore. And even when religions do not overlap, they still can be contemplated as the morphodynamic development of certain basic rules, perfectly intelligible and sometimes even sensible. [our trans.] (Culianu 1992, 268)

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4. Conclusions

For scholars of Religious Studies the implication of Eliade's view for all religious facts, named here *equivalence*, is probably not essential. To the best of our knowledge, there are no savants who claim that their area of research (i.e. a religion or a part of religion) is more important than that of their peers. So, the hypothesis confirms that their research is significant regardless what part of religion is studied. The scholar can benefit from Culianu's theory if s/he desires by extracting a new method of research, or an extension of their own theories, in a cognitive key. Anyhow, the implications are more than important at the societal level.

For a better understanding of the meaning of the concept of *the equivalence of religious facts* here is an example: if the members (no matter their number) of a community believe in a deity (in Allah, or in God, or in Vishnu, or in Yahweh, and so on), it is the entitlement of that community to have that belief. But if there is another community, again irrespective of its size, that believes that a *Rock* is sacred, or considers that God just does not exist, it is also their right to think that. None of these communities should try to convince – not even a single person of – the other community that the first community is right and the others (the second community, the third, and so on) are wrong. Hypothetically, taken to the limit, this principle can be stated like this: if at some point in a possible future the entire population *except* one person, will believe in something unique (e.g. the same God, or the same Sacred Tree) and only *one* person will not believe that – maybe that person will believe in something else or in nothing – then the rest of the population of the Earth has to leave that person to have his/her own belief and never try to prove that he/she is wrong and the rest is right – because it is not their number that gives them relevance (the reverse is similar: if the entire population minus one believes in no deity, and only one person believes that Deity exists, the same principle applies). It is a matter of personal faith and in issues related to faith there is no right and wrong, as long as that belief *remains in one's mind* and does not lead to actions that can hurt, annoy or disturb other people.

Therefore, that single person should be left alone to believe whatever s/he wants. S/he should not be excluded from society, nor converted. That individual must be treated with the same respect like any other member of the community. In return, s/he will similarly treat the community, and any of its members respectively.

Although faith (or religious belief) is a concept, a lot of people are used to considering it as coming from the heart, not the brain. But all human thoughts and feelings occur into the brain. Philosophically speaking, and not at all theologically, "God" is a concept, too (Le Poidevin 1996, 107-123). A very powerful one, indeed, and neurological research proved that Culianu was right.

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There is one declaration of Eliade, which precisely expresses his opinion, but at the same time meets Culianu's point of view, not in expression, but in essence. In fact, it is not about God but about his leading concept of the *Sacred*. The latter is in Eliade's philosophical point of view the most important one; and the broadest, too:

> It is unfortunate that we do not have at our disposal a more precise word than 'religion' to denote the experience of the sacred. [...] But perhaps it is too late to search for another word, and 'religion' may still be a useful term provided we keep in mind that it does not necessarily imply the belief in God, gods, or ghosts, but refers to the experience of the sacred (Eliade 1969, i).

As shown above, Culianu excludes the "sacred" from his definition of religion, because it is a concept that cannot be either verified or falsified. Beyond that, there is a complementarity in their visions, in the field of the equivalence of religion/s and religious facts.

The mentioned statement, which belongs to Eliade, and Eliade alone, as it was published in the American original, *The Quest*, is: "The 'Sacred' is an element in the structure of consciousness, not a stage in the history of consciousness" (Eliade 1969, i). But already one year before, in 1968, Eliade noted exactly the same passage in his journal, which was written exclusively in Romanian: "[...] 'sacrul' este un element în *structura* conştiinţei, nu un moment în *istoria* conştiinţei" [original emphasis] (Eliade 1993a, 592).

In Romanian "conştiinţă" has more meanings, which can be translated like this: 1. Mind. 2. Consciousness. 3. Conscience. It also has different other meanings in diverse expressions, which does not concern this study. In the text quoted, first of all Eliade used "conştiinţă" with the meaning of "human mind" in general. He was thinking of the concept of Sacred, and the universality of it, as a pattern. We should not forget that Eliade was a philosopher more than a scientist, so it is not so surprising that he interpreted his concept of Sacred as something more similar to a Kantian category of the intellect. Actually, in his last years, Eliade was sorry because, instead of the term *pattern* he used *archetype*, which creates confusion with Jung's theory. So, the correct unambiguous translation should be: "The 'Sacred' is an element in the *structure* of the mind, not a stage in the *history* of the mind".

To return to the Romanian text quoted above, it must also be said that the italics which appear only in the Romanian original, strengthen his idea of the importance of the fact that the Sacred should be understood as a constituent of the human mind, and not as something that appears accidentally, from time to time, in the history of humanity.

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What happened from time to time in human history, and still happens nowadays, is the interference of politics with religion; yet Eliade does not assert it specifically in this manner (related with Politics, or Power), he always supports the autonomy of Religion. As it was presented in this article, Culianu was interested in the relationship State versus Religion. There is a principle that can be simplified in a sentence: politics and religion must be completely and absolutely separated (Jensen, 2008). This means the Religion/s has/ve to stop trying to replace the role of the State, and also that Politics (i.e. the State) should abandon the religious discourse, the use of religion and the appeal to religious concepts. In fact, a government has to create the proper legal frame for religious activities; one of the first rules should be: believe in what Gods you want without *disturbing* other persons in any way. The rule can be completed with: one should never try to convert anybody else. Each is entitled to his/her own faith; even if it is only one person's faith. Believers should have the right to organize themselves in private in any way, as long as they respect that rule, and also common sense (because a belief as: a stone is sacred only when it is thrown at somebody's window, is not acceptable). After establishing this framework, politics should permanently withdraw from religious life. This also means exclusion of state subsidies to churches and religious cults. The citizens (the believers) should be left to support their faith alone, also materially, if that is what they want. And all citizens should respect their fellows' beliefs since all of them have the same root, i.e. the mind, and are all equivalent.

As Culianu (1992, 268) presumed, probably the "fundamentalists of any religion" will not be favorable to these points of view regarding (any) religions. The conclusion he wrote not long before his permanent silence, is still valid today (certainly not less than in the past):

> Such a game, played by the wrong minds in the wrong places, may seriously jeopardize two of the noblest conquests of Western mind and society: that freedom of thinking out everything to its ultimate consequences should never be interfered with by any authority; and that the dangers of freedom are not lessened by its suppression. [our trans.] (Culianu 1992, 268-269)

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