CREMATION IN CHRISTIAN MORAL EVALUATION

Rev. Leontin POPESCU,
PhD. Professor, Faculty of History, Philosophy and Theology
"Dunărea de Jos" University, "Sf. Trei Ierarhi" Research Centre Galați,
ROMANIA,
E-mail: leontin.popescu@ugal.ro

ABSTRACT

If ars moriendi is the ability to live one's own death, ars mortis celebrandi is proof that the issue of death and its rites lies at the very heart of the idea of humanity. The art of celebrating death is, like any art, humanity's desire to transfigure all reality, and nothing is more realistically cruel than a lifeless human body. Funeral rites are also a response to the enigma of death, and this response contains the meaning that man recognises in his own existence, from birth to death. For this reason, the burial of the dead is the oldest act of humanity that man performs towards his neighbour. Even in their most archaic and primitive forms, funeral rites are eloquent testimonies of man's respect for his neighbour, attesting that the dead human body is granted special dignity, so that it is treated as a person and not as a mere object.

Keywords: *cremation death; person; image; nature;*

INTRODUCTION

The need to discuss what happens to the earthly remains of man at the end of his life comes, on the one hand, from the liturgical practice and teaching regarding this moment in life and, on the other hand, from the challenges and determining factors of contemporary culture in which Christians and Christian communities live and which they experience.

Death, so present in biblical revelation and in the daily flow of events, trivialised in the media, marginalised everywhere, has become a real taboo in society today. With increasing secularisation, death and the moment of passing from this life have lost all their sacred connotations, becoming not just a passage, but an inevitable concept that ends in nothingness.

A civilisation such as ours, witnessing the decline of the cult of the dead because the way of contemplating the end of life differs from that of the past, receives a subtle but progressive anaesthesia, intended to mitigate, if not hide, or even remove the concept of death. This anaesthesia of consciousness, which acts by removing the visibility of the physical end through rendering its circumstances and rites opaque, brings with it a silence that is not the silence of prayer in the face of the sacrament and the inexplicable nature of the sacrament, but only an awkward silence, even full of compassion, which very often prepares us for non-acceptance or indifference to an obvious reality. Less than a generation ago, mourning underwent a radical change and is now reduced to a minimum, as it is now considered inappropriate to show pain and sadness. However, this process of removing death from real life is accompanied by an excess in its media representation, which only serves to miss the serious meaning of looking at the moment of death.

Death—an inevitable sign that man is also subject to the dynamism of every creature's movement of in the universe—has been and is too frequent, painful, and dramatic to be ignored. Death is the only event that can be seen with certainty in everyone's future. However, today, it seems that the humanity of death has been inevitably lost, erasing even the memory of the person, as the

growing phenomenon of cremation has taken hold, contributing decisively to erasing our being. There is, therefore, from the outset, a constitutive link between funeral rites and what makes a human being human, to the point where the rites surrounding death can be considered one of the most expressive signs of the quality and level of a person's humanity[1]. According to some researchers, funeral rites and the celebration of services for the dead have even led to the emergence of forms of civilisation[2].

While the Orthodox Church has been and remains opposed to cremation in its entirety and has not established any liturgical rites except for those cremated against their will[3], contemporary cultural discernment has revealed a misunderstanding of Orthodox theological anthropology regarding the value of man and life.

1. BIBLICAL AND PATRISTIC ARGUMENTS REGARDING THE VALUE OF THE HUMAN PERSON IN THEIR ENTIRETY, BODY AND SOUL

During the patristic period, Christian anthropological reflection was placed within the biblical sphere, in the sense that the texts of the Holy Scriptures were recognised as key to understanding the mystery of man[4]. Thus, both the Old Testament and the New Testament speak of the appearance of man and his relationship with the world around him, revealing his identity: who he is, how he was created, his purpose and mission on earth. Consequently, man is created as a result of God's own counsel with Himself in His image, and in accordance with the texts of the New Testament, patristic anthropology acquires a Christological content[5] at the centre of which there lies the synthesis made by St. Athanasius: "*God became incarnate so that we humans might become gods... that is, heirs of immortality'*"[6].

In the Sacrament of the God-Man, Christ, we have the answer to the great questions of our human existence.In the biblical view, the creation of man is considered as the completion of creation, which would otherwise have remained incomplete, distributed over six days to give theological foundation to the rest on the seventh day. For this reason, man is given a dignity that underlies all his values, and for this reason, human life cannot be violated, and any attack on it constitutes sacrilege.

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[1] Goffredo Boselli, *Evangelizzare la morte*, Edizioni Qiqajon, Comunita di Bose, 2012, p. 10.

[2] Louis-Vincent Thomas, *Rites de mort. Pour la paix des vivants*, Paris 1985, p.115; Louis-Vincent Thomas, *Antropologia della morte*, Milan 1976, p. 341. Louis-Vincent Thomas, *Le cadavre. From biology to anthropology*, Brussels 1980; Phlippe Aries, *Man in the face of death*, vol. I-II, Meridiane, 1996.

[3] *Decision of the Holy Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church of 15 June 1928*, reaffirmed by *the Decision of 20 September 1933* and *the Decision of 5 July 2012* of the same Holy Synod; *Decision of the Holy Synod of the Serbian Orthodox Church of 11/21 October 1928* and reaffirmed by *the Decision of 1967*; *Decision of the Holy Synod of the Orthodox Church of Greece of 10 October 1937* and *26 March 2002*; Cyprus 2013; Russian Orthodox Church 1915; *Decision of the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church in the diaspora 20 August / 2 September 1932*; For those cremated without their consent or against their wishes at the request of their relatives, following the decision of the local bishop, only the Trisagion service may be performed at the burial of the urn - see Răzvan BRUDIU, *Cremation - missionary challenge or* Christian *counter-witness*, REÎNTREGIREA, Alba Iulia, 2017, pp. 277-286; Jan-Claude LARCHET, *A Christian end to our lives, without pain, without confrontation, in peace... ,* BASILICA, Bucharest, 2012, pp. 303-310; Fr. Lucian Vasile PETROAIA, *The Burial and Commemoration of Those Who Have Fallen Asleep in the Lord*, Alexandru Ioan Cuza University Press, Iași, 2022.

[4] Marciano Vidal, *Manuale di etica teologica. Vol. 2, part one: Morale della persona e bioetica teologica*, Assisi: Cittadella Editrice, 1995, p. 143.

[5] Panayotis Nellas, *The Deified Animal Man*, Sibiu: Deisis, 1999, p. 65.

[6] S. Athanasius Alexandrinus archiepiscopus, "Oratio de incarnatione verbi", in: Jacques Paul Migne, *Patrologia Graeca* 25, col. 95-198, here 191C.

The starting point for our assessment is first of all the biblical account of the creation of man: In Genesis 1:26, man (= male-female) is the fruit of a divine plan that creates him "in the image and likeness" of God, meaning that in terms of his "appearance," he is the likeness-image of a divine being, like a copy of the original. The two terms "image" and "likeness" do not indicate two different aspects, but one external (image) and the other internal (likeness) of the same reality[7]. Almost all contemporary exegetes[8] recognise the centrality of this theme: *imago Dei* (the image of God) in biblical revelation, but also discussed in ancient philosophy and with great Christological relevance in New Testament theology, because according to the biblical account, man was created "in the image of God"; man is the image of the image, an icon of Christ. The two fundamental coordinates of Christian anthropology are the "image" and "likeness" of man in relation to God, emphasising that man is an incarnate spiritual being[9]. The two terms used in the biblical account of Genesis – tselem and demuwth (image and likeness) – which the Septuagint translates as Eikona (eikona) and omiosin (omoiosin), and the Vulgate by imaginem and similitudinem, are meant to indicate that human nature does not come from below, but from above and is connected to the divine world[10], in a recognised patristic formula: participation in divine life[11].

The image and likeness of God do not consist in the "personality" of man or in the "freedom of the self", nor even in the "dignity of man" or in the "free use of moral faculties", but rather in the fact - sic et simpliciter - that human nature does not come from below, but from above and is linked to the divine world. St. Gregory of Nyssa dares to say that man is indeed related to God in order to maintain within himself a constant longing for God[12]. In this context, by virtue of participation – kinship with the divine – the image could mean the appearance, manifestation and direct representation of God in the world[13]. That is why the biblical account completes the understanding of man's purpose in the world with that of dominion: "*And God blessed them, saying, Be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves upon the earth, and over all the earth!*" (Genesis 1:28). Essential to man's divine likeness is his function in relation to the extra-human world: due to this, creation is considered as being in a certain finalistic relationship of subordination to God, from whom it originates.

God placed man in the world as a sign of his own greatness, in order to guarantee and affirm his right to sovereignty. This sovereignty extends over the whole world, not just over animals, which

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[7] Vittorino Grossi, "Antropologia", in: *Nuovo Dizionario patristico e di antichita cristiane*, vol. I, A-E, Genoa- Milan: Casa Editrice Marietti S.p.A., ²2006, 370-378, p. 370.

[8] Panayotis Nellas, *The Deified Animal Man*, Sibiu: Deisis, 1999; Yannis Spiteris, "Trinitarian Theology in the Christian East: Soteriological and Anthropological Implications," Rome: PATH 1(2003) 71-93; Gerhard von Rad, "EIKON," in: Gerhard Kittel - Gerhard Friedrich, *Grande Lessico del Nuovo Testamento*, vol. III, Brescia: Paidea, 1967, 139-177; Olivier Clement, *Theology and Poetry of the Body*, Casale Monferrato: Piemme, 1997; P r.dr. Marin Ciulei, *Patristic Anthropology*, Bucharest: SIRONA, 1999; Dan Mirea, "The Orthodox Teaching on Image and Likeness," Alba Iulia: *Altarul Reintregirii,* 3(2018), 213 -236; Guido Bosio - Enrico dal Covolo - Mario Maritano, *Introduzione ai Padri della Chiesa. Secoli II-III*, Turin: Societa Editrice Internazionale, ⁴ 1998; Vittorino Grossi, "Antropologia", in *Nuovo Dizionario patristico e di antichita cristiane*, vol. I, Genoa-Milan: Casa Editrice Marietti S.p.A., ² 2006, 370-378; Juan Luis Lorda, *Antropologia Teologica*, Pamplona: EUNSA, 2009; Valerio Polidori, "L'idea di 'uomo' e 'persona umana'," in: "Eta Patristica. Due antropologie a confronto," Pontifical Institute of Arabic and Islamic Studies, Rome: ISLAMOCHRISTIANA 38 (2012) 21–33.

[9] D. Mirea, "The Orthodox Teaching ...", 215.

[10] G. von Rad, "EIKON," p. 167.

[11] S. Gregorius Nyssenus, "Oratio catechetica magna," in: J.P. Migne, *PG* 45, 11- 106; 22C.

[12] S. Gregorius Nyssenus, "Oratio catechetica ...", 22D.

[13] Christos Yanaras, *Primer of Faith*, trans. Fr. Dr. Constantin Coman, Bucharest: Editura Bizantină, 1996, p. 72.

are mentioned in the biblical account of creation because only they can be considered rivals to man. This right of sovereignty does not yet imply, however, the right to kill and sacrifice. In God's creative will, the food of humans and animals was to be vegetable[14].

"The words: *'Let us make mankind in our image, after our* likeness' (Genesis 1:26) - says St. John Chrysostom - mean nothing other than that man has been given dominion over everything on earth."He also said: "The words 'in our image' do not mean image in essence, but image in dominion"[15]. This dominion of man is not a despotic dominion in the sense of an imposing master, but in the sense of one who is ready to lead the whole creation towards its final reason or purpose[16]. Therefore, within the sphere of his dominion, man receives a "mandate" by which he is called to exercise God's sovereignty and prerogatives in the world[17].

Therefore, we affirm that both in the reading of the Old Testament biblical reference and in the patristic understanding, "image and likeness" is certainly of participation and not of nature, because the difference between the Creator and the creature is abysmal, qualitative and ontological[18]. Therefore, we reaffirm: the image and likeness of God does not consist in the "personality" of man or in the freedom of the "ego", nor even in the "free use of moral faculties", but rather in the fact that human nature has received, through its direct creation by God, a kinship with the divine world that gives it reason and the foundation of its dignity[19]. From this point of view, Panayotis Nellas says that:

"... it is clear that the essence of man is not found in the matter from which he was created, but in the Archetype (model) on the basis of which he was fashioned and towards which he tends. It is precisely for this reason that, in the patristic conception of the origin of man, the theory of evolution does not create a problem ... Science can and has a duty to study the 'matter' from which man was made, but any serious scientist knows that it is impossible to investigate with objective science the 'model' on the basis of which man was made"[20].

The meaning of the image in the Old Testament biblical sense is therefore very clear, namely, it attests to the status of man as a creature who has two modes of representation: on the one hand, he manifests himself as a dialogue with God, and on the other hand, as a dialogue with the world. If the texts in the Book of Genesis emphasise the relationship with God (Genesis 1: 26-28), and therefore the greatness of man, the wisdom texts (Psalm 8: 4-7 *"What is man that you are mindful of him? Or the son of man, that you seek him out? You have made him a little lower than the angels, and with honour and glory you have crowned him. You have put him over the works of your hands; you have put everything under his feet*"; Psalm 102:14 - "For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust"; Psalm 103:30 - But when Thou turnest away Thy face, they are troubled; Thou takest away their breath, they die and return to the dust; Ecclesiastes 12:7 (*"And as the dust returns to the earth as it was, so the spirit returns to God who gave it*") remind us of man's relationship with the world, and therefore the fact that he has a vulnerable body and that, together with his soul, he is

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[14] Gerhard von Rad, *Theology of the Old Testament. Theology of the Historical Traditions of Israel*, vol. I, Brescia: Paidea, 1972, pp. 177–178.
[15] S. Joannes Chrysostomus, "Sermones IX in Genesim", *Sermo III, 1, in: J.P. Migne, PG* 54, col. 581-630; 591: "Ad imaginem et similitudem, diximus, nempe non esse substantiae comparationem, sed dominatus similitudem".
[16] C. Yanaras, *Primer of Faith*, p. 72.
[17] Gerhard von Rad, "EIKON," p. 170.
[18] P. Nellas, *Man ...*, p. 73.
[19] Gianni Colzani, *Theological Anthropology. Man: Paradox and Mystery*, Bologna: Edizioni Dehoniane, ²2000, p. 68.
[20] P. Nellas, *Man ...*, p. 75.

destined to reach perfection. The name "man" applies to both the soul and the body, together and not separately, because both were created in the image of God. Although man belongs to the material world in body, he is not limited by it, but rules over it, his purpose being to bring matter to perfection (to likeness) and to inherit heaven.

Because of this dual nature[21], man's position is unique in the world, as, because of the spiritual part of human nature, he possesses the ability to attain the state of angels, while through his body, which is the instrument of judgment and reason, he dominates the visible world and places it under his control and authority. Therefore, the dignity and excellence of man are due not only to the soul, but also to the body, because both are created by God and both are necessary for the perfection of man[22]. St. Dumitru Stăniloae also expresses this when he speaks about the creation of man:

"Man, as a special being," says the holy father, "is created simultaneously in his entirety. By mentioning the bifurcated nature of the act of creation of man, Genesis means only that man is made up of two components: body and soul, and that the body is made of general matter, while the soul has a special kinship with God ... but Genesis specifies that the act of creation of man is a special act also in its part relating to the body. Man is, on the one hand, a being distinct from nature and, on the other hand, a being that is both unified and composite. Likewise, the act of his creation is an act distinct from the creation of nature. He is both unified and bifurcated at the same time"[23].

The image of God in man must therefore be related to the whole man and, therefore, also to his body. Christ, from an anthropological perspective, represents the concrete man "in the image and likeness" who becomes the way to the transformation of man, "in the image and likeness" of God. Man is not his own created constituent, he is in fact what he will become, therefore he is not only "God's work" in the sense of being created by God, but above all "the guarantor and assumed by the Holy Spirit"[24]. In other words, man has, through creation, the image of God—he is deiform[25] —in his unity of body and soul, which he must bring to perfection, that is, to the likeness of God, or, as the Holy Fathers say, to deification.

Being "in the image of God" does not naturally imply an identity with God in man: the immense distance between the creator and the creature separates him from it. This means that, since God is perfection and absolute stability, created nature cannot have consistency[26] in itself, but only through change. St. John Chrysostom sees this change in man's ability to choose between immortality and death, thus explaining that the sin of one man brought about a frightening change that spread to all his descendants, destroying everything and losing the power of domination[27].

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[21] S. Basilius Magnus, "Homilia in Psalmum", XLIV, 11, in: J.P. Migne, *PG* 29, col. 387-414D, here col. 411B.

[22] Marius Telea, "The Nature and Purpose of Man in the Cappadocian Fathers," in Petre Semen and Liviu Petcu (eds.), *The Cappadocian Fathers*, Iași: AXIS Foundation Publishing House, 2009, p. 152.

[23] S. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, vol. I, Bucharest: Publishing House of the Biblical and Missionary Institute of the Romanian Orthodox Church, ³2003, 405-406.

[24] S. Irenaeus, episcopus Lungudunensis et Martyr, "Adversus haereses libri quinque," in: J.P. Migne, *PG* 7b, 433-1224, here col. 1142B.

[25] S. Clemens Alexandrinus, "Stromata", Librum VI, in: J.P. Migne, *PG* 9, 9-604; here col. 294.

[26] S. Gregory of Nyssa, *De hominis opificio*, in: J.P. Migne, *PG* 44, 123-257, here col. 186AB.

[27] St. John Chrysostom, "In Mattheaum, Homilae 56," in: J.P. Migne, *PG 58*, 625-632 here col. 626; St. John Chrysostom, "Homiliae in Genesin" 16, 4, in: J.P. Migne, *PG 53*, 21-386, here col. 132; St. John Chrysostom, "Homiliae XXXII in Epistolam ad Romanos," Homilia X, 1: in: J.P. Migne, *PG* 60, 583-680, here col. 475; S. Joannes Chrysostomus, "Homiliae in Genesin", Homilia IX, 4: in: J.P. Migne, *PG* 53, 78- 79.

Man was created in a unity that cannot be defined by its individual components[28], i.e. only by the body or only by the soul, but only in the unity of coexistence[29] (semper coexistens) of the two. Hence the absolute value of human nature as a whole, but also of each person individually, due to their relationship with God, who is the Absolute par excellence[30]. For this reason, patristic teaching refrains from giving a definition of both the image of God in man and the likeness. Most of the Holy Fathers[31] see in the plural form in Genesis 1:26 a dialogue between God the Father and God the Son and identify this image according to which man was created with the Son[32]. For this reason, patristic anthropology[33] speaks of a single image of God, namely that of the Son, who through incarnation becomes the Archetype of the divine image in man. Christ is the only IMAGE of God, while man is always an image according to the IMAGE[34]. The divine Logos is the IMAGE not only at the moment of man's creation, but also at every moment of spiritual progress that man achieves by following Christ (kat eikona)[35]. God creates man not with a general humanity in mind, but with a specific, deified one, a precise IMAGE of man, namely the IMAGE of the absolute Man, of the future Christ[36]. The Son is the one through whom all the reasons for the existence of the entire creation were made and through whom the connection between God and the world is achieved. He is the only IMAGE of the triune divine being because only the Son is eternally born of the Father, and the Holy Spirit, through procession, eternally bears the same Image that is of the Son, thus fully manifesting the consubstantiality of the Holy Trinity[37]. Therefore, it can be said that, by virtue of his creation in the image of God, man is a bearer by participation of the IMAGE of the Holy Trinity[38]. St. Paul the Apostle is the first to highlight this when he states in his Epistle to the Colossians 1: 15-18 "*He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For in Him*

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[28] Leontin Popescu, "The image of god within man – the foundation of spiritual perfection", in: *International Multidisciplinary Scientific Conference on the Dialogue between Sciences & Arts, Religion & Education MCDSARE*, Târgoviște: Published by IFIASA,https://www.ifiasa.com/_files/ugd/378e6f_cdb7c1e1ee0845218c30fe04f78676c9.pdf, 2020, pp. 67-69, 72.

[29] S. Cyrillus Alexandrinus archiepiscopus, "Commentarium in Evangelium Ioannis," in: J.P. Migne, *PG* 73, 9- 156, here 27A.

[30] Jean-Claude Larchet, *The Ethics of Procreation in the Teachings of the Holy Fathers*, Bucharest: Sofia, 2003, 249. P. Nellas, The Deified Animal Man, p. 68.

[31] P. Nellas, *The Deified Animal Man*, p. 68.

[32] S. Basilius Magnus, "Homilia IX in Hexaemeron," in: J.P. Migne, *PG 29*, 187-208, here col. 206A.

[33] Athenagoras Atheniensis, Philosophus christianus, "De resurrectionem mortuorum," in: J.P. Migne, *PG* 06, 974-1022; St. Irinaeus, "Adversusu Haereses," in: J.P. Migne, *PG* 07b, 433-1224, Liber Quintus, 1119- 1224; Tertullian, in "De resurrectione carnis," develops his own theological vision, affirming the value of the body and soul, of the unity of body and soul in man, based on the fact that Adam was created and shaped by God in the light of Christ and the Church, in the perspective of the future kingdom, that is, God in his divine plan sees Adam together with his fall in the light of Christ and the Church - in Jacques Paul Migne, *Patrologia Latina* 02, 837-934, here col. 848BC; Sancti Methodius Episcopus et Martyr, "Ex Libro de Resurrectione", in: J.P. Migne, *PG* 18, 266D-330; Origen, "Contra Celsium", liber VI, 63, in J.P. Migne, *PG* 11, 1394; S. Joannes Chrysostomus, "Homiliae XII in Epistolam ad Colossenses", Homilia VIII, 2, in: J.P. Migne, *PG* 62, 299-390, here col. 353; St. Athanasius Alexandrinus Archiepiscopus, "Oratio contra gentes," in: J.P. Migne, *PG* 25, here col. 15D.

[34] P. Nellas, *Omul ...*, p. 67.

[35] Henri Crouzel, "Immagine", in: *Nuovo Dizionario patristico e di antichita cristiane*, vol. I, F-O, Genoa- Milan: Casa Editrice Marietti S.p.A., ² 2007, pp. 2533-2543, here p. 2534.

[36] Prof. Dr. George Remete, *Suferința omului și iubirea lui Dumnezeu*, Bucharest: Publishing House of the Biblical and Missionary Institute of the Romanian Orthodox Church, 2005, pp. 64-65.

[37] Ioan Bruss, *Primordial Man from the Perspective of Patristic Anthropology*, Bucharest: Mayon Publishing House, 2017, p. 26.

[38] Vittorino Grossi, *Outlines of* Patristic *Anthropology*, Rome: Borla, 1983, p. 60; Henri Crouzel, *Theology of the Image of God in Origen*, Toulouse, Editions Montaigne, 1955, p. 171.

all things were created, in heaven and on earth, the visible and the invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities. All things were created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. And He is the head of the body, the Church." Starting from here, most of the Eastern Holy Fathers—St. Cyril of Alexandria[39], St. Gregory of Nyssa[40], St. Basil the Great[41], St. Gregory of Nazianzus[42], St. John Chrysostom[43], St. Irenaeus[44], Methodius of Olympus[45] - but also Westerners - Marcus Minucius Felix[46], Tertullian[47], Lactantius[48], Blessed Augustine[49] - say that Adam foreshadowed the mystery of Christ, in the sense that Adam, who here represents all humanity, was created in the image of Christ before the creation of the world. Therefore, "let us make man in our image and likeness..." contains not only a statement about the origin of man, but according to theological interpretation[50], it speaks to us about the eschatological future of man.

Through His Incarnation as a human being, the Son of God gives special respect to matter in general, and to the body in particular. Moreover, the union of the two natures – human and divine – in the unique person of Christ is not to the detriment of either of them. The divine nature of Christ manifests itself without absorbing the human nature, and the human nature follows the divine nature as established by the Holy Fathers at the Fourth Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon: *Following the Holy Fathers, we unanimously teach that we confess one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only Begotten, recognised in two natures, unmixed and unchanged, undivided and inseparable, without the union abolishing the distinction of natures, but each of the two natures retaining its own properties and uniting in one person and one hypostasis, not in two persons divided and separated, but in one and the same Son, Only Begotten, God the Word, Lord Jesus Christ*"[51].

As is well known, the concepts of *prosopon and ipostasis* (in Greek) and persona (in Latin) appear in Trinitarian doctrine and only in the Christian context[52], that is, only in relation to the

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[39] S. Cyrillus Alexandrinus archiepiscopus, "Glaphyra in Genesim, Librum I", in: J.P. Migne, *PG* 69, 9-678 here col. 30D.

[40] S. Gregory of Nyssa, Bishop, "De hominis opificio," in: J.P. Migne, *PG* 44, 123-257, here col. 134B.

[41] S. Basilius Magnus, "Homiliae in Hexaemeron," in: J.P. Migne, *PG* 29, 187-208; "Homilia in illud, attende tibi ipsi," in: J.P. Migne, *PG* 31, 197-218.

[42] S. Gregorius Nazianzenus, "Orationes, Oratio VII: In laudem Caesarii fratris", in: J.P. Migne PG 35, 755-788, here col. 786C.

[43] S. Joannes Chrysostomus, "Homiliae XII in Epistolam ad Colossenses", Homilia VIII, 2, in: J.P. Migne, PG 62, 299-390.

[44] S. Irenaeus, episcopus Lungudunensis et Martyr, "Adversus haereses, Liber Tertius", in: J.P. Migne, *PG* 7, 843-972, here col.931B.

[45] Methodius Episcopus et Martyrus, "Ex libro de Resurrectione," in J.P. Migne, PG. vol. 18, col. 265-330.

[46] Marcus Minucius Felix, "Octavius," in: J.P. Migne, *PL* 03, col. 231-366.

[47] Tertullianus, "De resurrectione carnis," in: J.P. Migne, *PL* 02, 837-934; De Baptismo et de Poenitentia. Adnotationes," in: J.P. Migne, *PL* 02, 1199-1296;

[48] Lactantius, "De Opificio Dei, Vel formatione hominis," in: J.P. Migne, *PL* 07, 9-76.

[49] S. Aurelius Augustinus, "De civitate Dei", in: J.P. Migne, *PL* 41, col. 13-804; "De trinitate", in: J.P. Migne, *PL* 42, col. 819-1098, here col. 1060.

[50] Gerhard Kittel, "Uso traslatio di 'immagine' nel Nuovo Testamento," in: Gerhard Kittel - Gerhard Friedrich, *Grande Lessico del Nuovo Testamento*, vol. III, Brescia: Paidea, 1967, pp. 177-184, 184; Juan L. Ruiz de la Pena, *Imaginen de Dios. Antropologia teologica fundamental*, Santander: EDITORIAL SAL TERRAE, ³ 1988, pp. 80-81; P. Nellas, *Omul ...*, pp. 67-68.

[51] Fr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, II, Bucharest, IBMBOR, 2003, p. 36; see also Fr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru Radu (ed.), *Missionary Guidelines*, Bucharest, IBMBOR, 1986, p. 315.

[52] Fr. Ioan Ica Sr., Dr. Alexandros Kalomiros, Deacon Andrei Kuraev, & Fr. Doru Costache, *The Holy Fathers on the Origins and Destiny of the Cosmos and Man*, Sibiu, Ed. Deisis, 2003, p. 58.

Incarnation of the Son of God[53], which allowed human history to take a decisive step in this direction, that is, to ask the question about the concept of person and to explain who the person is[54]. The Christian doctrine of the Trinity explains that hypostasis in Greek is persona in Latin – ultimately considered equivalent – expressing the distinct subsistence of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, who are **one** in substance (ousia) or nature (fisis). Only in the context of Trinitarian doctrine is the concept clearly defined in terms of the relationship that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit experience – or rather have – with one another. This is true for both Eastern and Western Fathers[55].

In theological scholar thinking, the first to dare to use the Latin word "person" was the brilliant theologian Tertullian[56] (c. 155-230) when speaking about God, and from him onwards in theological language, this usage has never been abandoned, even though – it seems – Tertullian did not yet realise the full significance of the speculative step he had taken. He challenged the dualism of Gnosticism, but also the Sabellianism of a certain Praxeas, who had made the Father and the Son into a single person and spoke of the Father's passion on the cross (from which the heretical current of Patripassianism sprang). Tertullian calls both the Father and the Son "persons," but does not yet explain who or what the person is in itself[57].

Severinus Boethius (c. 480-524) provided us with the first rigorous philosophical definition of the concept of person. It is a definition so sober as to seem abstract, but it remains purely sufficient: *rationalis naturae individua substantia* (rational individual nature)[58]. It is a definition that manages to be open enough to express the entire personal universe of God and man. From this perspective, only man among all creatures can be and is a person. "*It is clear*," says Boethius, "*that there can be no question of a person in lifeless bodies; no one says that there is a person in a stone or in creatures without feeling. There is no person in a tree or in beings without intelligence and reason, in a horse or an ox or other animals that live their lives mute and without reason, living only by their senses. But we say that there is a person in man, in God, in the angel*"[59].

Each person, in their unique unrepeatable nature, is not only made up of a body, but also of a soul, so that the body is given, according to Christian teaching, at the moment when the soul comes, simultaneously forming what is called, from a Christian point of view, the human person. The body expresses the person in the different stages of life. The value of the human body lies not only in its biological superiority over everything that surrounds it, but especially in the fact that it carries within itself the special work of the soul with all the complexity of its rational activities and forms of sensitivity[60]. "*There is no part of the human body*," says Minucius Felix, "*that does not fulfil a need or constitute an adornment*"[61]. Even when the body is abandoned by the soul, says St. Dumitru

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[53] Dumitru Stăniloae, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, vol. III, IBMBOR Publishing House, Bucharest, 2003, p. 113.
[54] Mons. Krzysztof Charamsa, "Alle radici della persona," in: *Rivista Alpha & Omega*, 14/1(2011), Rome: Ateneo Pontificio Regina Apostolorum, ISSN 1126-8557, pp. 55-85, here p. 58.
[55] Ghislain Lafont, *Peut-on connaître Dieu en Jesus-Christ?*, Ed. du Cerf, Paris 1969, 124.
[56] Quintus Septimius Florens Tertullianus, "Adversus Praxean" VII-VIII; XII-XIII, in: J.P. Migne, *PL* 02, col. 175-219, here 184-187; 191-194.
[57] K. Charamsa, Alle radici della persona, p. 60.
[58] Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius, "Liber de persona et duabus naturis", III, in: JP. Migne, *PL* 64, col.1337D-1354D, here col. 1343D.
[59] Boethius, "Liber de persona ...", II, col. 1343B.
[60] S. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, vol. I, Published by the Biblical and Missionary Institute of the Romanian Orthodox Church, 3 2003, p. 392.
[61] Marcus Minucius Felix, "Octavius", in: J.P. Migne, *PL*. 03, 231-366, here 287B: "*Nihil membrorum est, quod non et necesitatis causa sit, et decoris*".

Stăniloae, not even then can the body be seen as an object[62]. *"If man has been given the body to care for*," continues St. Father, "*not only to procure for it what ensures its earthly life, but to raise it as a bridge to God and as a transparent and communicative means of friendship and love towards others, it means that the body has been given eternal importance*"[63]. The teaching of the Holy Fathers emphasises that the body is an intrinsic part of the human person and therefore participates in the perfection of the person according to God's purpose: deification.

The Holy Fathers see the body not as an obstacle to salvation, but as a medium for the manifestation of grace and participation in the Mystery of God. St. Gregory of Nyssa emphasises that man, in his entirety, body and soul, is called to deification. Not only the soul, but also the body is transfigured by the uncreated energies of the Holy Spirit. This holistic vision places the body in a mystical and existential framework, where knowledge is no longer just a cognitive act, but a process of ontological communion[64]. Man is inclined by his nature "towards the good and the beautiful," and it is irrational passions (Platonically linked to the "body") that cause him to fall into sin. For this reason, for the Holy Fathers, the true human nature is that of Christ, and the connection between anthropology and Christology (and, therefore, the connection with Trinitarian theology) becomes inevitable. "Christification," however, does not take place only through personal imitation - mímitei[65] - but through a true participation at the ontological level, hence the key role of the term fisis to express the same concept that in Trinitarian theology was usually designated by ousia[66]. Ultimately, therefore, it is the human nature of Christ, from which the unity and simplicity characteristic to the divine nature pours into man, that gives man access to the Trinitarian perichoresis.

Christian doctrine on creation categorically excludes metaphysical or cosmic dualism, because it affirms that the entire universe, spiritual and material, was created by God, who regarded it as *Very Good.* Along the same lines, Christian teaching on the Incarnation of the Son of God declares that the body is an intrinsic part of the person and participates in the salvation brought about by the divine acts of Christ, even having an eschatological dimension through the Resurrection of the Dead. In reality, it is only in the Great Sacrament of the Incarnate Logos that the mystery of each human being is revealed[67].

The Holy Fathers, as we have seen, clearly stated the position of the Orthodox Church on man and creation: man was created with the possibility of attaining immortality, which did not vanish with sin; on the contrary, the existence of the saints is the certainty that, through Christ, man can be sanctified. If we accept Western predestination, then the incarnation, sacrifice, death and resurrection of Christ no longer make sense, since it is arbitrarily decided who is and who is not saved. This explains why the West, abandoning the teaching of human free will, can conceive of everything as permissible: cremation, eugenics, euthanasia, genetic manipulation, and many other things that only lead to the conception that matter, creation, and man are evil, and consequently, everything is permitted.

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[62] S. Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Immortal Image of God*, vol. I, Bucharest: Cristal, 1995, pp. 92-93.
[63] S. Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Immortal Image...,* p. 97.
[64] S. Gregorius Nissenus Episcopus, "In Ecclesiasten," in: J.P. Migne, *PG,* 44(Paris: Garnier), col. 615-754, col. 623.
[65] S. Gregorius Nissenus Episcopus, "De oratione Dominica," in: J.P. Migne, *PG,* 44 (Paris: Garnier), col. 1119-1193, here col. 1179.
[66] Giulio Maspero, *Trinity and Man. Gregory of Nyssa's Ad Ablabium*, Leiden-Boston: BRILL, 2007, p. 26.
[67] Leontin Popescu, *Suffering as Proof of Freedom*, Tritonic, 2020, p. 80.

2. CREMATION

From the very beginning, the Christian Church, continuing the practice already existing in Israel, unlike the pagan world of the time, where it was an acquired custom, did not use cremation of corpses.

Christianity has never accepted cremation for several reasons.

The Old Testament presents a complete absence of the funeral rite of cremation, even a specific prohibition[68] regarding cremation, considered an abominable rite, which refers to the cruel pagan cult in honour of Moloch, a pagan deity of the Ammonites, to whom children were sacrificed and burned alive[69]. "*You shall not give any of your children to be sacrificed to Moloch, so that you do not defile the name of your God. I am the Lord*" (Leviticus 18:21). "*Do not learn to imitate the abominable practices of those nations. Let no one be found among you who passes his son or daughter through the fire*" (Deuteronomy 18:9-10). "Ahaz was twenty years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem sixteen years, but he did not do what was right in the eyes of the Lord his God, as his ancestor David had done. He walked in the ways of the kings of Israel and even passed his son through the fire, following the abominations of the nations that the Lord had driven out before the children of Israel (4 Kings 16: 2-3). Moreover, in the ancient world of the Old Testament, non-burial was considered a punishment or a source of curse. To avoid this, not only Mosaic law but also Roman law required the burial of all human remains, regardless of their condition and regardless of whom they belonged to, even those of criminals[70].

In the New Testament, we find repeated burial rituals that have nothing to do with cremation. The bodies of the deceased were laid in tombs dug into the rock, as in the case of Lazarus (John 11:38), as recorded in the case of Christ the Saviour (Matthew 27:30; Mark 15:46; Luke 23:53). Just before his death, in response to the act of love of Mary of Bethany, Jesus made a specific reference to burial, saying, "She has done this for my burial." (Matthew 26:12). Later it is specified that Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus took Jesus' body and wrapped it in linen cloth with spices, following the Jewish burial custom (John 19:40).

Christians, following the example of Christ the Saviour and the custom established among the Jews, never accepted cremation, precisely because they did not conform to pagan customs. Indeed, in the New Testament we find several references to burial, but never to cremation.

Ancient Christians, in order to demonstrate their belief in the resurrection of the dead, consistently practised the burial of the deceased, condemning cremation on several occasions, in controversy with pagan Gnostic authors[71] who often disregarded the body and especially the earthly remains[72]. This practice led to the construction of large Christian cemeteries known as catacombs, a testimony throughout the centuries to the practice of burial as a guarantee of the final resurrection. The belief in the resurrection of the body and in the sacredness of the body itself, as a temple of the Holy Spirit, once baptism had been received, was considered by the early Christian communities to be incompatible with the practice of cremation, which accelerates the natural process of

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[68] Fr. Prof. Dr. Nicolae D. Necula, *The Orthodox Church's Attitude towards* Cremation, Bucharest: Basilica, 2013, p. 41.

[69] Jean-Claude Larchet, *Why Does the Orthodox Church Not Accept Cremation*? Bucharest: Basilica, 2013, p. 44.

[70] Piotr Kuberski, *Christianity and Cremation*, Naples: EDI, 2014, p. 78.

[71] Tertullian, De anima, 51, *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesisticorum Latinorum* (*CSEL*), vol. 20, pp. 298–395, here p. 383; Tertullian, "De Ieiunio aduersus psychicos," 17, CSEL, vol. 20, pp. 59-133, here p. 297.

[72] Origen, *Against Celsus*, V, 24, in: JP. Migne, *PG* 11, col. 641-1632, here col.1213B: Celsus receives from Origen a response that affirms the unity between body and soul in the ancient pagan conception (Heraclitus) regarding earthly remains considered rubbish.

decomposition, immediately reducing the corpse to ashes[73]. Once Christianity became the official religion of the empire, Emperor Theodosius' edict of 392 expressly repudiated cremation as a pagan practice. This ban was further reaffirmed in 785 by an edict of Charlemagne, which even established the death penalty for anyone practising this rite[74]. In the Middle Ages, cremation was therefore not practised, except in very exceptional circumstances, such as those caused by natural or man-made disasters, such as epidemics, earthquakes, wars, etc.

Christians do not accept cremation not because, as some have argued[75], they fear they will not rise from the ashes. Rather, Christians do not cremate their bodies out of respect for God who created them, but also because the body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, as St. Paul says: "*Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own?" (*1 Corinthians 3:16, 19).

Respect for the body, of course, is based on respect for all creation. Unlike demons, who want to destroy and disfigure God's creation, Christians are called to respect, care for, and love everything that God has created, and even if creation shows signs of imperfection because of the fall into sin, we must not love it any less. Hence the deep aversion of Christians to phenomena such as abortion, infanticide, euthanasia and suicide: destructive solutions (even if they may be more convenient in the short term) are a sign of a lack of faith or, perhaps, of the replacement of Christian faith with another (Gnostic) faith, for which bodies are mere "prisons" of the spirit, preventing us from attaining true holiness.

This Gnostic idea of the body as a tomb for the soul was condemned as a lie by the incarnation of the Son of God. Our bodies are as holy as our souls: this is why we have a duty to feed the hungry and clothe the naked, as well as to pray for them.

In separating body and soul, we do not take refuge in the hope of a bodiless heaven, but await "new heavens and a new earth" (2 Peter 3:13), in which we will live in the same union of body and spirit that God willed for Himself.

In this sense, there is no trace in Antiquity that would allow us to assert that cremation was adopted in Christianity for dogmatic or philosophical reasons, but we can say that, due to a trust placed in the Jewish tradition to which every Christian feels bound as a new branch grafted onto the old trunk, starting from the burial and resurrection of Christ, we can explain why Christians have always preferred burial to cremation[76]. A study on the treatment of corpses in Antiquity reveals that the practice of cremation ceased with the advent of Christianity[77]. Even though Christian remains do not differ externally from those of the customs of the time, nevertheless, taking into account the general sensitivity, it can be said that all Christians expressed their piety for the deceased through multiple and precise rites that have their immediate origin in Greco-Roman and Jewish practice[78], as seen in funerary inscriptions, but also in the singing of psalms and the hallelujah[79] according to

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[73] Davide Dimodugno, "Requiescat in loco sacro: prime riflessioni sull'uso delle chiese cattoliche come colombari tra esigenze della Chiesa e complessità delle normative regionali," in: Rivista telematica, 2 (2024), pp. 41-75, here 48.

[74] Michele Aramini, *1500 grammi di cenere. Cremazione e fede cristiana*, Àncora, Milan, 2006, p. 35.

[75] Marcus Minucius Felix, *Octavius*, in: JP. Migne, *PL* 3, col. 252-360, here col. 266-271; 347.

[76] Felice di Molfeta, "Inumazione e cremazione. Tradizione cristiana, ritualita, legislazione," in: *Rivista Liturgica,* 5(2006), Padua: Edizioni Messaggero, pp. 739–755, here p. 743.

[77] Cyrille Vogel, "L'environnement cultuel du défunt durant la période paléochrétienne," in: *La maladie et la mort du chrétien dans la liturgie*, Conference Saint-Serge, XXI Semaine d'etudes liturgiques, Paris, 1, 4 July, 1974, Rome: CLV-Edizioni Liturgiche, 1975. - pp. 381-413, here 385-386.

[78] Cyrille Vogel, "L'environnement cultuel...", p. 385.

[79] S. Eusebius Hieronymus, "Epistola 77", 11, in: J.P. Migne PL, 22, 690-698, here col. 697-698.

the Christian writer Jerome, who describes the funeral of Saint Fabiola in Rome. The same is told to us by Saint Cyprian, who recommends wearing white clothes during the mourning period as a sign of immortality[80].

In contrast to any pagan custom of mummification, embalming or cremation, which affirms the concept of total annihilation of man, including body and soul, the Christian vision has been and remains essentially faithful to the eschatology of incarnation, modelled on the burial of Christ, the first seed sown in the ground with a view to resurrection. Thus, every time a Christian enters the "womb of Mother Earth" in anticipation of the resurrection, the entire universe inaugurates its eschatological orientation according to a suggestive vision of Saint Ambrose[81]: "The world has risen again in Him, heaven has risen again in Him, the earth has risen again in Him; for there will be a new heaven and a new earth." We could call this vision "a pause/stop in front of the tomb" where every Christian discovers the interdependence between personal eschatology, nourished by the certainty of attaining eternal happiness even before the resurrection of the body that dissolves into the earth from which man was taken, and universal eschatology in the kingdom of God, meant to lead to revising the whole Church and the whole creation in *the pleroma* of Christ's body through the final resurrection[82]. The implementation of this vision of death and the human person, embodied in the practice of burial, allowed for the construction of those large Christian cemeteries known as catacombs, where not even a cinerary urn can be found; in times of persecution, believers defied death to bury the bodies of their victims and save them from the pyre. And if the pagans preferred to speak of necropolises – the city of the dead – Christians, on the contrary, spoke of this final dwelling as a *collective dormitory* in view of the resurrection. Thus, the cemetery was born – meaning dormitory; cemetery, meaning a place consecrated to God; deposition, not in the physical sense of being laid in the ground, but in the spiritual sense whereby bodies are given as a guarantee to be returned on the day of resurrection. These symbolic values were so powerful in antiquity that the Church transformed them into theological values: cremation of the body was considered a manifestation of unbelief.

Because it denied the sacredness of the body and the doctrine of resurrection and because it diminished respect for the dead, typical of Christian tradition, cremation was for many years forbidden by the Church in the West and never permitted in the East.

Burial, as a fitting way to say goodbye to the dead, is also linked to the cult of saints and holy relics. Here too, we see the same characteristic of Christianity of uniting the cult of saints with that of the dead. This gave meaning to the creation of a liturgical form to accompany the passage of the deceased's soul from this life, but also to prayer at the grave in the cemetery or the invocation of saints in prayer before holy relics[83]. Human sensitivity, eager for contact, especially in times of grief, remains without comfort in the case of cremation. The experience of relationship in front of the grave where the remains of the one who was loved and known rest, as well as in the presence of the relics of a saint, is possible precisely because the body has not been destroyed by cremation. The presence of the incorruptible bodies of saints is considered by the Church to be proof of the effectiveness of ascetic effort: through the restoration of their bodies to the state of goodness they had before the Fall of our first parents, Adam and Eve. Through the practice of asceticism, the saints testify that this state can truly be attained and that its effects last beyond physical death. The relics

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[80] S. Cyprianus Carthaginensis "Liber de mortalitate", in: JP. Migne PL 04, 0581 - 0602B, here col. 596B.
[81] S. Ambrosius, "De excessu fratris", 2,102, in: CSEL vol. 73, pp. 207-325, here p. 305: "Resurrexit in eo mundus resurrexit in eo caelum resurrexit in eo terra; erit enim caelum novum et terra nova".
[82] F. Di Molfeta, "Inumazione e cremazione.........", p. 745.
[83] Michele Aramini, *Cremazione. Custodia degli affetti*, Milan: Ancora, 2024, p. 47.

of the saints are the most tangible proof that death is not omnipotent. Cremation not only destroys the very possibility that the remains of saints can perform miracles, but even erases the very idea of it. The parallel between the cult of saints and that of the dead brings another element that explains Christian pilgrimages. In places of pilgrimage, one experiences a revelation of the depth of the desire for a tangible element that allows one to enter into a relationship with the saints. The holy relics that are worshipped are important precisely as a tangible presence that allows communion with the saints. The presence of the relics gives the believer precisely this certainty of a relationship with the saints and of worship. The case of those martyrs (such as Saint Polycarp of Smyrna or Saint Ignatius Theophorus) who died on the pyre or were eaten by wild animals in the arena only confirms this rule, because they confessed with all their hearts their belief in resurrection, and then no Christian in the early centuries expressed the desire for their own body to suffer such a fate.

Another plausible argument against cremation is that, after the 4th century, it disappeared almost completely under the influence of Christianity, only to reappear in the late 1700s during the French Revolution, when practical and hygienic reasons were invoked. And in the 1800s, it spread through the propaganda of avowedly atheist associations, in opposition to the belief in immortality and resurrection. Indeed, cremation has since been supported by those who wish to assert their denial of eternity[84]. It must be said, however, that cremation, as it is understood today, is a "phenomenon of modernity, with a 'technological' character that clearly differentiates it from similar phenomena in Antiquity and the East. We are therefore dealing with a truly secular institution whose fundamental motives are ideological: the loss of the importance of the individual, a return to nature (ecological ideology), death without leaving traces, the disappearance of the cemetery as a place of memory[85].

In the socio-cultural climate of the 18th and 19th centuries, marked by the Enlightenment and anticlericalism, the idea and practice of cremation were revived and charged with polemical motivations and purposes, with serious ideological distortions. Its zealots, in fact, burdened the practice of cremation with motives foreign to its very nature. And if at the end of the 18th century the use of cremation was resumed and intensified, this was dictated by health and hygiene issues, such as: water pollution caused by the proximity of cemeteries to aqueducts; the inadequacy of water and sewage networks, which in many cases were completely lacking; and the emergence of epidemics such as cholera and the plague: situations that prompted governments and hygienists to take action, to the point of relocating cemeteries, which, due to urban expansion, often ended up being located in residential areas[86].

A traditional view is that cremation is an expression of an anti-Christian ideological attitude, a militant unbelief rooted in the 19th century, which, however, seems to be increasingly accepted, at least in Western society. And the most widespread conception is probably that of cremation as an escape from death, seen as an irrational reality that generates anxiety and requires its elimination, its complete removal. Indeed, cremation, by destroying the body of the deceased, effectively erases their physical memory and the rites of commemoration, such as the services ordained by the Church for the deceased, but also visits to the cemetery by family members, visits which, in the case of cremation, can no longer be made because the deceased has been reduced to ashes.

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[84] M. Aramini, *Cremazione*..., p. 50.
[85] Giovanni Cucci, "Sepoltura o cremazione", in: *La diecesi di San Bassiano. Official Bulletin for the Acts of the Bishop and the Curia of Lodi*, no. 2 (2006), p. 124.
[86] F. Di Molfeta, "Inumazione e cremazione...., p. 748.

In response to the Church's opposition to cremation, scientific evolutionism attempts, especially among a segment of the population that lacks strong religious convictions and is confused about the issue of death, both of their own and that of their close relatives, to impose the idea that death is a simple biological fact, common to the entire animal and plant world, and which can only be understood through a form of scientific rationality that reduces man to the physical and biological horizon. But this perception of death, apparently based on scientific data, is in fact very close to the conception of certain Eastern religions (Hinduism and Buddhism, which preach reincarnation) and New Age, which continue to exert a strong influence on universal film production and, through it, on contemporary society[87].

A final emerging trend in social evolution, destined to favour the spread of cremation, is the formation in most European countries, including Romania, of a multi- ethnic and multi-religious society. Immigrants already represent a significant part of the population, at least in Western countries, a phenomenon that is also growing in Romania. They bring along their lifestyles and customs, of which their attitude towards death is a fundamental part. Essentially, funeral rituals and the burial of the deceased are destined to become, in a multi-ethnic society, a privileged place for the affirmation of religious and cultural identity and a significant step towards the full integration of new immigrant populations. Indeed, funerals, along with baptisms and marriages, are one of the main occasions for public displays of religious affiliation. In the case of cemeteries, in Romania, with the exception of the old ethnic groups that have their own cemeteries – Turks, Bulgarians, Jews, Armenians, Greeks – as a result of political choices formally dictated by financial factors, the new common areas for cemeteries are undergoing a process of substantial secularisation, to the extent that there is a risk of progressive secularisation.

Mention must be made here that traditional Islam and Judaism do not allow cremation, requiring burial in the ground, prohibiting exhumation and, therefore, attaching much more importance to establishing common burial places for their followers than is the case today in European Christianity, which has somehow accepted the forced secularisation of cemeteries and adapted to it.

In this context of a multi-ethnic and multi-religious society, however, one cannot rule out that the issue will be brought to the attention of Christian churches, especially of Orthodox communities for whom cemeteries are "sacred places", subject to blessing and reserved for the worship of and devotion to the deceased, and form whom funerals are an act of divine worship, through which the Church prays for the forgiveness of sins and spiritual help for the deceased and honours their bodies, while at the same time bringing comfort to the living through the promise of resurrection[88]. The contact between Romanian Orthodox Christians and the adoption of various traditions and customs of the indigenous Catholic and non-Catholic populations who have already adopted cremation, as well as contact with immigrant communities from Asia who have no problem with cremation, may lead, by virtue of coexistence with others, to a relativism regarding the concept of death and the afterlife. The practice of cremation and its growing acceptance as a valid funeral option must be evaluated in the light of the Church's long-standing faith and practice. All Christians, and especially Orthodox Christians, should practise Christian burial, unless prevented by extraordinary circumstances of force majeure.

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[87] Paolo Cavana, "Death and its rites: cultural changes and legislative developments in Italy," in: *State, Churches and Confessional Pluralism, Online Magazine*, 1 November 2009, ISSN 1971-8543, pp. 1-37, here p. 19.
[88] P. Cavana, "Death and its rites.........", p. 22.

CONCLUSION

Funeral, funeral services, final farewell, cremation, grave, tomb... so many words to describe the same reality: the moment when, of the person who was alive just moments before, nothing remains but a lifeless body. Of all events, death is undoubtedly the most difficult, but also the most important to interpret. Human consciousness, in fact, not only confronts death in its various forms, but also uses funeral rites as words for life, words against death, transforming them into a form of consolation for the survivors[89].

Humanity has learned from graves and what is preserved in them to interpret the lives of the peoples who came before us; it has come to know their way of life, their beliefs and the organisation of life and death according to very precise rules. And human consciousness has not only confronted death, but has used funeral rites to reaffirm the value of life, so much so that it can truly claim that these rites are a symbol of human nature, because through them individuals transform the facts of biological life into the values and purposes of humanity.

Christian tradition has always attributed a special meaning to burial, a meaning dictated by substantial connotations related to the expression of the belief that death is not a total dissolution of existence, despite the biological decomposition of the body in the womb of the earth, but it rather is the moment of completion and synthesis of one's entire life, which finds its deepest meaning in the belief in the final resurrection as a result of Christ's Resurrection. In Christ, man living in the body or in the quality of an inanimate body assumes dignity[90]. Hence the renewed and clear condemnation of cremation and of the scattering of ashes, whenever they are supported by anti-Christian, pagan, pantheistic or naturalistic motivations.

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[89] F. Di Molfeta, "Burial and cremation...," p. 754.
[90] F. Di Molfeta, "Burial and cremation...", p. 755.

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