

## **Synthesis and Humility: Integrative Mindset and Values after Postmodernity**

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*Abstract:* This reflection presents a framework for creating, integrating and evaluating values needed for our time. Premodern, Modern, and Postmodern perspectives are taken as complementary reflections, offering an integrative paradigm of what is healthy, ethical, and spiritual, i.e., what really matters in our time. This integrative perspective is an opportunity to reflect critically on the last centuries of our Western intellectual development, creating a perspective that balances what is knowable and unknowable, while simultaneously rejecting any radical positions. The integrative perspective balances faith and reason, spiritual and material, relative and absolute, authority and freedom. Such synthesis requires a humble and open mind that does not pretend to know absolute answers but instead is willing to learn afresh from past experiences and present challenges.

*Keywords:* Premodern, Modern, Postmodern, Integrative, Synthesis, Humility

The globalization in the recent decades opened the question of which values should guide people, on a local and universal level, regardless of culture, religion, tradition, or political affiliations. The question of universal values is not entirely new; 250 years ago, Immanuel Kant (1724 – 1804), a firm believer in the power of human reason, already dealt with a similar question extensively. He believed that the Age of Enlightenment will end the dark Middle

Ages and lead us to an Enlightened Age,<sup>1</sup> when whoever has reason will know what to do in the best possible way.

The scholars in Modernity upgraded what Kant predicted with new conclusions. Something similar happened in Postmodernity, which introduced a new emphasis on understanding values through an internal critique of Modernity. Let us say that the Premodern, Modern, and Postmodern perspectives characterize recent centuries of Western Thought, and its organic and dynamic development, covering pendulum-like reactions of ideas.

Each of these three periods places a new emphasis on what to doubt, affirm, and submit. Referring to one of Pascal's fragments from his *Thoughts*, each one of these actions is crucial; however, one must know when it is the right time to doubt, affirm, and submit.<sup>2</sup> Our challenge is how to merge these perspectives in a more organic way into something where our doubts, affirmations, and submissions find a new balance. Let us call this an integrative perspective through which the age of synthesis finds its birth. To comprehend this age, it is not sufficient to base everything only on reason, as Kant imagined in his reflection on the Enlightened Age. The integrative perspective, leading to the age of synthesis, is an opportunity to critically reflect on the last centuries of the Western intellectual development, create a perspective that integrates and balances the knowable and unknowable, and simultaneously reject radical positions. The integrative perspective balances faith and reason, spiritual and material, relative and absolute, authority and freedom. Such synthesis requires a humble and open mind, that does not pretend to know absolute answers but is willing to learn

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<sup>1</sup> Immanuel Kant, "An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?," in *Perpetual Peace and Other Essays*, trans. T. Humphrey (Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Publishing Company, 1983), 44.

<sup>2</sup> Fragment 170 "One must know when it is right to doubt, to affirm, to submit. Anyone who does otherwise does not understand the force of reason. Some men run counter to these three principles, either affirming that everything can be proved, because they know nothing about proof, or doubting everything, because they do not know when to submit, or always submitting, because they do not know when judgment is called for" (Pascal 1995, 54).

afresh from past experiences and present challenges.<sup>3</sup> The integrative approach is in so many ways similar to the mind of someone who is able to wonder, which is Plato's dialogue *Theaetetus* the precondition of a real philosopher, i.e., lover of wisdom.<sup>4</sup>

This paper presents a framework for creating, integrating, and evaluating values needed for our time. Premodern, Modern, and Postmodern perspectives should be taken as complementary aspects, offering an integrative paradigm of what is healthy, ethical, as well as spiritual, i.e., what really matters in our time. For the purpose of this reflection, let us define spirituality and religiousness as an individual's or group's search for the sacred and significant goals that unfold within a traditional and non-traditional sacred context and traditions.

### *Premodern, Modern, and Postmodern Perspectives*

Premodernity is the period that extends from ancient history up to the 17<sup>th</sup> century. General knowledge during this era was rooted in the Greco-Roman worldviews, enriched with Judeo-Christian theological reflections. This over 2000 years of history is rich with dynamic differences, changes, and controversies. For example, theologians and philosophers of the Renaissance found new inspirations in the rediscovery of ancient Greek thought differently from the theologians and philosophers in the 11<sup>th</sup> or 12<sup>th</sup> centuries, dealing with the connection between faith and reason. Similarly, cultural, religious, and political settlements in Spain in the 15<sup>th</sup> century differed from cultural, religious, and political tensions in Italy or Germany in the same century. Premodernity includes centuries of intense search for individual and national identity, movements of nations followed by political unrest, hierarchical social changes, and rich intellectual life on many levels. The history of cultural, political, and religious activities in the European countries and the Americas calls for more thorough

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<sup>3</sup> Ivan Platovnjak and Tone Svetelj, "Anatheism - an incentive to discover the importance of discipleship in Christianity," *Bogoslovni vestnik* 78, no. 2 (2018): 380-85.

<sup>4</sup> Plato, "Theaetetus," in *Plato – Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper (Indianapolis, Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997), 173.

treatment and due respect, which goes beyond the purpose of this paper.

Broadly, Premodernity can be described by the following characteristics.<sup>5</sup> Religion was central in shaping beliefs, values, and cultural practices. Premodern societies were in many ways influenced by the principles of Christianity. Religious activities were often colored by superstition and magic, especially among the laity. The understanding of popular spiritual life was mixed with supernatural powers, deities, and spirits. The perception of time was based on religious rituals and ceremonies, shaping people's life routines. Settlements were organized around churches, shrines, and temples, serving as focal points for religious activities. Religious knowledge and wisdom were transmitted through sacred texts and oral tradition. Premodern cosmology included notions of divine or sacred order governing the universe; the cosmos was seen as a reflection of something divine. Natural events were often interpreted as divine signs and messages. Knowledge of the world for many people became synonymous with religious knowledge. There was a strong belief that the ultimate truth is knowable, even though not yet entirely revealed, but always disclosing itself to those looking for it. In epistemological terms, the source of the ultimate truth was divine revelation, God's initiative, and willingness to reveal Himself to humans at specific times and places. The main authority for general knowledge was the Christian church, supported or criticized by the powerful aristocracy rooted in political power. The final goal of life was synonymous with spiritual progress based on beliefs about the afterlife. By referring to the approved theology, one can evaluate the merits of his faith and the quality of his spiritual life. Religious art and symbolism, including statues, paintings, and religious icons, reflected the ideas of premodern spirituality.

The dawn of Modernity loosened premodern intellectual and spiritual worldviews and created new possibilities of self-perception. This change is associated with the rise of empirical and

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<sup>5</sup> Lynn Hunt and Thomas R. Martin, Barbara H. Rosenwein, Bonnie G. Smith, *The Making of the West: Peoples and Cultures*, Fifth Edition (Boston, New York: Macmillan Learning, 2017).

rational methods of inquiry, which steadily criticized and questioned the power of religious authority. New discoveries in natural sciences replaced certain religious activities, especially those based on superstition. There is still a strong belief in the ultimate truth, which is partially knowable but no longer the exclusive domain of the Church and aristocracy. Science and philosophy grow to become new intellectual authorities, prevailing over religion and theology. Rationalism and empiricism replace divine revelation as the only valid scientific method. Academics and scientists become new sources of intellectual authority. The nature of the new knowledge remains universal as it was in the premodern time, even though less revelatory, but more rational and, at least apparently, objective. The objective reality is considered knowable and based on some universal truths, can be discovered by employing the principles of rationalism, materialism, and reductionism. Nature functions as a unified whole that scientists can observe and measure. What cannot be measured cannot be proven, therefore is questionable. Since faith, sacredness, and spirituality belong to the nonmaterial reality, they cannot be judged based on rationality, empirical outcomes, and observations.

The new understanding of reality is based on verification by anyone wishing to repeat the observation process. All new scientific findings are supposed to be transparent and accountable. The goal of modernity was no longer spiritual progress vying for the final reward in the afterlife, but instead, it was material progress and improvement of social conditions, in line with the liberation of inquiry from tradition and religion. The liberty, equality, and fraternity of the French Revolution became the beacon for the emergence of universal values.

A strong emphasis on material reality opened the door to criticism. Observing reality through the principles of reductionism denies the importance of the individual or society as a whole. A mindset frightened by the non-material reality struggles to provide a strong foundation for moral values, which remain elusive. In addition, the modern mind occupied with the specialization of knowledge, struggles to create a holistic picture of reality. The benefits of the Enlightenment are also the main criticisms: new

knowledge is often misused and destructive, leading to negative impacts of the same scientific development.<sup>6</sup>

The genesis of the postmodern era is often traced to the 1950s. Postmodernism's main characteristic is a refutation of Modernity.<sup>7</sup> In opposition to modern thinkers, postmodernists do not believe in the ultimate truth; there is no such thing as the ultimate truth. Moreover, they consider this idea potentially dangerous. Instead of a universal truth, they propose a metaphysics of local and contextual truths, constructed and not discovered.<sup>8</sup> In Postmodernity, holding to objective truth claims is equal to holding the means of power for control, marginalization, and oppression of others. Postmodernism suggests “distrust toward the modern concept of universal reason and related claims to know objective truth.”<sup>9</sup> Consequently, there should be no metanarratives or cross-contextual frames, including the modernist ideas of progress. Since modern narratives and theories are still based on certain values, postmodernists cannot tolerate these narratives because they are relative, biased, and narrow. Different truths can be known through multiple methods; no truth or method should be privileged; all statements about reality are caught in the same relativistic language trap.<sup>10</sup> Any experience of so-called reality is already influenced by words that predispose the observer’s experience. All discourses are trapped in a relativity of “various discrete languages. And since we cannot know a supposedly objective world apart from language, we make our own worlds by how we use our language. Therefore, language and world are internally related.”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Richard Laugharne and Jonathan Laugharne, “Psychiatry, Postmodernism and Postnormal Science,” *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine* 95, no. 4 (2002): 207-10.

<sup>7</sup> e.g., Crystal L. Downing, *How Postmodernism Serves (My) Faith* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2006).

<sup>8</sup> Jerome Bruner, “The Narrative Construction of Reality,” *Critical Inquiry* 18, no. 1 (1991): 3.

<sup>9</sup> R. Scott Smith, “Christian Postmodernism and the Linguistic Turn,” in *Christianity and the Postmodern Turn*, ed. M.B. Penner (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2005), 53.

<sup>10</sup> P.J. Watson, “Faithful Translation and Postmodernism: Norms and Linguistic Relativity within a Christian Ideological Surround,” *Edification – Journal of the Society of Christian Psychology* 2 (2008): 5-18.

<sup>11</sup> Smith, “Christian Postmodernism and the Linguistic Turn,” 53-4.

Consequently, any narrative of postmodern spirituality is bound to the cultural context, language, pragmatic usefulness, and social systems. Such a postmodern assumption of linguistic relativity can invoke the Christian theology committed to the Absolute.

In the postmodern mindset, every authority should be distrusted, including the modern reliance on science and philosophy. If modernity believed in good as promoting equality, freedom, and justice, postmodernity takes a pragmatic approach to the meaning of good, that is internally coherent in a given context but not universally applicable. The ultimate goal of life is neither religious progress nor material social progress; what matters is respect for others, conditioned by an individual's relative gains and losses. A postmodern thinker sees spirituality as a cultural narrative measured in terms of utility, internal coherence, and part of a social power hierarchy.

### *Towards the Integrative Perspective*

Within the globalization framework, premodern, modern, and postmodern perspectives—present the background for our reflection on spiritual values and others defined as our search for the sacred and significant goals embodied within a traditional sacred context. As enriching as the perspectives above are, we lay them side by side in our presentation of the integrative perspective.<sup>12</sup>

We are in a privileged position, allowing us to integrate and maintain the best of each perspective without including its limitations. In the entire human history, humans have never been so globalized as at this time. The same globalization process creates tension between the global and local, demanding that we redefine national, individual, cultural, and religious identities. Intercultural and interreligious dialogues have never been so crucial as they are today. Economic dependency and the urge and need to work together, especially facing ecological issues, does not award soloistic decisions. As challenging as this might be, the same globalization

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<sup>12</sup> Al Dueck and Thomas D. Parsons, "Integration Discourse: Modern and Postmodern," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 32, no. 3 (2004): 232-47.

context can be taken as a classroom full of novel options for becoming more human.<sup>13</sup>

The premodern thinker or believer evaluated spirituality with tools of approved theology. This theology cannot be self-made or a simple collage of one's preferences, that would be typical of a postmodern believer. Thus, a premodern believer's spirituality is evaluated through adherence to an established religion in a specific culture. To express spiritual life, that believer uses the language of their milieu. Let us describe this approach as emic, a term borrowed from anthropological theory. An emic approach analyzes given phenomena from the participant's perspective. The accounts are consistent with the subjective perspectives, creating emic knowledge grounded on the consensual perception of cultural insiders.<sup>14</sup> Accordingly, the emic accounts consider belief systems and cultures as two interconnected systems that cannot be separated. An accurate description requires a holistic view, covering one's spiritual beliefs, adherence to a community of the faithful, spiritual experts or authorities, formal doctrines and spiritual prescriptions, and traditional religious systems. If done accurately, etic approaches present details of spiritual beliefs and cultural meanings on their own terms.<sup>15</sup> Nonetheless, the emic approach can be vulnerable to the researcher's biased interpretations, if not to his spiritual opinions.

If the premodern approach is primarily based on the emic approach, the modern approach favors the etic components, i.e., the study or description of a particular culture, social system, belief, and language in accordance with the scientific method. The results must be objective, replicable, falsifiable, comprehensive, and precise.<sup>16</sup> Abstract descriptions, cross-cultural constructs, survey

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<sup>13</sup> Tone Svetelj, "Universal Humanism – A Globalization Context is the Classroom of Unheard Options how to Become More Human," *The Person and the Challenges* 4 (2014).

<sup>14</sup> James Lett, "Emic/Etic distinctions," in *Encyclopedia of Cultural Anthropology*, eds. David Levinson and Melvin Ember (New York, NY: Holt, 1996), 382-83.

<sup>15</sup> Michael Morris and Kwok Leung, Daniel Ames, Brian Lickel, "Views from Inside and Outside: Integrating Emic and Etic Insights about Culture and Justice Judgment," *Academy of Management Review* 24, no. 4 (1999): 781-96.

<sup>16</sup> Lett, "Emic/Etic distinctions."



data, and cross-cultural constructs are almost mandatory in this approach. The observer does not feel constrained by a worldview and belief systems. Following the etic approach, the description of spirituality results in observational claims, which are interpreted logically and exposed to mathematical analyses. Such results present generalizable and cumulative knowledge. The nature of spirituality as such, is measured in terms of spiritual development, positive functioning in society, personal or collective well-being, and health outcomes.

The downside of this approach is the tension between faith and science, different worldviews, or between the etic and emic approaches. The etic approach is well-suited for religious advocates<sup>17</sup> as well as atheist polemicists,<sup>18</sup> who find the etic approach an objective tool for their analyses of conflicts between religious traditions and modern metaphysics. Religious advocates and atheist polemicists can arrive at opposing conclusions using identical etic data. Consequently, the critics of faith can easily prove, with scientific knowledge, that the premodern faith is largely irrational, based on historical myths, and in disagreement with positivistic assumptions. The biggest limit of the etic evaluations of spirituality is the struggle to grasp the fundamental core of spirituality, i.e., the human experience of the sacred.

The postmodern approach criticizes the modernist approach and goes beyond it by including the social and cultural components of investigation. While the modernist approach moves from the local toward the universal, the postmodern approach questions the validity of universal truths by stressing the importance of local truths. Since there are many local truths, there are also many methods of investigation bound and conditioned by different local truth communities. The same way of inquiry is applied to the postmodern understanding of spirituality.

This opens the question of how to translate concepts and knowledge across these local communities. Watson proposes a model called “ideological surround.”<sup>19</sup> Following his model, all

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<sup>17</sup> P.J. Watson, “Faithful Translation and Postmodernism: Norms and Linguistic Relativity within a Christian Ideological Surround,” 5-18.

<sup>18</sup> Sam Harris, *The End of Faith* (New York, NY: Knopf, 2004).

<sup>19</sup> Watson, “Faithful Translation and Postmodernism: Norms and Linguistic Relativity within a Christian Ideological Surround,” 6-8.

human activities occur within a context imbued with a meaning system. These meanings are ideological, characterized by three interlocking elements:<sup>20</sup> (1) they make assertions that can be related to empirical observations, but rest on a non-empirical foundation, e.g., God's creation of the universe; (2) non-empirical foundations of ideologies have normative implications. For example, the organization of our social life will be organized differently, depending on whether God or naturalistic processes are at the heart of the universe; (3) ideologies are sociologically significant, defining who does or does not belong to a certain community.

Watson continues that postmodernism does not necessarily exclude the existence of any universal truth but binds the idea that this truth will be readily apparent and accepted by anyone of the right mind, which might need some time for reflection. In any case, the existence of universal truth opens a new challenge for Christians in translating their norms of universal truth into ideological language structures of postmodern communities. Such translation cannot be based on language structures of inclusion or exclusion, based on the identification of members inside or outside the Christian community. The translation has to be such that it goes across ideologies of the postmodern communities and presents an appealing and meaningful message to all people of the right mind.

Premodern, modern, and postmodern perspectives lead us to the integrative perspective. As the adjective *integrative* indicates, this perspective combines and assimilates the key features of the other three perspectives. The integrative perspective recognizes the possibility of multiple truths and investigations in metaphysics and epistemology, including in ethical inquiry, as postmodernity claims. In addition, the premodern emic and modern etic analyses of spirituality come together; relying only on the insider's account without checking the universality of the insider's outcomes is insufficient.

The integrative approach embraces the multidimensionality of spirituality. Adequate comprehension of spirituality must include psychological and biological dimensions of

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<sup>20</sup> Watson borrows these ideas from Alasdair MacIntyre's book *Against the Self-Images of the Age*.

human existence, sensation, cognition, creativity, personality, self-awareness, virtues, pain, spiritual activities such as fasting, and spiritual insights.<sup>21</sup> At the same time, the phenomenon of spirituality can be analyzed from the microscopic scale of human existence (atoms and cells) to the macroscopic levels of family, community, culture, nation, religion.<sup>22</sup> Again, each one of these levels influences our narrative of spirituality.

In addition, the integrative approach introduces the concept of the “half-life” of truth. One needs to add temporal and historical truths to the subjective, objective, and contextual truths. The integrative approach is aware that the actual comprehension of truth is only transitory, far from being all-encompassing. As such, there is always space for a more complex understanding in the future. Applying this logic to Christian spirituality, a distinction must be made between the practitioner of spirituality and their present understanding of the transcendence on the one hand and the transcendence itself, on the other. Since the present understanding is always incomplete and temporary, the practitioner remains unattached to the temporary mental constructs, aware that the knowledge is incomplete, and striving to know more in the future.

What is the place of authority, of good, and of the goal of life within the integrative approach? Following the principles of the integrative perspectives strictly, even the position and the amount of power of authority remain contextual and limited by historical timelines. Similarly, the meaning of good remains flexible and conditioned by its positioning on the universal and local levels. Analogously, the goal of life is defined from the observer's point of view. In short, the integrative approach creates a strong awareness that the meaning of authority, of good, and of the goal of life are relative to the historical and cultural context when this awareness arises. At the same time, this awareness opens a new space for a deepened reflection on the true nature of the absolute, leading to

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<sup>21</sup> Robert A. Emmons and Raymond F. Paloutzian, “The Psychology of Religion,” *Annual Review of Psychology* 54 (2003): 377-402.

<sup>22</sup> Brian J Zinnbauer and Kenneth I. Pargament, “Religiosity and Spirituality,” *Handbook of the Psychology of Religion and Spirituality*, eds. Raymond F. Paloutzian and Crystal L. Park (New York, NY: Guilford Press, 2005).

new interpretations of the meaning of authority, of good, and of the goal of life, yet to be discovered.

At this point, the integrative approach overlaps with anatheism, a term borrowed from Richard Kearney's books *Anatheism: Returning to God after God* and *Reimagining the Sacred*. In the last centuries of Western intellectual and spiritual history, the phenomena related to secularization have gradually occupied areas once reserved for the ancient all-powerful God, dogmatic certainties, and strong metaphysics. The apparent departure of God should not be taken literally but as a departure of a particular understanding of God, influenced by our perspectives, traditions, cultures, and theology. After this departure, there is a new opening and a refreshed interest in the sacred with its spiritual and religious spheres. For Kearney, God is not a 'thing,' which can be described phenomenologically, but a call and cry that invites us to different interpretations by asking: "What do you say that I am?"<sup>23</sup> In this context, Kearney places his concept of anatheism as an attempt to reimagine God in our time. The *a* in the prefix *ana-* has a double meaning: "ab" (away from God) and "ad" (toward God). Kearney talks about the return of the lost God, that returns as a more real, powerful, and loving presence. There is an epiphany or a retrieval of past experience that moves forward, gives new life to memory, and a future to the past.<sup>24</sup> "The ana- of anatheism makes sure that God who has already come is always still to come."<sup>25</sup> In other words, Kearney's returning to God after God is a hermeneutical retrieval of sacred things from the past, reminding us about unrealized potential to be more fully realized in the future.<sup>26</sup>

In summary, the integrative perspective synthesizes elements from the premodern, modern, and postmodern worldviews and emphasizes cultural points of view as well as the ongoing process of change. As such, it creates the framework for a spirituality of synthesis and rediscovery of as yet unknown options

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<sup>23</sup> Richard Kearney and Jens Zimmermann, *Reimagining the Sacred: Richard Kearney debates God* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 241.

<sup>24</sup> Kearney and Zimmerman, *Reimagining the Sacred: Richard Kearney debates God*, 6-7

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>26</sup> Platovnjak and Svetelj, "Anatheism - an incentive to discover the importance of discipleship in Christianity," 377-80.

of becoming more human and, correspondingly, becoming more Christian.

*Postmodern Believer's Tension between the Inward and Outward Look*

Kearney's concept of anatheism, merged with the integrative approach, challenges the postmodern mindset and inquiry. Postmodernity is, in many ways, homocentric, cultivating the Protagorean idea of man as the center and measure of everything. As attractive as it seems, modern individualism cannot provide meaningful answers for man's inner unrest. Thus, postmodernity fosters a new awareness of the essence of humanness as a universal on the one hand, and, on the other, this humanness is always rooted in local culture and tradition. Even though there are so many racial, social, cultural, linguistic, and religious differences among people, they all share their human nature, equal to all. So, our reflection on human nature cannot start exclusively from an abstract, contentless, transcendental concept about the human agent, as it seems to be in modernity. The human is found only in an immersed existence – intersubjective, historical, corporeal, and through man's cultural, social, linguistic, and other expressions of immersion, which is the position of postmodernity. Let us call this universal humanism, as already explored elsewhere.<sup>27</sup>

If the integrative approach merges the abstract concepts about the human nature from modernity and the postmodern idea of the immersed existence, the nature of the individual appears in a new light. This reflection is incomplete, unless it is complemented by the premodern search for ultimate truth, universal knowledge, and investment into spiritual progress, as the first chapter of this paper proposes. In other words, postmodern inquiry on the existential human values is complemented with the universality and objectivity from modernity and subjectivity and inwardness from premodernity.

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<sup>27</sup> Svetelj, "Universal Humanism – A Globalization Context is the Classroom of Unheard Options how to Become More Human."

The main challenge for the postmodern individual is the desire to become his or her own, autonomous master. As the ancient Greek word explains (auto – self, and nomos – law), the person pretends to be self-legislator, creating laws for itself, landing in a precarious position: what is the foundation, the final criterion, and the unchanging values for self-legislative activities? The postmodern individual believes in finding them through self-knowledge and introspection, perceived as the privileged tools for discovering the final meaning of existence. The hope is to discover the orderliness and synchronicity with the world. So-called mythological, religious, or metaphysical metanarratives of the past should be replaced by discovering an inner law and order, pointing the right direction. However, in view of a complete self-discovery, looking inward undermines the hope of discovering a binding foundation independent from existence. A rational person cannot muster absolute and regulative principles of the ultimate truth, and the best is an energetic indifference. To know oneself does not mean determining one's own identity but to becoming aware of one's own groundlessness.<sup>28</sup>

There is always a gap between the foundation and the founder, between the values and the one who values. Introspective exploration alone can not find universal values, foundations, or absolute authority because it keeps the human mind locked within the boundaries of short, subjective narratives. Values are not as solid and stable as humans wish them to be, but are ambivalent and relative as human nature is.

To solve this dilemma, utilizing Postman's reflection,<sup>29</sup> the postmodern mind has to start looking for stability and objectivity outside itself, as modernity did in its search for something objective and universal, but had gone too far and failed to accomplish its promises because it excluded religious and metaphysical foundations. For this reason, the integrative perspective suggests returning to the premodern sensing and spiritual curiosity, opening our eyes and hearts to contemplation, enabling us to see beyond

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<sup>28</sup> Peter Sloterdijk, *Eurotaoismus: Zur Kritik der Politischen Kinetik* (Frankfurt am Main Suhrkamp, 1989), 264-65.

<sup>29</sup> Neil Postman, *Building a Bridge to the 18<sup>th</sup> Century* (New York: Vintage Books, 1999), 101-19.

capitalism, consumerism, materialism, Marxism, historicism, and other big narratives of postmodernity.<sup>30</sup> The solution is neither in constant problematization, dismantling, and trivialization of these narratives because this surrounds us with insecurity. What we need are encompassing new narratives that are consequent in themselves, i.e., inspire hope and ideals, optimism, and enable personal identification, establish the foundations for moral behavior, the basic feeling of justice, archetypal wisdom for right compassion, faith, and at least temporarily, provide us with acceptable explanations for the unknowable. For Postman, the answer lies not in inventing new narratives, but in rediscovering the old ones that call us to join them with new knowledge.

### *Conclusion*

Premodernity, modernity, and postmodernity, as three perspectives of Western intellectual history, offer dynamic explanations of the universe and the place of humans in it, with all the human weaknesses and limits. Each explanation appeals to human trust and responsibility and strengthens our hope for a better and more harmonious future. At the same time, each explanation provides only a limited comprehension of reality. Even though religion is the path to universal truth, our religious and theological comprehension does not necessarily provide the answers to the universal truth. They remain our narrative of the universal truth.

In different ways, three different perspectives and the Judeo-Christian narrative appeal to human trust and responsibility and strengthen our hope for a better future of harmony. They will remain meaningful if we learn to read them as stories about the limited human conception of truth. If we embark on the path of integrative behavior and inquiry, our intellectual and spiritual history can become a classroom for new insights.

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<sup>30</sup> Ivan Platovnjak and Tone Svetelj, "Ancient Greek and Christian understanding of contemplation in terms of a resonant attitude towards the world," *Bogoslovni vestnik* 82, no. 3 (2022): 623-37.

Once immersed in the process of globalization, it is difficult to follow only one all-clarifying narrative. The alternative is to accept the fact that, as humans, our search for a non-exclusive synthesis is limited. To accept this fact, a measure of intellectual and spiritual humility is required.

The same Western intellectual and spiritual history teaches us that any kind of imposition of big narratives, including the imposition of the Christian narrative, does not bring desired results. Religious narratives often became tools of political power and, consequently, lost their religious and spiritual purpose.

Chesterton explains that Christianity came to the world to assure humans that they are not left with their inner groundlessness but, instead, are invited to look outwards, to behold with astonishment and enthusiasm a divine company and a divine captain.<sup>31</sup> There is a God Creator, who left the creation to humans. As a measurement of all, this God can be found neither in humans nor in the creation; this God is opposed to humans and the entire creation as a transcending instance, continuously calling to be rediscovered. Through this discovery and reinterpretation of the ideal, human appeases his immanent need for participatory creativity. What matters is not how exact human interpretations are, but the need to not to change their ideal. This ideal, like values, has to remain unchanging; otherwise, human efforts to understand and accomplish them becomes futile.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Gilbert K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (Nashville, Tennessee: Sam Torode Book Arts, 2016), 71-2.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 102-103.



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