

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

Ph.D. Professor Habil. George Daniel PETROV,

"Ovidius" University of Constanta,
ROMANIA

Email: petrovgeorgedaniel@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

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

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

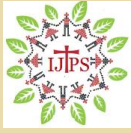
INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

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



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

1. PHILOSOPHICAL MORAL NIHILISM AND THE EXPRESSION OF ITS FORMS

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

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

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

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

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

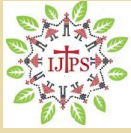
² J. Goudsblom, *Nihilism and culture*, Blackwell, 1980, p. 137.

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

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

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

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



as neither rational nor irrational. Thus, ethics "is an attempt to give universal and not just personal importance to certain desires of ours"⁷.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

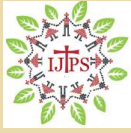
⁹ P. Edwards and P. Arthur, *A Modern Introduction to Philosophy*, The Free Press, New York, 1965, p. 487.

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

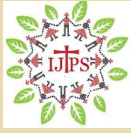
¹⁹ D. Eford, "Combinatorialism and the Possibility of Nothing", in *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 84 (2), 2006, p. 269.

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

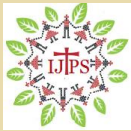
Being capable of perceiving God's love, the human person responds to divine love, this act introducing time as a means of manifesting love. "Time represents the spiritual distance between created persons and God, between God's offer of love and the expectation of an answer"³⁴ from man. Of course, it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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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



CONCLUSIONS

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

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

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