

## *Con Alma*

By Felician Stancioiu

Reading “Don Quijote” as teenager was one of the most unpleasant lectures for me at a time when loosing myself in a nice book was quite a rewarding activity; I could never finish it (which in itself was a crime for me then) but continuing the lecture of this heavy, obvious and cruel “irony” was too much of a painful exercise for my esthetic senses, for my young brain unused to compromises and the subtleties of metaphors and parables. Reading it was like a neverending bad joke and I was surprised to hear how successful this book happened to be, being the number 2 book sold in the world according to some accounts, second only to The Bible.

A few days ago I was in for a very nice surprise while reading “Pray for Brother Alexander” by Constantin Noica to have some things about it clarified in a way that couldn’t have happened a few decades ago (one of the few benefits of aging, probably) There are two separate, unrelated sentences in Noica’s book: “Don Q, while contemplating a picture of St. George or St. Martin realizes that those two *knew* what they had to conquer, unlike himself” (p. 84) and: “A great contemporary physicist said: We now know that we don’t know where science is leading us” (p. 61)...

And this is what I’m making of these:

...the main character in Don Q can be seen as a metaphor for the man who disregards convention, tradition or rather old beliefs, something that Mr. Noica calls in his book “Truth” or what Mircea Eliade and Joseph Campbell would refer to as “Universal myths”, and which in its most accessible form is given by Religion.

Without denying the great role and the need for science, one can say that man outside Religion, especially outside God is much alike Don Q: the physical limitations of the human condition are not sufficient for a firm anchoring amidst the energy flow of a Universe from which we perceive just a part, a fragment which is impossible to define in size and importance.

With God we know somehow where we are heading, where the limits lay (The Ten Commandments, the Mosaic and Christian laws) and what is the finality, the destination, the reward (heaven or hell). Outside those reference points (which can be criticized as “too vague, difficult to prove and consequently hard to be accepted”), life, human existence loses its sense, its meaning and is transformed in the kind of pointless, grotesque adventure that was so aptly described by de Cervantes.

Another aspect is that in the case of religion its reference points – especially The Ten Commandments – are unambiguous, firm and unchanged in time; the opposite is the case for the formulations of philosophy and sciences which have ethical considerations derived from practical adventures, sometimes changed with progress and time, as well as limitations of their applicability in a world in which military, state or technological secrets are easy to justify.

God has given man freewill and choice and evil things seem to happen a lot when choice is absent. Going back to the famous novel, a practical question needs to be asked: in the absence of God, who can best choose the right thing to do? Don Quijote? Sancho Panza? Dulcinea? The donkey? And finally: are we provoqing God’s absence with our choices and deeds?