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Preface

The 15-th issue of *International Journal of Theology, Philosophy and Science* (November 2024) presents scientific and theoretical articles on various aspects, all of them centred on the area of Philosophy, Theology, and Science.

In the first article is *GOD'S NATURE, POWERS, LAWS, SCIENCE PERFORMED: THEOLOGICAL, PHILOSOPHICAL, SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH*, signed by Ph.D. Professor M. B. DASTAGIRI. *The Theological schools philosophy is that God manifest through the universe. The natural world designed by Universal Laws. These laws outperform religion, philosophy, school of thoughts. Biblical scriptures revealed the mystery of God.*

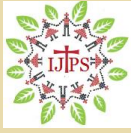
The next article is called: *'OPENNESS' TO OTHER FAITHS QUESTIONED*. In this article Ph.D. Professor Marc GRENIER, preview and critique the Moyaert-D'Costa debates as a way of answering a pivotal question still very much pertinent to contemporary biblical scholarship: to what extent, if at all, can the tense relationship between faith identity and openness to other faiths be realized. The next study, by Ph.D. Professor George Daniel PETROV, has title *THE MEANING OF LIFE. PHILOSOPHY VERSUS THEOLOGY PHILOSOPHICAL MORAL NIHILISM VERSUS MORAL THEOLOGY FROM AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE*. *The dichotomous structure of the human person defines it as a being who transcends time and space in search of perfection. Nothing in the materiality of the created world can rest the soul of man, which is permanently in a movement incomprehensible to rationality, towards the Absolute.*

Ph.D. Professor Sorin BUTE proposes our readers' two articles dedicated to interdisciplinary subject: *THE INTERSECTION OF PHILOSOPHY AND MEDICINE IN THE BRAIN DEATH DEBATE*. *The debate on brain death as equivalent to human death involves complex philosophical and medical dimensions. Initially guided by scientific criteria, the discussion now incorporates philosophical arguments questioning whether brain death genuinely signifies the end of human life. Key contributions from various commissions highlight the role of the brain in maintaining the organism's integrative functions, but philosophers argue this extends beyond empirical medical knowledge.*

THE HIERARCHICAL RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN THE DEGREES RESULTING FROM THE "HIERARCHIA ORDINIS" AND THE "HIERARCHIA JURISDICTIONIS". CANONICAL-LEGAL STUDY is the scientific research presented by Ph.D. Professor Cătălina MITITELU. *The canonists of the Eastern and Western Churches have examined and defined the hierarchical relationship between the degrees resulting from the "hierarchia ordinis" and the "hierarchia jurisdictionis" and the manner of exercising the two ecclesiastical powers, i.e., the sacramental power (potestas ordinis) and the governing power (potestas regiminis) or jurisdictional power, through the prism of the dogmatic and canonical doctrine of their Church.* Professor Ph.D. Anton SAVELOVICI propose the last article of our Journal, entitled: *THE PASTORAL AND SOCIAL DIMENSION OF ORTHODOX HOMILETICS: FROM TRADITION TO THE CHALLENGES OF THE MODERN WORLD*. After this, the book of Mr. Ionuț Vlădescu: *Ontologia timpului ca sens spre eternitate/Ontology of Time as Meaning towards Eternity (Presa Universitara Clujeană, 2024)* is review by Ph.D. Professor Ioan Alexandru TOFAN.

International Journal of Theology, Philosophy and Science provides the opportunity to examine the altogether truth-claims found in theology, philosophy and sciences.

Ph.D. Professor Marian BUGIULESCU,
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GOD'S NATURE, POWERS, LAWS, SCIENCE PERFORMED: THEOLOGICAL, PHILOSOPHICAL, SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH

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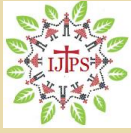
ABSTRACT

The Theological schools philosophy is that God manifest through the universe. The natural world designed by Universal Laws. These laws outperform religion, philosophy, school of thoughts. Biblical scriptures revealed the mystery of God. Humans difficult and beyond human knowledge to find out God by research and science tools. This paper search God's existence, origin from biblical evidences of theologians, world religions, philosophers, and science. The research framework is theological, philosophical, Scientific and meta analysis. The results found that God attributes are: omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence, and perfect goodness. Theists believe that God is somehow involved in world design. As per many religions, Humans can comprehend God through his creation, prayers, reading divine scripts inspite of his invisibility. Nature of God is God Is Sovereign, God Is Working, God Is Holy, God Is Love, God Is Omnipotent. The works of God are creation, redemption, providence. The God existence is more spiritual instead of philosophical or scientific. "God is a immortal Spirit. The spiritual body posses by the God and angels, where as human beings posses natural body. Almighty God is in the highest habitation, the heaven of heavens and it is the original abode of all souls. Religion is a tool for humanity to find God. God has "incommunicable" and "communicable" attributes. Hinduism belief is infinite manifestations of God. Brahma is the Hindu religion god. New Age believes is we ourselves are God. Buddhism belief is no god or gods exist. Islam belief is devoted to one transcendent God. Christianity beliefs is An infinite and personal God. Brahma Kumaris believe God is supreme soul. These results of religion beliefs indicate that vast diversity. The first law of heaven is obedience. The Eternal law of God is world of all things to have "eternal happiness". The first success spiritual law is "pure potentiality". The cosmic laws which regulates each person and every thing in the universe. The God performed science models are creative and evolutionary models. The creation models show that the universe, life suddenly created. Where as Scientific models show that the universe, solar system and life emerged by natural process. The study suggest that we should have the accurate, eternal realities and true knowledge of God without it we cannot be saved.

Keywords: God's Nature; Powers; Laws; Science; Theological; Philosophical;

INTRODUCTION

God is the supernatural being for creating and sustaining the universe. The polytheistic worldviews dominated until the rise of Judaism and other monotheistic religions. In Judaism, the world's existence as attributed to one divine Creator and Sustainer.



Christianity built on monotheistic foundation after the death and resurrection of Jesus. Islam became the third major monotheistic religion in the early seventh century. Sriya 2016 reported that in the world population, Christian identifies 31 per cent, Muslim 23 per cent, Hindus 15 per cent, Jewish 0.2 per cent, 16 per cent independent and Eastern religions including Sikhism, Shintoism, and Buddhism 16 per cent.

God is a singular deity in monotheistic religions where as multiple gods in polytheistic religions to sustain world. Theists, who believe in God, prophecy is that God involved in this world. As per many religions, Humans can comprehend God through his creation, Prayers and reading divine scripts inspite of his invisibility (Jason Malec). This necessitate the theologians, philosophers to prove the existence of God and Atheists to disprove. The universe mystery neither seances nor intelligence grasp correctly. The theological philosophy is God manifest through the universe. Modern scientists and Evolutionary biologists still believe in Georges Lemaitre's Big Bang theory. Later scientific development by Higgs Englert's (2013) God particle research received Physics Nobel prize.

The polytheistic worldviews largest civilization up to Judaism emerge and other monotheistic religions. New Atheists believe that religion should be debated by rational discourse. One century ago German philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche, declared "God is dead!" keeping in view of disdain of God, religion, religious people. Dastagiri MB (2024) reported that The 12 universal laws are inbuilt unchanging laws which ancient people intuitively fact finding. As Newton's gravity Law declared as "Universal" as it is suitable for being applied on all bodies (sun, moon, earth, apple). The 7 cosmic laws fundamentals which regulates everyone, everything. God blessed birth to humans and gave rational to discover natural laws and also provides revelation to practice God's will and wishes. God's Eternal law is discovered the planets and animals behaved and how people should behave.

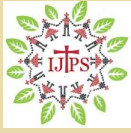
God blessed birth to humans and gave rational to discover natural laws and also provides revelation to practice God's will and wishes. The greatest science is actually the science of Mind rather than Science of Eye. Stephen Hawking prophesy is that by knowing the working of the universe you will know the mind of God. But yogis said the opposite that by knowing the mind of God, you would understand the working of the universe.

A Theology, Philosophy of Puzzle of God

Theology is the study of the nature of God and religious belief. It is difficult to find God by scientific instrument or academic research and also beyond human knowledge to find the secrecy of God. There are some questions like Is God a person? Has He a body? How is God like? What is God form or shape? And where is He?. These are the questions not able or difficult to answers by many including prophets and professors. More over the man sinful nature and ignorance about God, The Evil is misleading and schemes against God. In fact, knowing God is spiritual rather than philosophical and science.

Human Conceptions about God is different. The Pantheists believe God is every thing, anthropomorphist attribute human personality, Unitarians believe believe God is one in Trinitarians. God's secrecy is revealed in Scriptures. Many people believe in God's existence but the accurate knowledge of God is essential to salvation. Dastagiri M.B. (2018) conclude that the theologians confirm that God became the universe. But believer has faith and atheist contradict is that God really manifests the universe. Werner Heisenberg prophecy is: "superficial understanding of natural sciences makes atheist and farthermost profound understanding is God."

"Philosophy" defined as "the study of the fundamental nature of knowledge or truth (www.math)". Philosophically, Humans not created nature laws instead they discovered.



This will birth greater vision and thinking to theologians, philosophers, cosmologists, and scientist's in more advanced paths to search God evidences, experiences.

This paper analyzes world religions biblical scriptures, rationales, evidences, insights, knowledge, ideas, about the God's existence and origin by Theology, Mythology, Philosophy, Cosmology in particular, and Science in general.

The special objectives are:

Objectives

1. To examine and discover the God's accurate and eternal qualities, existence/origin from biblical texts and proofs of Theology, Philosophy, Cosmology, Mythology, and Science.
2. To determine God's Nature, Roles, and Works, Science performed, The Laws of God, Supernatural powers and abilities.
3. To analyze world religions; Hinduism, Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, New Age Spirituality views of God, and what a Humans gain the well-being of humanity.
5. To suggest the prophesy, true nature of the God to human beings.

1. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study centered on the research framework of Theological, Philosophical, scientific and meta analysis of God's existence/origin based on major world religions, theologians, cosmologists, philosophers, mythologists, scientists bibliographical scriptures, research evidences, theories, insights and rationales to finds out the God origin. The first great theologian, however, was **Socrates' student Plato**, who appears also to have been the first to use the term theology. For Plato, theology was the study of eternal realities, the realm of what he called forms, or ideas. The four types of theology include biblical, historical, systematic (or dogmatic), and practical theology.

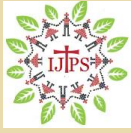
The different methods of theological analysis vary in their approach and focus. These includes scientific methodology, Theological progress, philosophy of science for evaluating scientific hypotheses and theories. The most reliable approach is reading the biblical text through a theological lens and interpretation implication for humans. The various analytical techniques used in philosophical analysis used by Jackson (1998), Chalmers (1996), and Bealer (1998).

The steps in Theological analysis are: Determine your own view of Nature of God's relationship to human beings, Identify the implications of this view for the passage you are studying, Assess the extent of theological knowledge available to the people at that time, Identify the additional knowledge about this topic that is available to us now because of later revelation. Finally, the study suggests the eternal attributes and reality of God origin to human beings.

2. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

God? His Nature, Roles, and Works

2.1) God: Many religious and philosophical texts reveals that God is supreme and transcendent divine being. As per Christianity, God is the creator and sustainer of the Universe and having traits; omnipotence(all-powerful), omniscience(all-knowing), omnipresent(present everywhere), omnibenevolence (perfect goodness). They believe God is a person to worship and devotion. Monotheistic religion people believe that God is a spiritual being, supreme and creator but polytheistic religions people believe multiple gods



and God is a spirit to perform various functions to control some parts of the universe and supervise the world.

The Bible reveals God as the Creator of the universe who carefully fashioned mankind in His very own image. God is omnipotent (all-powerful). The Almighty God is sovereign over all of creation. The Bible (Genesis 1:1, NIV) reveals "*In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth*". This indicates that God created the universe from nothing. And also shows God's creativity wisdom, power, and sovereignty over all creation. God's responsible to guide, sustain and preserve the universe. "*The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands*" Psalm 19:1 (NIV). The Bible also reveals God is the Holy Divine Trinity; Father, Son (Jesus Christ), and Holy Spirit. God's role is creator, Son is for redemption and revelation and Holy spirit is for sanctification and empowerment. **Theists**, those who believe in a God or gods, prophecy is that God is somehow involved in the world. Many religions believe that though God is invisible still perceivable through sacred texts, prayer, and through his creation.

2.2) Nature of God

Five words that answer, "Who is God?"?

God is the creator of the universe indicates God's Nature and humanity in the world

1. God Is Sovereign

God is sovereign means He is all-powerful (omnipotent) and everywhere-present (omnipresent).

2. God Is running the World

God's providential work denotes his invisible hand is working and sustaining the world, families, nations, individuals and tribes

3. God Is Holy

God is holy denotes he is sacred, pure and holy. But people aren't, to become holy God's blessings and divine transformation required.

4. God Is Love

God is love indicates God's love infinite and denotes "God" and "love" appear synonyms in the Bible.

5. God Is Omnipotent

God is Omnipotent denotes almighty and infinite powers. God is master of Impossible but humans are capable for possible things. God know all facts, infinity and eternity of the universe and creation.

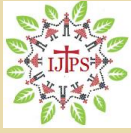
2.3. Works of God

The major works of God are Creation, Redemption, Providence.

Creation: As per Bible, The fundamental work of God is universe creation. Genesis book reveals that God is creator of Heaven and Earth and make the world with life without Chaos. The creation is a proof of God's sovereignty, power, wisdom over all creatures.

Redemption: The another important work of God is through Jesus saving humanity and salvation from sins on earth. This redemption is witnessing God's mercy and love towards humanity.

Providence: In the Bible depicted God's actively involved in protecting the human's life and nations in the world. God also take care and give guidance to creation and humans, animals, plants and other creatures. This work of providence safe guard shows that God's love, faithfulness, concern, wisdom of creation. The providence safe guard continue through Holy spirit (1).



2.4. The Existence of God

The mystery of God revealed in the scriptures and religious texts. They are people who have faith and believe in God but the accurate knowledge of God is important for salvation. The finding God is beyond human knowledge. The science and academic research can not be found God. Finding God is basically spiritual. Human Conceptions about God is different. The Pantheists believe God is every thing, anthropomorphist attribute human personality, Unitarians believe believe God is one in Trinitarians.

God of gods

God of gods excellency defined as the creator of Heaven and Hearth. As per Bible JEHOVAH is the God of gods. Bhagavad-Gita depicts God created spiritual, intellectual and material world and the cosmic universe is under his divine control. God is beginning and end and superior to all creatures (ISKON, 2016). According to Valmiki Ramayana, only Mahadeva was his equal in terms of everything be it power, skill, prowess and valour. Throughout Ramayana, Bhagwan Brahma was the most glorified deity next to Shree Rama.

An Angel was beginning of the creation of God. Later an angel who was later made flesh or human is known as Jesus Christ who was responsible for redemption of sinful. Infact, God is not a person and that He has no body, shape or form. *The Christian Doctrine* states: "God has no body: He is a Spirit." Jesus said so. "God is a Spirit: and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth.". Angels too are spirits but they possess spiritual body. St. Paul stated: "There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body." – 1 Corinthians 15: 44. God is immortal spirit where as angels have the spiritual body but human beings posses natural body. Jesus Christ said that "a spirit hath not flesh and bone." (Luke 24: 39).

Dwelling-Place

Bible quoted that Almighty God abode is the highest habitation known as the heaven of heavens. But God knows and sees whole universe at all times from anywhere. God's true knowledge is important for salvation. So knowing true and eternal qualities of god is essential. So humans must keep faith and worship in Jehovah. Humans whose minds are stayed on God will attain perfect peace Isaiah. 26: 3, 4. (2) .

Finding God

Texts reveals that religion is a way to find or reach God. And religions also teach to humans the ways they can find God or gods signals. Christianity is unique, God sending Jesus restore humanity. Judaism reveals humans can find God by seeking God. King David stated: "If you seek him, he will be found by you." (3).

Who is the main God of all:

According to Hinduism reveals that **Brahman** is the one supreme divine reality and creation of everything. The Bible clearly reveals JEHOVAH is Creator of heaven and earth.

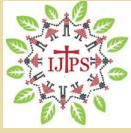
Which God is first in the world:

As per Hindhuism Brahma is the Grandfather and **the primeval first god**. Hindu Mahabharata declares that, Brahma is supreme in three Hindu gods which includes Shiva and Vishnu.

Attacking God

New Atheists are group of scientists, scholars, and philosophers prophesy is that "religion should be debatable and found truth by rational arguments".

Richard Dawkins, leading atheists criticized and fiction of Old Testament God. He used the following characters to God: jealous and proud of it; a petty, unjust, unforgiving



control-freak; a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser; a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, capriciously malevolent bully.” Many within these ranks agree with Dawkins and will be content only when God is eliminated from our vocabulary and consciousness (4). alethonews.com

3. GOD 15 AMAZING ATTRIBUTES OR QUALITIES:

God’s “incommunicable” and “communicable” qualities shown in Table 1. These attributes grouped in to 2 categories. The theologians call “incommunicable” (God alone have qualities) and “communicable” (Both God (perfectly possess) and Human possess qualities). These attributes are God is infinite, immutable, self-sufficient, omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, wise, faithful, good, perfect, merciful, gracious, loving, holy, glorious.

Table 1: God’s “incommunicable” and “communicable” Attributes

SL No	God Attributes	Meaning	Why they matter
1	Infinite	God is Self-Existing without Origin	The fact that God is created from nothing and self-existent forever.
2	Immutable	He Never Changes	God does not change. His attributes and characters are never changes from the beginning into eternity.
3.	Self-Sufficient	God is perfectly complete with his own and self sufficient. He never need anything.	Humans all needs can get from God because his never ending goodness, grace, mercy, and peace.
4	Omnipotent	He Is All Powerful	Omnipotent means He can do anything including impossible tasks.
5	Omniscient	All Knowing	God is omniscient means knows everything. Because God is all-knowing, so human can trust that God knows what we’re going through today and future.
6	Omnipresent	He Is Always Everywhere	God omnipresent means he is all places, at all times. God is in a place is not the same way people in a place.
7	Wise	God has full of Perfect Wisdom	Wisdom means beyond head intelligence and knowledge. A wise person understand all facts and execute soul, mind, heart with competence & skill to solve problems.
8	Faithful	God is Infinitely, Unchangingly True	God is the faithful to who love him and keep his directions or commands.
9	Good	God is Infinitely mercy and abundant good will	God is always good. God’s mercy & goodness flows within his immutability and infinite nature.
10	Just/Perfect	God does right and perfect in all	God is just indicates He does always right and good to all people.
11	Merciful	Infinitely, Immutable Compassionate and Kind	God is infinitely, unchangeably merciful. He is forgiving, lovingly kind towards humans and inexhaustibly, actively compassionate.
12	Gracious	Infinitely Inclined to Spare the Guilty	God’s grace is blessings what people don't worthy (eternal life).
13	Loving	Infinitely, Loves Humans ever lastingly	God’s love is infinite, sovereign, eternal, and unchanging.
14	Holy	Infinitely, Unchangingly Perfect sacred	That God’s holy is always perfect, never ending and his standards for humans is



			perfection.
15	Glorious	Infinitely Beautiful and Great	“His glow or light is like the sunlight. His rays flashing from His hand and hiding super natural divine power.”

Source: <https://www.biblestudytools.com/bible-study/topical-studies/15-amazing-attributes-of-god-what-they-mean-and-why-they-matter.html> (5).

4. WORLD MAJOR RELIGIONS AND THEIR VIEWS OF GOD

The World major religions and their beliefs of God shown in Table 2. The major world religions are Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, Brahma Kumaris and New Age Spirituality. The results show that each religions have differing core beliefs. Hinduism belief is infinite manifestations of God. New Age believes is we ourselves are God. Buddhism belief is no god or gods exist. Islam belief is devoted to one transcendent God. Christianity beliefs is An infinite and personal God. Brahma Kumaris believe incorporeal point of light is God.

Hindus worship Bramhan who is ultimate god though Hindus worship many gods and goddesses. These divinities incarnate as idols in temples, gurus, animals, rivers, etc. Hindus ultimate goal is the soul is to be from Law of Karma which will avoid continuous rebirth and death. New Age Spirituality develops person's own conscious power or divinity. Self consciousness is the originator, controller and power over all. To develop human altered consciousness and divinity, New Age teaches techniques of Eastern spiritual, metaphysical, mysticism and Psychic techniques.

Buddhists believe self enlightenment and do not worship God or any gods. Buddhists ultimate aim is spiritual enlightenment by meditation which will make a person free from the continuous cycle of life and death. Muslims worship only one God Allah, who is almighty God and creator of the universe. Muslims believe sacrificing owns life for Allah is a sure way of attaining Paradise. Christians believe one eternal loving God who is creator of all. Jesus proclaimed as God in human form and done miracles, redemption of people sin to attain Heaven.

Brahma Kumaris believe God as "Supreme Soul" to ultimate eternal God, who is providing living light as human souls. Shiv baba is the supreme soul (Param Atma) and all others will be called as 'Soul' (atma). Soul can become a deity and the same soul becomes sudra or king, queen and brahman. Souls are actors.

We find vast diversity by examining these religions belief and views: Hindus believe many Gods, Buddhists believe no God, Muslims believe in one God, Christians believe one loving God who created us and universe. The world's major religions are also quite unique in their requirements. To release karma, Hindus person worship and do good. The New age person trying by using own divinity. The Buddhist is trying free from desires. Islam individuals trying to reach paradise by following religious laws.

Majority of religions desire is same to attain peace and inner strength are working on the same problem. These persons practices meditation, religious rituals, prayer, personal sacrifice, self-help books, fasting, pilgrimages, etc.

Life after death

Many people followed Jesus as he demonstrated many miracles. Jesus said himself would judge the world, people and forgive sins, answer prayers and grant eternal life as he posses Gods virtues and equal to God and crucifixion. Jesus offers us relationship with him and eternal life (Erwin W. Lutzer 1997).



Existence of God

Humans have different beliefs and experiences about God. So every one try to experience and understand God in their own ways. Some people believe there is no God as there is no proof God’s existence. God can not be seen with physical eyes does not mean God is not exists. In nature some we experience for example air which can be seen but can feel. Through meditation and spiritual knowledge God’s presence can be felt.

God Virtues

God is the creator and supreme father of all souls. God’s virtues are Ocean of Knowledge, Peace, Blissful, Truth. God bless He liberates people from Evil and award salvation. God belongs to every one equally. God removes people sorrows and bless with mercy. Many have faith religions and seek will take souls to reach God.

The abode of God

The abode of God is not physical universe. His home is heaven and beyond the planets, stars, sun and moon. The heaven also is abode of all the souls. By prayers, thoughts people can reach heaven and experience peace, serenity, silent which makes soul free from all evil virtues (6).

Table 2. The World major religions and their beliefs of God

Sl No.	Laws group	Features	Proofs /rationality/ suggestions
1.	Hinduism	Hinduism belief is infinite manifestations of God. Hindhus worship Bramhan who is ultimate god though Hindus worship many gods and goddesses. These divinities incarnate in the form of idols, gurus, temples, animals, rivers, etc.	-Hindus have faith the present status of life is due to previous life actions. - In the past life, a person behaviour is evil accordingly that person will experience many hardships in the present life -Hindhus ultimate goal is the soul is to be free from Law of Karma which will avoid continuous rebirth and death. -Hindu person attain spiritual perfection to end the cycles of Karma; By devoted to any Hindu deities, By attaining knowledge via meditation of Brahman, By practicing religious ceremonies and rituals.
2.	New Age Spirituality	-New Age Spirituality believes is we ourselves are God. New Age Spirituality transcendent his own power or divinity and higher consciousness within a person.	-A spiritual development person would see himself as deity, the cosmos, the universe. -New Age Spirituality highly eclectic and knowledge is derived from texts of ancient spiritual, speakers teachings, books and seminars. -This spirituality accepts as in Hinduism many gods and goddesses. - This spirituality is viewed as the Earth is source of all spirituality. And believes Earth has its own intelligence and deity. -To develop one’s own consciousness and divinity, This spirituality teaches eastern and spiritual, metaphysical,



			<p>mysticism and psychic techniques. These includes mediating, chanting, breathing exercises, drumming.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Believing themselves to be completely sovereign and no external reality over their life, creates their own reality becoming a god.
3	Buddhism	<p>Buddhism belief is no god or gods exist Buddhists do not pray any gods. Buddhists ultimate aim is spiritual enlightenment as Buddha by meditation which will make a person free from life and death cycles.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Buddhists believe Humans have many rebirths, which inescapably suffering. A Buddhist seeks to end these rebirths. They believe person's desires, delusion and aversion responsible for rebirths. Hence Buddhist ultimate aim is to purify one's heart. -Buddhists follow devoted meditation and fasting religious principles to personal control. -Buddhist meditates for self control, self discipline and not as praying or focusing on a god. They believe by practicing meditation one can reach Nirvana. -Buddhism provides disciplines, values and directives a person wants to live peace and happiness.
4	Islam	<p>Islam belief is devoted to one transcendent God</p> <p>Muslims believe one almighty God, named Allah. Allah is the creator of the universe and he is responsible for all good and evils. Allah's will is responsible for all things to happen. Allah is a powerful and merciful towards persons good works and religious devotion.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Prophet Muhammad the last prophet, and his words and lifestyle are authority to Muslims. - As a Muslim strictly, one must do 5 religious duties: 1. Repeat Allah and Muhammad creed ; 2. Perform 5 times certain prayers in a day in Arabic; 3. Donate to the poor and needy; 4. Fast one month in each year from sunrise to sunset food, drink, smoking, sex; 5. As a Muslim in one's lifetime has to go and worship shrine in Mecca. Based on these duties -- a Muslim hopes to enter Paradise If not, eternally punished in hell. Islam teaches that After death, God judge a person is rewarded or punished according to their religious devotion. Muslims believe sacrificing one's life for Allah is ultimate way of entering Paradise.
5	Christianity	<p>Christianity beliefs is an infinite and personal God Christians believe one eternal loving God who is creator of all. Jesus declared as a God</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Christian Followers respect Bible as God's doctrine to humankind. The Bible reveals Jesus' miracles, his life,



		in human form and demonstrated miracles, redemption of people sin to attain Heaven.	personality, love truth, and how can human know God. -Christians believe Jesus as their Savior from sins for all humanity out of his love by dying on cross. After three days, Jesus rose from the dead.
6	Brahma Kumaris	Brahma Kumaris believe God as incorporeal point of light and refer as Eternal "Supreme Soul". They regard him without physical body just as human souls living light. God will not subject to birth, death and rebirth cycles. Who is God according to Brahma Kumaris? God is Supreme Soul, among all souls. God is as invisible light to naked eye. God will not subject to birth, death, rebirth cycles and experience pleasure or pain.	Is Brahma Kumaris a Hindu? The Brahma Kumaris is categorized three ways by scholars: as a millenarian New Religious Movement, as a new religion, and as a Hindu sect . Who is Shiv Baba in Brahma Kumaris? Shiv baba is the supreme soul (ParamAtma) and all others will be called as 'Soul' (atma). Soul can become a deity and the same soul becomes sudra or king, queen and brahman. Souls are actors.

Source: Number of religious traditions recognize God to be transcendent: beyond all human knowing (7).

God isn't a boy or a girl, or short or tall, but exists beyond all categories of sex and gender, height and weight. God doesn't get ill. God doesn't age. God doesn't forget things. God stuck out to Julian much more than all of the rest. And that attribute, quite simply, was 'Love'.

5. GOD ACCORDING TO DIFFERENT RELIGIONS:

Who is God according to different religions shown in Table 3. The results show that Hinduism belief is God as Supreme Soul worshiped as Vishnu, Brahma, and Shiva. Hindus worship the symbols represented as The Lotus or Om Shivlingam or Jyotirlingam. Islam belief is God as Allah and worship symbol of Crescent and star Sang-e-Aswad (holy stone) placed in Kaaba in the Grand Mosque in Mecca.

Christians belief is JEHOVA as God and worship Jesus Christ as God in human form and symbol is Cross. Brahma Kumaris believe God as **incorporeal point of light** and refer as Eternal "Supreme Soul".Sikhism belief is God as incorporeal 'All Light'. Zoroastrians belief is God as in the form of Fire. Buddhists do not worship any gods or God.

Table 3. Who is God according to different religions

Sl no.	Religion	Key Persons	Primary symbol
1	Christianity	Jesus, God, Virgin Mary	The (Latin) cross
2	Judaism	God, Moses, and others	The Star of David (Magen David)



3	Hinduism	Vishnu, Brahma, and Shiva	The Lotus or Om Shivlingam or Jyotirlingam
4	Islam	ALLAH, Prophet Muhammed and God	Crescent and star Sang-e-Aswad (holy stone)
5	Bramha Kumaris	Shiv baba is the supreme soul (ParamAtma) and all others will be called as 'Soul' (atma).God is called the Supreme Soul, which means He is supreme among all souls.	Brahma Kumaris believe God to be an incorporeal point of light.
6	Sikhism Zoroastrians	Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism, also sang the praise of the One who is 'all light' and incorporeal, while Zoroastrians worship God in the form of fire.	Sikhism -'all light' and incorporeal Zoroastrians--fire
7	Buddhism	Buddhists do not worship any gods or God. Spiritual Enlightenment	Buddhist is to purify one's heart.

Source: <https://www.google.com/search?client=firefox-b-d&q=As+per+different+religions+who+is+God> (8)

6. THE LAWS OF GOD LAWS, POWERS, VIRTUES:

Dastagiri MB. (2024) findings reveals about the God laws and powers. God’s powers are Omnipotent, Omniscient, Omnipresent. God's Eternal law is God's Utopian design which humans not fully ascertained. It discovered based on animals and planets behaved and how people should act. Though times and customs changed, God's law served as a bedrock of guiding ideals to help the people of God live in such a way as to love God and love neighbor. God's Eternal Law rational purpose is the world of all things to have "eternal happiness". God revelation through: Prophets, Miracles, God with human flesh, Bibles, Bibliographies, Scriptures. God's greatest laws: Love the Lord with all your 'heart, soul and mind' is the God's first law. Theological law of heaven and hell states that good people goes to heaven while bad people go to hell.

God 52 virtues <http://www.thegirlonpurposeproject.org/virtues>

The following virtues found in the sacred tradition of all cultures. These virtues honored by the United Nations during the International Year of the Family. These are: Assertiveness, caring, cleanliness, commitment, compassion, confidence, consideration, cooperation, courage, courtesy, creativity, detachment, determination, diligence, enthusiasm, excellence, flexibility, forgiveness, friendliness, generosity, gentleness, helpfulness, honesty, honor, humility, idealism, integrity, joyfulness, justice, kindness, love, loyalty, moderation, modesty, orderliness, patience, peacefulness, perseverance, purposefulness, reliability, respect, responsibility, self-discipline, service, tact, thankfulness, tolerance, trust, trustworthiness, truthfulness, understanding, unity (10).

7. GOD PERFORMED SCIENCE: SCIENTIFIC ANALYSIS

God created the universe. Ironically, as scientific discovery has progressed, the evidence for God’s existence has grown stronger than weak. The discovery of God particle and the great project of multiverse confirmed strange fitness of our universe to human life.

Five Best Scientific Evidences for the God

1. Origin of space, time, matter and the energy
2. Origin of life
3. Human exceptionalism
4. Fine tuning of the universe, Earth and Earth’s life to make the existence and redemption of billions of humans
5. Key events in Earth history leading to humans

Scientific Evidence for Creation

In Modern Era, in schools teaching two scientific models with apparent scientific evidence for creation. Such as Creation models and Evolution models of Universe, Life and Man origin. The creation model has minimum of Scientific and Evolution models. And also depicts as minimum nonreligious as the Evolution model. Both models can be taught in public schools with out referring religious biblical texts.

Creation Model and the Evolution Model

7 Characters of the scientific creation model and Scientific evolution model shown in Table 5. The scientific model of evolution depicts scientific evidences the evolution of present life which includes complex and diversified kind of life from simpler kind of nonliving matters over a long period of time. The following table lists 7 Characters of the scientific creation model and Scientific evolution model: The creation models show that the universe, life suddenly created. Man and apes have a separate ancestry. Where as Scientific models show that the universe, solar system and life emerged by natural process. Man and apes have a common ancestor.

Table 5: Scientific model of creation and Scientific model of evolution

SI No.	Creation Model	Scientific Model
Concept	The creation model depicts scientific evidences and their Logical thinking:	The evolution model includes the scientific evidence and their logical thinking:
1	The creation models show that the universe, life suddenly created.	Scientific models show that the universe, solar system and life emerged by natural process
2	Life created all of a sudden.	Life become apparent by naturalistic processes from nonlife.
3	Since creation all present creatures; animals, plants stay fixed other than extinction creatures. In originally created living things genetic variation happened very minimal.	The present living all living kinds evolved from earlier organisms. The Evolution cycle as follows : Single-celled organisms □ invertebrates □ Vertebrates □ Amphibians □ Reptiles □ mammals□ primates, including man.
4	Mutation and natural selection are inadequate process to coming in to existence of present living kinds from primordial organism.	Evolution of present complex living organisms have developed by Mutation and natural selection from a simplex primordial organism.
5	Man and apes ancestry have a separate ancestry.	Man and apes evolved from common ancestor.



6	The earth's global, regional geologic features nicely articulated developed by catastrophic processes (catastrophism).	The earth's geologic features nicely evolved by slow, gradual processes. Rarely catastrophic events might have happen local scale (uniformitarianism).
7	The origin of earth and living organisms might have been comparatively recent.	The inception of the earth and life origin must have happen several billion years ago.

Source: Duane Gish, Ph.D. 1981. Summary of Scientific Evidence for Creation.

8. WHAT DOES GOD SAY ABOUT HUMANS:

God is the Supreme Immortal Power. God uses humanity in God's creation and action within the world. According to the Scriptures, Humans are purposefully special creation of God not evolutionary. God created Human beings above other created beings with special qualities as some reflect His qualities (9).

What are the 7 things God created?

Here are the things created on each day: day 1 - light and darkness; day 2 - sky and sea; day 3 - land; day 4 - sun and moon; day 5 - birds and fish; day 6 - animals, man, and woman; day 7 - God rests.

God created the universe - and all the heavenly bodies, the sun, the moon, and the stars - in six days (Book of Genesis). But according to contemporary cosmologists the universe began with a great explosion known as the Big Bang, after which the stars and galaxies slowly formed over billions of years.

CONCLUSIONS

God blessed birth to humans and gave rational to discover natural laws and also provides revelation to practice God's will and wishes. The universal laws architecture natural world. Some people who have surpassed universal laws but let us understand.

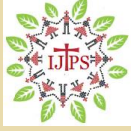
People often ask some questions about God which are not able to clarify by professors, prophets and saints. The present paper analyzes historical world religions scriptures, doctrines, proofs, rationales, bright ideas that confirm accurate and eternal God qualities, works, science performed.

Many religious and philosophical culture make to known people as "God" is supreme transcendent existence. God as supreme creator in monotheistic traditions. Where as God is a spirit for creating and sustaining universe and life in polytheistic traditions. The creation activity of God indicates his wisdom and Glory. God's has powers are

Omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence, perfect goodness. Theists believe God is involved in the world. Most religions believe God is invisible but can be known by his creation, sacred doctrines, prayers. New Atheists prophecy is that religion should be debatable by rational logic.

God's nature includes; God Is Sovereign, God Is Working, God Is Holy, God Is Love, God Is Omnipotent and knows all facts of universe. The works of God Here are three of the most significant areas examples in creation, redemption, providence. God is providential and take care of nations, individuals, families, tribes,.

The matter of knowing God, rather than being scientific or philosophical, is highly spiritual. "God is a Spirit: God and the angels have spiritual body and human have natural body. The dwelling-place of the Almighty God is the heaven of heavens. Theologians



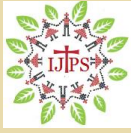
prophecy is religion as humanity's way to find God. And also religions teach to search and find God.

As per Hindhu Mahabharata Brahma is Supreme in Triad of Bramha, Shiva and Vishnu. As per Bible JEHOVAH is the God. God has "incommunicable" and "communicable" attributes. The theologians call "incommunicable" (God alone have qualities) and "communicable" both God and Human possess qualities.

The major world religions are Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Buddhism and New Age Spirituality. Each of these religions has sects with differing beliefs. Hinduism belief is infinite manifestations of God. New Age believes is we ourselves are God. Buddhism belief is no god or gods exist. Islam belief is devoted to one transcendent God. Christianity beliefs is An infinite and personal God. As per Brahma Kumaris God is incorporeal point of light. All religions are working to attain peace and strength by meditation, self-help books, religious rituals, prayer, fasting, pilgrimages, personal sacrifice, etc.

God is Supreme Soul and supreme among all souls. God home is heaven and all souls as well. The obedience is the first law of Heaven. The first spiritual law is pure potentiality. God's Eternal law is not fully grasp by Humans. The cosmic laws which regulates each person and every thing. Theological and Philosophical perspectives of heaven and hell is good people go to heaven as bad people go to hell. God's rational purpose is the world of all things to have "eternal happiness".

God performed science includes the scientific model of creation show that the universe, life suddenly created. Man and apes have a separate ancestry. Where as Scientific model of Evolution show that the universe, solar system and life emerged by natural process. Man and apes emerged from a common ancestor. God's rational purpose is the world of all things to have "eternal happiness". God is immortal spirit where as angels have the spiritual body but human beings posses natural body. God can be found in stillness, search and revelation. The Soul has seven innate qualities inherited from the Supreme *soul* (God). They are Purity, Peace, Love, Joy, Bliss, Powers, and Knowledge. God's attributes are infinite, immutable, self-sufficient, omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, wise, faithful, good, perfect, merciful, gracious, loving, holy, glorious. The study suggest that we should have the accurate, eternal realities and true knowledge of God because without it we cannot be saved.

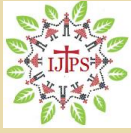


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‘OPENNESS’ TO OTHER FAITHS QUESTIONED

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ABSTRACT

In this essay, we review and critique the Moyaert-D’Costa debates as a way of answering a pivotal question still very much pertinent to contemporary biblical scholarship: to what extent, if at all, can the tense relationship between faith identity and openness to other faiths be realized. We begin by reviewing Moyaert’s initial argument that various soteriological models within the theology of religion assume this problem can and should be solved a priori through hermeneutical openness. The model of comparative theology, on the other hand, questions this a priori assumption that hermeneutical openness is the precondition for soteriological openness. Then we present the counterarguments of D’Costa and other theologians who claim that these theological models don’t address the implicit epistemological issues involved in interreligious dialogue. Soteriological openness is not a precondition for methodological openness, and ‘openness’ itself is not a precondition for interreligious dialogue. These models assume that institutionalized interreligious dialogue is desirable without any clear, explicit biblical mandate and that it is even possible to achieve a balance between faiths in dialogue. The implicit epistemological issues involved in interreligious dialogue are irresolvable by pluralizing, relativizing, and therefore, dethroning the Christian faith from its position above all other faiths. The essay concludes by rejecting the notion that genuine interreligious dialogue can only be gained by transcending their own religious faith and learning from the so-called ‘truth of others’, a claim that relativizes the absolute truth of the Judeo-Christian Bible. In the end, Christians and other adherents may need to admit not everything which seems possible in interreligious dialogue is truly possible.

Keywords: *Interreligious dialogue; inclusivism; exclusivism; pluralism; particularism; soteriological openness; methodological openness; comparative theology; hermeneutical circle, arc;*

INTRODUCTION

From a Christian theological point of view, one of the main challenges to interreligious dialogue is balancing personal commitment to a personal religious faith system while simultaneously remaining “open” to “other” or “non-Christian” faith systems, and vice versa as well. It goes without saying that this central “challenge” leads to many interesting questions.

We can posit many of these core questions here at the outset of this essay. For example: Can an individual actually maintain a solid religious identity with clear distinctive parameters without shutting the door to what “other faiths” have to say on any particular religious concept, idea, doctrine, principle, and so forth? _Indeed, is it even possible to be genuinely “open” to “other faiths” at all? If so, is it in fact possible to be genuinely “open” to



“other faiths” AND still maintain full commitment to all of the essential components of your own religious faith system, or is modern religious man just fooling himself?

What’s more, several if not all of the key concepts contained in the “main challenge to interreligious dialogue” are also open to many questions. For example: What does “open” to “other faiths” actually mean in practice versus in theory, and are there significant differences between the two? Why should the Christian faith be “open” in any kind of ways to the beliefs and/or practices of “other faiths”, and on what grounds (historical, biblical, etc.)? Shouldn’t “other faiths” be genuinely “open” to the core doctrines and beliefs of the Christian faith? Otherwise, what’s the point of the Christian “mission” as biblically defined? What did Christ in the Bible have to say about all of this?

Most importantly, from a methodological point of view, how do we empirically verify “openness” to “other faiths” both from the Christian and non-Christian perspectives? How do we know when we have captured honest and authentic “openness” to other faiths OR authentic “openness” to the Christian faith, for that matter? Along these same lines, how do we distinguish interreligious dialogue that is genuinely “open”_from one that is simply strategic engagement as a pretense or a means to achieve unrelated goals? Is genuinely truthful and honest “dialogue” between Christians and “other faiths” even possible from both points of view? What is interreligious “dialogue” and what are the criteria being employed to define when “dialogue” has actually taken place and when it has not?

As highly relevant as they are to understanding religious faith systems in modern times, these questions don’t address the implicit epistemological issues involved in interreligious dialogue. Should Christians even be directly engaged in such a practice called “interreligious dialogue” at all at any level, let alone global? Maybe yes, but maybe no, depending on the grounds upon which the argument is made and the sources employed to establish these grounds. As well, it is practically impossible for any faith system to control or predict all of the long-term and short-term global consequences of direct participation within institutionalized dialogues with other faith systems, let alone the Christian faith system.

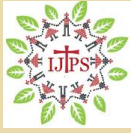
Despite all these questions about the nature and possibility of interreligious dialogue, one thing is relatively certain. One of the central philosophical and epistemological issues implied in all of them is the tension that appears to exist between devotion to one’s own personal religious beliefs and honest, authentic “openness” to “other faiths”. Assuming it is even possible to achieve a “balance” between them, almost certainly it would appear to be a tensive balance in essence.

If that is true, then learning how to manage that tensive balance may indeed be an important key to peace between the world’s different religious faith systems. These are some of the central themes and issues brought out by Moyaert as introductory remarks in the journal article cited above, which are then articulated and expanded much further into three major sections.

1. SECTION I. SOTERIOLOGY AND THEOLOGY OF RELIGIONS

In the first section, the author expounds upon the interconnection between faith conviction and “openness” to “other faiths” from a theological perspective. Here the main interest is to examine classical theology of religions and its traditional threefold typology of exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism. Moyaert focuses on how soteriology strongly influences the tension between faith commitment and openness to other faiths.

All the pertinent soteriological questions are posited and reviewed by the author from within the threefold typology of exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism. Are all



religions equally valid in the eyes of God? Is the fact of religious plurality a curse or a blessing from God's point of view? What is the nature and function of other faiths given the salvific character of the Christian doctrine? And so forth.

Here Moyaert shows that the soteriological model of classical theology of religions functions in many ways. It can either hinder or promote particular kinds of relationships to "other faiths". As well, the theory contained within it significantly influences both the kind of interreligious dialogue that takes place and the tense relationship between faith identity and openness. What is the relationship between exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism AND interreligious dialogue, faith commitment, and openness to other faiths?

A – Exclusivism at the Expense of Openness

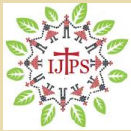
The exclusivism model is founded upon an irreparably pessimistic view of human nature. With original innate value as being made in the image of God, human beings nevertheless rejected God. This rejection caused them to be lost and perverted by sin. That is, human nature is inherently and constitutively sinful, a sinfulness that they cannot liberate themselves from in any anthropomorphic way. Human beings tore themselves from the bosom of a loving God, so to speak, and cannot be reconciled with that God except through genuine acceptance of Jesus Christ as personal Savior sent by God. God became flesh through his only begotten son, Jesus Christ, in order to save and redeem humanity. Exclusivist theology, therefore, contains within itself the epistemological requirements of salvation, divine incarnation, and redemption.

In exclusivist theology, the diversity of religious faiths tends to be viewed from the perspective of sinful human nature. Since all humanity is plagued by sinfulness, other religious faiths" cannot really make any genuinely positive contributions to interreligious dialogue. As well, for this reason there is no real appreciation for other religious faiths. Instead, other religions tend to be viewed simply as anthropomorphic attempts to achieve "salvation" on their own rather than ONLY through authentic personal faith in Christ.

All this having been said, it should not be very surprising to anyone that interreligious dialogue doesn't usually rank very high in value for exclusivist theology. Dialogue with other faiths tends to be viewed as a mask to achieve selfish material interests and material institutional goals. That means that "dialogue" is not a quest for truth because "truth" has already been morally corrupted and relativized by sinful personal and material interests. So, then, there is not much if any genuine "openness" to other faiths.

When on occasion exclusivist theologians become somewhat optimistic and engage in interreligious dialogue, it is engagement characterized by a distinctive language and clear boundaries for what can and cannot be discussed. So long as what is on the table does not waver from the absolute truth of God through Christ, interreligious participation is allowable. But even then, the main motivation driving that participation is not acceptance of dialogue in the context of religious diversity but, rather, proclamation of salvation only through personal acceptance of Christ on the cross.

In terms of faith commitment, identity, and dedication, exclusivist theology often claims superabundance, which makes it appear as if interreligious dialogue is viewed positively. Moyaert takes issue with this claim, however, because it appears to contain a negative flip side. That is, the exclusivist model achieves "identity" by a priori excluding all others who come from a different religious faith. So, the soteriological model within exclusivist theology achieves faith commitment and identity by rejecting all other faiths a



priori. Therefore, Moyaert is careful to underscore, “openness” is sacrificed at the altar of “identity”.

The individual who is the religious ‘other’ is not viewed as a legitimate or valid “believing subject” in their own right who can make significant positive contributions to interreligious dialogue because they don’t have the right faith. It is evident that the exclusivist worldview is dualistic in nature. There are only two types of human beings: Christians and non-Christians. *Christians are right* and *non-Christians are wrong*, so the latter need to be “converted” to the right way of believing. There is nothing contained in the faith system of “other faiths” that can make genuine and significant lasting contributions to interreligious dialogue.

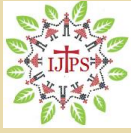
Even the language employed within interreligious dialogue is viewed as illegitimate and inappropriate within the “antithetical structure of the exclusivist worldview”. We can use the vocabulary of “Christians vs. non-Christians” or believers vs. unbelievers within the exclusivist model. But we cannot talk in terms of “other faiths” or “believers of other faiths” or introduce into the analysis and discussion of religion at any level distinctions beyond the collective group known as “non-Christians”. Introducing such distinctions implies acceptance of equal validity and legitimacy between different religious faiths. In exclusivist theology, there is only ONE correct absolute faith – faith in Jesus Christ as savior of all humankind, not simply some part of it.

The dualistic character of exclusivism is often complimented by a “binary grammar” which views individuals within faiths other than Christian in a base negative manner as “others”. In other words, ourselves we are Christians, and ‘they’ are the ‘others’, a kind of binary division of humanity into self and others. However, the negative mirror image goes much further: we live the truth and they live a lie; we know God and they don’t; we are good and they are bad; we serve and they are selfish; we have grace and they lack grace; we are saved and they are not; we have faith and they don’t; and so forth.

The selfing and othering binary grammar of exclusivism has important consequences for identity, commitment, openness, and interreligious dialogue. In the first place, it establishes firm boundaries between identity and otherness. Uncertainties and ambiguities that may exist in the meaning and content of the faith system can be dealt with by a literal reading and interpretation of Biblical passages which can be spoken with certainty and authority as absolute truth. Biblical interpretations which may vary from this literal view cannot be handled within exclusivist theology. Here identity is what remains the same, so it is opposed to the diversity and change of otherness. Absolute truth excludes dialogue, and identity excludes openness. So, then, claims Moyaert, the danger of exclusivism is that it tends to contain a myopic or narrow understanding of religious commitment and identity.

An even greater danger is that this fact can impact relations with other faiths at all levels of participation in extremely negative ways. It may indeed strengthen commitment among Christian believers themselves. But it is also clear that the soteriology of exclusivism in theory and in practice appears to strengthen the barriers between Christianity and other faiths, resulting in the application of a missiology exactly reversed from the Bible. At this point, exclusivism starts to operate like a self-fulfilling prophecy in the sense that excluding all “other faiths” compels Christians to only engage in relationships with their own Christian neighbors.

From this perspective, the doctrine of Kingdom of God is a very distant reality and hardly achievable in step-by-step human fashion. The soteriology of God rejection and



human sinfulness contained in exclusivism does not appear to invite continuously healing relations with other faiths, according to Moyaert. Indeed, it seems to encourage “broken and discontinuous relations” with other faiths.

B. The Ambiguity of Inclusivism

Unlike exclusivist theology, here within the inclusivist theological approach the main soteriological emphasis is not a personal relationship with God the mediator of salvation but, rather, the mediation of “God’s will for universal salvation”. In other words, human beings can be saved without having any knowledge of Christ at all, although the absolute reality of salvation only in the divine incarnation remains. Moyaert claims that this makes inclusivism appear as if it is favorable towards interreligious dialogue because it posits that all humans are saved and all were created by God. All human beings share a common origin and the salvific character of humanity’s history is the same for everyone, making divine salvation the same for everyone. It’s simply that divine salvation is mediated differently for other faiths than it is for the Christian faith. That is, God makes salvation accessible to adherents of other faiths in different ways than for Christians.

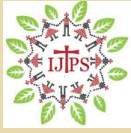
So, then, different religious faith systems are not differences in kind but, rather, differences in paths to salvation, the same salvation as for Christians. God is always universally present and shared with “other faiths”. This is the theological foundation for interreligious dialogue within inclusivism. From an inclusivist theological perspective, human beings are all interconnected in the PRESENT in a positive, optimistic way by sharing in the coming Reign of God on earth through participation in the mystery of salvation.

This present “connectedness” between human beings and God AND among human beings themselves forms the basis for a positive view of the religious “other” and, by extension, interreligious dialogue. Unlike exclusivist theology which starts with the Fall and places a pessimistic soteriological emphasis on excluding other faiths, discontinuity, and distinction, inclusivist theology points of contact, similarity, and continuity between faith systems. In this way, the religious universe becomes integrated into a “coherent whole”, making the religious “other” not so strange and depraved after all.

However, the great strength of this integrated aspect of the human religious universe in the inclusivist model is also exactly its weakness. How so? Moyaert says it continues the one-sided view of “openness” found within the exclusivist theological camp. The religious “other” within inclusivism does not appear as an independent other in its own right but, rather, in its connection to or affinity with the Christian faith. The strange religious “other” is absorbed within the known and familiar Christian tradition. It is Christian absorption of “other faiths” through appropriation, a unique selfing and othering grammar called encompassment rather than the strict selfing and othering technique employed by exclusivist theology.

The similarities between exclusivism and inclusivism do not end there, according to Moyaert. From within exclusivist theology, the “truth” claims contained in other faith systems are only true insofar as they confirm or lend support to Christian truth claims. This means that inclusivism contains within it a hierarchy of truth claims wherein the Christian faith sits at the top of that hierarchy. In other words, inclusivism is as hierarchical as exclusivism.

Therefore, the “tension” mentioned earlier between “identity” and “openness”, between commitment to one’s faith and openness to other faiths, is here expressed as tension



between all-encompassing universalism and particularism. Inclusivism includes the religious “other”, Moyaert claims, but only by robbing that religious “other” separate and independent uniqueness. The tensive relationship between identity and openness is not “balanced” but, instead, “one-sided”.

C. Pluralism: Democratizing the Religious Universe

According to Moyaert, the pluralism theological model is often presented as the “dream partner of interreligious dialogue”. Although distinctively lending itself well to the promise of dialogue between different religious faiths, it also gives rise to several problems. The fundamental feature of pluralist theology is the belief that different religious faith systems simply represent different ways of conceiving and relating to a “divine Reality” that transcends all human attempts to express or describe it.

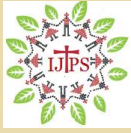
All the various religious faiths including Christianity are severely limited by their own human imperfections in their attempts to comprehend a “divine Reality” that transcends human-based understanding, an incapacity based in the Kantian distinction between the “noumenal” and the “phenomenal”, between the divine Transcendent itself and the way limited HUMAN BEINGS express it in material reality in the context of culture and other different human circumstances.

The upshot of this distinction is that each culture produces its own response to the divine Transcendent. In turn, this means that all of the diverse religious faiths participate in a similar soteriological project, but not one that relates to classical theology of religions. Pluralist theologians such as Hick (1982), Knitter (1985), and several others argue that the soteriology of pluralism is the liberation from egoism it provides in order to permit a focus on “ultimate reality”. Therefore, according to pluralist theology, no particular religious faith can claim soteriological superiority. Within pluralism, soteriological parity is the name of the game.

The soteriological model of pluralist theology strongly implies a certain view of interreligious dialogue. It claims that this dialogue cannot be authentic nor fruitful unless four conditions are met. First, it must be accepted that all religions have a common ground. There are not only commonalities and similarities between different religious faiths but, more profound epistemological connections, namely, one single overarching “divine Reality” or “divine Transcendent” but just expressed differently in various religious faiths. The presupposition here is clear: unity of religious faith is achieved through diversity.

The second precondition for authentic interreligious dialogue is the “de-absolutization of truth”. Since human beings cannot perfectly express or describe this “divine Reality”, this means that no particular religious faith system possesses a monopoly on “truth”. Truth remains a mystery in this theological model. This claim has significant impact upon the nature and function of interreligious dialogue because it demands from participants wholehearted genuine acceptance of the relativity of their own religious faith systems as a precondition for participation.

The third pre-requisite for interreligious dialogue within the pluralism model is the view that the faith system of the religious “other” constitutes a “supplementation of one’s own faith tradition”. This supplementary view of other faiths implies that the goals of getting a better view of “divine Reality” can only be realized by relativizing one’s own religious faith system AND constitutively adding to it or mixing with it the faith system of the “other”.



The assumption is that Christians can only get a better view of “divine reality” by transcending their own religious faith system through relativizing it. A better understanding of “truth” can only be gained listening and learning “from the truth of others”. In this way, human beings are changed or transform themselves to a higher level of understanding “divine Reality” through encountering or dialoguing people from other faith systems. This is called the dialogical concept of truth.

This conception of “truth” leads to a different way to perceive and understand the relationship between faith identity and openness to other faiths. The tense relationship between them contained in the previous soteriological models, due largely to the view that they are opposed to each other, effectively disappears since they are now interconnected. Therefore, interreligious dialogue becomes a place where faith adherents go to get “truths” from adherents of other faith systems in order to “fill in the gaps” in their own faith. This ‘fill-in-the-gaps’ view of participation in interreligious dialogue is precisely what gives the impression that pluralism is its “dream partner”. Moyaert takes issue with this point of view.

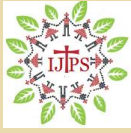
That is, pluralist theology is not the dream partner of interreligious dialogue. Rather than acknowledging other religious faiths as independent legitimate claims to religious truth in their own right, it transforms all religious diversity by collapsing or absorbing it into one truth for all faiths. The religious mask of this model appears to be an emphasis on distinct religious difference, diversity, and plurality. In fact, the soteriological emphasis is on universality and commonality. The assumption of common ground in practice involves the imposition of limits on listening or what can be heard from the religious “other” (Cobb, 1982, 1975). In this way, pluralism shows undeniable similarities to inclusivism (Knitter, 2005, 1985).

Like inclusivism, pluralism perceives religious solidarity by emphasizing continuity between religions, which means that conflicts and contradictions (discontinuities) between different religious faith systems are not focused upon very heavily. As well, like inclusivism pluralism adopts the grammar of encompassment or integration of different religious faith systems. However, this is accomplished by relativizing them through absorption into a universal “way to the Ultimate”.

2. SECTION II – THE MOVEMENT AWAY FROM SOTERIOLOGY

In the second section of the article, the author reviews recent theological literature to illustrate the emergence of increasing scholarly dissatisfaction with the classical theological view of interreligious dialogue. Several major criticisms are identified and examined thoroughly. One of the absolutely major criticisms of soteriology in classical theology of religions is that it perverts the virtue of openness, Moyaert claims. Another major criticism is that the threefold soteriological models are abstract designs with little if any practical relevance or utility.

A third criticism the author identified in the recent literature on theology of religions is that the soteriological models that are employed steadfastly avoid reference to religious traditions other than Christianity. Many of these dissatisfied theologians find this avoidance insulting and patronizing. In other words, “other faiths” are not being heard in the process of “interreligious dialogue” within classical theology of religion. These and other major criticisms are expressed more broadly within the relatively new soteriological model of particularism, which attempts to move beyond the obsession with soteriology within classical theology of religions.



That is why Moyaert spends a great deal of time explicating some of its main tenets, focusing mainly on the way particularism comes to a different understanding about the tense relationship between faith identity and openness to other faiths. Within this newer perspective, the claim is that hermeneutical openness should precede soteriological appreciation. You cannot truly be open to the truths of other faith systems until you are open hermeneutically.

That is to say, following Knitter, you cannot be “open” to other faiths unless you accept those other faiths as truly and independently different in their own right, not only insofar as they are connected to the Christian faith. Other faiths have to be accepted as truly different and those differences in themselves must also be truly accepted. That is why Knitter calls this new particularism model the “Acceptance Model” of theology. Essentially, Moyaert views this new perspective as the “fourth paradigm” in interreligious theology.

Acceptance, however, is only the first preconditional feature of the particularism model, argues Knitter and followers. Since the formerly “distinctive” quality of Christianity has been swept away by the “winds of modernity”, the distinctiveness of “other faiths” must now be recognized and accepted as the inevitable result of some kind of historical-evolutionary process. According to pluralist theologians like Knitter and Pratt (2003), this fact strongly implies that the assumption of common ground or linkages between different religions is essentially untenable.

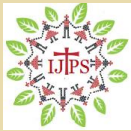
The claim here is that there are irreconcilable or irremediable differences between different religious faiths. So, then, as such they cannot be linked or combined conceptually in any way. “There can be no meaningful conceptual contact among the religions”. Therefore, the very essence of the concept “particularism” implies that the differences between religious faiths cannot be reduced to a “common ground” as assumed in the other soteriological models. In essence, religious differences are irreducible. Due to the “newness” of this model and its radical differences from previous models, Moyaert asserts the need to describe its central tenets.

A – Faith Commitment

The particularism model is suspicious about theologies of religion based in “common ground” perspectives and abstract schemas. In this view, religious meanings are always founded upon concrete practices within specific cultural contexts. So, the heavy focus is on the practical features of religion rather than the cognitive aspects. Religion is an all-encompassing interpretative framework that tells people who they are (identity) and HOW to live their lives; in effect, it is a way of life.

However, in this “way of life” view of religion, language takes front priority over material experience. Language appropriates for itself a way of life and a religious vocabulary, and as such creates a vivid religious life for the adherent. Since everyone in a culture shares a certain way of life, particularism emphasizes the communal dimension of faith identity. Becoming a member of a cultural community is what counts in this sort of religious identity.

Therefore, adherents from different religious traditions practice different ways of life that touches every part of practical and cognitive life - from marriage or mode of dress or reading texts TO all rituals, traditions, customs TO all choices, decisions, perceptions, and interpretations. No component of the adherent’s “way of life” will be left untouched. It is not “personal”, as in previous soteriological models, because it is comprehensive and takes account of every aspect of life. Although particularism acknowledges and respects diversity



and plurality of religions, genuine “openness” to other religions is considered important. But this “openness” doesn’t mean that adherents of particularism don’t “stand somewhere”. Indeed, particularism views faith commitments as “exclusive”. They cannot be combined and they are not interchangeable, and this feature of particularism theology has serious implications for both interreligious dialogue and interreligious conflict.

B. Doubting the Sincerity of Soteriological Openness

The particularism view also has serious implications for the soteriological vision of religious pluralism. Within this model, soteriological openness is not only approached with caution or suspicion but, rather, viewed as insincere or dishonest. In other words, it perverts the virtue of “openness” required for genuinely meaningful interreligious dialogue. So, then, it turns out that the so-called soteriological “openness” of previous theological models in theology of religions is actually a type of soteriological “closedness”. How does something presented as “openness” in practice actually turn out to be a just another form of “closedness”?

Particularism argues that the soteriological approach presupposes that different religious faiths represent different paths or roads to universal salvation. But the term “salvation” here is complex and extremely problematic because it doesn’t open up space for acknowledging “other” faiths in their “otherness”. Rather, the “goal” of “salvation” is treated as the “path” or “road” to “salvation”. In this way, the other faith is NOT taken seriously in its “otherness”.

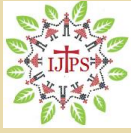
The “goal” of “salvation” in the Christian faith is projected into the other “path” or “road” or “religion”. In doing so, the Christian religion equalizes and then absorbs “other faiths” into itself. The “other” religious faith is not really “understood” in its own right or in its own independent “particularity” but, rather, “understood” from within the “structure of prejudices” of Christian soteriology.

The terminal effect of this soteriological feature of Christian theology upon genuine interreligious conversation is obvious. It is effectively “short-circuited” even before it can begin in earnest because it does not recognize or acknowledge the “other” as “other”. Therefore, there cannot be any “mutual understanding”; the meaning of what is being said by the “other faiths” cannot be grasped from their independent point by the Christian adherent. This means that soteriological openness is not hermeneutical openness.

So, then, what are the preconditions or pre-requisites for attainment of “true” hermeneutical openness within the model of particularism? According to Moyaert, this is the real hermeneutical challenge for interreligious dialogue. This dialogue can only begin to take place with a genuine desire to “understand” adherents of the “other faiths” in their otherness, that is, from their point of view. That is what authentic hermeneutical openness means, according to Moyaert, as opposed to the soteriological openness of the Christian tradition projected into the “other faiths”. The intractable, incompatible otherness of other religious traditions needs to be acknowledged and accepted by Christian adherents. From the particularism point of view, the so-called “soteriological openness” contained within the Christian tradition is nothing but smoke and mirrors, so to speak.

3. SECTION III

Let’s attempt a general recap of the author’s main themes up to this point. In Section I, the author talks about the quest for soteriological openness in classical theology of religions and the problems associated with this “quest”. In Section II, the author then argues in the particularism model for a movement away from soteriological openness towards a



more genuine hermeneutical openness which recognizes and accepts the religious “other” as an independent “other” in their own right, NOT as a soteriological extension of Christian soteriology.

In this third and final section of the article prior to the Conclusion, Moyaert claims that hermeneutical openness leads inexorably to the transformation of theology itself. The model of particularism with hermeneutical openness expresses itself in comparative theology. The central feature of this comparative theology is a central theological focus on the comparative study of religion. This comparative study of religion contains several key features.

First, it de-emphasizes the value of a priori theological assumptions on interpretational schemes since they tend to ignore the self-understanding of “other faiths”. Second, it rejects the a priori theological claim that there is only one global perspective on religion. Third, comparative theology explores the Christian tradition from the perspective of other faith traditions. From this perspective, it can be viewed as a genuine interreligious theology because it critically engages all religious sources and seeks to understand them as valid independent sources in their own right, in their wholeness and particularity a la Francis Clooney. That “understanding” does not emerge from the comparative theologian’s biases and expectations but, rather, in establishing distance from them.

Comparative theology also implies a detailed study of other religious traditions, usually one at a time. This detailed consideration of one religious faith primarily involves a close examination of particular religious texts that differ from the texts of one’s own religion. According to Moyaert, the reader of such a text must adopt a cognitive posture of “submission” and “self-effacement” in order to reach the levels of patience, perseverance, and imagination required for “understanding” it. This is why comparative theology differs from comparative religion, because it stems from the comparative theologian’s “commitment to God”.

This commitment is firmly maintained as they pursue their research, analysis and writing of the texts of the religious “other”. Comparative theologians adopt this cognitive posture because the aim is to know “a loving God more completely and intelligently”. For this reason, however, Moyaert asserts that such a venture of theological reflection remains a theological project, the next phase of theological development.

A – Comparative Theology as an Ambiguous Discipline?

The Catholic scholar and theologian Gavin D’Costa (2015, 1996) is deeply suspicious about any theological claims that balance between faith identity or commitment and genuine hermeneutical openness can be realized by comparative theology. Moyaert characterizes D’Costa’s first criticism of comparative theology is that it is too ambiguous because they don’t explicate their own fiduciary interests, that is, they don’t make a clear and strong theological case to what they are doing, they don’t make a clear theological argument for the central significance of hermeneutical openness to theology. The question becomes: what exactly are the full theological presuppositions of comparative theology? From a theological point of view, why should we enter into a “comparison” with “other faiths”?

D’Costa’s second critique of comparative theology is that it hesitates to make any judgements or views judgement with great suspicion or misgivings. This particular critique addresses the issue of what happens AFTER comparison to “other faiths” is made. In the debate with Clooney, the latter argues that comparison should occur BEFORE judgment of



the “other faith”. For Clooney, theological judgments demand adopting a “humble” posture towards other faiths, namely, a long and patient direct engagement with the central texts of the “other”. For his part, D’Costa believes that more is at stake theologically than simple humility or prudence, as Clooney claims. He argues that reluctance to engage in theological judgements of “other faiths” constitutes a feeble psychological reaction to unfounded accusations of “imperialism”.

In other words, theological judgments of “other faiths” are defined by many theologians as actions of imperialism. These theologians believe that judging “other faiths” by alien criteria is a form of theological imperialism that matches politico-economic imperialism. Consequently, comparative theologians like Clooney adopt a protective psychological mode against them in the formulation and development of their theology.

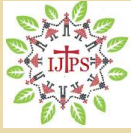
B – Hermeneutical Circle as Ricoeur’s Hermeneutical Arc

Here Moyaert argues that D’Costa’s telling criticisms of comparative theology can be at least partially addressed by viewing it as a “hermeneutical circle” using Ricoeur’s concept of “hermeneutical arc” (1976). That is to say, comparative theologians can face D’Costa’s challenge is they begin to view comparative theology as a continuous process of moving back and forth between faith commitment or identity and openness to other. This is possible, Moyaert claims, if comparative theologians use Ricoeur’s theory of interpretation especially as it is applied with the reading of the texts of theological “others”.

Ricoeur’s theory of interpreting these texts breaks down into three phases: the naïve first reading, the critical-analytical second reading, and the final phase of appropriation. These three phases are known as the “hermeneutical arc”, and they are motored by the tension existing between understanding and explaining. The assumption here is that better understanding occurs through greater explaining. This is achieved in comparative theology by alternating constantly between commitment to one’s faith and preventing its prejudices and presuppositions from entering into the interpretative process during the reading of texts of the “other faiths”. All three “phases” of the “hermeneutical arc” are aimed at understanding the “meaning” of these texts from the point of view of the “other faiths”, NOT from the particular theological point of view of the reader. The first naïve reading of that text is obviously a preliminary, pre-critical one. When reading a text the first time, mainly immediate familiar meaning comes to the mind of the reader. The full effect of the reader’s culture and context and theology are manifested here. Unless there are additional phases of interpretation that follow, the reader’s own theological tradition shapes the horizon or boundaries for understanding the other religious tradition.

On the other hand, when viewed reflexively by the reader cultural and theological prejudices and presuppositions can be recognized if the reader discloses their fiduciary interests, as D’Costa claims that they should. In this way, the naïve reader can check, validate, and correct their reading of the “other” text, thus preventing projection of their own biases into that text before moving to the next hermeneutical phases.

In order to genuinely understand the “inner dynamics” of the text itself, the second phase of critical-analytical is necessary which aims to scientifically explain the text by placing it at a “distance” from one’s own interpretative scheme. Here the text must be treated by the reader as a study object where several methods can be used to decode meaning. In doing so, the reader moves towards an understanding of a deeper meaning of text. Ricoeur calls this deeper reading “critical analysis” while Clooney (2010a, 2010b) calls it “close reading”. Needless to say, they function in the same way to prevent projection of the



“reader’s” meaning into the text, and in this way achieve some measure of distance or objectivity.

Finally, the last stage of the Ricoeur hermeneutical process is called appropriation. The central issue here is that the reader actualizes or “appropriates” the meaning of the text from the point of view of the “other faith”. The reader starts to understand how the meaning of the text reflects the lived experience of adherents of the “other faith”. In reaching this level of “understanding” of the religious texts of the “other faith”, Ricoeur claims, the reader has no choice but to “understand himself better” and “differently” from the “other faith” adherent. The reader’s self becomes “enlarged”, not just achieving an improved understanding of the text itself. In other words, when the true meaning of the text is actualized by the reader that text effectively “transforms the reader”, says Ricoeur. In a manner of speaking, then, Ricoeur claims that a reader finds themselves as a reader by losing themselves to the text itself, by debasing themselves in front of that text. The argument here is that the only way a theological reader can arrive at an authentic reading and understanding of the texts of other faiths is by not a priori reducing God to the fixed and familiar claims of one’s own theological interests because that would mean placing limits on God’s activity.

This argument holds profound implications for theology and interreligious dialogue, Moyaert argues. It turns out that D’Costa’s strong emphasis on the central importance of theological judgment in comparative theology is correct. Interreligious dialogue cannot end at the point of simply understanding the “other faith”. It must also ask what the newly appropriated “meanings” contained in those texts of the “other faith” say about God.

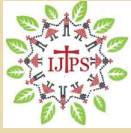
D’Costa asks: What does that mean? Moyaert answers that from a theological perspective, it certainly doesn’t mean that the purpose of engaging “other faiths” is to discover how they complement each other OR how to remove the possibility of religious conflict OR how to achieve a consensus of meaning OR how to compare differences between religions. Supposedly, it is about asking “where God comes into view”, Moyaert claims, and doing so with a genuine attitude of hermeneutical openness.

This can only be done by bringing back into the last phase of Ricoeur’s hermeneutical arc or circle what was suspended in the first phase, namely, “normative theological judgments”, as D’Costa insisted. This means that understanding the “other faith” is a never-ending process where the impact of the meaning contained in the texts of the “other faith” on Christian thinking and life experience is transformational. The “moment of theological judgment” in comparative theology cannot be intentionally avoided out of some unfounded fear of being accused of harboring “imperialist” theological motives, as it were. Why is this the case, Moyaert asks?

Theological judgments ensure that both one’s own faith convictions and the challenge of “other faiths” are taken very seriously. It ensures that God’s transcendence is not determined a priori. Lastly, but very pivotally, and following D’Costa’s argument, it also means admitting that not everything which seems possible in interreligious dialogue is truly possible. And that may be very difficult for many Christians to swallow, theologically speaking.

CONCLUSIONS

This essay began by asking to what extent, if at all, the problem of the tense relationship between faith identity and openness to other faiths can be realized. Moyaert’s argument is that the soteriological models within the theology of religion assume that this problem can indeed be solved and should be solved a priori. The model of comparative



theology, on the other hand, questions this a priori assumption that hermeneutical openness should be one precondition for soteriological openness. This newer theological model emphasizes the continuous, never-ending, and therefore, perpetually “unfinished” nature of that tensive relationship.

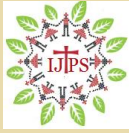
That means that the condition sine qua non of authentic interreligious dialogue is hermeneutical openness, not soteriological openness. For this reason, fixed stable answers to fixed stable questions is unattainable in comparative theology. Here searching endlessly for how the “grand narrative” expresses itself in the “other faith” is replaced by genuine learning from the “other faith” in its own terms that leaves one’s faith identity vulnerable to transformation, effectively deranging one’s personal life experiences and beliefs.

Interreligious dialogue in the comparative view is not about solving the problem of diversity of religious faiths because it is not viewed as a “problem” in the first place. So, then, comparative theology does not solve the tensive relationship between conviction to one’s faith and genuine openness to other faiths. Rather, it stands firmly exactly in the middle of this tension. Why? Answer: it is believed that by doing so one can learn more about God than utilizing any other theological approach.

D’Costa and several other modern theologians might beg to differ. Regardless, Moyaert’s argument is well worth consideration and thorough discussion as long as its weaknesses and strengths are clearly understood from both a theoretical and methodological view AND the validity of opposing theological perspectives are introduced into that argument in a straightforwardly honest manner.

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THE MEANING OF LIFE. PHILOSOPHY VERSUS THEOLOGY PHILOSOPHICAL MORAL NIHILISM VERSUS MORAL THEOLOGY FROM AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

The dichotomous structure of the human person defines it as a being who transcends time and space in search of perfection. Nothing in the materiality of the created world can rest the soul of man, which is permanently in a movement incomprehensible to rationality, towards the Absolute. If God as the Absolute does not obey the laws of physics, and if man has his soul directly from Him, "by the breath of life" (Genesis 2:7), it is imperative to consider whether human nature can be limited to rationality or whether it demands of itself the union, as far as it is possible for human beings, with God. From this perspective, it is necessary to analyze from an anthropological perspective the philosophical precepts regarding nihilism, be it metaphysical or the doctrine of Orthodox theology that positions man in another relationship, both with God and his fellow men.

Keywords: social equality; moral law; moral nihilism; metaphysical nihilism;

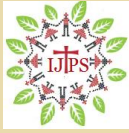
INTRODUCTION

The human person can be defined in his complexity as a dichotomous being only by correctly relating to moral values, which find their foundation in the Absolute morality of God. The removal of the human person from the sacred space and his anchoring only in the profane denotes a simplistic analysis of what moral nihilism entails. Thus, philosophical nihilism concludes that the moral absolute does not exist, and ethical systems "have no claims to validity".¹

From a philosophical perspective, the relationship of man only to reasoning denotes the impossibility of applying moral values, precisely because rationality, limited to materiality, does not grasp an ultimate justification, as expressed in theology the relationship of man to God, Him being the Absolute Moral Instance. From this, it follows that the ethical nihilism of philosophy transposes the human person into egocentrism, precisely because if there is no moral authority, everyone can act without limits.

The nihilistic hypothesis that everything can be justified when nothing is true is utterly false. "We only have to look at the multitude of options to conclude that nothing is true; If the next move is to proudly proclaim, 'So everything is justified,' we have a new

¹ See: Ken Gemes, "Nihilism and the Affirmation of Life: A Review of and Dialogue with Bernard Reginster," in *European Journal of Philosophy* 16 (3), 2008, pp. 459–466; Nadeem Hussain, "Metaethics and Nihilism in Reginster's *The Affirmation of Life*" in *Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 43 (1), 2012, pp. 99–117.



principle of action."² Of course, this new principle can only be based on either a form of violence or a form of egocentrism, which, although it does not come from nihilistic ideology, nevertheless leads the individual to find meaning where the answer of nihilism is lacking.

1. PHILOSOPHICAL MORAL NIHILISM AND THE EXPRESSION OF ITS FORMS

When it comes to moral nihilism, it can be expressed in at least three distinct forms. Thus, the first form is defined by the denial of any possible moral principle, so the person implicitly accesses the experience of a life without moral norms. A second form of philosophical moral nihilism is expressed by admitting the existence of a judgment of an arbitrary nature, this form being against any rational criticism, hence it follows that this form of nihilism outlines a series of individual moral judgments. The third form is described by egocentrism, in the sense that each person bears a responsibility only to himself. From this form of self-centeredness results the total indifference to the effects that his actions have on another person.

These three forms of expression of moral nihilism are termed by the American theologian Donald Crosby, professor emeritus of philosophy at Colorado State University, as amorality, moral subjectivism, and egoism³.

According to the theologian, amorality presents itself as a form of nihilism precisely because it brings to the fore the total negation of everything that can be defined as the norm of a moral life. For this category, any form of morality norm is denied, and the person who adheres to this current is totally removed from any system of moral norms⁴.

Unlike amorality, moral subjectivism is based on the denial of the reasoning of the person of choice when there are different moral forms. From this perspective, moral norms are in fact expressions of the choices that the human person makes, choices that he considers positive or negative in their relation to other people. Interesting is the conclusion reached by the philosopher Robert G. Olson who, starting from the forms of moral nihilism, points out: "If by nihilism we mean a distrust in the possibility of justifying moral judgments in a rational way, and if philosophers reflect the intellectual climate of the times in which they live, then our age is truly nihilistic. At no time in Western history, except, perhaps, the Hellenistic era, have so many philosophers regarded moral statements as somehow arbitrary."⁵

The problem of moral subjectivism is highlighted by many important researchers, including Bertrand Russell, who brought to the fore a form of ethics of emotions. When the question arises of misunderstandings between basic moral norms, which by definition cannot be resolved by any evidence of a rational nature, the statements being naturally subjective, each person appealing to his own emotions "can use such rhetorical artifices as to arouse emotions similar to others"⁶, of course to demonstrate his own norms of what he considers to be moral. From what has been highlighted, it can be concluded that ethical statements highlight emotions that, in themselves, cannot be confirmed or denied. From this we

² J. Goudsblom, *Nihilism and culture*, Blackwell, 1980, p. 137.

³ Donald Crosby, *The Specter of the Absurd, Sources and Criticisms of Modern Nihilism*, Suny Press, 1988, p. 11.

⁴ Donald Crosby, *The Specter of the Absurd...*, p. 12.

⁵ Robert G. Olson, "Nihilism," in Paul Edwards (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, V, The Macmillan Company and the Free Press, 1976, p. 515.

⁶ Bertrand Russell, *Religion and Science*, translated by Monica Medeleanu, Herald, 2018, p. 229.



understand that the emotions of moral subjectivism highlighted by Russell can be expressed as neither rational nor irrational. Thus, ethics "is an attempt to give universal and not just personal importance to certain desires of ours"⁷.

If the field of moral ethics is inextricably linked to the subjectivism of the choice of the human person, it follows that the moral norms between which there is disagreement are in fact differences of opinion. "This doctrine consists in holding that if two people differ in values, it is not a disagreement about some kind of truth, but a difference in taste. If one person says oysters are good, and another says I think they are bad, we recognize that there is nothing to discuss. The theory in question holds that all differences in values are of this kind. (...) The main reason for adopting this point of view is the total impossibility of finding arguments proving that this or that has an intrinsic value"⁸.

As there cannot be a valid universal agreement between people's emotions, it follows that philosophical moral norms are also seen in this way, in the sense that each person, starting from his own form of experience of pleasure or discomfort, defines as moral certain elements that produce a certain state of comfort. "In these feelings of pleasure and discomfort, and in them alone, lies the sense of *moral duty*"⁹.

Starting from Russell's idea that "what science cannot explain, man cannot know"¹⁰, we deduce that there is no fundamental philosophical, rational answer regarding moral norms. By the fact that moral norms, as they have been expressed in philosophy, go beyond the realm of science, and therefore the realm of knowledge, it follows that it is precisely the radical non-recognition of moral norms that gives meaning to moral nihilism.

Self-centeredness is the third form in which philosophical nihilism can be defined. This form stands out differently from amoralism in that selfishness causes the human person to claim to be a form of morality in himself. Thus, the person feels that his own norms of morality impose by himself his own evolution towards his fellow men. According to this form of nihilism, anyone who asserts the existence of a form of moral obligation to another is deceiving himself. The fundamental feature of self-centered nihilism is that it "rejects what is commonly regarded as the moral point of view"¹¹.

According to the Austrian philosopher Kurt Baier, whose work defines him as a moralist, man should follow "rules designed to cancel motives of personal interest, whenever it is in everyone's interest alike that these rules are generally followed"¹². In this philosopher's view, no person can be above another, hence the result that no one, for any reason, can benefit from special treatment from society. Starting from the premise that all people are equal by birth, involuntarily sharing the same human being, "to be moral means, therefore, to look at the world from everyone's perspective, not just one's own person. From this it follows that we should try to put ourselves in the shoes of others who will be affected by our actions and seek for them exactly what we would seek for ourselves"¹³.

The English writer Clive Staples Lewis expresses himself in the same idea in his work *Surprised by Joy: The Shape of My Early Life*, where he points out that the logic of the moral point of view consists in "preferring one's own happiness to that of one's neighbors

⁷ Bertrand Russell, *Religion and Science...*, p. 235.

⁸ Bertrand Russell, *Religion and Science...*, p. 238.

⁹ P. Edwards and P. Arthur, *A Modern Introduction to Philosophy*, The Free Press, New York, 1965, p. 487.

¹⁰ Bertrand Russell, *Religion and Science...*, p. 243.

¹¹ Donald Crosby, *The Specter of the Absurd...*, p. 14.

¹² Kurt Baier, *The Moral Point of View: A Rational Basis for Ethics*, New York, 1965, p. 155.

¹³ Kurt Baier, *The Moral Point of View...*, p. 107.



would be like thinking that the nearest telephone pole is actually the largest"¹⁴. The idea that one person considers himself more important than another is, in Lewis' view, nothing more than a distortion of reality and implicitly of proximity.

The two expressions, both that of Baier and that of Lewis, which denote a common point of view regarding morality, are categorically rejected by the foundations of egocentrism as a form of philosophical nihilism. This view is elegantly highlighted by the German philosopher Max Stirner, who, in his work *The Ego and His Own: The Case of the Individual Against Authority*, states: "For the egoist, nothing is high enough for him to humble himself before him, nothing is so independent as to live out of love for him, nothing is so sacred as to sacrifice for him. The love of the egoist rises into egoism, flows into the bed of egoism, and empties itself again into egoism"¹⁵.

Max Stirner's analysis shows that the person marked by selfishness uses all the means necessary to achieve his own goal, namely personal pleasure. From this it follows that the whole of creation is regarded by the egoistic man as his property, he never desires the freedom or equality of men. Basically, the man marked by selfishness, sees in other people only simple characters on whom to exert his power and his own desires. In the reason of such a man, other human persons are totally worthless, and Stirner concludes that no one owes anyone anything at all. "We owe nothing to each other, for what I seem to owe to you, I owe at most to myself"¹⁶.

By denying a moral point of view, any notion of equality between people is naturally rejected, and therefore implicitly any form of moral law. Starting from the uniqueness of each person, Stirner's main thesis is expressed as follows: "I am not an ego along with other egos, but the unique ego: I am unique. That is why my desires are unique, and so are my deeds; In short, everything about me is unique. And only as this unique self-do I appropriate everything, as I put myself to work and develop, only in this way. I do not develop people, not even as a man, but, like me, I develop myself. This is the meaning of unique"¹⁷.

From Stirner's expression we understand the total negation of the concept that defines similarity between persons, abstracting from those common to nature and implicitly raising the idea of uniqueness of each one to the highest level. Thus, the moral law, which presupposes by definition an equality of all people, is defined as being totally devoid of ontological value, considering egoism as the only form of morality. "Since each individual is totally unique, no general predicate can be applied to any given individual. All people are nothing and base their lives on nothing"¹⁸.

The preliminary conclusions of those presented denote the fact that there are certain points of convergence between egoism, amoralism and moral subjectivism. Thus, egoism and amoralism find their convergence in the fact that they reject fundamental moral elements such as freedom, justice, goodness. At the same time, egoism becomes convergent with moral subjectivism to the point where the aspect according to which the content of egoistic morality is relative is defined. In other words, each person has the duty to formulate his own content specific to morality that is useful to his own person and not to another person.

¹⁴ C. S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy: The Shape of My Early Life*, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1955, p. 226.

¹⁵ Max Stirner, *The Ego and His Own: The Case of the Individual Against Authority*, Dover Publications, 2005, p. 203.

¹⁶ Max Stirner, *The Ego and His Own...*, p. 205.

¹⁷ Max Stirner, *The Ego and His Own...*, p. 256.

¹⁸ Max Stirner, *The Ego and His Own...*, p. 261.



2. METAPHYSICAL NIHILISM FROM A PHILOSOPHICAL PERSPECTIVE. NIETZSCHE, RUSSELL, SCHOPENHAUER

Unlike philosophical moral nihilism, metaphysical nihilism presents itself as the absolute negation of the world as an independent existence, hence the idea of an "ontological nothingness"¹⁹, which would explain the world only in relation to an I. This ideology highlights the fact that reality is in fact only an illusion, a set of meaningless rules. "The opinion that nothing is real can lead either to a magnificent frenzy of being the center of the universe - without its perception by the observer, the universe does not exist - or to a total helplessness in the face of an overwhelming nullity, depending on the extent to which this nihilistic formulation is pursued"²⁰.

In relation to the cosmos, this form of nihilism highlights the impossibility of understanding and defining it as a structure, equally challenging the fact that the universe can be a support for all the value meanings to which the human person naturally aspires. Nietzsche's formula according to which "there are no facts, everything is in flux, incomprehensible, evasive; what is relatively more durable are our opinions"²¹, outlines the first way of exemplifying what is defined as cosmic nihilism. On the other hand, even if the cosmos had an intelligible structure, it would naturally be above all rationality, so it would be totally alien to the perception of the human person. For such a theory, the world "cannot be regarded as a comprehensive structure of objective meanings, but rather must be regarded as a metaphysical chaos"²².

Another nihilistic approach to the cosmos presents it as intelligible, therefore mathematically demonstrable, but totally worthless, in the sense that it does not represent a value system that influences human life. The philosopher Bertrand Russell develops this idea, exemplifying the universe as "alien and inhuman", and the totality of what humanity defines as values, is insignificant for the cosmos. "We must accept the fact that the natural world does not take into account any distinction between good and evil, and that it is nothing more than an arena of blind forces or powers that have combined by pure chance in the distant past to create conditions favorable to the emergence of human life. The same forces are now, inexorably, leading to the disappearance of humanity. Every human being is a helpless atom"²³.

The solution that Russell offers regarding man's relationship to the universe is to deny the model offered by natural forces and to seek to focus the human person on social relations from which a common, ephemeral form of happiness would result. In short, his vision regarding the relationship between the universe and man can be expressed in the words: "Short and powerless is the life of man; upon him and his entire race befalls, mercilessly and darkly, the slow and certain fate. Blinded to good and evil, indifferent to destruction, all-powerful matter rolls on its implacable path; Man, condemned today to lose his dearest beings, tomorrow to pass through the gate of darkness himself, has no choice but to cherish, before the blow falls, the great thoughts that ennoble his little day; despising the cowardly fears of the slave of Destiny, to worship the altar which his own hands have built; unchallenged by the empire of chance, in order to keep his mind free from the gratuitous

¹⁹ D. Eford, "Combinatorialism and the Possibility of Nothing", in *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 84 (2), 2006, p. 269.

²⁰ W. Slocombe, *Nihilism and the Sublime Postmodern*, Routledge, 2005, p. 6.

²¹ F. Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, Penguin Classics, translated by Michael A. Scarpitti, 2017, p. 327.

²² R. W. K. Patterson, *The Nihilistic Egoist: Max Stirner*, Oxford University Press, 1971, p. 217.

²³ Bertrand Russell, *Free Man's Worship*, Routledge, 1976, p. 47.



tyranny that governs his external life; proudly defying the irresistible forces that tolerate, for a moment, his knowledge and condemnation, in order to support alone, a tired but unyielding Atlas, the world that his own ideals have shaped despite the trampling march of unconscious power"²⁴.

The summary analysis of what has been highlighted denotes a clear connection between moral and cosmic nihilism, the conclusion being that, if there is no relationship between facts and values, it follows that the totality of the facts presented scientifically are worthless.

The relative form of cosmic nihilism is also analyzed by the German philosopher Schopenhauer, who presents the world as being ruled by "blind energy"²⁵. In this thinker's view, the world is an accumulation of pain and suffering, and the human person, through his will, produces suffering that can be described in many ways. For him, the foundation of the human person's effort lies in pain. "Thus, a constant internal war is being waged all over the world, and the price of every satisfaction is the pain or deprivation of someone or something at the expense of which satisfaction is obtained"²⁶. According to the theory described, even pleasure is nothing more than the temporary absence of pain, which is why the German philosopher recommends pleasure to be regarded as negative, because "the satisfied desire soon produces boredom, and life swings like a pendulum back and forth between pain and boredom"²⁷.

The overflow of suffering in Schopenhauer's vision denotes the tragedy of the human being, who, even when he overcomes the sufferings of life, still cannot escape the inevitability of death. As man is always under the threat of death, the human person's effort to resist suffering is classified as totally useless. Thus, the German philosopher highlights: "Life is a sea, full of rocks and whirlpools, which man avoids with the greatest care and solicitude, although he knows that, even if he manages to get through with all his efforts and skill, still, by doing so, he approaches at every step the total, inevitable and irremediable shipwreck, death; in fact, he even goes towards it; this is the final goal of the laborious journey, and worse for him than all the rocks from which he has escaped"²⁸. From this it follows that the world is in fact the punishment of the man who was born, predestined to unhappiness, and pain is in fact "as it should be, in a world in which each of us pays the punishment of existence in his own specific way"²⁹.

Concluding the vision of these great thinkers regarding the cosmos and implicitly the relationship of the human person with it, we can affirm that each of them qualifies to be nihilists, each in their own way. "While Stirner pleads for selfishness, Schopenhauer sees it as the source of all suffering. While Nietzsche celebrates the will to power as the highest value, Schopenhauer rejects it as the essence of evil. And where Russell recommends civilized existence as a fortress against a careless world, Schopenhauer would make us lay aside the concerns characteristic of civilization and seek instead secluded lives, characterized by severe personal hardships and selflessness"³⁰.

²⁴ Bertrand Russell, *Free Man's Worship...*, p. 54

²⁵ Arthur Schopenhauer, *World as Will & Idea*, Vol. 1, Everyman Paperbacks, 1995, p. 399.

²⁶ Arthur Schopenhauer, *World as Will & Idea...*, p. 399.

²⁷ Arthur Schopenhauer, *World as Will & Idea...*, p. 402.

²⁸ Arthur Schopenhauer, *World as Will & Idea...*, p. 403.

²⁹ Arthur Schopenhauer, *Complete Essays of Schopenhauer*, T. Bailey Saunders (trans.), book V, Willey Book Company, New York, 1942, p. 24

³⁰ Donald Crosby, *The Specter of the Absurd...*, p. 30.



3. THE MEANING OF THE EXISTENCE OF THE HUMAN PERSON FROM A THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE. DUMITRU STĂNILOAE

Paraphrasing the great Romanian philosopher Petre Țuțea, the truth is always revealed. From this it follows that the human person, through the rationality with which he is endowed by creation, has the capacity to receive the truth, through the act of revelation, but no rationality, devoid of faith, can penetrate the mystery of man's correct relationship to God. Starting from the dichotomous structure of the human person, we can submit to analysis two systems of moral norms. The first refers to the morality of dogmas, which is of divine origin, because the truth is revealed. The second system is constituted by the morality of norms, and this juggles according to the inability of reason to raise itself beyond materiality. If man defines himself as a perfectible being, the state of perfection towards which he tends clearly exceeds the limits imposed by rationality.

3.1. THE HUMAN PERSON, THE REALITY OF GOOD IN TIME AND SPACE

The definition of the supreme good can only be achieved by relating to God, because this relationship offers man the right understanding that, in God, "good is not abstract, purely thought, but a subsisting good, as such it is a reference of one person to another person"³¹. Starting from this, we can express the reality that the human person is created to continue, in the materiality of the created world, the interpersonal and eternal relationship existing between the Persons of the Holy Trinity. The personal good of God is extended in creation through the human person. Thus, "God, therefore, deciding to work outwardly, in accordance with His being, or with the good which is eternal interpersonal communion, uses His power to create persons who move towards the completion of communion with Him and with each other. The manifestation of God's power can have no other purpose than Himself"³².

The relationship between the Uncreated and the creature implies the movement of man in complete freedom towards God. The Creator calls the crown of creation to perfection, to communion in grace, and man, in his freedom, responds to this call by involving other elements of creation such as time and space. The importance of the human person lies precisely in the fact that he is not an object of creation, but a subject to which God Himself turns. Moreover, time and space are dimensions in the act of creation made precisely to sustain the created subjectivity.

The time of the creature can be understood only in relation to the eternity of God. The love between the Persons of the Holy Trinity has an absolute character, being a continuous present, without past and without future. By correctly relating to the Creator, the rational creature experiences the fact that "time does not belong to the being of created existence, since it can be surpassed. Time is the dynamic condition of created subjects that have not yet reached God"³³.

Being capable of perceiving God's love, the human person responds to divine love, this act introducing time as a means of manifesting love. "Time represents the spiritual distance between created persons and God, between God's offer of love and the expectation of an answer"³⁴ from man. Of course, it is imperative that man, in complete freedom, desire to respond to the love of the Holy Trinity, and this response is visible when man collaborates

³¹ Fr. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, vol. 1, Basilica Publishing House, 2018 p. 242

³² Fr. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, vol. 1..., p. 89

³³ Fr. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, vol. 1..., p. 128

³⁴ Fr. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, vol. 1..., p. 129



with divine grace and gradually grows in spiritual living. "As we draw closer to God, time becomes more and more filled with eternity"³⁵. From this it follows that time is only a means by which God draws the human person to His eternity. Without the correct relationship of man to God, time is no longer how the creature moves towards eternity but has a fateful character. The man seized by selfishness perceives the passage of time as a permanent fear in the face of the reality of death.

Along with time, space is, in Father Stăniloae's view, also a means used by the human person to participate in the love of the Holy Trinity. The dignity of a person gives meaning to space, which in the absence of people would be defined as "empty and meaningless"³⁶. For man, both space and time must be perceived as the means of work by which he can experience the absolute love of God in eternal life even in this life. "Just as time will be overwhelmed in the interiority of mutual and perfect communion, so will space be overwhelmed in the interiority of the same mutual and perfect communion, in perfect human intersubjectivity by raising it into divine intersubjectivity"³⁷.

The egoism present in philosophical nihilism makes human hypostases separate in time and space, the spiritual vacuum becoming insurmountable. The non-collaboration with the uncreated divine grace, fully free and conscious of man, has consequently the separation from the other and implicitly from the Persons of the Holy Trinity, and this in fact means the exit of man from communion and his direction towards the fateful destiny imposed by his anchoring only within the limits of materiality.

The rationality of human nature defines it as the being capable of encompassing within itself the reasons for creation, which are, in fact, the unifying factor between the created and the uncreated. To arrive at a different experience of reality, it is imperative that man "free himself from the passions that separate him from other people"³⁸ and implicitly from the Persons of the Holy Trinity. The divine-human hypostasis of the incarnate Son of God is living proof of the possibility of overcoming the distance between man and God. The overcoming of time and space in Christ is proof that human nature can transcend the two realities and is called by grace to the love of the Holy Trinity. This call finds its echo when man, completely free, chooses to grow spiritually in time and space, being aware that spatial and temporal reality only offer him the possibility of ascending into the eternity of God.

3.2. EXPERIENCING LIFE IN GOD THROUGH PURIFICATION, ILLUMINATION AND DEIFICATION

The ascension of the human person from the limits of materiality to the state of deification according to grace, therefore to the state of experience of existence in the love of the Holy Trinity, is achieved gradually, the ascension meaning first of all the exit of man from egocentrism and implicitly from what is imposed by materiality, then the taste, even in this life, of a vision of God through the means of the reasons, as in the end, in the state of deification, the experience of existence in God should be beyond the expressible and knowable.

The first stage, purification, involves the human person eliminating selfishness by transforming it into love for others. The multitude of passions that can govern the human person are based on selfishness, man's excessive self-love, and the struggle that he must

³⁵ Fr. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, vol. 1..., p. 129

³⁶ Fr. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, vol. 1..., p. 140

³⁷ Fr. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, vol. 1..., p. 144

³⁸ Fr. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, vol. 1..., p. 145



wage imperatively involves the replacement of passions with virtues. If man's existential goal is to elevate himself to the "likeness" of God, it is selfishness that distorts human nature by changing its natural purpose. Through selfishness, the centrality of God in man's life is replaced by a thirst directed towards various things offered by the materiality of the world, and man becomes unable to quench this thirst. The desire of the self-centered person to be all-sufficient throws man into an endless search, into a plunge that brings with it the deformation of natural affections. In such a state, the soul is threatened with "materialization" by being forced to work on lower, always unsatisfactory desires, and the person loses the very freedom with which he has been endowed by God.

The transfer, through faith, of the meaning of existence from one's own person to God represents the beginning of the exit from self-centeredness and the anchoring of man in a center external to him. It is also faith that modifies in man the center of his search, from those of materiality to those brought by the hope of salvation. The effect of faith is that it bears good fruit in man so that the end of purification may be marked by the definitive replacement of the passions with the beauty of the virtues. In this state, society itself sees itself transfigured, through its members, who, no longer subject to passions, malice and greed, are themselves restored.

The second stage, enlightenment, involves new powers of the soul through which man knows God. In this state, human rationality has an entirely different meaning, in the idea that it goes beyond the limitations imposed by materiality through the experience of uncreated divine grace. In the state of enlightenment, man experiences in depth the gifts of the Holy Spirit, Who, "through the Mystery of Holy Chrism, has created a dwelling place in the hidden center of our being. He is always in contact with us from that moment on"³⁹. Through these gifts, the human person acquires an intensification of what can be defined as a spiritual and intellectual faculty. Once reason is enlightened, man experiences the presence of God in everything. In this form of existence, man is defined by a state of prayer that raises him beyond any element of materiality, counting only the encounter, incomprehensible to the reasons of philosophy, between the Uncreated God and the creature. "Therefore, union is not really prayer, because in prayer the awareness of the difference from God is still too clear. It is the product of prayer, taking place at its end, as a rapture of the mind to God"⁴⁰.

The third stage, deification, is union with God outside the sphere of creation. In this state of existence, the human person is inexpressibly united with the uncreated light. This is the moment when time and space annul each other, and man experiences as in a continuous present the absolute love of the Persons of the Holy Trinity. The experience of this state by man does not imply the movement of man, but of God towards man, in the sense that by nothing that the human person can do he cannot lead him to this state. In other words, God Himself elevates man beyond all power and faculty of the mind, the entire action being a gift from the Creator. It should also be noted that in this work of God, the human person does not lose his identity, but chooses in complete freedom to collaborate with divine uncreated grace.

Deification is the state of holiness experienced by those who participate in the intersubjectivity of the Holy Trinity. The experience of this form of existence surpasses in all the expressible, the natural powers showing themselves to be unable to express it to the measure, being an overcoming of knowledge.

³⁹ Fr. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Orthodox Spirituality*, vol. 3, from Orthodox Moral Theology, IBMBOR Publishing House, Bucharest, 1981, p. 158.

⁴⁰ Fr. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Orthodox Spirituality...*, p. 256.



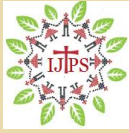
CONCLUSIONS

From what has been highlighted, we can say that the human person, as the crown of all creation, is called by the Creator to the state of deification according to grace. From this it follows that man cannot be subject to the limitations imposed by rationality and even by the materiality of the world, this not being the only reality. The limitation to this world, as the only reality, brings with it the danger that man, anchored only in matter, becomes subject to matter and threatens his soul with "materialization".

Philosophical systems, older and newer, limited by the power of reason, arrive at conclusions in which the personal self becomes the most important. This is where self-centeredness arises, and relationships between peers are no longer realized except on principles of necessity. Of course, the effects can be seen both at the personal level and at the level of the entire secularized society, which limits itself to the horizontal axis of existence and formulates what we define as moral nihilism, precisely because it does not relate the human person to the Only Absolute Moral Authority – God.

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THE INTERSECTION OF PHILOSOPHY AND MEDICINE IN THE BRAIN DEATH DEBATE (I): THE PHILOSOPHICAL ARGUMENT FOR THE EQUIVALENCE OF BRAIN DEATH AND HUMAN DEATH

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ABSTRACT

The debate on brain death as equivalent to human death involves complex philosophical and medical dimensions. Initially guided by scientific criteria, the discussion now incorporates philosophical arguments questioning whether brain death genuinely signifies the end of human life. Key contributions from various commissions highlight the role of the brain in maintaining the organism's integrative functions, but philosophers argue this extends beyond empirical medical knowledge. This interdisciplinary debate stresses the need for philosophical and ethical insights, alongside medical understanding, to fully grasp the implications of defining death.

Keywords: *brain death; human death; philosophical; medical; integrative functions; interdisciplinary;*

INTRODUCTION

In addition to scientific argumentation, which remains the most important, the need for arguments from the philosophical realm to support or refute the concept of brain death has been apparent from the very beginning. However, these philosophical analyses have shown that beyond the soundness of scientific arguments and evidence, brain death can be subjected to all kinds of interpretations, such that different philosophical approaches can lead to different and conflicting ethical conclusions.

There are, therefore, philosophical arguments that support brain death ascertained on criteria of brainstem death alone, 'brainstem death,' arguments that support the death of the entire brain, 'whole brain death,' and arguments that, abandoning the biological terrain almost entirely, seek to equate human death with the death of only the cerebral hemispheres, 'higher brain death,' or 'cortical death. Finally, there are philosophers who, if they do not try to prove the total falsity of brain death, at least question the possibility of acquiring moral certainty about it.

There are therefore philosophers who argue that brain death is not only a medical issue, but also or especially a philosophical issue, and that it is at the philosophical level that there is the real confusion that has resurrected the debate on a topic that seemed by now to have received unanimous consensus on all sides. If the responsibility for verifying brain death falls within the sphere of medical competence and is based on the criteria of ascertainment presented, equating the latter with the death of man is not an empirical medical thesis and, as such, is not exclusively the competence of physicians.



When we speak of brain death, we mean not only the death of the brain organ but also the death of man. The implication of the definition of brain death is that because the brain is so significant in its function for man's biological life, its collapse in itself leads to the cessation of life *tout court*, although all or most other vital biological functions remain. The conclusion that because a person's brain no longer functions, then he as a human person possessing life in the body is no longer alive is not a medical point of view. Or, as philosopher Josef Seifert, an opponent of brain death, states with good reason: "While on the irreversibility of the cessation of brain function, *only or at least predominantly medicine speaks competently*, in no way *only or at least predominantly medicine should or can say* whether the death of the organ 'brain' *is in fact the death of the human being*. Any doctor who talks about it does so *as a doctor doing philosophy*, and not as a doctor."¹

We are in a sense victims of the specialization of human knowledge and its shattering into so many different areas. No one holds holistic knowledge that can answer the problems that human life sometimes runs into. This fragmentation means that neither the doctor nor the philosopher nor the theologian nor the jurist, can answer for themselves the questions about life without being accused of presenting an insufficient and as such, reductionist perspective on the problem that needs to be solved.

In this perspective of the diversification and superspecialization of knowledge, I feel that a definitive answer on brain death and its ethical implications cannot come exclusively from medicine. There is also a need for *philosophical reflection and theological reflection and experience* that, together with medicine, will clarify such an intricate and, it seems, increasingly controversial problem as the problem of brain death.

1. UNDERSTANDING BRAIN DEATH: INTEGRATIVE UNITY AND PHILOSOPHICAL REFLECTION

As early as 1968, the Harvard Report, without going into philosophical or ethical details, held that "more than medical problems are present. There are moral, ethical, religious, and legal issues. Adequate definition here will prepare the way for better insight into all of these matters as well as for better law than is currently applicable."²

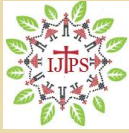
The definition of brain death as de facto death was supported at first exclusively with scientific arguments, while later, the 1981 President's Commission uses a variety of philosophical arguments to support it. Today, as we will have occasion to demonstrate by citing the opinions of the 2008 U.S. Presidential Commission, the arguments both supporting and rejecting brain death have shifted from predominantly scientific to predominantly philosophical arguments.

The 1981 President's Commission, relying on a stable scientific consensus, also introduced philosophical arguments to support the validity of the Harvard definition in an official document for the first time. But this was possible because, already soon after the appearance of the Harvard paper, a public debate began, which the 1981 Commission took full advantage of, so much so that its philosophical arguments were already formed at the time of its work.³

1 Josef SEIFERT, AA. VV., *Questioni mortali. L'attuale dibattito sulla morte cerebrale e il problema dei trapianti*, a cura di Risangela BARCARO e Paolo BECCHI, Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, 2004, 79.

2 AA.VV. "A Definition of Irreversible Coma. Report of Ad Hoc Committee of the Harvard Medical School to Examine the Definition of Brain Death," 85.

3 The most important works cited by the President's Commission are: J. L. BERNAT, C. M. CULVER, and B. GERT., "On the definition and criterion of death"; Robert M. VEATCH, *Death, Dying and the Biological*



According to the President's Commission's main argument in favor of brain death, the brain plays a unique role in integrating the biological functions of the organism such that if the brain is destroyed, the body is reduced to a conglomerate of organs. This idea allows for a distinction between the integrative life of the organism that functions as a whole and partial, disorganized life processes that are implemented only on mechanical principles. The death of the encephalon leads to the death of the organism as a whole.

*"On this view, death is that moment at which the body's physiological system ceases to constitute an integrated whole. Even if life continues in individual cells or organs, life of the organism as a whole requires complex integration, and without the latter, a person cannot properly be regarded as alive... A person is considered dead under this concept even if oxygenation and metabolism persist in some cells or organs. There would be no need to wait until all metabolism had ceased in every body part before recognizing that death has occurred."*⁴

What remains after the irreversible cessation of the functions of the entire encephalon, as the Presidential Commission defined brain death, is considered a mechanical system and not an organic one, since the function of integrating the body's organic systems and subsystems is presided over only by the encephalon. Philosophically, therefore, the Presidential Commission, considers the human body a mechanical system integrated by the encephalon. The following quotation from Bernat and colleagues, who provided the main scientific support, demonstrates this fully:

Philosophically, we answer the objection by saying that if the functioning of the brain is the factor which principally integrates any organism which has a brain, then if that function is lost, what is left is no longer as a whole an organic unity. If the dynamic equilibrium of the remaining parts of the system is maintained, it nevertheless *as a whole is a mechanical, not an organic system.*"⁵

The functioning of the organism as a whole, in this sense, is characterized by spontaneous and innate activities, realized by the integration of all or at least the majority of the organism's subsystems by the encephalon.

2. THE "WHITE PAPER OF THE PRESIDENT'S COUNCIL ON BIOETHICS"

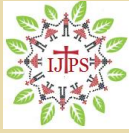
A more articulate philosophical argument was made by the recent paper of the American President's Council on Bioethics in 2008, which holds that the central question is precisely now a philosophical one. It is contextually stated, "Why do we describe the central question of this inquiry as a *philosophical* question? We do so, in part, because this question cannot be settled by appealing exclusively to clinical or pathophysiological facts."⁶

Revolution: Our Last Quest for Responsibility, Yale University Press, New Haven 1977; ID., "The whole-brain oriented concept of death: an outmoded philosophical formulation," in *Journal of Thanatology*, 3(1975)13-30; M. B. GREEN, D. WIKLER, "Brain Death and Personal Identity," in *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 2(1980)105-133; Douglas N. WALTON, *Defining Death: An Analytic Study of the Concept of Death in Philosophy and Medical Ethics*, McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal 1979; Julius KOREIN, "The Problem of Brain Death: Development and History," in *Ann. N.Y. Acad. Sci.* 19(1978);

4 AA. VV., President's Commission for the Study of Ethical Problems in Medicine and Bioemdicinal and Behavioural Research., *Defining Death...*, 33.

5 J. L. BERNAT, C. M. CULVER, and B. GERT., "On the definition and criterion of death," 391 (emphasis added).

6 AA.VV., *Controversies in determination of death*, A White Paper of the President's Council on Bioethics, 2008, 49.



Accordingly, accepting the most recent scientific and philosophical criticisms of the concept of brain death, this White Paper articulates a complex philosophical argument that we would present in the following pages, which, in some ways, is new compared to traditional philosophical argumentation.

The novelty of the scientific assumptions of this argument lies in accepting the persistence, at least for some time after brain failure, of the integrative unity of the organism. "If the patient is sustained with life-supporting technologies, this condition [brain failure] need not lead immediately to somatic disintegration or failure of other organ systems."⁷

Building on this new assumption, which was not accepted by the 1981 Presidential Commission, this paper makes a new and deeper interpretation of the concept of life as functioning of the organism as a whole. The argument we would analyze is found in the paper between pages 58 and 67, under the title, *"Position Two: There Is a Sound Biological Justification for Today's Neurological Standard."* This position, it states, *"defends the consensus, taking the challenges posed in recent years as opportunities to strengthen the philosophical rationale for the neurological standard."*⁸

Based on the review and reassessment of the clinical facts of the neurological standard of death, this position seeks to develop "a better rationale for continuing to use the neurological standard to determine whether a human being has died." Building on the philosophical assumption made by the earlier 1981 Commission based on the work of Bernat and colleagues, that an organism is alive when it functions as a whole, the paper asserts that the biological activity of cells and tissues remaining for some time yet does not indicate this kind of integrated functioning and that, consequently *"the moment at which the 'wholeness' of the body is lost ... must come before biological activity in all of its different cells or tissues has ceased."*

However, the position of the previous commission is criticized, which, it is argued, erred by focusing on the loss of somatic integration (loss of somatic integration) as a sign that the organism no longer functions as a whole. That is, the previous interpretation of "organism as a whole" as "an organism whose parts are working together in an integrated way" is deemed wrong, since:

*"Even in patient with total brain failure, some of the body's parts continue to work together in an integrated way for some time - for example, to fight infection, heal wounds, and maintain temperature. If these kinds of integration were sufficient to identify the presence of a living 'organism as a whole,' total brain failure could not serve as a criterion for organismic death, and the neurological standard enshrined in law would not be philosophically well-grounded."*⁹

Therefore, an attempt is made to formulate a more adequate explanation of the integrative unity of the organism that goes beyond mere somatic integration and shows that "after total brain failure the body is no longer an organismic whole and hence no longer alive," an explanation that offers "a superior defense of 'total brain failure' as the standard of declaring death." With this new reason/motivation (account) death remains a condition of the

7 AA.VV., *Controversies in determination of death*, A White Paper of the President's Council on Bioethics, 2008, 49.

8 AA.VV., *Controversies in determination of death*, A White Paper of the President's Council on Bioethics, 2008, 49.

9 AA.VV., *Controversies in determination of death*, A White Paper of the President's Council on Bioethics, 2008, 60.



organism as a whole, but reliance (reliance) on the concept of integration is abandoned and with that also "the false assumption that the brain is the 'integrator' of vital functions."

Consequently, determining whether an organism remains a whole does not depend on its somatic integration, but on recognizing the persistence or cessation of the fundamental vital *work* of a living organism (fundamental vital work of a living organism), namely, the self-preservation work acquired through the need-pulse of relationship and exchange with the surrounding environment (need-driven commerce with the surrounding world):

*"When there is good reason to believe that an injury has irreversibly destroyed an organism's ability to perform its fundamental vital work, then the conclusion that the organism as a whole has died is warranted."*¹⁰

It is then also explained what this 'fundamental vital work' of the organism consists of, the lack of which is equivalent to the loss of its functional unity and, as such, death. Compared to inanimate objects that continue to exist through inertia and without effort, each organism endures through its endeavor driven by its inner *need-pulse* for a continuous exchange with the surrounding world. This is what distinguishes living organisms from corpses.

This vital fundamental work depends, according to the document's drafters, on three essential capacities:

1. "Openness to the world, that is, receptivity to stimuli and signals from the surrounding environment." This openness manifests itself in different manners and at different levels. In higher animals, including humans, it is expressed primarily in consciousness and the feeling of awareness, even in its most rudimentary forms. In the persistent vegetative state, for example, the patient follows light with his eyes, twitches in response to pain, swallows fluids placed in the mouth, sleeps and wakes. These behaviors, even if they did not indicate self-awareness, witness the essential and vital openness of the organism to the surrounding world, which in this case, is not dead.

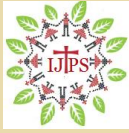
2. "The ability to act upon the world to selectively obtain what it needs." Also needed is the ability to *act* on one's own behalf to take food and water, and even more drastically, to breathe. Spontaneous respiration is an indispensable action in higher animals that makes metabolism and all other vital activities possible. Consequently, an organism that breathes spontaneously cannot be dead.

3. "The basic felt need that drives the organism to act as it must, to obtain what it needs and what its openness reveals to be available." *The basic felt need as an impulse of the organism to act in order to obtain what it needs and what its openness to the outside world reveals to be available.* The internal experience of need is manifested, for example and fundamentally, in the impulse to breathe. The perception of need can be conscious, but it can also be unconscious, as in the case of a person in a coma. The presence of the impulse to breathe, even in a comatose state, offers evidence of the continuation of the organism's impulse to live. After encephalic death, these elementary and essential capacities of any organism cease irreversibly. We can, therefore, state with certainty that the organism is no more, that the individual is dead.¹¹

The authors of the paper distinguish, therefore, the spontaneous action of breathing from the passive condition of being ventilated by a mechanical ventilator. The natural work

10 AA.VV., *Controversies in determination of death*, A White Paper of the President's Council on Bioethics, 2008, 60.

11 AA.VV., *Controversies in determination of death*, A White Paper of the President's Council on Bioethics, 2008, 61-64.



of spontaneous breathing, even in the absence of consciousness and awareness, is in itself a sure sign of the functioning of the organism as a whole. In contrast, artificial respiration that is not elicited by the experience of the inner impulse-need is not a sign of the genuine vitality of the organism. For this reason it can be said that mechanical ventilation obscures the arrival of death, namely, the death of the human organism as a working whole (the death of the human organism as a working whole).

This paper, seeks to correct the previous argument, especially in what concerns the concept of the life of the organism as an integrated whole. It accentuates, therefore, the spontaneity of the fundamental work that keeps the organism an integrated whole, especially respiration, which, to indicate the vitality of the organism, must be spontaneous and aroused by the internal experience of need. Thus, an in-depth interpretation is given to the concept of "organism as a whole," introducing, in addition to the functioning of the organism as a whole, functioning which, new scientific findings have shown is possible to a large extent even in brain-dead patients, also *the internal impulse-need* for this fundamental work, need that gives spontaneity to the act of breathing. The lack of this spontaneity indicates, according to the paper's authors, the loss of the internal impulse-need to live, and consequently, the loss of life.

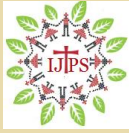
Although it uses more in-depth arguments than previous papers, the White Paper comes to the same conclusions by equating brain death with human death and defining it as loss of consciousness and spontaneous breathing under conditions of total irreversibility:

"If there are no signs of consciousness and if spontaneous breathing is absent and if the best clinical judgment is that these neurophysiological facts cannot be reversed, Position Two would lead us to conclude that a once-living patient has now died. Thus, on this account, total brain failure can continue to serve as a criterion for declaring death-not because it necessarily indicates complete loss of integrated somatic functioning, but because it is a sign that this organism can no longer engage in the essential work that defines living things."¹²

On closer inspection, the White Paper's proposal, circumvents the scientific criticism against brain death by dodging all arguments that purport to demonstrate both the persistence of non-encephalon-mediated integration of the organism and the persistence of isolated activity in the encephalon, through a revisiting and deepening of the concept of the organism being explained no longer through the concept of holistic integration of the organism as a *spontaneous interrelationship between the different parts of the organism*, but through its autonomous and spontaneous possibilities and capacities for *self-regulation* and *self-integration*, capacities verifiable only in *interaction with the environment*, of which the most basic is the capacity to breathe spontaneously.

This conception, in fact, is not new since it can be traced back to the concept of *autopoiesis*, which is the ability of the organism to autonomously maintain its own functional unity, an ability presided over by the encephalon. This does not mean that life resides exclusively in the encephalon or that there are no functions, even complex ones, that have their own autonomy and inertia nor that there is no relationship and interaction between the various parts, even apart from the functioning of the encephalon. Vital phenomena that persist even after the organism has lost its autopoietic ability to self-maintain and self-regulate do not indicate the organism's self-integration, but rather a process of interaction

12 AA.VV., *Controversies in determination of death*, A White Paper of the President's Council on Bioethics, 2008, 64.



among its different parts. According to some more recent authors, a distinction must be made between 'integration' and 'interaction' to understand the difference, which is difficult to observe between a living organism and a brain-dead organism.

*"Different tissues, organs and systems, interact with each other, sending and receiving messages, reacting in a certain way depending on the signal received, etc. This happens in the living organism, but it can also happen in an already dead body to the extent that, oxygenated with mechanical ventilation, some of its tissues, organs and systems still continue to function, receiving messages from each other, reacting autonomously to those messages. This same interaction we might even find outside the body, if a connection is maintained between various organs that are still functioning."*¹³

This kind of interaction present even in a brain-dead organism has nothing to do with the concept of "poietic self-integration" of an organism as a living unit. The fact that some biological functions remain present and that there is interaction between the parts of the organism due to the technical support that replaces some basic physiological processes, such as respiration that sustains the metabolism of every cell in the body, does not mean that the organism, without the encephalon, continues to self-manage as such an organism in its entirety.

The argumentative effort carried out by the *President's Council of Bioethics*, responds to the need to deepen fundamental concepts such as those of organism and life, which are necessary to better understand our topic and its ethical implications. It also demonstrates the lack of adequate exploration, both in the past and today, of these concepts and the underlying reasons why brain death would be equivalent to human death. "The debate around the criteria for ascertaining death certainly has this one positive thing: that it is forcing a little bit of everyone to think seriously about concepts that before were simply taken for granted."¹⁴

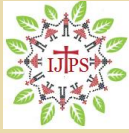
CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the intersection of philosophy and medicine in the brain death debate illuminates the complexity of defining human death. This discussion reveals that purely scientific definitions, while foundational, may not capture the full ethical and existential dimensions of the concept of death. Philosophical arguments challenge and enrich these definitions, questioning whether brain death truly marks the cessation of a human being's life. Throughout the evolving discourse, it becomes clear that determining brain death's equivalence to human death cannot rest solely on medical criteria. The topic necessitates an interdisciplinary approach that encompasses philosophical, ethical, and theological viewpoints. Such a multifaceted perspective ensures a more comprehensive understanding of death, which respects the complexity of life and human identity.

By integrating these diverse fields of knowledge, stakeholders can better navigate the ethical implications of brain death in medical practice. Future discussions and policies should continue to foster dialogue between medicine and philosophy, ensuring that both empirical evidence and humanistic concerns guide determinations of life and death. Ultimately, this approach promises more nuanced and ethically sound interpretations that can adapt to both advancing medical technologies and evolving societal values.

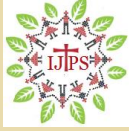
13 Gonzalo MIRANDA, "Encephalic death: analysis of arguments, for realistic moral reflection," 16.

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THE INTERSECTION OF PHILOSOPHY AND MEDICINE IN THE BRAIN DEATH DEBATE (II): THE PHILOSOPHICAL ARGUMENT AGAINST THE EQUIVALENCE OF BRAIN DEATH AND HUMAN DEATH

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ABSTRACT

The debate on brain death encompasses complex philosophical, ethical, and scientific dimensions. This article delves into philosophical arguments questioning the equivalence of brain death with human death, highlighting the work of philosophers like Hans Jonas, Josef Seifert, Robert Spaemann, and Peter Singer. It critiques the assumptions underlying brain death definitions, such as "brainstem death," "whole brain death," and "higher brain death," and explores the philosophical and ethical implications of these perspectives. Through exploring these arguments, the article emphasizes the inadequacy of purely medical perspectives in addressing the concept of death, advocating for an interdisciplinary approach. The discourse illustrates the stalemate in philosophical debates over brain death, where differing assumptions lead to conflicting conclusions, reflecting a broader cultural shift towards relativism in understanding human nature and truth.

Keywords: Brain death; philosophy; bioethics; interdisciplinary approach;

INTRODUCTION

The concept of brain death has sparked debates that extend beyond the scientific realm into philosophical, ethical, and, at times, theological domains. Philosophical arguments have shown that interpretations of brain death vary significantly, leading to disparate ethical conclusions. These interpretations include "brainstem death," "whole brain death," and "higher brain death," reflecting differing views on what constitutes human death. Some philosophers argue that the issue isn't solely medical but deeply philosophical, noting that equating brain organ death with the end of human life transcends empirical science. As Josef Seifert points out, the assertion that brain death equates to human death involves philosophical reasoning beyond medical competence.

The fragmentation of human knowledge into specialized areas complicates arriving at a comprehensive understanding. Thus, it is posited that resolving the complexities surrounding brain death and its implications requires an interdisciplinary approach involving medicine, philosophy, and theology.

1. HANS JONAS'S CRITIQUE

The equivalence of brain death and death of the organism has already been challenged from the very beginning by one of the most prominent philosophers of the 20th



century, Hans Jonas. The latter had been raising objections against the definition published in the Harvard Report since the late 1970s¹. Jonas does not contest the lawfulness of suspending treatment when death of the brain has irreversibly taken over; on the contrary, in his view, artificial life support treatments should be suspended in such cases. Instead, he opposes what he believes to be the main goal of the Harvard report, namely, to provide a new definition of death.

It does not generate serious ethical problems, according to Jonas, to allow the respirator to be disconnected in the case of brain death, but rather the opposite, to allow it to continue to be used to keep the body in a condition "that under the old definition would have been 'life' (but under the new is merely its simulation) - to be able to draw on its organs and tissues under the ideal conditions that we would previously have called the 'vivisection' state."²

*"In the first case we do not need to know where the exact dividing line between life and death lies: we leave it to nature to cross it... We need only know as a fact that the how is irreversible in order to decide ethically not to oppose death further. In the second case we must know the dividing line with absolute certainty."*³

The crux of Jonas' argument is *the indeterminacy of the boundary between life and death*, which we need to know precisely, beyond any doubt, in order to accept brain death as a definition of human death. Since we do not know the precise dividing line between life and death, a definition in this field proves inappropriate since we cannot claim a more precise knowledge of the object than the object itself allows. From this perspective, the definition of death would like to define with certainty that which, by its very nature, evades.

Charged that in his critique he would have disallowed the difference between the death of the "organism as a whole" and the death of "the whole organism," Jonas sets out to analyze it and replies that he has "always understood the death of the 'organism as a whole' and not of 'the whole organism.'" Local subsystems, individual cells or tissues, may well continue to function for a time (...) without affecting the determination of death according to the broader criteria."⁴ However, according to the German philosopher, respiration and blood circulation, although carried out by subsystems cannot be included in this class since they ensure both functional and substantial preservation of all other parts of the organism, otherwise there would be no explanation for the need to prolong the "life" of the brain-dead patient.

With regard to the argument of the spontaneity of the organism's vital processes, the lack of which would, according to the supporters of brain death, constitute a certain sign of de facto death, Jonas replies that 'the old conception...did not specify at all that organic activity, the irreversible cessation of which constitutes death, must be *spontaneous* and that it

1 See Hans JONAS, «Morte cerebrale e banca di organi umani: sulla ridefinizione pragmatica della morte», in ID., *Tecnica, medicina ed etica. Prassi del principio responsabilità*, Einaudi, Torino 1999, 166-184.

2 Hans JONAS, «Morte cerebrale e banca di organi umani: sulla ridefinizione pragmatica della morte», in AA.VV., *Questioni mortali. L'attuale dibattito sulla morte cerebrale e il problema dei trapianti*, a cura di Rosangela BARCARO e Paolo BECCHI, Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, Roma 2004, 49.

3 Hans JONAS, «Morte cerebrale e banca di organi umani: sulla ridefinizione pragmatica della morte», in AA.VV., *Questioni mortali. L'attuale dibattito sulla morte cerebrale e il problema dei trapianti*, a cura di Rosangela BARCARO e Paolo BECCHI, Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, Roma 2004, 50.

4 Hans JONAS, «Morte cerebrale e banca di organi umani: sulla ridefinizione pragmatica della morte», in AA.VV., *Questioni mortali. L'attuale dibattito sulla morte cerebrale e il problema dei trapianti*, a cura di Rosangela BARCARO e Paolo BECCHI, Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, Roma 2004, 56.



should not be considered life if it is induced and sustained artificially'⁵. Although the organism is not capable of spontaneously activating the functions of the encephalon that govern the functioning of other subsystems of the organism, this is not, according to Jonas, relevant, since, theoretically at least, one could do for the brain what we can do today for the heart and lungs, namely, make it work by constant activation from outside. In this hypothetical condition, even if the resulting activity lacked spontaneity, 'the activity as such would matter.' Therefore, Jonas concludes that: *"In the face of the stratification and interdependence of the organism's functions...spontaneity is distributed over many levels and places, and each higher level enables those below it to function naturally and spontaneously, whether its activity is natural or artificial."*⁶

In this last idea, I think also lies the weakness of Jonas' argument concerning the importance of spontaneity for a living organism. Since there is a stratification of interdependent functions in the organism, distributing their spontaneity from higher to lower levels, it follows that there must be a last higher organ that receives its spontaneity not from another organ but, either from itself, or from the vital principle that animates the whole body, without this vital principle being present exclusively in it.

When an organ or subsystem of the organism that receives its spontaneity from another organ or system also receives it in certain clinical cases from an artificial system, such as the lungs from a mechanical ventilator, this does not indicate the death of the organism as a whole. If, on the other hand, the organ that presides over the other subsystems by 'distributing' their spontaneity, an organ that medicine unanimously believes to be the encephalon, loses its spontaneity, this means both the loss of the organism's integrative unity - death -, if spontaneity were its inherent capacity, and the departure of the vital principle - the soul - if it were the latter that bestowed spontaneity upon it.

Jonas concludes that, in the impossibility of ruling out the possibility that a remnant of life persists in the comatose patient, the question to be asked before a "brainless" organism is not of a "biological" nature - "is he dead?" - but of an ethical nature - "what to do with him?" A question that requires not a definition of death but a definition of what human life is. In this sense, in Jonas's view, it is not possible to disallow the extracerebral body the essential participation in the identity of the person: *"the body is uniquely the body of this and no other brain and vice versa."* *"My identity is the identity of the whole organism."* So that, according to Jonas, the only possible answer to the question, "what to do with the patient in an irreversible coma," is that: *"it is neither humanly right nor necessary to artificially prolong the life of a brainless body."* Answer that allows and requires the physician to disconnect the ventilator in order to allow death to fulfill itself, but nothing more than that.⁷

In two letters from 1992⁸ published at the opening of a volume, written on the occasion of an incident that rekindled the discussion of brain death in Germany - the protraction of the brain-dead state of a pregnant woman who died following a car accident for the purpose of delivering the child - Jonas reiterated his earlier position by observing that

⁵ Hans JONAS, «Morte cerebrale e banca di organi umani: sulla ridefinizione pragmatica della morte», in AA.VV., *Questioni mortali. L'attuale dibattito sulla morte cerebrale e il problema dei trapianti*, a cura di Rosangela BARCARO e Paolo BECCHI, Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, Roma 2004, 57.

⁶ *Ibid*, 58.

⁷ Chiara ARIANO, «Dibattiti attuali sulla morte cerebrale», in *Studia Bioethica*, 2(2009)7.

⁸ AA. VV., *Wann ist der Mensch tot? Organverpflanzung und 'Hirntod' – Kriterium*, a cura di J. HOFF e J. In der SCHMITTEN, Reinbeck bei Hamburg 1994, 17 e 21-25; the italian translation, H. JONAS, «Una madre morta con un feto vivo in corpo? Due lettere», in AA.VV., *Questioni mortali. L'attuale dibattito sulla morte cerebrale e il problema dei trapianti*, 69-76.



the case of the pregnant woman shows that in brain death it is the body as a whole that is still kept alive by the respirator and not some individual parts. The abortion with which the case ended prompted him to see this as further confirmation that the woman's body was to such an extent alive that it could 'decide' to expel the fetus from itself when it was no longer alive.

When Jonas first formulated his critique he remained a voice out of the chorus and against the mainstream. "It was only in the course of the 1990s that a critical attitude began to manifest itself in both the philosophical and scientific spheres that today even prompts some scholars to argue for the need to abandon the notion of brain death once and for all."⁹ In the philosophical sphere, it is worth the pen to recall and briefly analyze the contributions of Josef Seifert¹⁰, Robert Spaemann¹¹ and Peter Singer¹², in order to get the full picture of the philosophical arguments made against equating brain death with human death.

2. JOSEF SEIFERT'S POSITION

In the wake of Jonas, Josef Seifert is against the equivalence of brain death and de facto death by adopting a `tutoristic` position, according to which, since "we are unable to reach an absolute certainty that a 'brain dead' patient is not actually dead, we should nevertheless treat him as if he might be alive. In the uncertainty or impossibility of proving that a person is dead, one should treat him as alive."¹³ Such certainty would not only be completely absent in the case of brain death, but all evidence points in the opposite direction.

9 Paolo BECCHI, *Morte cerebrale e trapianto di organi*, 61.

10 Josef (Maria) SEIFERT (Austria, 1945) is an Austrian philosopher, since 1986 Rector and Professor of the International Academy of Philosophy, Vaduz, Principality of Liechtenstein. Of the many contributions Josef Seifert has devoted to the topic at hand, we mention: J. SEIFERT, «Is "brain death" actually death? A critique of redefining man's death in terms of "brain death"», in AA.VV., *Working group on the determination of brain death and its relationship to human death 10-14 december 1989*, a cura di R.J. WHITE, H. ANGSTURM, I. CARRASCO DE PAULA, Città del Vaticano 1992, 95-143; ID., «La morte cerebrale non è la morte di fatto», in AA.VV., *Questioni mortali. L'attuale dibattito sulla morte cerebrale e il problema dei trapianti*, 77-97; ID., «On "Brain Death" in Brief: Philosophical Arguments for and against Equating it with Actual Death», in AA.VV., *Finis Vitae. Is Brain Death Still Life?*, 189-210, trad. it. ID., «Sulla 'morte cerebrale in breve. Argomentazioni filosofiche a favore e contro l'equivalenza fra morte cerebrale e morte di fatto», in *Finis Vitae. La morte cerebrale è ancora viva?*, 247-276.

11 Robert Spaemann (Berlin, May 5, 1927) is a German philosopher and theologian professor emeritus of philosophy at the Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität in Munich. His contributions on the subject are: R. SPAEMAN, «La morte della persona e la morte dell'essere umano», in *Lepanto*, 162(2002); ID., «Is Brain Death the Death of Human Being? On the Current State of the Debate», in AA.VV., *Finis Vitae. Is Brain Death Still Life?*, a cura di R. de Mattei, Soveria Mannelli 2006, 251-263, trad. it. ID., «La morte cerebrale è la morte dell'essere umano? Il dibattito in corso», in AA.VV., *Finis Vitae. La morte cerebrale è ancora viva?*, Soveria Mannelli 2007, 333-349; ID., *Personen. Versuche über den Unterschied zwischen „etwas“ und „jemand“*, Klett-Cotta, Stuttgart Stuttgart 2006³, trad. it.: *Persone. Sulla differenza tra „qualcosa“ e „qualcuno“*, a cura di L. ALLODI, Laterza, Bari 2005.

12 Peter Albert David SINGER (Melbourne, July 6, 1946) is an Australian philosopher. He has taught at Princeton University since 1999 and at Melbourne University since 2005. Best known for pioneering the animal rights movement, for which he is still one of the most influential activists. Singer's moral philosophy is consequentialist and is set up as a form of utilitarianism. He denies the existence of God and consequently rejects the concept of the sacredness of life. His most important contributions on the subject are: P. SINGER, «Il concetto di morte tra etica filosofica e medicina», in *Politeia*, 16(1989)9-13; ID. «Morte cerebrale ed etica della sacralità della vita», in AA.VV., *Questioni mortali. L'attuale dibattito sulla morte cerebrale e il problema dei trapianti*, 99-121.

13 Josef SEIFERT, «La morte cerebrale non è la morte di fatto», 77.



Let us briefly illustrate the most important philosophical arguments that Seifert has developed in his work against the equivalence of brain death and factual death.

First, regarding the role of philosophy and its arguments in clarifying the problem of brain death, Seifert states: "*One must stop viewing this matter as a matter to be resolved first and foremost by medical experts. It is crucial to recognize that the key issue at stake in the discussion of brain death is purely philosophical, not medical. People who agree on all the medical facts and empirical evidence disagree on this issue simply for philosophical and religious reasons.*"¹⁴

Starting from a metaphysical hylomorphic conception that identifies the human person as the co-presence of a material body and a spiritual soul, Seifert, who is a Catholic-inspired philosopher, believes that the human person ontologically transcends the sum of the parts that make up the body, as an integrated organism, and that death is, in the metaphysical sense, the separation between the spiritual soul and the material body. Therefore, against the argument that brain death, as the death of the human organism in its integrated totality, coincides with the death of the person, Seifert develops three types of arguments.

1. *Objections against death as loss of integrative wholeness.* Among these objections, *the empirical argument* points out the presence of consciousness in some cases after the loss of integrative unity. Since consciousness necessarily presupposes the life of the conscious subject, and it is also present in some cases where all the integrative functions of the brainstem in the rest of the body are absent due to certain injuries that separate the body from the functions of the brainstem and sever the vagus nerve, it follows that "the presence of body-bound human life does not necessarily depend on the integrative role of the brainstem for bodily functions."¹⁵ The weakness of this argument consists in the fact that the author is referring to the absence of the functions of the brainstem alone and at the level of the body and not to the very ability of the brainstem to have a function, which, in the cases he uses as examples remains. Brain death, on the other hand, refers to the loss of the very ability of the brainstem to function *and* the total loss of consciousness. The difference between capacity and the actualization of that capacity, often used by opponents of brain death, comes to contradict him in this case.

Another *argument, empirical and philosophical* at the same time, assumes that "the deepest source and level of 'integration' of all dimensions of bodily life is achieved through the presence of a single spiritual soul in man", and that integration has "many more empirical, spiritual, psychological and biological levels."¹⁶ Consequently, since many levels of biological integration and biological functions are also present in 'brain-dead' people, the argument that one identifies integrated functions dependent on brainstem functioning with human life, while ignoring other functions not dependent on the brainstem, is "arbitrary and untenable from both a medical and philosophical point of view." This argument, I think, was answered by the *White Paper*, which, in its philosophical position deals not with biological functions per se, but with death as the organism's lack of autopoietic capacity.

Last objection against death as loss of integrated unity philosophically argues *the irreducibility of human life to the 'integrated functions' guaranteed by the brainstem.* Human

14 J. SEIFERT, «Sulla 'morte cerebrale in breve. Argomentazioni filosofiche a favore e contro l'equivalenza fra morte cerebrale e morte di fatto», 275.

15 J. SEIFERT, «Sulla 'morte cerebrale in breve. Argomentazioni filosofiche a favore e contro l'equivalenza fra morte cerebrale e morte di fatto», 248.

16 J. SEIFERT, «Sulla 'morte cerebrale in breve. Argomentazioni filosofiche a favore e contro l'equivalenza fra morte cerebrale e morte di fatto», 249.



life, the author asserts, is deeper than all the integrated functions of the encephalon and all the integration and unification of life events within the individual cells and organs of the body, since it is ontologically rooted in both the *life of the soul* and the *presence of the soul in the body and living organism*. Consequently, human life ends when the soul of man ceases to be present in the body and not before, and, according to Seifert, as long as the organic life of the body considered as a whole is present even without the integrative function of the encephalon, the spiritual soul has not yet left the body.

Human life, the author states, is much more than biological life integrated into all basic body parts and different cells and organs, life that moves at the purely vegetative level, like that of a plant. Considering that human life can exist without complete integration or even without the presence of all organs or all basic bodily functions, the crucial question would, therefore, be: *"How and where is the line that separates this organic life of the organism as an organism, or the organic life of the human body as such, from the partial processes of life within individual cells and organs, as well as from the integrated whole of vital biological processes? [...] And how does the human life of the human organism as such differ from a purely vegetative life of an organism as a whole with its divisible structures that characterize plant life? [...] What then distinguishes the life of a human being from that of isolated life processes?"*¹⁷

The author believes that the essential organic life of the body can be properly understood and distinguished from life understood in the sense of partial organic processes if it is precisely understood "in its relation to a higher level of life and soul than vegetative life, to a unified center of life."¹⁸ The life of the human organism can be understood only by basing the source of human life in a rational soul, only if, in its concrete embodied form, it derives solely from the presence of the intellectual soul in the body, which, being a single soul, is responsible for both vegetative life and conscious intellectual life. Therefore, he believes that vegetative life is a sign of the union of body and soul, and consequently "this life of the human body and the presence of the soul in it may well be present in the brain-dead individual" and that "any reduction of human life to integrated functions is erroneous and the loss of part of the bodily integration and coordination with the death of the brainstem is not a good reason to support the death of the individual".¹⁹

2. The second group of objections moves against the idea that the encephalon is the seat of the soul and the only true body, the 'incarnational organ,' and that, consequently, brain functioning is the absolute condition for the presence of the human soul in the body.

As a first objection Seifert adduces the argument that the thesis that human life requires a human brain or even a functioning brain is already refuted by the fact that the brain appears in the embryo much later than human life, and that therefore human life is present independent of, and prior to, brain functioning. Consequently, "if a functioning brain were a condition for the presence of the soul in the body, the embryo could neither have a soul nor be alive in the sense of human life."²⁰

17 J. SEIFERT, «Sulla 'morte cerebrale in breve. Argomentazioni filosofiche a favore e contro l'equivalenza fra morte cerebrale e morte di fatto», 253-254.

18 J. SEIFERT, «Sulla 'morte cerebrale in breve. Argomentazioni filosofiche a favore e contro l'equivalenza fra morte cerebrale e morte di fatto», 254.

19 J. SEIFERT, «Sulla 'morte cerebrale in breve. Argomentazioni filosofiche a favore e contro l'equivalenza fra morte cerebrale e morte di fatto», 258.

20 J. SEIFERT, «Sulla 'morte cerebrale in breve. Argomentazioni filosofiche a favore e contro l'equivalenza fra morte cerebrale e morte di fatto», 259.



Another objection stems from brain plasticity. First, the possibility of the implantation of brain cells that are then used by the recipient person becoming his or her own would show that the brain is not the only site of the embodied presence of the human person. Then, the adaptation of the encephalon, in the case of removal of a brain hemisphere, to assume many functions previously performed by the removed hemisphere, would confirm the same point. Therefore: *"The unique and individual human soul (mind) cannot be identical with parts of the brain or its functions if it can continue to exist and operate even after these parts have been removed and a fortiori all brain functions have ceased to exist. If hemispherectomy leaves a person's consciousness intact...one cannot claim an identity of the mind with specific functions of the brain and parts of it."*²¹

Having demonstrated that neither brain hemisphere is the seat of the soul in the body, then it follows that the incarnational role played by the body is not exercised by the brain alone. This demonstration is also provided by some studies undertaken on anencephalic children that have shown how it is possible the brainstem can also assume some of the functions of the brain hemispheres.

3. A third argument that Seifert set out to refute is the concept of irreversibility of consciousness, which would prove, according to proponents of brain death, its equivalence to de facto death. Here the author distinguishes between being a person and acting as a person. Not only the person, but also its "fundamental potentialities and faculties, which precede any and all activations, cannot be reduced to their actualization and the conditions of the brain."²² It is argued that the reality of the soul and the faculties of the mind, can exist even if they cannot be exercised in the present or can never be exercised again. Therefore, while it cannot undoubtedly be shown that in brain death not only the functions but also the fundamental potentialities related to the mental faculties (thinking or willing) are destroyed, "the living person, though irreversibly disabled, is still a person even when he cannot act as a person."

In conclusion, for philosopher Josef Seifert, the moment of death is not a calculable problem, but a mystery that cannot be known empirically, since its essence consists in the separation between the rational soul and the material body. Therefore: *"Since human death, by its very objective essence, consists of the mystery of the end of that union of life, soul and body that constitutes personal human life, it becomes quite unjustifiable to declare, in terms of various criteria of brain death that are external in nature and philosophically irrelevant, that the death of the individual, who is biologically alive, occurred before irreversible clinical death."*²³

3. Robert Spaemann's Perspective and Peter Singer's Utilitarian Critique

Robert Spaemann believes that we cannot define life and death, because we cannot define being and non-being. We can, however, distinguish life and death by their physical signs, which, according to the author, are the traditional, cardio-pulmonary signs. Basing his position on the hylomorphic conception, Spaemann believes that the human person is ontologically reducible neither to the function of thinking nor to the encephalon as the

21 J. SEIFERT, «Sulla 'morte cerebrale in breve. Argomentazioni filosofiche a favore e contro l'equivalenza fra morte cerebrale e morte di fatto», 261.

22 J. SEIFERT, «Sulla 'morte cerebrale in breve. Argomentazioni filosofiche a favore e contro l'equivalenza fra morte cerebrale e morte di fatto», 263.

23 J. SEIFERT, «Sulla 'morte cerebrale in breve. Argomentazioni filosofiche a favore e contro l'equivalenza fra morte cerebrale e morte di fatto», 272.



organic condition of thinking. Therefore, his death cannot coincide with the cessation of brain functions, but must be identified with the cessation of all vital functions, including cardio-respiratory functions.

For Spaeman, human being does not consist of a connection of intellect and matter since intellect is not only the actual thinking but also the capacity to think. *"Such capacity belongs to the human soul which is forma corporis as long as the condition of the body permits."*²⁴

Therefore, as long as the human being's body is not dead, the personal soul is still present. This conclusion is believed to be the only one compatible with Christian doctrine and the European philosophical tradition.

Philosopher Peter Singer, best known for his animalist philosophy, starts from anti-metaphysical and utilitarian premises to express his critique of the concept of whole brain death. It seems strange that precisely from a utilitarian perspective that disavows any sacredness to human life, one can argue against the equivalence of brain death and de facto death, as Singer does, but, as we shall see, his position on the subject, is rather 'special,' as indeed, the majority of his positions on different topics that have in common only the character of being upstream.²⁵

For Singer, the transition from the traditional definition of death to the new definition is an ethical problem, not a scientific one. When we say that an individual in an irreversible coma is dead we make, according to Singer, an ethical judgment and not a scientific one. We have called Singer's position 'special' because although he considers that "the death of the brain is not really the death of the organism," he considers at the same time that "the use of the criterion of brain death is definitely justifiable."²⁶ . On the one hand, he stresses that from a biological perspective, brain death is not really the death of the organism; on the other hand, he accentuates the importance of the encephalon for the life of the organism. This is explained in the fact that, over the years, Singer has matured and changed his judgment on the subject of brain death. In 1989 he showed inconsistency and contradictory attitude regarding the topic by stating, for example: *"I suppose you can defend this conception to some extent ... I suppose to some extent you can challenge the idea of the brain as a 'unification center.'"*²⁷

After some years of doubt, uncertainty and perplexity he comes to the conclusion that the brain death criterion is a scientific fallacy. This thesis will be argued in a more recent article that points to four purposes: the first is to show that the belief that the brain death criterion is not a moral issue, but a problem of medical science, is erroneous; the second "is

24 R. SPAEMANN, «La morte cerebrale è la morte dell'essere umano? Il dibattito in corso», 348.

25 In his book *Ripensare la vita. La vecchia morale non serve più*, il Saggiatore, Milano 1996, Singer argues that the old morality is no longer needed to address such pivotal issues in bioethics as the definition of death, organ transplants, abortion and artificial insemination, euthanasia, and animal rights. He rewrites five ancient commandments to shape a new approach to life and death. The commandment "treat human lives as having equal value" is replaced by a new one: "recognize that the value of human life varies"; the ancient commandment: "never intentionally take an innocent human life," is replaced with "take responsibility for the consequences of your actions"; "never take your own life and always try to prevent others from doing so" is replaced with "respect people's desire to live and die." "grow and multiply" should be replaced with "bring children into the world only if they are wanted"; and finally the commandment "treat every human life as invariably more valuable than every non-human life" should be replaced with "do not discriminate on the basis of species." In the same book Singer states, "the idea that a person is dead when his or her brain is dead is, at best, rather strange."(p. 37).

26 P. SINGER, «Il concetto di morte tra etica filosofica e medicina», 7.

27 27 P. SINGER, «Il concetto di morte tra etica filosofica e medicina», 12.



to show the erroneousness of the thesis that the criterion of death is the death of the whole brain"; the third is to show that to reject the brain death criterion is to "make the traditional thesis" of the sanctity of life less attractive; and the fourth is "to point to a better solution."²⁸

Let us omit the first purpose of the article since it has already been argued by the other philosophers mentioned, who, although of opposite approaches, have argued the same idea. In order to demonstrate the fallacy of the thesis that the criteria of death is the death of the whole brain Singer draws mainly on the work and arguments of Shewman, Trough and Fackler, who intend to show that death is not the irreversible loss of integrated organ function and that the encephalon is not the only integrator of the organism since it can function as an integrated whole even without a brain, as demonstrated by Shewman in his work. Consequently, Singer believes that it is currently necessary to return to a traditional conception of death that rejects any criteria based solely on the brain.

The strange thing about Singer, however, is that this theoretical conclusion does not affect his practical attitude, for he arrives at the same practical results as those who advocate a definition of cortical death today. This is what he explicitly states in the cited article: *"We could admit that these human organisms are living, but insist that they are currently unoccupied, in the sense that they have ceased to be persons. In that case we would have to go on to say that when faced with moral issues such as those of the permissibility of organ removal or the suspension of life support, the important thing is the death of the person, not the death of the human organism."*²⁹

With this Singer accepts the traditional conception of death but rejects the view that it is always wrong to intentionally end the life of an innocent human being by arguing that: *"it is morally acceptable (once the necessary consent has been given) to suspend all life support and remove organs for transplantation purposes when consciousness has been irreversibly lost. In doing so, we would be preventing the same practical outcome that would be arrived at by redefining death in terms of irreversible loss of consciousness."*³⁰

In this way, Singer goes so far as to assert that despite being alive, it is permissible to harvest organs, not only from brain-dead patients, but also from patients who are in a Persistent Vegetative State or from anencephalic children. Moreover, this proposal would be "a direct challenge to the traditional doctrine of the sanctity of all human life."³¹, since, according to him, the extension of the definition of death to those who have irretrievably lost consciousness, which would be a 'fiction,' is an effort to "contain the scope" of the doctrine of the sanctity of life, which, however, "is increasingly being abandoned by both medical practice and the law."³² It proposes, therefore, the disjunction of death and organ removal, abandoning the dead donor rule.

CONCLUSION

To conclude this part on the philosophical arguments for the equivalence of brain death and de facto death, it can be said that the dialogue has reached a stalemate in which the arguments, both on one side and the other, are always the same. Sometimes, the same arguments serve both opponents and supporters to prove completely opposite things. For example, the hylomorphic perspective, which considers death as a separation of soul and

28 Peter SINGER, «Morte cerebrale ed etica della sacralità della vita», 99.

29 Peter SINGER, «Morte cerebrale ed etica della sacralità della vita», 119.

30 Peter SINGER, «Morte cerebrale ed etica della sacralità della vita».

31 Peter SINGER, «Morte cerebrale ed etica della sacralità della vita», 120.

32 Peter SINGER, «Morte cerebrale ed etica della sacralità della vita».



body is called into question both by philosophers who oppose the equivalence of brain death and de facto death, such as Seifert and Spaeman who draw on St. Thomas' theology of the soul as 'forma corporis,' and by the majority of Catholic theologians, who believe that total brain death is a sign of the already accomplished separation of soul and body.

There are also those, such as Peter Singer, while starting from the philosophical assumption that has been used from the beginning to support the new definition of death with brain criteria, utilitarianism³³, come to a different theoretical conclusion, that is, rejecting the equivalence between brain death and de facto death, and then arrive at the same practical conclusion and even beyond, accepting organ harvesting where the physician is the cause of death, even from people in a persistent vegetative state or anencephalic children.

All of this, I think, is a demonstration of the fact that "in modern culture there is no longer the concept of a common human nature, nor the concept of a universal truth, but only that of a relative truth in philosophical research"³⁴, in which the autonomous reason for individual truth is also in the plural in a culture formed of, in Engelhardt's inspired expression, "moral aliens."³⁵

33 In fact, the Harvard Report uses utilitarian justifications to define irreversible coma as a new criterion of death, stating that the situation of individuals in irreversible comas entails "enormous *difficulties* for patients permanently deprived of intellectual capacity, for their families, for hospitals and for all those who *need the beds* occupied by these comatose patients." (Italic added.)

34 Ignazio SANNA, *L'antropologia cristiana tra modernità e postmodernità*, Editrice Queriniana, Brescia 2002², 204.

35 H. Tristram ENGELHARDT, *The Foundations of Bioethics*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1996², 80-81.



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THE HIERARCHICAL RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN THE DEGREES RESULTING FROM THE "*HIERARCHIA ORDINIS*" AND THE "*HIERARCHIA JURISDICTIONIS*". CANONICAL-LEGAL STUDY

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ABSTRACT

The canonists of the Eastern and Western Churches have examined and defined the hierarchical relationship between the degrees resulting from the "hierarchia ordinis" and the "hierarchia jurisdictionis" and the manner of exercising the two ecclesiastical powers, i.e., the sacramental power (potestas ordinis) and the governing power (potestas regiminis) or jurisdictional power, through the prism of the dogmatic and canonical doctrine of their Church. The way this teaching was understood and formulated, however, led to the creation of different ecclesiological and canonical doctrines, which we find affirmed both in the text of the canonical legislation of the two Churches (Eastern and Western) and in the works of their theologians and canonists.

For a better understanding of these two ecclesiologies concerning the relationship both between the two powers, sacramental and jurisdictional, and between the two hierarchies, the hierarchy established by virtue of the grace received through the Sacrament of Holy Ordination - known in specialist terminology as the "hierarchia ordinis" - and the hierarchy created on the basis of a juridical act, called the "hierarchia jurisdictionis", I examined and evaluated not only the ecclesiologies of both Churches (Eastern and Western), but also the statements of prestigious theologians and canonists on the content and canonical basis of the two hierarchies, which enabled us to identify both the similarities and the canonical-legal and doctrinal differences of the two Churches on the topic at hand.

Keywords: sacramental power, ecclesiastical governing power, Sacrament of Holy Ordination, canonical-legal doctrine;

INTRODUCTION

From specialty literature (church history, dogmatic, canonical, liturgical theology, etc.) it can be seen that, over the centuries, the hierarchical relationships between the levels resulting from the 'hierarchia ordinis' and the 'hierarchia jurisdictionis' have often been reversed because some of those who held positions or ranks in the administration of the great ecclesiastical centres (patriarchates, exarchates and metropolises) were not bearers of the divinely instituted grace of the priesthood in one of its three levels.

This inversion of the hierarchical relations of the members of the two hierarchies was due to the fact that some of those who belonged to the hierarchia jurisdictionis did not have the grace of the priesthood acquired through the sacrament of ordination, which was and must remain the sole basis for the acquisition and exercise of ecclesiastical power, but,



instead, they availed themselves of the exercise of this power only through jurisdictional power. To understand how the two powers are administered or exercised in the Church, i.e. the "potestas ordinis" (sacramental power), which is acquired through the Sacrament of Ordination, and the "potestas regiminis ecclesiastici" (ecclesiastical governing power), which is obtained through an act of jurisdictional power by the competent authority, we must take into account the position of the degree or rank of those who belong both to the "hierarchy ordinis" (ἱεραρχία ἱερατική), i.e. the priestly hierarchy, and to the "hierarchy jurisdictionis" (ἱεραρχία διοικητική) or jurisdictional hierarchy.

The hierarchical structure of the two Churches, Eastern and Western, included and still includes the jurisdictional institutions through which they organize their pastoral activity, hence the canonical-legal relationship that is created not only between "potestas sacra" and "potestas regiminis", but also between "hierarchy ordinis" and "hierarchy jurisdictionis".

In the desire to familiarize the reader with the ecclesiological and canonical-legal issues generated by the way in which the two Churches, Eastern and Western, have perceived and defined their hierarchical structure, and implicitly the way in which they exercise or administer the "potestas regiminis" (power of governance), in the pages of this canonical study, with an interdisciplinary content (theological, canonical and juridical), we have made new contributions to a subject of comparative canon law that the specialized literature has not yet managed to present in a holistic way.

To this end, in the pages of our study we have first of all made some notional elucidations, as well as clarifications of ecclesiological and canonical-legal doctrine regarding the way in which the two ecclesial powers, i.e. the sacramental power (potestas ordinis), and the governing power (potestas regiminis) or jurisdictional power (potestas jurisdictionis), were and are exercised in the two Christian Churches, i.e. in the Orthodox Church and in the Roman Catholic Church, hence the comparative approach and evaluation of these ecclesiological and canonical-legal realities, which bring to the landscape of the specialised literature a scientific contribution with an interdisciplinary content.

1. NOTIONAL AND CANONICAL-LEGAL DOCTRINAL CLARIFICATIONS ON THE HIERARCHICAL STRUCTURE OF THE CHURCH

By the noun "potestas/tis"¹, the Romans understood the notion of "power", i.e., the "power to dispose" (of something), the "power" to do something. The adjective "sacra"², which accompanies the noun "potestas", comes from 'sacer, sacra, sacrum', which means "holy", "divine", i.e., something consecrated to the divine.

The word "regimen/inis"³, by which the Romans expressed the notion of "management" in public administration, has also been taken up by the Church, and in particular by the Western Church, as the phrase "potestas jurisdictionis" in the Code of Canon Law of the Roman Catholic Church today (cf. can. 129 § 1)⁴ attests.

Among the Romans, the phrase "potestas regiminis" (governing power) referred to the concept of "auctoritas/atis"⁵ (authority, basis, decision, order, empowerment, etc.), hence the verb "auctorari" or "se auctorare" (to guarantee, to make oneself master), to which the

¹ G. Guțu, *Dicționar latin-român*, Editura Științifică și enciclopedică, București, 1983, p. 940.

² G. Guțu, *Dicționar latin-român*, p. 1081.

³ G. Guțu, *Dicționar latin-român*, p. 1044.

⁴ *Codul de Drept Canonic: Textul oficial și traducerea în limba română*, Edit. Sapienția, Iași, 2004, p104-105.

⁵ G. Guțu, *Dicționar latin-român*, p. 122.



jurists of Emperor Justinian also made express reference in their famous work entitled *Digestae* (*Pandectae*).

In the ecclesiological-canonical language of the Roman Catholic Church, the phrase "hierarchia jurisdictionis" refers to this concept of "auctoritas" (authority), which is acquired through a jurisdictional act, whereas in the Eastern Church it is acquired through a sacramental act, i.e., through the power of grace received through the Sacrament of the Priesthood, on the basis of which divinely instituted clerics also exercise this authority of a jurisdictional nature.

By the noun "ordo/inis"⁶, the Romans expressed both the notions of "order", "rule", "norm" and "rank", "status", "position" (social).

The Latin word "Hierarchia", which comes from the Greek word "Ἱεραρχία", entered the lexicon of ecclesiastical Latin language particularly through the work of Dionysius Pseudo-Areopagite, entitled "On the Heavenly Hierarchy and the Ecclesiastical Hierarchy"⁷.

Dionysius Pseudo-Areopagite's name was also mentioned in the old Collections of Romanian Law⁸. For example, in the "Chosen Pravila", compiled in Moldavia before 1632 by Eustratius, biv chancellor who was one of the great jurists of the Country at that time, and who "also composed the Pravila of Vasile Lupu and wrote the work Seven Mysteries"⁹.

From the Greek word "Ἱεραρχία" derived the noun "ἱερεὺς/ἑως" (priest), which is derived from the verb "ἱεράω/ω", meaning to be consecrated to a religious cult, to be entitled to exercise a priesthood, hence the adjective "ἱερατικός/ή/όν" (hieratic, sacred).

In Western Canon Law, the phrase "hierarchia ordinis" expresses the hierarchical structure created by "the degrees of the sacramental hierarchy"¹⁰, i.e., the three degrees of divine establishment (bishop, priest and deacon), which are considered "of divine right"¹¹ also in the Roman Catholic Church.

The Code of Canon Law provides that *de jure* jurisdictional power can only be exercised by those who have received "a degree of the sacrament of the Priesthood (ordre sacro)" (can. 129 § 1)¹². Therefore, according to the provisions of this Code of Canon Law, jurisdictional power can only be exercised by those who hold a divinely instituted priesthood degree (bishop, priest and deacon).

Moreover, with regard to the power of the hierarchy "of divine right", some Roman Catholic canonists have stated that "even the Pope could not exercise this power in an absolute way"¹³, because this power has a "sacramental character"¹⁴, resulting from the Mystery of Ordination, by which clerics of divine establishment enter *de jure* and *de facto* both the "hierarchia ordinis" and the "hierarchia jurisdictionis".

In the Western Church there existed from the first centuries those "Ordines Romani", which are in fact books of worship in which the liturgical ritual is prescribed, and in which

⁶ G. Guțu, *Dicționar latin-român*, p. 842.

⁷ See its text in J. D. Migne, *Patrologiae Cursus Completus. Series Graeca*, III, 119-370. Retrieved from URL <https://www.roger-pearse.com/weblog/patrologia-graeca-pg-pdfs/>

⁸ See R. Constantinescu, *Vechiul drept românesc scris. Repertoriul izvoarelor 1340-1640*, București, 1984, p. 200.

⁹ I. N. Floca, *Drept canonic ortodox. Legislație și administrație bisericească*, vol. I, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1990, p. 131.

¹⁰ R. Naz, "Ordre en Droit occidental", in *Dictionnaire de droit canonique*, tom. VI, Paris, 1957, col. 1146.

¹¹ R. Naz, "Ordre en Droit occidental", col. 1148.

¹² *Codul de Drept Canonic*, p. 104-105.

¹³ R. Naz, "Ordre en Droit occidental", col. 1146.

¹⁴ R. Naz, "Ordre en Droit occidental", col. 1148.



are indicated "the rubrics to be followed in ... the administration of the Mysteries"¹⁵, and particularly of the Mystery of Ordination, from which in fact both sacramental and jurisdictional powers are derived.

Since apostolic times, the Church hierarchy has had two constitutive elements, namely a hierarchy of divine right (bishops, priests and deacons), and one of human right, which included the subdeacons, psalters (cantores), readers (anagnostes), exorcists¹⁶ etc.

In the Western Church, some of these degrees of the clergy of human establishment have been introduced into the hierarchy of divine law¹⁷, as was the case of subdeacons who, in the Eastern Church, have always been part of the hierarchy of the lower clergy, i.e., of human establishment.

About the subdeacons (ipodeacons), we find express provisions both, in Eastern Canon Law (cf. can. 15 VI ec.), and in some state laws (Byzantine) (cf. Novel VI of Emperor Leo VI Wise).

This divinely instituted order of church hierarchy, established and respected in the Eastern Church since apostolic and post-apostolic times, was "expressly admitted by Pope Benedict XIV in his Constitution *Etsi pastoralis* of 26 May 1742"¹⁸, according to which subdeacons were placed in the catalogue of humanly instituted clergy.

According to the dogmatic, canonical and liturgical teaching of the Eastern Church, one can enter the sacramental hierarchy only by administering the Holy Sacrament of Ordination, as the noun "χειροτονία/ας" suggests, which in ancient Greek meant "the action of extending the hand to vote", or "voting with the raised hand", or "election by the people with the raised hand", hence the adjective "χειροτονητός/ή/ον"¹⁹, meaning elected or appointed by voting with the raised hand.

In the same language of Homer, the verb "ιέρω/ω" had the meaning "to be consecrated to a cult", to be the priest of a deity, hence the nouns "ιέρεια/ας" (priesthood) and "ιερεύς/ένης"²⁰ (priest, high priest).

In ancient Greek, however, the noun "ιέραξ/ακος"²¹ also circulated, meaning the leader of a religious ceremony, whose equivalent in Rome was "Pontifex", also called "ιερονόμος" in ancient Greek. In Christianity, the Greek noun "χειροτονία" (ordination) was used to express the notion of the Rite of Ordination administered to the three degrees of the divinely instituted priesthood. According to the apostolic ordinance (cf. can. 68 ap.) and the provisions of some canons of the Church of the first millennium, the Sacrament of Ordination is not repeated (cf. can. 5 Antioch; 48 Carthage; 9 I-II Constantinople), hence also its indelible character, which both, the Sacrament of Holy Baptism (cf. can. 47 ap.) and the Sacrament of Holy Ordination (cf. can. 68 ap.) have.

Later, the Western Church also made mention of this indelible character at the Council of Trent (cf. Session XXIII, can. 4), which provided that the act of ordination imprints on the one who receives this Sacrament a "character indelebilis", i.e., a mark which cannot be erased.

¹⁵ F. C. Bouuaert, "Ordines romani", in *Dictionnaire de droit canonique*, col. 1144.

¹⁶ On the canonical status of the members of the lower clergy and the work they performed, see I. N. Floca, *Drept canonic ortodox*, vol. I, p. 304-305.

¹⁷ F. C. Bouuaert, "Hierarchie", in *Dictionnaire de droit canonique*, tom. V, Paris, 1953, col. 1126-1127.

¹⁸ F. C. Bouuaert, "Hierarchie", col. 1127.

¹⁹ A. Bailly, *Dictionnaire Grec-Française*, ed. XXVIe, Librairie Hachette, Paris, 1963, p. 2132.

²⁰ A. Bailly, *Dictionnaire Grec-Française*, p. 960.

²¹ A. Bailly, *Dictionnaire Grec-Française*, p. 967.



2. ON HOW THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE "HIERARCHIA ORDINIS" AND THE "HIERARCHIA JURISDICTIONIS" IS PERCEIVED AND DEFINED IN THE EASTERN AND WESTERN CHURCH

As a divine-human institution, the Church has a hierarchical structure, and has both degrees or ranks of the priestly hierarchy and ranks or degrees of the jurisdictional hierarchy.

In this regard, the difference between the Eastern and the Western Church lies in the way their theology has defined the relationship between "potestas ordinis" and "potestas jurisdictionis", hence the different concepts and definitions found in the ecclesiology of the two Churches.

That, in the Eastern Church, the "hierarchy jurisdictionis" (jurisdictional hierarchy) has always been conditioned by the graceful state of the person who has received an office in which he exercises the power of leadership or jurisdictional power, is confirmed by canon 7 of the Sixth Ecumenical Council²² (Second Session of 691/692).

In the text of this canon, it is expressly provided "that the deacon, even if he were in a dignity (ἐν ἀξιώματι) or ecclesiastical office (ἐν ὀφφικίῳ ἐκκλησιαστικῶ), ..., he shall not sit before the presbyters"²³, unless he is "in another city" as a representative "of his patriarch or metropolitan on a particular mission"²⁴.

In their commentary on canon 7 of the Sixth Ecumenical Council, the reputed twelfth-century Byzantine canonists also noted that canon 18 of Nicaea forbade deacons to sit before priests in the Holy Altar, while in their canon the Fathers of the Sixth Ecumenical Council forbade deacons to sit "before the priests" and "outside the Altar"²⁵.

The same Fathers of the Sixth Ecumenical Council ordered that "the other degrees of the priesthood (τῶν λοιπῶν ἱερῶν ταγμάτων)"²⁶, i.e., the other two degrees of the divinely established priesthood (priests and bishops), should also be considered, since "ecclesiastical dignities are higher than worldly offices"²⁷.

From the commentary of the 12th century Byzantine canonists (Zonaras, Aristenos and Balsamon) on canon 7 of the 6th Ecumenical Council (691/692), we note that deacons holding ecclesiastical offices no longer respected the old canonical ordinance of the Ecumenical Church, hence their exhortation that each degree of the divinely instituted clergy should not exceed the position which the grace of ordination gives them, otherwise the canonical status of sacramental power would be disregarded in favour of jurisdictional power.

²² N. V. Dură, "The Ecumenicity of the Council in Trullo: Witnesses of the Canonical Tradition in the East and the West", in *The Council in Trullo Revisited*, coord. G. Nedungatt, M. Featherstone, Rome, 1995, p. 229-262.

²³ G.A. Rhali, M. Potli, *Σύνταγμα τῶν θείων καὶ ἱερῶν κανόνων (Sintagma Ateniană)*, vol. II, Athens, 1852, p. 320.

²⁴ G.A. Rhali, M. Potli, *Sintagma Ateniană*, vol. II, p. 321; I. N. Floca, *Canoanele Bisericii Ortodoxe. Note și comentarii*, Sibiu, 1991, p. 102.

²⁵ Balsamon, Commentary on canon 7 of the Sixth Ecumenical Council, in G.A. Rhali, M. Potli, *Sintagma Ateniană*, vol. II, p. 322.

²⁶ See the comments of the canons Zonaras, Balsamon and Aristenos on canon 7 of the Sixth Ecumenical Council, in G.A. Rhali, M. Potli, *Sintagma Ateniană*, vol. II, p. 321.

²⁷ G.A. Rhali, M. Potli, *Sintagma Ateniană*, vol. II, p. 324.



In the text of his commentary on canon 7 of the Sixth Ecumenical Council, the canonist Balsamon²⁸ was keen to point out that this canon also makes express reference to deacons who "sit in chairs before the priests and outside the Altar (ἐκτὸς τοῦ Βήματος)"²⁹.

With this canon, the Synod Fathers also wished to make a provision of principle, according to which this prohibition on deacons should also be valid "for other holy orders"³⁰, in order to avoid that, in the future, those who hold "any dignity or office"³¹ (ecclesiastical) should no longer behave with pride towards those who hold "higher orders"³², i.e. one of the other two orders of the divinely established priesthood, the presbyterate or the episcopate.

From the same commentary of the Byzantine canonist, we note that from the text of canon 7 of the Sixth Ecumenical Council it also follows that "the ecclesiastical offices, i.e., dignities (ἀγιώματα)"³³, are to be understood and defined as "ecclesiastical degrees (βαθμοὺς ἐκκλησιαστικῶς), such as the degree of deacon and others"³⁴.

This "state of affairs", contrary to the apostolic ordinance, mentioned in this canon written towards the end of the 7th century, i.e., the inversion of the relationship between the degrees of divine establishment and those resulting from the "potestas jurisdictionis", has been in existence since the 3rd-4th centuries (cf. can. 18 Sin. I ec.; 20 Lodicea), "and has continued for a good part of the time of the Byzantine Empire in the East, and in the Church in the West it continues to this day. It is the elevation of deacons, by administrative function, not only to the level of presbyters, but even above them"³⁵.

Canonical testimonies from the 4th century, followed by those up to the fall of the Byzantine Empire in 1453, confirm that deacons who held administrative offices, such as that of iconomist, hartophylax, apocrisiar, etc., "came to consider themselves, in an abusive manner, to be superior to presbyters, and sometimes even to bishops, thus inverting from worldly positions the hierarchical relationships based on the grace status of the various degrees of the priesthood"³⁶.

From the commentary on canon 7 of the Sixth Ecumenical Council (trulan) of the Collection of Canons of the Eastern Church published in Leipzig in 1800 by the hieromonk Agapie and the monk Nicodemus, which was circulated in 1802 "with the blessing of Patriarch Neophytos VII of Constantinople and with the approval of his Council"³⁷, which was also translated into Romanian by Metropolitan Veniamin Costachi³⁸, and then edited and published by Neofit Scriban in 1844, we note that some deacons, who had been appointed to various "ecclesiastical offices, ..., had become so arrogant"³⁹ that they sat

²⁸ On the life and work of this reputed canonist, see at length S. Troinos, "Byzantine canon law from the twelfth to the fifteenth centuries", in *The History of Byzantine and Eastern Canon Law to 1500*, ed. W. Hartman, K. Pennington, Catholic University of America Press, Washington DC, 2012, p. 170-214.

²⁹ Balsamon, Commentary on Canon 7 of the Sixth Ecumenical Council, in G.A. Rhali, M. Potli, *Sintagma Ateniană*, vol. II, p. 322.

³⁰ G.A. Rhali, M. Potli, *Sintagma Ateniană*, vol. II, p. 322.

³¹ G.A. Rhali, M. Potli, *Sintagma Ateniană*, vol. II, p. 322.

³² G.A. Rhali, M. Potli, *Sintagma Ateniană*, vol. II, p. 322.

³³ G.A. Rhali, M. Potli, *Sintagma Ateniană*, vol. II, p. 323.

³⁴ G.A. Rhali, M. Potli, *Sintagma Ateniană*, vol. II, p. 323.

³⁵ I. N. Floca, *Canoanele Bisericii Ortodoxe*, p. 102-103.

³⁶ I. N. Floca, *Canoanele Bisericii Ortodoxe*, p. 103.

³⁷ I. N. Floca, *Drept canonic ortodox*, vol. I, p. 113.

³⁸ N. V. Dură, "Activitatea canonică a mitropolitului Veniamin Costache", in *Mitropolia Moldovei și Sucevei*, XLVII, 7-8 (1971), p. 471-493.

³⁹ Neofit, Patriarhul Constantinopolului, *Pidalion*, Ed. Credința strămoșească, 2007, p. 244.



"higher than the presbyters" at Holy Mass⁴⁰. However, the holders of these offices should not ignore the fact that, in the Church, these 'offices' are not 'like worldly offices', i.e. like these, but are "spiritual offices, which are given with the divine gift of the Holy Spirit"⁴¹, that is, by virtue of the grace of the priesthood received through the Holy Sacrament of ordination in one of the three stages of divine establishment, and therefore, "these ... are above and higher than the worldly ones"⁴².

Orthodox dogmatic theology also confirms that by the Holy Sacrament of ordination is to be understood "a set of three rites, each of which is a whole in itself: ordination to the episcopate, the priesthood and the diaconate"⁴³, and by which "pastors of the Church", including those who are subjects of the exercise of jurisdictional power, are and must be primarily "bearers of grace ..." (archimandrite Sofronie)⁴⁴.

In other words, those who exercise the power of leadership must also be primarily bearers of the grace power of the priesthood of Christ, because only by taking into account the stage in which the cleric in question is divinely instituted can we also speak of their different amount of jurisdictional power, to which the Fathers of the Sixth Ecumenical Council also referred in canon 7.

Under the 1917 Code of Canon Law, the canonists of the Roman Catholic Church defined ecclesiastical jurisdiction as "the power to govern in the ecclesiastical realm, either by a magisterium or by ministry, deriving from divine or canon law"⁴⁵.

This ecclesiological reality, in the Roman Catholic Church, where there had long been an inversion or a disruption of the relationship between "potestas ordinis" and "potestas jurisdictionis", is also confirmed by some catholic canonists who, among other things, included in the sphere of ecclesiastical jurisdiction "the right to hear and decide all civil or criminal cases belonging to the ecclesiastical forum, that is to say, to the tribunals established by the Church"⁴⁶.

The same canonists said that the Church, being "a hierarchical society", allowed, unlike Roman law, appeals against judicial decisions given by her authorities. Indeed, by appealing to the diocesan synod against the decisions taken by a bishop, it in fact reaffirms the provision of principle enunciated by the First Ecumenical Council in canon 5 and reaffirmed by canon 6 of the Council of Antioch⁴⁷.

Throughout the ages, the hierarchical order of Episcopal sees has been established by canons (cf. can. 4, 5, 6, Sin. I ec.; 2, 3, 6, Sin. II ec.; 8 Sin. III ec.; 9, 17, 28 Sin. IV ec.; 36, Sin. VI ec.).

Initially, in this hierarchization of the principal episcopal sees, the apostolic principle was taken into account, then the political principle prevailed, that is, the political importance of the cities in which the hierarch in question had his episcopal See, which often led in this respect too not only to a reversal or a disruption of the hierarchical order of the Church, but also to a primacy of the jurisdictional hierarchy (cf. can. 4, 6 Sin. I ec.; 2, 3 Sin. II ec.).

⁴⁰ Neofit, Patriarhul Constantinopolului, *Pidalion*, p. 244.

⁴¹ Neofit, Patriarhul Constantinopolului, *Pidalion*, p. 244.

⁴² Neofit, Patriarhul Constantinopolului, *Pidalion*, p. 245.

⁴³ I. Alfeyev, *Taina credinței. Introducere în teologia dogmatică ortodoxă*, trad. F. Dumas, Ed. Doxologia, Iași, 2014, p. 249.

⁴⁴ I. Alfeyev, *Taina credinței*, p. 252.

⁴⁵ G. Oesterle, "Jurisdiction d'après la Code", in *Dictionnaire de droit canonique*, tom. VI, col. 225.

⁴⁶ A. Dumas, "Jurisdiction ecclésiastique", in *Dictionnaire de droit canonique*, tom. VI, col. 236.

⁴⁷ A. Dumas, "Jurisdiction ecclésiastique", p. 239.



The Fourth Ecumenical Council (Chalcedon, 451), which established "a new hierarchical order of the more important episcopal sees in the Church" only "according to political criteria"⁴⁸, "formally introduced"⁴⁹ and "patriarchal dignity in the Church"⁵⁰, which led to the establishment of a "new" hierarchical order also "among the patriarchal Sees, taking as a basis in this regard the political importance of the cities of residence of the patriarchates"⁵¹.

This ecclesiological reality, confirmed both by the texts of some canons of the Second Ecumenical Council⁵² and by those of the Fourth Ecumenical Council⁵³, is present to this day in the Eastern Church, but not in the Roman Catholic Church, where not long ago even the dignity of Patriarch⁵⁴ disappeared.

In the Eastern Church, the old hierarchical order of the principal primatial Episcopal Sees is recalled at every Mass celebrated by the Primate of all the autocephalous Orthodox Churches.

Indeed, in the Orthodox Church, at the celebration of the Holy Mass, the proto-hierarchy of a local Church pronounces - in front of the Holy Altar - the names of the Primate of the other sister Orthodox Churches according to the order in which their names were once inscribed in the diptychs⁵⁵ of the Ecumenical Orthodox Church.

Since the Orthodox world has been aware that, over the centuries, the order in which the names of these Primate were to be mentioned has not always been respected, it led the Ecumenical Orthodox Church to include the question of diptychs on the agenda of the presynodal pan-Orthodox conference held in Geneva in 1976⁵⁶, which also gave rise to studies and reports by some local Churches, which also confirms that, unfortunately, the dispute over the primacy of the episcopal Sees was and remains the real "causa dirimens" of the ecumenical Church.

In the Roman Catholic Church, "jurisdictional power" or "power of government (potestate regiminis)" is exercised only by the bearers of higher ranks in the Church administration, such as cardinals, who in this Church perform "variis officiis" (various offices) (can. 349)⁵⁷.

In the theological literature we also find the statement that the "hierarchy of jurisdiction in the Latin Church"⁵⁸ is made up of the "Supreme Pontiff" and "cardinals"⁵⁹.

That the use of the word jurisdiction to define "the position of the hierarchical levels" and to specify "the jurisdictional relations between them"⁶⁰ cannot "totally disregard their

⁴⁸ L. Stan, "Importanța canonic-juridică a Sinodului al IV-lea ecumenic", in *Pr. prof. univ. dr. Liviu Stan, Biserica și Dreptul. Izvoarele dreptului canonic ortodox*, vol. II, Ed. Andreiana, Sibiu, 2012, p. 6.

⁴⁹ L. Stan, "Importanța canonic-juridică", p. 6.

⁵⁰ L. Stan, "Importanța canonic-juridică", p. 6.

⁵¹ L. Stan, "Importanța canonic-juridică", p. 13.

⁵² N. V. Dură, "Legislația canonică a Sinodului II ecumenic și importanța sa pentru organizarea și disciplina Bisericii", in *Glasul Bisericii*, XL, 6-8 (1981), p. 630-671.

⁵³ L. Stan, "Importanța canonic-juridică", p. 14-15.

⁵⁴ N. V. Dură, "Instituția juridico-canonică a Patriarhatului și implicațiile ei ecleziologice. De la sistemul de conducere de tip diarhic la cel pentarhic, și apoi la cel tetarhic", in *Revista de Teologie Sfântul Apostol Andrei*, XV, 1 (2011), p. 21-51.

⁵⁵ N. V. Dură, "Dipticele. Studiu istoric și canonic", in *Studii Teologice*, XXIX, 9-10 (1977), p. 636-659.

⁵⁶ † D. Papandreu, Mitropolitul Elveției, *Sfântul și Marele Sinod al Ortodoxiei. Tematică și lucrări pregătitoare*, trad. N. Dascălu, Ed. Trinitas, Iași, 1998, p.16-34.

⁵⁷ *Codul de Drept Canonic*, p. 234-235.

⁵⁸ F. C. Bouuaert, "Hierarchie", col. 1129.

⁵⁹ F. C. Bouuaert, "Hierarchie", col. 1129.



state of grace"⁶¹, is confirmed by both the legislation and the canonical doctrine of the ecumenical Church of the first millennium.

Ignorance of this reality has meant that, in the Roman Catholic Church, jurisdictional power is conferred by "missio canonica", which in fact has "nothing to do with the ordination that (clerics) have or have not received"⁶².

A few years before the Second Vatican Council, some theologians of the Roman Catholic Church were keen to affirm that "the Pontiff does not constitute a rank distinct from that of bishop"⁶³, but that "his primacy derives properly from the power of jurisdiction"⁶⁴.

In other words, there was not only a clear distinction between grace and jurisdiction, i.e., between the power received through the Sacrament of Ordination in the episcopal degree and the jurisdictional power, which also created the primatial power of the pope, but also a clear separation between "potestas ordinis" and "potestas regiminis", and between "hierarchia ordinis" and "hierarchia jurisdictionis", and, between grace and jurisdiction.

This ecclesiological reality is also confirmed by the text of the Code of Canon Law in force, which states that the "Roman Pontiff" (Romanus Pontifex) (cf. can. 330)⁶⁵ is "Bishop of the Church of Rome" (Ecclesiae Romanae Episcopus) (cf. can. 331)⁶⁶, and that he exercises "the supreme authority of the Church" in his capacity as successor of Peter (successor Petri) (can. 330)⁶⁷.

The priestly power of the Pope is therefore identical to that of a bishop, but his primacy derives from the office which Jesus granted "to Peter alone", and of which he is the sole holder. But it is precisely this ecclesiology of the papal primacy that makes efforts to restore Christian unity an impasse still difficult to overcome⁶⁸.

The 1917 Code of Canon Law provided that the Roman Pontiff and the bishops are two degrees of the jurisdictional hierarchy "of divine right" (cf. can. 218).

Roman Catholic theologians and canonists have also confirmed that, according to the norms of the 1917 Code of Canon Law (cf. can. 218), the Pontiff and the episcopate are "two degrees of the jurisdictional hierarchy of divine law"⁶⁹.

The primacy of the Roman Pontiff, considered to be the natural result of the "governing power" (potestas regiminis) or (potestas jurisdictionis), is still today considered to be "ex divina institutione" (of divine institution) (cf. can. 129 § 1)⁷⁰.

The "Roman Pontiff", "successor of Peter (successor Petri)" (can. 330)⁷¹, is still today perceived and defined - in the 1983 Code of Canon Law - as the first rung of the jurisdictional hierarchy, followed by the bishops, considered to be "successors of the Apostles (successores Apostolorum)" (can. 330)⁷².

⁶⁰ L. Stan, "Har și jurisdicție", in *Pr. prof. univ. dr. Liviu Stan, Biserica și Dreptul. Principiile dreptului canonic ortodox*, vol. III, Ed. Andreiana, Sibiu, 2012, p. 309.

⁶¹ L. Stan, "Har și jurisdicție", p. 309.

⁶² L. Stan, "Har și jurisdicție", p. 309.

⁶³ F. C. Bouuaert, "Hierarchie", col. 1127.

⁶⁴ F. C. Bouuaert, "Hierarchie", col. 1127.

⁶⁵ *Codul de Drept Canonic*, p. 222-223.

⁶⁶ *Codul de Drept Canonic*, p. 222-223.

⁶⁷ *Codul de Drept Canonic*, p. 222-223.

⁶⁸ Cf. L. Stan, "Împăratul Justinian, Sinodul V ecumenic și papalitatea", in *Pr. prof. univ. dr. Liviu Stan, Biserica și Dreptul*, vol. II, p. 30-64.

⁶⁹ F. C. Bouuaert, "Hierarchie", col. 1128.

⁷⁰ *Codul de Drept Canonic*, p. 104-105.

⁷¹ *Codul de Drept Canonic*, p. 222-223.

⁷² *Codul de Drept Canonic*, p. 222-223.



According to the 1917 Code of Canon Law, the supreme authority in the Church is the Supreme Pontiff, and cardinals constitute his "senate" (can. 230), followed in the jurisdictional hierarchy by "nuncios, internates and apostolic delegates" (cf. can. 267, 269 and 270)⁷³.

The current Code of Canon Law also states that in the Roman Catholic Church the "power of government" (*potestas regiminis*) is fully and universally vested in the Roman Pontiff, who is the "supreme pastor of the Church"⁷⁴ and, consequently, "against a sentence or decree of the Roman Pontiff there is no appeal or recourse" (can. 333 § 3)⁷⁵.

In the same Code of Canon Law, which entered into force on 25 January 1983 with the Apostolic Constitution "Sacrae Disciplinae Leges"⁷⁶, it is stated that "the Roman Pontiff obtains full and supreme power in the Church by legitimate election, accepted by him, together with episcopal consecration" (can. 332 § 1)⁷⁷.

The legitimate election of a pope is therefore conditional first on his acceptance of full and supreme power in the Church, and then on his reception of the sacrament of ordination to the office of bishop, if he has not already done so.

This procedure of electing the pope, and implicitly that of the Roman Pontiff's acquisition of full and supreme power in the Church, remains an eloquent testimony to the reversal of the relationship between grace and jurisdiction that exists in this Church.

In order to obtain full and supreme power, the Roman Pontiff needs "episcopal consecration", i.e., his ordination to the rank of bishop. But the one elected to be pope can only be ordained bishop after personally accepting his election.

By the act of ordination to the episcopal office of the person elected and legitimated as pope, the inheritance of a special grace is given evident expression, which makes it possible for the "Bishop of the Church of Rome" (*Ecclesiae Romanae Episcopus*) to endure "without interruption the office (*munus*) which the Lord granted only to Peter, the first of the Apostles, and which must be transmitted to his successors" (can. 331)⁷⁸.

According to the dogmatic and canonical doctrine of the Orthodox Church, "each bishop is a descendant of all the Apostles"⁷⁹, and none of the Apostles had "universal jurisdiction as is wrongly claimed"⁸⁰.

A similar case, which is alien to the dogmatic and canonical teaching of the ecumenical Church of the first millennium, is that of cardinals, who are appointed by the Roman Pontiff to one of the three "ordines" (cf. can. 350 § 1)⁸¹, namely the episcopal, presbyteral, and diaconal orders, even if they have not yet received ordination to any of the three degrees of the priesthood, provided that "those who are not yet bishops"⁸², i.e.,

⁷³ F. C. Bouuaert, "Hierarchie", col. 1129.

⁷⁴ *Codul de Drept Canonic*, p. 224-245.

⁷⁵ *Codul de Drept Canonic*, p. 224-245.

⁷⁶ N. V. Dură, "Codul de drept canonic (latin). Principiile ecleziologico-canonice enunțate de Constituția apostolică *Sacrae disciplinae leges*", in *Ortodoxia*, LIII, 1-2 (2002), p. 25-40.

⁷⁷ *Codul de Drept Canonic*, p. 222-223.

⁷⁸ *Codul de Drept Canonic*, p. 222-223.

⁷⁹ D. Stăniloae, *Teologia dogmatică ortodoxă*, vol. II, ed. a IV-a, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune Ortodoxă, București, 2010, p. 246.

⁸⁰ I. N. Floca, *Drept canonic ortodox*, vol. I, p. 219.

⁸¹ *Codul de Drept Canonic*, p. 234-235.

⁸² *Codul de Drept Canonic*, p. 236-237.



cardinals in the rank of bishop, "must receive episcopal consecration (consecrationem episcopalem)" (can. 351 § 1)⁸³.

From the same legislation and canonical doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church we see that the Roman Pontiff and the "bishops" of the Catholic Church are incorporated into the structure of the Church, as "a College", just as "St. Peter and the other Apostles"⁸⁴ formed a single college (can. 330)⁸⁵, and that "in the Apostles, considered not individually but as a college, are incorporated into the structure of the Church, established in them, in its universality and unity"⁸⁶.

CONCLUSIONS

From the time of the 6th Ecumenical Council until the appearance of the Code of Canon Law of the Roman Catholic Church in 1983, there were often some reversals or upheavals in the relationship between the levels resulting from the priestly hierarchy and the jurisdictional hierarchy.

This unfortunate ecclesiological reality shows that the decision of the Fathers of the Sixth Ecumenical Council, according to which the spiritual dignities received through the grace of the priesthood are superior to worldly dignities, i.e., to the ranks received through an act of a jurisdictional nature issued by the competent authorities (cf. can. 7 Sin. VI ec.), was also ignored.

Hence the conclusion we have also reached in our canonical-legal study, namely that any reversal of the relationship between the two hierarchies affects the very hierarchical structure of the Church which the One who founded it, namely our Saviour Jesus Christ, left us, on the basis of which His disciples, the Holy Apostles, by their "Ordinances", and the Holy Fathers of the Ecumenical Church, by the "Canons", which they formulated at the Ecumenical and local Synods, forbade any inversion or disruption of the hierarchical relationships based on the grace state of the divinely established priesthood degrees with the ranks resulting from the "hierarchy jurisdictionis".

Both from an examination of the text of some canons of the two Churches, Eastern and Western, and from the commentaries of some reputed dogmatists and canonists, we have found that the question of the relationship between the "hierarchy ordinis" and the "hierarchy jurisdictionis" can only be fully explained through an interdisciplinary theological approach (dogmatic and canonical) and a comparative evaluation of the relationship between grace and jurisdiction.

In our research we have used both the text of the two canonical legislations and the statements of leading theologians and canonists of the two Churches, precisely in order to better understand both the canonical status of the two "hierarchies" and the evolutionary process of the canonical doctrine of the two Churches regarding the hierarchical relationship between the degrees resulting from the "potestas ordinis" and the "potestas jurisdictionis".

⁸³ *Codul de Drept Canonic*, p. 236-237.

⁸⁴ *Codul de Drept Canonic*, p. 222-223.

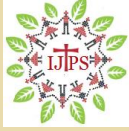
⁸⁵ For an explanation of the content of this canon, see the text of Pope John Paul II Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, "Pastores gregis", 8, Vatican, 2003, retrieved from URL https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_20031016_pastores-gregis.html

⁸⁶ J. L. Gutiérrez, "Commentary on the canon 330", in *Code de droit canonique bilingue et annoté*, 3e édition révisée, sous la direction de E. Caparros et H. Aubé, Montréal, 2009, p. 310.



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THE PASTORAL AND SOCIAL DIMENSION OF ORTHODOX HOMILETICS: FROM TRADITION TO THE CHALLENGES OF THE MODERN WORLD

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ABSTRACT

This paper provides a detailed examination of the pastoral and social dimensions inherent in Orthodox homiletics, emphasizing the nuanced balance Orthodox preachers must achieve between preserving traditional values and addressing contemporary societal challenges. Through an analysis of biblical teachings, patristic writings, and insights from contemporary theological scholarship, the study delves into the unique prophetic role of Orthodox preaching as a guiding force for communities experiencing both spiritual and societal turmoil. The research highlights that the preacher's role goes beyond mere conveyance of doctrine; it includes a responsibility to uphold Orthodox teachings faithfully while also thoughtfully engaging with the complex, evolving moral and social dilemmas that arise in today's fast-paced, modern world. By doing so, Orthodox homiletics not only supports the spiritual growth of the faithful but also provides a framework for moral reflection and social engagement, fostering a more compassionate and resilient community capable of responding to change without losing its foundational values.

Keywords: *Orthodox homiletics; pastoral dimension; social dimension; patristic tradition; globalization; secularization;*

INTRODUCTION

Orthodox homiletics represents a vast and profound branch of pastoral theology that seeks not only to transmit the Gospel message but also to communicate the teachings of the Church in a manner that resonates with the spiritual and existential needs of contemporary believers. This work explores two core dimensions of Orthodox homiletics: pastoral care, which addresses the individual and communal needs of believers, and social engagement, which calls the priest to actively respond to the ethical and communal challenges within modern society. In today's world, priests find themselves navigating a diverse landscape of social and spiritual needs, urging them to adapt their preaching to remain relevant to their communities. They are tasked not only with guiding believers in their personal spiritual journeys but also with addressing societal issues that affect the faithful's lives.

This includes tackling matters related to social justice, moral ambiguity, and ethical guidance within a rapidly changing cultural environment. Thus, Orthodox homiletics emphasizes a preaching approach that is both rooted in tradition and responsive to the dynamic challenges of the present age, aiming to provide both comfort and clarity amidst the complexities of modern life.



1. THE PASTORAL DIMENSION OF ORTHODOX HOMILETICS

At the heart of Orthodox preaching is the call to repent and follow Jesus Christ. Orthodox homiletics draws its roots from patristic teachings, which emphasise the importance of conversion of soul and spiritual life. For example, saint John Chrysostom emphasised that: *"Great is the power of preaching.... And just as the spark when it falls on wood kindles wood and kindles wood and kindles more, so also with the preaching of the Gospel"*¹.

In this sense, the sermon has a dual function: to instruct believers in the right faith and to exhort them to a life in conformity with the Gospel.

The pastoral dimension of Orthodox homiletics is a fundamental element of the priest's mission, at the centre of which is the care for the souls of the faithful and the transmission of the Gospel in a relevant and contextualised way. In this study, we explore the significance of this dimension from biblical, patristic and contemporary perspectives, focussing on how preaching responds to the spiritual and social needs of the community, especially in the face of the challenges of the modern world.

Pastoral preaching draws its essence from Holy Scripture. In the New Testament, the pastoral mission is clearly expressed in the words of the Lord Jesus Christ to the Apostles: *"Go and teach all nations..."* (Matthew 28:19). Preaching is the means by which the Gospel is proclaimed and the priest is the instrument by which God works in people's souls (Romans 10:14-15). Saint Apostle Paul exhorts Church servants to be models of faith and Christian living (1 Timothy 4:12).

The pastoral dimension of homiletics implies that the priest is not just a mere teacher, but that he lays his heart on behalf of those in his care (John 10:11). Saint Gregory the Theologian emphasised the importance of knowing community members, noting that the priest must have discernment in order to know how to spiritually nourish the flock entrusted to him². Pastoral care means the involvement of the priest in the life of the community, the needs and challenges of the faithful.

The Church Fathers attached particular importance to the pastoral dimension of preaching. Saint John Chrysostom, considered the Church's greatest preacher, emphasised the need for the priest to deliver relevant sermons that touch the soul of the listener.

*"Priests have but one means, one way of healing: teaching with the word, preaching. This is the instrument, this is the food, this is the best air; this takes the place of medicine, this takes the place of cauterisation, this takes the place of the scalpel. If the priest must burn or cut, he must of necessity use the sermon. If preaching is not able to do this, all else is vain. By preaching we lift up the discouraged soul; by preaching we humble the conceited soul; by preaching we cut off what is superfluous; by preaching we fulfil what is lacking; by preaching we work all the other things that help to heal the soul"*³.

Saint Basil the Great also urged that the sermon should be a beacon of light for the lost, calling to repentance and authentic life in Jesus Christ⁴.

¹ Ioan Gură de Aur, *Omilii la Matei*, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1994, p. 540.

² Grigorie de Nazianz, *Cuvânt de apărare pentru fuga în Pont sau Despre preoție*, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1987, pp. 163-169.

³ Ioan Gură de Aur, *Tratatul despre preoție*, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1997, p. 99.

⁴ Vasile cel Mare, *Rânduielele vieții monahale*, Editura Sophia, București, 2023, p. 125.



Orthodox preaching is not only a teaching tool, but also a prophetic one. The sermon must be a call to change, a voice, expressing God's will in the face of contemporary challenges⁵. In the context of secularisation and moral relativism, the priest must offer a prophetic message, based on the perennial values of the Gospel.

In today's world, clergy face complex social and cultural challenges. Globalisation, technology and secularisation put new pressures on the Church and on the way the Gospel message is perceived. In this reality, pastoral preaching must address issues such as individualism, loss of a sense of community and the global moral crisis.

The Church cannot be absent from the dialogue on social justice and the ethical challenges of contemporary times. In his preaching, the priest must address the concrete problems of the community: poverty, social injustice, moral crises⁶.

One of the essential features of pastoral preaching is empathy. The priest must be attentive to the needs of the believers and address those needs from a spiritual perspective. The sermon is a form of pastoral love, which must be delivered with love and understanding⁷. Empathy helps the preacher establish a deep connection with his listeners.

The Orthodox sermon is inseparable from the Divine Liturgy. It finds its natural place within the Holy Liturgy, being an extension of prayer and communion with the Body and Blood of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The pastoral dimension of Orthodox homiletics is essential to the Church's mission, as the priest is called to be both teacher and shepherd of souls. In a world marked by spiritual and social challenges, Orthodox preaching must be a beacon of light and hope, addressing the spiritual and social needs of the faithful.

2. THE SOCIAL DIMENSION OF ORTHODOX HOMILETICS

"Man is an organised and social being. And in our community life and in our relationships with one another, it is imperative that we give generously to help those in need"⁸. The Orthodox Church cannot ignore the social needs of its faithful. In the New Testament, the Lord Jesus Christ spoke about the importance of loving your neighbour and serving those in need (*Matthew 25:31-46*). These are also essential themes for Orthodox homiletics. Orthodox homiletics is not just a form of theological teaching, but an essential tool for involving the Church in the social life of the community. Orthodox homiletics finds its place in pastoral ministry by addressing not only spiritual problems but also social challenges. In today's context, characterised by poverty, social inequality and suffering, the priest has a duty to address these issues by offering guidance and support. The sermon thus becomes a call to social action, inspired by Christian values, of love and mercy (*John 13:34-35*). In Holy Scripture, we find many examples, that emphasise the importance of the social dimension of faith. In the Old Testament, the prophet Isaiah proclaimed the importance of social justice. "*Teach yourselves to do good, seek justice, rescue the afflicted, give justice to the fatherless, defend the widow's righteousness*" (*Isaiah 1:17*). Also, in the New Testament, in the *Sermon on the Mount* (*Matthew 5-7*), Jesus Christ emphasises charity and social

⁵ Dumitru Stăniloae, *Teologia dogmatică ortodoxă*, vol. 2, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1997, pp. 151-168.

⁶ Vasile cel Mare, *Regulile morale*, Părinți și Scriitori Bisericești, vol. 18, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1989, pp. 173-177.

⁷ Antonie de Suroj, *Taina iubirii*, Editura Sophia, București, 2009, pp. 35-40.

⁸ Vasile cel Mare, *Scrieri dogmatice și exegetice*, Părinți și Scriitori Bisericești, serie nouă, vol. 4, Editura Basilica, București, 2011, p. 405.



responsibility. The priest, as preacher, should exhort the community to fulfil these biblical exhortations through deeds of love and justice.

In the parable of the *Good Samaritan* (Luke 10:25-37), we see a concrete example of how faith should manifest itself in actions to help those in distress. Just as the Samaritan intervened to help the wounded man, so the priest, through his preaching, has a duty to encourage the community to be involved in acts of benevolence and social support.

The Church Fathers have repeatedly emphasised the importance of the social dimension of preaching. Saint John Chrysostom, known for his vehemence against social injustices, considered that the riches, we possess, are not our own but those of the poor. For saint John Chrysostom, preaching was not just a means of proclaiming theological teachings, but a call to justice and mercy⁹.

Social involvement of Church members is not optional, but an integral part of the Christian mission. Therefore, Orthodox preaching cannot ignore social challenges, but must be a prophetic voice, calling for justice, equity and support for the marginalised.

In a world dominated by social inequalities and moral crises, the social dimension of Orthodox preaching is becoming increasingly necessary. Priests are called to offer spiritual and practical solutions to the problems faced by the faithful, whether it be poverty, discrimination or meaninglessness in the face of modern challenges. Priests need to be aware of the specific needs of their communities and offer, through their preaching, not only spiritual guidance, but also concrete solutions to social problems. Whether it is organising charity work or preaching directly on issues such as social justice, the priest has a duty to offer hope and support to those who are suffering.

An essential aspect of Orthodox homiletics is concern for the marginalised and excluded. In modern times, this means supporting those who are economically, socially or culturally excluded. In his sermons, the priest must be an advocate for the marginalised, calling the community to solidarity and compassion. In this sense, the sermon becomes a call to action, inspired by the merciful love of Jesus Christ for all people, but especially for those in suffering and need¹⁰. The social dimension of Orthodox homiletics is not a secondary component of preaching, but an expression of active Christian love in the world. In a society marked by inequalities and social crises, the priest is called to be a voice of justice and compassion. Through preaching, priest offers not only spiritual guidance, but also solutions to concrete community problems. In this way, the Church becomes a place of comfort, support and social transformation, based on the teachings of the Gospel and the patristic tradition of mercy.

3. THE PATRISTIC TRADITION AND ITS RELEVANCE IN MODERN HOMILETICS

Patristic tradition remains a foundation of Orthodox homiletics. Preaching must be the light of the world. This light is not only theological, but also moral, calling the faithful to be "salt and light" in a world, that is moving away from Christian values.

Many Fathers of the Church have played a central role in the formation and development of Orthodox homiletics, for they have left sermons and homilies, that have not only formed generations of believers, but have provided a solid theological framework for pastoral ministry. Preaching, in the patristic vision, is an act not only of teaching, but also of

⁹ In the paper *Omilii la Matei*, of St John Chrysostom, 69 subchapters are dedicated to the theme of mercy.

¹⁰ Anton Savelovici, "Principii de alcătuire a unei omilii într-o societate globalizată", in: *Globalizare, Religie, Educație*, Valahia University Press, Târgoviște, 2013, pp. 168-177.



spiritual guidance, which must touch both the souls of believers and the practical aspects of their daily lives.

Over the centuries, the patristic tradition has continued to be a vital source of inspiration for Orthodox preachers. Their teachings have not remained mere relics of the past, but have been integrated into contemporary homiletics, providing answers to the challenges and dilemmas of the modern world.

One of the Church's greatest preachers, saint John Chrysostom (347-407), remains a central figure in the development of Orthodox preaching. He is known for his ability to blend profound theology with the social and economic issues of his time. In many homilies, saint John Chrysostom addressed issues of inequality, injustice and mercy. For example: "*He who has pity on the poor, lends to the Lord*" (Proverbs 19:17). Let us lend God mercy, that we may receive from Him, in return, love of mankind. How wise are these words: *He that lends mercy to the poor, lends to God!*

- But why Scripture did not say: He that hath mercy on the poor, giveth to God, but lends to God?

- Scripture knows our greed. It saw that our greed seeks to have as much as possible. That is why it did not simply say: *He who gives to the poor, gives to God*, so that you do not think of almsgiving as a simple exchange of money, but: *He who gives to the poor, lends to God*. If God borrows from us, God is our debtor. How would you have God: Judge or debtor? The debtor has respect for him from whom he has borrowed; but the judge does not shun him whom he has lent"¹¹.

For modern preachers, the example of saint John Chrysostom is particularly relevant. In a world in which poverty and inequality are the order of the day, homiletics must respond not only to the spiritual, but also to the social needs of believers. Saint John Chrysostom showed that the message of the Gospel has an immediate and concrete application in everyday life, emphasising the need for charity and social justice.

Saint Gregory of Nazianz (329-390) is another Church father, who significantly influenced Orthodox homiletics. Known for his ability to bring extraordinary theological depth to his sermons, saint Gregory of Nazianz is a model for preachers, who wish to address complex theological themes in a way that is accessible to the faithful. The sermons of saint Gregory of Nazianz are an example of the balance between mystical theology and pastoral concerns. In the homily *Despre teologie*¹², saint Gregory of Nazianz emphasises the importance of the Word of God in the life of every believer, calling everyone to deepen their connection with God, through prayer and the study of Holy Scripture. This mystical aspect of preaching remains particularly relevant for contemporary preachers, who are called to combine theological depth with the pastoral needs of the community.

Saint Basil the Great (330-379) is known both for his theological contributions and for his involvement in the social life of the community. He was an active preacher, who used preaching as a tool to educate and reform society. In his writings, saint Basil the Great emphasised the need to help the poor and the need for Christian solidarity.

*"Mercy is the greatest virtue, for by it we are likened to God"*¹³.

Although they lived in different times from today, the Church Fathers offered teachings, that remain relevant today. Saint Gregory of Nyssa, for example, spoke of the

¹¹ Ioan Gură de Aur, *Omilii despre pocăință*, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1998, p. 146.

¹² Grigorie de Nazianz, *Cele cinci cuvântări teologice*, Editura Anastasia, București, 1993, pp. 21-50.

¹³ Vasile cel Mare, *Regulile morale*, p. 110.



infinity of God's love and the call of every believer to reflect this love in everyday life. In his homilies, saint Gregory of Nyssa emphasised that man's true greatness lies in his capacity to love unconditionally¹⁴. For contemporary Orthodox preachers, this teaching is particularly important, especially in a world where conflict and hatred are the order of the day. Preaching must be an instrument of reconciliation and love, offering spiritual and moral solutions to the challenges facing the world today.

For modern homiletics, the relevance of the patristic tradition is indisputable. From saint John Chrysostom, who emphasised the importance of social justice, to saint Gregory of Nazianz, who brought mystical theology into preaching, the Church Fathers have provided a solid foundation for contemporary Orthodox preachers. In the context of modern challenges, homiletics must be both a form of theological teaching and a call to social and moral action. By integrating patristic teachings into their sermons, today's priests can better respond to the spiritual and social needs of the faithful, offering a living sermon, that inspires both love of God and compassion for neighbour.

4. MODERN CHALLENGES: GLOBALISATION AND SECULARISATION

In the context of globalisation and secularisation, Orthodox homiletics faces new challenges. Preachers are called to witness to Christian values in a world increasingly dominated by moral relativism. Globalisation and secularisation are distinct but interconnected processes shaping the modern context of religious life. Globalisation defines a world in which rapid flows of information, ideas and goods have created a global cultural marketplace. On the other hand, secularisation marks the shift from a society in which religion was a central component of public life to one in which religion is private and marginalised. In the face of these changes, the Orthodox Church is trying to find appropriate responses.

Globalisation has created unique opportunities for the Church to spread the Christian faith through new technologies, such as the internet and social media¹⁵. However, it also comes with risks, such as religious superficiality and syncretism. In the Orthodox diaspora, for example, believers are exposed to multiple cultures and religions, which can lead to a relativisation of their own religious tradition.

The Church, especially in the Orthodox area, has to respond to the challenges of identity, having to live between preserving traditional values and adapting to new cultural contexts. Inter-religious and intercultural dialogue can be seen as a way of reconciling these two extremes, but also as a danger, if it leads to a dilution of faith.

Secularisation has produced a profound change in the way religion is perceived and experienced in public life. From being an essential pillar of society, religion has been pushed to the margins and is now considered an individual choice. In many Western societies, including Romania, we are witnessing a decline in religious participation, especially among young people. The secularisation of the younger generation does not only imply the decline of religion, but a profound change in the structures of meaning, that underpin religious belief¹⁶. In this context, Christianity faces a major challenge: how to remain relevant in a world, where secular and individualistic values dominate public discourse. The Church must

¹⁴ Grigorie de Nyssa, *Despre iubirea față de săraci și despre facerea de bine*, Părinți și Scriitori Bisericești, vol. 30, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1998, pp. 444-447.

¹⁵ Anton Savelovici, "Rolul internetului în transmiterea cuvântului lui Dumnezeu", in: *Digresiuni necesare*, Editura Napoca Star, Cluj-Napoca, 2021, pp. 141-151.

¹⁶ Charles Taylor, *A secular age*, Harvard University Press, 2007, p. 45.



redefine its mission and find ways to respond to the spiritual needs of an increasingly secular society.

Globalisation and secularisation have a significant impact on Orthodox communities. In many cases, believers in the diaspora face identity dilemmas, as they are exposed to norms and values, that conflict with the religious traditions they have inherited. On the other hand, secularisation has led to a fragmentation of local religious communities. In Romania, although the majority of the population declare themselves to be Orthodox, the number of those who actively participate in the life of the Church is decreasing. This reflects a general trend of distancing from religious institutions, especially among younger generations¹⁷.

Faced with these challenges, the Orthodox Church has adopted various strategies of adaptation and response. Central to this response is the reaffirmation of traditional values in an increasingly secular and globalised world. The Church emphasises the importance of preserving religious identity, not as a form of isolation, but as a way of offering authentic spiritual alternatives to those seeking meaning in a world dominated by consumerism and moral relativism.

The Orthodox Church has the advantage of a strong and deep-rooted tradition in liturgical and community life. This can serve as a spiritual anchor in an ever-changing world. Of Himself, Jesus Christ said that He is the "Way, the Truth and the Life" (John 14:6). Since Jesus Christ is immutable, then the Truth does not change with the times, but remains eternal. Because the Church is a living organism, with Jesus Christ as its head, it can provide answers to contemporary challenges, while remaining faithful to its tradition.

Another important dimension of the Orthodox response to the challenges of modernity is the renewal of the pastoral mission. In the face of secularisation, the Church needs to focus on religious education and the involvement of young people in Church life. This involves not only traditional preaching, but also using modern means of communication to reach new generations. The Church can use social media and digital platforms to extend its influence and respond to the challenges of a globalised and secularised society.

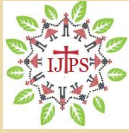
Globalisation and secularisation are major challenges for the Orthodox Church, but they can also be opportunities for spiritual and pastoral renewal. By reaffirming its traditional values and adapting its mission to the modern context, the Church can remain relevant and effective in serving the faithful. In the face of these global phenomena, Orthodoxy offers an alternative vision, rooted in tradition, but open to dialogue with the contemporary world.

5. HOMILETICS AND INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

In a world marked by religious pluralism, Orthodox preaching must promote not only the confession of traditional values, but also open dialogue with other Christian confessions and religions.

Homiletics, the art of preaching, plays an essential role in transmitting the Gospel message to Christian communities. In a globalised and pluralistic context, homiletics is no longer addressed to a uniform audience, but to an increasingly diverse public. Interfaith dialogue, as an essential component of ecumenism, aims to foster understanding and cooperation between different Christian traditions, and homiletics becomes an important tool in this process. Preachers should address common Christian themes that unite, without

¹⁷ Anton Savelovici, "Tendințe și orientări moral-religioase la tinerii post-decembrști. Raportare la învățătura Bisericii", in: *Tinerii și educația religioasă-morală în contextul provocărilor lumii contemporane. Contribuția Bisericii la cultura universală*, Valahia University Press, Târgoviște, 2016, pp. 493-502.



compromising the identity of each denomination. In this way, homiletics becomes a privileged place for promoting interfaith dialogue.

The exhortation of the saint Apostle Paul, to the people of Ephesus, to preserve the unity of the spirit and of the faith, can provide a theological framework for interfaith dialogue, underlining that while there are differences between confessions, there is also a common foundation of faith (*Ephesians* 4:3-6).

In his parting words, the Lord Jesus Christ expressed his desire for the unity of humanity: "*that they may all be one; as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be one in us*" (*John* 17:21). This prayer is essential for understanding the Church's role in promoting dialogue and unity among Christians. Preachers are called to preach about unity in a way, that not only unites their own communities, but also encourages cooperation and understanding between denominations.

In the patristic tradition, dialogue and cooperation between Christian communities have been seen as a way to strengthen the common faith. Saint John Chrysostom stressed the importance of dialogue for spiritual growth. In his homilies, saint John Chrysostom stressed the need to find ways of communion with other Christians and to promote love of neighbour¹⁸.

In the current context, the challenges to interfaith dialogue are diverse. Secularisation, globalisation and religious pluralism complicate the process of preaching, calling for a homiletical approach, that is sensitive to confessional differences, but also firmly rooted in the tradition of the Church. Preachers must be able to tailor their messages in such a way as to promote unity without sacrificing the fundamental teachings of their own denomination.

Homiletics has an essential role in promoting interfaith dialogue, and preachers have a special responsibility in this regard. In an increasingly confessionally fragmented world, homiletics can help strengthen Christian unity, while respecting theological and cultural diversity. By remaining faithful to the patristic and biblical traditions, but also by being open to modern dialogue, preachers can help build bridges of understanding between the various Christian confessions.

6. THE ROLE OF PREACHING IN COMBATING CONTEMPORARY SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Orthodox preachers have a prophetic mission to address contemporary social issues from a Gospel perspective. The Church cannot remain indifferent to problems such as poverty, inequality, discrimination, violence, wars or environmental crises. These problems are not only economic or political; they also have a moral and spiritual dimension. In this context, preaching, as a fundamental tool for communicating the Christian message, plays a crucial role in addressing and combating these problems. Preachers have a responsibility to offer not only information, but also solutions based on Gospel values, urging communities to act in the face of these challenges.

Holy Scripture contains numerous passages, which emphasise the importance of social justice. For example, in *Isaiah* 1:17, it is written: "*Teach to do good, seek justice, help the oppressed, do justice to the fatherless, defend the widow.*" These verses make it clear that the Church has a divine mandate to engage in social issues. The Church's teaching on love of neighbour and compassion for the marginalised is found in the preaching of the Lord Jesus

¹⁸ Ioan Gură de Aur, *Tâlcuire la epistolele către Galateni și către Efeseni*, Editura Doxologia, Iași, 2021, p. 95.



Christ and is a model for dealing with social problems (*The Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7)*). Preachers can use biblical examples to inspire social action, providing a theological basis for tackling contemporary problems.

One of the main roles of preaching is to raise community awareness of social issues. Sermons, which address issues such as poverty or injustice, can sensitise members of the community to become actively involved.

Every sermon should have a social education component, helping believers understand how they can act in accordance with Christian values to combat social problems. This may include involvement in volunteer programmes, supporting charities or simply educating the community about social issues.

Preaching can be a catalyst for social action. Preachers can use examples of social-philanthropic activity, organised and coordinated by the Romanian Orthodox Church, as models for applying preaching in action, demonstrating how biblical teaching can lead to concrete changes in society. Likewise, the teachings of generosity and charity, as presented in *Luke 6:38* ("*Give, and it will be given to you; a good measure, a good measure, a heaping, a shaking, a laden, and a laden ladder will be poured into your lap; for with what measure you mete, it will be measured to you*"), can motivate community members to become actively involved in supporting those in need.

Preaching can be a tool to promote social justice by emphasising the importance of equity and respect for human dignity. In this regard, preachers can use examples from the history of Western Christianity, such as activism, which used preaching as a platform to fight racial discrimination¹⁹. The saint Apostle Paul exhorts us: "*Do not avenge yourselves, beloved, but give place to the wrath of the wrath spoken by the Lord, for it is written: Vengeance is mine; I will repay.*" (*Romans 12:19*), thus showing that God is concerned for justice. This provides a solid basis for addressing social issues from a Christian perspective.

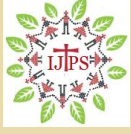
With the advancement of technology, preaching has evolved, now having digital platforms to reach a wider audience. Using social media to spread social messages and mobilise communities is an opportunity, which preachers can capitalise on²⁰. This opportunity also comes with challenges, such as spreading false information or distorted messages. In this context, it is crucial for preachers to be well-informed and to deliver a clear message based on Holy Scripture. Preaching has the potential to transform communities, by promoting actions of mutual helpfulness and cultivating a culture of love and compassion. It not only encourages social involvement, but also helps to build a united community capable of dealing with social problems²¹. The example of the early Church, which helped orphans and widows, should also inspire modern communities to respond to today's social challenges (*Acts 2:44-45*).

Preaching can play an essential role in combating contemporary social problems. Through awareness-raising, education, mobilisation and the promotion of biblical values, preachers can help create a more just and equitable society. Preaching is not just a form of religious communication; it is a call to action, a call to social responsibility and a tool for change.

¹⁹ Martin Luther King, *A testament of hope. The essential writings and speeches*, HarperOne, 2003, pp. 197-280.

²⁰ Michael Novak, *The Catholic ethic and the spirit of capitalism*, The Free Press, New York, 1993, pp. 147-151.

²¹ Ilaria L.E. Ramelli, *Social justice and the legitimacy of slavery. The role of philosophical asceticism from ancient Judaism to late antiquity*, Oxford University Press, 2017, pp. 121-140.



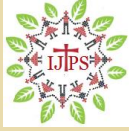
CONCLUSION

Orthodox homiletics, deeply grounded in both Holy Scripture and the rich patristic heritage, serves as an essential instrument in the spiritual guidance of Orthodox communities. Through its pastoral function, homiletics fosters a deeper connection between the faithful and their spiritual lives, helping individuals internalize and live according to the principles of Orthodox Christianity. Furthermore, the social dimension of Orthodox preaching enables the Church to address the various challenges that arise within an ever-evolving society. This social engagement is crucial, especially as globalization and secularization continue to shape contemporary cultural landscapes. Orthodox preachers are therefore called to adapt their methods, seeking innovative ways to communicate the Gospel's timeless truths in a language and form that resonate with modern audiences. Yet, even as they adapt, preachers must remain unwavering in their commitment to preserving the core teachings of the Church, ensuring that any new approach to preaching strengthens, rather than dilutes, the integrity of Orthodox doctrine. This balance between tradition and adaptability empowers Orthodox homiletics to remain a dynamic and relevant force within both spiritual and societal realms, providing a moral compass amidst the complexities of modern life.



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ONTOLOGY OF TIME AS MEANING TOWARDS ETERNITY

[ONTOLOGIA TIMPULUI CA SENS SPRE ETERNITATE],

Prof. Ph.D. Ionuț VLĂDESCU, Editura Presa Universitară Clujeană,
Cluj-Napoca, 2024,

BOOK REVIEW

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The book of Mr. Ionuț Vlădescu bears an austere title: *Ontologia timpului ca sens spre eternitate/Ontology of Time as Meaning towards Eternity* (Presa Universitara Clujeană, 2024). In fact, it is a reviewed edition of an older version, based on his PhD researches. Thus, the reader may expect an academic discussion with regard to difficult concepts and old and rooted problems of theology. In reality, they shall meet a different kind of address.

The terminological distinctions, analyses of movement and of the new semantics taking place at the borderline between the classic Greek thinking and the Christian thinking, they all come under the question that persists in the architecture of our daily existence: “What is our attitude as Christians and where do we stand in the inexorable passing of time, in a historic framework that encompasses, on an average, 50 – 60 years for each?” (p. 15). In this way, time and eternity lose their conceptual rigor and fill up with an existential content, and the classic problems of theology and philosophy re-articulate.

The two coordinates of the book’s themes (ontological and dynamical) find themselves into an exclusively somewhat unusual relationship. Actually, the author (a tried educator, as his background proves it) proposes a much clearer progress of questions, on rather intuitive coordinates: time “as building” and time “as progress”.

The two dimensions get a theological synthesis in the event of Embodiment that separates and, at the same time, gathers together the old world and the new world. Mr. Vlădescu sums it up to: “Time finds its axis in Christ. Before Christ, history goes towards Him, it is Messianically oriented and drawn towards Him, it is the time of gestation, of previsions and of expectation. After embodiment, everything internalizes, everything is directed by the categories of void and full, of absence and presence, of non-accomplishment and accomplishment, and in this case, the only true content of time is the presence of Christ throughout His expansion” (p. 176).

With Christ, time becomes transparent to eternity, it internalizes and transforms altogether the chronological progress in the draw of the present. From this moment, eternity



is no longer a far-away reference, but it is already here, now, and the way in which it is met becomes totally different. This new draw, accompanied by the loud calling of a new answer is the face that this issue gains in Christianity.

The Greeks (but only them, as Mr. Vlădescu shows), used to find a reconciliation with time, if not through a theoretical construction, at least through a calming conceptual distinction. The Christian man, on the other hand, does not have such instruments at hand. The relationship between time and eternity becomes the interest of a decision that must be taken without delay: “the Church lives time as an active draw towards Parousia since the present is no longer the now of the chronological, equidistant and neutral moment, but bears the draw of the prophecy of the Kingdom to be and it is already quietly present in the Eucharist” (p. 192). Penitence represents to the Christian a rather temporary experience than a moral existence. And that is because it is not the strict expression of respecting a law, but an immediate, irresistible need of renewal that knows the paradox of an empirically attested death, but void of reality and an unseen eternity, that yet gathers in itself the entire reality. The call to penitence is one of the radical messages of the Gospel. In the philosophical-theological language in which Mr. Vlădescu reformulates it, it is no longer a frightful call; it becomes, more gently, a necessity of acknowledging an existential situation. Yet, it does not lose its urgency too: “The time of death becomes the time of penitence in the mystery offered by God to His being. Penitence is to Saint Gregory a spiritual birth with full power in the plan of human existence, the narrow perimeter of this life fallen in time, between birth and death, being the most adequate occasion.” (p. 209).

In relation to the fall of temporary building and necessity of penitence, eternity proposes the bright image of holiness. Just as penitence, holiness is also alien to a strictly moral reference. It is not a prize obtained after some ethical performances. On the contrary, it is a paradoxical manifestation, a theophany (as Father Scrima called it): “Holiness is that which on a human and cosmic level makes for the presence of the Holy Spirit in time” (p. 220). Its grounds can be found in a radical internalization of the human condition, in bringing the world into an inner space where it totally changes its meaning because it meets its transcendental origin.

As far as time is concerned – the central theme of the book – holiness has its own meaning: liturgy. It is it that reveals the interiority of time, making it transparent for eternity. By its eschatological rhythmicity, by the hymnography that constantly emphasizes the actual presence of transcendence, but even more so by the invincible event of the Eucharist, liturgy transforms time into eternity. And together with penitence and clean breath of holiness, it answers the question from which Mr. Vlădescu starts in the first paragraphs of the book.



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