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COMMUNICATION, RELIGION AND POLITICS IN THE WESTERN WORLD OF THE DIGITAL AGE

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Abstract: Today we are witnessing a revival of the spirit of religious fundamentalism in the political discourse of the European Union countries. A discourse of violence unfolds in the form of a new alliance between religion and politics is present among some Western political leaders. These forms of political communication are facilitated, on the one hand, by the political discourse of the populist parties, and on the other hand, using communication technologies to transmit political messages. They occur despite the fact that one of the gains of the postmodern world was the secularization of public life, the rule of law and political communication. In order to understand what is happening to political constructions in the era of the development of artificial intelligence, we have resorted to the perspective on communication formulated by Aurel Codoban, one of the most important Romanian philosophers. An unavoidable theme is that of otherness and identity construction. Artificial intelligence cannot be constituted as an otherness in relation to which the human being can build his own identity or the identity of the community to which he belongs. However, in the digital age, communication constructs reality, and in this process, communication technologies and especially artificial intelligence can be instrumentalized in the construction of discourse that can lead to the construction of identity in general and political identity in particular. Everything takes place in the context of a dialectic of the sacred and the profane in which the development of communication technologies enhances the collaboration between the human being and artificial intelligence.

Key words: Communication, artificial intelligence, the communication society, otherness, religion and politics, dialectic of the sacred and the profane, Aurel Codoban.

1. Europe Face to Face with the Dialectic of the Sacred and the Profane

To reveal what is happening in the relationship between communication, religion and politics in the digital age, I will focus on the vision of one of the most important Romanian philosophers. As a semiotician, hermeneutician, philosopher of religions and philosopher of communication, Aurel Codoban is interested in his more recent research on the relationship between knowledge and communication in the context of the development of communication technologies and artificial intelligence. In the work *Communication in the Age of its Artificial Reproduction*, an important starting point is the analysis of Walter Benjamin's (2002) perspective on the work of art. His thinking is used as a good opportunity for his own reflections on religion, politics and communication. Starting from the idea that art was linked to religion and ritualization, he notes that in the digital age there is a tendency for religion to no longer be given the role of source of authenticity, art becoming rather the prerogative of the political game.

A dissociation of religion from politics is lucrative here, a deeper perspective when the issue of communication and the intervention of artificial intelligence intervenes in the relational analysis. This transition from religion to politics and then to communication marks a loss of authenticity that, in metaphorical language, the philosopher associates with the idea of the loss of the "aura" as it was thought by Benjamin. Which coincides with the observation that the aura understood as a dimension of living experience is precisely the element that differentiates the way of relating to the human being in relation to the way in which artificial intelligence positions itself in relation to the things present in the reality of the world. In this way, although we can talk about the emergence of new forms of spirituality or religiosity, we expect the digital age to be more under the sign of secularization. Which may be valid in a generic sense, but in an analysis that goes towards the particular and towards the detail, things may be completely different (Codoban 2025). For example, analyses of the relationship between religion and technology show that new generations, who have a greater presence in the digital sphere, end up constructing a new type of religious imaginary, a technologically mediated imaginary, which targets the human sphere with its openings towards dialogue, tolerance and coexistence, with the emphasis placed on religious issues connected to private life to a greater extent than to the public sphere. The new type of imaginary makes the technological space reflect the concerns of the technological man of the digital age (Chirilă, Iliescu 2024; Erawati, Indiyanto, Syafera 2023).

A theorist of the dialectic of the sacred and the profane, Aurel Codoban stated that Europe is no longer imperialist and colonialist because history has lost its sacredness, the sacred has left history (Codoban 2023). We must consider at least two aspects here. First, we are witnessing in the Western world a re-actualization of modern political myths (Eliade 1991, 133). Then, it is relevant to note that populist ideologies, following the model of religious fundamentalism, recover the sacredness of history, lost with the end of modernity, in order to nourish with its grace the group identity and the promise of a good life for the entire community. Codoban ignored the fact that in addition to the generic meaning of history, we are also confronted with an instrumentalization of history understood as the tradition of a community. In this way, history becomes a foundation not only of identity, but also of life as such understood as community life.

Against this background, we can see in Romania a phenomenon that we find in different manifestations in all countries in Europe. After a period of well-being and good life based on liberal values and the consumer society, we notice that a rebirth is taking place. Or more precisely, there is a strong return from the underground of democracy of illiberal, fundamentalist and populist currents in relation to the democratic practices that democracy maintained in the postmodern era. In this context, new political mythologies fuel political ideologies and shape public discourse regarding a new society, which should bring back to the members of the community the feeling of security, recognition and affirmation of their own identity.

It should not surprise us that during the electoral campaign for the 2024 Romanian presidential elections, a virtually unknown figure, with no chance according to opinion polls, but who used an unexpected form of combining religion, spirituality and political message, ended up taking first place in the elections compared to the other candidates, entering the second round of the elections detached. The invocation of religion and cardinal values, in the manner specific to the New Age imagination, but also to the ideological discourse of religious fundamentalists, has a double impact. On the one hand, it touches the sensitive chord of the people who live in the Romanian cultural space and who declare their belief in a Supreme Being in a proportion of over 90%. And on the other hand, the discourses regarding these themes have a persuasive force at the level of the deep structures of thought and action of people who live in a secularized world assumed at the individual level, but are exposed to messages that have a camouflaged content from the sphere of the sacred. Following Mircea Eliade, the philosopher and writer Aurel Codoban theorized this second aspect from the perspective of the influence that the sacred has on the subconscious of the person of the secularized society, from the perspective of a dialectic of the sacred and the profane (Codoban, 1998). He is no longer a practitioner of traditional religious values, be-

lieves in the separation of religion from politics, advocates for the secular character of the state and legislation and is oriented towards a public discourse in which spirituality has a cultural rather than a theological meaning. This happens because, as the philosopher pointed out, the dialectic of the sacred is a continuous process, a transition in which the sacred always returns to itself while moving away from itself. Once the sacred has left history to give a special content to life (Codoban 2023), history can be instrumentalized in ideological discourse to communicate about the good life understood as life shaped by a certain political perspective. This becomes a kind of gospel of a new attitude towards life because it is a new option for a different way of doing politics.

The choice of such a political communication strategy has, on the one hand, a persuasive force, and on the other hand it can generate political manipulation. In both cases we see metamorphoses of the sacred that make possible the manifestation of forms of religious syncretism accepted even by the most rigorous defenders of the dogmatic contents of the church's teaching, as well as the presence of religion as a cultural system (Geertz 2014) and of culture, especially national culture, as a religious system, in a context of political ideology that itself tends to manifest itself with the pretension of a new form of religion. The religious imaginary is sometimes unrecognizable, dissolved in discourses that appeal to patriotism, ancestral traditions, community values and sovereignty considered to be under siege by globalist forces. Other times, a diluted form of theological dogmatism intervenes at the level of discourse, especially in order to draw the circumference that makes it possible to delimit the identity space, built starting from an imaginary of delimiting or even rejecting otherness left outside the circumference drawn with quite great religiosity.

In this context of the confrontation between what is local and what is global, the current world brings a new alliance between religion and national ideology. A double process is taking place that theorists describe as the sacralization of the nation and the ethnicization of religion. The relationship between religion and nationalism has a particular history in Central and Eastern Europe. It is not at all surprising that today in the countries of the region religion is used for political purposes, often without a direct connection to religious purposes. The sacralization of national identity ends up shaping the discourse of policies that govern internal reality and external relations (Kulska 2023). Often, this type of discourse involves a triple way of constructing the imaginary: a demonization of otherness, an exacerbation of the exceptionalism of the people, to whom a messianic destiny is projected, characterized by uniqueness in the context of global development, and a sacralization of the people in the form of a single community, which must have a unitary action (Kettell, Kerr 2022).

We note that, just as religious fundamentalists used the means of democracy to fight against democracy itself, the followers of anti-globalist and anti-secular ideologies use precisely the tools made available by technologies and global communication to restrict the effects that the planetary network establishes in the form of inclusive networks. Against this background, we note that analyses show that in Central and Eastern Europe traditional religious values can come into conflict with personal values, with aspects regarding the intimate life of individuals, but also with regard to aspects of social life, especially in the context of the circulation of these themes in the discourse of populist groups (Juchneviciute 2025). The increase in the share of populist orientations in various countries of the European Union makes the share of religious content in political discourse increasingly greater. These guidelines attempt to impose religious and nationalist contents as competing options for secular policies (Vaughan 2024).

At the same time, given the perspective of secular policies of European states, we can expect an increase in the tense state between religious institutions and the secular state, including the possibility, signaled by some theorists, of the emergence of social and religious tensions among the electorates of various Western countries (Parenkov, Vorotnikov 2023). However, there are theorists who point out that although it is a secular institution, there are voices in the European Parliament that speak of a Christian Europe. In European countries, tense states often do not manifest themselves in the relations between religious organizations and secular institutions, but rather in the form of a Christian discourse oriented against other religions, especially through the voice of the populists oriented against Islam and other religious minorities (Caluwaerts et al. 2023).

2. Communication and living experience in the context of the development of communication technologies

These phenomena take place in the context of technological development and especially of communication technologies. "Communication builds reality" (Codoban 2009) is one of the most famous statements by the philosopher Aurel Codoban. This statement is significant from the point of view of the relationship between religion and politics due to the momentum that the use of social networks and artificial intelligence in political communication is gaining. The most visible impact that AI intervention has is the effect that the philosopher foresees on literary and artistic production. He associates the presence of this new type of intelligence, not with human intelligence, but with the instrumenttalization of conversation, communication, and influencing. The

development of communication technologies and artificial intelligence is one of the aspects that lead us to the realization that in the world built on communication, the voice of influencers is the one that matters to a greater extent than that of the media elites of the past. One of the reasons why influencers' prestige is growing is the perception of their personal authenticity and the message they convey (Xu, Schneider 2025; Liu, Zheng 2024; Chirică 2024). Today, we can see, even in a brief analysis of the messages transmitted on social networks during electoral campaigns, the significant role that influencers play as opinion leaders in public communication. Given that the voice of influencers has become an increasingly powerful tool used especially to increase public participation, especially of young people, in political life, it is necessary for both professional associations and governments to impose ethical rules that ensure an objective and professional approach on their part (Venus et al. 2025).

To describe artificial intelligence as an entity, Codoban uses anthropological constructs of archaic societies, the image of the expectation of the extraterrestrial, but also more elaborate religious constructs, such as the image of the Golem. However, commenting on Walter Benjamin, the philosopher gives the new entity only the quality of reproducer, depriving it of the quality of creator. The light movement of artificial intelligence in the sphere of art is possible in a perspective in which "he sees in the reproduction of the work of art the chance to transform art from a ritual and cultic practice into a political one: art no longer serves exclusively religious or aristocratic functions, but becomes a means of expressing political and social ideologies. Moving from a state of transcendence to a state of immanence, the work of art becomes accessible to people" (Codoban 2025, 12).

At the same time, artistic and cultural production also becomes accessible as an effective concern of AI in the digital age. In order to explain the difference between human creation and AI productions, the metaphysical concept of absence is used. In the sense that cultural products made by AI always lack something that cannot be well defined. For this, the concept of "aura" is invoked, as developed by Benjamin. It does not only mean the aura with which the heads of saints are adorned in icons, but also presupposes the presence of a living experience, "an inaccessible and individualized existential experience". living experience is inseparable from the organism. Only "as an organism, man lives, that is, he has living experience. living experience is the aura and is somehow in itself. You do not question the shaman, you do not ask him for proof, evidence of his experiences, but you credit them through faith. Or in love - you credit the living experience of the one in love... Man can become aware of the living experience as an experience through gestures and words - it can be expressed and communicated... The expression of the living experience, its awareness as an experience and its reproduction are all related to communication, they are communication" (Codoban 2025,

15). As a biological being, man relates to the other, in a process of communication in which otherness is established. The question that Aurel Codoban asks himself is whether the human being can communicate with artificial intelligence. He notes that otherness assumes that the beings who enter into dialogue must be, on the one hand, similar, and on the other hand, they must be different. The role of the Turing Test is considered by the philosopher as significant in this sense - that of perceiving the computer, artificial intelligence as another, similar, but also different. As such, a significant comparison offered by Aurel Codoban is that between humans and AI. An important aspect concerns the fact that although, both, organisms and machines are products of relationships, the relationship is different. In the case of humans, the relationship derives from the organic character, which makes it, to a certain extent, dependent on politics and economic exchange. While in the case of machines, artificial intelligence, the relationship is closely dependent on communication (Codoban 2023, 55). Which for the philosopher means that in the case of artificial intelligence we are dealing with an absence of aura, with a lack of living experience. Unlike the human being, "artificial intelligence is a digital mechanism, a mechanism based on a calculation, not on an understanding that is born from living experience " (Codoban 2025, 22).

One of the statements that we must remember is that "There is no living experience without communication, but there is communication without living experience", as in the case of artificial intelligence (Codoban 2025, 21). However, although communication without living experience is devoid of the dimension of relationship, artificial intelligence has learned to use the structures, the discursive rules according to which we build our own creations. Codoban believes that humans have previously created all the conditions for artificial intelligence to take over human occupations, including cultural and creative ones, even if in the new context the process is reversed, in the sense that AI no longer starts from living experience, but from communication. If in the case of humans, the starting point was represented by the expression of living experience, its awareness as experience and its reproduction, artificial intelligence cannot act outside the community of people like all humans, it functions based on the efficiency of communication. It is one of the reasons why Codoban states about artificial intelligence: "I contested its quality of intelligence from the beginning, replacing it with that of artificial communication, even though I have kept the name under which it was officially born throughout these comments" (Codoban 2025, 37).

3. Communication, religion and politics in the communication society

Without being a follower, in any way, of conspiracy theories, Aurel Codoban believes that the entire Western culture has prepared through its entire evolution the emergence of an intelligence that would be capable not only of taking over the activities of people like all people and their elites, but even of becoming a superintelligence that would control human behavior and give it direction, orient its preferences and induce its meanings. The philosopher notes that even though at the level of the European Union Commission the Western society in which we live has been defined as a knowledge society, the reality of the digital world shows us that we live in a communication society.

A good starting point for understanding how communication works in the digital age is Codoban's call to recall the meaning that Feuerbach (1961) gives to religion, starting from the etymology of the word *religare*, which leads us to the idea of putting into relationship, of connection, of entering into a network - we could say appealing to the imaginary of today's communication. In the context of the development of AI and digitalization, these connections are the basis for the establishment of new forms of community, social networks becoming not only a structure of communication, but also the foundation of a new communication culture. And because the definition of community is achieved in communication processes, "social networks are the new religion" (Codoban 2025, 53) on which new forms of communities engaged in the use of communication technologies and on social networks are established. What coagulates the new communities is no longer kinship, but spontaneous individual emotion. This change brought about by communication technologies is significant in terms of the way communities are constituted in general, but especially for the way political tribes are formed, as Vasile Sebastian Dâncu (2015) describes them when he describes the volatile forms of communities in the digital age. Aurel Codoban portrays them as being detached from the ideologies that were born from a worldview specific to modern culture, inspired by scientific knowledge, the new context being that of a public knowledge based on "a disenchanted worldview and without the support of a consistent historical subject... So that it can no longer be a question of utopias and ideologies, but of individual fantasies and fairly direct promotions of group interests. That is, on the one hand, and on the other, the expression of individual desires or interests without symbolic mediation and without cultural construction – only individual fantasies and interests, somewhat only statistically superimposed on superior interests" (Codoban 2025, 54). Being quintessentially relational, we expect artificial intelligence to create special types of communities.

But Codoban links the coagulation of communities to emotion, to living experience. The community needs an aura to constitute itself. However, AI lacks this dimension of living experience. The type of communication it puts into play cannot lead to the development of new communities. However, one of the fears that contemporary man has is that AI can influence human beings and even manipulate them in their capacity as political communities. In order to remove the fears that may arise in the face of the distortions that the action of artificial intelligence can bring with it, a real development of tools is necessary to detect false content and elements of disinformation created or circulated with the help of AI, given that recent studies reveal an increase in this content related to the generation of images, the generation of information or the use of false content and fake news in political communication campaigns (Farooq, de Vreese 2025).

Concern grows with the observation that "there has been a massive erosion of information and the possibility of relating to the truth". Such negative effects have been attributed, among others, to communication technologies, social networks, but also to artificial intelligence. At the same time, Codoban states that "neoliberal thinking probably also makes an important contribution to this erosion, with the involvement and expansion of competition in all areas of social and political life: public knowledge and culture hardly withstand quantification and auditing, which have become a key mechanism for the management of politics and markets. Those who lead or make politics in these areas are increasingly economically oriented, and knowledge and culture are thus increasingly becoming a matter of costs and especially of individual choice, just as religion became in European modernity, after the religious wars" (Codoban 2025, 44). The efficiency of communication that animates artificial intelligence coexists very well with this neoliberal spirit.

In its promise to change our lives, AI relies on a new type of truth. The effectiveness of this truth is based on the fact that it is a truth-meaning. To understand the place that this truth occupies in human knowledge, we must bear in mind that "the significant represents the highest category of the rational" (Codoban 2011, 55). Unlike truth-correspondence or truth-coherence, truth-meaning is an intersubjectively and democratically established truth and "is the truth of the present of the discourses of art, culture in general and politics" (Codoban 2025, 116). In each of these spheres, the presence of AI can be perceived in an ambivalent sense.

Current research attempts to cultivate an attitude of epistemological optimism in the face of the ambivalent nature of artificial intelligence: on the one hand, to familiarize ourselves with the perception of the risks that AI-induced transformations can bring to human life, and on the other hand, to enjoy the benefits that we can feel on a social, cultural and political level or the gains that the instrumentalization of AI can bring to

individuals, in their daily lives (Pitonakova, Pal, Kubala 2025). The object-tivity of this optimism must be fueled by the idea that we should not strive for the development of a superintelligence that would control and dominate humanity, but to constantly build spiritually sustainable and ethically responsible standards (Florea, Gilder 2024). A similar ambi-valence is also present in the relationship between religion and politics. With the "digital turn", it becomes increasingly clear again that the relationship between religion and politics is ambivalent. Theorists point out that religion can strengthen democracy, but it can also weaken it. The involvement of artificial intelligence in the spiritual domain can be used to develop platforms that lead to a democratization of access to religion, including greater openness in terms of interreligious dialogue, the emergence of inclusive forms of religiosity and religious practices, or the use of spiritual technology to support and strengthen democratic values (Tretter 2025; Vidican-Manci 2020).

The main trend of postmodern political discourse was to highlight the pluralistic resources of democratic society. Through cultural practices related to religious, cultural and ideological pluralism, the man of demo-cratic societies - despite his options for institutional secularization and laicization of public discourse - does not eliminate the presence of the sacred from political representations, discourse and behaviors. However, the general trend is to exploit the positive, pluralistic, dialogic orientation of culture, religion and politics (Frunză 2012). AI can have a beneficial role in this process.

4. Instead of conclusions

We are in a social media landscape that opens new forms of religious practices, new ways of encountering the human being with himself and with otherness. One way to bring artificial intelligence and the human being together is to make them similar from the perspective of the appeal to truth-meaning. Aurel Codoban believes that man must be viewed from the perspective of an expanded rationality, which in addition to opera-tional rationality also includes signifying rationality. The latter is not the result of knowledge (in the sense of scientific knowledge), but it is born from personal experiences or at least is shaped by them. Having no personal history, in Codoban's vision, artificial intelligence can only receive meanings ready-made through programming. "What separates man from AI is the existence of the level of consciousness of his experiences," the philosopher tells us, thus addressing the quality of personhood of the human being (Codoban 2025, 87). Although artificial intelligence can be thought of as a machine capable of thinking, learning and acting like all humans, what it significantly lacks is the "aura", the

capacity to have personal living experience. It cannot have its own identity because it lacks this essential element to have the quality of a person. It cannot be put in the position of otherness. If we accept that otherness is a complex relationship between something sufficiently similar, but at the same time sufficiently different, the analysis of the status of artificial intelligence shows us that AI is a radical otherness that cannot be included in the dialogue of otherness.

However, artificial intelligence can be instrumentalized in order to communicate towards the realization of the personal identity of human beings. The issue of identity is important for Aurel Codoban because it is the essence of the political construction of the community. Once leaving religion, what is most significant for the individual is his belonging to a community that gives him cultural and political identity.

The evaluation of artificial intelligence from the perspective of identity and otherness is important because "The presence of the other, the issue it raises in philosophy, derives from the fact that the relationships that human beings maintain with each other are constitutive and determining for man and involve the entire human condition. They mediate our relationship with the world and even our self, our identity, can only appear due to the presence of another and under the gaze of another. To exist means to be related: there is no human life without relationships" (Codoban 2015). The appeal to the symbolism of the aura in defining man almost transforms him into a magical-religious being. The same happens when communities build their own identity. Codoban brings to discussion analyses that reveal that in the construction of group identity, the establishment of an otherness represented by the presence of the enemy is assumed, an entity that is sufficiently similar, but which at the same time belongs to a different space. "But if identity is built with the help of the enemy, the reciprocal is valid: the enemy is built correlatively with identity" (Codoban 2015). We understand these statements better if we observe what is happening today in political communication. The demonization of otherness is a process that leads to the strengthening of community identity, just as the latter potentiates and maintains the sphere of otherness of the evil represented by the enemy.

The recovery of religious symbolism in political discourse in the European political sphere is largely built on this duality brought about by the affirmation of otherness and identity. The use of social networks and artificial intelligence in the transmission and construction of messages is not at all problematic for anti-globalization politicians, although these tools are a symbol of globalization as such. Any incompatibility is diminished because political discourse that uses symbols that are originally religious appeals not to logical analysis, but to the emotion of community members. That is why the development of emotional intelligence is important, especially among young people and leaders (Calinici, Calinici, Crişan 2024; Ramesh 2024; Marcus, Neuman, MacKuen 2000). In

this way, the use of artificial intelligence for the purpose of message distortion and political manipulation could be delayed and diminished in its effects.

Starting from the premise that multiple forms of intelligence can become productive in human life (Gardner 2000; Sandu 2017), we believe that emotional intelligence, together with cultural intelligence, must be important components of the political communication strategy. Artificial intelligence should be instrumentalized to implement such a strategy. This would lead to an adequate perception of the emotional escalation to which some political leaders' resort, would contribute to the formulation of messages that would remove the discomfort produced by the violence of radicalized language. At the same time, it would orient political communication towards taking place on a ground of trust, could contribute to reducing the polarization of political discourse and to its nuance from the perspective of dialogue, acceptance and respect in relation to otherness.

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