

ICOANA CREDINȚEI
INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF INTERDISCIPLINARY
SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH

Printed with the blessing of
His Eminence
† NIFON,
Metropolitan and Archbishop of Târgoviște



Volume 3, Number 6, June 2017
Valahia University Press
Târgoviște 2017

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Text correction Alexandru-Corneliu ARION, Ramona NEACSA

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Preface

The scientific aim of *Icon of Faith* is primordially focused on coalescing scholars and theologians in a researching academic place we raised, with the help of our authors, to very high standards. Our effort and scientific results gave rise to the Conference and Journal as well, all that being accessible for reading to international level. The committee of authors present in the issue *Number 6, Year III (2017)* of *Icoana Credinței. International Journal of Interdisciplinary Scientific Research* proposes and offers various articles, concentrated on the relationship between Man and Cosmos from Science and Religion perspectives.

Thus, 1-st section: **THEOLOGY STUDIES** starts with the paper of Prof. PhD. **Petros Vassiliadis**, entitled: “*Saint Paul: Apostle of freedom in Christ*”. According to him, Saint Paul is the first great Christian theologian who really wrestled at length and to good effect with a variety of theological and moral issues. The second paper, “*The man created in God’s image - the spiritual axis of the world. Saint Gregory of Nyssa’s Theology*” is signed by Fr. Prof. PhD. **Florea Ștefan**. In this article it is analyzed the central idea of Saint Gregory, i.e. image of God in human nature, which means participation, communion, yet without supposing a transfer of substance to man from the divinity.

The study of Fr. PhD. **Marin Bugiulescu** called: “*Man and Cosmos from the Christian Theology perspective*” is consecrated to finding the theological reflection or pattern of thinking on the relationship between man and the universe. Ultimately, both world and man are in reality a gift of the divine Love. The next paper belongs to Fr. PhD. **Alexandru-Corneliu Arion** and brings new clues in understanding “*The origin of the world from science and religion perspectives*”. The arguments of Orthodox Theology proof that the quantum universe was created ‘out of nothing’ and that it’s kept in existence only by God’s relationship with creation through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. For **Mihai Sebastian Stoian**, modern cosmologists are based on the laws governing the world that are valid all over the universe, as it is affirmed in his “*Man – the light of the universe*”. This first section ends with the paper of Fr. PhD. **Florin Vârlan** and bears the title: “*Aspects of our Savior’s activity as a Teacher*”. This article highlights the theological doctrine about the prophetic activity of our Savior Jesus Christ.

The 2-nd section: **EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND RELIGION STUDIES** includes firstly the paper of PhD. **Encarnación Ruiz Callejon**: “*The relationship between man and Cosmos: the contribution of Isaac Israeli*”, whose subject is an essential understanding of the philosophical concept of Jewish Isaac Israeli to the medieval reflection on the relationship between man and cosmos. The following issue, unfolded by Fr. PhD. **Gustaf Hans Gunnar af Hallstrom** is “*What can modern theologians learn from Origen’s School in Caesarea?*” He demonstrates the superiority of Christian educational process, a fact confirmed also through the analytic program of theological School. Next article belongs to PhD. **Ion Marian Croitoru**, in which he exposes the issue: “*Saint Basil of Poiana Mărului. Biographic milestones*”. The paper presents the personality of Saint Basil of Poiana Mărului, who was the spiritual Father of Saint Paisius Velichkovsky, both of them playing an important part for the hesychastic movement in the Romanian Countries Wallachia and Moldavia. The following paper bears the signature of PhD. **Paul Scarlat**, and is dedicated to neurosciences; the analysis is concentrated on the influences of work of mind for spiritual fulfillment. The section ends with PhD. **Traian-Alexandru Miu**’ paper: “*Secularization - the promoter of ‘new type of man’*”. The author defined the hypermodern man as one pertaining with transience, and who no longer enjoys the Christian precepts of life.

June 2017

Editor Fr. PhD. **MARIN BUGIULESCU**

*** THEOLOGY STUDIES****Saint Paul: Apostle of freedom in Christ****Petros VASSILIADIS**

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ABSTRACT

Many scholars in modernity have accused Saint Paul either for an unrestricted obedience to civil authorities (Rom 13), or for surrendering the divine gift of freedom and human dignity and accepting the status of slavery (1 Cor 7:21; Phlm), or for implying the subordination of women (1 Cor 14:34ff.; Eph 5:22; Col 3:18; etc.). I am referring of course to the well known household codes (Haustafeln, Col 3:18ff. and parallels). It was mainly these cases that gave rise to the criticism that Paul (or the Pauline school) did not resist with all his power as he should to the socio-political status quo of his time, and that he and his school, and Christianity thereafter, tolerated unjust social institutions and structures.

Keywords: Saint Paul; man; freedom; Christianity; social transformation;

INTRODUCTION

Saint Paul the Apostle is the first and greatest Christian theologian. He is the only one who clearly speaks to us from the first generation of Christianity with his own voice and the first Christian we know of who wrestled at length and to good effect with a variety of theological and ethical issues. One such issue is the concept of freedom, and one can justifiably call him "the Apostle of Freedom", taking into account that phrases like "*For freedom Christ has set us free*" (Gal 5:1), "*the freedom we have in Christ Jesus*" (Gal 2:4), or "*the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God*" (Rom 8:21), all come from his undisputed and by all means authentic letters. These statements and his letters in general quickly came to be recognized as of continuing authority for the Church up to the present era. And as part of the NT canon they have served to define Christian theology as no other set of documents has. This last point remains true, even when later writers (e.g. the Fathers in the Golden age) have been more determinative, since they all acknowledged the prior authority of Paul.

Saint Paul's letters, therefore, contain the first elaboration, though a sketchy one, of an understanding of Christian faith as freedom. Nevertheless, Saint Paul's conception of freedom has for generations been discussed within framework of, and for some in opposition to, the *Jewish Law*; consequently freedom is normally conceived of in relation to *sin* and *death*: in other words freedom is almost exclusively understood as *freedom from the law*, *freedom from sin*, and *freedom from death*. The analysis of the subject in the well-known

TDNT by H. Schlier¹ is largely² responsible for this tendency, at least in recent biblical scholarship. Based on a very surfaced and not a thorough examination of some NT data it was suggested that in the early Christian tradition a holistic understanding of freedom (i.e. including liberation) was not decisive for salvation. The only thorough treatment on the subject early in the '70s by an Orthodox scholar, the late colleague of mine Vassilios Stoyannos, was pursued on the same track, although he tried to underline some ecclesiological (and pneumatological), and therefore social, characteristics of freedom³.

The obvious question, therefore, of all unbiased students of the Bible, who are accustomed with the undisputed connection in the O.T. between freedom and liberation, is how a Jew, admittedly follower of his own traditions, could have completely despised the Jewish Law, and in addition internalize the basic story of the *Shema*. More and more biblical theologians nowadays realize that the above mentioned threefold schema is based not on a thorough examination of the proto-Pauline relevant passages, but on the assumption that law, sin, and death, being undoubtedly central entities in Saint Paul's thought, must have naturally influenced also his understanding of freedom.

This conventional treatment of the Pauline theology was the result of the antithesis between *Law* and *Gospel*, which had been for centuries the effective key for Christian theology at large⁴. For some scholars,⁵ this antithesis was a result of Paul's doctrine of justification by faith (*Gospel*) defined in opposition to justification by the works of the Jewish Law. Inevitably the antithesis between Christianity (*Gospel*) and Judaism (*Law*) came into the fore. Recent biblical scholarship, however, has convincingly demonstrated that this view owed more to the Reformation polemics than to a critical study of the Judaism and its canonical and extracanonical texts. Many scholars nowadays underline the real character of Judaism in the early Christian period, and Saint Paul's more positive statements about the law. Critical here has been also the recognition that Paul's *conversion* was in fact a *prophetic* calling similar to the calling of the Old Testament Prophets, or at least was not a conversion from first century "Judaism" as we today would define the term. Rather it was a conversion *within* Judaism. Paul did not think of himself as an *apostate*, but rather as carrying forward Israel's task to be a blessing to the nations and a light to the Gentiles⁶.

As a consequence Christianity is how defined not in opposition to Israel but by reference to its heritage and missionary task. In addition, today a refreshed reading of **Rom. 9-11** has helped scholars to underline that Paul's hope was not for a Christianity freed from the Mosaic Law and distinct from Israel, but for an Israel defined by the grace and call of God within which Gentiles had an integral place.

It is not, therefore, only this "*new perspective*" in Pauline theology that requires a new approach to Saint Paul's understanding of freedom. The Pauline texts on freedom themselves also disclose a different picture. Modern and post-modern critical challenges to Saint Paul's de-radicalizing Jesus of Nazareth's teaching have also provided further elements

¹ H. Schlier, «*EXev6pia etc.*», *TDNT* vol. 2 pp. 496-502.

² Largely but not exclusively; see R. Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*. 2 vols. Trans. K. Grobel, New York and London 1955, esp. vol 1, pp. 330-52.

³ *Eleutheria*, Thessaloniki 1973.

⁴ Cf. K. Stendahl, *Paul among Jews and Gentiles*, Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976.

⁵ J. D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1997, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998.

⁶ More on this in A. F. Segal, *Paul the Convert: The Apostolate and Apostasy of Saul the Pharisee*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990.

for such reconsideration⁷. Finally, the contribution some socio-anthropological studies have made in the N.T. field enhanced our understanding of the origins of Christianity in general and of freedom in particular. To these two approaches I will limit my presentation.

I. A LITERARY AND RELIGIO-HISTORICAL APPROACH

The Pauline passages that deal with freedom are worth considering in detail, for Paul is by far the most vocal advocate of freedom in the entire Bible. It is quite characteristic that almost all usages of the term *eleutheria* and its cognates (*eleutheros*, *eleutheroun*) in the N.T. occur in the authentic proto-Pauline epistles (26 altogether and only few outside them). Before analysing them, however, we must briefly refer to the O.T. and the Hellenistic background.

1. *The Old Testament background*

In the O.T. freedom is almost exclusively understood only in its social dimension, i.e. in opposition to slavery. The Hebrew terms חֲפְזָא (*hupša*) for "freedom" often occur in discussions of slavery and manumission. In these texts, *hopši* (*free*) is mainly used to designate someone merely freed from slavery. Though the redemption of Israel from slavery in Egypt is cited within the institution of Jubilee in support of the manumission of all Hebrew slaves every 7th year (Deut 15:15), the O.T. does not develop a theology of freedom on the basis of the Exodus. In the book of Leviticus Israel was ransomed in order to be God's servants (Lev 25:42; cf. Deut 6:20-25). In sum, the language used to describe this event is primarily that of "redemption", not of "freedom." Only in the description of *Jubilee*, the year of "freedom", are we encountered with a real conception of freedom (Lev 25:10). This idea was theologically developed in Trito-Isaiah (Is 61:1), the passage on which Jesus of Nazareth has based his programmatic proclamation (Lk 4:16ff). We shall come later on this.

2. *The Greek, Hellenism and Roman Background*

In contrast to the O.T. Semitic tradition the Greek term *eleutheria* is first connected with the Greek resistance to the Persian Empire. Herodotus e.g. understood the Persian War as a defense of freedom and law against despotism. *Eleutheria* and *libertas* (Latin "freedom") were later developed in the Greek and Roman world. One standard definition of "freedom", at the latest since the time of Aristotle, was "doing whatever one wants" (*to ho ti an boulētai tis poiein*, repeated in Latin by Cicero⁸).

Greeks and Romans were of course aware that such a definition might lead to conflicts with the law. Stoic philosophers resolved the debate by asserting that since the law (of nature) is good and since no one desires to do what is bad, the only person who is truly free and does what he/she wants is the one who does what is good and thus follows the law⁹. Nevertheless, even this clarification did not put an end to the discussions and later the Cynics advanced the theory that the true law can be recognized only by the rugged individual in a struggle against vulgar opinions (including laws established merely by humans). This theory coincided with the rise of the *oecumene*, in place of the *polls* (city), as the framework for human life¹⁰. As a consequence a notion of an internal, individualized freedom started to be

⁷ See among many H. D. Betz, *Paul's Concept of Freedom in the Context of Hellenistic Discussions about the Possibilities of Human Freedom*. Protocol Series of the Colloquies of the Center for Hermeneutical Studies in Hellenistic and Modern Culture 26. Berkeley 1977.

⁸ Cicero *Off.* 1.70; Epict. *Diss.* 4.1.1; Dio Chrysostom, *Orla* 14. 13, 17 etc.

⁹ See, e.g. Cicero *Par ad.* 34 and Epict. *Diss.* 4.1.1-5, 158.

¹⁰ F. S. Jones, *"Freiheit" in den Briefen des Apostels Paulus: Eine historische, exegetische und religionsgeschichtliche Studie*, GTA 34: Göttingen 1987.

established in the Hellenistic age. It is important at this stage to mention that in Greek classical antiquity a connection between freedom and God is clearly established, and the term *eleutherios* (Gk "liberating") became a particularly popular epithet of the gods.

3. The Proto-Pauline evidence

I will try to examine the literary evidence of the Pauline usage of *eleutheria* starting from the earlier evidence. The argument is not affected even if one takes Galatians as written earlier than the letters to the Corinthians.

a. Freedom in Christian literature is first mentioned in **1 Cor 7:22**, in a wordplay in which Paul describes the Christian slave as a freedman of the Lord and the Christian freeman as a slave of Christ (*whoever was called in the Lord as a slave is a freed person belonging to the Lord, just as whoever was free when called is a slave of Christ*). No matter how one interprets the *crux interpretum* ("*mallon de chresai*") in 1 Cor 7:21 ("*make use of your present condition now more than ever*"; or "*avail yourself of the opportunity*") as an answer to the rhetorical question "*even if you can gain your freedom*", the dialectic employed here to comfort the Christian slave is strongly reminiscent of a broad spectrum of Hellenistic statements and discussions that dismissed external social status as decisive for true (internal) freedom¹¹. What Paul actually does here is that he introduced a *Christological* dimension. Christ is the liberator of Christians from slavery to a third party thus acting as the slave's patron. It was for this reason that Paul uses both for himself and for all Christians the epithet *doulos Christou*, meaning denial of being slave to any other force.

In sum, when Paul speaks of *internal* freedom, he clearly employs the great Hellenistic tradition concerning freedom. Parallel to Paul's statement "Christ is the liberator of Christians" (*Χριστός ημάς ηλευθέρωσε*) there are numerous similar assertions by Cynics with regard to Diogenes¹² and by Epicureans with regard to Epicurus¹³.

b. The discussion of sanctified meats in **1 Cor 8:1-11:1** presents two distinctive conceptions of freedom. In chap. 9 Paul argues that he is free from everyone because he does not accept money for his proclamation. Instead, by preaching free of charge he preserves his integrity and authority in the Gospel and can thus win more converts (1 Cor 9:19). Recent scholarship has recognized that the type of freedom Paul has here in mind, is precisely a conception of *eleutheria* also found in the Hellenistic tradition¹⁴. In other words, the Pauline freedom in 1 Cor 9 is not a gift of Christ or God but rather something Paul himself acquires by waiving financial support, even though he knows that Christ had commanded the opposite (1 Cor 9:14).

c. Only in **1 Cor 10:29** are we encountered with a freedom that is specifically Christian. Certain Corinthians maintained that they were free to eat sanctified meat (1 Cor 10:29) because Christian faith had convinced them that the gods of the gentiles do not exist (1 Cor 8:4). They thus considered themselves free, but free in contrast not to Jews but rather to gentiles (1 Cor 8:7). The background for this view of freedom is of course found also among Cynics, who were notorious for their indiscriminate eating habits connecting them

¹¹ This idea was already clearly present in Euripides, e.g., *Fr.* 831 and was a standard starting point for Cynic and Stoic discussions of freedom, e.g., Bion in Stob. *Flor.* 3.2.38; Dio Chrys. *Or.* 14, 15; Epict. *Diss.* 4.1; that. 1 Cor 7:22 imagines (in juristically correct terminology).

¹² Cf. e.g., Crates Theb. *Ep.* 8; Lucian *Vit. Auct.* 8 etc.

¹³ Cf. e.g., Cicero *Tusc.* 1.48; Lucian *Alex.* 47, 61 etc.

¹⁴ Cf. e.g. the example of Socrates in Xen. *Mem.* 1.2.5-7, *Ap.* 16; also Muson. *Fr.* 11. The survival of this tradition at the time of Paul, and an entire treatise by Lucian, *De mercede conductis potentium familiaribus* [Eng title: "On Salaried Posts in Great Houses"], is devoted precisely to the subject of loss of *eleutheria* through acceptance of a *misthos*.

with the term "freedom"¹⁵. But Saint Paul added here another dimension: this time the *ecclesiological*, one as he did in ch.7 with the Christological ("*why should my freedom be subject to the judgment of someone else's conscience?*" 1 Cor 10:29; cf. also 1 Cor 10:32 *kai ti ekklisia tou theou*, in addition to his argument in 1 Cor 8:9 "*take care that this freedom of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak*"). In other words, St Paul corrected a common understanding of freedom by introducing a completely different conception of the term¹⁶.

d. In **2 Cor 3:17** Paul again speaks positively of Christian freedom and introduces yet another Hellenistic tradition on the topic. Here *eleutheria* is equivalent to *parrhesia* or freedom to speak forthrightly, and without a veil, for where the Spirit dwells there is freedom¹⁷.

e. The observation that none of these views of freedom has anything to do with the conventional schema "freedom from law, sin, and death" sheds new light on Paul's use of the concept of freedom in his letter to the **Galatians**. None can argue nowadays that Paul had preached "freedom from the law" in his initial proclamation to the Galatians (or to any of his other congregations). Such an understanding of *eleutheria*, as we have seen so far, is nowhere reflected in Paul's chronologically earlier letters. In addition, it should be noted that the phrase "freedom from the law" is nowhere mentioned in this letter. When Paul speaks of the upper Jerusalem as free in **Gal 4:26**, he rather meant free from corruption (cf. Rom 8:21); and in **Gal 5:1** the freedom of the Christian includes at least also freedom from service to the elements. The rhetorical effect that Paul was trying to create by employing the term "freedom" is most apparent in the political imagery evoked in **Gal 2:4f**. Paul claims "freedom" for his version of the Gospel calling his opponents "*spies and enemies of freedom*". Since his opponents' goal was to subject the free Christians "*to themselves*", it is clear that Paul was not operating here with the conventional concept of "freedom from the law." "Freedom" is more probably being employed in accordance with the classical **Aristotelian standard definition as "freedom to do what one likes."** within the framework.

f. This meaning fits **Gal 5:13** ("*do not let freedom be an excuse to the flesh*"), where a clearly ecclesiological nuance is added ("*let love make you serve one another*"), for in this passage the condition of slavery is described as not being able to do what one wishes (Gal 5:17).

g. This analysis brings us to the epitome of the Pauline thought, his letter to the **Romans**. In this letter, where most of the argument for an internalized understanding of freedom by Paul is based upon¹⁸, his employment of the notion of "freedom" is much more reserved than it was generally thought. Thus in **Rom 6:18-22** all words of freedom are strikingly used in an absolutely neutral way to describe both Christian and non-Christian existence. Vv 6:18 and 22 ("*having been freed from sin*") are **counterbalanced by v 20** ("*you were free with respect to righteousness*"). **Only in Rom 7:2-3** do we find the phrase "*free from the law*," but here the context strongly emphasizes the new bond of the Christian. Finally, **Rom 8:21** transfers freedom totally into the future by reliance on an apocalyptic

¹⁵ Cf. Porph. *Abst.* 1.42; and Diog. Laert. 6.73.

¹⁶ Even though it was the Corinthians who introduced this Cynic concept of freedom, St Paul does not reject this new understanding of Christian faith but rather draws on other Hellenistic concepts of freedom known to him in order to promote a more holistic, and certainly not simply internalized, view of freedom.

¹⁷ Cf. especially v 12. Note that in Hellenistic writings the two words are frequently synonymous. See e.g. Lucian *Demon.* 3, *Peregr.* 18; Philo *QuodOmn* 95.

¹⁸ Cf. "*Having been set free from sin*" (Rom 6:18); *when you were slaves of sin*, (v.20); *now that you have been freed from sin* (v.21)

tradition (freedom from corruption; cf. Gal 4:26), expanding it to the cosmic realm (*"the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God"*). Some scholars believe that Paul's restraint and qualifications in his use of "freedom" in Romans is doubtless owing to his suspicion that the Romans had heard blasphemies of his teaching as libertine (Rom 3:8, 6:1, 15).

The rest of the N.T. evidence with regard to freedom either follow the Pauline reflection or provide a further elaboration of it, as it is clear in the Johannine connection of truth and freedom (*"know the truth, and the truth will make you free"* Jn 8:32).

II. A SOCIO-HISTORICAL APPROACH

In recent years social and anthropological science, and in particular "Cultural" or "Social" Anthropology gave new impetus to biblical research and unexpectedly shed new light to the understanding of the Christian origins. In my view, the affirmation of the importance of "common meals" (i.e. the Eucharist) in dealing with Christian identity was the result, to a certain extent, of recent developments in the field of "Cultural Anthropology". The combination of biblical and cultural anthropological studies has enormously contributed to the predominance within Christian circles, and to a certain degree in theological scholarship, of the assumption that the Eucharist determines the *esse* and the *identity* of the Church right from the beginning¹⁹.

Gillian Feeley-Harnik has convincingly shown that food was an important language in which Jews of the time of Jesus expressed relations among human beings and especially between human beings and God. Violation of dietary rules and inclusion in religious tables of non-Jews or unclean people became equivalent to apostasy²⁰. The problem of who eats what with whom and why was of extreme importance, the anthropologists insist²¹, since "anyone familiar with Jewish religious observance will notice that food plays a considerable part throughout", as Jacob Neusner, a specialist in the field has stated²². It is rightly argued, that "what distinguished Jesus among many of his rabbinic contemporaries was his practice of fellowship at meals"²³. J.G.D.Dunn argues that "open table fellowship" and the absence of boundaries at meals are "characteristic and distinctive of the social-self-understanding that Jesus encouraged in his disciples"²⁴.

In the third millennium, therefore, one can fairly argue that biblical research has proved (with the help of other disciplines) beyond any doubt that Jesus' (and the early Church's thereafter) "open fellowship" and their "inclusive" theology constitutes a characteristic element of the Christian identity, which determined Pauline understanding of freedom. For it was Saint Paul, first among all his co-apostles, who has so vigorously defended full and outright freedom in participation in the Church community's "common

¹⁹ More on this in my "Eucharist as a Unifying and Inclusive Element in N.T. Ecclesiology,"

²⁰ G. Feeley-Harnik, *The Lord's Table. Eucharist and Passover in Early Christianity*, UPP: Philadelphia 1981, especially ch.4.

²¹ *Ibid*, p. 6.

²² J. Neusner, *Invitation to Talmud: A Teaching Book*, Harper and Row: New York, 1973, p. 18.

²³ B. Chilton, "Inclusion and Noninclusion: The Practice of the Kingdom in Formative Christianity," in J. Neusner (ed.), *Religion and the Political Order*, Scholars Press: Atlanta, 133-172, p. 137; also in his *Pure Kingdom: Jesus' Vision of God*, Eerdmans: Grand Rapids 1996.

²⁴ B. Chilton, *Inclusion and Noninclusion...*, p. 599.

meals". He argued in favour of Peter's dining - before the arrival of James' people - with the Gentiles (Gal 2:12) in the so called "Antioch incident"²⁵.

In addition, therefore, to the "literary/religio-historical" approach we presented in the first part, a "socio-historical" (or in traditional terms "eucharistic") approach to the Pauline data on freedom can equally enhance our understanding of the mind of the greatest figure in the history of the early Church. And to this end I suggest we start to analysis of the literary evidence the examination of the social and religious significance of the Jewish regulations about "cleanness". There is no doubt that the Historical Jesus has in numerous cases challenged the social and religious validity of some Torah regulations on clean and unclean. Most of his healings were directed toward people who were considered unclean: lepers (Mk. 1, 40-45, Mt. 8, 1-4, πρβλ. Lc. 17, 11-19), the woman in bloodshed (Mc. 5, 25-34, Mt. 9, 20-22, Lc. 8, 43-48), people possessed by daemons, blind, cripple etc²⁶.

The issue in question received quite dangerous consequences with the expansion of Christianity beyond the boundaries of Judaism, its mother religion. Receiving new converts was not an actual problem throughout the early Church. Even Judeo-Christians could accept and endorse it. The problem arose on the practical consequences of such a move: i.e. at the common Eucharistic (eschatological/messianic or otherwise) meals between former Jews and former Gentiles.

Till quite recently Saint Paul's letter to *Galatians* - especially its first autobiographical chapters - was almost exclusively read as an anti-authoritarian appeal, obviously because of the old confessional polemics. However, the so-called "Antioch incident" was an appeal to the "inclusive" character of the new religion, embracing all people of faith regardless of their past²⁷. At the heart of the incident lies the problem of receiving former Gentiles and freely accepting them to the Eucharistic table without the Jewish legal conditions. Obviously in the early Church there were leaders insisting on separate Eucharistic celebrations, so that the basic rules of cleanness are kept. In other words they followed the line of a "Eucharistic *exclusiveness*". Paul's line, on the contrary, understood the fundamental issue of salvation "ἐν Χριστῷ" in a quite *inclusive* way, and understood as an inconceivable practice the separate Eucharistic tables. His view was that of a "Eucharistic *inclusiveness*". For Paul there was no other way; any compromise would destroy the basis of his faith as freedom²⁸. Therefore, he understood freedom, openness and inclusiveness in the Eucharistic meals as a way to open-up to, and advance toward, the nations. For Saint Paul the Eucharist was taken as a *topos* (place) and *chronos* (time), where "οὐκ ἐνὶ Ἰουδαίῳ οὐδέ Ἑλληνι, οὐκ ἐνὶ δούλῳ οὐδέ ἐλεύθερῳ, οὐκ ἐνὶ ἀρσεν καὶ θηλῷ" (Gal 3:28); for "πάντες γὰρ ὑμεῖς εἰς ἓστε ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ" (ibid.).

Despite the compromise adopted at the Apostolic Council, Saint Paul's conception of freedom remained a central element in all charismatic and visionary expressions of

²⁵ More in D. Passakos, "Μετα ΤCOV εOvcov (jvvrjadiev., *Theology and Society in Dialogue*", Thessaloniki 2001, pp. 96ff (in Greek).

²⁶ B. J. Malina, *New Testament World*, pp. 143-146.

²⁷ F. Watson, *Paul, Judaism and the Gentiles. A Sociological Approach*, SNTSMS 56, Cambridge: CUP, 1986; S. Agouridis, "The Incident Between Peter and Paul in Antioch (Gal 2:11-21)," *ABM* n.s. 12 [1992], pp. 5-27; B.P.Stoyannos, *The Apostolic Synod* EE0SAI1© vol. IH', Thessaloniki 1973; also his dissertation *Peter in Paul*, Thessaloniki, 1968 (all in Greek).

²⁸ Cf. J.D.G. Dunn, "The Incident," p. 23; S.G.Wilson, *Luke and the Law*, Cambridge: CUP, 1983, p. 70. D. K. Passakos, *The Divine Eucharist in St. Paul's Mission. A Sociological Approach* .(Doctoral Dissertation, Thessaloniki

Christian life²⁹. And it was this determination that made the "Apostle of freedom", Paul, also an "Apostle of the Nations".

CONCLUSION

You have probably noticed that my paper did not put the emphasis all would expect on the last phrase of the title, i.e. "in Christ", with the exception of few passing references to the Christological nuance Saint Paul gave to the concept of freedom did it deliberately, and I left it for the last part of my paper for two reasons: First in order to deal with Saint Paul's dynamic view of Christology together with the other important subject of the relation between Saint Paul and Jesus Christ; closely connected with this question is the issue I mentioned at the beginning of the de-radicalization by our great apostle of the kerygma of Jesus of Nazareth in quite a number of cases including freedom. The question frequently asked is: what happened and in less than a generation Jesus' programmatic proclamation (Luke 4: 1ff) of the new messianic era, which would also entail liberation, according to the Prophets (Is 61: 1ff etc), after his death on the cross disappeared or at least became marginal.

Without denying any question, the solution Paul offered to ancient society was not as radical and idealistic as the solution the Palestinian community experienced in their "common" or "no property" communal life (evidenced in the Synoptic tradition and Acts). Nevertheless, the "open fellowship" and the "common Eucharistic meals" Saint Paul so vigorously defended, was in fact a *realistic solution*³⁰ that can be characterized as a "social integration" of the Church (as an eschatological charismatic community and proleptic manifestation of the Kingdom of God) into a declining world³¹. This realistic solution of Paul may not struggle to implement the social values of unconditional freedom, justice and equality at any cost. Rather it gave priority to the reality of the Kingdom of God within the present social order. In other words, Saint Paul's emphasis was not upon social *transformation* as such, but upon the *formation* of an ecclesial (Eucharistic) reality that inevitably would become the decisive element in creating a new social reality of freedom, justice and equality.

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²⁹ J. D. G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, Eerdmans: Grand Rapids 2003, p. 599.

³⁰ For another view on the problem, see N. A. Dahl, "Paul and Possessions" in *Studies in Paul*, pp.22-39.

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The man created in God's image - spiritual axis of the world. Saint Gregory of Nyssa's theology

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ABSTRACT

Man has been created at the crossroads between the material and the spiritual things, being given the greatest honour among creatures, since he is the only one edified in God's image and likeness. With Saint Gregory, the image does not mean, as in Platonism, the rough analogy of the sensitive world in relation to the intelligible world, but participation, a communion, yet without supposing a transfer of substance. There are two levels of the image in his theology: Christ – Logos of the Father, archetypal image, on this level the image supposing the very communion of nature, the hypostatizing of the unique divine being, and man – image of the Logos, level on which the image supposes the ontological distinction, yet simultaneously, by its quality of direct image, of non-mediated reflection, is a faithful image, this image containing in itself precisely the promise of communion, though, by its character, it has to define the eternity of the distinction between created and uncreated.

Keywords: man; world; divine image; philosophy; Saint Gregory of Nyssa; holiness;

INTRODUCTION

Maybe the meeting between the Greek philosophy and the Christian theology has never been as harmonious as in Saint Gregory of Nyssa's work. Maybe in no other place, especially in ontology, has the Christian Revelation been so systematically structured using the scaffolding of the Greek thinking. In his relation on the Genesis, a series of stages of the creation act are revealed to us, stages supposed by its aim, which is the creation of man as a thinking being, edified in God's image and likeness.

“After the physical universe has been created, man did not appear immediately on earth; on the contrary, the speechless animals were created before him, and previous to them, the plants. By this order, I think the Scripture wanted to show to us that the vivifying power got mixed with the material nature in a certain order: first it put on the senseless ones, then it moved on to the sensitive beings and then it ascended to the thinking and speaking nature. Therefore, out of everything that exists in the world, a part is material and sensitive, and another one has the ability to think.”¹

We can note how the creative process is thought by Saint Gregory of Nyssa according to logic of harmonization of the whole set, by the gradual constitution of the created, distinct orders, yet all bearing the same seal of creature. This distinction between the created orders actually permits their harmonization, yet it simultaneously imposes their

¹ Sf. Grigorie de Nyssa, *Dialog despre suflet și înviere*, P.G. 46, 60 A-B

hierarchic arrangement. The whole set is developed to attain an aim above this set, namely man. Therefore all the creation is thought in such a way as to be able to receive the one in whom the ineffable character of the divinity is fully reflected – man. The study of the ascendant stages of nature do not reveal to us only a necessary progress law, but also one of imperative foundation, in which each stage is the sine qua non condition of the next stage. The essential thing is the impossibility of the spirit's existence without the sensorial for the human condition: this determines the intertwinement of the eternity in the sphere of human spirituality.

“Man, supreme fruit of nature's ascent, has the duty of unifying it in his spirit and to bring it as a whole in front of God”. “Through man flows a unique gift of the same value upon the whole creation. The body and the entire material world receive the spiritual reflection of the soul, becoming an image of the image.”²

Man is thus created and thought of, implicitly, in a double connection, namely both related with the cosmos (universe) and with the divinity. On the one hand, the harmony between man and universe, man being thought as a microcosm, as a whole, in whom the entire beauty of creation is reflected under the auspices of rationality, makes him an authentic master of the universe. On the other hand, man seen as a divine creation, makes of this feature a seal of divine saturated with the structured material of creation, giving way to the potentiality (latency) of building the integral likeness between the created and uncreated, but this should be enabled by creature's own freewill, otherwise the essential spirit of it, namely the freedom, would be obscured.

This double character of man, this position of his at the crossroads between the material and the spiritual things, offers two ways: the ascendant one, to the likeness, the ascent supposing to accurately follow the likeness to God, in other words, man's personal answer according to his edified nature, namely the plenary manifestation of the man in the universe, through which the creation meaning would be fully achieved (reached); the opposite way, the descendant one, opposition to likeness, concealment of the image and its plunge in the world's materiality, stepping against the human nature itself.

From the fall's relation we know which was the option, we fully note it in every action of our humanity. This is where man's tragic status comes from as a reality generated by his own freedom affirmation.

1. MAN, THE ONE EDIFIED ACCORDING TO GOD'S LIKENESS

The Holy Fathers think about the human being definition starting from two directions: on the one hand, from Revelation to the immediate reality, and on the other hand, from the immediate reality to the Revelation's meanings, Saint Gregory approaching in his writings both directions of thinking. This dialectic approach is possible because of mankind's nature itself:

“Man was the last one among creatures: not because he was to be thrown to the end of the line as an unvalued one, but because he was entitled, from the very first moment of his birth, to be an emperor ruling over his servants... God put in man's nature the mixed seeds of divine and human, so that he can taste from the happiness of both, namely the joy of being interconnected with Him, and also the laic pleasures, by his feeling that he is not apart from joys.”³

² Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Présence et Pensée...*, p 34

³ Sf. Grigorie de Nyssa, *Despre facerea omului*, P.G. 44, 133 A-B

In conclusion, human being belongs to two realities, more or less naturally obvious, but simultaneously present, thus the possibility of the double approach in man's definition as being submitted to two different orders.

When we talk about the theologically ruled humanity, about what man should have been and is not exactly all the time, the direction is from Revelation to the immediate concreteness.

While, in the Old Testament, man was considered from the perspective of God's likeness, the theological context itself refusing the image of Christ, the New Testament Revelation will change the accent moving it on to the divine image. Saint Apostle Paul will have the mission of preaching Christ as image of God, according to the following: "*The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation, for in him all things were created.*" (Col. 1:15). Starting from here, the direction of a Pauline New Testament's anthropology will appear, according to which, man validates himself as an authentic man, only if he proves in himself the man par excellence, the heavenly man who is Jesus Christ, the Father's image, because our becoming into humanity imposes the attainment of "*the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ*" (Ephes. 4:14).

The Holy Fathers' theology continued Saint Paul's way of thinking, connecting Saint Paul's theme "*Jesus Christ – God's image*" with the Genesis theme "*Man – created in to God's image*". Already in the writings of Iraeneus, Clement, Origen, Athanasius and Saint Gregory of Nyssa appears very clearly the idea that **Jesus Christ represents God's image and man represents Jesus Christ's image, namely man is image of the Image, yet of the Archetype Image**. "The firstborn over all creation is God's image... yet man is made in God's image." (Origen) And "in Christ's image; because this means in the image of the Creator" (Saint John Chrysostom)". This change of anthropological accent will be the mark of the new theology, of that theology based on the fullness of the Revelation which is Christ, and from this moment on, man's status will be thought of as essentially Christ-centered.⁴ Taking into account the Christological theology, the next step will be the anthropological definitions from this new perspective, which will be realized in analogical manner in their great majority, by means of man's reference to the archetype Christ. In this way, man's Christ-centered character will be revealed both by the image stamped upon his being, and where can we find the most pregnant image of the divinity in man if not in Jesus Christ, who restores the whole human nature bringing the image to completeness, and also by the rational and spiritual features by which man manifests himself in the created reality, always attracted by overcoming it in order to attain that asymptotic likeness.

2. THE REFLECTION OF THE DIVINITY INTO THE HUMANITY

Yet, in order to integrate our thinking in the authentic theology of the image, we need to understand what the image or the *eikon* for Saint Gregory of Nyssa represents. For the pagan thinking the image is considered either as a possession of something of the archetype of whose image is, as in the Stoic philosophy, or as a simple copy, a modeling of an absolutely different reality. In Plato's philosophy we had observed that the image is par excellence the idea of the thing, the paradigm, and the thing is that what it is, only to the extent to which it suggests the specific attributes of the paradigm, but the image will never partake of its paradigm, given the ontological separation supposed by the alterity of the two

⁴ Panayotis Nellas, *Omul – animal îndumnezeit*, Deisis, Sibiu, 1994, p 7-9

worlds; in Christian terms, the image will never reach the absolute likeness of its paradigm, given the ontological distinction that stands as separation in the absolute.

Let us analyse the evolution of the word “*image*” – ΕΙΚΩΝ

- **Plato:** the word refers to the sensitive world in its connection with the intelligible world, it supposes an analogy between these two worlds, yet, the supposed analogy itself implies a relation of inferiority of the copy in relation to the original.
- **Philo:** the term will signify the very reality of the participation, being applied to the human Logos, Kosmos and Nous.
- with Saint Gregory, the meanings will be strictly of religious nature, though the term already has a long history in the Hellenistic thinking:
- applied to the Logos, as Saint Paul had done in Colossians 1: 15, it does not mean an incomplete participation, but the genuine relation of originating in a perfect identity of nature, here he refers about the Trinitarian meaning of the term;
- in a different sense, regarding man, his likeness with God is not realized by means of a cosmic intermediation, as in Philo’s thinking, but man himself is image of God: “*You have to understand how much honour you got from The One who created you. The sky was not edified as an image of God, nor was the Moon, the Sun, anything from all the things created by Him.*”

The second term: “*likeness*” - ΟΜΟΙΩΣΙΝ, what does it consist in? It is an authentic participation to all the attributes of God:

“The one created in God’s image possesses the entire likeness of his archetype: he is spiritual like He is spiritual, he is incorporeal like He is incorporeal... The soul is like a living image participating to the archetype’s dignity and name.”⁵ “To be created in God’s image means that a kingly dignity is offered to man by his creation, yet this dignity does not consist in the external attributes, but in virtue, in the happiness of immortality, in justice...”⁶ “This indescribable happiness according to virtue supposes purity, freedom from sinful passions, happiness, going away from the entire evil: these are what the likeness of God consists of.”⁷

With Saint Gregory, the image does not mean, like in Platonism, the rough analogy of the palpable world in relation to the intelligible world, but. But, continuing Philo’s thinking, it means participation, a communion, yet without supposing a transfer of substance. There are two levels of the image in his theology: Christ – Logos of the Father, archetypal image, on this level the image supposing the very communion of nature, the hypostatizing of the unique divine being, and man – image of the Logos, level on which the image supposes the ontological distinction, yet simultaneously, by its quality of direct image, of non-mediated reflection, it is faithful image, this image containing in itself precisely the promise of communion, though, by its character, it must emphasize the eternity of the distinction between created and uncreated. But, more than this, the image is the seal of the divinity upon the entire humanity, none of the individual hypostases being able to drain up (exhaust) the image. The pleroma (fullness) He has created was projected by a single action in existence, all together and not each hypostasis by a unique action. Still the pleroma is situated in the space and time where the life of the creation unfolds, where it develops until the moment it reaches the plenitude.⁸

The image, the face, with Saint Gregory, supposes the possibility of communion which the revealed likeness opens as a potentiality.

⁵ Sf. Grigorie de Nyssa, *Despre suflet și înviere [Dialogue about soul and resurrection]* P. G. 46, 41 C

⁶ Sf. Grigorie de Nyssa, *Despre suflet și înviere [Dialogue about soul and resurrection]* P. G. 44, 136 C-D

⁷ *Ibidem*, 137 A-B

⁸ A. G. Hamman, *L’homme, image de Dieu*, Desclée, Paris, 1987, p 214

“The image represents a supernatural participation to God’s holiness. The image refers to the intellectual life (nous) and to the spiritual life (pneuma), together forming human nature (physis) in the state he has been created. The somatic, psychic or animal life is a superadded accident”⁹.

We note especially at Saint Gregory a dynamic connotation introduced in the concept of image. It is the eternal attraction which he will manifest for the ascension towards likeness. It is the image’s way of manifestation, the ceaseless drive towards reaching the likeness. Moreover, with Saint Gregory of Nyssa, the interpretation of the image sends directly to this communion potency, as it opens the way to a unification supported on the idea of the existence of a feature shared by both natures, this constituting the principle that justifies man’s desiring God, as a natural aspiration of human nature towards what is characteristic to it, because it is specific of the human nature not to find fulfillment in the material world, but, by assuming this world and transfiguring it, his fulfillment being only the meeting with its identity from above:

“The way the eye comes in communion with the light by means of the glow naturally existing inside it, attracting by means of this natural power planted in him, what is connatural with him, similarly it became necessary to mix the human nature with something connatural with the Divine, so that by means of this correspondence, the human nature may long for what it is intimately related with. This is what the word on the Creation of the World has shown by means of just one word, using a comprehensive expression and saying that man was created in God’s image.”¹⁰

Thus, man’s thirst for God becomes a natural feature, a deep reflection of what man is as such: image of his Creator.

3. THE ATTRIBUTES OF IMAGE: FREEDOM AND LOVE

God’s image in man is considered by Saint Gregory the source of humanity, yet of that humanity born from above, able to reflect the celestial Man that Saint Paul the Apostle was talking about, because:

“The Creator, giving him the likeness of an archetype of a distinguished beauty, also explained on that occasion the precise destination for which he was brought to life, and He ordered then, according to the meaning of man’s activity, that all man’s aim is in connection with the divine will.”¹¹

We will present below the attributes that make out of the image a source of divine fulfillment, mentioning that, for Saint Gregory of Nyssa, the human dignity resides precisely in the divine birth, in man’s likeness with God:

“What does man’s greatness consist in? Not in his likeness to the created world, but in the fact that he is made in the image of the nature who created him.”¹² “In his writing **On Man’s Creation**, Saint Gregory turns his back on the Stoics’ pantheism, refusing to define man from the perspective of his likeness to the universe. The thesis is unacceptable if we take into account that the creation is structured to glorify man, who is its king and its center, in charge with guiding all the creation to God. Man’s greatness comes from the fact that he is image of God.”¹³

⁹ Alain Besançon, *Imaginea interzisă*, Humanitas, București, 1996, p 107

¹⁰ Sf. Grigorie de Nyssa, *Marele Cuvânt Catehetic*, P.G. 45, 21 C

¹¹ Sf. Grigorie de Nyssa, *Despre facerea omului*, P.G. 44, 136 A

¹² *Ibidem*, 16, 180A

¹³ A. G. Hamman, *L’homme, image de Dieu*, Desclée, Paris, 1987, p 207

Man is edified by the unification of two levels, but what is his law and, implicitly, his dignity is what connects him with the divinity, what stimulates his ascent. This is the source of the thinking of man, of the complete man, not of the one who has not reached the age of maturity in Christ. The way our Holy Father thinks the anthropological development of this chapter is the analogical one, relying on the possibility of drawing an analogy between the divine attributes and the human features, this opportunity being opened, as it was mentioned above, by the very meaning of the term “image”.

In this context, maybe the first feature of the image is the *incognoscibility*:

“Therefore, because one of the features considered to belong to the divine nature is the incomprehensibility of the being, necessarily in this, too, the image has the imitation of the archetype. Because the nature of the image could be comprehensible, but the prototype would be above comprehension, the contrariety of these qualities considered would demonstrate the illusory character of the image. But because the nature of our mind which is in the Creator’s image, escapes our comprehension, it has an exact likeness to the superior one, marking by such an incognoscible character its incomprehensible nature.”¹⁴ “The eikon is the fundamental gift of God through which and in which God completely (fully) gives Himself to the created humanity. Thus, the eikon contains all the divine attributes, all the divine gifts, its nature as energy, understanding by this the character of incomprehensibility character, not the one of infinity. The unfathomable mystery of the human soul is the reflection of the divine incomprehensibility.”¹⁵

While all that belongs to the created world can be rationally decrypted in their intimate parts precisely due to their intrinsic rationality, man, as bearer of the divine image, reveals himself as resembling the One, by this ineffable character. No one belonging to the rational world is able to decrypt His image. We are referring to image’s features, to manifestations of it, which represent the decipherable aspects of the human being, still no rational type of cognition (knowledge) will be able to state what man is. Every time there will remain something, an indeterminable bit that will escape any reductionist rationalist exercise, and, hence, the unrepeatability character of the individual, who has his core in this incomprehensibility specific to the original image. No effort of our reason will ever be able to decipher it. This highlights an apophatic foundation of the human, about which we will talk in the same negative terms, specific of the divine being that is the source of this foundation. All that is in agreement with this world is rational, compliant to the being’s reason, but those that are not in agreement with this world will not be able to subscribe to the comprehensible reasons of this world ether. Hence, perhaps the most powerful argument of man’s divine origin.

It is necessary to mention here an anthropological explanation. Saint Gregory, when he speaks about man, uses two stages of the humanity, analyzing the *standard man*, the man before the fall, and the *Man Christ*, in opposition to the ordinary man. The standard man is seen through the perspective of the divine image connected to the materiality structure, and the *real man* is analyzed from the perspective of the divine image darkened in the same relation to the materiality. From here results the necessity to distinguish between what is and what should be. Moreover, we need to state that both the man before the Fall, and the man after the Fall, by his created human nature, are simultaneously material and spiritual, yet what has priority in the relation between the parts gives to man his character: either primordial is the emphasis on the image toward the likeness, or the emphasis of materiality becomes primordial, determining the image’s occultation, though, in both cases, the essence

¹⁴ Sf. Grigorie de Nyssa, *Despre facerea omului [About man’s creation]*, 11, P.G. 44, 156AB

¹⁵ A. G. Hamman, *L’homme, image de Dieu...*, p 217

of humanity is considered to be God's image, because, man, man as he should be, remains the Christ archetype, and the man *per se* becomes a man only to the extent to which he is centered in Christ, so to the extent to which the image occultation is dissipated. Saint Gregory of Nyssa states in this sense the differences between the two sides of humanity, yet without breaking the human as a whole:

“What do we state here, in conclusion? That man, this thinking being is able to think and to know, but our human being can not be defined only by these notions, if we were to admit that anger and lust and sinful passions of this kind were inborn in us since the beginning. Because anger and lust are vices common both to the thinking and unthinking nature, it would not be wise to describe each of them, starting from features common to both natures. Yet what is superfluous in describing a thing, and which we have no need of, how could it have to be defining? This is the reason why in any definition are considered the specific features of the object that has to be defined. All the non-specific features and of a different nature than the object defined, are not considered in definition. On the other hand, all the researchers consider that the action of lust and anger is present in the whole world of unthinking beings. Common attributes are not the same with the specific ones. Especially, this means that we should not consider anger and lust among the feelings characterizing in the first place the human nature, but as we see functioning in us different parts of the body for touching, eating and growing, no one will deny because of them the above-mentioned definition of the soul, because the existence in the soul of certain attributes does not mean the inexistence in the body of those activities and parts of it; similarly, after somebody had observed that our human nature's tendencies to anger and lust do exist, he would unfairly be against the soul's definition, considering it incomplete.”¹⁶

Yet, if the essence of what humanity is escapes our reason, as the being of the divinity does, too, we should unravel the actions that activate this essence, those that are essential attributes of the divine image existing in man. All these attributes of the humanity as divine image, are in their first activation Jesus Christ's features, because He is the Archetype of the divine image, the divinity's fullness being settled in Him. Jesus Christ is par excellence Logos, simultaneously God's Logos and the creation's Logos, implicitly Logos of the Christ-centered man. In this manner, man reaches a double affirmation of his rationality, corresponding to his dual character: on the one hand, the materiality by which man gets integrated in the universe is a proof of the rational Christocentrism that marks the universe from the perspective of the creation's Logos, and, on the other hand, man is again Christocentric by his attribute of man edified according to God's image.

Talking about the two ways of defining humanity, only the revealed one can determine the character of image of:

“this rational and thinking being, man, piece of work and copy of the pure divine nature, that had neither in his nature, nor coexisting with him, at the moment of his first genesis, either the attraction to sinful passions or mortality. Because it would have been impossible to maintain the reason of the image, if the beauty reflected in the image had been contrary to the archetype”¹⁷.

Therefore, the rational nature that plainly distinguishes man from all the other beings is a divine mark. While all are edified according to rationality, only human nature is able of rational reflection, only man is able to know that he is beyond the instincts that make him a being that belongs to the universe. Saint Gregory of Nyssa states in this sense:

¹⁶ Sf. Grigorie de Nyssa, *Dialog despre suflet și înviere*, P.G. 46, 52C-53B

¹⁷ Sf. Grigorie de Nyssa, *Despre feciorie*, P.G. 46, 369B- 376C

“we should take into account that in the divine Being and in our mind we meet something in common, because we note that we see both of them as being outside the circle of things that can be known by means of our senses.”¹⁸

In conclusion, if we take into account the ascendant theory, from the immediate reality to the revealed one, it can be determined only the alterity character of the human ration in connection with the being, but its divine origination can be only a supposition, not in any case a truth. What can validate this presumption, what can transform this opinion of man about himself in a truth is only the Revelation that unveils his origin.

In this sense, what consists as a source of the humanity, what makes man be the way he is, is precisely the divine image existing inside him, an image that makes the distinction between man and all the other creatures. The main feature of the distinction made is in the first place rationality. Though, relying on the affirmation of the same ontological scheme of integrality specific of Saint Gregory of Nyssa, this rationality does not exist as an unique mark of the humanity, being only one of the correlated attributes that define humanity from the perspective of the divine image, the Saint stating in this sense the following:

“The One Who edified man in His image planted in the nature of the one He created the seeds of all the goodness (virtues), so that none of these virtues creeps from the outside, but what we want is in our power, taking out as from a treasury, the good in our nature.”¹⁹

Hence, the image is valued as a source of all that is beneficial in man, as spring of all the good seeds (aspirations). Yet, the presence of the image as source of good things does not imply their unconditional activation. Man does not manifest himself as being kind in all his actions due to the fact that he is edified according to the divine image. Our author himself makes the distinction here, affirming “*the seeds of all the goodness (virtues)*” as a mark, not referring here to their manifestation. We should seize the implicit character of benefic potentiality that the presence of the divine image in man gives to him, and when we affirm potentiality, implicitly we affirm its activation only by means of the human free will, and not as a mechanistic obligation susceptible of annihilating the subject’s freedom. Still, the affirmation of these distinctions between the bodily nature and the spiritual nature of man should not be thought of as generating an irreconcilable break between the pneumatic man and the carnal man, because man is pondered over as an integrality, as a unique individual that succeeds in integrating both of his natures, moreover, the integration of the carnal is specific of the good human nature, being even possible for him:

“If man was brought in the world to partake of the divine goods, it appears as necessary that just as he was edified, he is also able to partake of them.”²⁰

Following the same scheme of the correlative terms, the rationality of the image brings with it man’s status of king over the created world, as the Genesis states: “*Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.*” (Genesis 1:26) And he is worthy of all this dominion as “*the one who even from his birth moment ought to rule as a king over his servants.*”²¹ In this dominion over the entire creation we can see the attribute of Lord that

¹⁸ Sf. Grigorie de Nyssa, *Dialog despre suflet și înviere*, P.G. 46, 36A

¹⁹ Sf. Grigorie de Nyssa, *Despre Fericiri*, P.G. 44, 1253D-1256A

²⁰ Sf. Grigorie de Nyssa, *Marele Cuvânt Catehetic*, P.G. 45, 21C;

²¹ Sf. Grigorie de Nyssa, *Despre facerea omului*, P.G. 44, 133A;

Jesus Christ Himself possesses and brings to completeness by assuming the fullness of the human nature, of that nature in which the entire cosmos is contained the way the microcosm reflects in itself all the attributes of the whole. This aspect is presented in a very modernist-utilitarian way in the seventh book of *On Man's Creation*, where man's status of king over the created world is analyzed by developing the utility criterion which affirms that all the submissive creation is meant to fulfill man. From here comes a new manner of approach concerning the presence of man in the created world, on the one hand as a king, and on the other hand all the created beings being presented not only as submissive to man, but simultaneously as useful to him, man being considered from the perspective of his bodily nature as “*lacking the weapons of the other beings... But what is lacking in our nature, becomes a reason of superiority upon others.*”²² The perspective from which all these relations between man and other beings are viewed can constitute at any moment a perspective that can be defined today as balanced ecologism.

But the image itself, on the basis of that integrality of benefic attributes contained by it, can be for man a source of virtue, as I stated above, of virtuous potentiality, because

“many and miscellaneous are the colors of the image that reflect the true shades of the original, in any case not the red or the white, or other medium color, but instead of these all, the purity, the freedom from sinful passions, the happiness, the deliverance from all the evil, and many others of this kind express man's creation in the likeness of God. You can see what flowers of His own image God used to adorn His creation, man.”²³

The negative attributes prevail here because the presented shades of the image are of ethic nature, therefore they belong par excellence to the deliverance from evil, in relation to which the human being becomes positive by denying it. Therefore, all that is man's benefic orientation comes from the divine image. Man is again turned to good from this perspective that supposes his development according to the Archetype, to Jesus Christ, to the new Adam.

From all the features that make man the image of Archetype, there are two, that are not only correlated, but also of major importance in the *oikonomia* of humanity: freedom and love. If the first represents for man a summit of God's consideration towards the creature, and maybe, precisely due to its height it is also the riskiest, requesting of man to strung his entire will to head for the likeness, the second is the feature able to repair, on the one hand, from God to man, and on the other hand, from man to man and also to God: love. The same idea is expressed by Paul Evdokimov:

“With Saint Gregory of Nyssa, man is related to God, deiform in his nature, which consecrates him for deification, the most intimate communion with God. While intelligence, wisdom and love are images of the same realities present in God, higher than all these, the power of self-determination is the one that comes to man from the divine image. The axiological function of reasoning, of appreciation, of judgment make man the king that rules over the nature, cosmic word participant to the divine life conditions. Between the deified man and God the difference is the following: the Divine is uncreated while man exists by creation.”²⁴

Freedom is the most complexly appreciated in the work of Saint Gregory of Nyssa, first of all due to the binary potential it has: freedom is the complete likeness of God, and, simultaneously, its activation means the tragism of human nature. The structure of integrality

²² Sf. Grigorie de Nyssa, *Despre facerea omului*, P.G. 44, 140D-141A

²³ Sf. Grigorie de Nyssa, *Despre facerea omului*, P.G. 44, 137 A-B

²⁴ Paul Evdokimov, *La connaissance de Dieu selon la tradition orientale*, Desclée de Brouwer, Paris 1988, p 33

presumes as correlative quality of the divine image, moreover, as essential fundament of the personality, the gift of love. This because “God is love and also the source of love, as Great Saint John says that

“Love is from God and that God is love. This was marked by the Creator of our nature on our face, because He says: By this everyone will know that you are My disciples, if you love one another. Hence, if this love does not exist, then all the image’s features change. God sees all, hears all, and understands all. You also can understand what is going on, by seeing and hearing and the power of reasoning is the one that analyzes and understands everything.”²⁵

In all the thinking of Saint Gregory of Nyssa we can observe the relevance of the entirety, the sense that presumes that not even one of the features should be thought of in isolation, as if not linked with the others. Just as reasoning without liberty falls apart, or justice without understanding loses itself as justice, similarly all the other features cannot really function, so they can not be in harmony with the nature they put into work in actions, if they are not correlated. But the fundamental feature, the one in which the thinking on the being of the divinity was conceived as having the maximum power of integration, the Good, that Good supposes love, and “*has by its very nature the power to draw somehow to itself anyone looking for it*”²⁶. Love in its turn determines man’s action in agreement with his divine image, that action for which the very *Oikonomia* of the Son stands as a proof, as archetype of any Christian act.

CONCLUSION

Maybe the meeting between the Greek philosophy and the Christian theology has never been as harmonious as in the work of Saint Gregory of Nyssa. Maybe the Christian Revelation has never been so systematically structured, on the basis of Greek thinking, especially in ontology. All these, as we have seen, generated as well some divagations from what the Christian theology is nowadays, yet, beyond all these, remains this monument of theology, which, today, after seventeen centuries is relevant, however not yet discovered in its entire beauty, and, moreover, which shows us sometimes where we make mistakes in our own theological interpretations.

In Saint Gregory of Nyssa’s theology, harmony is defining for the Holy Trinity, but, at the same time, it is a norm of the universe, it is a norm of the relation between man and universe, between man and the other people, and, in addition, is a norm precisely for man’s structure, in which God set in perfect harmony the spirit of life and of reason together with the material of the world’s elements. Harmony is the one that makes man be, beyond the appearances of a world continuously flowing; it is precisely harmony that makes man be a combination of elements, and, in the end, after the soul returns to God who gave it, harmony sends the elements to their places, then at the moment of the Resurrection, also under the sign of harmony, they will be unified, this time pneumatised, with the soul from which they had been separated by sin.

All these have only one Source: God, the One who edified man out of love and set him as a crown over his work, He Who like the Father from the evangelical parable, is waiting for us all as His prodigal sons. From here, the meaning that Saint Gregory of Nyssa disseminates in his entire work: man’s entire destiny is connected, by creation, by Redemption and by Deification, to God. From here also comes the obsessive theme of

²⁵ Sf. Grigorie de Nyssa, *Despre facerea omului*, P.G. 44, 137C; P.S.B., vol 30, p 24

²⁶ Sf. Grigorie de Nyssa, *Despre suflet și înviere*, P.G. 46, 89B; P.S.B. vol. 46, p 379

reflection: man, as a reflection of Jesus Christ; Christ, as the Father's image, the Other, as an image of Christ, the very universe as image of the rational Logos, the spiritualized man as image of man according to his true nature, the ascendant approach as reflection in our own actions of the Way by which Christ has regained us for our Father.

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Man and Cosmos from the Christian Theology perspective

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to analyse the theological reflection on the relationship between man and cosmos. The origin of the world and man is connected to God; God is the Creator and consequently the Author of them both. Unlike dualistic materialistic thinking, according to the Christian conception the whole cosmos is created by God. In search for the cosmos an important chapter was granted for man, considered to be a synthesis of the world. Man, from the theological perspective, is the personal, rational, free, and speaking being that has – through the image of God according to which he has been created –, the tension after perfection. But it pertains exclusively to the relationship with Christ in the light of Whom he really knows himself, and by knowing himself he recognizes the infinite beauty of the Archetype. This is the existential-theological truth, which the content of this paper emphasizes, according to the Bible and patristic teaching.

Keywords: man; world; cosmos; philosophy; theology; Christianity;

INTRODUCTION

According to Christian teachings, the world is created by God “out of nothing” and in time, which shows that it did not pre-exist. The world, the cosmos, the universe as described by the Christian Revelation appears as a space imprinted by the divine energies because it is basically the work of the Holy Trinity, the only source from which the power of life springs and providentially sustains everything all that exists. The world is the updating to plan of God in space and time. The world as a whole is dynamic, alive, in continuing moving, a reality defined by the notion of “*creation in the state of creation*”, but not in the evolutionary sense, but in the sense of becoming and renewing, or as an incomplete situation, once all tend to perfection, to transfiguration, that is the final state.

From the various language words used to define the work and result of God, for example, the creation or nature, that is, what was born, or cosmos, which means ordaining, and in broader sense the order of the universe; or as the Latin “*universum*”, i.e. etymologically, *turned, oriented so as to form a whole, a coordinated ensemble*. The most appropriate for creation is the Latin word “*lumen*”, which means *light*, and is explained in and through the Light of the world – Jesus Christ, the Son of God who became man (cf. John 8:12). Man cannot conceive beyond cosmic nature. Nature is not only the condition of the existence of the unique man, but also of human solidarity. Nature appears in a very clear way as the environment by which man can do good or evil by progressing or regressing from the material and spiritual point of view.

1. Man and cosmos. Ancient philosophical landmarks

The notion of cosmos (κόσμος - order, harmony) occurs in ancient Greek thought, where the Demiurge gives shape to amorphous matter, pre-existing matter, which before being ordered is under total chaos. This is a dualist materialistic conception that brings to the origin of the world two principles: *divinity* and *matter*. The ancient Greeks believed that the world as we know it, with its laws, has not always existed, but it originated from an initial chaos, to a prehistoric phase in which there was no distinction and differentiation, in which their things and their attributes, phenomena and beings had not existed as such. The principle of all things is the "unity" from which the animated universe is born (Diogenes Laertios¹). This unity, seen as a struggle of opposites, is according to Heraclitus, the Supreme Harmony, or *Logos*.

“This logos-principle, though hidden and accessible only to intelligence, is still material, as it results from the identification of the heraclitian logos with cosmic fire”².

Image of chaos, as an undifferentiated mixture, in the philosophy appears for the first time at Anaxagoras of Clazomene, who claims that the order of creation is given by *Reason, Nous - Intelligence*, but Intelligence is not part of the world, because then it would have been so Imperfect like these, so the Intelligence is independent of the world, not mixing with creation, but it moves and orders all things.

At origin of the “*cosmos*” idea, there were the simple observations made on the phenomena of nature. The notion of *cosmos* opposes the concept of *chaos*³. The big and central idea of ancient Greek Philosophy is concentrated in the notion of cosmos-order, which gives the unity of the world, harmony but also determinism, as well as the preoccupation to understand the origin of the world and its order in search a divinity as a unitary principle Unchangeable, to give him real existence. The relationship between the actual existence of the creation ones is under a continual contradictory struggle. The movement of things makes Heraclitus consider their existence to be apparent; And Parmenides argues that true existence has the unchangeable being, that is, Supreme Reason, which is not related to the things of the world. Plato, attempts to reconcile these two contradictory views, through the theory of ideas or the world of eternal ideas, which serve as the standard, model, the sensible world, of which the greatest is the idea of Good⁴, identified by Plotinus (3rd century AD) .) With God, the infinite, the simple one that transcends time and space through emanation. Thus, Plato considers the birth of the world somewhat of something that can be called God. Even if he attributes a divine identity to the world, it is devoid of content, of real existence.

John Sallis says the logical term in Greek thought has two meanings, namely, “*to say, to speak*” and “*to mediate the thing together*”⁵. Aristotle, in opposition to Plato, gives an substratum ontological, real to individual things, claiming that the only thing that exists is

¹ Diogenes Laertios, *Viața și doctrinele filosofilor (Life and Doctrines of the Philosophers)*, Academia Română, Bucharest, 1963.

² Francis E. Peters, *Termenii filosofiei grecești (The terms of Greek Philosophy)*, 2nd edit., Bucharest, Humanitas, 1997, p. 161.

³ Jean Pierre Lonchamp, *Știință și credință (Science and Faith)*, transl. by Magda Stavinschi, Eonul Dogmatic, Bucharest, 2003, pp. 18-31; John F. Haught, *Știință și religie (Science and Religion)*, Eonul Dogmatic, Bucharest, 2002, pp. 194- 220.

⁴ C. Narly, *Antologie filosofica, (Philosophical Anthology)*, Bucharest, Casa Scoalelor, 1943, p. 36

⁵ John Sallis, *Being and Logos-Reading the platonic dialogues*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1996, p. 7.

the individual. But through this, the ontology of the material outside of God, which coincides with the ones created, cannot be sustained, for the individual ends tragically with his death. Aristotle sought to solve the fundamental problem of the Greek philosopher as to how a Being is in substance, and God as pure thinking is out of the world in an eternal state.

The philosophical conception of an impersonal God makes him merge with the created ones, or those created to be an emanation from Him, as in pantheism. God is not only an ordering existence, but a Creator, who brings to existence "out of nothing", all being made in order to promote the crown of creation i.e. man. He is not connected to the world in the form of Plato's "creation", that is, as an identification of the sensible and intelligible world; nor the confusion with the seminal logos, or the generating principle of the Universe, a concept promoted by the Stoics, who taught that the reason of creation is inanimate and unconscious, exerted by the influence of the one who imposes it, that is to say the Logos, as generating reason concurrent with creation; nor by emanation as Plotinus thinks. But God as the Absolute thrice-personal-Being is the transcendent and immanent source, whose rationality is put with measure in those created by uncreated divine energies, theologically called with the concept of grace.

2. Man and the world from the Christian Theology perspective

The world, created in time and of nothing, is the work of divine love. God is revealing in the world to man willingly and freely, so man's existence was necessary to receive and perceive divinity. The Absolute divine Existence has no internal or external necessity, a fact expressed by the definition of God in the Old Testament as "*I am That I am*" (Exodus 3:14), and of course, theologically stressed through the formula: "*The Trinity in Unity and Unity in the Trinity*"⁶ which includes perfect personal communion and love. The existence of God does not depend on anything, not even His Being or Nature, for they do not make His existence obligatory. His absolute will and liberty is realized forever as love and triumphal communion. Thus, the real meaning of Divine Existence is "to be loved"; that's why love in its true meaning implies sharing, and it involves rational, conscious and free subjects capable of receiving and responding to the action of love, namely angels, and especially men.

Creation and man represent the environment through which the entire love of the Holy Trinity is manifested. The Holy Trinity is, by and large, the fullness of existence and of love. God the Father fully and overseas loves the Son as the fruit of perfect union, "*I and the Father are one*" (John 10:30)⁷. The God Son participates in the Father's Being as God, having His own hypostasis, manifesting at the same time His gratitude and benevolence to the infinite love of the Father. The Love of the Father to the Son also takes part in the joy of coexistent eternity, which proceeds from the eternal nature of the Father, and which has the superhuman existence of the Father, namely the third Divine Person, i.e. the Holy Spirit. Thus the Father is the source of the triumphal love, the Reflexion and the answer of love, and the Holy Spirit the gladness to the love of the Father and of the Son. Love is a personal action that reveals itself in communion; therefore, the main result of love is union and unity. The Paradox of the Trinitarian Persons consists in the fact that their love is perfect, which makes their union full, each person revealing to one other and having the same Being: "*I am in the Father and the Father is in Me*" (John 14:10) - says our Saviour. But the Father and

⁶ Sf. Ioan Scăraru, *Scara Raiului* (Ladder of Paradise), XXV 14, transl. by Rev. Prof. D. Staniloae, in *Philocaly*, vol. IX, IBMBOR, Bucuresti 1980, p. 302

⁷ Tertulian, *Adversus Praxeam*, chap. 10., P.L., II,188B: „*Habet necesse est Pater Filium, ut Pater sit, et Filius Patrem, ut Filius sit*”, compared with St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Cateheza*, VII, 5; P.G. XXXIII.609B.

the Son and the Holy Spirit decide from eternity that the existence they enjoy, be shared with other conscious and free existences, so that they participate in the infinite happiness and the gladness of the entire existence, in order to make known the love that characterizes Divine Being, love flowing over whole creation. God the Father, as the perfect Person, is the source of all existence. The Father's hypostasis is the beginning of hypostatic subsistence (ἀρχή), but not the being or the common Nature of the Holy Trinity. Thus this Hypostasis is the source of the Divine Being, which is in the Son and in the Holy Spirit. The Father's monarchy is seen in the fact that He is the beginning of all, so that the work of the Holy Trinity is a single one, having only one will, and consequently a single work. Therefore, in the verily act of creation, the entire Holy Trinity is present:

„each is and is working in every one, it is obvious that working the Father also works the Son as His natural and physical and hypostatic Power, and by working the Son, the Father also works as the source of the creative word that naturally exists in The one born of Him, like the fire and the heat from Him ...”,⁸ As the Saviour shows: “My Father is working until now, and I am working.” (John 5:17).

The biblical account does not propose a timeline, but a functional concentric perspective, so the Book of Creation should not be regarded as a manual of geology or cosmology. The order of the days of creation is logical, aiming to affirm the plan and direct involvement of God in the bringing into existence and organizing of the universe. The biblical account of the creation of the world and of man is presented in three realities that must be understood in a unitary way:

1) The very short one that is the one from Genesis (1:1) "*In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.*" This indicates God's work "at the beginning," and places the earth in relation to the whole of the universe⁹. The infinite love of the Father to the Son in the Holy Spirit is now manifested in history, which enables Him to update himself in a concrete way outside of the Holy Trinity (ad extra) through the act of will and love, not only of humility or kenosis as Russian theologians have put it¹⁰. Therefore, the expression "*in the beginning (en arhe) God made heaven and earth*" (Genesis 1:1) indicates the first moment of the world's feast and all that exists besides God, namely an exit from the absence of existence. At first, when the creative act occurs and the creation comes to life, indicates both the beginning of God's descent in time and the beginning of the time that takes place with creation through the creative power of God. From this moment on, the discovery of the divine plan takes place through its application.

St. Maximus the Confessor claims that within the creation are inserted the divine rationale or the rays of the Logos (Supreme Reason), which reveals the very reality of the transcendental Divine presence and existence.

“He who does not limit the nature of those seen only on the horizon of the senses, but intelligently searches the reason of every creature with the wise mind, discovers God, learning their cause from the greatness of things themselves”¹¹.

⁸ St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Comentariu la Evanghelia Sfântului Ioan*, I, transl. by Rev. Prof. D. Stăniloae, in *P.S.B.*, 41, IBMBOR, Bucharest, 2000 p. 59

⁹ Paul Davies, *The Mind of God: The Scientific Basis for a Rational World*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992, p. 66

¹⁰ Sergei Bulgakov, *Orthodoxy*, transl. by N. Grosu, Paidea, Bucharest, 1994 and P. Evdochimov, *Orthodoxy*, transl. by Dr. Irineu Ioan Popa, IBMBOR, Bucharest, 1996.

¹¹ St. Maximus the Confessor, *Quaestiones ad Thalassium*, P.G. 90, col. 756A

The rationality of creation is contained in the eternal counsel (the plan of God) as the potential of all created ones. Divine wisdom imparts to the creation rationality through which all must be conducted. According to St. Maximus the Confessor, the universe and any part of it, including man, have a sense of its being, λογος φύσεως τον είναι, a reason to be; "What is," which makes possible the definition and the meaning of being, as well as the connection between man and God, created and uncreated. The rationale of encompassing divine intent as an informational structure in which God's power, embodied actively and temporally in creation, operates. Reason of appearing as a sum of possibilities on structure, being and meaning ((δύναμις). Thus, rationally, the being contains all that is inscribed in reason, its possibilities materializing in the mode of being, or movement – the natural physical movement, but not according to the wisdom and the presence of the Creator Logos, through uncreated divine energies.

„The God Father creates the universe looking the icon of Christ. And because Christ is a theandric existence, no moment of the history of creation takes place outside of this paradigm, or otherwise than through an act of synergy ... In Christ, is revealed this principle and the ultimate form of the world”¹².

Thus, the world has the cause of the one God who has the unsteady stability, which calls and attracts those created by the endless overflow of uncreated divine energies.

„One of the earliest theological formulations of a ‘cosmic Christ’ can be traced back to the second century. Irenaeus of Lyon speaks of Christ’s work of atonement in terms of ‘recapitulating’ or ‘summing up’ all of humanity in Him. This understanding of the cosmic redemption of Christ has been the dominant Christological view in Eastern or Greek Christianity up until the present day”¹³.

Logos-ness (*logonost*¹⁴) means an indelible and eternal connection between creation and holiness, between Creation and Incarnation, a connection made by Christ in the Holy Spirit.

„Creation through the Logos thus implies, after St. Maxim the Confessor, not only a positive evaluation of creation but its inclusion in the intent of universal unification based on the Incarnation of the Logos, in which all the rationale of things is hidden”¹⁵.

The Fathers of the Church talk of the eternal reasoning of the things contained in Christ, the Word of God, understanding by them and these ever-higher meanings hidden in them, and they are surprised, with the help of the Supreme Word, also of the human reason that surprises the rationale of things in strict sense. Sometimes they distinguish the meaning of the work (*noem*) from its strict (*logos*) reason. St. Athanasius the Great, starting from harmony and the orderly creation, highlights the rationality of the universe, stating that: „*the creation shows and proclaims the Master and its Maker through its order and harmony as letters...*”¹⁶ which shows that the whole creation is a rational being, a reflex of the Logos – Reason and Divine Word. The rationality of creation is given by the fact that it carries the imprint of the supreme Logos (reason). Between creation and the divine Logos there is an

¹² Andrei Kuraev, *Sfinții Părinți, Despre originea și destinul cosmosului și al omului...* transl. by Rev. Ioan Ică jr., 2nd edit., Deisis, Sibiu 2000, p. 240.

¹³ Alexander Chow, ‘Wang Weifan’s Cosmic Christ’. *Modern Theology*. (2016), 10.1111/moth.12260

¹⁴ Archim. Iustin Popovici, *Omul și Dumnezeu-Om*, transl. by Rev. Ioan Ică and Deac. Ioan Ică jr., Deisis, Sibiu 1997, p. 44.

¹⁵ Lars Thunberg, *Microcosm und Mediator. The Theology of Maximus the Confessor*, Lund, 1965, p. 83.

¹⁶ St. Athanasius the Great, *Despre întruparea Cuvântului*, III, 3, in «PSB» 15, IBMBOR, Bucharest, 1987, p. 69

ontological connection because each part of creation receives life from Him having an eternal reason in Him¹⁷.

To express the relationship between the Creator and the universe, Saint Maximus the Confessor conceives the Logos as its centre and unity. The whole creation carries the mark of His reason¹⁸. The world is a set of reasons (*logoi*) that are established and maintain a direct connection with the Creator Logos. As St. Maximus shows, the creatures exist as potential in the plan of God only, and their present existence is in time, but their temporal existence is not autonomous (that is, the world does not self-centred), but theonomic, it calls the latter, updated ones – *logos*, and those in potency – *noema*.

„Paradoxically, the creatures are one in the One Logos, which, however, is superficial and above participation. Thus, reasons are not the same with God's being, nor with the things of the created world”¹⁹.

Remaining faithful to the distinction between nature and energy – divine grace as a work of God's will, Saint Maximus manages to build a genuine ontology of creation that transcends the transcendence of the God Person, a perfect idea later perfected by St. Gregory Palamas. God creating things as plasticizers of His reasons - as Father Stăniloae says²⁰ - gave man reason as a means of knowledge by which he comes into contact with them, and through them he shares the love of the Creator. In the spirit of those affirmed, the world is distinct from God, but it is not separated from Him, neither in its existence, its meaning, nor in its rational structure.

Creating of the world “ex nihilo” (from nothing) is based on the love of God, therefore the world is His gift seen as a reality of harmony and communion (2 Maccabees 7:28). Creation is a medium of uncreated divine energies. According to the divine revelation, the world is not an emanation from the divine Being, nor is it modelled from a pre-existing matter, as Plato claimed. In pantheistic conceptions God is identified with the world, because the creative or modelling deity of matter is conceived as impersonal. If God were not a Personal Existence (tri-personal), then the created man would not have the same status as personal being, but can be "something" that, after a series of evolutions, will attain perfection, but unconsciously through the world, as, for instance, in the Asian religious conception of nirvana – the merging into the Great All. This idea makes man's conscious relationship with divinity impossible since his will-to-be forced man is reincarnated to ultimately reach nirvana, and on the other hand, he excludes his freedom from being destined to fusion with the universe. Also, the theory of pre-existence of matter limiting God's omnipotence has no logical arguments. If God needed a matter to create, it means He is not Absolute, Almighty, and free, but weak and limited. The dualist materialist-dualist argument (God and matter) is contradictory and impermissible because it leads to a reciprocal limitation of the two realities with the following consequences: 1. God, as Absolute Being, is no longer infinite (super temporal) and consequently somewhere God would end up and matter would begin. 2. Matter would be absorbed by God or emanate from Him (and then we ask ourselves why it is not the perfect world?). 3. God would be circumscribed by matter (i.e. matter would limit and absorb God, and consequently God would be matter). The

¹⁷ St. Augustine, *De Genesi ad literam*, II; P.L.XXXIV, col.268

¹⁸ St. Maximus the Confessor, *Ambigua*, in «PSB», 80, IBMBOR, Bucharest, p. 84.

¹⁹ John Meyendorff, *Teologia bizantină* (Byzantine theology), transl. by Rev. Prof. Dr. Alexandru I. Stan, IBMBOR, Bucharest, 1996, pp.179-180

²⁰ Rev. Prof. Dr. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Teologia dogmatică ortodoxă* (Orthodox Dogmatic Theology), vol. II, 2nd edit., IBMBOR, Bucharest, 1997, p. 7.

teaching of Saint Gregory Palama about uncreated energies with the distinction between being and divine energies helps us to understand that the rationale of matter is grace, matter as science states – is essentially condensed energy, being the fruit of grace or unclean divine energy, as Christian theology affirms²¹. That is why God (as Absolute Pure Being is not confused with matter), through the uncreated gracious energies is transcendent and immanent, Almighty, Over-spatial, Supra-temporal (logically, there cannot be two realities of eternity, because they would limit each other) because it is not subject to any constraint or internal or external requires. Therefore, the only argument underlying the existence of the world is the absolute and unconditional love, specific to the Holy Trinity.

2) The second account of the biblical account of creation (Genesis 1:2-2:3) describes the various chronological phases of the history of the world in which the great wisdom of God, who creates all, as a palace, to be the emperor – the man. The biblical account shows that every new occurrence of a new order in existence, every new creation, expresses the power of the word of God "to be".

The first day of creation (Genesis 1: 2-5) shows the creation of the earth "*for the earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep.*" (Genesis 1: 2). This first day tells us how the Creator puts into his work his eternal plan of the world; it appears as an update of his thinking. The fact that the earth was empty and void, discovers that a wise Creator was required to give him the beauty and shine he now has, to remove the depth of the water and the void to fill it with His joy, that is, the Holy Spirit – the divine energy. That is why in patristic thinking:

„The Spirit is fine as water, because the water is fine, the Spirit over the waters fed water ... (and water) penetrates and nourishes the earth, gives it the germination power, so the Spirit over the waters did not rest...”²².

Through Him was carried over the will of the light. Saint Ephraim the Syrian says:

„The Holy Spirit warmed the waters and made them fruitful and able to conceive, like the bird when it sits on the eggs, with its wings spread and warming them with its heat, making them fruitful...”²³.

St. Basil the Great, quoting this Hexaimeron, states that the Spirit gave life to the water, or made the ones in the latent state potentially present, and St. John Chrysostom concluded stressing out that it was present in the water:

„A lively energy; And it was not a mere standing and motionless water, for what is still motionless is certainly useless”²⁴.

The life was present from the very first moment, says Louis Pasteur, who demonstrated the fundamental law of biology, according to which every living being comes from a living thing. The presence of the Holy Spirit over the waters, as the Greek expression shows – behaves highlights the continuous aspect through which the Holy Spirit sanctifies and gives life. In this deep of water, light appears (Genesis 1: 3,4), and also day and night.

²¹ Keith Ward, *God as a Principle of Cosmological, Explanation*, edit. by Roberth Russell, Nancey Murphy & C. J. Isham, Notre Dame, Vatican Observatory and University of Notre Dame, Press, 1993, pp. 248-249.

²² St. Augustine, *Confessiones*, transl. by Ion Barbu, 2nd edit., IBMBOR, Bucharest, 1994, p. 395

²³ St. Ephraim the Syrian, *Tâlcuri la facere*, The Fathers of Church, New York, 1961, pp. 286-287

²⁴ St. John Chrysostom, *Omiliu la Facere*, I; III,1, transl. by Rev. D. Fecioru, in «PSB», no. 17, IBMBOR, Bucharest, 1987, p. 94

In patristic thinking the light from the beginning was spread everywhere, not being locked in a particular place, it was spreading the darkness, but anticipating the coming of the night.

„Then day and night were not due to the movement of the sun, but ... according to God's appointed measure ... the air was full of light ... the nature of the light being diaphanous ... the ether being more pleasant, and the brighter waters, because they caught the reflex of light”²⁵.

God called the day as the end of the night to be an order and a sequence in the things seen. Concerning the light, the Sacred Scripture, the unseen world of the angels who dwell in heaven, or in the heaven of heaven, as David says (Ps. The creation of the unseen and implicit world of angels took place before the creation of the seen world (Luke 1:26).

From day two to the sixth day of creation (Genesis 1: 6-25), God-Creator brings into existence by His word all that exists, putting in every love and rationality. On the second day, God made the strength, that is, the celestial vault, dividing the waters from above into the lower ones, at which time the organization of matter began.

On the third day God separated the waters from the dry land, making the oceans, seas, rivers, and earth appeared with all sorts of plants according to their kind.

„It was not said of the water that God did; But he said that the earth was unseen ... not because it could cover the fire or the air, but because the liquid matter had not yet been in its place ...the earth had birth pains, the birth of all thanks to the power put into it by the Creator and only wait the time appointed, that at his command bring to light those spawned”²⁶.

The Fourth Day of Creation (Genesis 1:13-19) presents the making of the great and small enlighteners (sun, moon stars), and their laying on the power of heaven, to enlighten the earth day and night. The creation of the sun on this day aims at strengthening the faith in Creator, and discovers that the sun is not a deity, as many misconceptions of mankind had expressed after the fall into sin, which honour creation instead of the Creator. In conclusion, God is the Creator of the sun, He is the light without evening, the One without Beginning and End.

On the fifth day of creation, God made the living creatures of the water and the birds in the air, each by their own kind, blessing them to increase and multiply (Genesis 1: 20-23).

On the sixth day, God made all the great animals, the creepers, the wild beasts, the domestic animals, all by their kind, and then the man (Genesis 1: 24-31). Each day of creation ends with the finding that all created ones are very good.

„That this perfect kindness refers to every creature in part, it is clear from the very admiration, which is to say emphatically, that in the case of that good nothing was missing so that it was not considered to be perfect”²⁷.

Creation relates to the mission of man, and man to God, because the world has been made to be inhabited and coordinated by man (Isaiah 45:18).

3) The third account of the biblical account (Genesis 2: 4-25) is less systematic and chronological, but it is centred on man. This is essential for theological argumentation. Man is created by direct act of God; he is the direct work of divinity. The creation of the Holy

²⁵ St. Basil the Great, *Omiliu la Hexaemeron (Homilies at Hexaemeron)*, II, VII, transl. by Rev. Prof. D. Feciorul in «PSB», no. 17, IBMBOR, Bucharest, 1986, p. 93

²⁶ St. Basil the Great, *Homilies at Hexaemeron*, II, 3, pp. 87-88.

²⁷ St. Gregory of Nyssa, *Cuvânt apologetic la Hexaemeron...*, transl. by Rev. T. Bodogae, in «PSB», no. 30, IBMBOR, Bucharest, 1998, p. 110.

Trinity takes place: “*And God said, «Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens ... and all the earth*” (Genesis 1: 26). Of all creatures, God creates him specially only; he is not the result of the divine commandment, for the earth was not able to produce a being endowed with reason, freedom, conscience and will, but only God through its great power and Love, it does in the image of His Glory, giving him the likeness to which they must reach through their own work.

Analysing the scriptural text, we see the distinction between the singular “*and He said*” and the plural “*Let's make,*” man (singular), in our own (plural) image and likeness, we come to the conclusion that man is a reflex of the ternary icon of “*the unseen God*” (Colossians 1: 15), being created in the image of Christ. The “divine icon” of man is an ontological datum of human nature, while likeness concerns the realization of the image. The clarification of this statement is given by the conclusion of the Bible after the creation of the woman (Eve): “*So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them*” (Genesis 1:27) without reminding the likeness, the latter being the goal of his life. The distinction between masculine and feminine, of course, has no implication on the image of God in man, for God is not divided into masculine and feminine; therefore, His image extends over the whole human nature personally covered by man and woman. Chapter 2, verse 7 of Genesis relates the way of man's creation: “then the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature...” Thus, human nature is dually constituted i.e. soul-body, being penetrated by grace, by life's breath. The man (*anthropos*) is the personal being composed of the body (*soma*), and the soul (*psyche, anima*) or the rational and immortal part. The soul created by God is presented as the reality of life, which leads the body with which it forms a harmonic unity, with the attitude of being untouchable and not material (quantitative) endowed with reason, self-consciousness and free will through which perceives the organic body, immortal through the divine, immaterial, unique and united, indelible and unrepeatable grace, which through its faculties offers and directs human nature to spirituality.

The Book of Faith shows that God has not put on the woman – as in Adam – the breath of life, but has taken part of his body and made another human being: Eve. The man-woman pair formed for love and procreation is a necessity of the human nature created by God. Man and woman have the same biological, ontological identity (of the unique human being), but after the constitution of the body, there are some differences that generate gender-specific attributes of both masculine and feminine. This distinction does not imply the divine image because they are equal in terms of ontological qualities and moral aspects and virtues imply full personal involvement, freedom and responsibility, making progress or material and spiritual regression possible.

3. The man living icon of the love and beauty of God

Man is the psycho-physical being created by love in the image of God that has in its rationality both the divine origin and the purpose to which it is to be directed, namely the full existence. The creation of man in the image of the Son of God implies the natural implementation in his nature, of all the necessary capabilities and tools by which to do likewise with God. The divine human constitution or “creation in the image of God” actually means participation in the Archetype. This is the Christian foundation through which man differentiates himself from other creatures from the other beings. Sacred Scripture defines

the nature and role of man by the expression "*image and likeness*." Man was created by God through a special act, which gives him a special status: "*And God said, Let us make man in our image and likeness*" (Genesis 1: 26-27; 9.6).

By and large, this is the definition given by the Old Testament to man. Taking into account the free and rational nature of man, the Sacred Scripture presents it in different states, which correspond to the moral reality in which it is found as a result of the relationship with God. Thus, we have an incomplete positive state before sin; a negative state by altering the face of sin, and a positive state that is about the eschatological, made by Christ in which humanity is renewed and magnified.

Etymologically, the term "icon" derives from the Hebrew word "*telem*" (goal, shadow, reflection), and from the Greek εἰκόν / image, designating a plastic image such as an effigy or a statue understood in the Old Orient as a manifestation or as an incarnation of the represented one, as evidenced by the Wisdom of Solomon (15: 14-18). As for the definition of the notion of the image and its evolution, the Holy Fathers and Church' writers have identified it, either with a part of human nature, of course, the spiritual one – the soul or the body, or the correct theological sense which pertains to man as a whole (Soul-body), and not to one of his rational or affective faculties.

The word "εἰκόν" (*image*) defines what man is naturally ontological in himself. Natural in the original state of the image reflects in itself the state of grace, the grace being the medium in which the human-face is manifested, being intrinsic human natures. By the term "image" is shown the ontological gift created by God, without the man having any input, and by the likeness it is shown what man can be, what must be done by the fulfilment of the image, i.e. the acquisition of holiness.

Specific to theological logic, man is the personal being characterized by reason, will and freedom, by the responsibility of his deeds. Man by what he accomplishes in the material and spiritual realm becomes a personality. The ontology of nature, nature, species of which it is part is embodied in person:

"Common and universal are also attributed to those who are under them. Common is the being, as a species, and the particular hypostasis. It is special not because it has a part of nature, because it has no part of it, but it is private in number, for example: the individual. The hypostases are different in number and not by nature. The being is asserted by the hypostasis, because the being is perfect in each of the hypostases of the same species. That is why the hypostases do not differ from one another in terms of being, but in terms of accidents, which are characteristic traits. However, characteristic features belong to the hypostasis and not to the flesh. The hypostasis defines: being together with accidents. That is why the hypostasis possesses the common with the individual and the existence itself. The being, however, does not exist in itself, but is considered to be hypostasis"²⁸.

The real mode of subsistence of the being in the hypostasis (*person*) τρόπος τῆς ὑπάρξεώς way of parable is the concrete state which relates to God has the same meaning, and shows that the being does not exist without the hypostasis and the hypostasis without being. As for the being and its distinction from hypostasis, St. Basil the Great says:

„We therefore support the following: what it is stated in its own way is shown by the hypostasis. Indeed, when you say, Man, in your ear – by the undefined specification of this word – is a scattered idea, so if nature is indicated by this appointment what is meant and which has indicated it by its name is not specified. On the contrary, when you say Paul, then you look exactly at the being indicated by that name. This is the hypostasis: not the

²⁸ St. John Damascene, *Dogmatics*, II, transl., intr., notes and indexes by Rev. D. Fecioru, IBMBOR, Bucharest, 2001, pp. 124-125.

undefined notion of the substance, which finds no stability in the community of the specified work, but that notion defines and defines what is common and indefinite in a particular object determined by its own attributes. Ousia (being) is the bond of the common nature of several individuals of the same species, for example: humanity, and hypostasis is the concrete subconscious individual, Peter, Paul, John ... So when two or more people are taken together, for example, Paul, Silvan ... we will not give a special definition for Paul, another for Silvan and another for Timothy, but the terms that will help us to identify Paul will be also fit for the others who are in them of the same being(ὁμοουσίοι) because they are specified by the same definition of the substance²⁹.

The term hypostasis, as described by Saint Basil the Great, means the person in dialogue, or the person bound by communion with another person. So a first characteristic of the person is love and communion. The human existence has been imprinted with God and human nature, man being created in the image of God and so framed within the boundaries of love, but as a conscious and living subject, yet full of freedom from the boundaries of his own nature. Through the choices made, and especially through the relationship with God, the man helped by far reaches true freedom. Thus, the ontological meaning of "to be" from the human point of view means TO BE GOD-LIKE, TO BE GOD AFTER GRACE. Man cannot acquire the state of perfection than in working with God and by giving up the evil will at the same time as giving to others who are themselves God's icons. What corresponds to the image of God is not a part of his being, but the person who encompasses the whole of the nature, as Leontius of Byzantium shows in the fourth century, through *enypostasis* (ἐνυπόστατον), a term that defines the nature contained in hypostasis/person. Thus nature is the content of the person and the person the existence of the nature.

The person is a dynamic ensemble, not an automatic mechanism, it is the mark of authenticity and uniqueness, and it hypothesizes the being with existence in itself, materialized by a conscious and free being, capable of communion and relationship. The dual human being, made up of body and soul, is in constant quest, in constant kneading and tension, by relationship and communion. Through man the soul tends to the spiritual, to the knowledge of God, through the flesh man is bound to the whole world.

„In the fact that man knows the universe and exceeds his knowledge, in his quality of unity, spirit and body, keeping in his soul and putting on him the spiritual seal, it is shown that the body participates in the subject quality or person as man. The body is thus human and object given and participant in its quality of subject”³⁰.

The centrality of the theology the "icon of man" is Christ, a teaching emphasized by Apostle Paul, which shows that

„Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature: For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: And he is before all things, and by him all things consist. And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the pre-eminence.” (Colossians 1: 15-18).

Man's aspiration to God cannot be understood without the breath of life of the Holy Spirit through which appears in man a "Thou-God" relationship, identified by the divine image.

According to Christian thinking, God creates from nothing a partner for dialogue in a biological organism through the spiritual breath of grace, namely man. From the beginning,

²⁹ St. Basil the Great, *Homily XXXVIII*, 2 -3, transl. by Rev. T. Bodogae, in «PSB», no. 12, Bucharest, 1998, p. 178.

³⁰ Rev. Prof. D. Staniloae, *Chipul nemuritor al lui Dumnezeu*, I, 1,3 Mitropolia Olteniei, Craiova 1987, p. 34

the real mode of human existence is to participate into divine life and spirituality, a possibility given by its special constitution in the image of God:

„Thus the icon is the horizon in which the truth about being is revealed, not as a simple nature, a subject of individualization and combination, but as a unique icon (είκόν) of the totality and universality of the being”³¹.

By Christ, man knows and receives the beauty of God, one in being, and one in God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Christ the Son of God highlights the character of the relational, dialogical, human-specific being, conceived in the reflection that transcends like the mirror of another being. Marching on this idea, Saint Gregory of Nyssa bases man's degree of kinship with God (σύγγενεία), affinity between the man icon and model, man's participation in divine life in which he enjoys infinity and enlightenment of divine spirituality, namely, deification. This state of communion with God involves μεταουσία του θεου, on the one hand, the origin of the divine man, but also the necessity to taste the immeasurable beauty and love of the Creator, which is accomplished by the derivation of the fruits of the sacrifice of Christ. All this issue of man's likeness to God is possible because there are divine elements in man, namely the image and divine energies, through which the boundary – where philosophies and humanistic sciences stop when dealing with God and man about created and uncreated, transcendent and immanent – is overcome. In the ambience of uncreated divine energies the image of God in man redefines the beauty of the Christ model. That is why man is an iconic being in accordance with theology that finds and tends to communion with God, with himself, with his fellow men and with all creation.

CONCLUSION

Christian cosmology and anthropology presents creation in general and man in particular, in direct relationship with Christ. The exceptional position of man in his creation, his structure and his ultimate purpose are fully discovered and made by the cosmic Christ. The transcendent and immanent principle, active in creation, is the grace of the Holy Spirit or the uncreated divine energy that sustains the entire cosmos.

The world is, in this sense, a gift of divine love, a love that he shares with man through the Holy Spirit. Love means affection and necessity of communion, fully lived through sharing and giving to others. The creation of the world and of man is the first testimony of the love of God – the Holy Trinity.

There is a very close connection between man and the world, a connection that is based primarily on his bodily and soul constitution. But more than anything created, man is the bearer of God's image, who makes him rational, free and sentimental. These man-specific traits call for interpersonal communion, for dialogue and unity, because the functions of the image are the objective foundation that by its dynamic structure implies the likeness of God or the state of perfection, namely of *deification*.

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The origin of the world from science and religion perspectives

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Motto: «The teleology of the Universe is directed toward the production of Beauty. Thus any system of things which in any wide sense is beautiful is to that extent justified in its existence».
(A.N. Whitehead)

ABSTRACT

The issue of the origin of the world was one of the most controversial chapters in the dispute between science and religion, for it was reduced until recently to the confrontation between two theories: creationism and evolutionism, the latter claiming the scientific nature. But whether it's creationism or evolutionism, both theories disregard the presence and continuous work of God in creation. In terms of philosophical and religious point of view, creationists are rather deist because they consider God being transcendently isolated, while evolutionists lean more towards pantheism, believing that the world exists from eternity. Unlike science, the theonomist cosmology of the Eastern Church does not launch into speculation about the origin and movement of the world, but starts from a divine gift, i.e. from biblical narration, which she does not ignore even when engaging a dialogue with the theories of scientific cosmology. The arguments of Orthodox Christian theology proof that the quantum universe was created “out of nothing” and that it's kept in existence only by God's relationship with creation through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. In relation to itself, the universe is reduced to nothing, because God is in Himself, while any other created thing is dependent upon Him, into an indissoluble connection with Him. From the perspective of quantum physics, the genesis of the universe involves the image of a void space, serving as a stage for the material world.

Keywords: origin; world; science; Big-Bang; ‘creatio ex nihilo’; God hypothesis; cosmology; inflationary universe; quantum theory;

INTRODUCTION

For over three centuries, mankind is experiencing a real fight, that made inlaid trace to the gene of *homo sapiens*, often resulting in a split at the level of thinking. This is the so-called conflict between science and religion or between the positivist-scientific and the religious (especially Christian) paradigm, regarding the origin and nature of the universe and of man. The very beginning of this dichotomy is identified with the Enlightenment (18th century - the famous Aufklärung) and the French Encyclopaedism, even if its germs are to be found in the anthropocentric vision of the Renaissance.

This attitude, which maintained for a long time the representatives of the two paradigms of thinking on schizoid positions, has its peak in the nineteenth century, who witnessed the emergence of evolutionary theories (Lamarckian and Darwinian ones) or of

Pierre-Simon Laplace' cosmology ("The Celestial Mechanics"), and in the twentieth century, which brought with it the radicalized secularization of communist regimes (who used the theoretical framework of dialectical and historical materialism). The two "camps" have long been in irreconcilable-antagonistic positions, very few bridges spanning between them.¹

The two fields of knowledge – the immanent one or of science and the transcendent one or of religion – radically differ from each other in epistemological planes. In other words, the methods for knowing the realities of the material world are totally different from those for the spiritual world and cannot be transferred from one domain to another. This is an essential and evaded, unfortunately too often by some representatives of both areas. For *scientific knowledge* is based on both observation and measurement of objects and phenomena of the material world and on the experiment. And because observation and experiment are possible only in the material world, it follows that the scientist' obligation is restricted exclusively to the material world, eliminating from its objectives and hypotheses any spiritual entity, adopting a methodological reductionism, subject to the principle of objectivity.² In turn, *religious knowledge* relies heavily on the Revelation. Not being able to observe, measure, and experience in transcendence, man must get satisfaction with what God reveals to him only. As Revelation recognizes the material world along with its components and laws, *homo religiosus* can, without any doubts, engage in scientific research or philosophical reflection.³

The Judeo-Christian experience affirms emphatically the enfleshment of the divine and, since God is the source of the meaning of all things, that meaning too becomes incarnate. Some see in this religious belief the foundations of modern science. A rigorous attempt to observe the universe in a systematic way and to analyze those observations by rational processes, principally using mathematics, will be rewarded with understanding because the rational structure is there in the universe to be discovered by human ingenuity. Since God has come among human beings in his Son, humans can discover the meaning of the universe, or at least it is worth the struggle to do so, by living intelligently in the universe. Religious experience thus provides the inspiration for scientific investigation.⁴

I. ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN ISSUES IN SCIENCE AND RELIGION

Historically, Orthodox Christianity dates back to the ancient Church, which was established by the apostles, powerful bishops, and seven Ecumenical Councils (from Nicea in 325 to Constantinople in 727). Orthodox Christianity considers itself as the "right" belief

¹ Ph.D. Alexandru-Corneliu ARION, „Cosmologia creștină și modelul științific al originii universului” (Christian Cosmology and the Scientific Model of the Origin of the Universe), in *Mărturie comună. Credință și știință în dialog* („Common testimony. Faith and science in dialogue”), Year III, no. 1(3), 2007, Bibliotheca, Târgoviște, 2007, p. 177.

² The spiritual world is not denied, it is only excluded, cut off with Ockham's "razor". This is the exact meaning of Simon Laplace's famous statement: "Sire, I do not need the hypothesis of God." The inability to exploit a domain does not, however, imply denying of this area.

³ It is obvious that it rejects the scientist reductionism as *ontological* and it only supports the *methodological* one and therefore rejects the exclusive material world existence and accepts the existence of "supernatural" phenomena. Cf. Constantin BĂLĂCEANU-STOLNICI, "Religie și știință, complementaritate, nu antagonism" ("Religion and science, complementarity, not antagonism"), in Basarab NICOLESCU and Magda STAVINSCHI (eds.), *Science and Religion. Antagonism or complementarity?*, XXI: Eonul Dogmatic, Bucharest, 2002, p. 76.

⁴ William A. WALLACE, *The Modeling of Nature: Philosophy of Science and Philosophy of Nature in Synthesis*, Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1996; Michael J. BUCKLEY, *At the Origins of Modern Atheism*, New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1987; Mary B. HESSE, *Models and Analogies in Science*. Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1966.

and “right glory,” whose Church guards and teaches the true belief about God and represents the Church of Christ on Earth.

Orthodox theology has a positive attitude towards the natural world as a good creation of a good God. Nature is never worshiped; it is God-creator who is worshiped through creation. The Fathers of the Church loved nature, but were never captured by the imagery of nature, which could prevent them from having a spiritual life in God. Thus nature was never considered an end in itself; its meaning and purpose can only be revealed in the perspective of Christ who, through the incarnation, recapitulated nature.⁵ The Fathers saw nature in the perspective of the hierarchy of the orders of creation, which proceeds from the natural law established by God. This “platonic” approach to nature could not provide any methodology of its investigation.⁶

The attitude to nature was speculative; it was interpreted in terms of laws that govern nature, but not their particular outcomes, which are displayed in a variety of phenomena. Nature, however, was never excluded from the general view of communion with God, so that the theology of the Greek Fathers was cosmic in its essence. St. Maximus the Confessor (580-662) articulated that it is through communion with the Logos (Word) of God in Scriptures, through contemplation of the underlying principles of creation in nature, and in sacramental communion with Christ in Church that the fullness of communion can be achieved. Nature itself as the medium through which and by which communion with God can be established is seen as sacrament. Human being as microcosm and mediator participates in the cosmic Eucharist, which aims to renew and redeem the material world. Science then is treated as a tool to articulate the world in terms of its relationship with God.⁷

The Greek Fathers asserted that scientific knowledge is incomplete in itself and must be supported by wider views of reality, which are accessible through faith. Knowledge and the sciences thus have their foundation in faith. Carried out through the centuries this attitude to science did not change, excluding any open conflicts between science and theology.⁸

There is a perception among leading modern Orthodox theologians that science cannot be excluded from the theological vision of God and creation. The task of Orthodox theology is to reconcile the cosmic vision of the Fathers with the vision that grows out of the results of natural science. The split between science and religion can be overcome on the grounds of their reinstatement to communion with God. Scientific work can be interpreted as “para-eucharistic” work (See John Zizioulas)⁹. Scientific progress must be taken into account only in the context of the progress of human spirit and the deepening of human experience of the reality of the divine, which cannot be reduced to a physical or chemical level (Dumitru Staniloae).¹⁰ New conceptual tools for mediation between religion and science must be developed. The most important and urgent problems in the science-religion dialogue are not

⁵ V. VUCANOVICH, *Science and Faith: Order in the Universe and Cosmic Evolution Motivate Belief in God*. Minneapolis, Minn.: Light and Life Press, 1995, pp. 146 sq.

⁶ Alexei V. NESTERUK, “Christianity, Orthodox, issues in science and religion”, in J. Wentzel Vrede VAN HUYSSTEEN (editor in chief), *Encyclopedia of Science and Religion*, Macmillan Reference, Thomson Gale, USA, 2003, p. 130.

⁷ Paulos Mar. GREGORIOS, *The Human Presence: Ecological Spirituality and the Age of the Spirit*, New York: Amity House, 1987, p. 79.

⁸ That with one exception – the seventy years of “scientific atheism” in Soviet Russia.

⁹ John ZIZIOULAS, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church*. Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1997.

¹⁰ Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *Theology and the Church*. Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1980, p. 198.

cosmological (e.g., creation of the universe) or philosophical (e.g., the meaning of evolution), but ecological and bioethical.

The Orthodox Church understands the modern ecological crisis either in terms of the misuse of science or utopian reliance on the power of progress. The Church consequently treats the crisis as essentially anthropological and spiritual. The message of the Church is to be cautious with scientific discoveries and technologies because they are handled by spiritually disorientated human beings, who have lost their roots in the divine. The loss of vision of the unity of the whole creation and human priestly responsibility for nature leads to abuse and degradation of the natural world, which threatens the very existence of humankind.¹¹

The Orthodox Church is deeply concerned with the possible moral and social implications of the fast advance of biology and medical science in terms of control and regulation of human life. For Orthodox Christians, life is the gift of God, who creates and preserves human personality.¹² When biology and medicine interfere with human existence on the natural level, and threaten human integrity and personality, Orthodox theology opposes this on moral and social grounds¹³. For example, the official position of the Church, expressed by the Council of Bishops of the Russian Church in 2001, with respect to cloning human beings is strongly negative on *social grounds* (the “printing” of people with specified parameters can appear welcome to adherents of totalitarian ideologies), as well as on *personal grounds* (a clone can feel like an independent person, but it is only a “copy” of someone who lives or lived before). However, the cloning of isolated cells and tissues does not threaten the personality and can be helpful in medical practice.¹⁴

Given Orthodoxy’s attitude toward discursive knowledge, it is not surprising that it has generally been at peace with the findings of natural science, medicine, and technology. The Orthodoxy has considered scientific endeavors as undertaken on an ontological plane quite different from that of theology. Because science and theology involve different orders of knowledge and being, the first, creation, and the second, the transcendent Creator, the methods and ends of science and theology are distinct. In that Orthodoxy has seen scientific knowledge and theology as radically distinct rather than conflicting, there is a long tradition of Orthodox theologians employing science without any commitment to the theological truth of the science. An early example of using science in concert with theological discourse is the *Hexaemeron* of St. Basil the Great (c. 330–79), a commentary on the six days of Creation. Although St. Basil accepts “spontaneous generation” as a scientific truth, subsequent theologians have not been concerned by the fact that this view seems to conflict with God’s role as the Creator.¹⁵

¹¹ It is in the context of love for nature, inner vigilance and chastity towards nature, and self-restraint in the consumption of natural resources that scientific activity can acquire some “Eucharistic” features and nature can become reinstated to its sacramental status. Cf. Alexei V. NESTERUK, “Patristic theology and the natural sciences”, *Sourozh: a Journal of orthodox life and thought* 84, 2001, (part 1), p. 23.

¹² See, inter alia, the work of renowned American theologian John BRECK, *The Sacred Gift of Life: Orthodox Christianity and Bioethics*. Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1998.

¹³ Kallistos WARE, *Through the Creation to the Creator*, London: Friends of the Centre, 1997.

¹⁴ Genetic engineering is admissible with the consent of the patient in the case of some hereditary diseases, but the genetic therapy of germ cells is considered dangerous because it involves a change of the genome in the line of generations, which can lead to mutations and can destabilize the balance between the human community and the environment. Cf. Constantine CAVARNOS, *Biological Evolutionism*, Etna, Calif.: Center for Traditionalist Orthodox Studies, 1994, p. 291.

¹⁵ More recently, one finds in the work of Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain (c. 1749–1809) the incorporation of the science of his day regarding the human heart. The subsequent disconfirmation of the scientific accounts

In spite of the recognition that science and theology have a very different character, applied science has played a positive role within Orthodox cultures, particularly within a philanthropic context. The Byzantine Empire maintained, for example, a sophisticated level of medical practice. Perhaps the greatest contribution of Orthodoxy to medicine was the birth of the hospital in the fourth century.¹⁶ From the third-century saint and mathematician Catherine the Wise, to the various saint-physicians who practiced without charging for their services (the holy and unmercenary physicians), to “scientist saints” of the twentieth century, the Orthodox Church has often (but not always) regarded science and technology as non-threatening undertakings.¹⁷ A more recent example is that of the Russian Orthodox priest and mathematician Pavel A. Florensky (1882–c. 1946), who made a number of contributions to science and technology before he was put to death under Stalin.¹⁸

When conflicts have arisen between Orthodox theology and science, they have generally involved what, from an Orthodox theological perspective, should be considered a category mistake: confusing concerns about created being vs. Uncreated Being. When such conflict has occurred, it has usually, in retrospect, been attributed in Orthodoxy to the introduction of Western theological perspectives that disregard the Orthodox principle of a gulf between nature and God. Over the past two centuries, there has been a particular reaction within Orthodoxy against such confusions in favor of the earlier patristic and monastic understanding of theology as an experience of God and a recognition that no analogy exists between the Being of God and the being of nature. A climate has been created that favors the pursuit of science, technology, and medicine independently of theology.¹⁹

In the modern age, the Orthodox community has objected to scientists attempting to speak authoritatively *qua* scientists on theological and metaphysical matters. This kind of category mistake has been understood within Orthodoxy to result in both the dehumanization of man and the desanctification of nature. Finally, as with the use of medicine for abortion, so, too, particular uses of science and technology have been brought into question in the Orthodox tradition when they have set human life and interests at jeopardy.²⁰

Unlike the Orthodox tradition, the relation between science and religion in *Roman-Catholic Church* presents different traits due to a peculiar context. Although there are many others, the sources for deriving the most recent view from Roman Catholicism concerning

that Nicodemus borrowed for purposes of illustrating theological concerns has engendered no embarrassment among Orthodox churchmen. Cf. Allyne L. SMITH Jr., H. Tristram ENGELHARDT Jr., Edward W. HUGHES, and John HENRY, “Orthodoxy”, in Gary B. FERNINGREN (general editor), *The history of Science and Religion in the Western Tradition: an Encyclopedia*, Garland Publishing, Inc., A member of the Taylor & Francis Group, New York & London, 2000, p. 309.

¹⁶ It has been argued that, unlike hospices in the West, which existed primarily to give comfort and care to the ill and dying, Byzantine *xenones* were “medical centers controlled by trained physicians and designed to cure the sick” See Timothy S. MILLER, *The Birth of the Hospital in the Byzantine Empire*, 1985, Reprint Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997, p. xxviii.

¹⁷ Stanley S. HARAKAS, *Health and Medicine in the Eastern Orthodox Tradition: Faith, Liturgy, and Wholeness*, New York: Crossroad, 1990, pp. 235-236.

¹⁸ Similarly, the great physiological psychologist Iva Pavlov (1849-1936), who was educated at a religious seminary, never lost his interest in the Orthodox faith. Cf. Loren R. GRAHAM, *Science in Russia and the Soviet Union: A Short History*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.

¹⁹ Christos YANNARAS, *Elements of Faith: An Introduction to Orthodox Theology*. Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1991, p. 124.

²⁰ Alexandre KALOMIROS, “The Eternal Will: Some Thoughts Concerning Scriptural and Patristic Understanding of the Creation of Man and the World”, *Christian Activist* 11 (Fall/Winter 1997; Aidan KAVANAGH, *On Liturgical Theology*, New York: Pueblo, 1984.

the relationship of science and faith are essentially three messages of John Paul II²¹. The public has emphasized the statements made by the Pope concerning the Copernican-Ptolemaic controversy of the seventeenth century. In his statements concerning Galileo the Pope essentially does two things: He admits that there was wrong on the part of the Church and apologizes for it, and he calls for a serene, studious, new investigation of the history of that time. However, there are matters that are much more forward-looking and of much more significance than a reinvestigation of the Galileo case.

Especially in the 1988 message, given on the occasion of the tricentennial of Newton's *Principia Mathematica*, Pope John Paul II clearly states that science cannot be used in a simplistic way as a rational basis for religious belief²², nor can it be judged to be by its nature atheistic or opposed to belief in God.

“Christianity possesses the source of its justification within itself and does not expect science to constitute its primary apologetic. Science must bear witness to its own worth. While each can and should support the other as distinct dimensions of a common human culture, neither ought to assume that it forms a necessary premise for the other.”²³

The newest element in this view from Rome is the expressed uncertainty as to where the dialogue between science and faith will lead. Whereas the awakening of the Church to modern science during the papacy of Pius XII resulted in a too facile an appropriation of scientific results to bolster religious beliefs, Pope John II expresses the extreme caution of the Church in defining its partnership in the dialogue: “Exactly what form that (the dialogue) will take must be left to the future”²⁴

2. ‘CREATIO EX NIHILO’: THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE DOCTRINE

2.1. *Approaches of contemporary science and Christian tradition dialogue*

Contemporary science is historically rooted in the so-called modernity, which has been responsible for dualisms – such as the opposition between faith and reason – which have provided the grounds for excluding the divine and transcendent. Modernity is responsible for the claim that truth is based on universal reason, which tells us what reality is like. In this historical setting, theology is forced to follow the rules of modernity in its dialogue with science, not its own intrinsic logic of the communion with God. These rules effectively dictate that theology enter the dialogue on faith and reason along the lines of the adopted secular standards of scientific truth or normative rationality, assuming a particular notion of the knowing subject, which is sharply opposed to the premodern theological way of asserting truth through the existential events of the incarnate hypostatic lives of humanity inherent in the divine image. Seen theologically, the secular standards of stating the truth have subjective aspirations in the sense that they themselves are based on certain ill-articulated myths and beliefs, so they can state objective values and divine transcendence only precariously.²⁵

²¹ Two of them given in 1979 and 1986 to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, and the third in 1988 to the Vatican Observatory.

²² George COYNE, “Christianity, Roman catholic, issues in science and religion”, in J. Wentzel Vrede VAN HUYSSTEEN (editor in chief), *Encyclopedia of Science and Religion*, p. 143.

²³ Quoted in Robert John RUSSELL; William R. STOEGER and George V. COYNE (eds.), *Physics, Philosophy, and Theology: A Common Quest for Understanding*, Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988, p. 9.

²⁴ Robert RUSSELL; William STOEGER and George V. COYNE (eds.), *Physics, Philosophy, and Theology*, p.7.

²⁵ The dialogue between science and theology, as it takes place in the West, manifests a simple truth that theology, as its counterpart, has to adapt to the implied liberal forms of thought, thus deviating from its

The natural employment of phenomenology within a theological discourse confirms an intrinsic truth: that theology, as a mode of thinking, is critical thinking. The sphere of operation of this critical thinking is in all realms where the Church (ecclesial humanity) meets the historical and cultural reality. Theology creatively and critically thinks of any emerging historical problem or theme, while remaining in the immutable state of the spiritual life of the Church, because this life is experience of God – that is, of eternity. In the words of Father Dumitru Stăniloae:

“The very existence of the Church is an effect, continually renewed, of the action of the Holy Spirit in creating communion”; “The door of the infinite riches of the personal or interpersonal divine being has opened up before the reflections of Orthodox theology, and with it the prospects of an endless progress of the human spirit within the divine”²⁶

This is the context where the Church uses the notion of tradition. Since theology operates in the conditions of faith, it acts as a critical form of thought in that situation when a faithful has to react to a problem arising in the world at large. Here, since theology as a spiritual and intellectual activity is rooted in the experience of the Church (that is, that of eternity), it always functions from above mass-religious consciousness, as well as “secular” consciousness, which claims its freedom from any faith commitments.²⁷

The scope and place of the critical function of theology are determined by other discourses, for example by the science-religion dialogue with its demands to deal with some particular issues such as, for example, the question of the origin of the universe in *cosmology* or the origin of life in *biology*. In this sense, theology can never be defined and positioned by secular reason and thus it does not accept the idea of a complete autonomy of that sphere of the worldly reality which is asserted through rational understanding. One must not forget that the Theology we are talking about assumes its ecclesial setting, that is, its inseparability from the experience of God through liturgy and mystical communion. This entails that by being critical with respect to various forms of thought Theology represents the voice of the Church.²⁸ That’s why any kind of “accommodation” of the Church to whatever secular thinking means to remain critical to all scientific claims for monopoly of truth, that is, to remain a “meta-discourse”.²⁹

Therefore, an important integral part of the contemporary science (that of quantum physics), regarding the *origin of cosmos*, namely, the theory of Big Bang was very seriously taken by Christian theology in a critical fashion. The issue of the origin of the world was one of the most controversial chapters in the dispute between science and religion, for it was

apostolic and patristic understanding as experience of God in communion. Cf. Alexei V. NESTERUK, “*Eastern Orthodox Theological Commitment in the Modern Science-Religion Debate*”, in Eric WEISLOGEL, Guest Editor, *Transdisciplinarity in Science and Religion*, No. 4/2008, *Science and Religion Series*, coordinated by Basarab Nicolescu and Magda Stavinschi, Curtea Veche Publishing House, Bucharest, 2008, p. 227

²⁶ Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *Theology and the Church*, p. 218.

²⁷ The unceasing task of theology is to provide a constant and constructive critique of these modes of consciousness. PHILARET (Metropolitan of Minsk and Slutsk), *The Way of the Life-Asserting Love*, Kiev, Duh I Litera, 2004, p. 29, apud Alexei V. NESTERUK, “*Eastern Orthodox Theological Commitment in the Modern Science-Religion Debate*”, p. 234.

²⁸ This makes Christian theology flexible to any scientific developments without being assimilated by them. According to V. Lossky, Christian theology “is able to accommodate itself very easily to any scientific theory of the universe, provided that this does not attempt to go beyond its own boundaries and begins impertinently to deny things which are outside its own field of vision”. Vladimir LOSSKY, *Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, London, James Clarke & Co. Ltd, 1957, p. 106.

²⁹ For details: Alexei V. NESTERUK, “*Eastern Orthodox Theological Commitment in the Modern Science-Religion Debate*”, pp. 229 sqq.

reduced until recently to the confrontation between two theories: *creationism* and *evolutionism*, the latter claiming the scientific nature. If the followers of the former, the creationists, believe that the universe was created by God *ex nihilo* (“out of nothing”) and reject the idea of any progressive movement of the world, placing so much emphasis on the original perfection of the world to the extent that the world then enters the descending curve of a process of gradual degradation³⁰, in contrast, evolutionists reject the idea of the original perfection of the world and claim that the universe is the result of a natural evolution that ends with the appearance of man. In the name of this theory, one speaks of an ascending evolution of the world, which is not the result of God's intervention, but an effect of chance or natural selection.³¹

In the last decades, however, it's becoming increasing the talk about a *scientific creationism*, as well as a *Christian evolutionism*, that does not ignore the creative work of God. Taking the example of the latter, it is noted, on the one hand, the theistic shade promoted by its followers, by affirming the directly creation of the world by God “*ex nihilo*”, though, on the other hand, it understands the evolution as a result of God's indirect intervention in creation, through the seminal reasons or the second causes, which functions deterministically in the universe and autonomously to their Creator.³² But whether it's creationism or evolutionism, both theories disregard the presence and continuous work of God in creation.³³

2.2. *God and the doctrine of creation (ex nihilo)*

Christianity expanded from its origins in Palestine to engage with the intellectual world of late classical antiquity. Within this world, a number of ideas had become firmly established as virtually self-evidently correct. Although a degree of diversity on the issue can be discerned, the Hellenistic world of the first few centuries of the Christian era was convinced that the universe was eternal. An especially important issue concerns the doctrine of the origin of the universe found in Plato's *Timaeus*, which was especially influential in shaping Christian thinking on the issue.³⁴ In this work, Plato is concerned to deal with a number of questions of perennial philosophical importance. What is the nature of the world? In what way did it come into being? And what may be known of its author or creator? Plato's answer is that the world which is perceptible to the senses is fundamentally an image (εἰκόν) or likeness of an eternal pattern or model (παρδειγμα). Despite all the weaknesses of the

³⁰ See, inter alia, Dr. Henry M. MORRIS (ed.), *Creționismul științific (Scientific creationism)*, transl. by Dr. Iosif Țon, Societatea Misionară Română, 1992, p. 10.

³¹ Henry M. MORRIS, *Scientific creationism*, pp. 9 sq.

³² Cf. Blessed AUGUSTINE, *De Genesi ad litteram liber imperfectus.*, PL 34, col. 338: “Just as in the seed is to be found invisibly, everything that the tree will be made up with, so the world had contained all that was to be manifested later, not only heaven and the sun, but also other beings that God created in potency, as if in a cause of them”. Apud Dumitru POPESCU, „Crearea lumii din perspectiva Sfintei Scripturi și a științei contemporane. Reconcilierea între știință și credință la început de mileniu” (‘Creating the world from the perspective of Sacred Scriptures and contemporary science. Reconciliation between science and faith at the beginning of the millennium’), in: *Știință și teologie. Preliminarii pentru dialog (Science and theology. Preliminaries for dialogue)*, XXI: Eonul Dogmatic, Bucharest, 2001, p. 107.

³³ Cf. Assist. Prof. Alexandru-Corneliu ARION, „Creționism, evoluționism și creație continuă” (‘Creationism, Evolution and continuous creation’), in: *Creație și evoluție, Lucrările simpozionului (Creation and Evolution, Symposium Works)*, May, 30th, 2002), Bioedit, Ploiești, 2003, pp. 48-69.

³⁴ Michael LANDMANN, *Urspringsbild und Schbpfertat: zumplatonisch-biblischen Gespräch*, Munich: Nymphenburger Verlagshandlung, 1966; Jaroslav PELIKAN, *What has Athens to do with Jerusalem? Timaeus and Genesis in Counterpoint*, Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1997.

human ability to perceive things, at least some knowledge of this eternal pattern is possible, on the basis of reasoned reflection on the visible order. For Plato, the world (κοσμος) has been fashioned from existing material by a Demiurge (*Timaeus* 29d-30c). While the world was created according to the requirements of reason and necessity, the Demiurge was nevertheless restricted by the material from which he was obliged to construct the world.³⁵

The Christian doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* can be regarded as, in part, a reaction against the Greek teaching of the eternity of the world.³⁶ In part, the doctrine can also be seen as an attempt to retain a more biblical perspective on the issue of the origins of the world. However, there was still debate within early Christian circles over what that biblical teaching actually was.³⁷

The doctrine of creation was not an issue to which Christian theologians of the patristic era would have given much attention, had not controversy forced the issue upon them. In general terms, most early Christian writers – such as Theophilus of Antioch, Origen and Diodore of Tarsus – developed critiques of the classic Greek idea of the eternity of the world, without necessarily developing a focused alternative.³⁸

The doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* may be regarded as gaining the ascendancy from the end of the second century onwards. From that point onwards, it became the received doctrine within the Church.³⁹ A radical *dualism* between God and creation was thus eliminated, in favor of the view that the *truth, goodness and beauty* of God (platonic triad) could be discerned within the natural order, in consequence of that order having been established by God.⁴⁰

The debate over the doctrine of creation became of increasing importance in Western Europe during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, especially as the intellectual heritage of

³⁵ Some interpreted this *Dialogue* to teach that the world had been created at a *specific point in time*; others that the ordered world might have a definite point of origin, but that the matter from which it was fashioned was eternal. By the second century, however, there was growing sympathy within Platonist circles for the doctrine of the eternity of the world. Cf. Alister E. McGRATH, *A scientific Theology. Volume I: Nature*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company Grand Rapids, Michigan, T&T Clark Ltd, 2001, pp. 159-160.

³⁶ See Gethard MAY, *Creatio Ex Nihilo: The Doctrine of 'Creation out of Nothing' in Early Christian Thought*. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995.

³⁷ Some scholars have suggested that some such notion can be seen in Jewish theological texts dating from the Maccabean period, when Jewish thought was brought into contact with Hellenistic ideas. The critical text is 2 Maccabees 7:28, which the Vulgate renders into Latin as '*ex nihilo fecit ilia Deus*'. However, the evidence for this suggestion is weak and Jewish thought of this period is still best thought of in terms of God working with existent matter. It is indeed debatable whether Judaism developed a doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* at this stage, or even later. Georg Shmuttermayr, "'Schopfung aus dem Nichts" in 2. Makk. 7:28? Zum Verhältnis von Position und Bedeutung', *Biblische Zeitschrift*, 17, 1973, pp. 203-228, apud Alister E. McGRATH, *A scientific Theology*, p. 160.

³⁸ Henry A. WOLFSON, 'Patristic Arguments against the Eternity of the World', in *Harvard Theological Review* 59/1966, pp. 351-367.

³⁹ Cf. Tarsicius van BAVEL, 'The Creator and the Integrity of Creation in the Fathers of the Church', in *Augustinian Studies* 21/1990, pp. 1-33. The importance of the decisive rejection of Gnosticism by the early Church for the development of the natural sciences has been explored by Thomas F. Torrance, who argues that the affirmation of the fundamental goodness of creation "established the reality of the empirical, contingent world, and thus destroyed the age-old Hellenistic and Oriental assumption that the real is reached only by transcending the contingent". Thomas F. TORRANCE, *Reality and Scientific Theology: Theology and Science at the Frontiers of Knowledge*, Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1985, p. 6.

⁴⁰ For example, Origen argued that it was God's creation of the world which structured the natural order in such a manner that it could be comprehended by the human mind, by conferring upon that order an intrinsic rationality and order which derived from and reflected the divine nature itself. Cf. Alister E. McGrath, *A scientific Theology*, p. 163.

the Islamic philosopher *Avicenna* (980-1037) was debated. For Avicenna, the concept of creation implies origination. To say that a thing is created means that “it receives its existence from another”.⁴¹ Yet although this at first sight might seem similar to Christian ways of thinking about the matter, a closer examination reveals some fundamental points of distinction. In effect, Avicenna adopts an *emanationist* understanding of creation, in which “creation” is understood as the establishment of an ontological relationship between entities, rather than having any necessary reference to temporality. The universe is to be understood as eternal; within that universe, certain relationships are established within the order of being.⁴²

In 1277, Etienne Tempier, bishop of Paris, condemned a series of Aristotelian propositions, including the teaching that the world was eternal. The result of these measures was to enforce adherence to the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*. While there is some doubt as to the precise position adopted by Albert the Great (c.1200-1280)⁴³, both Bonaventure and Thomas Aquinas offered rigorous defenses of the doctrine. From this point onwards, the doctrine may be regarded as definitive for Christian orthodoxy.

The doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* makes a number of significant assertions, which we shall consider in more detail presently. Among them, we may notice the following:

1. The doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* is primarily concerned with ontological origin, rather than with temporal beginnings. The doctrine is not primarily concerned – if, indeed, it is concerned at all – with issues of chronology or dating; the specific issue concerns the ontological dependence of the cosmos upon its creator.
2. The doctrine affirms that God, in creating the universe, was not constrained by the limitations of the already existing stuff from which that universe was to be fashioned, but was free to bring into existence a universe in which the divine will was recognizably embodied and enacted.⁴⁴

3. THE SCIENTIFIC VIEW ON COSMOLOGY: BIG BANG THEORY

As we already stressed out, the relationship between science and religion was often portrayed as one of warfare. Thus, by the time these two domains of knowledge were viewed so much antagonistic, in a classic of 19th century like *A History of the Warfare of Science with Theology in Christendom* (1896), Andrew White, co-founder of Cornell University, details many of the beliefs once sanctioned by religion that science has shown to be false, such as the belief that the earth is flat, that the earth is the center of the universe, or that the universe is only 6,000 years old. So it is an event of some note when a scientific theory seems to support a religious view, and that is just what the Big Bang seems to do. According to that theory, the universe came into existence about 15 billion years ago in an explosion of

⁴¹ See AVICENNA, *La métaphysique du Shifa*, trans. Georges Anawati, 2 vols, Paris: Vrin, 1978, vol. 2, pp. 83-84; Remus RUS, *Istoria filosofiei islamice (History of Islamic Philosophy)*, Enciclopedică, Bucharest, 1994, pp. 127-166. A distinction is drawn between essence and existence, allowing Avicenna to affirm the contingency of the created order, within a context largely shaped by the categories of Greek metaphysics. Avicenna can be held to have “fused the Aristotelian metaphysics of self-sufficiency with the monotheistic metaphysics of contingency”. See: Lenn E. GOODMAN, *Avicenna*, London: Routledge, 1992, p. 63.

⁴² Lenn E. GOODMAN, *Avicenna*, p. 74. It was not merely Christian writers of the period who felt uneasy about this approach. Islamic writers – such as al-Ghazālī (1058-1111) – argued that it was inconsistent with the Qu’ran, and demanded that Avicenna be declared an infidel. And yet the concept of eternal creation continued to gain acceptance within philosophical circles. See Barry S. KOGAN, *Averroes and the Metaphysics of Causation*, Binghamton, NY: State University of New York Press, 1985.

⁴³ See Steven SNYDER, ‘Albert the Great: Creation and the Eternity of the World’, in R. James LONG (ed.), *Philosophy and the God of Abraham*, Toronto, ON: Pontifical Institute of Biblical Studies, 1991, pp. 191-202.

⁴⁴ See Alister E. MCGRATH, *A scientific Theology*, pp. 166 sq.

unimaginable power. The Judeo-Christian tradition has always taught that the universe came into existence at some time in the past. It now seems that science endorses that view.⁴⁵

Some physicists, among them Stephen Hawking, have hailed the Big Bang theory as “the discovery of the century, if not of all time.” But if the universe began with a big bang, what caused it? Its cause would seem to be something outside our universe. Could that something be God? As astrophysicist Allan Sandage puts it, “The Big Bang is best understood as a miracle triggered by some transcendent power.”⁴⁶ The question before us, then, is whether God provides the best explanation of the Big Bang. That why, the great German philosopher Martin Heidegger once wrote, unarguably, that the essence of humanity is in the form of a question. And no question is more fundamental than that of our origin.⁴⁷

3.1. *The Universe – neither eternal nor static*

The ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle, for example, argues that matter can be neither created nor destroyed, while Hindus believe that the universe goes through an endless and beginningless cycle of creation and destruction. There is much to recommend the view that the universe has always existed, for it seems to be the only view that is consistent with the principle “From nothing nothing comes” (“*ex nihilo nihil fit*”). Since the universe is the totality of all that exists, if it came into being, it must have come into being from nothing. But you can’t get something from nothing. So the universe must have always existed.⁴⁸

When Einstein formulated his theory of gravity in 1915, he too had to deal with the problem of the effect of gravity on the large-scale structure of the universe. To uphold his view that the universe is unchanging, he originally postulated an infinite universe. In 1917, however, he proposed a finite or “closed” model of the universe and added a term to his equations known as the “cosmological constant,” which served to keep the force of gravity in check. This allowed him to maintain his view of a static universe but at the price of making his theory more complex.⁴⁹

In the 1920s, the Russian meteorologist Alexander Friedmann and the Belgian priest and cosmologist Georges Henri Lemaître demonstrated that Einstein’s original 1915 equations – the ones without the cosmological constant – predicted that the universe was expanding. Tracing the expansion backward in time, Lemaître concluded that at some point in the past, all of the matter in the universe must have been concentrated in a single primeval atom of inconceivable density. American astronomer Vesto Slipher was the first to observe the expansion of the universe.⁵⁰ Lemaître and Slipher independently shared their results with

⁴⁵ Theodore SCHICK Jr., ‘God and the Big Bang’, in Arri EISEN and Gary LADERMAN (eds.), *Science, religion, and society: an encyclopedia of history, culture, and controversy*, Volume One, Foreword by the Dalai Lama, M.E. Sharpe, Armonk, New York, London, England, 2007, p. 370.

⁴⁶ Alan SANDAGE, Quoted in “Science Finds God”, *Newsweek*, July 20, 1998, 46. Likewise, physicist Hugh Ross goes even farther and identifies that transcendent power with the God of the Bible.

⁴⁷ See Marcelo GLEISER, ‘Creation and Origins of the Universe’, in Arri EISEN and Gary LADERMAN, *Science, religion, and society*, p. 311.

⁴⁸ Most scientists of the modern era followed Aristotle in believing that the universe was eternal and unchanging on a global scale. Newton realized, however, that his law of gravity – which maintains that every object in the universe attracts every other – seemed to imply that everything in the universe would be drawn together into one massive object.

⁴⁹ Albert EINSTEIN, “The Einstein-DeSitter-Weyl-Klein Debate”, in *The Collected Papers of Albert Einstein*, Vol. 8, *The Berlin Years: Correspondence, 1914–1918*, ed. Robert Schulmann, A.J. Knox, Michel Jansen, and Jozsef Illy, pp. 351-57. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998.

⁵⁰ At the Lowell Observatory in Flagstaff, Arizona, he detected dozens of galaxies rushing away from each other.

Einstein, but Einstein did not accept them. So wedded was he to the notion of a static universe, he was convinced there must be a mistake in their calculations.

In 1929, however, Edwin Hubble demonstrated conclusively that it was Einstein who was mistaken. His observations at the Mt. Wilson observatory outside Pasadena, California, showed that hundreds of galaxies were receding from one another. Still unconvinced, Einstein made a number of trips to Pasadena during the 1930s to look through Hubble's telescope. Only after he had seen Hubble's evidence with his own eyes did he consider it likely that the universe was not static. He was later to say that the introduction of the cosmological constant into his equations was the biggest mistake of his life.⁵¹

Einstein was not the only physicist who abhorred the thought of the universe springing into existence from a giant explosion. Fred Hoyle, in his turn, thought that an explosion was an undignified way for a universe to begin, something like a party girl jumping out of a cake.⁵² To explain the expansion, he formulated what came to be known as the *Steady State* theory. According to this theory, matter is constantly forming in empty space, thus driving the expansion and keeping the average density of the universe constant. Advocates of the Big Bang, such as George Gamow, hypothesized that all of the elements of the universe were created in the first few minutes after the Big Bang. Hoyle proposed that they were created as a result of fusion reactions inside stars or as the result of supernova explosions. Hoyle's theory turned out to be the correct one.

In 1965, however, Arno Penzias and Robert Wilson discovered the "fossil evidence" that Hoyle had sought. While attempting to refurbish a large radio antenna in New Jersey, they found a background noise that they couldn't eliminate. That background noise turned out to be the residual radiation left over from the Big Bang. You can observe that background radiation by tuning your television to an unused channel; scientists estimate that between 1 to 10 percent of the dots on the screen are caused by photons left over from the Big Bang.⁵³

Further investigation has confirmed other predictions made by the Big Bang theory. For example, in order for stars and galaxies to form, the Big Bang could not have been totally homogenous. This lumpiness should show up in a variation of the temperature of the background radiation. In 1989, the Cosmic Background Explorer (COBE) satellite was launched to study the background radiation. It found the predicted variation in temperature. When George Smoot, head of the COBE research team, announced the results, he remarked to a reporter, "If you're religious, it's like looking at God." Why? Because something must have caused the Big Bang, and for many people, God seems the most likely candidate.⁵⁴

3.2. *Inflationary universe theory*

Closely and intrinsically related with the Big Bang, the *Inflationary Universe Theory* (IUT) proposes a brief period of extremely rapid accelerating expansion in the very early

⁵¹ Theodore SCHICK Jr., 'God and the Big Bang', p. 371.

⁵² In a BBC interview, he referred to this explosion as "the big bang." Given Hubble's evidence, Hoyle couldn't deny that the universe is expanding. But he could deny that the universe began with the Big Bang, because there was, in his words, no "fossil evidence" for it, no telltale signs.

⁵³ See Alan GUTH, *The Inflationary Universe: The Quest for a New Theory of Cosmic Origins*, Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1997, p. 176.

⁵⁴ The scientific evidence for the Big Bang has been used to refurbish one of the oldest arguments for the existence of God: the first cause or cosmological argument. In its current guise, it goes like this: 1. Whatever begins to exist has a cause. 2. The universe began to exist. 3. Therefore, the universe has a cause, namely God. See Theodore SCHICK Jr., 'God and the Big Bang', p. 372.

universe, before the radiation dominated era called the *hot big bang*. This acceleration is believed to be driven by a quantum field (in effect, some exotic kind of matter) with a repulsive gravitational effect. This can be achieved if the pressure of the field is extremely large and negative (unlike ordinary matter, which has positive pressure).

A specific example is a *scalar field* associated with a potential energy. Such a field “rolls down” the energy surface defined by the potential, and if it is slow-rolling can act like an effective cosmological constant, driving an exponential expansion with constant acceleration. During this epoch, any matter or radiation density other than that of the scalar field is negligible; one is left with an almost constant energy density of the field, often called a *false vacuum* because it behaves like the highly energetic vacuum of quantum field theory. Inflation ends through decay of the repulsive material into a mixture of matter and radiation, this decay taking place by quantum processes similar to radioactive decay of ordinary matter. The resulting hot expanding gas provides the starting point for the hot big bang era in the early universe.⁵⁵

This scenario provides explanations for some puzzles in cosmology: why the universe is so large, why it is so uniform, and why it is so nearly flat. Most importantly, this scenario provides an explanation for the origin of large-scale structure in the universe: Clusters of galaxies arise from seed perturbations generated by quantum fluctuations in the very early universe, amplified vastly in size by the inflationary expansion of the universe and in amplitude by gravitational instability after the decoupling of matter and radiation.⁵⁶

Moreover, various theoretical conundrums remain, for example the problem of exactly how inflation ends, how probable it is that inflation will succeed in starting in an extremely inhomogeneous and anisotropic situation, and how successful inflation can be in smoothing out the universe if arbitrary initial conditions are allowed. Despite these theoretical problems, and the difficulties in testing the physics proposed, inflation is currently the dominant explanatory paradigm for the physics of the early universe. It has generated immense interest because it provides a major link between particle physics and cosmology, allowing cosmological observations to be used for testing theories in particle physics.⁵⁷

3.3. The God Hypothesis

But the universe may well be eternal (endless and beginningless), despite the evidence for the Big Bang. There are not few partisans that explain the Big Bang without appealing to the supernatural. Paul Steinhardt of Princeton University and Neil Turok of Cambridge University have proposed a new oscillating theory of the universe in which the universe is brought into existence as the result of a collision between giant membranes of matter. And Stephen Hawking has proposed that although the universe is finitely old, it had no beginning in time because, as Augustine suggests, time came into existence with the

⁵⁵ Alan GUTH, *The Inflationary Universe: The Quest for a New Theory of Cosmic Origins*, p. 68.

⁵⁶ A major triumph of the theory is that the subtle variations in the cosmic background radiation it predicted have been observed from satellites and balloons. Cf. George F.R. ELLIS, ‘Inflationary Universe Theory’, in J. Wentzel Vrede VAN HUYSSTEEN (editor in chief), *Encyclopedia of Science and Religion*, p. 455.

⁵⁷ See, inter alia, Andrew R. LIDDLE, and David H. LYTH, *Cosmological Inflation and Large-scale Structure*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000; Andrei D. LINDE, *Particle Physics and Inflationary Cosmology*, Chur, Switzerland: Harwood Academic, 1990; J.A. PEACOCKE, *Cosmological Physics*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

universe.⁵⁸ Although many scientific theories can account for the Big Bang without invoking God, one might object that the God hypothesis is just as good as they are, because there is no “fossil evidence” to help us decide among them. But fitting the evidence is not the only criteria used in deciding among competing theories.

On all of the criteria, the God hypothesis – argue many scientist of nature – fares worse than a comparable natural one. It is often claimed that God is perfectly merciful and perfectly just. But if he is perfectly merciful, he lets everyone off, and if he is perfectly just, he makes sure that everyone gets what’s coming to them, which does not seem to be the case.

The God hypothesis is also usually less simple than naturalistic theories because it postulates an entity, namely God, not found in any naturalistic hypothesis. In this regard, it violates Occam’s razor, a concept that tells us not to multiply entities beyond necessity.⁵⁹

The God hypothesis also tends to be less conservative because it suggests that certain natural laws have been violated, such as the law of conservation of mass/energy. It lacks fruitfulness because it has not successfully predicted any new phenomena. The predictions that can be derived from it, for example, that its design should be perfect and that there should be no evil in the world, appear to be false. So in terms of the amount of understanding produced, the God hypothesis is not as good as a comparable scientific one.⁶⁰

CONCLUSION

Jews, Christians and Muslims all believe that the universe is the temporal and spatial expression of an eternal meaning or purpose. In these traditions, authentic human life begins with a steady trust that something of everlasting significance is going on in the universe and that our own lives are connected to this larger drama. However, these same faith traditions are also aware that whatever purpose the universe might have can never be made completely clear to mortals. Why not? Because if there is a pervasive purpose in the universe, in order for it to give meaning to our own lives it would have to be larger and deeper than any human mind could fathom. At least, this is the teaching of all traditional theologies. Purpose, if real, would grasp us more than we could grasp it. We could encounter purpose only if we let it take hold of us and carry us away, just as we may have allowed a great symphony or poem to carry us away in its intoxicating beauty. We cannot appreciate a great work of art or allow it to have any impact on us unless we abandon the need to control it intellectually. The same would be true of cosmic purpose.

However, in the age of science can we honestly believe that the universe has any purpose? Is it credible to claim that something of everlasting importance is working itself out in the universe? Of all the questions in science and religion, many thinkers believe the most fundamental is whether the universe has a purpose.

⁵⁸ Andre Linde has proposed a self-reproducing theory of the universe where the budding-off process is driven by scalar fields (phenomena, such as temperature, in which each point in space can be defined by a number) rather than black holes. See Andrei D. LINDE, *Inflation and Quantum Cosmology*, New York: Academic Press, 1990, p. 258.

⁵⁹ If a phenomenon can be explained without assuming the existence of a certain entity, then that phenomenon provides no reason for believing in the existence of that entity. Cf. William Lane CRAIG and Quentin SMITH, *Theism, Atheism, and Big Bang Cosmology*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995, pp. 189-190.

⁶⁰ As Plato points out in the *Cratylus*, to say that God did something is not to explain it but merely to offer an excuse for not having an explanation. PLATO, *Cratylus*, Trans. and Introd. C.D.C. Reeve, Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1998.

Nowadays many scientifically educated people are quite certain that the universe can have no overarching purpose since science predicts that it is heading irreversibly towards a decisive and final death at some point in the future.⁶¹

This, of course, is not how religions, especially the Judeo-Christian traditions, see things. They have no trouble agreeing that everything physical, including our own bodily existence and the universe that sustains it, will perish.⁶² But they also believe in something eternal. Not everything, in other words, is subject to non-being. In order for anything to exist at all, theologians have argued, there must be a creator, a being that is not capable of non-being. This being believers have called God. Accordingly, the purpose of the universe is to disclose the infinite divine resourcefulness that gives being to all beings. Simply by existing and witnessing to the infinite creativity of God, the totality of beings is full of purpose.⁶³

From the perspective of *quantum physics*, the genesis of the universe involves the image of a void space, serving as a stage for the material world. By its physical nature, quantum vacuum, far from being a total vacuum, is an infinite and inexhaustible ocean of pulsed energy. Out of this quantum vacuum (“nothing”), it is presumed that 15 billion years ago the universe was born of a gigantic explosion, which caused expansion of matter (Big Bang). Quantum physics proves that matter can occur in vacuum provided of being injected of enough energy quantity. It is assumed that originally, before the Big Bang, an immeasurable tidal energy was transferred into initial void bringing about a primordial quantum fluctuation from which the universe came to be born. The question that remains for science is: where does this colossal amount of energy from the Big Bang origin comes from? The assertion that the quantum universe was created out of nothing (the quantum vacuum and pure information) must be understood only in the sense that creation got into existence outside God's being, since creation has not existed from eternity, as theology teaches – or before the moment of big bang, according to the theory of quantum physics. That's why scoring its paradoxical character, it is to be remembered the words of great Danish physicist Niels Bohr: “Anyone who is not shocked by quantum theory has not understood it.”

However we posit ourselves, the new scientific findings that have come to light in the twentieth century require us to abdicate the certainty of knowledge that provides us our senses or our logical constructions. It is a crucial moment in the history of the human spirit and a perspective that contributes to the reconciliation between science and faith, especially with a view to the integral education, i.e. spiritual, moral, and cultural of the beginning of third millennium' man.

⁶¹ Physics and astronomy together claim that the entire universe, along with each one of us, is drifting slowly toward an abyss in which everything, including life, consciousness and culture, will perish utterly. The end of all things is zero. Consequently the universe must be purposeless. John HAUGHT, ‘Science, God and cosmic purpose’, in Peter HARRISON (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Science and Religion*, Cambridge University Press, 2010, p. 261.

⁶² This common point with science refers to the so-called theory of Big Crunch. That If there is enough matter in the universe to create a gravitational force sufficient to bring this movement to a halt and to reverse its direction, then at some point in the remote future all matter in the universe will converge into an infinitely dense point in space, resembling a massive black hole. The end of the universe would then resemble its beginning – a singularity at which the laws of physics as we know them no longer apply. Such a universe is called a *closed universe*. See Mark WORTHING, ‘Big Crunch Theory’, in J. Wentzel Vrede VAN HUYSSTEEN (editor in chief), *Encyclopedia of Science and Religion*, p. 62.

⁶³ John HAUGHT, ‘Science, God and cosmic purpose’, pp. 261-262.

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Man – the light of the Universe

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ABSTRACT

Humans have studied and have been studying ceaselessly the universe, trying to find out our place in this mysterious cosmos, learning all the time something and as we believe that we have established something, there are other question marks to come. This is probably due to our inability to know everything. Science sometimes seeks and finds answers but not cease to be amazed, to bow before the mystery. However we must accept that there are countless ways to approach the differences between the possibilities of knowledge for understanding the universe.

Keywords: Universe; Man; Expansion; Atom; Time; Big Bang;

INTRODUCTION

Human beings since ancient times tried to chase away the specter of the unknown in their imaginations. Man needed to find his place in the hierarchy of creation and to relate to the cosmos, to the entire universe trying to avoid confrontation with the unknowable. But today science has to offer much more than simple hypotheses. The explanations of science must be quite deep regarding the cosmos. These explanations must give coherence and unity to a multitude of disparate facts.

Modern cosmologists based on the assumption that the laws governing the world here on earth are valid all over the universe. But in other circumstances of extreme density and temperature outside our planet, we come to some approximations that need to be adapted to the unusual conditions we encounter.

Cosmologists often talk about building “*cosmological patterns*”. Through this means, generating simplified mathematical descriptions of the structure and the past of the universe, descriptions that seem to capture its main features.¹

It is like using a layout to reproduce some of the characteristics of the real object in itself, but not all, in the same way a model of the universe cannot hope to cover every detail of the structure of the universe.

1. Origin of the universe

One of the most striking features of our universe is that its visible part is so well described by the simplified model of uniform distribution of the raw. Our cosmological patterns involve properties such as density or temperature. Their numerical values can only

¹ John D. Barrow, *Originea Universului*, trad. Alexandru David, Ed. Humanitas, București, 2007, p.11

be found by observations, and only certain combinations of values observed for some of these quantities are compatible with the model. Therefore, the compatibility between the model and the real universe can be verified.

The certainty of philosophers and astronomers, until the beginning of the twentieth century, that space is absolutely fixed - an arena in which stars, planets and all other celestial bodies carry out their movement - underwent transformations during the 1920s: first under the impetus of the physicists who were probing the consequences of Einstein's theory on gravity and then under the impulse of observations made by astronomer Edwin Hubble on the light coming from distant galaxies stars.

1.1. Hubble's Law - The Expansion of the Universe

Hubble called for a simple wave property. If their source moves away from the receiver then the frequency that the waves are received decreases. The movement of the finger up and down in quiet water and observing the ridges of waves heading towards a random point on the surface of the water will make you understand this principle. Now move your finger away from that point and continue to make waves, they will get there with a lower frequency than the one with which they are emitted. Then move your finger to the reception point and the frequency will increase.

This property is characteristic of all waves. In the case of sound waves, it is responsible for changing the locomotive whistling tone or the siren of the police car that passes near you. The light is also a wave, and when its source moves away from the observer, the decrease in the frequency of the light waves translates into the fact that the visible light received appears more reddish. This is why the effect is called “*redness*”. When the light source approaches the observer, the received frequency increases, the visible light becomes bluer and the effect is called “*shifting towards the blue*”.

What Hubble had discovered was the expansion of the universe.² In place of an unchanging arena in which we can look the local pursuit of planets and stars, he found that the universe is in a dynamic condition. It was the greatest discovery of the 20th century science and confirmed the predictions of the general theory of relativity regarding the universe: it cannot be static. In order to gain a simple picture you must imagine the strands of dust on the surface of a balloon that inflates. The balloon will expand and the strands of dust will be removed from each other but will not dilate in the same way³.

1.2 The primordial atom

In the 1930s, the Belgian priest and physicist Georges Le Maître played an important role. His theory of the “*primordial atom*”⁴ was the forerunner of what is now known as the big bang. The most important steps were made in the late 1940s by George Gamow, a Russian émigré arrived in the United States, and two of his young students, Ralph Alpher and Robert Herman. They began to take seriously the possibility of applying the physics they knew to deduce what happened in the early stages of the universe expansion. They discovered an essential aspect: if the universe would be formed in a hot, dense state in a distant past, there should have been some radiation from this explosive beginning. More exactly, they realized that when the universe was a few minutes old it must have been hot

² Alexander Sharov, Igor Novikov, *Edwin Hubble, The discoverer of the Big Bang Universe*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2005, p. 56.

³ John Farrell, *The day without yesterday*, Thunder's Mouth Press, New York, 2005, p. 35.

⁴ John D. Barrow, *Originea Universului*, p. 25.

enough to have nuclear reactions everywhere. Later, these remarkable observations would be confirmed by more in-depth research.⁵

2. The nature of time

The true nature of time is a longstanding problem shrouded in mystery. Thinkers of many cultures have faced it for thousands of years. The issue is in the following terms: do we need to look at time as an immutable and transcendent background, a stage for the unfolding of events, or time is simply the events themselves - so if nothing happens, there is no time? The difference is very important because accepting the first hypothesis, we can talk about the creation of the universe over time. The alternative is to look at time as something that is born with the universe. There was no “*ahead*” of the beginning of the universe, because before the beginning there was no time. Our experience of day-to-day measures time in terms of strings of natural events which succeed: the oscillations of the pendulum in the gravitational field of the Earth, the shadow left by the Sun on a sundial as the Earth rotates or the vibrations of a cesium atom.

We can't talk about what “*time*” is, except in terms of how we measure it. Time is often defined by the way in which things are changing. If this approach is correct, there may be things totally out of the question about the nature of time. Newton's representation on the world has given time a transcendental status. Time simply passes inexorably and uniformly, unaffected by any kind of events and by the content of the universe.⁶ Einstein represented his time in a totally different way. Space geometry and the rate of time flow are determined by the material content of the universe. Our universe is one in which quantum uncertainties are small, which gives us an unambiguous sense of flow of “*time*” in our everyday life. The requirements of having a universe of ours - one that allows the existence of life - can be very restrictive, making our universe a special one among all the possible worlds.⁷

3. The Light of the Divine Lamp

The divine Revelation shows us that the material world has a beginning in the utterance of God's word “Let there be light” (Genesis 1: 3) and a purpose, an end forever full of the divine light: “*And night shall be no more; and I have no need of lamplight or sunlight, because the Lord God will be their light, and they shall reign for ever and ever*” (Revelation 22: 5).

The Deviation from God - Supreme Reason to the material world or to the unreal world of heathen idolatry has caused in human thinking, on the one hand, the accumulation of information, more and more about the sensible reality, structuring them into categories and concepts and so their relationship to logical, provable, and on the other hand the setting of taboos of certain “axioms” that will be completely unassailable, mostly related to the origins of the world and of things. So they sat the landmarks of the experience and human imagination in place of the Divine Revelation;⁸ the consequence is immediate: there is only

⁵ John Farrell, *The day without yesterday*, p. 99.

⁶ Helge Kragh, *Cosmology and Controversy*, Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1996, p. 74.

⁷ John D. Barrow, *Originea Universului*, p. 110.

⁸ P.Schaff & H.Wace, *Gregory of Nyssa – On the making of man*, The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, vol.5, Grand Rapids, W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, p.388.

what can be proven by man through a sensitive and repeatable experience. Knowledge would pass through the senses and would be the product only of human reason.

In this manner has raised the philosophies and science (secular, atheist) as a method of knowledge and description of the world and of the existence, exclusively through the senses and intellect, without any endeavor of faith in the Divine Revelation of the above senses. Losing the landmarks of the divine revelation, secularized culture continuously generated countless cosmological theologies, theory which, although partially seem to describe and model the reality, however, does not offer human satisfactory answers to the questions and his deep spiritual aspirations.⁹ The secularized man of today does not bow down to the divine Reason that he has almost completely deny, but only loves his own reason with his own creations and representations. But with all his effort to avoid confronting his deep aspirations towards eternal happiness and love, the secular man merely succeeds in constantly deceiving himself, spinning in a ghetto of passions, boring monotony and suicidal nihilism.

For the orthodox Christian, however, divine Revelation and human reasoning are not in opposition, but in a never-ending dialogue whereas human rationality and the reasons of things in the world have their beginning and support the existence in Divine Reason. That is why man's dialogue with God is a loving relationship, full of spiritual light, full of meaning, full of spiritual understanding, a relationship developed and enriched in the cosmic framework. The cosmos itself, the entire world, is continually filled with this spiritual light, it is continually transformed in the light of love between God and people. In the divine-human community of the Church, at the Divine Liturgy, we are already experiencing this communion that is more and more full of light between God, men and the world, as a “*mirroring*” light of the age to come.¹⁰ The existence of the world and people therefore has a luminous meaning, a sense, an everlasting light reason that comes from their dynamic connection with God the “Father of the Light”. The light of the world is the uncreated divine Logos. This rational and spiritual harmony of the world is beautifully depicted in its cosmological teaching by St. Maximus the Confessor.¹¹

Besides divine revelation, the world and man lose their true value and meaning. The contemporary secularized culture as the expression of the peak of human pride tends to eliminate totally marks of God in the life and thinking of the man, putting in their place atheist landmarks. In the center of existence is no longer any God, not even the cosmos idolized, but only the man with his productions, meaning he went from the *theocentrism* and *cosmocentrism* to the apothetic *anthropocentrism*. God brought man to existence, building him in his personal - communitarian way. But in this enactment of man not only commanded, but engaged in a loving dialogue with the man to whom he planted all the

⁹ Lars Thunberg, *Microcosmos and Mediator The Theological Antropology of Maximus the Confessor*, 2nd edition, Chicago, La Salle, 1995, p. 52.

¹⁰ Jean-Claude Larchet, *La divinisation de l'homme selon Saint Maxime le Confesseur*, Les éditions du Cerf, Paris, 1996, p.119.

¹¹ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy, The Universe According to Maximus the Confessor*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 2003, p. 146.

powers necessary for this divine fellowship: “by taking the Lord God dust from the ground, he made man and breathed Before him the breath of life, and he became the living being” (Genesis 2: 7). Human life consists of, so, in a communion ever more free and more conscious, tending to become face to face with God, the Giver of life.

According to St. Maximus, if the whole cosmos presents itself through the hierarchy, unity and diversity of its creatures, so wonderfully guided symphonically by the divine Providence, as a church, even more so, the man, as part and as a summary in the small of the whole creation reflects, in his own personal nature, his constitution and his ecclesial purpose: the body is like a nave, the soul as a hierarchy, and the mind as an altar, in which the doxological sacrifice brought to God is continually made.¹² The cosmos is a Sacred Scripture; He:

“depicts the harmonious fabric of the universe as a book that has, as letters and syllables, the bodies which are distinguished and thickened by the encounter of many qualities, which are the first and closest to us, and as words, the general qualities that are more Far and thin. From these, by reading them, the Word (Reason) that wraps out and is contoured in them in an unspoken way”.¹³

The whole cosmos, which consists of the seen and unseen, is man, and the man, which consists of soul and body, is the cosmos. For the intelligible ones have the purpose of the soul, as the soul has the same purpose as the intelligible ones. And the senses are the image of the body, as the body is the face of the senses. The intelligible are the soul of the sensible ones, and the sensitive ones the body of the intelligible. And as the soul is in the flesh, so the cosmos intelligible in the sensible. And the sensible cosmos is held together by the intelligible, as the body is held by the soul. And from both of them a single cosmos is formed, as well as from soul and body one man.¹⁴

4. The order of the Cosmos

Our universe is special: it seems to be in a condition unlikely of well-ordered, in which the pace of expansion is the same in all directions, with a high accuracy. It's like you find the children's bedrooms in perfect order - a situation very unlikely. So, there must be an explanation for the amazing isotropy of the expansion of the universe.¹⁵ Looking at one of the greatest scientists, Albert Einstein, we see that although he had inherited the traditional idea of a static universe, this does not mean that his predecessors have rejected the possibility of any change in the state of the universe.

Although the idea of universal expansion or shrinkage did not arise, there was much speculation that the universe might collapse into a state of increasingly disordered in which life would not be possible. This perspective has emerged from research into how heat can be used as a source of power. The Industrial Revolution brought with it many important advances in science and technology, of which the most important was the design and understanding of functioning machines with steam. This has led to the study of heat as a

¹² V. Karayiannis, *Maxime le Confesseur: Essence et energies de Dieu*, Theologie historique, Paris, 1993, p. 343.

¹³ Jean-Claude Larchet, *La divinisation de l'homme selon Saint Maxime le Confesseur*, p. 114.

¹⁴ V. Karayiannis, *Maxime le Confesseur...*, p. 362.

¹⁵ John Barrow, Joseph Silk, *The Left Hand of Creation: The Origin and Evolution of the Universe*, 2nd edition, Oxford University Press, New York, 1994, p. 32.

form of energy. It had become clear that energy was a product to be preserved. It could not be created nor destroyed, but only transformed from one form into another. But there was something else. Some forms of energy are more useful than others. The measure of their utility is a measure of the order of that form under which the energy appears: the more disordered it is, the less useful. This clutter, which has become known as “*entropy*,” seems to always grow in natural processes. At a certain level, there's no mystery here. Your office and children's bedroom seem to shift from a state of order to a mess - never the other way round. There are several ways for things to evolve from order to disorder rather than vice versa, so the first trend is what we see in practice. This idea has been kept with holiness in the famous “*second law of thermodynamics*”, which states that entropy in a closed system never falls.¹⁶ The universe is still in an extremely orderly state, although it is expanding by increasing its entropy for fifteen billion years. It's a mystery. It would mean that the starting point of the universe was very orderly, so a very different state, probably governed by a great principle of symmetry or economy.

These ideas, however, have proved impossible to use to discover the principle, because we don't sufficiently know the structure of the universe to identify all the ways of manifestation of order and disorder within it. Our calculations on current entropy are therefore incomplete.¹⁷ The mission of cosmologists is to establish a history of the expansion of the universe - to find out how galaxies have been formed; Why they are piling up in swarms; Why expansion has the speed it has - and to explain the shape of the universe and the equilibrium between matter and radiation.¹⁸

5. Humanity in the universe

Man is subject to creative communion with other subjects in virtue of freedom, uniqueness, alterity, relativity, complementarity, conscience, responsibility and dignity that characterizes his personal existence.¹⁹ He represents God in creation, it is the living icon of Jesus Christ as a prototype and has a special blessing and mandate to be a standing vis-à-vis God, his partner of dialogue in the creation and at the same time His mirror. According to St. Basil in Hexaemeron's Commentary, “*Beings are mirrors of the tremendous beauty*,” and that is why the holy Fathers of the Eastern Front urged us to “*see the beauty of the Creator in the beauty of the creatures*,” which scientists also confronted. Apparently, renowned researcher Karl Linne, when examining a microscope in front of students, a myositis flower fell into ecstasy. The amazement and the joy on his face were indescribable. Asked by the students what happened, what he saw, he replied: “The footsteps of God's steps in this world,” so His beauty and majesty.

The purpose of man is to be in a personal relationship, free of conscience and responsibility with God, with the world, with heaven and earth, to accomplish by grace participation, the being and at the same time to contribute through his work to the completion of creation by transforming it in the kingdom of God.²⁰ The universe of man is heaven and earth and can't be reduced to a single dimension or “opening”. The man created

¹⁶ Arieh Ben-Naim, *Entropy and the Second Law: Interpretation and Miss-Interpretations*, World Scientific Publishing, Singapore, 2012, p. 10.

¹⁷ Guy Deutscher, *The Entropy Crisis*, World Scientific Publishing, Singapore, 2008, p. 8.

¹⁸ John D. Barrow, *Originea Universului*, p. 47.

¹⁹ Albert Einstein, *The world as i see it*, The book Tree edition, San Diego, 2007, p. 24.

²⁰ Adam Hamilton, *The way: Walking in the Footsteps of Jesus*, Large Print edition, Abingdon Press, Nashville, 2016, p. 187.

“in the image of God” (Genesis 1: 27) is “*capax Dei*”.²¹ The human being has a spiritual and personal existence not only purely biological. We must not forget that man, the one taken from the dust is the one who is asking permanently about itself and about nature, it has a reflexive thinking. By the fact that his body was taken up by God from the earth, it is bound by nature, so it is one of it, it is part of it. But at the same time, being taken from it by the creation of the image and the inspiration of life from God, he is above it, because God is present and works especially through him in His creation. He is still not perfect, he has not reached the divine likeness. Through the body now lives in history here and now, but through the spirit is projected to its future becoming beyond history, from eternity. His special position in nature lies precisely in the fact that he overcomes any reached level. And to understand him, you must always interpret him, again, only as projected in the future as the one who realizes or misses in history and through history his mission of deification. So man is the being who anticipates the future, gives meaning to the present precisely because he shares the future, he actually trains it and lives today from the perspective of tomorrow.

This ancient relationship with God as the source of existence actually forms the essence of religion and makes man capable of spirituality and emanate spirituality. Man will remain human only as long as it exudes spirituality, meaning it will relate vertically with God and not only with the horizontal world.²² Man is in relation to himself, to his surrounding nature, and to his fellow human beings, as brothers and sons of God. Man can't exist alone in the world. He is a person and the person is an existence in communion that relates to God, the fellow human being, and nature. The man isn't self-sufficient, not an individual. Even the concept of an atom or an individual is today shown to be divisible. The existence of the human person is together-existence and pro-existence, according to the model of divine communion. Today, also benefiting from the “increased lights” of science in the process of knowing, we do not know precisely what man is. Pilate shows us “Ecce Homo!” But it doesn't define it and doesn't refer to a particular man.

Research and studies carried out on him, by philosophers, theologians and scientists in particular, seem to be endless, precisely because permanent self-attainment of the attained condition seems to be a characteristic of the human condition. From here you can see how hard it is to be human, and at the same time how beautiful it is and also remains a man of humanity. This isn't a matter of time, methods and techniques of investigation, and specialized apparatus to know the essence of man. His person isn't unknown yet, but it is a divine miracle and mystery, which has always made him and made man human. It relates to the “human condition” of the ontological status of the human person in the cosmos, the status God has given him by creation. This status, which implies a special position in the cosmos (creation), means primarily self-consciousness, freedom and responsibility. When we look at a man's face and wonder what he means, the only amazement and admiration is the “right” answer. Truly as a person man remains a mystery and also a miracle of God in creation.²³ In an attempt to find out what man is, we can say that, on the one hand, as the essence of the tree is revealed in the fruit, and the fruit is already present in the seed, so,

²¹ Luigi Gioia, *The Theological Epistemology of Augustine's De Trinitate*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2008, p. 106.

²² Voltaire, *God and Human Beings*, translated by Michael Shreve, Prometheus Books edition, New York, 2010, p. 153.

²³ Cristoph Schoenborn, *Man, The Image of God*, San Francisco, Ignatius Press, 2011, p.40.

seeing the deeds of a man, his behavior and his work can be said: that he is a good man, a true man, a beautiful man, not a perfect man, a “superman”, an angel, or that he could and should also become good, true and beautiful, since from the moment of his conception in existence, in the image of God as a person is a man with a dynamic identity. He is perfect and not perfect, he is neither an angel nor a monster, and for this reason no man is irrecoverable in history. Neuroplasticity of the brain convinces us. And that is why man should become permanent through education, faith and love to behave and act as such. From the opera, so from his work, we can know something of his essence and not so much of himself as we cannot penetrate and especially because he is an artisan, and the face he wants to display in society is only a conventional mask or a social role, it has ontological consistency and must be approached from a soteriological and eschatological perspective. On the other hand, let us not forget that as the “*pyramids*” don’t show the humanity, the genius and the goodness of the pharaoh, but rather a favorable conjuncture, and that history was not written as a Scripture, but as a court chronicle we shouldn’t believe that only the grandiose works show the real people who are “*more men than others*” and that “*only their lives would have the quality*” and the others would mean “only an anonymous clay table” at the disposal of those who exercise the power, the mastery of science, or the talent to mold them at will. Good, true and beautiful people are not “the slopes that break the masts, leaving only the bare rocks and stones on the beach”, but “molecules that make up the water” so necessary to life. So whenever we try to explain what man is, there is always an unexpected phenomenon that causes a change of perspective. In this sense, “Kierkegaard noticed that the genius of the person belongs to the great infinitely small, both unpredictable but essential”.²⁴

From little things, from their daily behavior, they can know the man is truly great, good, true and beautiful.

CONCLUSIONS

If we were to take into account the geo-physical phenomena that were the basis for the formation of the earth we could say that the idea that man would have regarding the genesis of the world would be that of a chaos and not to the formation of the cosmos, of a world subject to laws precisely arrayed.²⁵ Also, the experience of the empirical world on which the primitive man had, it was without doubt that of permanence, in which alternations of extinction and return to the same state occur. That is why it is suggested that in order to conceive a beginning of the world was necessary a „detachment superior to the physical environment outdoors, as well as the power to contemplate that environment as an integral whole, going in time beyond personal memory, to its distant beginning prefigured.”²⁶ This, however, leads us to the question: how did man come to the idea of a creative beginning, especially as this concept suggests the notion of “*event*”, which also implies the

²⁴ Dominique Beaufils, Pr. Boris Bobrinskoy, Pr. John Breck, Oliver Clement, Claude Hiffler, Pr. Ioannis Chrysavgis, Mitropolitul Meletios, Pr. Ignace Peckstadt, Pr. Jean Roberti, Bertrand Vergely, *Bioetica și Taina persoanei, Perspective ortodoxe*, Editura Bizantină, București, 2006, p.46.

²⁵ Remus Rus, *Concepția despre om în marile religii*, în *Glasul Bsericiei*, An XXXVII, Nr.7-8,1978, p. 734.

²⁶ Brandon S.G.F, *Creation Legend of the Ancient Near East*, Hodder and Stoughten, London, 1963, p. 3.

consciousness time flow? For us Christians, to this concept, people reached on the basis of a primordial revelation. Researchers who ignore faith have embarked on other theories. Some say that more factors have contributed to the crystallization of the idea.

The most important of these factors was to achieve the immediate attention away from the reality here and now, and to obtain a mental perspective that includes past experience, as well as identifying a particular event that marks or produces a new existential situation.²⁷

Generally, man is seen as a limit; a convergence between the empirical world and the transcendent world, or the seen and the unseen. As a consequence of its convergence condition, where two different realms meet, man is placed in a mediator position, is the only being with perspectives of detachment from the immediate condition and projection in the future.

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²⁷ Brandon S.G.F, *Time and Mankind*, Hutchinson & Co, London, 1951 p. 15-16.

Aspects of our Savior's activity as a Teacher

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ABSTRACT

When we talk about the redeeming work of our Savior Jesus Christ, we have in view His three ministries: that of teacher or prophetic, the one of overseer (archbishop) and that of leader or king. These three ministries define His redeeming work, which is one and unique and is turned to the human nature that He assumed and then to all of us, who are His fellows, and, at the same time, to God as sacrificial attitude, Christ being "the Lamb of God, Who wipes away the world's sin" (Jn. 1: 29) and brings to us our reconciliation with God the Father. Our Savior Christ has fulfilled His ministry as a teacher directly, namely preaching He Himself the truth of the Evangel, yet, in an indirect manner, His work has been continued, in the Church, through the Apostles and their followers, the bishops and priests whom the Holy Spirit will illuminate for an uninterrupted and correct preaching of the divine truth, until the end of the centuries, according to the commandment that He has given to His disciples: "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit; teaching them to observe everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you all the days, to the end of the age. Amen." (Mt. 28: 19-20).

Keywords: Evangel; teaching; Savior; example; theology;

INTRODUCTION

The redeeming work of Jesus Christ can be viewed from these three perspectives of it (teacher, archbishop and king), yet without separating them, each being found in the other, and all together being intertwined in:

"The sacrifice of His own body, the teaching and example of ministry given to the people and the power He exerts on nature by miracles, on death by Resurrection and on people by the commandments and the power He is giving them for their redemption"¹.

In the connection between them, these three forms of ministry are intertwined, so that one can say that our Savior *"is teaching by serving, is sacrificing Himself defeating the consequences of sin, and dominates like a stabbed Lamb"* (Revelation 5).

This work is continued by our Savior after His Ascension to heaven, in the Church, by the Holy Spirit. So, as a prophet, He is teaching, making known to man, in the highest degree and in the most accessible way, the Being and the will of God and the work of

¹ Pr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, vol. II, ediția a II-a, EIBMBOR, București, 1997, p. 76.

salvation. As an Archbishop, He restores the connection between man and God, reconciling, by His supreme sacrifice, God with man, because we “*are sanctified by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ’s body, once and for all*”, Who “*offering one sacrifice for sins, sat down forever on the right side of God*” (Hebrews 10: 10, 12).

By the Embodied Son, man has the possibility to know God, to find out the true theology, as much as necessary, the divine teaching preached by our Savior Christ being “*the words of eternal life*” (Jn. 6: 68). By their content, the evangels become the culmination of the revelation, all the other writings of the New Testament having as fundament the Person of Jesus Christ, truly God and truly Man, under all the three aspects of His Messianic activity: teacher, king and archbishop.

As a Teacher, our Savior shows that theology is not a simple reflection on what Divinity means, but a way of living led in a personal relationship with God, Whom He presents is His quality of Father, a life that starts by obeying (the commandments), is nourished by faith and ends by eternal life: “*I tell you the solemn truth: the one who hears My message and believes the One Who sent Me has eternal life and will not come into judgement but has passed from death to life.*” (Jn. 5: 24). In his quality of Leader and King, Christ reveals Himself as *the Way* to the true knowledge: “*I am the Way, the Truth and the Life*” (Jn. 14: 6); He is *the door* that leads to the Father: “*I am the gate. If anyone enters through me, he will be saved; he will come in and will be saved*” (Jn. 10: 9).

1. OUR SAVIOR – THE TEACHER BY EXCELLENCE

Our Savior Jesus Christ is *the Teacher by excellence*² - *Rabbi*, as He Himself shows Himself to be: “*You have but one teacher: Christ.*” (Mt. 23: 8, 10); He is the supreme Teacher and Prophet³. About no other teacher has anyone said that: “*never has a man spoken like this Man*” (Jn. 7: 46). By this, it is shown that He is “*the One and only*”, yet not in the sense of “*singularity or exclusivity*”, as Father Constantin Galeriu writes, “*but of supreme revealer of the truth*”⁴.

Regarding this aspect, Father Dorin Opreș considers:

“By His uniqueness, one must not understand, by no means, the desire of being the only preacher of the whole truth, transmitted with power to be able to awaken and purify the spirits to make them partakers of the Truth”⁵.

He is not a teacher like any other man, but, in the activity He fulfills, He impresses on this mission of teacher the highest degree possible. Father Prof. Dumitru Stăniloae says in this sense:

“He is the Teacher, in the supreme sense, by His very Person, because out of His Person springs His teaching, showing man’s true way to the perfect eternity of the existence”⁶.

Amazed by the teachings it was listening and by the wonderful acts it was seeing, the people calls our Savior Jesus Christ “*Prophet*” (Luke 7: 16) and “*Teacher*” (Jn. 6: 14), the prophet announced by Moses (Deut. 18: 15-18), and so do the Apostles but also His

² Pr. Lect. Dr. Vasile GORDON, *Predica Ocazională (pareneza)*, E.I.B.M.B.O.R., București, 2001, p. 172.

³ Pr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *op. cit.*, p. 78.

⁴ Pr. Prof. Dr. Constantin GALERIU, *Mântuitorul Iisus Hristos, Învățătorul nostru suprem*, in rev. “Ortodoxia”, no. 1/1983, p.34.

⁵ Dorin OPRIȘ, *Dimensiuni creștine ale pedagogiei moderne*, ediția a III-a, Ed. Didactică și Pedagogică, R. A., București, 2012, p. 85.

⁶ Pr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *op. cit.*, p. 79.

adversaries who were calling Him “*Teacher*” (Mt. 8: 19; Mk. 10: 35). Since then and forever He remained *the Prophet of the truth* and *the Teacher of the world*, the prophet of all the prophets and the Teacher of all the teachers, His teaching being, first of all, His very Person⁷. But Christ is not just a simple teacher of the law or just any prophet, but the Teacher by excellence, the prototype of perfection of the Christian. This truth is confessed by the evangelist Matthew who wrote that: “... *the crowds were amazed at His teaching, for He was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes.*” (Mt. 7: 28-29).

The prophetic call of our Savior is His activity of teacher and discoverer of the absolute religious truth about God, of the moral norms, confirming everything also by His Life, as the supreme example of perfect life: “*Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, “I am the light of the world. The one who follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”*” (Jn. 8: 12). Just as the prophets of the Old Testament, chosen and sent by God to announce Him and His will, to guide the people and to watch over its religious and moral life, similarly Jesus Christ, as a prophet, teaches the divine truth, which He illustrates by His own life, a true example of perfection in virtue for us.

“Just as the prophets of the Old Testament, who would prove that they were sent by God by miracles and prophecies, our Savior also accompanies His preaching by performing miracles and by announcing future events, such as those regarding the fall of Jerusalem and the life of the Church”⁸.

But Christ is not like the other prophets. He is the prophet of the prophets, because the other prophets are announcing and teaching the world by the power given to them by God; Christ, being Himself God, announces His own things, which are also those of the Father.

“He is identified with His teaching. And His teaching can only spring from Him. He is the Prophet in a unique and supreme sense. (...) He is the One Who preaches and the One Who Preaches Himself. He is even, by this, the Prophet by excellence, because His teaching shows the true way for making humanity perfect. And in this He only translates Himself, since He is the way to perfection and perfection itself”⁹.

Having the qualities of a perfect educator, the Lord Christ has been called *the Pedagogue* in the patristic literature. Clement of Alexandria, in the work bearing this title, explains why only the Savior can be called this way:

“The Pedagogue is Jesus. Sometimes He calls Himself a Shepherd, saying: «I am the Good Shepherd» (Jn. 10: 11-14). According to a metaphor, starting from the shepherds taking care of the sheep, Jesus ... is the Pedagogue leading us, the children, to salvation. The Logos stated by Hosea very clearly about Him, saying: «I am your teacher.»” (Hosea 5: 2)¹⁰.

Even since the Old Testament, the Great Prophet is announced by the prophets. Moses forewarns the children of Israel about the coming in their midst of a prophet greater than himself Whom they will need to obey: “*A prophet like me will the Lord, your God, raise up for you from among your own kindred; that is the one to whom you shall listen.*”

⁷ Ilarion V. FELEA, *Duhul Adevărului*, Editura Diecezana, Arad 1943, p. 88, apud. Nicolae CODREA: *Iisus Hristos Învățătorul, în opera lui Ilarion V. Felea*, http://www.agoracrestina.ro/biblioteca/nicolae_codrea-iisus-hristos-invatatorul-in-opera-lui-ilarion-v-felea-.html, accessed on 12.06.2016.

⁸ Prof. N. CHIȚESCU, Pr. Prof. Isidor TODORAN, Pr. Prof. I. PETREUȚĂ, *Teologia dogmatică și simbolică*, vol. II, Ed. Renașterea, Cluj-Napoca, 2005, p. 40.

⁹ Pr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *op. cit.*, p. 116.

¹⁰ Clement ALEXANDRINUL, *Pedagogul*, in *Scrieri*, partea I, trad. Dumitru Fecioru, colecția **P.S.B.**, vol.4, E.I.B.M.B.O.R., București, 1982, p. 196.

(Deut. 18: 15), prophetic words also confirmed afterwards by Yahweh – the Almighty God, Who added that the New Prophet will speak what He will tell Him: “*I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their kindred, and will put my words into the mouth of the prophet; the prophet shall tell them all that I command*” (Deut. 18: 18). Thus, these two Messianic texts highlight the prophetic ministry of our Savior Christ.

In the New Testament, Jesus is presented as the prophet of the last days, because “*in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe*” (Hebr. 1: 2); He is indicated as Rabbi, teacher and great prophet, strong in acts and in deeds: “*...Jesus of Nazareth, Who has been a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people*” (Luke 24: 19), Who by His coming in the world is leading us to the eternal life and is giving to us the power to see and understand the true God, because we know that “*the Son of God has come and has given us discernment so that we may know him who is true; and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ.*” (1 Jn. 5: 20). Christ is the perfect teacher on God’s Being and will and the most skilled preacher of the Creator’s vivifying word, which He is sharing to us directly.

As a Teacher, the Savior Christ reveals to the world the Evangel, namely the good news of the divine mercy bestowed upon man to redeem him, and the eternal truths regarding God’s Person and His eternal Kingdom. In His mission, Christ our Lord has in view to transmit all that man needs to know about God, about the world, about himself, the essentials that will lead man to salvation.

“As God’s Son, He reveals the glorified Triune God, as Logos, creator Word, He is giving to us the authentic sense of the creation, as Man’s Son He is offering to us the model and the plenitude that the human person is called to attain”¹¹.

A special feature of the activity of our Savior as a teacher, as Father Dumitru Călugăru highlights as well, is that He takes into account “*the sense organ*”, namely the features and the specific of the audience: their occupation, their age or their culture. “For this reason, Jesus Christ is speaking to the ploughmen about the sower; to the workers of the vineyard, about their own occupation; to the fishermen, about the wonderful fishing. To Nicodemus (Jn. 3), who was erudite and pure at heart, He is offering a deep gaze into the plan of salvation even from the start of His activity. At the same time, to the Samaritan woman, who had an active spirit, a good soul, He reveals Himself as a Prophet and the true Messiah, by a dialogue led with great and deep psychology. He speaks in one way with a *legislator* and in a different way with the Pharisees (Mt. 22: 41 and the next)”¹².

Regarding His mission as a teacher, we need to say that our Savior did not write anything Himself, but only talked to the multitudes looking for Him, thirsty for His redeeming word. This call and attraction to His Person and His word reveal to us, in the didactic work of our Lord Jesus Christ, a spring full of life, conquering the mind, the heart and the will of the listeners. The Lord was speaking everywhere, at any time and on any occasion, yet He would take into account the circumstances in which He was speaking and the audience He was speaking to. He was speaking in one manner with the teachers of the law and the Pharisees, and in a different way with the people. There is one rule to remember. His word was simple and attractive. For this reason, the multitudes, namely large crowds, were following Him, and they were listening to Him so carefully that sometimes they even forgot about their hunger during the day, as it happened in the desert, with the five thousand

¹¹ Pr. Prof. Dr. Constantin GALERIU, *art. cit.*, p. 37.

¹² Pr. Prof. Dumitru CĂLUGĂRU, *Catehetica*, ediția a IV-a, Editura “Renașterea”, Cluj-Napoca, 2005, pp. 23-24.

men, without counting the women and the children, who were filled to their full in a miraculous manner with five loaves of bread and two fish (Mt. 14: 13-21).

Saint Matthew the Evangelist synthesizes in a narrative summary the whole public activity of our Lord as follows: “*And Jesus went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every sickness among the people.*” (Mt. 4: 23).

These three verbs—*teach*, *proclaim* and *heal*, underline the most important aspects of the Lord’s activity: *didactic*, *kerygmatic* and *therapeutic*. The didactic activity of our Savior is synthesized by the Evangelist in the five great discourses included in his Evangel: *The Sermon on the Mount* (Mt. 5-7); *The Apostolic or Missionary Discourse* (Mt. 10), *The Discourse in parables* (Mt. 13: 1-52), *The Discourse of the Church* (Mt. 18) and *The Eschatological Discourse* (Mt. 24-25). The First Evangel of the canon of the Holy Scripture presents Christ our Lord as a teacher rather than as a wonder-worker, teacher not just for the Jews but also for the people of all the times and all the places, to whom the celestial Father addresses the commandment: “*Listen to Him!*” (17: 5). Our Savior teaches us in His preaching about God, about the world, about man. As Son of God, He reveals to us the glorified Triune God, as creating Logos He gives meaning to our existence in the framework of creation, as Son of Man, He is offering to us the perfect model that humanity is called to attain. Jesus Christ is the eternal Teacher exhorting us to salvation, out of His words springs directly His divinity, which we are enjoying by receiving the teaching of the Evangel. He is accomplishing His prophetic call directly, preaching He Himself the truth of His Evangel, yet, indirectly, His work is continued, in the Church, by the Apostles and their followers, the bishops and the priests, whom the Holy Spirit illuminates to preach uninterruptedly and correctly the divine truth, until the end of the ages, according to the commandment given by our Savior: “*And remember, I am with you all the days, to the end of the age.*” (Mt. 28: 20).

2. ASPECTS OF THE ACTIVITY AS A TEACHER (WAYS OF PRESENTING THE WORD: THE DIRECT SPEECH AND THE PARABLE)

In His activity of Teacher of the world, the Savior speaks about God, about the world, about man. As Son of God, He reveals to us the glorified Triune God, as creating Logos He gives sense to our existence in the creation, as Son of Man, He offers to us the perfect model that humanity is called to attain.

“The truth preached by Him is, according to its content, the teaching about Himself, about His work and His kingdom and at the same time completion of the Mosaic law.”¹³

Wanting to present in one place several teachings of our Savior, Matthew the evangelist condensates in three chapters (5-7) a series of discourses grouped on certain themes. From the beginning, we need to mention that this group of discourses “*is not the stenograph of that sermon, namely a rendering word by word but a well-delineated abstract*”¹⁴. At the same time, one must specify that many of these teachings are found as well in other circumstances in the evangels, though not in the same words, however in a very similar form.

¹³ Hristu ANDRUTSOS, *Dogmatica Bisericii Ortodoxe răsăritene*, Editura și tiparul Tipografiei Arhiepiscopale, Sibiu, 1930, p. 225.

¹⁴ Pr. Prof. Univ. Dr. Leon ARION, *Comentarii la Sfânta Evanghelie după Matei*, Ed. ASA, București, 2007, p. 141.

The section in the Evangel according to Matthew is the first out of the five great literary units that the specialists call “*speeches*”. This first discourse is also entitled “*the sermon on the mount*”, according to the place where it was uttered, and it has a structure that can be divided into three parts: the disciples’ status and mission (cf. Mt. 5: 1-48), the new lifestyle of the one who wants to follow God (cf. Mt. 6: 1-7, 12) and the true and the false prophets (cf. Mt. 7: 13-29). In their turn, these three parts can be divided into: the introduction of the sermon on the mount (cf. Mt. 5: 1-2), the beatitudes (cf. Mt. 5: 3-12), the disciples’ mission (cf. Mt. 5: 13-16), Jesus Christ and the Law (cf. Mt. 5: 17-20), the antithesis of the discourse (cf. Mt. 5: 21-48), the disciples’ way of life, which can be practiced by charity, prayer and fasting (cf. Mt. 6: 1-6, 16-18), the prayer model: *Our Father* (cf. Mt. 6: 7-15), the deliverance from earthly concerns (cf. Mt. 6: 19-34), charity and trust in God (cf. Mt. 7: 1-12), the two ways (cf. Mt. 7: 13-14), the false prophets (cf. Mt. 7: 15-20), the false disciples (cf. Mt. 7: 21-13), the house built on the rock (cf. Mt. 7: 24-27) and conclusion (cf. Mt. 7,28-29).

Viewed from the perspective of its situation in time, *The Sermon on the Mount* belongs to the beginning of the Lord’s activity in Galilee, so to the beginning of the second year of evangelization, and concerning its content, we could say it has a face turned towards the disciples and another turned towards the multitudes, this is why any exegesis must take into account this fact, trying to go not just into the immediate, exterior (exoteric) aspects, turned to the multitudes, but especially into the deepest, interior (esoteric) ones, turned to those who make a greater effort of understanding and effectively follow Christ.

Concerning the place where this “*sermon*” may have been held, an old tradition mentions that it would be the mountain Kurun (Karn) Hattin, which will receive the name of *The Mount of Beatitudes*, a mount situated not far from the city of Tiberias, just 560 m above the level of Lake Gennesaret¹⁵. It is on one of the two tops of this mount that our Lord Jesus Christ sat down, “*and His disciples drew near Him and He opened His mouth and began to teach them*” (Mt. 5: 1-2). According to the Oriental customs, our Savior taught sitting down; only in exceptional cases, when He wanted not just to be listened to, but also to involve His listeners in a direct manner or to defend Himself in front of His accusers, He spoke standing up (cf. Jn. 7: 37).

Jesus opens his speech with the presentation of nine ways of reaching beatitude, and here the term *beatitude* is another word for perfection, because beatitude is associated each time with the practice of a virtue, of a way to perfection whose target is the likeness of God (a fact resulting from the expressions: acquiring God’s kingdom, seeing God etc.). Likening this speech to Moses’ Decalogue, the Holy Fathers call *The Sermon on the Mount*: “*Codex of the New Law*”¹⁶. By this comparison between the essential teachings of the Old Testament and those preached by our Savior:

“He made the Old Law perfect, turning it into a superior and universal law, putting the accent on the love for God and for our fellow”¹⁷.

A special feature of our Savior’s discourse is that his teaching is present both directly, the message being presented in a simple, easily understandable manner, and by

¹⁵ Pr. Prof. Dr. Constantin CORNÎȚESCU, *Studiul biblic al Noului Testament*, Ed. Europolis, Constanța, 2005, p. 142.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 114.

¹⁷ Pr. Prof. Ioan CONSTANTINESCU, *Studiul Noului Testament*, E.I.B.M.B.O.R., București, 2002, p. 55.

means of parables¹⁸, which are but comparisons, starting from images taken from the surrounding reality. Desiring to highlight the atmosphere dominating around the Teacher, the evangelist Matthew emphasizes that “*He did not say anything to them without using a parable*” (Mt. 13: 34).

Christ’s pedagogical plan is clear: He speaks to the people, He shows to them the truth of faith, and He gives them the fruits to listen to Him. God’s plan is always good: He first transmits something, man takes over the message, or not, then comes the lesson. The lesson can be towards progress, when man is receptive, or it can be painful, when man chooses the opposite of God’s will. The elementary principle of classical education relied on listening and respect: the younger was supposed to listen to the older, the pupil was supposed to listen to the teacher, the student was supposed to listen to the professor, the disciple was supposed to listen to the master, in order to be able to learn and for education to become redeeming.

In the specialized language of the Christian pedagogy, this way of presenting the teaching is called the principle of intuition, and has in view the direct influence of the objects or phenomena of the surrounding world on the senses and by this on learning. Father Dorin Opriș notes:

“Since the true knowledge relies on sensitivity and reason, our Savior shows that the necessity of intuition is directly connected to the level of abstractization of the teaching”¹⁹.

To help His listeners understand the fact that the value of the human being and the care the Creator has for it is perfect, Christ our Lord intuitively starts from concrete aspects of life, such as the bird’s food, the beauty of the lilies and of the field:

“Look at the birds of the sky, they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not more valuable than they? And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they do not toil nor do they spin; but I say to you that not even Solomon in his entire royal splendor was clothed like one of these. Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is here today but tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?” (Mt. 6: 26, 28-30).

Speaking in parables, our Savior uses exemplifications from the daily life, realities known by the majority of the listeners who were part of simple social categories and who, by these methods, got to understand teachings on: behavior, morals, salvation, eternal life and the Kingdom of God²⁰. In fact,

“in the authority with which Jesus speaks, and the power with which He acts, the Kingdom of God is revealed. That Jesus goes to His death as King of Jews, predicting His resurrection as Son of Man, is in harmony with the implication of His teaching that the Kingdom of God come, with the coming of the Messiah”²¹.

¹⁸ Like R. Zimmermann said, „A parable is a short narrative fictional text that is related in the narrated world to known reality but, by way of implicit or explicit transfer signals, makes it understood that the meaning of the narration must be differentiated from the literal words of the text. In its appeal structure it challenges the reader to carry out a metaphoric transfer of meaning that is steered by co-text and context information”. See Ruben ZIMMERMANN, *How to understand the parables of Jesus. A paradigm shift in parable exegesis*, in *Acta Theologica*, 1/2009, p, 170, apud <https://oalibrary.org/papers>

¹⁹ Dorin OPRÎȘ, *op. cit.*, p. 196.

²⁰ Norman PERRIN, *The Kingdom of God in the teaching of Jesus*, Cheap Edition, London, 1996, pp. 62-63.

²¹ C. H. DODD, *The Kingdom of God and history*, George Allen & Unwin Ltd., London, 1938, p. 33.

Like Klyne Snodgrass said, „ the purpose of the parables is not to teach theology; if that were the case, direct communication would have been used. But, the parables are theological, and virtually no where is Scripture intended to teach theology in a technical sense. Scripture embeds a theology and assumes a theology in seeking to move people to right relation and right living with God”²².

The man looking for Christ does not look for beautiful words and does not find only beautiful words. Following Christ is not just beauty but also sacrifice; and where this is manifested, namely where Christ is being followed, the gifts received are multiplied by the thousand; there is also material not just spiritual abundance. When man is wise and looks for God, he enjoys not just spiritual but also material goods.

CONCLUSION

Amazed by the teachings they were listening to and the wonderful actions they were seeing, the multitudes call our Savior Jesus Christ “*the Teacher*” (Jn. 6:14) and “*the Prophet*” (Luke 7: 16), the Prophet announced by Moses (Deut. 18: 15-18). His apostles, but also His adversaries, were calling Him “*Teacher*” (Mt. 8: 19; Mk. 10: 35); since then and for eternity He remains *the Prophet of the truth* and *the Teacher of the world*, the prophet of all the prophets and the Teachers of all the teachers, and His teaching is, above all, His person.

Our Savior Christ, *the Teacher by excellence*, has revealed to the world *the Evangel*, namely the good news of the divine mercy coming on man to save, and the eternal truths regarding God’s Person and His eternal Kingdom. Christ has taken care to teach to the people God’s Word, in such a manner that this Word may be easily understandable and assimilable by the listeners, being attentive and very perceptive regarding the needs of the human being, to whom He descended so lovingly.

In his mission, Christ our Lord has in view to transmit all that man needs to know about God, about the world, about his own person, the essentials able to lead man to salvation. For this reason, more than in any part of the Evangel, in the parables we find theological truths that our Savior wraps up in perfect literary forms adapted to man’s power of understanding.

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²² Klyne SNODGRASS, *Prophets, parables, and theologians*, in *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 18.1 (2008), p. 67, apud. <https://www.ibr-bbr.org/files>

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- [17] http://www.agoracrestina.ro/biblioteca/nicolae_codrea-iisus-hristos-invatorul-in-opera-lui-ilarion-v-felea-.html
- [18] <https://oalibrary.org/papers>
- [19] <https://www.ibr-bbr.org/files>

EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND RELIGION STUDIES*The relationship between man and cosmos:
the contribution of Isaac Israeli****Prof. PhD. Encarnación Ruiz CALLEJÓN**Faculty of Philosophy, University of Granada
SPAIN,E-mail: ruizencarnacion@ugr.es**ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this work is to analyse the contribution of the Jewish doctor Isaac Israeli to the medieval reflection on the relationship between man and the cosmos. To this end, starting from the methodological change proposed by al-Yabri for the study of classical Arabic philosophy, I question the usual characterization of the Jewish author as being merely an eclectic thinker, and indicate the most noteworthy aspects of his position. The philosophical texts that have come down to us reveal a philosopher who participates in the great debates of his time, among them: the relation between philosophy and revelation and the nature of the human intellect. Beyond the prophetic aspect, Israeli points to a special logic based on the ability to argue evoking images, a universal way that facilitates the compression of a complex idea or promotes the performance of an action.

Keywords: Arabic Philosophy; Medieval Jewish Philosophy; Neoplatonism; Prophecy;**INTRODUCTION**

We hardly have any information on Isaac Israeli¹, also known as Isaac Judaeus² or Isaac the Elder, in order to differentiate him from the 14th century Hispanic astronomer. He was born in Egypt between 830 and 850³, and died between 932 and 955/956. He was called to Kairuán, capital of modern Tunisia, as a court physician. Already a prestigious practitioner, he met the young Saadia Gaon, with whom he exchanged correspondence on scientific and philosophical topics. Israeli would have also dedicated himself to astronomy, research into the Hebrew language and Biblical exegesis⁴. He is considered the first Neoplatonic Jewish philosopher⁵ and one of the first Jewish philosophers of the Medieval period. But his fame as a physician would have been decisive for the discreet disclosure of

[1] Abū Ya'qūb Ishāq ibn Sulaymān al-Isrā'īlī. The author's patronymic, Abū Ya'qūb, which does not necessarily indicate his paternity, is provided by, for example, Ibn Abī Uṣaibi'a.

[2] To differentiate him from the 14th century Hispanic astronomer, also called Isaac Israeli.

[3] Raphaela Veit, *Das Buch der Fieber des Isaac Israeli und seine Bedeutung im lateinischen Westeuropa. Ein Beitrag zur Rezeption arabischer Wissenschaft im Abendland*, Franz Steiner Verlag, München, 2003, p. 25.

[4] Salomon Fried, *Das Buch über die Elemente. Ein Beitrag zur jüdischen Religionsphilosophie des Mittelalters*, Verlag von J. Kauffmann, Frankfurt a. M., 1900, pp. 26-27.

[5] And the first Medieval, if we exclude al-Muqāmis, who lived between 820 and 890, and who we still know very little about. We have the publication, translation and notes of Sarah Stroumsa, *Dāwud ibn Marwān al-Muqāmis's Twenty Chapters ('Ishrūn Maqāla)*. Études sur le judaïsme médiéval XIII, Brill, Leiden, 1989.

his philosophical work⁶, considered as a mere compilation lacking originality⁷. On the following pages, I would like firstly to focus on some aspects that highlight the above assessment and, secondly, on significant aspects of his conception of philosophy and prophecy concerning the relationship between man and the cosmos and the configuration of knowledge. I believe this second part would allow for the inclusion of the author in the philosophical tradition which analyses the conditions of the prophecy and its meaning as a channel for knowledge transfer.

1. A COMPILER AND MERELY A GREAT PHYSICIAN

It should firstly be pointed out that the previous assessment which usually appears also in the combined works does not entirely depend on the analysis of the thought of Isaac Israeli, as a number of his works have only come to us in fragments, and others simply have not been conserved. We know little about his training and nothing in the case of philosophy⁸. His style of writing and argumentation doesn't help the interpretation, either. Secondly, the majority of the research carried out dates from the era of the translation into English of his philosophical work, that is, 1958⁹. In addition to the question relating to his birth and death dates, various have been proposed for the latter (932, 953, 955-6), with a domination of the search for sources which, being absolutely necessary, has however contributed to excluding direct readings on the part of the author, as well as the exposition of original ideas¹⁰. In an

[6] Julius Guttman, *Philosophies of Judaism. A History of Jewish Philosophy from Biblical Times to Franz Rosenzweig*. Introduction by R. J. Zwi Werblowsky. Translated by David W. Silverman, Schocken Books, 1976, New York, p. 96.

[7] This is the opinion, for example, of Guttman: "Als philosophischer Schriftsteller ist Israeli ein bloßer Kompilator geblieben" (Jacob Guttman, *Die philosophischen Lehren des Isaak ben Salomon Israeli*, Aschendorffsche Verlagsbuchhandlung, Münster i. W., 1911, p. 5). And also of Isaac Husik, although he stresses that the author lacked the ambition to create a system, and underlines his main achievement as having attracted the attention of Jews towards Greek thought and science, although within an Arabic context (Isaac Husik, *A History of medieval Jewish philosophy*, The Macmillan Company, New York, 1918, p. 16). Colette Sirat refers to him as the first writer, after Philo of Alexandria, to integrate philosophical ideas extracted directly from Greek sources into Jewish thought. His thought would offer us an exposition of a Neoplatonic Jewish philosophy. She adds that the importance of Israeli is in being the first Medieval Jewish "philosopher", although his influence on later Jewish philosophers was limited (Colette Sirat, *A History of Jewish philosophy in the Middle Ages*, Cambridge University Press y La Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, Cambridge, 1977, pp. 57-58).

[8] Stern affirms that the problem would be solved if it could be assumed that the Ishāq ibn Sulaymān mentioned by Hunayn ibn Ishāq were identical to our Ishāq ibn Sulaymān. Hunayn, in a list of his translations of works by Galeno, speaks of four of his translations that were done by "Ishāq ibn Sulaymān". If it is the same person, this information could widen the perspective on Israeli's contacts with the scholars of Baghdad. But it is more likely that Ishāq ibn Sulaymān is identical to the noted Muslim of the same name who was, for a time, Governor of Egypt (S. M. Stern, "Introduction". Note 2, in A. Altmann, S. M. Stern. *Isaac Israeli: a neoplatonic philosopher of the early tenth century. His works translated with comments and an outline of his Philosophy*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1958, pp. xxi-xxii).

[9] A. Altmann, S. M. Stern. *Isaac Israeli: a neoplatonic philosopher*. In this version of Israeli's works, the participation of the researchers is distributed as follows: Stern is responsible for the biographical note and translates and comments on the *Book of Definitions*, the *Book of Substances* and the *Book on Spirit and Soul*. Altmann, the *Mantuan Text* and the passage from the *Book of the Elements*. The study of the philosophy of Israeli is carried out by Altmann. I will quote the works of Israeli in the following manner: author, title of the work, paragraph or fragment (§), number of paragraph or fragment, and page corresponding to the English version. Comments, preliminary notes, etc. by the editors will be quoted as follows: name of the comment author, title of the section in question and page.

[10] An extreme example is how Altmann explains Israeli's interest in the topic of creation out of nothing due to the influence of al-Kindī who, in turn, would have taken it from Islamic Neoplatonic authors. However,

attempt to determine these sources, a series of works has been considered, including: compilations of the *Enneads*; the short version of the so-called *Theology of Aristotle* and the fragments of the long version; the *Epistles of the Brethren of Purity* and the Pseudo-Empedoclean *Book of the Five Substances*. But these works themselves refer to diverse influences, representing rather a reference framework from the era, and some are even after Israeli. The publishers of his work into English have indicated two fundamental influences on our philosopher¹¹: al-Kindī, especially in the *Book of Definitions*, and a Neoplatonic treatise possibly attributed to Aristotle, now lost, about which we know nothing of either the author or the title¹². Another added question is the lack of further research into the direct or indirect influence of Israeli's work. He is quoted in *El fin del sabio* (*The purpose of the wise man*), an Andalusī work from the 11th century¹³. Moses ibn Ezra uses the *Book of definitions* and refers to a lost treatise by the author. His influence has also been mentioned in Josef ibn Ṣaddīq¹⁴, in Saadia Gaon, in Ibn Gabirol¹⁵ and in the circle of Jewish mystics of Gerona. In the Latin context, his work was known and had a direct influence on Domingo Gundisalvo, Albertus Magnus, Thomas Aquinas (who incorrectly attributes the theory of truth as correspondence to him), Vincent of Beauvais, Buenaventura, Roger Bacon and Nicholas of Cusa¹⁶. We also know he had Jewish and Muslim disciples¹⁷.

Thirdly, a factor to consider, not least, is the repercussion of the known letter from Maimonides to Samuel ibn Tibbon. Amongst the authors that advised against it we find Israeli, who he doesn't consider a philosopher as such. The *Book of Definitions* and the *Book of Elements* seem "unrealistic, conceited, and vain"¹⁸. According to Harvey¹⁹, the

creation out of nothing is naturally associated with Judaism, like the rest of the monotheisms (A. Altmann, "The philosophy of Isaac Israeli", in A. Altmann and S. M. Stern, *Isaac Israeli: a neoplatonic philosopher*, p. 152).

[11] "Thus for the proper understanding of the *Book of Substances*, as well as of the *Book on Spirit and Soul* and the Mantua Text, an acquaintance with Ibn Ḥasdāy is necessary" (S. M. Stern, "Comments", in A. Altmann and S. M. Stern, *Isaac Israeli: a neoplatonic philosopher*, p. 96).

[12] Stern calls it Ibn Ḥasdāy's Neoplatonist and attempts to reconstruct the treatise in a 1960 work published in the magazine *Oriens*: S. M. Stern, "Ibn Ḥasdāy's, Neoplatonist. A Neoplatonism Treatise and its influence on I. Israeli and the longer version of the Theology of Aristotle", in *Oriens* 13, (1960-1961), pp. 58-120.

[13] Cf. S. M. Stern, "Biographical Note", in A. Altmann and S. M. Stern, *Isaac Israeli: a neoplatonic philosopher*, pp. xii-xiv.

[14] In relation to this influence Stern asserts: "The eschatology of Israeli (combined with elements derived from other sources) recurs in the *Microcosm* of Joseph ibn Ṣaddīq" (S. M. Stern, "Comments". Note I, in A. Altmann and S. M. Stern, *Isaac Israeli: a neoplatonic philosopher*, p. 117).

[15] "How far Solomon ibn Gabirol, the greatest among the Jewish Neoplatonists, is indebted to Israeli is a question which still requires detailed investigation" (S. M. Stern, "Biographical Note", in A. Altmann and S. M. Stern, *Isaac Israeli: a neoplatonic philosopher*, p. 152). Fried refers to the philosophy within Judaism and a significant number of authors, apart from those mentioned, which Israeli would have influenced: Sabbatai Donnolo, the first doctor and philosopher in the west to write in Hebrew, Ibn Paqūda, Yēhūdāh ben Šemu'el ha-Levi and Abraham ibn Daud (Salomon Fried, *Das Buch über die Elemente*, pp. 55-75).

[16] Jacob Guttman, *Die philosophischen Lehren*.

[17] Israeli's disciples were the Muslim Ibn al-Jazzār, Abū Ja'far Ahmad ibn Ibrāhīm ibn Abī Khālid, the author of a manual of medicine translated by Constantine the African as *Viaticum peregrinantis*, and the Jew, Dūnaš ibn Tamīm. The latter would have succeeded him as court physician. According to Fried, Dūnaš ibn Tamīm didn't practice medicine, rather he studied philosophy, astronomy, mathematics and exegesis with Israeli (Salomon Fried, *Das Buch über die Elemente*, p. 20).

[18] "...the *Sefer ha-gebulim* (*Book of Definitions*) and the *Sefer ha-yesodot* (*Book of Elements*) composed by Isaac Israeli, are equally unrealistic, conceited and vain, because Isaac Israeli was also [previously, Abū Bakr al-Rāzī's was also referred to in the same sense] just a doctor (...) (Carlos del Valle (ed.), *Letters and testimony of Maimonides (1138-1204)*. III Letter of R. Shemuel Ibn Tibbón, Publicaciones del Monte de Piedad y Caja de Ahorros de Córdoba, Córdoba, 1989, p. 34).

recommendations of the philosopher from Cordoba were decisive when deciding that he was worthy of being studied and, above all, translated. Luckily, the *Book of Definitions* had previously been translated and in the 13th century, David Qimhī, a famous biblical commentator, asks ibn Ḥasdāy to translate the *Book of Elements*, who for his part laments that the philosophy of Israeli has been forgotten amongst Jews who don't speak Arabic. In Harvey's opinion, ibn Ḥasdāy's circle would represent a work programme and a conception of knowledge favourable to Neoplatonism. This was the framework and the horizon for the Jewish intellectuals of the 11th and 12th centuries²⁰, capable of bringing together a great variety of components and of conciliating the two great Greek philosophers with monotheism. Samuel ibn Tibbon, on the contrary, shared Maimonides' guidelines, which furthermore ended up triumphing: translation of Aristotelian work, of his commentators and of works of mathematics, astronomy and medicine²¹.

Furthermore, apart from the pretension of originality not being a value in the period and, even less so, an objective, we also face one of the typical criticisms of medieval philosophy in general²²: its eclectic condition of transmission and repetition as regards the Greek contributions. Along the line of a similar assessment, but in this case of classical Arabic philosophy, the now disappeared Moroccan philosopher, al-Yabri, proposed a change in the study of this line of thinking motivated by both "methodological imperative", and by the demand itself for the "reality of philosophical thought in the Islamic world"²³. This methodological change, based on effective, and not on projected or demanded history, would consist in analysing Arabic philosophy firstly from its own contemporaneity, as the perspective adopted up to this point - impose a past and some unrelated cultural keys upon it - could do nothing other than distort it, such as has occurred, and lead to the conclusion that, in effect, Arabic philosophy has been a copy, or even a bad copy, of Greek philosophy²⁴. To

[19] Steven Harvey, "Did Maimonides' letter to Samuel ibn Tibbon determine which philosophers would be studied by later Jewish thinkers?", in *The Jewish Quarterly Review*. Vol. LXXXIII (july-october 1992), pp. 56-57.

[20] Tamar M., Rudavsky, "Medieval Jewish Neoplatonism", in Daniel H., Frank and Oliver Leaman (eds.), *Routledge History of World Philosophies*. Vol. II: *History of Jewish Philosophy*, Routledge Press, London and New York, 1974, p. 149. Colette Sirat, *A History of Jewish philosophy*, p. 57.

[21] "This meant a seemingly concerted effort to translate the entire Aristotelian corpus, or more precisely, all the Averroean commentaries on Aristotle and some commentaries of Alexander of Aphrodisias and Themistius, ancillary writings of the Muslim Aristotelians- especially al-Fārābī and Averroes- and the most important texts on mathematics, astronomy, and medicine. This agenda, which I have suggested was somehow defined by Maimonides' letter to Ibn Tibbon, afforded little time for the luxury of translating "optional reading", such as the Neoplatonic writings" (Steven Harvey, "Did Maimonides' letter to Samuel ibn Tibbon", pp. 65-66).

[22] The possible utility of the texts of the Jewish thinkers is still added to this critique for discovering the intellectual scene of his era, or to complete the knowledge, but of other authors: "The Jewish thinkers, though not remarkable for the originality of their ideas, introduce us to the intellectual climate of their age, and its possible that quotations from unknown authors occasionally occur in their works" (Colette Sirat, *A History of Jewish philosophy*, p. 57).

[23] Mohamed Abed Yabri, *El legado filosófico árabe: Alfarabi, Avicena, Avempace, Averroes, Abenjaldún: Lecturas contemporáneas*, Trotta, Madrid, 2006, p. 42.

[24] It is excessive to indicate the intrinsic diversity of Greek knowledge, and other sometimes forgotten aspects of it: "Neither the Greeks or those from the Middle East ever knew the limits between Europe and the East, between the West and the Middle East. Our great culture is born and matures in this unitary corner without borders, which is Egypt, Babylon, Persia, Greece. (...) The great philosophy and science, upon which we boast of basing our rationalism and culture, are not born on the Hellenic Peninsula, but the Colonies of Asia Minor (...). And it will be necessary to wait for Socrates for the first Athenian philosopher. And it must be taken into account that all of these colonies had been Persian cities until very recently (up to 500 BC, more or

this end, Al-Yabri indicated the need to distinguish between what he calls the *cognitive component* and *ideological content*²⁵ of a work or a thought. The cognitive component is comprised of the materials with which the work or thought is formed (concepts, for example). The ideological content is the socio-political function of such materials, or in other words, their application, to which the philosopher or the work in question has wished to respond, to which challenge or problem they were attempting to overcome. The key is in the fact that it is not necessary for both aspects, the cognitive and the ideological, to coincide, as a single material can be used for very different ends, in the same way as we erect very different buildings with the same construction materials. Taking this methodological approach into account, according to Yabri, the Islamic philosophers would not have been interested in developing the inherited cognitive material, that which they take from the Greeks, rather in using it according to the needs of their social and political context²⁶. As Lomba indicates, they didn't read the Greeks to transfer their thought to anyone, rather for their own scientific interest, and to enrich their culture. The ideological (socio-political) function "is only revealed attending to their thought itself"²⁷, even considering that which it was aimed at. The fact is that we would be facing the same situation, the same philosophical path, the same conception of what philosophy was in the Hellenist and Medieval Christian period: "*The cognitive material employed in philosophical thought remained unaltered: it only changed the way in which this material was ideologically exploited*"²⁸, and this just means, what was it used for, and for what purpose? In classical Arabic philosophy, which is the objective of al-Yabri's reflection, we would then be facing a thought in action and a militant discourse:

"Muslim philosophers were interested in religion being accepted by reason and reason legitimated in the eyes of religion, and not to approach unexplored horizons from new grounds. This made Islamic philosophy into a continuous ideological discourse (...) What Islamic philosophy contributes as new should be sought not in the group of knowledge that it caused to flourish and disseminated, but in the ideological function that each philosopher attributed to this knowledge"²⁹.

And in each one of the authors analysed by Yabri, he indicates how and why philosophy has been an "ideological and militant discourse committed to science, development and progress"³⁰. In reality, what the Moroccan philosopher proposes to us is merely to be an honest reader, an interpreter who by reading does justice to the text tackled and is capable of articulating hermeneutics not only from critique and suspecting but from listening, as Paul Ricoeur says. I believe that in the case of Isaac Israeli, we would then need consider researching the ideological content, the objective of the works of our author, including his concept of Neoplatonism: a metaphysics of light and shadow, the conciliation of the emanation of the revelation and a conception of evil distinct from privation and identification with the material, and with a theory of the causality that models *ex nihilo* creation and includes a naturalist explanation of the sublunary world, not exempt from hints of mysticism. In addition, the interest of the Neoplatonic system for Fatimid Islam is not

less), with the Persian border then being few kilometres from these centres" (Joaquín Lomba, "The agonies of 'eurocentrism' ", in *Éndoxa: Series Filosóficas* 12 (2000), pp. 82-83).

[25] Mohamed Abed Yabri, *El legado filosófico árabe*, p. 41.

[26] Joaquín Lomba, "The agonies of 'eurocentrism' ", p. 13.

[27] Mohamed Abed Yabri, *El legado filosófico árabe*, p. 42.

[28] Mohamed Abed Yabri, *El legado filosófico árabe*, p. 45.

[29] Mohamed Abed Yabri, *El legado filosófico árabe*, pp. 45-46.

[30] Mohamed Abed Yabri, *El legado filosófico árabe*, p. 48.

excluded, as according to some sources Israeli wrote his treatises³¹ at the behest of the governor. We are also in the dark about the possible teaching activity of the philosopher. Maybe some of his works have this purpose. Furthermore, the contribution of Israeli should also be assessed in light of his work as a pioneer:

“It may be that this lack of originality is, to some extent, inherent in his status as the man who introduced philosophy and science into his cultural circle, where it was too early to generate new ideas”³².

It is not possible to reject the philosophical framework that dominates his medical production, either:

“Regarding *Book on Fevers* specifically and the aspects of the work analysed here, it is apparent that Isaac Israeli considered the first treatise a work of philosophy and saw the rest as a medical text. By combining them in a single work, Israeli made it clear – and with more conviction than later authors – that medicine was a skill rooted in philosophy and based on philosophy, and he expressed that distinctly in his classification of the science”³³.

We must not forget, either, that in recommendation 14 of his *Propaedeutics for Physicians*, it affirms that the doctor must establish the foundations of his science in natural philosophy and to this end it was essential to refer to the scientific framework and the intellectual horizon of the era: Neoplatonism. All of these questions rest importance from the first, and most partial assessment of the author.

2. PHILOSOPHY AND ITS DISCOURSE

It is not my intention to offer a solution to what would be the ideological content of the philosophical works of Israeli. It is not possible taking into account the conserved texts and the secondary information available to us today. But I do believe that indications can be made separately from this problem, highlighting some aspects of his idea of philosophy in relation to his method and prediction. The philosophical works that have come to use, partially in some cases, are: the *Book of Definitions*, the *Book of Substances*, the *Book on Spirit and Soul*, the *Chapter on the Elements* or *Mantuan Text*, and the *Book of the Elements*. The sources also attribute a work on metaphysics (*Garden of Wisdom*) and an introduction to logic. According to Ibn Ġulġul, Israeli would have been a doctor with a gift for the word and familiarised with the art of discourse. Stern interprets this detail as an allusion to the style of his medical documents. Perhaps he also refers to some of Israeli’s professional profile features when treating patients, to his communication skills. Šāid states that he was an expert in logic and a scholar in all branches of knowledge, maybe interpreting the allusion of Ibn Ġulġul to Israeli’s gift for speaking. Israeli’s *Propaedeutics for Physicians* reveals his appreciation for logic. In recommendation number 14, as we have pointed out above, it refers to the need of a doctor not just to know all the books written on medicine, but to also understand this in relation to the foundations of natural science. These foundations point to the demand for building a philosophy of nature that Israeli based on a conception of reality. He was able to find the information for it not just from Muslim authors, but other philosophers, and even in medical texts. To this he adds that the doctor must be able to manage the rules of logic, as an instrument for preserving the profession by unmasking false physicians:

[31] S. M. Stern, in A. Altmann and S. M. Stern, *Isaac Israeli: a neoplatonic philosopher*, p. xx.

[32] Lola Ferre, “Medicine through a Philosophical Lens: Treatise of Isaac Israeli’ *Books on Fevers*”, p. 111. (In press).

[33] Lola Ferre, “Medicine through a Philosophical Lens”, p. 128.

“Just as you need to read all the books composed on the art of medicine, so you will need to understand their contents in terms of the fundamentals of natural science, because medicine stems from it, and also become proficient in the rules of logic, so that you will be wise in refuting the ignoramuses who walk in the guise of physician, and frighten them from before you, and they shall fear you”³⁴.

In addition, in his texts the figure of dialectic and its discourse also appears, sometimes explicitly and sometimes implicitly, coming to be the answer to some of his questions, which is the motive that is even the origin of some of Israeli's texts.

It is in the *Book of Definitions* where he tackles the statute of philosophy to respond to those who criticise that there is more than one definition. According to Israeli, philosophy cannot be defined, because the definition is made up of genre and specific difference, and philosophy doesn't belong to any genre³⁵. But it can be described according to name, property or effects, coinciding with the methodology that should govern all research³⁶ (whether or not something exists, what it is, what its qualities are and what its purpose is). The different descriptions would be, then, aspects distinct from philosophy: love of wisdom; assimilating, according to human capacity, not God but the actions of the Creator, and man's self-knowledge. He who wishes to acquire true knowledge of himself, of his corporeality and spirituality, has come to know the existing realities and with this, the universe, and because of this, man is a microcosmos. His purpose is to investigate with his reason to understand the truth of things and act according to this knowledge, with justice and rectitude, pursuing good and avoiding evil. In this way he will merit the reward of his Creator: the union which constitutes the form of the intellect, wisdom. He who achieves this type of perfection is worthy of calling himself “philosopher”.

Philosophy is, then, maximum knowledge and also maximum dedication, as it perfects man and puts wisdom within his reach. In this respect the scarce presence of Judaism on this matter, and the work of Israeli in general, is surprising. He doesn't base his argumentation on his faith, and doesn't enter into theological questions or deal with the basis of the precepts, as for example Maimonides will do later. His monotheism is inserted into the Neoplatonic system, a metaphysics of light and a philosophy of nature, a physics, and transcends the ascribing to a specific faith, as he also writes in Arabic.

The sources note that, upon being questioned why he had no children, Israeli responded that his books would grant him the recognition and fame that no child could obtain for him. And amongst these books he alluded to the *Book of Elements*³⁷, a text of philosophy that includes an excursus on the double discourse of the ancients and in which the topic of prophecy appears. Hippocrates and Galen would have followed this methodology, that of double discourse, attributing it to the philosophers, who would use it in the face of the intellectual and moral diversity of man. The first level would be the common man, impetuous and of hard understanding; the second - in which the true message would be - would be for the philosophers: it is aimed at the intellect and demands training,

[34] Ariel Bar-Sela, “Isaac Israeli's fifty admonitions to the physicians”, in *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences*, 17:2 (1962:Apr.) p. 253.

[35] In *Topics* I, 4, 108 to 31, Aristotle defines genre as that which predicates essentially from many that differ specifically. Every substance implies an essence. Essence is the group of the fundamental notes of a thing. Such notes will be genre and difference. Genre is the undetermined part, but which can be determined, from essence. The difference is that which distinguishes one thing from another, but starting from a common shared base.

[36] In the *Book on Fevers*, he also applies them to medicine, which suggests that the philosophical methodology is the usual research method in all fields of knowledge.

[37] A. Altmann and S. M Stern, *Isaac Israeli: a neoplatonic philosopher*, p. xix.

investigation and effort³⁸. The development of this idea later gives rise to another double discourse that will end up imposing itself against that of the levels of philosophy: the difference between philosophy, which speaks to the elite, and religion, which speaks to the people. And we will find its development at least until the 19th century in an author such as Arthur Schopenhauer who already starts out from an atheist paradigm, and for whom the concept of revelation already has other connotations³⁹.

Returning to Israeli, he provides, however, an additional reason on double discourse: philosophers imitate the working of the intellect. In modern words, Israeli would be saying that they imitate the way in which the brain processes information. According to our author, the information of the senses, especially vision, passes through common sense and then fantasy, situated in the anterior ventricle of the brain. This transforms matter into intermediate representations between the sentient and the abstract. At this level a basic understanding, an initial pre-reflexive assimilation, would take place. Thus, once the information is captured, and only then, will it be possible to extract its intelligible or spiritual meaning, again via images, of analogy and allegory, as *“the shape of something corporal and communicated by the senses is better printed on the anterior ventricle of the brain, due to its proximity to the corporal sense”*⁴⁰. From one moment to the other representations, images are fundamental.

But in turn, the intellect imitates revelation. The prophet is the intermediary between the Creator and his creatures, as the intellect is between God and the soul. Part of the prophet's message will be evident, but another part will need interpretation. To this end, God transmits a message to some in an unequivocal form in order for them to interpret it and be teachers to those who cannot understand. However, the prophet appears in the work of Israeli as a trustee of the revelation and as a receiver of the Book, but not as an interpreter or educator of man. Interpreters are the moral teachers and researchers of truth⁴¹, the philosophers, who also know how the intellect works. Philosophy, as he put forward in the *Book of Definitions*, imitates the acts of God; in this case it is revelation. Israeli supposes that prophets and philosophers achieve the same knowledge, which deals with both figures and leaves their differences and the need for religion in the air, which in an author such as Alfarabi will be better for the people. But he also lets us see that, although all men are obliged to search for and examine the truth, and he himself inclines towards philosophy, the objective is to sustain a dialogue, which calls together everyone, to clarify the truth⁴² and put it into practice.

[38] This double discourse thesis will repeat itself throughout the history of philosophy. It appears in the Arabic context, for example, in Alfarabi, in Avicena, in Averroes, but also - now in a secularised context - in an author such as Schopenhauer in relation to the usefulness of philosophy and religion to respond to the metaphysical necessity.

[39] “There is no more revelation than the thoughts of the wise; although, in accordance with the destiny of all that is human, these thoughts are subject to error and are often sheathed in astonishing allegories and myths, and so they are called religions. Therefore, at this level it is not important if one lives and dies trusting in one's own thoughts or other thoughts, as one always trusts in simple human thoughts and opinions. Notwithstanding this, men normally have the weakness of trusting more in others who claim to have supernatural sources than in their own mind. But faced with the enormous intellectual inequality between man and man, we could easily consider that the thoughts of one are to a certain extent like revelations to another (Arthur Schopenhauer, *Parerga and Paralipomena* II. “On Religion”. Translation, introduction and notes by Pilar López de Santamaría, Trotta, Madrid, 2009, p. 374.

[40] An excerpt from the *Book on the elements*, pp. 134-5.

[41] I. Israeli, An excerpt, p. 140.

[42] I. Israeli, *The Mantua Text*, § 6, p. 125.

David Shatz has pointed out that the theory of prophecy is a window into Medieval epistemology which, in turn is founded on Medieval metaphysics. As Altmann indicates, Israeli does not expound a developed theory on prophecy. References in this regard, Neoplatonic in nature, appear in the *Book of Definitions*, in the second chapter of the *Book of Elements*, and in the three types of prophecy established by his disciple Dūnash ibn Tamīm in his commentary in the *Book of Creation* which we suppose come from a distinction already made by his teacher⁴³. In the case of the disciple the three types refer to: prophecy through a voice created by God and heard by the individual; the prophetic vision or dream, which would be a higher level; and the highest level, which would be that reached by Moses. Israeli's disciple understands it as an ecstatic experience, a mystic union, being in the case of Israeli specified as inspiration or possession through which the soul of the prophet becomes the body of God⁴⁴. Also according to Altmann, in this context, prophecy, there wouldn't be a difference for Israeli between the philosopher and the prophet:

“There is no sharp dividing line between prophet and philosopher. Both share in the common task of guiding mankind towards the same goal: both are concerned with the ascent of the soul, its liberation from the bondage of matter, and its eventual union with the supernal Light”⁴⁵.

The difference between both, between philosophers and prophets, will initially reside in the process. In the case of prophets they do not require advanced training, or investigation, reflection, time or effort, as it is a divine gift. Israeli underlines how philosophers - with their double discourse method - consciously imitate how the intellect works when processing information, that is, they base themselves on their theorisation on the working of knowledge. In addition, he even indicates a cerebral location for the capacity to create images. We can also point out here a certain intention to develop a deep naturalist approach, to the extent that the aim is to articulate a rational explanation based on natural causes, on human faculties. We could even say that Israeli would form part of the prehistory of which is today still a very emerging field in philosophy, or rather interdisciplinary: that of neurophilosophy or, moreover, neurotheology.

And more. Beyond the prophetic aspect, Israeli points to a special logic, based on the capacity to argue evoking images, a universal channel that facilitates the understanding of a complex idea or promotes the carrying out of an action. With this he furthermore brings the philosophical discourse closer to other spheres to which he has traditionally been opposed. In this sense, our author would form part of a long tradition in which philosophy converges, to a certain degree, with inspiration and artistic creation. In the analysis of his work the importance of al-Kindi has been highlighted, but especially in relation to the *Book of Definitions*. However, it is also worth exploring the harmony with the Alfarabi position as regards the relationship between philosophy and religion. López Farjeat has referred to one of the achievements of this tradition, the contemporary of Israeli, Alfarabi, and to his interest – following the thread of the *Poetic-* in poetic reasoning: a deduction, image, intuition with the same strength as an analogy. Poetic discourse⁴⁶ does not operate with evident premises. It

[43] Altmann, “The role of prophecy”, in A. Altmann and S. M Stern, *Isaac Israeli: a neoplatonic philosopher* p. 209.

[44] Altmann, “The role of prophecy”, p. 215.

[45] Altmann, “The role of prophecy”, p. 209.

[46] “Poetic discourse consists of similes and comparisons, whose rational meaning we analyse by showing that they are the conclusions of a kind of syllogism –of argument by example- that has an imaginative universal or particular as its main premise and the first figure syllogism as its ultimate form (...) Imagination constructs

pursues representation and the suggestion of something, an idea, an action, through an image that makes us comprehend, but also leads us to act. For the non-reflexive person, understanding through images sometimes causes reflection. For the reflexive person it is also useful – if not necessary –, as “imaginative suggestion precedes his reflection” and accelerates his action. The imagination imitates: “*It is capable of searching for new images to create representations of the unknowable via a sensitive path*”⁴⁷.

As Pérez Gandía has also indicated, the theorisation that Alfarabi carries out on the wisdom of the prophets, a topic also of great interest to the rest of the Arabic philosophers of the classical era, leads him to

“expand on the logic of Aristotle with rhetoric (through which the truths are made accessible to all) and the poetic (which allows the suggestion, through images and metaphors, of the ultimate metaphysical truths)”⁴⁸.

The hypothesis of Paredes Gandía is that

“one of the sources of these ‘such European’ ideas, that attempt to define the role of religion in a lay state and a secular society, would be in the Muslim philosophers, which they would transmit, via Maimonides, to Spinoza, going from him to German idealism”⁴⁹.

What we sustain is that in our author we would have, in this sense, one of the milestones of the process.

In all of these contexts, prophecy would not consist as much in anticipating the future as in “bringing a message of a higher order or reality to a specific human collective”, as indicated today by Seyyed Hossein Nasr. And it is not always an order that is legal, ethical or of spiritual significance. It can also be sapiential or a message from another level of the conscious⁵⁰ as occurs in knowledge through images. Furthermore, and following the thread of prophecy, Israeli tends to explain, as do so many authors, the origin of knowledge as a divine gift. What he calls “intellectual precepts”, the laws of reason, he presents as an example of prophetic emanation. It will be centuries before they are situated in the subject and his authorship is recognised. An important fact is the gradual tendency, in the field of Arabic philosophy, not just to be interested in the whole process of knowledge, but to interpret the different intellects as stages of a unitary and internal process.

Another important contribution is that of ibn Paquda, a Jewish philosopher from Zaragoza in the 11th century. The tension between the philosopher and the man of religion is

the associated representations which are present in examples. Therefore, first, the resulting statement can never be actual but must be only potential; and, second, because it is only an association of particulars, it cannot be strictly deductive and based on universal premises but must succeed only on the basis of representations. Yet, third, because the subject must understand the associations in order to acquiesce to their meanings, the statement is categorical and its inferential structure «has the force of a syllogism»” (Salim Kemal, *The Philosophical Poetics of Alfarabi, Avicenna and Averroës. The Aristotelian Reception*, Routledge, London and New York, 2010, p. 62).

[47] Luis Xavier López Farjeat, “El silogismo poético y la imaginación en Alfarabi”, in *Tópicos*, 10 (2000), p. 108.

[48] José Antonio Paredes Gandía. Introduction to Abu Nasr Al-Farabi, *The Book of Letters. The origin of words, philosophy and religion*. Trotta, Madrid, 2004, p. 29.

[49] José Antonio Paredes Gandía, Introduction to Abu Nasr Al-Farabi, p. 36. “The philosophical origin of Europe would be, then, in its capacity to distinguish reason and faith, world and spirit, Church and State, having received the first impulse behind this distinction of the Muslim thinkers, although the solutions ended up being original from the Christian world (Introduction to Abu Nasr Al-Farabi, p. 37).

[50] Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Islamic philosophy from its origin to the present: philosophy in the land of prophecy*, State University of New York Press, New York, 2006, pp. 1-9.

renewed in *The Duties of the Heart*, which seems to be a text of exclusively pious reading. It calls intellectual precepts “duties of the heart”. They are principles and foundations, conditions of possibility, practical and theoretical in nature. They always oblige us, “while we have use of reason”. Ibn Paquda indicates that it is necessary to bring them into the light, tackle their reconstruction, his “science of the duties of the heart” being more an exercise of transcendental reflection not carried out up to now. The path of reason, which for him is also wider than the strictly logical, is the obligatory one where it is possible⁵¹, as along it are the most noble gifts awarded to man⁵². And only he who follows his reason can have self-determination. In fact, the only ones who would understand religion (its concepts, its foundations) are the prophet and the philosopher. The rest - he comes to say - adore something that is not God⁵³. But only in the philosopher would the desired correspondence be given between the internal principles and the actions. The problem is that the notion of God that philosophers subscribe to, and which Ibn Paquda shares, is “pure solitude separated from everything; individuality which completely excludes anything similar and communion”⁵⁴. But not just this: Paquda has no problem in recognising that in reality philosophy does not offer a conclusive answer for everything it deals with, including the science of duties of the heart itself⁵⁵. And however, the knowledge of the philosopher is inspired⁵⁶, and as long as it doesn’t go against the foundations of faith (and the author does not specify more on this), a philosopher can and must continue with his reflections⁵⁷. Moreover, to paraphrase the *Ecclesiastes* about the wise: their words are a healthy stimulus because they rouse: they endure in the soul like hard nails, and always have something to say to us. In any case, he who is truly prepared for investigating the science of the heart is the philosopher.

3. PROPHETS OR PHILOSOPHERS?

We at least know because of one letter that Maimonides knew the work of Ibn Paquda and because of another that he didn't appreciate Israeli's *Book of Elements*. And in some way the *Guide for the Perplexed* will respond to both. It will attempt to dilute the tension between philosophy and religion, rationalising Judaism. The fight against the perplexity of the heart runs through the *Guide for the Perplexed*. Maimonides is concerned about the anthropomorphism of religious language but defends its use for the masses, that nothing can be conceived if it is not based on corporeality, although deep knowledge should be in any case vetoed for the uneducated and must even not be completely revealed to just any wise man. Nevertheless, he does not comment on Israeli's interest in the potent meaning

[51] Ibn Paquda, *Los deberes de los corazones*, Fundación Universitaria Española, Madrid, 1994, p. 14.

[52] Ibn Paquda, *Los deberes*, p. 3.

[53] Ibn Paquda, *Los deberes*, p. 29.

[54] Ibn Paquda, *Los deberes*, p. 41. ‘God is for us and for his very essence the most hidden of the hidden and the furthest that there can be (...). If you wish to reach his essence or compare it with anything created his existence will fade from us (Ibn Paquda, *Los deberes*, p. 57).

‘despite his Neoplatonic concept of the unity of God (...) Bahya did not attempt to bridge the gap between God and reason by means of ascetic contemplation. Nor did accept a sphere of psychic intermediaries between God and man’ (Ibn Paquda, *The Book of Direction to the Duties of the Heart (from the original Arabic version of Bahya Ben Joseph Ibn Paquda's al-Hidāya ilā Fara'id al-Qulūb)*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1973, p.8).

[55] Ibn Paquda, *Los deberes*, p. 51.

[56] Ibn Paquda, *Los deberes*, p. 109.

[57] Ibn Paquda does not subscribe to the reservations for example of Maimonides regarding the teaching of physics and metaphysics.

of images in philosophical discourse, despite the importance of imagination in his analysis of prophecy.

Furthermore, in chapters 32 to 47 of the second part of the *Guide* and the end of the third part we come across a theory of prophecy to return the primacy to the prophet. He defines the prophet as an emanation of God through the active intellect initially on the first rational faculty and then on the imaginative faculty. This acquires prominence, for example, during sleep, when it is not occupied with the transformation of information from the senses. Thus, there is a sudden chance of inspiration common to this and to prophecy. It is the highest degree of perception to which man can aspire and requires a series of conditions: perfection of the moral and rational qualities of the imagination, and a constant orientation of the individual towards knowledge.

According to Maimonides, this divine emanation is rationality, that which allows us to think. And to that depends the individual superiority of our intelligences. If the emanation occurs only on the rational faculty, due to its scarcity or a defect of the imaginative faculty, we have speculative sages. If the emanation occurs in both faculties, we have prophets. If it only happens with the imagination, we have statisticians and legislators, next to miracle-workers and frauds. Furthermore, sometimes the emanation reaches an individual in such excess that it allows him to create works and teach. Without it there would be no scientific books, and prophets wouldn't be concerned with Humanity. But Maimonides always adds a requisite: the prophet must be chosen by God. Only Moses would have been a prophet par excellence, because the active intellect emanated on him directly, without intervening in the imagination.

With regard to the above reflection on prophecy, Maimonides specifies what love of God consists in, the objective of the believer but also of the “science of the duties of the heart” and of philosophy in Israeli. The love of God would go further than the fulfilment of precepts, of the knowledge of the intelligible and even of virtue. But this aspiration, this passion, faces a great hurdle linked to the total heterogeneity of the object of love and which is emphatically expressed: “Your thoughts are not my thoughts, nor are my paths your paths”, that is, to the insurmountable abyss between God and Man. Despite this, in the scene of Sinai, although God denies Moses, the perfect prophet, the knowledge of his essence, He promises to show him his “back” understood as such to be his footprints on the world, with which it would be possible to imitate His behaviour. As Maimonides points out in the same text, according to Jeremiah, that which can glorify man is to know the acts of God, who would have said: “I am Yhwhm, and I act with compassion, justice and righteousness on the earth”. Imitating God would be to know and follow this model: His benevolence, justice and equity. And to this moral orientation another would accompany it in politics: “He who governs a State, if a prophet, must accommodate these attributes”. The three *middot* must be the principles of his political action, such as Moses himself decided to govern his people. *Middot* mean “characteristics and nearly all of them allude to God's compassion. The script limits them to 13 because they are those relating to the government of men. To imitate God, actions must emanate from the leader “in accordance with moderation and justice”, not from outbursts of passion. There must not, then, be emotional involvement, rather, “because it follows to do so”, and “considering the great utility” for the masses. In this imitation - dispassionate as it is divine - and which would guide the moral and the political, constant thought is focused on God to such an extent that Maimonides began classifying it as passion. We have the situation, then, where the tension between religion and philosophy is resolved in the imitation of the attributes of God's action. And here would be the ultimate indication

for the perplexed, the deepest principle of the worship of the heart and also the final fulfilment of “Hear, O Israel”. He has Moses, the Prophet, as a model. Centuries later, an author such as Spinoza will end up encapsulating in it, in charity and justice, the most important message of the Scriptures and in the common goal of all men, believers or not, and in a free State⁵⁸.

Ibn Paquda and Israeli ended up establishing the model in the philosopher, also perplexed in the first case, as I have indicated, and in the second, that of Israeli, to a certain point artistic, for his work with images, in essence a literary and creative resource not exempt from scientific knowledge, in the era of the psychology of the soul. In both cases, in Ibn Paquda and in Israeli, both the philosopher and the philosopher with artistic qualities are merely men, humans. In the case of Maimonides, it shouldn't be forgotten that God lacks what we would call our moral qualities, although “He carries out actions similar to those that in ourselves originate from them”. His attributes of action are attributes *indicative of* a perfection, but by analogy with the model that is essentially behind although not because of this it stops being valuable, extremely valuable: that which *humanity* has considered as ideals of perfection.

CONCLUSION

The scarce information available on the life of Israeli, the total lack of details on his training and the texts that have reached us, not all of which are mentioned in the sources and some of them being incomplete, do not allow us to make an exact assessment, and less so definitive, of his work. In addition, the author's style, sometimes allusive, completely unsystematic, and basically imprecise, together with the use he makes of the language and the Neoplatonic topics and philosophemes, are an added difficulty for getting close to and characterising his thought. This has been approached, above all, from the point of view of his possible sources and has been characterised as a reading within the context of Neoplatonism and, in essence, is eclectic and lacks originality.

Isaac Israeli, for his part, considered that his philosophical work, especially the ideas developed in the *Book of Elements*, was also worthy of later recognition and he entrusted his memory to it. Whether this anecdote is real or not, an attentive reading of the philosophical texts that have reached us does not reveal a mere eclectic or compiler. The texts reveal a physician with a global conception of knowledge, of the search for a basis for medicine via the philosophy of nature and Neoplatonic and Aristotelian metaphysics. But they also reveal a philosopher who participates in the great debates of his time: the relationship between philosophy and revelation and the nature of the human intellect. For both debates, however, he lacked both the Jewish precedents and vocabulary in Arabic, which makes his contribution more valuable, meagre as it may be. But the most outstanding feature of Israeli's entire project is that, more than a Jewish author, he appears as a thinker who incorporates Greek thought and tries to conciliate it with monotheism. And the latter, monotheism, is perhaps the most important, in the sense that in his thinking he overcomes adherence to a specific faith, and could even be called a philosopher of the three cultures. Not in vain does he state that all men have the obligation to seek the truth, especially the most intellectually gifted; that philosophers, prophets and the wise must do it with dialogue amongst themselves and with others; and that the truth must be put into practice.

[⁵⁸] Spinoza, *Tratado teológico-político* [Theological-Political Treatise]. Translation, introduction, notes and indices by Atilano Domínguez. Alianza Editorial, Madrid, 2012, pp. 70, 316-317, 391.

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What can modern theologians learn from Origen's School in Caesarea?

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ABSTRACT

Early Christianity could enumerate only a very limited number of higher educational institutions. One of the best known is Origen's "academy" in Caesarea (Palestine). Gregory the Wonderworker wrote a speech of praise, 'Oratio panegyrica', to his professor when leaving the school after many years of study. The speech illustrates a number of interesting facts about the professor, the students, and the curriculum. The low number of students made it possible to achieve a very close relationship between the teaching staff and the students. The teacher was very much a spiritual father and a friend. Gregory thought that Origen was an example of a godlike person, and thus also an example to be followed. The likeness of God consisted first of all in likeness with God's Logos. A person living in accordance with reason lives the life of God. The students participating in the tuition provided by Origen came from respectable classes of the society. Both men and women could participate, both young and grown-up people. Many can be classified as seekers, that is, persons looking for an intellectually acceptable world-view.

Keywords: Origen of Alexandria; Gregory the Wonderworker; Plotinus the Platonist; Biblical hermeneutics; imago Dei;

INTRODUCTION

The Christianization of millions of former pagans constitutes the greatest miracle in the history of the Early Church. Within a relatively short time people who worshipped pagan gods learned to cite the Creed, to pray the Lord's Prayer, and to recall central parts of Biblical history. This miracle within the realm of religious education may never get a satisfactory scholarly explanation. *Pax Romana*, good communications, and the dominance of the Latin and Greek languages provide only an unsatisfactory explanation: all other religions and ideologies were promoted by the same conditions. The efficiency of the catechumenate with its baptismal teaching is one of the best explanations. But in the Early Church there were also schools, providing advanced teaching in Christian faith. In the second century, Justin the Martyr ran one of them in Rome. Conversion to Christianity was not an obligatory element in the curriculum, but from the trustworthy tract called *The Martyrdom of St. Justin* we learn that Justin's students did follow their teacher even into martyrdom. In Egypt, Alexandria, there was a famous "catechetical school". Modern scholars disagree regarding the nature and status of this school; therefore it is not easy to tell much about it. But we do know a lot about the Christian school that existed in Caesarea, in

Palestine, in the early third century, a school founded by Origen of Alexandria. This school is better known than the Alexandrian school and the other schools within the Empire also, for that matter, since a written description remains: that of Gregorius Thaumaturgus from about 240 A.D. This speech, called *Oratio panegyrica*, is a speech of thanks delivered by a former student to the professor.¹ A panegyric address should not be believed uncritically in all its details, but even so it provides a lot of information how a Christian institution for higher education was run in those days.

After five years of study Gregory was leaving the school and wished to take farewell.² The speech shows that Origen's spiritual academy was highly successful - therefore we can expect to learn something from it! Gregory's description is of course not normative for all times in the future: we need not accept everything. But we can learn, either by accepting the useful characteristics of the school, or take warning from other features that we do not wish to copy to our modern theological schools.

It so happens that another speech by a student to his teacher was held perhaps even in the same year: the encomium speech of the philosopher Porphyry (Porfyrios) to his teacher Plotinus, the famous Neoplatonist.³

Porphyry, too, describes the teacher and the teaching. A comparison between this secular "university" with Origen's Christian counterpart is therefore possible to make: was there any difference? May be there is something to be learned from Porphyry, too? However, in this short presentation it will not be possible to treat Plotinus' school extensively.

1. THE PROFESSOR

We are not told how many teachers there were at Origen's Spiritual Academy in Caesarea. Gregory gives, however, the impression that Origen was the dean, the professor, and the secretary of the school! More important than the number of staff is what we learn about Origen as a professor.

Let's start with the most chocking statement: Origen, the teacher, is a living example of what means the famous biblical expression *homoiosis Theo*, that is, the likeness of God.⁴ This sounds terribly pretentious; a modern university professor cannot but feel certain hopelessness in front of such a description! But Gregory understands the *similitudo Dei* in a comforting and interesting way: he interprets it in terms of education. He states that the education performed by such a god-like teacher consists of nothing less than making the students also more and more God-like. That is what Christian education is all about! Origen was the most educated person. He was the one living more than all others according to Logos, the Divine Word. And so, when students get *logikoteroi*, more like Christ the Word and formed by his wisdom, they are educated in a Christian way and closer to the likeness of God. A modern teacher, wishing to practice this principle, needs to concentrate on and imitate Christ first of all as the Wisdom.

The relationship between Origen, the teacher, and his students is described in detail. It is like the relation of a father to his sons.⁵ Allow me to interpret this as follows: not only the bishop is a father. The professor is a father, too, at least in Origen's academy. Origen was

[1] The original Greek text is edited and translated into French by Henri Crouzel s.j., in the series *Sources chrétiennes*, vol. 148.

[2] According to some scholars Gregory stayed no less than seven years in Origen's school.

[3] The text is edited by Paul Henry and Hans-Rudolf Schwytzer 1964.

[4] *Oratio* II.

[5] *Oratio* XVI.

ordained a presbyter, but denied presbyterial status by the Alexandrian church. But his being a father is not a consequence of his disputed clerical status. He has a heart for his students. And he seems very different from modern professors and other academic teachers who tend to be remote lecturing machines!

The relation between a father and a son has a hierarchical one, and it contains a ring of difference in authority. Gregory corrects this impression by providing another example of his relation to his professor, an example less traditional than that of a father and son. His feelings for Origen were those of king Saul's son Jonathan towards king David (1 Sam. 18:1).⁶ Anyone familiar with this Old Testament couple will understand how close Origen and Gregory in fact were: "Jonathan had given his heart to David and had grown to love him as himself." Both David and Jonathan were royalties, and no difference in hierarchical status existed in that relationship. How strong emotional ties there can be between modern students of theology and their professors, and how these ties should be handled, is too vast a topic to be discussed here.

From other sources we know that Origen wrote biblical commentaries (e.g. on St. John) during his Caesarean period. These were erudite and large pieces of intellectual work. He also preached to ordinary people in the church. These remain in homilies illustrating great pedagogical skill from Origen's part. In them, the professor presents to simple believers understandable explanations of biblical texts. Origen also wrote an apology for those outside the borders of the church.

Modern theologians are thus reminded: teaching, writing and preaching are traditionally activities attached to a Christian "*doctor ecclesiae*". These activities ought to be undertaken in all directions: towards the learned experts, towards simple people, and to the opponents of Christian faith. In the Neo-Platonic academy run by Plotinus we notice that the professor was an exegete also there. But instead of commenting on the Bible, he commented upon the works of Plato. Modern natural sciences may not be benefitted from such an exegetic method, but within theology, and philosophy, the importance of explaining tradition, the Bible included, was vital, and still is.

2. The Students

Gregory the Wonderworker came from a wealthy home in Pontus. His aim was to become a lawyer; therefore he studied jurisprudence for many years in Berytus (Beirut). But he met a Christian sage, the famous Origen, in Caesarea. And so he left his previous life behind, homeland, friends and relatives. This is what he says, but it was not altogether true: his brother was also studying at Origen's Academy, and his sister lived in town as well. All the same: a new life began for Gregory when he began his theological studies. This does not mean that he suddenly decided to study for the priesthood. After five years of study he does not yet know what to do next, but he imagines that he will be doing something "secular." We may draw the conclusion that Gregory was a student for personal, or perhaps better, existential reasons, and not for the bread that would follow a good education.

As for the students at Plotinus's philosophical school, the same facts apply. Many "seekers" attended. Thus the theologians were not alone on the market, there were others wishing to take care of young people looking for spiritual values! *Vita Plotini* tells about a certain Rogatianus, who had achieved almost everything possible in the secular world: he was a Roman senator, elected praetor, both rich and influential. But then one day he notes

[6] *Oratio VI.*

that all this is worth nothing: he renounces it all, sells his belongings, frees his slaves, and starts looking for something deeper in life in the school of Plotinus.

To be sure, there were often young persons among the students of Origen, persons just beginning to shape their world view and values. But surprisingly often the “students” were somewhat older persons with a professional carrier behind them. Among them were also high-ranking persons, perhaps fed up with fame and material welfare, in need of something deeper, something spiritual. From the imperial house, persons such as Julia Mamaea, the mother of Emperor Alexander Severus, visited the school of Origen. And the emperor Gallienus with wife Salonina attended Plotinus’ school.

Our faculties should be prepared to accept such “seekers.” Those who have experienced everything and reached all there is to reach in this world. Today’s values are hard. What matters now is economic growth, share markets, personal progress. But theological faculties have always been frequented by persons wishing to find something more and deeper. Professors should be prepared to provide something more to them than a language course and an ocean of facts. Thus, when the well-off student Gregory with a diploma from the faculty of jurisdiction comes to us, what will we offer? Let’s see what Origen had to give them.

3. CURRICULUM

It all starts with training in critical thinking. In the first phase, however, Origen is listening carefully to his students, in order to define what is needed. Like a farmer, Gregory says, like a peasant analyzing his fields in order to know what needs to be done in order to get a harvest, so Origen analyzed his students.⁷

A kind of “first test” took place before the studies began. Thereafter came what is called the “*Socratic method*” of questioning. Socrates used to ask people simple looking questions in order to show, step by step, that the “knowledge” people had was no real knowledge, but simply beliefs. Origen, the Christian Socrates, used “upsetting argumentation” - it was unpleasant, the student admits, and it caused “pain.”⁸

What a strange first year of theological studies! Part of this training of the mind consisted in processing/analyzing statements: the students should not assent to any statements without critical analysis, nor should they reject statements straight away, but they should take their time, and analyze whether there was some truth in the statement that appeared stupid when first heard. “*Origen exposed us as men who are ridiculously deluded,*” Gregory the Wonderworker writes.⁹ It was just too easy to deceive the students by beautiful rhetoric or intimidating authority. What would this “painful” part of the curriculum mean today? The professor should, I think, teach the students not to approve or reject his statements but to attend the courses and seminars with the mind trained to think critically. Love for the teacher, so vividly portrayed in the speech of Gregorius, does not mean that the teacher becomes an infallible person, and even if he were infallible, the student should not start from that assumption.

In Origen’s academy all known philosophies were used as training materials. Without prejudice the student should accept or reject what was said by them. The intellectual

[7] *Oratio VII.*

[8] “And that was at first an unpleasant position for us, and one not without pain, as he dealt with persons who were unused to it, and still all untrained to submit to reason, when he plied us with his argumentations; and yet he purged us by them.” *Oratio VII.*

[9] *Oratio VII.*

freedom was remarkable, even in comparison with theological schools of our times. “Therefore to us there was no forbidden subject of speech; for there was no matter of knowledge hidden or inaccessible to us, but we had it in our power to learn every kind of discourse, both foreign and Greek, both spiritual and political, both divine and human; and we were permitted with all freedom to go round the whole circle of knowledge, and investigate it, and satisfy ourselves with all kinds of doctrines, and enjoy the sweets of intellect.”¹⁰

Origen himself liked Plato most, but the others were also studied in order to exercise the critical mind. As a consequence of this training, the students will “know themselves.” In this context it means that they will learn their own assets and limits, intellectually and ethically.

In the curriculum, natural science followed. It included geometry, which had a place of honor among the subjects studied, but astronomy was also important. The study of related subjects such as physics and chemistry are still important in our education today, but the goal was different in Origen’s school: the natural sciences were “natural philosophy.” They provided the students not only with mere facts concerning the structure of the world and the universe, but they also gave an impulse to meditate upon nature and, as a consequence, upon the Creator of nature and the whole cosmos.

Next on the schedule followed something we may call “*ethical science*.” However, purely theoretical ethics without a practical dimension was strongly criticized and out of the question in Origen’s school. “Doctrine without deeds” is vain and profitless, Gregory concludes after having passed the examination. In the moral teaching introspective self-observance was surprisingly central. “*Know yourself*” means also that one should know the impulses and affections and passions in one’s mind. But in a more constructive sense it means exercise in prudence, temperance, fortitude and righteousness. These cardinal virtues were followed by exercises in the even more religious virtues such as patience and godliness. Again it seems that the curriculum was not that much concentrated on instruction about different moral theories, or providing details, but on the training of the soul (mind) in general. The logic seems to be that when the student’s soul is well educated, it follows that the intellect of the student will be also be prepared and open to instruction.

CONCLUSIONS

The great importance of the theological school in Caesarea was not immediately evident. But it was known as one of the rather few institutions providing the highest possible training in Christian theology. Its great *alumnus* Gregory the Wonderworker carried its fame beyond the times of Origen. Later the Cappadocian fathers were to get inspiration from Origen and Gregorius. And from Cappadocia theological wisdom is still spreading all over the Christian world. To me this means the following: an educator never knows what consequences his/her activity has. It may take centuries for the harvest to ripen, and by then we are not here to see it. Educating means to work in faith, accepting the Pauline wisdom: we plant the seed, we water it, but God makes it grow (1 Cor. 3:6).

[10] *Oriatio* XV. Translation: Ante-Nicene Fathers.

Saint Basil of Poiana Mărului. Biographic milestones

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ABSTRACT

While, in the 19th century, many servants of the monastic settlements left Wallachia and Moldova, because of the measures taken there, the situation was nevertheless different in the 18th century, when monks from different areas inhabited by Orthodox Christians came to the Romanian Countries, where they encountered an uninterrupted reality of hesychastic renewal started by Saint Gregory of Sinai (1255-1346), due to the fact that the Romanians had known another cultural continuity, different from what had happened, until that century, in the Greek Byzantine or in the Slav world. This reality explains why the revitalization of the hesychastic and spiritual life in the areas north of the Danube is related, in the 18th century, to the Saints Basil of Poiana Mărului (1692-1767) and Paisius Velichkovsky or Wieliczkowski of Neamț (1722-1794), both of them arrived from the Slav world in the Romanian extra-Carpathian territories. Saint Basil founded many hermitages and trained many disciples in the practice of the prayer of the mind or of the heart, becoming known as a great teacher of this prayer, in the modern times. Just as the Holy Fathers of Mount Sinai (Gregory, Philotheos, Hesychios), but also from other parts of the Byzantine world (Saint Symeon the New Theologian, Saint Gregory Palamas etc.), once again, he draws the attention not just of the monks but also of the lay people on the prayer of the heart, so that in the 19th century it was not the teaching of Saint Paisius on the practice of the prayer of the heart that prevailed, but the teaching of Saint Basil, followed especially in the Romanian and in the Russian tradition. Regarding the monastic life, the activity of Starets Basil can be characterized by the ecumenicity of the Orthodox faith, due to the fact that, on the one hand, he brought together monks from the Romanian and the Slav area, and, on the other hand, he contributed to the enrichment of the Romanian monasticism through the cultivation of the spirit of two Holy Mounts, Athos and Sinai.

Keywords: Saint Basil of Poiana Mărului; Paisius Velichkovsky or Wieliczkowski; hesychasm; Wallachia; Moldova; monasticism; Orthodox faith; ecumenicity;

1. Commemoratio

In the year 2013, 10 years had elapsed¹ since the hesychast Basil of the Skete of Poiana Mărului officially joined the ranks of the Saints honoured in the Orthodox Church of Romania, his commemoration day being the date of 25 April.

* The text represents the reviewed variant of the study in Romanian entitled *Sfântul Vasile de la Poiana Mărului. Repere biografice*, which was printed in *Păstori și păstorire în trecutul Bisericii noastre. Simpozion*

Thus, in 2003 a fact was actually confirmed, because Elder Basil had been honoured as a Saint even since his life, enjoying great respect among the Christians of the Orthodox world, who have called him and continue to call him to their help².

2. Social-political and ecclesial situation at the beginning of the 18th century

Saint Basil carried the *cross* of the monastic life and of the service as a starets in the 18th century, a century full of turmoil and attacks against the Orthodox Church around the Romanian Countries situated near the Danube³. In Ukraine, the native country of Saint Paisius Velichkovsky, the Orthodoxy was, at the beginning of the 18th century, under the oppression of the Romano-Catholicism and Uniatism, and in Russia it was being submitted to a policy of westernization or, rather, lutheranization, under the pressures of Tzar Peter I or the Great (1682-1725)⁴. Due to this policy (*Spiritual Regulation* of 1721, *Proclamation of Monasticism* of 1724), not few were the Russian Church servants and believers who reacted, especially the monks. The last ones hid themselves in the sketes and hermitages of the Siberian wilderness or left for Moldova or Wallachia, being attracted to these Countries situated near the Danube *by the reputation of the hesychastic life of the Moldavian and Wallachian monasteries and sketes, where, beside the Romanian monks, there were also foreign monks (Greeks, Serbians, Russians, Bulgarians etc.), as a proof of the ecumenicity of the Orthodox spirituality, which knows no boundaries and frontiers, nor is it limited, as the peoples and the countries are*⁵.

3. The monastic life in the Romanian Countries during the life of Elder Basil of Poiana Mărului

The coming and the settlement of Elder Basil in Wallachia was determined by a climate favorable to the ascetic life, whose origins are closely related to the genesis and the particularities of Christianity with the Romanians⁶. These particularities facilitated the

Național, Deva, 25-26 septembrie 2015, Editura Argonaut & Editura Episcopiei Devei și Hunedoarei, Cluj-Napoca & Deva, 2015, pp. 285-307.

¹ The pages of this study represent a fragment of the course given by the author in Athens, as part of the Erasmus Programme, precisely in the month of May of the year 2013.

² Epifanie, episcopul Buzăului și Vrancei, “Cuvânt înainte”, in *Cuviosul Vasile de la Poiana Mărului. Propuneri de canonizare*, Editura Sfintei Episcopii a Buzăului și Vrancei, 2003, pp. 10, 13-14.

³ During those times, the Romanians were living separated in three countries: the two Reigns situated near the Danube, namely Wallachia, also known under the names of *Ungrovlahia*, *Țara Românească* (*Romanian Country*) or *Vlahia*, and Moldavia, known as *Moldova* or *Moldovlahia*, and the Principality of Transylvania or Ardeal, on the other side of the Carpathian Mountains. As far as the Orthodox Church is concerned, she had a privileged situation in the Countries near the Danube, whereas in Transylvania she was submitted to the Western propagandas, which culminated with the episode of Uniatism (1699-1701), see Pr. Prof. Dr. Mircea Păcurariu, *Uniția în Transilvania în trecut și astăzi*, Editura “Episcop Nicolae Popovici”, Oradea, 2006; Prof. Dr. Liviu Patachi, “Românii ortodocși în lupta cu Catolicismul după 1700”, in *Studii Teologice* 2/3-6 (1950), pp. 218-235.

⁴ Pr. Conf. Univ. Dr. Ionel Ene, “Cuviosul Vasile de la Poiana Mărului. Legături și influențe asupra schiturilor și mănăstirilor din zonă. Renașterea monahismului de la curbura Carpaților în secolul al XVIII-lea”, in *Cuviosul Vasile de la Poiana Mărului. Propuneri de canonizare...*, p. 41; Diac. Ioan I. Ică jr., “Starețul Vasile și cheile «Filocaliei» – de la Poiana Mărului în canonul Ortodoxiei românești și ecumenice”, in *Sfântul stareț Vasile de la Poiana Mărului, Introduceri în rugăciunea lui Iisus și isihasm*, studiu de Dario Raccanello, argument de diac. Ioan I. Ică jr, traducere de diac. Ioan și Maria-Cornelia Ică jr, Edit. Deisis, Sibiu, 2009, p. 7.

⁵ Epifanie, *Cuvânt*, p. 7.

⁶ A people which was born of the symbiosis of the Getho-Dacians with the Romans. The first were extremely religious, having religious groups with ascetic life lived in solitude, celibacy and vegetarianism, inspired by the cult of Zamolxis. For this reason, one can say about the Romanians that they had eremitic monks even before Christ, and Zalmoxis was the only barbarian religious personage that stirred the interest of the Greek and Roman elite during the Antiquity, see Diac. Ioan I. Ică jr, “Monahismul românesc și spiritualitatea lui”, in idem,

penetration of hesychasm in the 14th century among the Romanians as well⁷, and it had a great influence on them, maybe in a special way, namely it reinforced the Romanians' preference for living in hermitages⁸.

These hermitages represented points of attraction for the believers. Desiring hesychia, the zealous believer would leave his village, go to the woods and settle near an old ascetic. After a while, they would build a small wooden church and were sought by the villagers of the area for prayer and spiritual counsel. When the number of the people aspiring to hesychia multiplied, a skete was formed and, around it, in two generations, a village. Then the hesychasts would leave the small church to the villagers and would go deeper in the woods, to found another hermitage. In this way, it has been affirmed that at least 3,000 hermitages gave their name to just as many villages in the three countries lived by the Romanians, and most of the monasteries were built on the place of hermitages, this origin being demonstrable for 800 of them⁹. The richest areas or precincts in hesychastic settlements were Putna – Voroneț – Rarău in Moldova, the Mountains of Tismana, Polovragi, Bistrița, Cozia and Buzău in Wallachia, and the Râmeți Mountains in Transylvania, so that it has been affirmed that the Carpathian Mountains had become a second Athos¹⁰. Saint Nicodemus († 1406) reorganized only the Romanian monasticism, introducing, at the rulers' initiative, the cenobitic monastic life, by founding several large monasteries. However, the Romanian monasticism will remain faithful to hermitism and its hesychastic inspiration¹¹.

The measures undertaken by certain rulers and metropolitans of the Romanians, who wanted to group the hermitages into large monasteries, were rejected by the hesychasts, who foresaw the danger of their subjection to the economic preoccupations imposed by the administration of large properties. The hesychasts' reaction favoured the surprising multiplication of the hermitages, a fact signalling the inner crisis of the cenobitic life of the large monasteries, which were under the burden of the administration of extended estates and in the framework of an exploitation regime generated by the *dedication* of their own revenues to certain monasteries and holy places of Greece and the Near East. One can notice, therefore, that in the 18th century in Moldova there were 83 hermitages and only 4 monasteries, and in Wallachia 93 hermitages (of which 28 in the area of Buzău) and 14 monasteries¹².

Mărturiile de sfințenie românească. Monahi îmbunătățiți din secolele trecute, Sibiu, 2002, pp. 5-11; Pr. Prof. Dr. Nicolae Dură, "Monahismul din Dacia Pontică. «Călugării sciți» (daco-romani) și contribuția lor la afirmarea unității ecumenice și la dezvoltarea culturii umanist creștine-europene", in *Studii Teologice* 66/3-4 (2004), pp. 3-14.

⁷ See Drd. Corneliu Zăvoianu, "Rugăciunea lui Iisus în Imperiul Bizantin. Răspândirea ei în Peninsula Balcanică și în Țările Române", in *Glăsuț Bisericii* 40/11-12 (1981), pp. 1100-1130; Magstrand Dumitru Dima, "Contribuția românească la cunoașterea isihasmului (secolul al XIV-lea)", in *Studii Teologice* 17/9-10 (1965), pp. 571-580.

⁸ Ierom. Ioanichie Bălan, *Vetre de sihăstrie românească, secolele IV-XX*, București, 1982, p. 16.

⁹ Ioanichie, *Vetre de sihăstrie*, pp. 17-19; Ică, *Monahismul românesc*, p. 17.

¹⁰ Ică, *Monahismul românesc*, p. 20.

¹¹ Ică, *Monahismul românesc*, p. 20.

¹² Ioanichie, *Vetre de sihăstrie*, p. 30; Ică, *Monahismul românesc*, p. 21. In Transylvania, the monasteries and the hermitages were massively destroyed, given their resistance to the Roman-Catholic propaganda and to the uniatist movement. Thus, over 150 monasteries and hermitages were burnt or destroyed by cannon by General Bucow, on Maria Theresa's order, in the years 1761-1762, an action continued until the end of the 18th century. In Bukovina, which entered under the dominion of the Austrian Empire beginning with 1775, over 25 monasteries and hermitages were closed, left to ruin or turned into parishes, which lead to a massive exodus of

The revitalization of the hesychastic and spiritual life is related, in the 18th century, to the Startsy¹³ Basil of Poiana Mărului (1692-1767) and Paisius of Neamț (1722-1794)¹⁴, arrived from the area of the Slavic or Moldo-Slavic world to the extra-Carpathian Romanian Countries. However, we ought to mention that the hesychast renewal started by Saint Gregory of Sinai (1255-1346) remained in the Romanian Countries an *uninterrupted reality*, found there by the two above-mentioned startsy. This reality arrived up to them *due to a series of numerous spiritual personalities*, and thanks to the fact that the *Romanian Principalities have also known an important cultural continuity, different from what happened in the Greek Byzantine world, or in the Russian one*¹⁵.

4. Biographic milestones in the life of Saint Basil of Poiana Mărului

In the context of those times of the Christian Orthodox world concerning the spiritual life and the freedom of circulation¹⁶, monk Basil came from the area of Russia to Wallachia, in 1713¹⁷, being attracted by the reputation of the elder hermits of the region of Buzău, abounding in sketes and monasteries, with a long Christian tradition and monastic life¹⁸.

hundreds of monks of Transylvania and Bukovina towards Moldavia and Wallachia (Ioanichie, *Vetre de sihăstrie*, p. 32).

¹³ The Old Slavic term *starets* (pl. *startsy*) is the equivalent of the Greek term *gheron* (γέρον) and not of that of *hegumen* (ἡγούμενος), namely it refers to a person not in the administrative sense, but in that of spiritually improved person guiding several disciples (Dario Raccanello, “Rugăciunea lui Iisus în Scrierile starețului Vasile de la Poiana Mărului”, in Sfântul stareț Vasile de la Poiana Mărului, *Introducere în rugăciunea lui Iisus și isihasm...*, p. 265).

¹⁴ Pr. prof. univ. dr. Ioan Moldoveanu, “Cuv. Vasile de la Poiana Mărului, Muntele Athos și curentul filocalic”, in Pr. prof. univ. dr. Vasile Stanciu, Pr. lect. univ. dr. Cristian Sonea (coord.), *Misiunea parohiei și a mănăstirii într-o lume în continuă schimbare. Lucrările simpozionului internațional de Teologie, Istorie, Muzicologie și Artă, 3-4 noiembrie, 2015*, vol. I, Cluj-Napoca, 2016, pp. 409-410. In the 19th century, the opposite phenomenon happens, when improved monks were obliged, because of the measures taken [*The Organic Regulations (Regulamentele organice)* of 1830, the secularization of Alexandru Ioan Cuza of the years 1859, 1860 and 1863; following this measure, out of the 250 monasteries and sketes of Wallachia and Moldavia only 75 survived, the rest being transformed into parish churches, prisons or mental asylums], given the foundation of modern Romania (*The 1848 Revolution and the Union of the Romanian Principalities of 1859*), but based on a secular anticlerical conception, to leave their country and settle themselves in Russia, Palestine or Athos (Ică, *Monahismul românesc*, pp. 23, 31; Ică, *Starețul Vasile*, p. 12).

¹⁵ Raccanello, *Starețul Vasile*, pp. 243, 271; see also Pr. Dr. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Din istoria isihasmului în Ortodoxia română*, București, 1992, pp. 6-20.

¹⁶ By virtue of this freedom, memorable exchanges of personalities of the spiritual life take place in the Churches of South-Eastern Europe, during the first half of the 18th century, see Pr. Dr. Paul Mihail, “Schitul Poiana Mărului, un centru ortodox cărturăresc”, in *Spiritualitate și istorie la întorsura Carpaților*, I, Buzău, 1983, p. 355; Raccanello, *Starețul Vasile*, p. 268.

¹⁷ Protos. Prof. Chiril Lovin, “Cuviosul Vasile de Poiana Mărului, mare povățuitor al vieții duhovnicești”, in *Cuviosul Vasile de la Poiana Mărului. Propuneri de canonizare...*, p. 60, note 1. Other researchers propose the year 1724, following the promulgation in Russia of the *Proclamation of Monasticism* (1724), by which drastic measures of suppression of the monastic life in the Russian Empire were foreseen (Ică, *Starețul Vasile*, p. 7).

¹⁸ Signalled by archeological vestiges, the activity of certain missionaries and bishops (Ulfilas etc.), persecutions against the Christians, the existence of old sketes and hermitages etc. For instance, Saint Sabbas the Martyr received the crown of martyrdom on 12 April 372, and Saint Basil the Great asked that the latter’s Holy Relics be sent to him to Cappadocia. In the *Epistle 164*, probably written in 374, he confirmed their reception. For more details, see Epifanie, episcopul Buzăului, “Sfântul Mucenic Sava”, in *Sfinți români și apărători ai legii strămoșești*, București, 1987, pp. 194-200; Prof. Dr. Ioan G. Coman, “Elemente de continuitate spirituală geto-daco-romană și creștină în regiunea râului Mousaios-Buzău după mărturiile patristice și arheologice”, in *Spiritualitate și istorie...*, pp. 231-258; Prof. Dr. Emilian Popescu, “Creștinismul în Eparhia Buzăului până în secolul al VII-lea”, in *op. cit.*, pp. 259-277; Horia Constantinescu, “Schituri sau sihăstrie

Born in 1692, in a pious Russian family¹⁹, Basil joined the monastic life at an early age²⁰ and spent several years of his youth in the hermitages of Russia, and then in the Moshenski Mountains, near Kiev, visiting for his spiritual profit all the improved monks of those places and copying writings of the Holy Fathers on prayer and the monastic life²¹.

Because of the difficult ecclesial situation of Russia, but also of Ukraine²², Elder Basil came to the Romanian Countries near the Danube. He did not stop in Moldova, which he crossed, and went on to Wallachia, in the area of Buzău-Focșani, being attracted by the monastic and theological tradition of this area²³, where over 40 hermitages are attested by the end of the 17th century²⁴. For this reason, it is affirmed that the area of Buzău-Focșani was, along with that of Neamț in Moldova and that of Oltenia in Wallachia, one of the centers of more intense dissemination and living of the hesychastic spirituality from the 14th century²⁵. Accompanied by his disciple Michael the Hieroschemamonk, and by other monks²⁶, Elder Basil settles first at Valea Șchiopului Skete (1713), then at Dălhăuți Skete in the area of Focșani²⁷, where he remained for 20 years (1713-1733)²⁸.

In the hesychastic atmosphere of this skete, which had had a century of existence and a strong heremical life²⁹, Elder Basil became a *great spiritual father and teacher of the Jesus Prayer*, gathering around himself over 50 disciples of all the Romanian areas, but also Ukrainians and Russians³⁰. For the *cleanliness of his life full of endeavours*, he was ordained

rupestre buzoiene, mărturii ale vechimii creștinismului și continuității noastre pe aceste meleaguri”, in *op. cit.*, pp. 321-340.

¹⁹ In the Romanian historiography also circulated the opinion that Starets Basil was a Romanian, according to some, born in Ukraine and even a relative of Saint Paisius Velichkovsky (see Diac. P. I. David, *Cuviosul Paisie cel Mare, un desăvârșit monah român*, București, 1975, p. 8; Pr. Prof. Dr. Mihail Milea, “Cuviosul Vasile de la Mănăstirea Poiana Mărului”, in *Almanah bisericesc*, Buzău, 1995, pp. 92-93; Ierom. Ioanichie Bălan, *Pateric românesc ce cuprinde viața și cuvintele unor Cuvioși Părinți ce s-au nevoit în mănăstirile românești. Secolele XIV-XX*, București, 1908, p. 213). Yet, most researchers do not share this opinion [Ene, *Cuviosul Vasile*, p. 40; Protos Paisie Fantaziu, “Mănăstirea Poiana Mărului. 270 de ani de la întemeierea sa de către Cuviosul Stareț Vasile Ieroschimonahul”, in *Cuviosul Vasile de la Poiana Mărului. Propuneri de canonizare...*, p. 91; Raccanello, *Starețul Vasile*, pp. 255-256].

²⁰ Protos. Prof. Chiril Lovin, “Cinstirea ca Sfânt a Cuviosului Vasile de la Poiana Mărului”, in *Cuviosul Vasile de la Poiana Mărului. Propuneri de canonizare...*, p. 22; Pr. Gabriel Cocora, “Cuviosul Vasile de la Poiana Mărului”, in *Sfinți români și apărători...*, p. 422; Fantaziu, *Mănăstirea Poiana Mărului*, pp. 89-90.

²¹ Irineu Slătineanu, Arhiepiscop-Vicar al Episcopiei Râmnicului (today, Metropolitan of Oltenia), “Viața Sfântului Prea Cuviosului Părintelui nostru Vasile de la Poiana Mărului”, in *Cuviosul Vasile de la Poiana Mărului. Propuneri de canonizare...*, p. 17; Chiril, *Cinstirea ca Sfânt*, p. 22; Ene, *Cuviosul Vasile*, pp. 40-41; see also Pr. Prof. Dr. Mircea Păcurariu, *Sfinți daco-români și români*, Iași, 2007, pp. 103-105.

²² Ene, *Cuviosul Vasile*, p. 41.

²³ Ene, *Cuviosul Vasile*, p. 41.

²⁴ Ioanichie, *Vetre de sihăstrie*, p. 206.

²⁵ Pr. Prof. Dr. D. Stăniloae, “Momente din vechea spiritualitate a ținutului buzoian”, in *Spiritualitate și istorie...*, pp. 342-343.

²⁶ One of them was even his spiritual father, *Stephen the Hieroschemamonk, who had been living for many years as a hermit*. It seems that he remained at Valea Șchiopului Skete and did not follow Elder Basil at Dălhăuți Skete (Lovin, *Cuviosul Vasile mare povățuitor*, p. 61).

²⁷ Dălhăuți Skete was situated towards the border between Wallachia and Moldova (Cocora, *Cuviosul Vasile*, p. 422).

²⁸ Chiril, *Cinstirea ca Sfânt*, p. 22; Ene, *Cuviosul Vasile*, p. 42; Chiril, *Cuviosul Vasile mare povățuitor*, pp. 61-62; Cocora, *Cuviosul Vasile*, p. 422; Stăniloae, *Momente*, p. 344; Raccanello, *Starețul Vasile*, p. 258.

²⁹ Ioanichie, *Vetre de sihăstrie*, p. 202; Stăniloae, *Din istoria isihasmului*, p. 20.

³⁰ Ioanichie, *Vetre de sihăstrie*, pp. 202-203, 206; Ene, *Cuviosul Vasile*, pp. 42-43. The number of disciples varies, some researchers mentioning *over 40* (Chiril, *Cuviosul Vasile mare povățuitor*, p. 62), the others *approximately 40-50* (Fantaziu, *Mănăstirea Poiana Mărului*, p. 91).

a priest in 1715³¹, when Bishop of Buzău³² was Ioasaf (1708-1716). It ought to be mentioned that at Dălhăuți Skete, which he enriched by the donations received and by buying properties³³, Starets Basil also set up a school for translating and copying certain writings of the Holy Fathers³⁴.

Lacking the desired hesychia at Dălhăuți, because many laymen were looking for him for their spiritual profit³⁵, Elder Basil sought out a remote place, and chose Poiana Mărului of Buzău Mountains, where a hermitage was present since earlier times. There, he had a church and cells built, during the period 1730-1733, being also helped by the reigning Prince of Wallachia Nicholas Mavrocordatos³⁶, and then also by his son and inheritor of the throne, Constantine Mavrocordatos³⁷, during his second reign (1731-1733)³⁸. He settled there with a community of 12 Russian disciples³⁹, later joined by Romanians as well⁴⁰, and their ascetic rule was the following: meat consumption was forbidden, while wine consumption was permitted very rarely; during the week, fasting food was eaten, and only on Saturdays and Sundays was the consumption of eggs, milk and cheese allowed; the access to this skete was forbidden for women and nuns, similarly to the rule of the Holy Mount Athos⁴¹.

³¹ Epifanie, *Cuvânt*, p. 8; Ene, *Cuviosul Vasile*, p. 42; Chiril, *Cuviosul Vasile mare povățuitor*, p. 62; Fantaziu, *Mănăstirea Poiana Mărului*, p. 89. Other researchers (Deacon Ioan I. Ică jr) contest the ordination of Elder Basil as a priest and affirm that he was only Schemamonk (Raccanello, *Starețul Vasile*, p. 258, note 39).

³² This Eparchy was, during that time, as now, under the jurisdiction of the Metropolitanate of Wallachia.

³³ Ene, *Cuviosul Vasile*, p. 42.

³⁴ Ene, *Cuviosul Vasile*, pp. 42-43; Chiril, *Cuviosul Vasile mare povățuitor*, p. 66.

³⁵ The skete was a place of pilgrimage, having a miracle-making icon of the Theotokos. This explains the presence of copies of this holy icon in many of the monastic settlements (Poiana Mărului, Rătești, Ciolanu) that used to be under the spiritual guidance of Starets Basil (Chiril, *Cuviosul Vasile mare povățuitor*, p. 63, note 9).

³⁶ He was first the ruler of Moldova twice (1709-1710, 1711-1716), and then of Wallachia, also two times [1716 (January-November), 1719-1730].

³⁷ He was a ruler of Wallachia six times [1730 (Sept.-Oct.), 1731-1733, 1735-1741, 1744-1748, 1756-1758, 1761-1763], and of Moldova four times [(1733-1735, 1741-1743, 1748-1749, 1769 (Jun.-Dec.))].

³⁸ Ene, *Cuviosul Vasile*, pp. 44-45; Cocora, *Cuviosul Vasile*, p. 422; Raccanello, *Starețul Vasile*, pp. 253-254. The sanctification of the skete, with the dedication day the *Birth of the Theotokos*, was realized by the Bishop of Buzău of those times, Misail (1732-1739) (Fantaziu, *Mănăstirea Poiana Mărului*, pp. 84, 92); for more details regarding the Skete of Poiana Mărului see Pr. Horia Constantinescu, Pr. Gabriel Cocora, "Poiana Mărului", in *Glăsurile Bisericii* 23/5-6 (1964), pp. 466-500; Fantaziu, *Mănăstirea Poiana Mărului*, pp. 95-113. We shall mention only that the skete burned down to the ground on 14th of April 1771, and was rebuilt during the period 1771-1784, when the current small church was built, with the dedication day the *Birth of the Theotokos*, whereas between 1810-1812 the big church with the dedication day *All the Saints* was constructed, both of them out of wood. In 1879, the skete goes through a new fire, which engulfs the cells near the guesthouse and refectory, along with the abbey. The skete was closed in 1893, yet it was not deserted, as some of its inhabitants remained there until 1913, when the last five monks moved to Găvanu Skete. The Skete of Poiana Mărului remains under the care of a layman, and in 1938 it is reopened but as a monastic settlement for nuns. Between the years 1959-1960, the skete was closed again, remaining under the protection of a few old nuns. After 1982, the skete was semi-active, and after 1989, it was reopened, first as a monastic settlement for nuns, for a short while (1990-1991), and then as a monastery for monks (1991-2010), becoming, beginning with 2010, a monastery for nuns with two main dedication days: 8 September, the Birth of the Theotokos; and 25 April, the day of Saint Basil of Poiana Mărului.

³⁹ Irineu Slătineanu, *Cuviosul Vasile*, p. 17; Ene, *Cuviosul Vasile*, p. 43. The local tradition was that a hermitage or a skete would have a number of maximum 12 inhabitants. Going over this number meant declaring that hermitage or skete a monastery (Raccanello, *Starețul Vasile*, p. 313).

⁴⁰ Fantaziu, *Mănăstirea Poiana Mărului*, p. 89.

⁴¹ Epifanie, *Cuvânt*, p. 11; Cocora, *Cuviosul Vasile*, p. 424. The Skete of Poiana Mărului was considered in its time *the second holy mountain* after Athos (Cocora, *Cuviosul Vasile*, p. 423). The community did not grow cattle and its food was assured by villagers specially exempted from any other taxes by princely *Charter*. At the

In point of its canonic jurisdiction, the skete enjoyed a special regime, in the sense that it was a *stavropighia*, namely it was under the direct guidance of the metropolitan of the country, with no intervention from the bishops of Buzău⁴², and had not been dedicated to the Holy Places, being devoid of properties, but also of other revenues⁴³. It is believed that it is precisely the lacks and needs that made Starets Basil go to Iași for relief, in 1757, where he made a great impression on the reigning Prince Constantine Racovița⁴⁴ and his contemporaries⁴⁵.

Material poverty was compensated by the richness of the ascetic life, doubled by the love for the writings of the Holy Fathers. By the care of Starets Basil, a library was founded in the skete, with many manuscripts and books in the languages: Old Slavic, Ukrainian, Russian and Romanian⁴⁶, and to have all these at hand for the other communities under his spiritual supervision, he took care of the dissemination of these books in numerous copies. Several manuscripts are known, coming precisely from the hands of Elder Basil⁴⁷, who also founded a school for translators and copyers at the Skete of Poiana Mărului. The activity of this school allowed the dissemination in Old Slavic and Romanian⁴⁸ of the writings of some great endeavurers unto spiritual and pneumatic perfection, such as Saints Isaac the Syrian, John Climacus, Hesychius the Sinaite⁴⁹, Gregory the Sinaite, Philotheos the Sinaite, Nilus of Sora⁵⁰ and Dimitry of Rostov⁵¹. Thus, Starets Basil accentuated in the Romanian culture

same time, their clothes were received via princely *Charters* annually, see Cocora, *Cuviosul Vasile*, p. 423-note 5, 424-note 12. It is also affirmed that the Poiana Mărului Skete of Wallachia had the same spiritual role in the 18th century hesychastic renewal as the Pocrov-Neamț and Vorona-Botoșani Sketes of Moldova (Ioanichie, *Vetre de sihăstrie*, p. 207).

⁴² Cocora, *Cuviosul Vasile*, pp. 422-423.

⁴³ Raccanello, *Starețul Vasile*, p. 273. The skete was built on the estate of Râmnic Monastery, on condition, however, that the monks of Poiana Mărului would work something for Sinai Monastery, to which Râmnic Monastery was dedicated. The situation was regulated in 1754, when the community of the Skete of Poiana Mărului gets to own the land the skete had been built on, thanks to the generosity of Iordache Neculescu, who gave Râmnic Monastery 33 fathoms (Rom. *stânjeni*) of his estate, in exchange for the precincts of the skete founded by Elder Basil (Ene, *Cuviosul Vasile*, 45 and note 30).

⁴⁴ He was a ruler in Moldova (1753, 1756-1757), but also in Wallachia (1753-1756, 1763-1764).

⁴⁵ On this occasion, Elder Basil received from the ruler *settled alms* (Fantaziu, *Mănăstirea Poiana Mărului*, p. 102; Epifanie, *Cuvânt*, pp. 10-11; Ene, *Cuviosul Vasile*, p. 46). In 1765, the Great Logothete Nicholas Dudescu donated the Gabricina estate to the Skete of Poiana Mărului (Chiril, *Cuviosul Vasile mare povățuitor*, p. 64).

⁴⁶ Raccanello, *Starețul Vasile*, p. 274. The library was destroyed in the fire of the year 1771 (Fantaziu, *Mănăstirea Poiana Mărului*, pp. 95-96). In 1867, the library still had 543 volumes (manuscripts and printings), of which 396 Russian, namely in the languages Old Slavic and Russian (Pr. Horia Constantinescu, Pr. Gabriel Cocora, *op. cit.*, p. 493; Raccanello, *Starețul Vasile*, p. 278). On the manuscripts and books saved not from fire, but thanks to the donations made even since the time of Starets Basil see, for instance, Pr. Dr. Paul Mihail, Prof. Univ. Dr. Zamfira Mihail, "Biblioteca dăruită de la mănăstirea Poiana Mărului", in *Glasul adevărului* 14 (2003), pp. 84-87.

⁴⁷ Irineu Slătineanu, *Cuviosul Vasile*, p. 19.

⁴⁸ Chiril, *Cuviosul Vasile mare povățuitor*, p. 66; Raccanello, *Starețul Vasile*, pp. 245-246, 279.

⁴⁹ It can be noticed that Starets Basil, just as the authors of the Greek *Philocaly*, mistakenly takes Hesychius the Sinaite (7th-8th century) for Hesychius the Priest of Jerusalem (5th century), see Raccanello, *Starețul Vasile*, p. 285, note 94.

⁵⁰ Saint Basil is attributed the merit of having made known, in the Romanian tradition, the work and personality of Saint Nilus of Sora (Nil Sorsky) (Raccanello, *Starețul Vasile*, p. 280).

⁵¹ Chiril, *Cuviosul Vasile mare povățuitor*, p. 66; Cocora, *Cuviosul Vasile*, p. 427; Mihail, *Schitul Poiana Mărului*, pp. 355-384. It is not impossible that an influence may have come as well from the spiritual renaissance trend initiated by Saint Dimitry of Rostov (1651-1709), made known to the Romanians by Bishop Pachomius of Roman (1671-1724). A disciple of Saint Dimitry, Pachomius initiated in 1714, almost at the same time as Starets Basil, a similar movement in Moldova: he edified the Skete of Pocrov, where he imposed

exactly the spiritual writings of which some will become part of the great anthology of the *Philocaly*⁵².

From the analysis of the manuscripts preserved one can notice the combination between artistic taste and *scientific* concern. In order to reproduce the text faithfully, with no modifications or lexical substitutes, and also to transcribe and to use the foreign expressions that did not follow the Old Slavic orthograph, it was attempted to establish common rules, put together in a *Grammar*⁵³. Another feature of the scriptorium of Poiana Mărului, which reflects the spiritual qualities and the openness of Starets Basil, is the copying of a Roman-Catholic work, attributed to an unknown Western author. In an Old Slavic manuscript copied precisely by Starets Basil, was found, along with texts of the Saints Basil the Great, Symeon the New Theologian, Anastasius the Sinaite, Peter of Damascus and others, the allegorical writing *Desiderie*⁵⁴, then translated as well into Romanian based on an Old Slavic manuscript⁵⁵.

Starets Basil brought together, in order to clarify some passages hard to understand, *Forewords* to the writings of the Saints Gregory the Sinaite, Philotheos the Sinaite, Hesychius the Sinaite⁵⁶ and Nile of Sora, an *Addendum* to the book of Saint Nile, *On the Way We Should Straighten Ourselves by Repentance*, and a writing against those monks claiming that they are allowed to eat meat⁵⁷. To collect the texts, Elder Basil sent his disciple Michael, who had become starets of the Skete of Trăisteni⁵⁸, to Ukraine, a moment when, according to certain researchers, the latter met the Rassophore Platon (Plato)⁵⁹, who, in this way, found out about Starets Basil⁶⁰. Certainly, many patristic writings were found as well in the monasteries of Moldova and Wallachia⁶¹.

The activity of Starets Basil at the two sketes, Dălhăuți and Poiana Mărului, can be characterized by the ecumenicity of the Orthodox faith, due to the gathering of monks from the Romanian and Slav area, then by the enrichment of the Romanian monasticism, by the cultivation of the Athonite spirit⁶², but also of the Sinaite one. Elder Basil made this renewal felt at the other sketes of the area of Buzău as well, either sending to them disciples and

a life according to the ascetic rule of Mount Athos, and founded in the skete's community a school for translating and copying the patristic manuscripts in Romanian (Chiril, *Cuviosul Vasile mare povățuitor*, pp. 61, 64; Raccanello, *Starețul Vasile*, p. 270). The best known copyers of the scriptorium of Poiana Mărului were the monks: Mitrofanis, Ananias and Timothy (Raccanello, *Starețul Vasile*, p. 279).

⁵² Raccanello, *Starețul Vasile*, p. 280.

⁵³ Raccanello, *Starețul Vasile*, p. 279.

⁵⁴ The text is that of an edition appeared in Moscow, in 1688, by the care of Hierodeacon Teofan, who translated it from Polish. For more details regarding the Latin original see Raccanello, *Starețul Vasile*, p. 281.

⁵⁵ Raccanello, *Starețul Vasile*, p. 282 and note 90; Mihail, *Schitul Poiana Mărului*, pp. 364-365.

⁵⁶ See above, note 49.

⁵⁷ Irineu Slătineanu, *Cuviosul Vasile*, p. 20. This writing, entitled in Romanian *Întrebătoare răspunsuri adunate din sfințita Scriptură, pentru depărtarea de bucatele ceale oprite făgăduinței călugărești cei de bună voie* (*Questioning-Answers gathered from the sacred Scriptures in order to avoid the Foods Forbidden to Those Who Willingly Take a Monk's Vows*), circulated in manuscript and was printed in 1816, at Neamțu Monastery, with the blessing of Veniamin Costache, Metropolitan of Moldavia (Cocora, *Cuviosul Vasile*, p. 424; Ică, *Starețul Vasile*, p. 10, note 5).

⁵⁸ There are testimonies as well about Michael's holiness, characterized as having become *like Starets Basil* and used as grounds for comparison regarding other fathers of his time, see Cocora, *Cuviosul Vasile*, pp. 430-431.

⁵⁹ It is the rassophore name of Saint Paisius Velichkovsky.

⁶⁰ Chiril, *Cuviosul Vasile mare povățuitor*, p. 65; Ică, *Starețul Vasile*, p. 18.

⁶¹ Chiril, *Cuviosul Vasile mare povățuitor*, p. 65.

⁶² Ene, *Cuviosul Vasile*, p. 43.

some of his writings or visiting them personally⁶³, but also at the parishes⁶⁴. The fact that Starets Basil came to have under his spiritual guidance a large number of monastic communities represents *a rarity in the Romanian hesychastic tradition*⁶⁵. It has been affirmed that he *knew to awaken new spiritual seeds, relying mainly on two elements: the Holy Fathers' writings and the Jesus prayer*⁶⁶. However, he did not ordain the Jesus prayer only for the monks, but also for the lay believers⁶⁷.

In 1749, Saint Basil was in Bucharest, *in the presence* of the Ruler Constantine Nicholas Mavrocordatos as well⁶⁸, where he met Patriarch Silvester of Antioch⁶⁹, while Neophyte I the Cretan (1738-1753), Metropolitan of Walachia, must have been present too, due to his position of host of a hierarch of the Eastern Orthodox world, but also because the Skete of Poiana Mărului was a stavropighia of the Metropolitanate. We can find the reason of this meeting in the *Prologue* of his work *On Refraining from Foods*, namely, the debate regarding the consumption of meat by monks. Saint Basil receives on this occasion the blessing of Patriarch Silvester to preach and write against those who were teaching that monks can eat meat, and after that meeting he understood that he must gather the right teaching on this matter *from the sacred Scripture, from the Church teachers and from the Typika of the great monasteries, received and kept by the holy sobornical Church*⁷⁰. The

⁶³ Situated in the area of Buzău-Focșani, these sketes, of which some have been preserved to this day, either as sketes or transformed into monasteries, were: Trăisteni, Gârlași-Buzău, Cârnu, Rogozu, Rătești, Valea Neagră, Ciolanu, Bonțești, Cotești, Pometul Broșteanului, Găvanu, to which one can add the Skete of Dălhăuți and the Monastery of Căldărușani, near Bucharest, which took over the influence of the monastic lifestyle lived by Elder Basil and his community (Ene, *Cuviosul Vasile*, p. 44, note 27; Cocora, *Cuviosul Vasile*, p. 423, note 7).

⁶⁴ The parishes mentioned in this sense are the church *Saint Demeter-Bagdat* of Râmnicu-Sărat and the church *Valea Fântâniei* of Buzău County (Ene, *Cuviosul Vasile*, p. 44, note 27; Fantaziu, *Mănăstirea Poiana Mărului*, p. 104).

⁶⁵ Ene, *Cuviosul Vasile*, p. 57; Chiril, *Cuviosul Vasile mare povățuitor*, p. 64; Ioanichie, *Vetre de sihăstrie*, pp. 206-207; Raccanello, *Starețul Vasile*, pp. 245, 259.

⁶⁶ Raccanello, *Starețul Vasile*, p. 277.

⁶⁷ Ene, *Cuviosul Vasile*, pp. 57-58.

⁶⁸ In the specialized studies dedicated to Saint Basil it is affirmed that, during the respective year, ruler of Wallachia was Constantine Nicholas Mavrocordatos, yet, according to *Cronologia de domni și guvernatori în Țările Române* (1711-1821), it is Gregory II Ghica (1748-1752) who was ruler at that time. He had been a reigning prince of Wallachia before (1733-1735), and in Moldova he ruled four times (1726-1733, 1735-1739, 1739-1741, 1747-1748). Constantine Nicholas Mavrocordatos was a reigning prince of Wallachia six times [1730 (Sept.-Oct.), 1731-1733, 1735-1741, 1744-1748, 1756-1758, 1761-1763], and in *Moldavia* four times [1733-1735, 1741-1743, 1748-1749, 1769 (Jun.-Dec.)], see *Istoria românilor, vol. VI, Românii între Europa clasică și Europa luminilor (1711-1821)*, Editura Enciclopedică, București, 2002, pp. 975-976. It is possible that the reigning Prince Constantine Nicholas Mavrocordatos, who during that year (the months January-August) was on the throne of Moldavia, may have been visiting Bucharest, in the presence of the Ruler Gregory II Ghica and of the Eastern patriarchs, and the meeting with Saint Basil may have been the consequence of their spiritual relation.

⁶⁹ Arrived in Wallachia for several problems, including the sanctification of the Monastery *Saint Spiridon the Old* of Bucharest, dedicated to the Patriarchate of Antioch (Fantaziu, *Mănăstirea Poiana Mărului*, p. 94). On the connections of the Patriarch of Antioch, Silvester (1724-1766), with the extra-Carpathian Romanian Countries, where he travelled twice, between the years 1729-1730 and 1744-1749, see Ion I. Croitoru, *Ortodoxia și Apusul în tradiția spirituală a românilor. Unitatea Ortodoxiei și apărarea credinței ortodoxe în fața propagandei protestante din secolul al XVII-lea*, I, Editura Cetatea de Scaun, Târgoviște, 2012, pp. 260-261.

⁷⁰ Sfântul Vasile de la Poiana Mărului, *Despre abținerea de la mâncărurile oprite făgăduinței de bunăvoie a monahilor*, in idem, *Introduceri în rugăciunea lui Iisus și în isihasm...*, p. 177.

place where he could have found those *Typika* was the Holy Mount Athos, to which he will also travel during the following year⁷¹.

In the same year 1749, also in Bucharest, Saint Basil is interrogated by the same Patriarch Silvester, together with the Patriarchs Matthew of Alexandria and Parthenius of Jerusalem, regarding the orthodoxy of *his teachings*. It seems that a polemic had emerged concerning certain aspects of Saint Basil's teaching, especially in relation to the introduction of a new element in the practice of the Jesus prayer, namely, going beyond the psychosomatic methods and the advice to focus the attention *above the heart*⁷². Finding no trace of error in the teachings and writings of Elder Basil, the three patriarchs testified in front of the Synod reunited in Bucharest that no one was to doubt these teachings and writings, being recommended to all the monks and all the believers⁷³. Although it is not known if the two events took place simultaneously or during different periods of the same year or if the three patriarchs exhorted him together to go to the Holy Mount Athos, it is important to note the existence of the two polemics, namely regarding the consumption of meat by the monks and the practice of the prayer of the heart, for whose solution there were debates in Bucharest and a local Synod was convoked, yet of ecumenical dimensions, including the participation not just of rulers and Eastern hierarchs, but also of representatives of the ecclesial and intellectual life of Wallachia, but maybe also of Moldavia.

Even since that time, the news about the holiness of Elder Basil spread throughout the Orthodox world. Leaving Ukraina, the rassophore Platon (Peter) Velichkovsky comes as well to Wallachia (1742)⁷⁴, visiting Dălhăuți Skete first, where he discovered the hesychastic life⁷⁵, but he settles in 1743 at Trăisteni Skete, from where he goes to Cârnu Skete as well⁷⁶, all these sketes being under the spiritual guidance of Starets Basil⁷⁷. During one of his pastoral visits, Starets Basil met Platon at Trăisteni Skete (1743), and the latter became his disciple⁷⁸. Platon did not follow Starets Basil at Poiana Mărului⁷⁹, but they were going to

⁷¹ Cocora, *Cuviosul Vasile*, p. 424; Mihail, *Schitul Poiana Mărului*, p. 375; Raccanello, *Starețul Vasile*, pp. 260-261.

⁷² Raccanello, *Starețul Vasile*, p. 448.

⁷³ Epifanie, *Cuvânt*, p. 11; Irineu Slătineanu, *Cuviosul Vasile*, pp. 18-19; Ene, *Cuviosul Vasile*, p. 58; Fantaziu, *Mănăstirea Poiana Mărului*, pp. 93- note 23, 94; Cocora, *Cuviosul Vasile*, p. 430. This event was related by Saint Paisius Velichkovsky in a letter to the Moldavian monk Athanasius the Kafsokalyvitis of Mount Athos, see *Scrisorile unor monahi*, ediție îngrijită de Ț. Dr. Antim Anghelescu, episcopul Buzăului, Editura Episcopiei Buzăului, 1947, pp. 66-67.

⁷⁴ Stăniloae, *Momente*, p. 344; Raccanello, *Starețul Vasile*, p. 266.

⁷⁵ Stăniloae, *Momente*, p. 344.

⁷⁶ Chiril, *Cuviosul Vasile mare povățuitor*, p. 62; Stăniloae, *Momente*, pp. 344-345; Stăniloae, *Din istoria isihasmului*, pp. 22-23; Fantaziu, *Mănăstirea Poiana Mărului*, p. 93; Arhim. Macarie Ciolan, *Neoisihasmul paisian. Reînduhovnicirea vieții noastre bisericești*, Iași, 2004, p. 112; Diac. P. I. David, "Cuviosul Paisie cel Mare (Velicicovski). Un desăvârșit monah român! – noi cercetări și ipoteze –", in *Biserica Ortodoxă Română* 93/1-2 (1975), p. 168. It has been affirmed that Saint Paisius visited the Skete of Poiana Mărului, from where he came to Cârnu Skete, where he remained during the period 1744-1746, and from this skete he left for the Holy Mount Athos, going through Moldavia, see Pr. Prof. Dr. Vasile Gh. Sibiescu, "Paisie Velicicovski vițeitor la schitul Cârnu (jud. Buzău) între anii 1744-1746", in *Sfinți români și apărători...*, pp. 347-354. It should be mentioned that Saint Paisius himself reminds of Starets Mihail of Trăisteni and of Skemamonk Onufrie of Cârnu, see Sfântul Paisie de la Neamț, *Autobiografia unui stareț*, Sibiu, 1996, pp. 189, 190-note 4; Stăniloae, *Din istoria isihasmului*, pp. 22-23.

⁷⁷ Chiril, *Cinstirea ca Sfânt*, p. 23.

⁷⁸ Ene, *Cuviosul Vasile*, pp. 47, 49; Fantaziu, *Mănăstirea Poiana Mărului*, p. 92; Raccanello, *Starețul Vasile*, pp. 260, 276.

meet again in Athos, in 1750⁸⁰. On this occasion, Starets Basil will tonsure the rassophore Plato into monasticism at Kapsala Kelli, and the latter will receive the name of Paisius⁸¹. He was in Athos in 1746 and had not interrupted his relations with Starets Basil⁸². Saint Paisius will invoke later on (before 1758, when he was ordained a priest), the authority of Starets Basil, answering the unjust accusations brought against him by monk Athanasius the Kafsokalyvitis of Moldavia, living in Mount Athos, mainly regarding the Jesus prayer⁸³. He brings as an argument precisely the meeting with the three Eastern Patriarchs, but also the honour that Starets Basil was enjoying *in the Russian country, and Wallachia and Moldavia, and in Sveta Gora (Athos)*⁸⁴.

A few years after 1753, Elder Basil took the initiative of re-foundation of Ciolanu Skete, sending there 12 more monks, Wallachians and Moldavians⁸⁵. *The insistent petitions* of re-foundation were considered only by the reigning Prince Alexander Scarlat Ghica (1766-1768), by the *Charter* of 12 February 1767⁸⁶.

In 1764, by his *Diata (Testament)*, Elder Basil placed a community of Romanian disciples in the Valea Neagră Skete of Vrancea, founded by Father Maftei of Spinești and edified between the years 1755-1757⁸⁷. This *Diata* mentions the reason for which this skete was created, namely, around Starets Basil there were also Romanians gathered at Poiana Mărului. Yet, since the Romanian brothers wanted to have the hymns also in Romanian, because they could not understand them in Old Slavic, they decided to leave for Valea Neagră or Vrancea Skete, which, at that time, was under the jurisdiction of the Metropolitanate of Moldavia⁸⁸.

⁷⁹ Out of the fear not to be made a priest, because he did not want the canons to be disrespected (for instance, the minimum age for priesthood, namely 30 years of age), preferring, therefore, to focus on a hesychastic life of solitude (Ică, *Starețul Vasile*, p. 19; Raccanello, *Starețul Vasile*, p. 260).

⁸⁰ According to others, in 1754 (see Ene, *Cuviosul Vasile*, p. 59) or even in 1756 (Cocora, *Cuviosul Vasile*, p. 423; Moldoveanu, *Cuv. Vasile*, p. 413, note 15). Another opinion goes for the year 1750, and the reason of the visit to Athos was given also as a consequence of the meeting with Patriarch Silvester of Antioch in Bucharest, in 1749 (Raccanello, *Starețul Vasile*, pp. 260-261).

⁸¹ Fantaziu, *Mănăstirea Poiana Mărului*, pp. 87, 89-note 17. It has been affirmed that Saint Paisius' tonsure into monasticism took place with the participation of his two spiritual fathers, Father Daniil of *Saint Demeter* Skete of Athos and Starets Basil, *one receiving him under his mantle, and the other one carrying out the holy service, according to the order*. Out of the *Autobiography* of Saint Paisius, it results that Father Daniil was also the confessor of Starets Basil (Chiril, *Cuviosul Vasile mare povățuitor*, p. 62).

⁸² Epifanie, *Cuvânt*, p. 11; Irineu Slătineanu, *Cuviosul Vasile*, p. 18; Fantaziu, *Mănăstirea Poiana Mărului*, pp. 93-94.

⁸³ Raccanello, *Starețul Vasile*, p. 261, note 49.

⁸⁴ See *Scrisorile unor monahi...*, pp. 66-67; Chiril, *Cinstirea ca Sfânt*, p. 26, note 5.

⁸⁵ Ene, *Cuviosul Vasile*, pp. 52-53. Sometimes monastery, at other times skete, the monastic settlement of Ciolanu had been dedicated even since the year 1625 to the Monastery Dusicon of Rumelia. Remaining without dwellers, the Greek monks of Bradu Monastery took its possessions, a fact testified by Elder Basil himself in the petition to Constantine Racoviță, twice ruler of Wallachia (1753-1756, 1763-1764), but also of Moldavia (1749-1753, 1756-1757), for its re-foundation (Ene, *Cuviosul Vasile*, p. 51).

⁸⁶ Ene, *Cuviosul Vasile*, p. 52; Raccanello, *Starețul Vasile*, p. 276.

⁸⁷ Ene, *Cuviosul Vasile*, pp. 53-55.

⁸⁸ Out of his *Diata*, one can see the humility and the holiness of Starets Basil, who proposed to the Romanians to remain themselves at Poiana Mărului, while he would have returned to Dălhăuți, but also the Romanians' *delicacy and love*, because they refused, looking for a place for a new skete. After having found the place, Elder Basil shared his fortune to his sons, *both to the Russians and to the Wallachians*, giving them both books in their language and what they needed for the holy service, see Ene, *Cuviosul Vasile*, pp. 54-55; Fantaziu, *Mănăstirea Poiana Mărului*, p. 90; Raccanello, *Starețul Vasile*, pp. 254-255.

On 25 April 1767, Elder Basil stepped into the life from beyond the grave also going through the trial of enduring physical disease⁸⁹. His tomb is still not known to this day, and his Holy Relics remain hidden, out of God's will and, maybe, out of his own will⁹⁰.

5. Honouring Elder Basil of Poiana Mărului as a Saint

Starets Basil was considered, *doubtlessly, the most famous hesychast of Romania before [Saint] Paisius and profoundly aware of the Byzantine ascetic and mystic literature translated into Old Slavic up to his time*⁹¹, and the *first teacher, in the Orthodox East, of the prayer of the mind in the modern times, [the Saints] Paisius Velichkovsky and Nicodemus the Hagiorite standing out after him, chronologically*⁹².

Saint Paisius Velichkovsky, starets of three monasteries of Moldavia, namely Dragomirna, Secu and Neamț, wrote about his spiritual father, following his meeting with him at the Skete of Trăisteni, in 1743: *This man well-pleasing to God was at that time matchless among all in the understanding of the divine Scriptures, of the teachings of the God-bearing Fathers, in the spiritual discernment and the all-perfect knowledge of the Holy Canons of the Church and in the understanding of their correct interpretation... The news about his teaching and about his advice well-pleasing to God on the way to salvation had spread everywhere. When I saw him, I glorified God with all my soul for having made me worthy to see such a holy man... While the Starets remained there, on several occasions I have been made worthy to listen to his words useful for the soul and full of spiritual judgment that he was saying to the brothers, which, being very useful to me, I considered to be words of eternal life*⁹³. Saint Paisius Velicicovski reminds Starets Basil on several occasions in his *Autobiography*, using praising expressions, and out of the Saints he met during his stay in the sketes of the area of Buzău he reminds of Basil of Poiana Mărului, but also, among others, of Mihail of Trăisteni and Onufrie of Cârnu⁹⁴.

The proposition that Elder Basil ought to be honoured among the Saints was made in the year 1992 and brought to completion only in 2003⁹⁵. The reasons of this act of the Orthodox Church of Romania are given by: Saint Basil's ascetic life and his work, examined and found faultless, regarding the prayer of the heart; *the gift of advising and guiding souls*; his drafting of writings on the prayer of the heart and his pieces of advice for monks; the honour he enjoyed as a *follower by his acts and by his writings of the great endeavours on*

⁸⁹ Chiril, *Cinstirea ca Sfânt*, p. 23.

⁹⁰ Epifanie, *Cuvânt*, p. 12.

⁹¹ Αναμφιβόλως ὁ Βασίλειος ὑπῆρξεν ὁ διαπρεπέστατος ἡσυχαστὴς ἐν Ρουμανίᾳ πρὸ τοῦ Παΐσιου καὶ βαθὺς γνώστης τῆς μέχρι τῆς ἐποχῆς του μετεφρασμένης εἰς τὴν σλαβονικὴν βυζαντινῆς ἀσκητικῆς καὶ μυστικῆς γραμματείας (Αντωνίου Αἰμιλιανοῦ Ταχιάου, *Ὁ Παΐσιος Βελιτσικόφσκι (1722-1794) καὶ ἡ ἀσκητοφιλολογικὴ σχολή του*, Θεσσαλονίκη, 1964, p. 34).

⁹² ... ὁ πρῶτος ἐν τῇ ὀρθοδόξῳ Ἀνατολῇ διδάσκαλος τῆς νοερᾶς προσευχῆς κατὰ τοὺς νεωτέρους χρόνους, τοῦ Παΐσιου Βελιτσικόφσκι καὶ τοῦ Νικοδήμου τοῦ Ἀγιορείτου διαπρεψάντων μετ' αὐτὸν χρονολογικῶς (*ibidem*).

⁹³ Sfântul Paisie de la Neamț, *Autobiografia unui stareț...*, pp. 170-171; *Ἡ αὐτογραφία τοῦ Ὁσίου Παΐσιου Βελιτσικόφσκι*, ἴν Ἀντώνιος-Αἰμίλιος Ταχιάος, *Ὁ Ὁσιος Παΐσιος Βελιτσικόφσκι*, Θεσσαλονίκη, 2009, pp. 157-158.

⁹⁴ Sfântul Paisie de la Neamț, *Autobiografia unui stareț...*, pp. 189, 190-note 4; *Ἡ αὐτογραφία τοῦ Ὁσίου Παΐσιου Βελιτσικόφσκι...*, pp. 169-171. Saint Paisius refers to Basil of Poiana Mărului and Mihail of Trăisteni also in a *Letter* to the Archimandrite Theodosius of Sofroniev Monastery, the latter being also a disciple of Elder Basil, calling them *our startsy* (Sfântul Paisie de la Neamț, *Cuvinte și scrisori duhovnicești*, I, Chișinău, 1998, p. 39). Shortly after the assumption of Elder Basil, Saint Paisius addressed the community of Poiana Mărului, calling him *the blessed into memory* (*ibidem*, pp. 17-18).

⁹⁵ Epifanie, *Cuvânt*, pp. 12-14; Pr. Prof. Dr. Nicolae Nicula, "Noi canonizări de Sfinți în Biserica Ortodoxă Română. Eparhia Buzăului și Vrancei în mare sărbătoare", in *Biserica Ortodoxă Română* 121/7-12 (2003), pp. 149-165.

*the way to perfection*⁹⁶. It is not by chance that the great scholar Nicholas Iorga called him *a great preacher of culture*⁹⁷.

The memory of Starets Basil had been honoured up to the date of his proclamation among the Saints not just by Orthodox monks, nuns and believers from different places, but also by the rulers of Romanians who gave various *Charters* either to the Skete of Poiana Mărului, or to some of the sketes that had been under his spiritual leadership⁹⁸. Actually, the scriptorium of Poiana Mărului Skete continued for a long time its activity of copying manuscripts containing the writings of Starets Basil, in their titles appearing the appellatives *The very Elder Basil the Starets, The Blessed Basil the Starets, The Elder among Skemamonks Basil the Starets*, which show the honour he enjoyed in the course of time⁹⁹.

In the first *Holy Service* composed to honour Saint Paisius of Neamț on 15 November, written precisely in the year of his assumption (1794) by hieroschemamonk John Diacovschi in Slavo-Russian, is also mentioned the honouring of Starets Basil as a Saint, along with the other Holy monks whose advice was useful for Elder Paisius, during his first stay in Wallachia¹⁰⁰. For this reason, the local honour for Starets Basil never ceased and he was painted, as a Saint, in many churches of the Archbishopric of Buzău and Vrancea, even before the year of his proclamation in the ranks of the Saints (2003)¹⁰¹.

One can notice, therefore, that Saint Basil stood out in the Romanians' Church life, but also in that of other peoples of the Orthodox world, as a *teacher of the Jesus prayer* for the modern times, and by his teachings he went deeper into the hesychastic tradition that he found in Wallachia, at the curvature of the Carpathians in the Buzău area. Saint Basil's choice to come in this place was not by chance, but through the divine oikonomia, and the studies dedicated to his life demonstrate the spiritual reasons he had in this concern.

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⁹⁶ See "Tomos sinodal al Bisericii Ortodoxe Autocefale Române privind canonizarea Sfântului Cuviosului Vasile de la Poiana Mărului (5 martie 2003)", in *Biserica Ortodoxă Română* 121/7-12 (2003), p. 155; Ică, *Starețul Vasile*, pp. 53-54.

⁹⁷ N. Iorga, *Istoria literaturii române în sec. XVIII*, București, 1901, p. 391.

⁹⁸ For instance, the *Charters* of the reigning Princes of Wallachia Alexander Scarlat Ghica (1766), Gregory III Ghica (1769), Alexander Ipsilanti (1775, 1796) and Alexander Moruzi (1793) for the monastic settlement of Ciolanu, mentioning the re-foundation of Ciolanu Skete by Elder Basil, see Protos. Chiril Dobre, Pamfil Georgian *Mănăstirea Ciolanu, monografie istorică*, București, 1930, pp. 94-99.

⁹⁹ Chiril, *Cinstirea ca Sfânt*, pp. 27-28.

¹⁰⁰ See, for instance, *Prima sedeaună după cântarea a III-a la Utrenie, Primul tropar al cântării a VI-a din Canonul cel dintâi al Sfântului Paisie la Utrenie, Sinaxarul slujbei* (Chiril, *Cinstirea ca Sfânt*, pp. 30-31). *The Holy Service of Saint Paisius of Neamț* circulated in numerous manuscripts and was printed in 1836, at Neamț Monastery. The translation of this *Holy Service* into Romanian was realized and printed only in 1992 (*Biserica Ortodoxă Română* 1-3/1992, pp. 141-157), see Chiril, *Cinstirea ca Sfânt*, p. 30, note 16.

¹⁰¹ See Chiril, *Cinstirea ca Sfânt*, pp. 32-33, note 23.

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The work of the mind for spiritual fulfillment in Orthodox patristics

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ABSTRACT

The mysticism of the Orthodox Church provides spiritual fulfillment of man in three stages: purification, enlightenment or knowledge, and perfection or union with God. Purification is the removal of passions and their replacement with virtues. For example, the philokalic texts, which are a collection of texts written by 25 Holy Fathers, form a true handbook containing various themes, but all of them educate on “the love of divine beauty” or “the love of virtue”, as the etymology of the chosen title for the compilation. Of these, the study of the mind and its dynamics is a predilection for most authors, some of whom have offered real treatises on this subject. This study limits the presentation of some Church Fathers who have spoken of this argument. The mind is a place where good and evil thought stake on a continuous struggle that positively or negatively influences human behaviour and closeness to God. For this reason, man’s special attention is needed on the mind, that is, a permanent nepsis.

Keywords: Philokalia; Orthodox; Nepsis, Mind; Vigilance; Heart; Self;

INTRODUCTION

In the context in which religiosity becomes more subjective and people seek to fill spiritual needs away from church institutions, the present study aims to briefly review a representative part of oriental Christian mysticism - the battle against thoughts, for a better understanding of the phenomenon. It is positive that many books of Orthodox spirituality are published today, and it is admirable to reactivate the work of the Holy Fathers, but without spiritual guidance, which is obligatory in Orthodoxy¹, the texts may lead to unwanted or even contrary effects to the intentions of the authors. This caution was rightly given:

„Vigilance is understood as a type of defensive barrier to the preservation of purity in action and being, reached by the Christian in relation to the world. Often confused with caution, it is likely to be taken as a mechanism that generates suspicion and fear, and which favors a negative aspect and a prejudice towards the whole reality that wrongly or rightly can infect the identity of the believer”².

¹ Hausherr, Irénée, *Paternitatea și îndrumarea duhovnicească în Răsăritul creștin*, Sibiu, Deisi 1999.

² Piovano, Adalberto, *Vigilanza e attenzione su di sé: il versante monastico*, *Tredimensioni* 4(2007) 275-282, p.275.

For this reason, it is necessary to emphasize from the beginning that the work of the mind in the Orthodox tradition is an action that concerns the entire human person through his life. Recently, Saint Paisios of Mount Athos said that:

„when there is spiritual nobility, self-sacrifice, man is related to God, is in touch with Him, and his mind is continually upon Him. Then, even if he does not pray, he still prays. His whole life is prayer. He does not think of anything else; whatever he does, his mind is continually there, with God”³.

The interest in this theme is both theological and anthropological. Thought disputes and spiritual achievement directly affect man's way of life. Sandu Tudor, the initiator of a movement of spiritual resilience and awakening in Romania in the middle of the 20th century, said that :

“we ourselves create our unhappiness and suffering through our own dark minds of evil sins and thoughts. We are stressed, worried, angry, emotional, troubled, restless, insecure, feeling inadequate, pessimistic, malicious, disconnected, and because of sins and the war caused by the evil thoughts, we do not rejoice in all our successes and accomplishments, more quickly than our failures and failures of peers”⁴.

1. Rediscovering the self in the heart by awakening and attention

The idea of the awakening mind comes in Christianity from the writings of the New Testament. “*Watch your life and doctrine closely*” (Timothy 4:16), “*be ready, that at the time when you do not think the Son of Man will come*” (Luke 12: 40), “*Watch and pray that you do not enter into temptation*” (Matthew 14,38) are passages that invite believers to a greater mindfulness, a research of what is happening around or in mind. The word used - Nipsis, which comes from the Greek language, means this state of attention to the dynamics of the mind and the constant care for cultivating the spirit. Awakening is a state of mind of waking (compared to the state of man when he does not sleep, the state of vigilance), a state of attention and remembering of the mind the movements of the soul and thoughts.

When he interprets the words of the gospel „*Watch your life and doctrine closely*”, Saint Basil the Great says,:

we men, we fall into sin lightly with the thought. Therefore, He who built our hearts one by one, knowing that most sins are committed by the impulse of our thoughts, commanded that the mind be clean first. And because we sin easily with the mind, God asks us to take more care and caution. That as the foreseeable doctors strengthen long before, by prophylactic means, the weaker parts of the bodies, so also the Carrier, and the true Doctor of the Souls, provided with a stronger guard especially the part of our soul that we know More inclined to sin”⁵.

So, if man was endowed with a superior mind above all creatures, by which he is just like God, this capacity is the place where thoughts can be good or bad, virtuous or sinful. The mind is a gift from God that man is indebted to keep.

It is very important for the attention to go inwards, leaving aside the general judgments of the world. In a famous dictum that is found in the Egyptian Apophthegm Patrum, Anthony the Great asks answers to his judgments from God, but receives a response that demands a major, if not exclusive, attention on the self:

³ Paisie Aghioritul, *Cuvinte duhovnicești. Vol IV. Despre rugăciune*, București, Evanghelismos 2013, p.168.

⁴ Daniel de la Rarău, *Gândurile bune în viața creștinului ortodox. Viața ca o prăznuire duhovnicească*. Colecția „Rugul Aprins”, Panaghia 2013, p. 7.

⁵ Vasile cel Mare, Scrieri. *Omilia a III-a la cuvintele: Ia aminte de tine insuti. Părinți și Scriitori Bisericești. Vol. 17*, București, EIBMBOR, 1986, p. 366.

“Lord, why do some who live a little, die, and others get so old? And why are some poor and rich? How are the unrighteous enriched, and the righteous poor? And a voice came to him, saying: Anthony, remember that you are judged by God, and it is not good for you to know”⁶.

Special attention given by the Holy Fathers to minds is due to the fact that it is a human organ capable of controlling their body activities. As such there is a close link between mind and behaviour, and the former is largely responsible for sinful actions. John of Damascus⁷ says that *noerón*, meaning the mind, is an organ with which God has endowed man to think and decide before committing any act. Maximus the Confessor advises in this sense in the *Second Hundred Texts on Love*: “Do not use evilly the ideas, lest you be forced to use evil actions. For if anyone does not sin first with the mind, he will not sin either with the action”⁸.

This reduction of physical life to the inner struggle of thoughts is a constant in the writings of the Holy Fathers. Macarius of Egypt, also known as Macarius the Elder, says that it is necessary an exclusive concentration of forces on thoughts to succeed in the spiritual asceticism: “it is therefore right that all man’s struggle shall be undertaken with regard to the mind”⁹. The attentions of the self that the Holy Fathers speak of are of many kinds, as we find it treated in the work of Simeon the New Theologian. Thus, there is a focus on speech by which the monk takes care of the words spoken in prayer:

“When one says this prayer, he raises his hands and eyes together with his mind in heaven, and the mind forms divine meanings and imagines his heavenly beauties, the hierarchies of Angels and tents of the righteous and, simply speaking, everything he heard from the Scriptures gathers them in mind at the time of prayer; He is stirring up his soul to divine love, looking at heaven and sometimes shedding tears in his eyes”¹⁰.

It is an urge to participate with the mind through the body language, which is, in my opinion, very real nowadays¹¹. For prayer to be fruitful, a conscious return is needed on prayers and liturgical texts. It is very important to emphasize that the attention to repetitive prayer in Orthodox monasticism does not stem from an incessant begging of Christ, but from man’s anthropological need to form mental habits:

“we repeat many times the pre-eternal Name of Christ, not because Christ does not hear the first time we call Him, but that our mind may unite with Him, for Christ is all for us, and we will end in Him”¹².

The second attention is contemplative, in the sense that the mind is no longer confined to the body’s observation and begins to focus on what is useful to salvation. It chooses itself, without the need for external stimuli:

⁶ Antonie cel Mare, *Patericul Egiptean*, Alba Iulia, Reîntregirea 2003, p. 10.

⁷ Ioan Damaschinul, *Dogmatica*, București, Apolgeticum 2004, p. 59.

⁸ Maxim Mărturisitorul, *Filocalia. Vol II*, Apologeticum, p.107; “Sinning, not blaming the deed but the thought. For if the mind did not take it before, it would not have followed the body”, Marcu Ascetul, *Filocalia. Vol. I*, Sibiu, Editura Institutul de Arte Grafice „Dacia Traiană” 1947, p. 241.

⁹ Macarie Egipteanul, *Cele cincizeci de omilii duhovnicești. Părinți și Scriitori Bisericești. Vol. 34*, București, EIBMBOR 1992, p. 122.

¹⁰ Simeon Noul Teolog, *Metoda sfintei rugăciuni și atențiunii. Filocalia. Vol. 8*, București, EIBMBOR 1979, p. 529.

¹¹ But there are also different views that accept prayers without mind participation: “The prayer of Jesus only with his mouth, without participating in the mind also helps. Of course, it does not drive the enemy out, but with the breaths you take, immobilize him where he is”, Paisie Aghioritul, *Cuvinte duhovnicești*, p. 154.

¹² Paisie Aghioritul, *Cuvinte duhovnicești*, p. 153.

“the mind is withdrawing from the senses, protecting its senses from the outside, and gathering all its thoughts, so that it will not go after the empty things; then researching its thoughts, remembering requests that speak to God with the mouth, or bring forth the robbed thoughts (of the devil), so she embraces itself in passion, starts to return to itself with force”¹³.

The third form of attention, also called mystic, is “attention of the heart” or the discovery of the light that springs from the heart:

“At first you will find a darkness and an unfathomable thickness. But by persevering and doing this day and night, you will find, a miracle, endless joy. For as soon as the mind finds the place of the heart, it sees what it does not believe. It sees the air that is in the middle of its heart, and sees itself entirely bright and full of distinctive power. And so forth, as soon as one thinks a thought, before it is formed and takes shape, it is moved by the call of Jesus Christ and consumes it”¹⁴.

The recovering the self is the discovery of the heart, a similarity in patristic terminology that identifies the two notions in two comments. Dumitru Stăniloae sees two meanings of the heart that the Fathers use in relation to the mind. On the one hand, the heart is the hidden centre of the mind, its depth, which lies at the heart of cognitive abilities, or where the attraction for beauty and God is born. On the other hand, the heart also means the subconscious of the passions, where affections guide existence wholly or the super-conscious where the impulse of the faith lies:

“the memory of our vibrations and passionate actions, imprinted in our being, related to its biological nature, as the super-conscious would be the memory of spiritualized acts and the potency of higher energies. They are also called one heart because they are hidden, central regions of our being, one of the spirit, the other of the soul’s life linked to the biological side”¹⁵.

Hence, the uniqueness of the human mind is closely linked to the believer’s voluntary act. Man has a reason, but is obliged to use creation (including his own) through the will. In fact, the unity of the reasoning of thoughts and the action of man to control his thoughts stems from the theological anthropology of the image of God that he receives in creation¹⁶. Thus, the Holy Fathers see this “in the image” of God, reason¹⁷, self-will and free will¹⁸, or reason and free will together¹⁹. That is why it can be said that the mind is not the place in

¹³ Simeon Noul Teolog, *Metoda sfintei rugăciuni și atențiuni. Filocalia. Vol. 8*, București, EIBMBOR 1979, p. 530-531.

¹⁴ Simeon Noul Teolog, *Metoda sfintei rugăciuni*, p. 536-537.

¹⁵ Stăniloae, Dumitru, *Ascetica și mistică Bisericii Ortodoxe*, București, EIBMBOR 2002, p. 172-173.

¹⁶ “When the mind will unite with God, then man will think of nothing else, not only of God. Thus, the mind of man passes from one face to another, and is created in its likeness. Because something else is gone. The mind is good, but it is on another frequency”, Paisie Aghioritul, *Cuvinte duhovnicești*, p. 169.

¹⁷ Atanasie cel Mare, *Cuvânt împotriva elinilor, Tratat despre întruparea Cuvântului, Trei cuvinte împotriva arienilor*, București, IBMBOR 2010, p. 142; “the mind of man is a good thing, and through it we are the image of the Creator ... but if reason is directed to the divine things and receives in itself from the Gifts of the Spirit, then it comes to understand the divine truths as the powers of the flesh allow it”, Vasile cel Mare, *Epistola 233. Părinți și Scriitori Bisericești. Vol. 12*, București, EIBMBOR 1988, p. 480.

¹⁸ “One by rational nature has as a natural power rational desire, which is also called the will of the rational soul, through which we will reason and in reasoning, we are going towards something deliberate willingly. So, we will, seek, think, deliberate, and judge, develop a mood, choose and start on what we have chosen and is useful”, Maxim Mărturisitorul, *Disputa Sfântului Maxim cu Pyrrhus. Părinți și Scriitori Bisericești. Vol. 81*, București, EIBMBOR 1990, p. 324.

¹⁹ “Who among the heavens is said to be the image of the God the highest? Does the Sun have the image of the Maker in it? But the moon, but the other stars? All are inanimate and material. They have only bright bodies in

which man is passionately accepting thoughts, but is the space in which man is indebted to labor, to construct thought by properly arranging the ideas and representations that are born.

The noetic and intellectual abilities that make it different from the rest of creation are also a way of special communication with God. The mind (*nous*) is a window or gate to the soul. Reason is an eye of the soul, which in the Eastern Christian tradition is also called the heart, that is, the spiritual centre of man. The Orthodox Asceticism is a “*transition from multiplicity to unity*”²⁰, from the diversity of senses to spiritual poverty, from the richness of perceptions to the unique taste of God. That is why the purpose of the world’s heart, the retreat from within the world, is the attainment of a gradual silence in which the mind is emptied of any visual, conceptual or fantastic image to contemplate. The final victory of the mind in the struggle with evil thoughts is the ability to anchor and contemplate God.

2. Thoughts lead to falling into sin

The term used by the Holy Fathers to appoint the intellectual product, the thinking faculty is *logismos*²¹. There are two kinds of thoughts produced by discursive reason: some that are an obstacle to God’s knowledge, coming from the passions of men and others that fall under the paternity of virtues. Some are clean and others unclean²².

The mind is in permanent motion. It perceives the environment through the senses, has a consciousness of things, and when it is lacking, it is capable of building images by itself. The human imagination often replaces the lack of perception by constructing what the Holy Fathers call incantations or phantasms: “*Most people do not know that all thoughts are nothing more than mere enlightenments of sensible and worldly things*”²³. So, between thoughts and reasoning, the mind is an organ that invents new mental images with which the individual must confront oneself. Whoever looks behind these ghosts will discover the bad thoughts²⁴.

When interpreting the definition of the term of *logismos* by the Holy Fathers, Tomáš Špidlík notes that this is not a thought as we understand it, but rather translates the concept of image of the mind²⁵. It is more a fantasy that is borne on the external or inferior part of the cognitive faculty, that is, in thought or in discursive reason.

Sinful thoughts (*logismo*) are hidden and very often lie in human subconscious²⁶. Macarius of Egypt urged:

which there is not thought, they are not movements caused by will. There is no freedom of will; They are subject to a constraining necessity, according to which they move incessantly without change”, Vasile cel Mare, *Omilie la Psalmul 48. Părinți și Scriitori Bisericești. Vol. 17*, București, EIBMBOR 1986, p. 319.

²⁰ Ware, Kallistos, *Împărăția lăuntrică*, București, Christiana 1996 p. 85.

²¹ For terminology and their division, see Špidlík, Tomáš, *Spiritualitatea Răsăritului Creștin. Vol I. Manual sistematic*, Sibiu, Deisis 2005, p. 285.

²² There is, in a sense, a certain positivity of evil thoughts, in the sense that a man’s consciousness that discovers wrong, false, or harmful thought can lead to the search for good things: “Tangalachi (Satan) of malice resembles cunning thoughts, but you value this work of yours in order to acquire unceasing prayer. To say to him, Good that you have brought these thoughts to me, because I have forgotten God and have spoken prayer”, Paisie Aghioritul, *Cuvinte duhovnicești*, p. 154-155.

²³ Isihie Sinaitul, *Către Teodul. Scurt cuvânt de folos sufletului și mântuitor despre trezvie și virtute*, Sibiu, Tipografia Arhidiecezană 1948, p. 80.

²⁴ Hierotheos Vlachos, *Psihoterapia ortodoxă. Știința Sfinților Părinți*, Editura Învierea, Arhiepiscopia Timișoarei, 1998, p. 245.

²⁵ Špidlík, Tomáš, *Spiritualitatea Răsăritului Creștin. Vol I. Manual sistematic*, Sibiu, Deisis 2005, p. 287.

²⁶ Evdokimov, Paul, *Înnoirea Spiritului*, Târgoviște, Pandora, 1997. p. 194.

“to suppress (the man) the forest of evil thoughts that surround him and to force himself to fulfill the commandments of God; not to let go of their thoughts, but to gather them from everywhere, to distinguish them from the evil ones. For the soul that is beneath sin is like a great forest on a mountain, or a brood in a river, or a bush of briars and thistles”²⁷.

Thoughts are fast, sharp, incisive and spontaneous. Basil the Great said that:

“the body, in order to commit an act, needs time, occasion, labor, aid, and other facilities; the mind, however, gives rise to thoughts in a moment and makes them without fatigue; and thoughts grow without hindrance and are appropriate for any time”²⁸.

Evagrius Ponticus, also known as Evagrius the Solitary, points out that thoughts are insistent and powerful and often attack violently. *Logismoi* are “evil thoughts sneaking sensitive aspects into the soul”²⁹. Thoughts have a certain capacity to act in total autonomy³⁰. The traditional concept of the Holy Fathers is that they are autonomous entities with a certain consistency and capable of penetrating by their own will. Moreover, once in the mind, they have the power to wander in different directions. From this point of view, thoughts are personified. Moreover, they are unpredictable, like a child:

“the mind is an unhindered child, a giddy and unloved child, who always wants to walk around and laugh”³¹.

Thoughts are changeable, covering a wide range. Evagrius Ponticus wrote that there are eight evil thoughts: gluttony, fornication, avarice, sorrow, discouragement, anger, vainglory, pride³². Elder Paisios of the Holy Mountain stated that “the mind, in one moment, can take you to Heaven, and the next moment, if you do not remember, it will take you to hell”³³. Thoughts are so intelligent and complex that they complicate the subject’s mind. All these “brownian movements” in which the mind records lead to disorientation and mental exhaustion³⁴. When interpreting the phrase “loosening the hidden” of Hesychius of Sinai, Emilianos Simonopetritus says that it is in fact a redeeming of the mind, by calming it, to find the meaning of life, and to respond to the most serious problems, such as health:

“How was the problem resolved? ... because your inner settlement has changed, your experience has changed ... Our problems are not unleashed because they are triggered by others and their surroundings”³⁵.

How can it be explained, however, that people perceive a world created by God, according to the act of creation? Why are stimuli ruined when they reach the mind? The

²⁷ Macarie Egipteanul, *Cele cincizeci de omilii duhovnicești*, p. 122.

²⁸ Vasile cel Mare, Scrieri. *Omilia a III-a la cuvintele: Ia aminte de tine insuti. Părinți și Scriitori Bisericești. Vol. 17*, București, EIBMBOR, 1986, p. 366.

²⁹ Evagrius Ponticus, *Capete despre deosebirea gândurilor. Filocalia I*, Sibiu, Institutul de arte grafice “Dacia Traiana” 1947, Harisma, București, p. 49.

³⁰ Bormolini, Guidalberto, *I logismoi. La disciplina dei pensieri nei Padri del deserto*, «Rivista di ascetica e mistica» 1 (2001) pp. 33-52.

³¹ Paisie Aghioritul, *Cuvinte duhovnicești*, p. 175.

³² Evagrius Ponticus, *În luptă cu gândurile. Despre cele opt gânduri ale răutății și Replici împotriva lor*, Sibiu, Deisis 2006.

³³ Paisie Aghioritul, *Cuvinte duhovnicești*, p. 171.

³⁴ Diadochus of Photicia says that the intellect is in a state of restlessness, marginalization, because only prayer gives it the possibility of an opening, Diadoch al Foticeii, *Cuvânt ascetic, despre vieța morală, despre cunoștință și despre dreapta socoteală duhovnicească, împărțit în 100 de capete. Filocalia I*, Sibiu, Institutul de arte grafice “Dacia Traiana” 1947, Harisma, București, pp. 363-364.

³⁵ Emilianos Simonopetritul, *Cuvânt despre trezvie. Tâlcuire la Sfântul Isihie*, Arad, Editura Sf. Nectarie, 2014, P.40.

Holy Fathers say that there is nothing wrong in the world and that Satan works directly on the mind to create a misinterpretation of reality by changing the body. Maximus the Confessor says that temptations “change the organic state of the body, and give thoughts through it, whether with or without intemperance: angels, demons, air, and food. Angels, I say, change it by word (reason); devils by touch; air by combustion (metabolism); and alimentation, through the kinds of food and drink, by multiplying or shrinking them. There are also the changes that emerge through memory, hearing and sight, when the soul first suffers of sorrow or joy. Because of these the soul first changes the organic state of the body. The former ones, however, first change the organic state, and then instil thoughts into the mind³⁶.

There are several stages of a sinful thought entering the heart. With a few small nuances³⁷, all the Holy Fathers who have spoken of this agree that sins start from thoughts and follow the following four-step process³⁸:

- Challenge of thought or suggestion. It is not just a temptation, but the presence of a strange thought;
- Interaction or dialogue with thought;
- Thinking or consent is the interest in the idea and the understanding of the mind, based on our freedom³⁹;
- Transforming thought into action or committing sin.

3. Method of Deliverence of the Mind

First of all, to apply the method that helps in mental vigilance, a sincere desire for self-return is necessary. In everyday life the mind is mainly associated with senses and perceptions; for the spiritual struggle with evil thoughts to begin, the believer needs retrieval by eliminating the senses. Basil the Great says that:

“when the mind is not scattered in the outer world, and the first senses are no more scattered in the world, it returns to itself and rises to the mind of God”⁴⁰.

³⁶ Maxim Mărturisitorul, *Cuvânt Ascetic. Prin întrebări și răspunsuri Fratele-Bătrânul. Filocalia. Vol II Apologeticum*, 2005, p. 111.

³⁷ “Among the discerning Fathers, distinctions are recognized between provocation, coupling, struggle, and the disease called passion, which is in the soul. These blessed Fathers say that provocation is a simple word or image encountered for the first time, which has entered into the heart. Coupling is conversation with what has been encountered, whether this be passionately or otherwise. Assent is the delighted yielding of the soul to what it has encountered. Captivity is a forcible and unwilling abduction of the heart, a permanent lingering with what we have encountered and which totally undermines the necessary order of our souls. By struggle they mean force equal to that which is leading the attack, and this force wins or loses according to the desires of the spirit. Passion, in their view, is properly something that lies hidden for a long time in the soul and by its very presence it takes on the character of a habit, until the soul of its own accord clings to it with affection”, Ioan Scărarul, *Scara raiului*, Timișoara, Învieea 2013, p. 210-211.

³⁸ Špidlík, Tomáš, *Spiritualitatea Răsăritului Creștin. Vol I. Manual sistematic*, Sibiu, Deisis 2005, pp. 289-290; Hesychios describes this process : „the provocation comes first, then our coupling with it, or the mingling of our thoughts with those of the wicked demons. Third comes our assent to the provocation, with both sets of intermingling thoughts contriving how to commit the sin in practice. Fourth comes the concrete action — that is, the sin itself. If however, the intellect is attentive and watchful, and at once repulses the provocation by counter-attacking and gainsaying it and invoking the Lord Jesus, its consequences remain inoperative; for the devil, being a bodiless intellect, can deceive our souls only by means of fantasies and thoughts”, Isihie Sinaitul, *Către Teodul. Scurt cuvânt de folos sufletului și mântuitor despre trezvie și virtute. Filocalia. Vol 4.*, Sibiu, Tipografia Arhiepiscopiei 1948. p. 53-54.

³⁹ Lossky, Vladimir, *Teologia mistică a Bisericii de Răsărit*, București, Anastasia, p. 158.

⁴⁰ Vasile cel Mare, Epistola II. *Părinți și Scriitori Bisericești. Vol. 12*, București, EIBMBOR 1988, p. 119.

It is worth mentioning here that this rupturing of the world is not definitive and does not deny creation, because the purpose is to find God in every corner of the world and to be fascinated by the beauty of the world.

In a study on Hesychasm, Kallistos Ware states that there are three developments or understandings of the term, to send to the outer or inner silence of the monk. The first refers to the choice of the isolated human way of life that the first Christian monks wanted. The second, it also refers to a spatial dimension, that is, to the that each monk undertakes in his own cell. The third meaning is borne of the inner retreat of each monk. The present study is interested the second sense of the process, which associates the tradition of the wilderness with the vigilance of the mind. Thus, spiritual warmth or sobriety can be achieved in the quiet space that the monk has in his cell⁴¹. In that place there is a series of movements in the mind of the monk, far from a flattening of the mind, where silence is a context or a pretext for refining thoughts to virtue. The silence or space in which it enters is a dimension that rises and seeks essential answers, which in everyday life are covered by various worries:

“the monk that remains in the cell is like the chord of a finely tuned instrument. Hesychia keeps him in a state of vital tension, but without excessive anxiety. If it stays far out, the soul is humming and falling away”⁴².

As such it is very important that man is invited to introspection and cleansing of the mind. I could say that, based on Ware’s line of reasoning, who asserts that there is a sect of the laity, every man who wants to gain a victory over evil thoughts needs an intimate space, a “prayer corner”.

4. The association between mind and prayer reveals virtues

The importance of fighting evil thoughts is equal to the danger. The Tradition of the Christian East speaks of two ways of the mind fighting against thoughts. On the one hand, the mind can resist the evil concepts that overwhelm it. But:

“this method can lead to the opposite result, for, rejected by violence, thoughts tend to return with greater force. Whoever is not master of course is better to use the second method, which is indirect”⁴³.

The second method is to point the mind to good things. The mission is not to immediately empty the mind, but to fill it with prayer and the call of God. The mind is thus an instrument through which the prayer of the heart can be reached, which goes beyond human understanding.

For this reason, the battle between the mind and constant prayer are like two sides of the same coin. From which it follows that they can not exist without each other and that they support each other. Both dynamics, a cathartic and sliding one that descends to the heart, and another ascetic and creative asceticism that comes from the heart to reshape the mind, are like two lungs of the same reality, that of spiritual life. From the heart, prayer also includes the mind, which becomes self-made. In other words, the cleansing of conscience and reason, which in the Orthodox tradition has the term of *ennoia*, makes place or re-incarnates the intuitive faculty of mind, that is, *nous*⁴⁴:

⁴¹ Ware, Kallistos, *Împărăția lăuntrică*, București, Christiana, 1996 p. 79.

⁴² Ware, Kallistos, *Împărăția lăuntrică*, București, Christiana, 1996 p. 80.

⁴³ Ware, Kallistos, *Împărăția lăuntrică*, București, Christiana, 1996 p. 88.

⁴⁴ The difference between rational, discursive and intuitive minds is underlined in Špidlík, Tomáš, *Spiritualitatea Răsăritului Creștin. Vol I. Manual sistematic*, Sibiu, Deisis 2005, p.285.

“the man whose prayer does not strive to say Jesus’ Prayer, but without making an effort, speaks for and within itself. Even in sleep, he prays the Prayer, and when he awakens continues it”⁴⁵.

“Hesychia means the passage from my prayer to the prayer of God that works in me”, said Kallistos Ware⁴⁶. But how is this prayer of the heart? Tomáš Špidlík says this is beyond words. It is neither imaginative nor conceptual, because “the multitude of ideas does not go hand in hand with the hesychia”. The lack of any logical idea leads to a “genuine iconoclasm”⁴⁷.

The method of defending evil thoughts recommended by the Holy Fathers is to combat them by quoting texts from the Holy Scripture. Evagrius Ponticus writes a true manual in this sense, called *Antirretheticos*⁴⁸, in which he shares the eight thoughts of malice and offers remedies from the Bible to each. Each diabolical turn-over corresponds to quotations from Holy Scripture for the beautification of the mind. However, today’s practice is rather little presence, much more used is the utterance of Jesus’ Prayer. This is because, as Špidlík says:

“their learning was a considerable labor for a monk lacking in culture! But the practice simplified things. The invocation of Jesus became sufficient to banish all the demons, and Jesus’ Prayer substitutes into mystery complicated classifications”⁴⁹.

CONCLUSIONS

The first conclusion that emerges from the above is that human effort is needed for spiritual fulfillment. Although God has unlimited and mysterious powers, he demands from believer free will of and expression of the liberty, that he received in creation. This expression is a struggle that a faithful man must always hold. The second conclusion is that there is a reduction of religious experience to the mind dynamics. The Holy Fathers agree that the mind is the territory in which man’s ability to do good or evil is played. Many of the Eastern Fathers quoted give to the mind a primordial, if not exclusive, role in generating sins. This reduction also results in the spiritual counsel they give, the instructions that come from their own experience. Man must focus on the mind and can do it with waking, consciousness, but especially with the struggle against thoughts. Another important conclusion is that this struggle, which tends to cancel or remove thoughts, is not confused with a simple cleansing of the mind, but with a healing of evil thoughts with the good ones. Good thoughts are those that contain God.

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⁴⁵ Paisie Aghioritul, *Cuvinte duhovnicești*, p. 159.

⁴⁶ Ware, Kallistos, *Împărăția lăuntrică*, București, Christiana, 1996 p. 86.

⁴⁷ Špidlík, Tomáš, *Spiritualitatea Răsăritului creștin. Vol. II. Rugăciunea*, Sibiu, Deisis 1998, p. 320.

⁴⁸ Evagrie Ponticul, *În luptă cu gândurile. Despre cele opt gânduri ale răutății și Replici împotriva lor*, Sibiu, Deisis 2006.

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Secularization - the promoter of 'new type of man'

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ABSTRACT

Secularization is a phenomenon supposing major mutations on the social level. Thus, based on the principle of rationality, secularization has led to the removal of religion from the social sphere, the desacralization, aiming, ultimately, that the sacred disappear altogether from man's life. Within the globalizing-secularizing society, economics seeks to take possession of the entire social and spiritual life, helped by a policy-aggressive mercantile mentality. Secularization has led to manipulation of man so that he believes he has to build his future by abstaining from religion. The secularized man has come to the conclusion that only by his own forces helped by reason, economy and technology he can be the one who creates progress, namely perfection for himself and for the world he lives in. The hypermodern man is a man of ephemerality, a human being looking for his accomplishment in trifles, who no longer has deification as his final goal. The problems that man is facing today can be solved by taking the eternity as reference system for them.

Keywords: Orthodoxy; secularization; globalization; spirituality; hypermodernism; ethical relativism;

INTRODUCTION

The Orthodoxy and the Christian world, in general, are faced today with a moral-spiritual crisis making its presence felt in the society defined as hypermodernist and globalized, a crisis maintained by secularization.

Etymologically, the word "secularization" comes from the Latin "seculum", which means "race, nation, generation, epoch, century (in the sense of long, undetermined duration)", but also "spirit of the epoch, fashion of the time, worldly life"¹. Thus, the notion of *secularism*, *secularization* designates a phenomenon by which, on the level of mentalities, there appears an important mutation *in the spirit of the time* or *according to the fashion of the time*. Actually, this spirit and fashion of our times are tributary to "the lust of the body" and "the lust of the eyes" and "the pride of life" (1 John 2: 16), which constitute now absolute values and ideas. It is the type of society whose ideas and principles (with the pretense of "values" that must be universalized) are impregnated in today's human consciousness. Saint John the Evangelist has in view precisely this danger when he exhorts: "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world - the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, and the pride of possession - is not from the Father but from the world. The world is passing away with all its desires, but the one who does the will of God remains for all time."

¹ G. Guțu, *Dicționar Latin-Român, Științifică și Enciclopedică*, București, 1983, p. 1082;

(1 John 2: 15-17). The ideals of the secularized world, its principles radically differ from the world built on the foundation of Christ's teachings, namely the world purified and transfigured by the work of the Holy Spirit, which will enjoy "a new earth and new heavens" in the age to come, as the Good God assures us (Revelation 21: 1-22: 5).²

1. BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE SECULARIZATION PHENOMENON

The period of maximal theoretical preoccupation with the secularization phenomenon was that of the 1960s, when this phenomenon developed and took place very intensely. According to some specialists of that epoch, the crisis caused by the secularization of religion was irreversible, secularization being nothing else but the result of the rationalization process. It was believed that the phenomenon is irreversible and unstoppable, its results being the removal of religion from the social sphere, desecration, and then a total disappearance of the sacred from man's life. The public, influenced by the "scientific" theories of the specialists and of the media, was thinking that "modernity" would settle down in history as complete rationalization of the existence.

Today, globalization represents the most recent stage of Western modernity, with implications that are simply unpredictable for the entire mankind, due to the fact that the economic factor is trying to acquire dominion, with the help of its aggressive-mercantile mentality, on the entire social and spiritual life.

"Due to the fact that globalization is an effect of the economic developments, it has a secular nature, edified outside the living of faith."³

To move from a *market economy* to a *market society*, the human society is exposed to huge risks, which could trigger un-healable wounds for man's becoming in the world and his destiny in eternity. We see the economic factor triumphing over spirituality, the technique trying to drive aside culture, the politics taking no heed to Christian ethics and the body being given more importance than the soul.

"In essence, the discussion on the theme of secularization wants to express the fact that the ratio between religion and laity, between the orientation to a transcendent system of reference and immanent accomplishment has changed fundamentally in modern Europe."⁴

Secularization means the drifting away of man and of the society from the fundamental principles of Christian spirituality.⁵ All is reduced to the horizon of the earthly life, religion being no longer able to give legitimacy to the social and political order. Therefore, by "secularization" one can designate:

"the processes of laicization, namely of emancipation from under the authority of the religious area, appeared in the Occident starting with the period of dissolution of feudalism. This process involved the moving away of the spheres of science, social action and political power from the dominion or influence of the ecclesiastic institutions or of the symbolical-religious universes."⁶

² Pr. Ioan Bizău, *Viața în Hristos și Maladia Secularizării*, Patmos, Cluj-Napoca, 2002, pp. 62-63;

³ M. Vlad, "Globalizare și Religie", in *Renașterea*, Editată de Arhiepiscopia Ortodoxă a Vadului, Feleacului și Clujului, no. 6, iunie 2000, p.6;

⁴ Ulrich Ruh, "Europa și secularizarea: trăsăturile principale ale unui proces cu multe fațete", in *Un suflet pentru Europa. Dimensiunea religioasă a unui proiect politic*, Anastasia, București, 2005, p. 1;

⁵ Pr. lect. univ. dr. Mihai Hincinschi, *Misiune și dialog. Ontologia misionară a Bisericii din perspectiva dialogului interreligios*, Reîntregirea, Alba Iulia, 2003, p. 134;

⁶ Arhimandrit lector univ. dr. Teofil Tia, *Reîncreștinarea Europei? Teologia religiei în pastorală și misiologia occidentală contemporană*, Reîntregirea, Alba Iulia, 2003, p. 20;

Religion and morals are driven away from the public life, into the private life domain, technical solutions and public legislation becoming a substitute for moral consensus. Thus, public life comes under the dominion of secular legislation, bureaucracy, rationality and technology, and the private life domain comes under the dominion of the individual options.

Due to the artificial separation between public domain and private domain:

“religion being reserved to the second domain of existence, (...) the Western social, economic and political structures will take shape and will be expressed either outside the Church, or against it. Although religion is attributed the domain of private options, the majority of the individuals get to live their personal life in a secularized manner, without any religious interpretation of the existence.”⁷

2. THE SECULARIZED MAN - A “NEW TYPE OF MAN”

Speaking of secularization, we mean the laicization of society and culture so much that the Church and religion were excluded from human life. This vision of the Church and religion stated strongly by the philosophies of Descartes, Kant and Hegel, but began in the late thirteenth century by disputes between Boethius of Dacia and Siger of Brabant, who modified the relation between faith and reason, between theology and philosophy, between monks and intellectuals. More precisely, this report went from a phase of harmony to a phase of indifference, then of opposition.⁸ The report mentioned above followed an interesting route. In the first part of modernity, from Descartes to Hegel, the rationality was emphasized only because it was believed to be the key to all things, and therefore everything that pertained to faith, Church and Christianity was rejected. But, in Postmodernity, in the second part of modernity, the rationality has come to the conclusion that it is powerless, cannot answer the fundamental questions of mankind, and therefore appealed to the help of any religion or superstition, thus encouraging religious syncretism, resulting in the emergence of many sects. It should be noted that:

"the secularized man has changed his perspective on the history of mankind, in which he has not seen a history of God-directed salvation, but the initiative of men - secularized history has become the subject of scientific research. Liberated from any spiritual conditioning, the modern man thought he could build his future by ignoring religion. That's how appeared and developed earthly messianisms, the ideologies of the historical rise of societies - Hegelianism, positivism, Marxism, communism, fascism, etc. - who have brought many sufferings into the lives of people and societies."⁹

The secularized man is of the opinion that only by his own forces helped by reason, economics and technology can be the one who creates the progress, that is, his own perfection and the world in which he lives. Thus the role of the rationality was overestimated as the engine of the evolution of the world, reaching a linearity of Christian time without transcendence and sense. We meet enough people today who are struggling for progress, relying solely on rationality.

The hypermodern man turned into a disinterested being that nothing impresses him.

"Pleasure and profit are the only values that attract him. The hustle and bustle of modern man are only an endless and frightened run after sensations and useful. A look around us

⁷ Pr. Ioan Bizău, *Viața în Hristos și Maladia Secularizării*, p. 66;

⁸ Pr. Prof. Univ. Dr. Wilhelm Dancă, “Creștinismul și provocările actuale”, interview conducted by Pr. Drd. Nicolae Răzvan Stan, in *Mitropolia Olteniei*, anul LVIII, no. 5-8, 2006, p.134;

⁹ Pr. Prof. Univ. Dr. Wilhelm Dancă, “Creștinismul și provocările actuale”, interview conducted by Pr. Drd. Nicolae Răzvan Stan, p. 135;

reveals only hurried beings, running under the pressure of an obsession for sensations and riches, or beings with tired faces of restraint, walking their passionate gaze over everything that might give them new and new sensations"¹⁰.

Another feature of today's man is the fact that he no longer has cultural roots, is the servant of a so-called "global culture" that alienates him and throws him into a mass of people who are chaotically guided by excessive consumerism. This man consumes a foreign culture of what he really is, that is, a man with a distinct identity and individuality, a citizen of a nation with certain customs and traditions, with a Christian morality that did not fail in the course of two millennia. We can talk about cultural consumerism, that is, about the consumption of cultural acts specific to other geographic areas, other traditions, other peoples formed over time. McDonaldisation, the type of MTV or hollywoodian culture and other such excessively promoted cultures, only lead the man of today to a disastrous departure from the true culture, the "Holy Spirit" culture.

Contemporary man who lives in an ethical relativism, and can no longer understand what freedom is in reality:

"confuses the inner freedom with consensual permissiveness without ontological root, and comes to practice a tolerance based not on the full respect of the human person but on the conviction that all things have the same value, because nothing is absolutely true. The major risk to which the new man in the new secularized world is exposed is that this ideological consensus that serves as a norm turns into oppression and affirm that a "legal" thing is also a "moral" thing. Though it seems to be a tormented Prometheus, it shares the discouragement of Sisyphus or the egalitarian love of Narcissus swallowed by the waters, the contemporary man has never given up looking for a meaning for his life project."¹¹

One can see today a removal of religion from public life and its isolation in private life. The same happens in the case of the man who is separated, according to the pleasure of those who are interested, in the body (which becomes the object of the other) and the soul (autonomous subject). But, we must not forget that from the Christian point of view the separation between body and soul is erroneous, while man is both body and soul. The character of a human person involves the indissoluble and indestructible connection between body and soul, matter and form. Historians and sociologists of Christianity have identified three factors underlying the estrangement of the man of faith and mutilation and reduction only to the body: the spread of Anglo-Saxon puritanism at a geographical and cultural level, the emergence of "scientific dilemmas" in the second half of the eighteenth century and the exaggerated promotion of the culture of liberalism in the nineteenth century.

The secularized man, reducing everything to purely utilitarian value, is continually looking for comfort and pleasure, avoiding even the simplest forms of asceticism.

"As soon as he lives comfort, satisfied adaptation and the installation in his own comfy life, limited to the preoccupation of acquiring his material satisfaction, man, any man, loses his spiritual light, becoming, etymologically and actually, a civilized and comfortable animal."¹²

All these lead to the settling in of a true spiritual amnesia in the deepest area of conscience. This type of man proves to be indifferent both to God's existence and to the principles of life of the Evangel, showing an almost complete lack of interest to the religious problems, yet being fond of political and economic, sportive or mundane issues.

¹⁰ Constantin C. Pavel, *Tragedia omului în cultura modernă*, Anastasia, 1997, p.24;

¹¹ Constantin C. Pavel, *Tragedia omului în cultura modernă*, p. 136;

¹² H.-R. Patapievică, *Om recent: o critica a modernității din perspectiva întrebării «Ce se pierde atunci când ceva se câștigă?»*, Humanitas, București, 2002, p. 137;

Chasing away the sacred from his life and his preoccupations, the secularized man produced a desecration of the Christian celebration by replacing it with conventional “feasts”, which have a strictly consumerist, political, nationalist or playful character. Though not yet erased from the modern calendar, the ancient Christian celebrations have been emptied of their liturgical, sacred contents and have become “celebrations” for fun, physical relaxation, supplementary work in the family, or exaggerate consumption of material goods. Secularism makes man no longer feel the need to have God as his system of reference in all he does, since God would annul his liberty. This man, affected by the malady of secularism:

“no longer prays, feeling sufficient to himself; no longer has the eternity as his system of reference, being the prisoner of the moment; is no longer concerned by the liturgical and sacramental life of the Church because he no longer feels the need of holiness. He no longer accepts to take into account God’s will and the natural laws by which the world’s Creator and Custodian leads the creation towards its final target, having the conviction that the whole reality can be controlled and managed only based on laws elaborated by himself. One can say that we are dealing with a man belonging to a different anthropological type than the one understood for a long time by the European man. This new man lives as if God did not exist or is content with a diffuse, vague religiousness. And when he accepts a certain form of religiousness, he is only looking for comfort; a physical and psychic comfort that he would like to perpetuate infinitely.”¹³

The secularized man no longer perceives salvation as an ontological restoration in Christ, but as a means of delivering stress by acquiring certain techniques and methods specifically created for that purpose. This explains the success of the numerous sects that sprouted into Christian space. Religion no longer represents, for the secularized man, the “way” of spiritual fulfillment and meeting with God, but only an “alternative technique” for harmonizing, developing, securing and welfare, without clear reporting to transcendence.

Speaking of “the last days”, the Apostle Paul says that then:

“people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, braggarts, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderous, uncontrolled, untamed, not loving the good, treacherous, reckless, conceited, loving pleasure rather than loving God, having the appearance of godliness but denying its power” (II Timothy 3, 1-5). This is also the portrait of the secularized man, ‘an instinctual man, selfish, unscrupulous, powerless, cowardly, servile, and avid of comfort, superstitious, slave of petty pleasures and of breaking news. The secularized man gradually loses control over his own interiority, which means that his intimacy is delivered to the outside and that he does not belong’¹⁴.

One must not forget the fact that:

“the secularization phenomenon has both positive and negative aspects. The Enlightenment, as engine of the secularization process, promoted very valuable ideas for the European civilization and culture, such as: the idea of nation, the idea of human rights, scientific and technological progress etc. Yet, the great shortcoming that secularization brings with it is the tendency to orient man more to the world down here than to the spiritual world”¹⁵.

Trying to drive man away from faith, from the spiritual world, secularization is dragging man into a spiritual void, a state in which he no longer has values and landmarks

¹³ H.-R. Patapievi, *Omul recent: o critica a modernității din perspectiva întrebării «Ce se pierde atunci când ceva se câștigă?»*, p. 82;

¹⁴ H.-R. Patapievi, *Omul recent: o critica a modernității din perspectiva întrebării «Ce se pierde atunci când ceva se câștigă?»*, p. 84;

¹⁵ Arhiepiscop Prof. Univ. Dr. Nifon Mihăiță, “Consumism și Globalizare – Provocări făcute credinței de cultura consumistă”, in vol. *Spiritualitate și Consumism în Europa Unită*, Ed. Reîntregirea, Alba Iulia, 2004, p. 214;

and this is why he becomes individualistic, with a weakened conscience, no longer wanting to take on responsibility for his own acts.

Among the effects of secularization on man and the society he lives in, one can enumerate:

- a diminution of the role of the Church in the daily life;
- a lower trust of man in the divinity;
- a degradation of the relations among people;
- encouragement of an excessive libertinage;
- a fragmentation of the traditional Christian family;
- an alteration of all the social structures;
- desecration of the Christian celebrations;
- imposing the symbol instead of the religious essence.¹⁶

One can find a man's removal from spiritual experiences, their repression, and their substitution with various surrogates borrowed from the various "religious" movements that have emerged on the background of secularization. Thus, the absolute man's thirst has been exploited by many charismatic spiritual leaders, adepts of some of the most eccentric spiritual forms, who take advantage of the lack of discomfort in which people today are. We are urged to lead a life based on excessive consumption of material things, the consumerism becoming in the vision of postmodernity and hypermodernity the standard of good living. We are taught that if we do not have the material comfort indicated by the ads that abound and suffocate our lives, then we can consider ourselves and we are considered by our peers to be the "pariah" of the society in which we live. The man is valued according to the material possibilities, according to the accounts he has in the bank and the way he spends his money on them, and not on the virtuous or sinful way of living his life. In fact, man's consciousness has been so suffocated by the shambles brought by secularization that he can no longer encompass God.

In secular society, man lost God and replaced him with what the fashion of the time offered him, the secular spirit, and that to be an integral part of society, in order to resemble the peoples, to be liked by them, or rather to be tolerated, and not to bother them with things related to Christian spirituality and to disturb their lives with no reference to the transcendent or to the eternal dimension of the human being. Christians must struggle to stop the phenomenon of secularization because they bear most of the responsibility for its consequences because they are tempted by the "spirit of time," and are easily accommodated to the "standards" of a world that accepts to live only in the plan of earthly life.

3. THE ORTHODOXY – THE CHANCE OF SALVATION FOR THE SECULARIZED MAN

To the present human society, conquered by the principles of the market economy, the Orthodoxy needs to offer the viable solutions it has available, yet which it needs to apply taking into account the present context. Of course, there have already appeared positive results thanks to the efforts made by the Orthodox Church, and one can feel a deepening of the faith, which had a positive impact especially among the young.

Although in the social environments one can feel a true rebirth of the authentic Orthodox faith, one cannot mask or minimize the absence of spirituality on a large scale, this spirituality having been replaced by forms of pseudo-spirituality coming from the West or

¹⁶ Ștefan Iloaie, *Relativizarea valorilor morale. Tendințele eticii postmoderne*, Renașterea, Cluj-Napoca, 2009, p. 23;

imported from the East. One can also add the scourge of the sects that have invaded the Orthodox environments, causing confusion and unrest. Orthodox minds today preserve the "key" values of the market economy culture - success, safety, competition, profit and social condition - "values" detached from everything that means Orthodox ethos through the fact that they no longer have evangelical inspiration.¹⁷

We, the Orthodox, need to be aware that secularization, though born and having acquired ample proportions especially in the Occident, affects us and this is why we should take steps towards stopping this scourge. And how could we counteract the damaging effects of secularization if not by an authentic Christian life, at the same time ascetic and sacramental, prophetic and community-based, with the deep capacity of happily assimilating the positive experiences of the modern culture while eliminating, at the same time, its deviations. The Orthodoxy has the possibility to give a chance of true living to the world around us by the power of its mighty weapons: the Evangel, the Liturgy, the Philocaly, the Icon and, last but not least, the Holy Fathers. Yet, to venture in the just fight, it must evaluate with discerning heart and wisdom the evil produced by secularization, to elaborate afterwards a coherent strategy, because it is only in this way that the weapons enumerated will bring fruit.

Let us not forget that one of the unhappy consequences of secularization is the fact that Europe runs the risk of no longer recognizing its roots, and this is happening because the European man no longer acts according to the Christian principles.

The Orthodox Church is the perfect keeper of the treasure received as heritage from Jesus Christ, her Savior and Leader, a treasure enriched during the epoch of the persecutions and the Ecumenical Synods by so many martyrs who have testified for the faith and Holy Fathers. The Orthodoxy is the one perfectly expressing the authentic communion of man with God. It is in this light that we must see the overwhelming importance of the Orthodoxy in a world increasingly ruined by secularization, a world that needs a return to the true values with and by the help of the Orthodox morals and spirituality.

In the context of the spiritual confusion the contemporary man is sinking in, the Orthodoxy offers the possibility of being the binder between the contemporary civilization and its traditional roots, without diminishing or altering its basic components. The Orthodoxy always makes this solution by its pan-Orthodox approaches for a better coordination of its common testimony, which it highlights in dialogue not just with the rest of the Christian world, but especially with the monotheist religions (Judaism and Islam) in order to promote a larger collaboration and to face together man's and the world's contemporary problems.

The place of the Orthodoxy in the secularized society of our days is defined by the role it has, namely of ministering to the contemporary man, a ministry not limited to arid theory inspired by its patristic tradition but manifested by the implementation of this tradition to face the heavy problems of our contemporary world.

CONCLUSIONS

We can characterize the secular world as a space in which sacredness and spirituality are no longer included, where man is encouraged to live as dictated by "the desire

¹⁷ Christos Yannaras, *Adevărul și Unitatea Bisericii*, trad. rom. Ierom. Ignatie Trif și Uliniuc Ionuț Dumitru, Sophia, București, 2009, p. 54;

of the flesh, the desire of the eyes", where the "the pride of possession" is valued, and humility, prudence, temperance are considered non-values.

The secularized man, de-spiritualized and desacralized, guides his steps according to the "spirit of the age" and "the fashion of time". The criteria for guiding people's personal lives have radically changed: convenience is the one that bases most of all the actions that the secularist man does. There is no longer a reference to the values of spiritual life, to what remains in eternity. In fact, the man of this age shapes his existence only by referring to the ephemeral, for which he will pay here, will accumulate the "passing ones", having only the false impression that he has acquired what he needs, that he is happy and fulfilled. The personal and social life of this new type of man revolves around the ephemeral.

The Christian, the man having the eternity for his perspective, following the way inspired by the moral-Christian teachings, desiring spiritual enrichment, that man moving along the horizontal axis of life always taking into account its transcendental level, has the capacity to re-orient the secularized man as well, to move the economic, the political and the social level of life according to the vibrant rhythms of the celestial music. The problems that man is facing today can be solved by taking the eternity as reference system for them.

The immediate, the ordinary, the comfortable, namely the ideals and the ephemerality specific of the secularizing norms find their solution in embracing the Christian-Orthodox spirituality, in the profound anchoring in the Church. The latter, by virtue of the loving communion uniting her and which she promotes, has the capacity of transforming the contemporary man into a being able to face all the challenges coming from secularization.

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