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## Preface

The 12-th issue of *International Journal of Theology, Philosophy and Science* (May 2023) presents scientific and theoretical articles on various aspects, all of them centred on the area of Philosophy, Theology, and Science.

In the first article: *DIMITRIE CANTEMIR PROMINENT REPRESENTATIVE OF ROMANIAN ENCYCLOPEDIISM*, Ph. D. Professor Agnes Terezia ERICH presents the great personality of Dimitrie Cantemir on of the most prominent representative of Romanian encyclopedism. The next article is called: *MODERNITY, SECULAR RELIGIONS AND VIOLENCE – AN ORTHODOX CHRYSTIAN PERSPECTIVE*. In this article Ph.D. Professor Sorin BUTE explores the relationship between modernity, secular religions, and violence from an Orthodox Christian perspective. The next study, by Phd. Ioan-Tănase CHIȘ, has title *ABOUT AN ORTHODOX GEOGRAPHY OF TIME*. Although perceived as an implacable reality, a kind of liquid frame of existence, which inevitably frames being, the latter being defined as a dynamic in time, nevertheless, the systematic analysis of time involves difficulties specific to a subject as obvious as it is abstract. *SATAN IN THE KINGDOM OF GOD: EXPLORING CENTRAL MOTIFS IN LUKE’S GOSPEL* is the article presented by Marc GRENIER. This essay identifies and discusses some of the salient features contained in the central motifs employed in Luke’s gospel. It begins by addressing the key controversies involved in Lukan biblical scholarship such as the Theophilus reference in the Prologue; the Pauline connection; Luke’s stated purpose for writing his gospel; and Luke’s alleged concerns with imperial Rome.

*THE REASONS (LOGOI) OF CREATION, PREMISES OF THE FULFILMENT OF GOD’S ETERNAL PLAN* is the scientific research presented by Cosmin Iulian CÎRSTEA. Ionuț MÎLCOMETE propose for our readers the article entitled: *ELEMENTS OF ORTHODOX TRIADODOLOGY PRESENT IN THE WORK OF SAINT MAXIMUS THE CONFESSOR*. The next issue presented is: *THE RATIONAL EXPRESSION OF THE SUPREME BEING IN KANTIAN THEORETICAL PHILOSOPHY VERSUS THE EXPERIENCE OF THE PERSONAL GOD IN THEOLOGY* by Professor PhD. George Daniel PETROV. *Man has always aspired towards the highest knowledge. Thus philosophy, as the science of sciences, has tried, starting from what could be expressed rationally, to explain the existence or the possibility of man's knowledge of the existence of the Supreme Being, as designated by Immanuel Kant.* *ADAM’S WRONGDOING IN THE LIGHT OF THE BENEFICENT QUALITIES OF THE TREE OF ETERNITY AND MERCIFULNESS OF ALLAH*, the last article of our Journal, presented by Bharat JHUNJHUNWALA. *There appears to exist a consensus among scholars that God prohibited Adam from eating of the Tree of Eternity and Adam ate despite the prohibition. This raises a number of questions. One, God had created Adam in his image and had taught Adam names (2:31) which means Adam, the teacher of his children, had attained a sense of divinity to be able to teach the divine names to his children*

The scientific content presented in the current issue of *International Journal of Theology, Philosophy and Science* is very actual and diverse. In this line, disciplinary and interdisciplinary works related to philosophy, especially philosophy of religion, metaphysics, and philosophical ethics. IJTPS provides the opportunity to examine the altogether truth-claims found in theology, philosophy and sciences.

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## DIMITRIE CANTEMIR PROMINENT REPRESENTATIVE OF ROMANIAN ENCYCLOPEDIISM

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### ABSTRACT

*This year was declared the Dimitrie Cantemir Cultural Year in Romania, taking into account that 350 years have passed since the birth, respectively 300 years since the death of the most famous encyclopedist of Romanian culture. The work of the Moldavian savant contributed to an extraordinary cultural development, also marking the beginning of the theorizing of new ideas in literature, history and philosophy. His works were appreciated by contemporaries of his time in European countries with advanced culture, for which international recognition came to him in his lifetime through his election as a member of the Berlin Academy. Having real qualities of analysis and synthesis of events, as well as the desire to verify any information he referred to, all this led to the creation of an impressive work. In this work we want to point out his main contributions to the cultural edification of the Romanian nation, emphasizing the innovative initiatives of his main writings.*

**Keywords:** *Dimitrie Cantemir; Descriptio Moldaviae; Hieroglyphic history; History of the Ottoman Empire; The Princely Council;*

### INTRODUCTION

Creator of a noteworthy work, Dimitrie Cantemir opens the series of encyclopedic personalities from Romanian culture. Anthropologist, historian, writer, linguist, orientalist, philosopher, geographer, politician, etc., Cantemir is one of the most important scholars of the Romanian nation, enjoying an enviable fame in the environments of Eastern and Western Europe. Being the son of a ruler, he spent his adolescence in Constantinople, being his father's guarantor, whom he inherited after his death. He received a good education and the fact that he lived for a good period of time outside his native places put him in the position of getting to know people, places and sharing ideas among the most different, which opened his spiritual horizon.

He lived for many years in Constantinople, as a capuchin (ambassador of the ruler of Moldavia), studying at the Orthodox Patriarchate Academy, where he came into contact with the scholars of the time and the ambassadors of Western countries. From an early age he was attracted to deep things, knowledge and new things, studying Philosophy, Latin and Greek, reading religious and folklore books, having contact with the works of chroniclers from Moldova and Wallachia from whom he learned everything that could be known about his country. He was fascinated by the history of the Ottoman Empire, by the diverse culture of the Turks, learning, on this occasion, the Turkish, Persian and Arabic languages. He loved Moldavia, whose ruler he was twice, March 1693-April 1693 and 1710-1711, wanting the liberation of Moldavian land from Turkish occupation.

Neculce described him in *The Chronicle of Moldavia* as "... impatient and angry, vicious when drunk, and he got the name of a bad man. And now, coming with the reign, he don't know how to lose his bad name: he had only grown older, his life had only faded, where was there no peace? That's how good and gentle he looked! The door was open to everyone and he was not proud, he talked to all the children... He was a learned man. Only in the judgments he couldn't do very well, maybe because he lived for a long time in Tarigrad, abroad. He was not stingy and his things wanted to be praised".<sup>1</sup> At some point, he settles in Russia where he will continue his literary and scientific work, being firmly convinced that the truth must also prevail in terms of the history of the nation, in particular, the history of the Romanian nation.

## 1. THE BIOGRAPHY

Dimitrie Cantemir's life cannot be presented as a simple biography, being too rich and too full of political circumstances of great historical significance to be properly detailed.<sup>2</sup> As I have already pointed out, he received a good education even in the country, his father wanting to give him all the knowledge of the world so that he entrusted him to the monk Ieremia Cacavela from whom he received lessons in philosophy and literature, as well as knowledge of the Greek and Latin languages. Sent to Constantinople as a guarantor, he learns Turkish, Persian and Arabic, learns Turkish customs, history, literature and music, but also attends the courses of the famous Academy of the Orthodox Patriarchate of Fanar, where he learns ancient Greek and Latin.<sup>3</sup> Dimitrie lived among Turkish cultured people and among Christian ambassadors, he was friends with intellectual people from whom he had much to learn. The foreigners said of himself that he was an educated young man, with a very pleasant conversation, which he carried with great ease in the Latin language. Also, Cantemir is described as a pleasant young man who imposed himself by the beauty of his features.

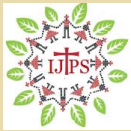


Source: *Demetrius Cantemirs ehemaligen Fürsten in der Moldau, historisch-geographisch und politische Beschreibung der Moldau, nebst dem Leben des Verfassers und eine Landcharte.* Frankfurt und Leipzig, 1771

<sup>1</sup> Neculce, Ion. *Letopisețul Țării Moldovei* (București: Editura Litera, 2001)., 192-193.

<sup>2</sup> Minea, I. *Despre Dimitrie Cantemir: omul, scriitorul, domnitorul* (Iași: Editura Viața românească, 1926)., 17.

<sup>3</sup> Călinescu, G. *Istoria literaturii române de la origini până în prezent* (Onești □ Editura ARISTARC, 1998)., 40.



## 2. DESCRIPTIO MOLDAVIAE – THE FIRST MONOGRAPHIC WORK IN ROMANIAN LITERATURE

The work of the Moldavian savant meant an extraordinary cultural development for those times, but also the beginning of new theories and ideas, which enriched the values of the centuries to come. His works were recognized and appreciated by contemporary personalities from European countries that had a highly developed culture.

Harmonious personality, man of the Renaissance, bridge between ancient and modern chronicle literature, philosopher and physicist, Dimitrie Cantemir is among the few local intellectual figures who managed to receive international recognition during his lifetime by being elected as a member of the Berlin Academy of Sciences, on his diploma writing "philosopher among kings, but also king among philosophers". At the request of this institution, he will write *Descriptio Moldaviae*, which includes clear and precise information about Moldavia. In no other work of his does the personality of Dimitrie Cantemir appear so strongly outlined as in this monograph. Initially, the work was supposed to have a geographical character and provide clear and precise information about Wallachia and Moldavia. Moldavia map<sup>4</sup> present in the work was mapped while Cantemir was in Russia. Particular attention is paid to the description of customs.

Thus, marriage was guided by church laws, the initiative belonging to the young men, being considered a shame when the girl asked the man. When a boy liked a girl, he would send suitors to her parents. When the girl's parents agreed to the marriage, the suitors along with the groom's relatives would go to the girl's house. The ritual by which the parents gave the girl to the wedding was an ancient one and full of emotion.<sup>5</sup> Like the wedding, the funeral in the Moldavian nation was carried out according to the laws of the Eastern Church. The body of the deceased was washed with warm water and dressed in the best clothes he had. It was expected until the third day from the date of death, so that any suspicion of clinical death would be removed. On the third day, the neighbors gathered to lead the dead on the last journey. After the funeral service, the body of the deceased is buried in the church yard. Mourning is different depending on the person of the deceased. If the deceased was a peasant, his sons were obliged to walk with their heads uncovered for six months, regardless of the season, and to let their hair and beard grow.

The boyars did the same, but only for forty days.<sup>6</sup> Related to faith, Cantemir emphasizes the fact that Moldavians do not recognize the Hell, but believe that small sins can be forgiven even after death through the prayers of the church and with the help of alms. Apart from Wednesdays and Fridays, they fast four times a year, and in the forty-day long fast and the fast devoted to the Holy Virgin, they do not even eat fish.<sup>7</sup> Among other customs described, a special place is dedicated to the "hora" and the "călușar", dances "with heresy", with their help the sick can be cured. About the fairies, they say that they love the young and beautiful boys, but that their love often turns into hate and they kill them with various diseases.

An interesting chapter is the one entitled *About the temperaments of the Moldavians*, which raised numerous positions because the Moldavians are described in not very pleasant colors. As if he had sensed the repercussions that were to appear, Cantemir justified himself

<sup>4</sup> Crețu, Bogdan. Dimitrie Cantemir Perspective interdisciplinare (Iași □ Editura Institutul european, 2012), 146.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 210-211.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 215-216.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 220-221.



and believes that the Moldavians "will find it more useful if we clearly show them the flaws that make them ugly, than if we deceive them with gentle flattery and clever exonerations," emphasizing that "in the character of the Moldavians, apart from the true faith and hospitality, we do not easily find anything that we could praise."<sup>8</sup> Thus, they are haughty and scheming, quarrelsome, what is in their hearts is also on their lips, and they do not value education very much. Fatalists by nature, they go to war carelessly, being convinced that God decides the day of death.

Cantemir can also be called our first dialectologist, he observed the differences between the dialects of the Romanian language and the fact that the speech of the inhabitants of the Wallachia "is somewhat harsher" than that of the Moldavians. As for Slavonic, he calls it "barbaric", unknown to the vast majority of people, even the priests not understanding what they preach in the church. Placing great value on education, he praises the initiatives of Vasile Lupu and Șerban Cantacuzino who had established Greek schools and printing centers, but also Miron Costin, whom he considers "the best chronicler that Moldavia had it".

### **3. THE PRINCELY COUNCIL OR THE SAGE'S QUARREL WITH THE WORLD - THE FIRST PHILOSOPHICAL WORK IN ROMANIAN CULTURE**

Another important work by Dimitrie Cantemir is *The Princely Council or the sage's quarrel with the world*. These two characters correspond to Body and Soul or Macrocosm and Microcosm. The identity of World-Body-Macrocosm and Wise-Soul-Microcosm is affirmed by the author in the contents of the book, but also in the title.<sup>9</sup> Although it confronts two totally opposite conceptions of life, *The Princely Council* is a document that belongs to the secularization period of South-Eastern Europe.<sup>10</sup> Starting from the idea that the World is the divine creation, the conversation between the World and the Sage is a violent one from the first lines. The World is accused by the Sage of being deceitful and treacherous, the gifts it offers, wealth, dignity and beauty, being fleeting.

The World fights back and brings into question the happiness emanating from the human being after benefiting from what it offers. The correspondence theory between the macrocosm and the microcosm interprets the World as an instrument of virtue that ensures the human being eternal life and wealth, the illusory beauty of the world, and debauchery is among the main dangers that the human being should avoid.

The World can be understood as the prison of the human being, devoid of happiness and light, thus forcing him to come to the conclusion that the only solution is to distance himself from the world. If we were to refer to a similar work in universal literature, it would be Philip the Solitary's *Mirror of the World*. The difference between the two works lies in their conclusions: *The Mirror of the World* believes that contempt for life and the world is natural asceticism, while Dimitrie Cantemir believes that the fight against life takes place while the human being is alive, not after death. The conclusion he reaches is that the reader who will read his book "will benefit both in this passing life and in the life to come."

<sup>8</sup> Cantemir, Dimitrie. *Descrierea Moldovei* (București: Editura Librăriei Leon Alcalay, 1909), 95.

<sup>9</sup> Bădărău, Dan. *Filozofia lui Dimitrie Cantemir* (București: Editura Academiei Republicii Populare Române, 1964), 294.

<sup>10</sup> Cantemir, Dimitrie. *Divanul*. Ediție îngrijită și studiu introductiv de Virgil Căndea (București: Editura pentru literatură, 1969), 11-12.



#### 4. HIEROGLYPHIC HISTORY - THE FIRST NOVEL IN ROMANIAN LITERATURE

The evidence of the full maturation of the savant Dimitrie Cantemir is represented by *Istoria hieroglyphica*, considered the first allegorical novel in Romanian literature, a political pamphlet, in which he borrows a modern literary method, placing the middle part at the beginning and the beginning at the middle.

The novel reveals and presents for the first time the classes and social categories of the Romanian society at that time, also offering their characterization, in the form of a pamphlet.<sup>11</sup> The portraits made by the author belong to important figures of the political life of the time, only that his subjectivity makes him exaggerate the qualities of those close to him and accentuate the negative features of his enemies. The central theme of this work is political life with its characters, embodied in animals.

The reader will be enlightened only after reading the key at the end of the book as to their identity.<sup>12</sup> The criticism that Cantemir exposes includes not only vehement personal attacks, but also general attacks or addressed to the superiors of Romanian society at that time. The image of the "theatre" of the world is revealed to us through the characters who are made to reveal their true character in front of the reading public. We can consider that this work is also a social and political satire, one of the most penetrating in our ancient literature.

For the most part, the boyars of Moldavia were likened to beasts that enjoyed killing innocent people, and the boyars of Wallachia were considered birds of prey.<sup>13</sup> Hieroglyphic history is original through the chosen way of presenting historical events seen from the perspective of the author who was involved in them.



Source: *The complete Cantemir manuscripts. Vol. VII. The Hieroglyphic History: Unpublished Facsimile Manuscript.*

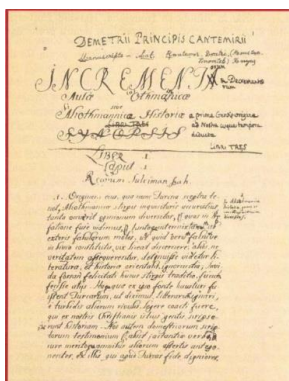
<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>12</sup> Rosetti, Al. *Istoria literaturii române* (București □ Editura Academiei Republicii Socialiste România, 1970), 566-567.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 567-568.

## 5. HISTORY OF THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE - THE FIRST SCIENTIFIC WORK ON THE HISTORY OF THE TURKS

The writing that established Dimitrie Cantemir as a famous historian in Europe is the History of the Ottoman Empire, a work written at the same time as the Description of Moldavia, but finished in 1716. This was considered for a long time the document with scientific authority regarding the history of the Turks. The fact that he spent many years in Constantinople meant that he participated in all the political events of the time. Particular attention is paid to the description of Ottoman institutions, monuments and schools, but also to the political organization of the Turks.<sup>14</sup> The work is carefully supplemented with explanatory footnotes on many aspects presented in the text, especially those related to the history of the Romanians. The first mention is occasioned by the story of the reign of Murad I and the battle of Kosovo (1389), in which detachments from Wallachia also participated, as allies of the Christians. On the battlefield, the Christians were defeated and Murad was killed by a Serbian soldier. In this work, the word Romania appears for the first time when it presents Șerban Cantacuzino as "prince of Romania". Through this work, Cantemir informed civilized Europe that the great Ottoman Empire, recognized for its conquests, was at the beginning of its decline, also revealing their battle tactics so that they become vulnerable to the opponent.<sup>15</sup>



Source: *The complete Cantemir manuscripts. Vol. IV. Incrementorum et decrementorum Aulæ Othmannicæ: original facsimile manuscript.*

## 6. THE CHRONICLE OF THE ROMAN-MOLDO-VLACH ANTIQUITY: "THE CLEAN MIRROR OF THE ROMANIAN NATION"

Through this history, Cantemir proves to be a worthy follower of Grigore Ureche who wanted the history of the Romanian nation to be written in his language, but also of Miron Costin who compared the book to a mirror in which the reader must look to know which are its roots. That is why he also advises those belonging to the Moldovan nation to look in this book as in a clean mirror to see their face, old age and the honor of the nation.<sup>16</sup> The chronicle is an erudite work that includes a bibliographic list of no less than 150 names of authors and titles and that summarizes the history of the Romanians. The objectivity of the author is emphasized by him whenever he has the opportunity, often stating that "my friend is Plato, my friend is Socrates, and more than words, truth is my friend."

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 574-575.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Cantemir, Dimitrie. *Hronicul vechimei a romano-moldo-vlahilor* (București: Editura Albatros, 2003), 178.



## CONCLUSIONS

Dimitrie Cantemir remains the most prominent representative of Romanian encyclopedism, his work giving him this well-deserved status. Petre P. Panaitescu was among the first to include Cantemir's creation in Renaissance humanism: the admiration for art, the concept of civilization and the value that civilization has, but also the attraction for classical languages, adding: "the entire work of Dimitrie Cantemir is permeated by a humanistic spirit".<sup>17</sup> George Călinescu, for his part, compared Dimitrie Cantemir to the people of the Renaissance: "An enlightened, ambitious voievod, a man of the world and a library ascetic, intriguing and solidary, manipulative and misanthropic, a lover of his Moldavia, which he yearns for, and an adventurer, drum singer from Tsarigrad, academician recognized by Berlin, Russian prince, Romanian chronicler, connoisseur of all the pleasures the world can give, Dimitrie Cantemir is our Lorenzo de' Medici".<sup>18</sup>

Historian and politician animated by advanced ideas, often surprisingly new for his time, literate and prestigious encyclopedist, Cantemir was and remains a benchmark for universal and national cultural history.

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<sup>17</sup> Panaitescu, P.P. Dimitrie Cantemir. Viața și opera (București □ Editura Academiei Republicii Populare Române, 1958), 638, apud Vaida, Petru. Dimitrie Cantemir și umanismul (București □ Editura Minerva, 1972), 21.

<sup>18</sup> Călinescu, G. Istoria literaturii române (București, 1941), 41, apud Vaida, Petru. Dimitrie Cantemir și umanismul (București □ Editura Minerva, 1972), 47.



## MODERNITY, SECULAR RELIGIONS AND VIOLENCE – AN ORTHODOX CHRYSTIAN PERSPECTIVE

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### ABSTRACT

*This article explores the relationship between modernity, secular religions, and violence from an Orthodox Christian perspective. It discusses how modernity emerged as a rejection of the transcendent, leading to a utopian desire for progress. The concept of monotheism and its alleged connection to violence is examined, with a counterargument asserting that Christianity's focus on love and human dignity contributed positively to European civilization. The analysis includes the role of secular ideologies, totalitarian regimes, and the rejection of traditional moral frameworks in promoting violence in the modern age.*

**Keywords:** *modernity; secular religions; utopia; violence;*

### MODERNITY AND THE REPUDIATION OF THE TRANSCENDENCE

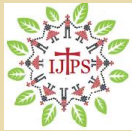
Modernity refers to a period characterized by significant social, cultural, and technological changes that occurred during the late 18th to early 19th centuries and continue to influence the present day. It is often associated with the rise of industrialization, urbanization, scientific advancements, and a shift towards more secular and rational thinking. The modern age is usually regarded as an age in which the world is freed from all religious superstition, an age of the disenchantment of the world<sup>1</sup>, of cultural, material or spiritual progress, of enlightenment of the human spirit through natural and rational knowledge. It is considered an age of scientific progress in which humanism replaces Christianity, man becomes the measure of all things and takes the place of Providence and God at the helm of history. God has died and with Him is claimed the disappearance of all mystical fervor, all religious interpretation of reality and all religious behavior, now inappropriate to the scientific interpretation of the world.

Modernity is born as a *repudiation of the transcendent*, on the one hand, but also as a *utopian desire to build the perfect world in time and space by idolizing progress*.<sup>2</sup>

The transcendent refers to things beyond our ordinary, everyday experiences - such as spiritual or religious beliefs, the idea of a divine being, or anything that goes beyond the material world. Before modernity, these transcendent elements played a central role in shaping how people understood the world and their place in it. However, during modernity, many thinkers and scholars began to emphasize the importance of reason, scientific observation, and empirical evidence. They sought to understand the world through logic and

<sup>1</sup> Marcel GAUCHET, *The Disenchantment of the World: A Political History of Religion*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey 1997.

<sup>2</sup> Eric VOEGELIN, *Dall'Illuminismo alla Rivoluzione*, Gangemi Editore, Rome 200.



critical thinking rather than relying on traditional religious or spiritual beliefs. As science and technology advanced, they provided explanations for natural phenomena that had previously been attributed to the transcendent. This led some people to question or even abandon their traditional religious beliefs in favor of a more rational and empirical worldview.

Furthermore, during modernity, there was an increasing focus on the individual and human capabilities, rather than relying on external forces or divine intervention. Human achievements and progress were attributed to human efforts and ingenuity rather than seen as gifts from God. In this way, modernity can be seen as a turning point where many societies moved away from relying on the transcendent as a guiding force and placed greater emphasis on human reason, science, and autonomy.<sup>3</sup>

It's important to note that not everyone in modernity rejected the transcendent entirely, and there are still people who hold religious or spiritual beliefs even in modern times. However, the overall trend during this period was a shift towards secularism and a greater emphasis on human agency and rationality in shaping the world.

## 1. THE SECULAR RELIGIONS

The reality is, however, that the process of secularisation has not only meant the repudiation of Christianity or any religious attitude to the world, but also its replacement by certain religious surrogates, idolised reason, the god State or the political religions<sup>4</sup> of the 20th century with ideologies professed as doctrines of faith: Nazism and Communism. The meaning of history can no longer be metahistorical but immanent.

One of the first philosophers to write about the connection between the secularization of Christian concepts and the emerging of secular religions and ideologies as religious surrogates was the German philosopher Eric Voegelin.

Eric Voegelin, a prominent political philosopher and historian of ideas, argued that modernity can be seen as a utopian desire to build a perfect world in time and space by idolizing progress. Voegelin's work provides valuable insights into how certain ideologies and political movements in modernity have exhibited utopian tendencies, which can be linked to the pursuit of progress. Voegelin identified a utopian impulse in modernity, which he saw as an attempt to create a perfect society or a "heaven on earth." This desire for perfection is often associated with ideologies that envision a future in which all social and political problems are eradicated, and human life is transformed into an ideal state of harmony and prosperity. This utopian vision is rooted in the belief that through human action and progress, we can create a flawless world.

Within the context of modernity, the idea of progress gained significant importance. Progress became synonymous with the advancement of science, technology, and rationality, leading to improvements in human life. The belief in progress led to a sense of optimism and faith in human capacity to overcome challenges and improve society continuously. As progress was idolized, it fueled the desire to reach ever greater heights of human achievement, often with the goal of reaching an ideal, utopian state.

Voegelin also introduced the concept of "immanentizing the eschaton," which refers to the attempt to bring about a future utopian state within the confines of earthly existence.

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<sup>3</sup>Charles TAYLOR, *The Secular Age*, The Belknap Press Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, England 2007.

<sup>4</sup>Eric VOEGELIN, *Modernity without Restraint. The Political Religions, The new Science of Politics and Science, Politics and Gnosticism*, University of Missouri Press, Columbia and London 2000.



Traditionally, eschaton represents the end times or the final divine fulfillment of history. However, in modernity, certain ideologies sought to secularize this concept, seeking to achieve a utopian future within the immanent, temporal world rather than relying on divine intervention.

Voegelin particularly focused on totalitarian ideologies, such as Marxism and Nazism, which he viewed as manifestations of the utopian desire for a perfect world. These ideologies believed in the possibility of creating a utopian society by radically reorganizing social structures and eliminating perceived obstacles to progress. They were characterized by their rejection of traditional moral and religious constraints, emphasizing faith in human reason and material progress to achieve their goals.

Voegelin's analysis highlights the potential dangers of utopian thinking when it becomes divorced from the limitations and complexities of human existence. The pursuit of building a perfect world through progress, especially when combined with an absolutist rejection of the transcendent or spiritual dimensions of life, can lead to totalitarianism and other ideological excesses.

In summary, Eric Voegelin's work offers valuable insights into how modernity's utopian desire to create a perfect world in time and space is intertwined with the idolization of progress and can lead to ideological extremes.<sup>5</sup>

Modernity was also born through the secularization of some Christian values, through the approximate preservation of form and the extirpation of their transcendent essence, but also through the secularization of heresies, such as millenarianism or gnosticism. Thus 20th century ideologies have become religious surrogates for Christianity, and people, believing themselves to be liberated from the intellectual and spiritual minority in which they were held by Christianity, have embraced them en masse.<sup>6</sup> The new religious surrogates in the form of political religions and totalitarian ideologies that have parasitized certain Christian values and elements of Christian eschatology have<sup>7</sup>, however, abandoned the essential values of Christianity and created a wave of violence and hatred that has marked the 20th century through the two world wars and continues to haunt Europe in the current war in Ukraine. These religious surrogates, with their secular eschatology, are idolatrous in nature, and the violence they have unleashed stems from the renunciation of the essential values of Christianity: love and human being as absolute value because he is the image of God.

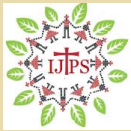
Totalitarian ideologies are limited theories that reduce the complexity of human nature to a few, often misunderstood, general lines and consider themselves self-sufficient in explaining reality. Ideologies tend to substitute for Truth. Ideologies often promise the

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<sup>5</sup> Eric Voegelin discussed the concepts of utopian desire, progress, and the immanentization of the eschaton in several of his works. Here are some of the key books where he explored these ideas: *The New Science of Politics: An Introduction*, University of Chicago Press, 1987; *Science, Politics, and Gnosticism. Two Essays*, Simon and Schuster, 2012; *Order and History*, University of Missouri Press, 1957; *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, University of Missouri Press, Columbia, Missouri, 2006.

<sup>6</sup> Eric Hoffer, *The True Believer: Thoughts on the Nature of Mass Movements*, Harper Collins, 2011. In this book, Eric Hoffer explores the psychology behind mass movements and the role of fanaticism and violence in the pursuit of utopian ideologies.

<sup>7</sup> Norman COHN, *The Pursuit of the Millennium: Revolutionary Millenarians and Mystical Anarchists of the Middle Ages*, Oxford University Press, 1970. While not directly focused on the modern age, this book examines millenarian and apocalyptic ideologies that have surfaced throughout history, offering insights into how such thinking can lead to violence and social upheaval.



achievement of a perfect social order in history, a substitute for the Kingdom of Heaven. The main ideas and "values" of the utopian ideologies of the last centuries are ideas and values that parasiticise and secularise the basic values of Christianity. This is why these ideologies have no concrete original content, but rather tend to absolutise a form of historical organization and misinterpreted principles based on a mistaken anthropology.

If for Christianity, the key to interpreting reality, the world and history is Jesus Christ, the Way, the Truth and the Life, for modernity it is the progress of the human spirit itself. Progress for the sake of progress becomes the central idol of modernity, mysticism is replaced by social activism, and the Kingdom of Heaven is replaced by the Utopia that is supposed to be built according to professed totalitarian ideologies: the perfect race, the perfect class, the perfect state, the perfect nation. Ernest Bernea wrote: "The contemporary crisis is the logical and historical consequence of the orientation of modern man, of the demiurgic spirit that dominates him, of his absolutism and the false divinities he has created for himself".<sup>8</sup>

Eric Voegelin's analysis of the idolization of progress in modernity can be understood through his examination of the Enlightenment philosopher Voltaire. Voltaire, a prominent figure of the 18th-century Enlightenment, epitomizes the modern tendency to idolize progress and place faith in the power of reason and scientific advancement to shape a better world. Voegelin's critique of Voltaire helps shed light on the broader concept of progress in modernity. For Voegelin The Enlightenment, and especially Voltaire, was guilty for creating the cult of reason and rationality, an irrational optimism on human perfectibility and an undeserved critique of traditional institutions.

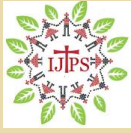
Voltaire, along with other Enlightenment thinkers, emphasized the power of human reason and the scientific method in understanding and shaping the world. This emphasis on rationality was a departure from traditional religious and metaphysical explanations for natural phenomena. Voltaire's works championed the idea that human progress could be achieved through the application of reason to solve problems and improve society. Voltaire and other Enlightenment thinkers were generally optimistic about the potential for human perfectibility. They believed that through education, the spread of knowledge, and the elimination of ignorance and superstition, humanity could continually progress toward a more enlightened and prosperous state.

The Enlightenment thinkers often criticized traditional institutions, such as the Church and the monarchy, for hindering progress. They viewed these institutions as obstacles to reason and liberty, advocating for the need to reform or even overthrow them to create a more rational and progressive society.

Many Enlightenment thinkers, including Voltaire, held a teleological view of history. They saw history as moving towards a predetermined endpoint, characterized by enlightenment and progress. This view suggested that human history had a purpose, and that purpose was the continual advancement of knowledge and human civilization.

Thus, modernity fostered an almost religious faith in the power of human reason and progress. The Enlightenment's rejection of traditional authorities and metaphysical frameworks allowed for the rise of an optimistic and utopian vision centered on human agency and rationality. However, Voegelin also cautioned against the dangers of this idolization of progress. He argued that the rejection of transcendent principles and the belief

<sup>8</sup> Ernest BERNEA, *Criza lumii moderne*, (The Crisis of the Modern World), Predania, București 2011, p. 47.



in an immanent utopia could lead to an imbalance in human affairs, potentially resulting in ideologies that aim to impose utopian visions through totalitarian means and violence.

The Church, the body of Christ, does not create or participate in the creation of social or political utopias, because any such utopia is nothing but a surrogate for the Kingdom of Heaven, an absolutisation of limited structures, ultimately an idolatry. But the Church is in history the most important creative factor of culture and civilization, because by aiming at the Kingdom of God it creates those values that continually renew the world and human society, refusing to absolutize any intermediate state on the way to the Kingdom, any surrogate of the Kingdom of Heaven, refusing to recognize any usurper of the Messiah. "My kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36), says the Saviour Christ. The Church follows the same programme of seeking a Kingdom which is not of this world, but which, from beyond history, is continually transforming history itself into a form which more and more approximates the true Kingdom, without, however, fully coinciding with it.

In modernity, however, Christianity has remained focused on the salvation of the soul, and the original eschatological hopes have been parasitized and confiscated through secularization by political utopias that militate for the change of the world, for the creation of a perfect world in time and space, for the indefinite progress of society. "The creation of a new world: this is the task which now absorbs all energies. As a result, the older eschatology has been pushed back into a corner where it stands bearing the dismissive label "salvation for the soul". No contribution here, or so it seems, to the *praxis* of a new age."<sup>9</sup>

In modernity "the Christian God, transcendent living reality, becomes something superfluous, an imagination without meaning and correspondence in objective reality... The immanent God is nothing other than the self-divinization of man, individual or collective man, but always man and his productions".<sup>10</sup>

Modernity gave birth to what Bernea calls *atheistic religion*: „Decartes and Hegel carried the process of idealizing God to the point of presenting Him as the peak of evolution of man. Nietzsche and Marx carried out the process of decapitating God to the point of creating an *atheistic religion*, a task that fell to Lenin in the social-political order".<sup>11</sup>

## 2. SECULAR RELIGIONS AND VIOLENCE

Recently a theory has emerged stating that the main source of violence in history was the emergence of monotheism. Monotheistic religions are therefore the main culprits of violence because of their religious exclusivism, their claim that their God is the only true God. It is also implied that it is polytheism or religious syncretism that is more likely to set the conditions for lasting peace.

Jan Assmann, an influential Egyptologist and cultural theorist, has explored the relationship between monotheism and violence in his book "Der Monotheismus und die Sprache der Gewalt" (Monotheism and the Language of Violence)<sup>12</sup>. In this work, Assmann presents the concept that the emergence of monotheism in history has played a significant role in shaping patterns of violence. He highlights how the exclusivity of monotheistic beliefs, the role of sacred texts, and the construction of the "other" have contributed to historical instances of religiously motivated violence and conflict. Assmann argues that the

<sup>9</sup> Joseph RATZINGER, Eschatology. Death and eternal Life, The Catholic University of America Press, Washington D.C., 1988, p. 15.

<sup>10</sup> Ernest BERNEA, The Crisis of the Modern World,...p. 54.

<sup>11</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>12</sup> Jan ASSMAN, Der Monotheismus un die Sprache der Gewalt, Vienna 2006.





transition from polytheism to monotheism was a crucial turning point in human history. In many ancient societies, polytheistic religions had multiple gods representing various aspects of life, and there was often a degree of religious pluralism. However, with the rise of monotheism, the belief in a single, all-powerful deity emerged, leading to a transformation in religious consciousness.

Monotheism brought with it the idea of exclusivity, asserting that there is only one true God, while other gods are false or even evil. This exclusivity led to a rejection of other religious beliefs, practices, and deities. Assmann argues that this shift in religious exclusivity contributed to an "us vs. them" mentality, setting the stage for potential conflict and violence between different religious communities.

Assmann emphasizes also the importance of sacred texts in monotheistic religions. These texts, such as the Hebrew Bible, the Quran, or the New Testament, carry religious authority and provide a basis for moral and legal codes. However, the interpretation and promotion of these texts can sometimes lead to the justification of violence, as seen in historical instances of religiously motivated wars and conflicts. Assmann argues that monotheistic religions, by virtue of their belief in a singular and absolute truth, have the potential to justify and legitimize violence in the name of religious preservation or divine mandate. He suggests that monotheistic traditions have been historically entangled with power and politics, leading to violence in pursuit of religious or political goals.

It's important to note that Assmann's work does not aim to portray monotheism as inherently violent, but rather to explore the historical and cultural dynamics that have shaped the relationship between monotheistic belief systems and violence. He encourages a nuanced examination of the historical context and the various factors contributing to violence throughout history.

Nothing could be further from the truth in this theory. It misses the point, it forgets that Judaism and Christianity, the former linking the honouring of God to a moral attitude towards people, and the latter positing love and human person made in the image of God, as fundamental values, moved away from the violence of previous tribal and idolatrous ages and built European culture and civilisation on these values. Only when Christianity began to be repudiated and replaced by the religious surrogates of totalitarian ideologies, only when the Christian God, God Who is love, was „killed”, did violence increase exponentially. It is precisely the exclusivism, radicalism and competition of the new idols of modernity that have come to sacrifice people on the altars of the new secular religions. It is not the concrete man who has absolute value anymore, but the abstract man, humanity, the state, race or class, in whose name and for whose sake the concrete man, who is no longer considered the image of God, can be killed.

To argue against Assmann's ideas, one could emphasize the importance of contextual understanding when examining historical instances of violence related to monotheistic religions. While some violent acts have been carried out in the name of monotheism, it is essential to consider the broader historical, political, and social factors at play. Violence in the name of religion is not unique to monotheistic traditions, as polytheistic religions and even secular ideologies have also been associated with violence throughout history.

It is crucial to recognize that monotheistic religions, including Christianity, encompass a wide range of beliefs and practices. While some interpretations of sacred texts may have been used to justify violence, there are countless examples of religious leaders and followers advocating for peace, compassion, and love. The teachings of Jesus Christ in Christianity, for instance, emphasize love, forgiveness, and non-violence.



Assmann's argument regarding the role of sacred texts in justifying violence can be countered by highlighting that texts are often subject to interpretation. Individuals or groups with specific political or social agendas may selectively interpret religious texts to suit their objectives, leading to a distortion of the original message. This misuse of texts does not necessarily reflect the core teachings of the religion itself. People can use religious or ideological beliefs as a pretext to rationalize their actions, but underlying political, economic, or social factors often contribute to acts of violence.

One of the revolutionary moral principles introduced into the world through the Jewish and Christian religions is the linking of honoring God with kindness to people. In the Decalogue revealed to Moses, God, showing Himself to be a living and personal God, different from any idolatrous human representation, links His honour to moral behaviour towards people. For the first time in history, honouring the divinity is done by honouring one's parents, not killing, not stealing, not fornicating, etc. Up to that time, idolatry was also embellished by human sacrifices. In the New Testament this becomes the essence of religion: to love God with all your being and your neighbour as yourself.

Since then, in a civilization built on Christian values, as long as the awareness and experience of the existence and presence of a living, personal, incarnate God and of a God-bearing human being, image of God and destined to live forever, remains alive, human life is sacred and intangible. When, however, the world is "stripped" of His existence and presence, replacing Him with the new abstract idols of totalitarian and materialistic humanist ideologies and utopias, the sacred value of the human being is also denied. The fundamental moral principle on which our civilisation was built disappears: the identity between honouring God and kindness to His children. The new idols also demand their human sacrifices precisely because they are idols. Therefore, goodness and love for people are not self-evident values that can be automatically extracted from human nature, but are revealed. It is not secular humanism or science that creates moral values but the relationship with the living and personal God. Without Him man always reverts to idolatrous representations that demand their human sacrifices, however materially, technologically and scientifically developed he may be. When people end up being cruelly murdered again it is because the murderers reject God, even though they sometimes use His name, marginally, as a pretext and bait in the abject equations of their (idol) ideology.

The goal of progress within secular eschatologies is Utopia, and the way to change the world on the road to utopia are revolutions which have always been in the modern era based on resentment and violence. From the reign of terror during the French Revolution when the first genocide in modern history took place<sup>13</sup>, to the Bolshevik Revolution,<sup>14</sup> all have been based on resentment and achieved through extreme violence. In one way or another, modern secular eschatologies, manifested in the form of political religions, totalitarian ideologies, justified violence in the name of Utopia. The secular eschatologies of utopian ideologies imagine the perfect world of utopia in terms of Christian morality, but justify the violence and immorality they produce as necessary to build that world.

<sup>13</sup> David A. BELL, The French Revolution, the Vendée, and Genocide, *Journal of Genocide Research*, Volume 22, 2020 - Issue 1, pp. 19-25.

<sup>14</sup> Orlando FIGES, *A People's Tragedy: The Russian Revolution 1891-1924*, Penguin Books, 1998.

Alexander RABINOWITCH, *The Bolsheviks Come to Power: The Revolution of 1917 in Petrograd*, Pluto Press, 2004.



The rise of secular religions and utopian ideologies in the modern age, particularly during world wars and totalitarian regimes<sup>15</sup>, has been linked to significant violence and atrocities. The rejection of traditional moral restraints, the cult of the leader, apocalyptic thinking, and the pursuit of absolute control are among the factors that contributed to the use of violence to achieve ideological goals. It is essential to critically examine the historical context and ideological underpinnings of such movements to understand the role they played in perpetuating violence in the modern era.

The secular religions and utopian ideologies have played a significant role in producing violence in the modern age. Totalitarian ideologies, such as communism and fascism, were explicitly secular in nature and aimed to create a utopian society based on a specific vision of progress and perfection. These ideologies sought to reshape society entirely, often through the elimination of perceived enemies or obstacles. The implementation of these ideologies resulted in mass violence and atrocities, such as the Holocaust during World War II or the horrors of the Soviet gulags. Secular religions and utopian ideologies often reject traditional moral and ethical restraints in pursuit of their vision of a better society. They prioritize achieving their ideological goals over preserving individual rights and human dignity. This rejection of moral restraints can lead to dehumanization, brutal treatment of opponents, and the justification of violence as a means to an end.

Totalitarian regimes often revolve around a charismatic leader who is placed at the center of the ideology. The leader's authority is portrayed as absolute and beyond questioning, similar to a religious figure. The cult of personality around the leader can lead to the suppression of dissent and the justification of extreme actions in the name of the leader's ideology. As secular religions and utopian ideologies gained prominence in the modern age, traditional religious beliefs were often rejected or suppressed. In the absence of traditional moral frameworks, people could be more susceptible to radical ideologies that promoted violence in the pursuit of a utopian future. Some secular religions and utopian ideologies embraced apocalyptic thinking, envisioning a cataclysmic transformation of society. This apocalyptic mindset could justify extreme measures, including violence, in the belief that the end goal justified the means to bring about the utopian vision.

Totalitarian regimes sought total control over all aspects of society, using propaganda, surveillance, and repression to maintain power. This centralized control enabled them to enforce their ideological agenda with violence, as seen in the Holocaust, the Soviet purges, and other atrocities.

## CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, although Christianity, a revolution of love, has placed at the foundation of European civilization the values of love and the human person, the image of God as an absolute value, incompatible with violence and war, modern times have seen outbreaks of violence of an intensity and extent never seen before in the form of revolutions and wars. The origin of this modern escalation of violence has been precisely the repudiation of Christianity, the secularization and parasitism of Christian values and the emergence of a type of secular eschatology and secular political religions which, in the name of Utopia, the modern surrogate of the Kingdom of Heaven, abandon those Christian values on which Euro-Atlantic civilization was built, and end up justifying violence.

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<sup>15</sup> Hannah ARENDT, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, HarperCollins, 1973.



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## ABOUT AN ORTHODOX GEOGRAPHY OF TIME

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### ABSTRACT

*Although perceived as an implacable reality, a kind of liquid frame of existence, which inevitably frames being, the latter being defined as a dynamic in time, nevertheless, the systematic analysis of time involves difficulties specific to a subject as obvious as it is abstract. We have approached time from a theological-phenomenological perspective in which we have tried to capture it both in its manifestations and in its implications. The horizon of faith proposes the eschaton as the ultimate goal of personal fulfilment, but, however desirable, this horizon is determined by our being in time or, in other words, by our relation to time. Beyond relating to it as an external phenomenon with major implications, it is vital to understand how we can embody time and what are the levers through which it can be transfigured. To transfigure time is to convert it from an implacable destiny into a tool, bridge or lever for anchoring beyond it. It is not a simple management of time but a new category of time. This is how liturgical time and the new context in which we realize the section in time, the timeless moment of temporality, which is the moment, is born; and the moment implies in its equation, presence. The key to resolving the casuistry of time is anthropological, unfolding in the corridors of spirituality and communion. Our ontological fabric metabolizes time by conjugating it with the process of sanctification of the person. Only in this way will time have known its fulfilment.*

**Keywords:** *Time; temporality; presence; instant; space;*

### INTRODUCTION

It would probably take forever to talk about time. The subject is difficult because it is both abstract and complex. Any discussion of time initiates a process of time capture, and this closes us in a seemingly hermetic circle. However, just by looking back, we can feast on what the minds of those before us have decanted into the cup of culture. From the philosophy of the Greeks to the theology of the Holy Fathers to the reflections of modern phenomenology, we are already the beneficiaries of a vast universe that has managed to tame the subject at hand. Thus we know that Greek antiquity drew a line between two types of time: *chronos* and *kairos*. The first is the one that makes us captive to a temporality hostile to human destiny - that god who devours his children, moments - while *kairos* is the space of a presence and a relationship. It allows the assumption of the human condition in time in the form of an interiorization and verticalization; that is, it affirms an opening of existence towards a timeless and meta-temporal horizon, time becoming a function of the realization of the person.

From this point on, the discussion of time shifts its focus to an ontological, anthropological and spiritual register. Thus we can identify the place of time as the inner universe of the person, with its areas of manifestation. Even though the discussion is broad,



we have tried to mark its serious areas. In the logic of internalized time, of time seen as a function of the person, we discover the otherness beyond time that makes its presence felt in time and that is God. The space of the encounter between man and God establishes a new time, namely liturgical time, which is also a time of mystery; mystery is understood as a reality outside of time which, however, makes itself accessible in temporality. We discover, through the moment, a timeless section in time and, through the state of presence, a way of capturing the moment and investing it in eternity. The most important function of the person, spiritually speaking, is to acquire holiness, and time fulfils its purpose if it is imprinted with a spiral dynamic, if it makes the honest transfer to eternity.

### 1. TIME - A DEFINITION

„Time is the horizon of what I am”<sup>1</sup>, said Jean-Yves Lacoste in his extensive work on the subject. There is no universally accepted formula of time, precisely because the subject always slips through your fingers and is perpetually revealed as a vast fabric, in texture and consistency alike. If we were to look for a formula for time in the palette of statements drawn from the spiritual experience of Orthodoxy, we would recall Father Arsenie Papacioc who manages to capture, in an expression as simple in appearance as it is complex in essence, precisely this aspect: „Every moment is a time and every sigh can be a prayer”<sup>2</sup>.

However, a dictionary definition would put etymological issues in the foreground. This is why the Lampe dictionary proposes two notions of time. The first is Cronos (Χρονος) and the other Kairos (Καιρος)<sup>3</sup>. Chronos represents the time we usually refer to, the time in which you settle, the time that constitutes itself as a framework of existence subject to it, or the time whose effect is temporality itself. Through him we see that God is the creator of time, but also through him we understand that God stands outside of time or beyond it, in the sense that he does not know the constraints or limitations of temporality, God being timeless. This time knows its sequence and the years themselves are inscribed in it. Everything that happens between time and/or for a time is its own<sup>4</sup>. Kairos, on the other hand, presents itself as a more refined yet friendly time. It is not an accountant of our temporality, but opens up the prospect of a wider and deeper assumption of existence. It can be understood as time, the opportune moment of the present times, but also of those to come. It is the unit of measurement of history, but also the term of comparison of eternity. Kairos is the opportune moment for the service of God<sup>5</sup>.

Greek philosopher and theologian Christos Yannaras defines time as „the measure of personal relationship with beings”<sup>6</sup>. Another definition of time is provided by Father Dumitru Stăniloae himself: „Time is the interval of waiting for the response to the call; a spiritual distance between persons”<sup>7</sup>, The caller being God, and the implicit and expected answer coming from man. A gradual, organic evolution is involved in this process. As a comparison, „within the Holy Trinity the waiting period for response is reduced to nothing,

<sup>1</sup> Jean-Yves Lacoste, *Timpul – o fenomenologie teologică*, Deisis, Sibiu, 2005, p. 155.

<sup>2</sup> Arhimandrit Arsenie Papacioc, *Veșnicia ascunsă într-o clipă*, Reîntregirea, Alba-Iulia, 2004, p. 122.

<sup>3</sup> G. W. H. Lampe, D. D., *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1961, pp. 693; 1534.

<sup>4</sup> G. W. H. Lampe, D. D., *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*, p. 1534.

<sup>5</sup> G. W. H. Lampe, D. D., *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*, p. 693.

<sup>6</sup> Christos Yannaras, *Persoană și eros*, Anastasia, București, 2000, p. 147.

<sup>7</sup> Dumitru Stăniloae, „Timp și veșnicie”, SLG Fairacress, Oxford, 1971, [https://archive.org/stream/Dumitru\\_Staniloae-Timp\\_si\\_vesnicie/Dumitru\\_Staniloae-Timp\\_si\\_vesnicie\\_djvu.txt](https://archive.org/stream/Dumitru_Staniloae-Timp_si_vesnicie/Dumitru_Staniloae-Timp_si_vesnicie_djvu.txt).



because the gift of one Person to the Other is immediate. ... For humans the response implies freedom of will, effort and progress. ... This gradual, slow movement in response to God is equivalent to time”<sup>8</sup>. The prayer that man prays in time gives consistency to time, in that it constitutes the response to a call that comes from beyond time (by beyond we can understand both a-chronology and simultaneity with time, without being confused with the latter). Through prayer, the intervals are metamorphosed to the point of changing their valence; they are no longer characterised as separating, but, on the contrary, become the colour of meaning and interpersonal communication. This is probably what led the theologian Christos Yannaras to strongly affirm the consistency of time decanted, on a personal level, as relationship: „Personal relationship is the existential premise of ... the experience of time. The experience of time presupposes the personal relation - the ec-state of the person and the presence (παρ - ουσια) of beings in relation to the person. ... Time, therefore, exists only as a function of personal relation ...”<sup>9</sup>. In the face of this drastic reduction of Yannaras, Father Arsenie's statement presents itself as a synthesis of rare finesse.

Time can be perceived as that element that implacably conditions our existence, from which we can only escape through death and which we cannot control or manage. It seems to have its own metabolism, and we humans are time's tolerators, without the right to reply. It is up to us how adept we are at intuiting the itinerary of time, to align ourselves with its corridor. However, even death does not promise to be a resolution of time, for the simple fact that there is no more time on its ground. The itinerary of time can be captured in time, not out of it. In this sense, Pavel Florenski defines time as an implacable element, as destiny itself, and this destiny necessarily spills over into death: „To exist in time is basically to die - existence in time is a slow but implacable advance of Death. Living in time is the inevitable submission to the Rapture. Living and dying are the same thing. And Death is nothing but Time more tense, more efficient, drawing more attention to itself. Death is instantaneous time, and Time, lasting death. ... Death does not burst in from without into serene Life, but Life itself, in its depths, conceals the embryo of death which grows unyieldingly. Living - we die, dying - we live. Death is the condition of life... ... The destiny that gravitates on us is Time”<sup>10</sup>.

The definition of time is contained, from this perspective, in the very definition of life and death: „Time is the material from which death grows; it lends life to death”<sup>11</sup>. Why is it important to have a correct understanding of time? Without this understanding, we will have neither a coherent assumption nor a valid axiological positioning in time. In the absence of a clear vision, counterfeit and harmful conceptions take shape: „In particular, the objectification of time alters the meaning of life and leads to confusion and self-delusion. For us, time is not just an objective process, but a profound existential reality. Moreover, time has less to do with objects and more to do with our personal existence. This is why only the existential experience of time frees us from the delusion created when we objectify it. A proper attitude towards time is the fundamental requirement for a proper *modus vivendi* and *modus operandi* in the world. Another basic misconception about how we experience time is

<sup>8</sup> D. Stăniloae, „Timp și veșnicie”, SLG Fairacress, Oxford, 1971.

<sup>9</sup> C. Yannaras, *Persoană și eros*, p. 146.

<sup>10</sup> Pavel Florenski, *Stâlpul și Temelia Adevărului*, Polirom, București, 1999, p. 329.

<sup>11</sup> Andre Scrima, *Antropologia apofatică*, Humanitas, București, 2005, p. 341.



the following: people usually forget the meaning of their lives in the present and look for it in an ever-expected future”<sup>12</sup>.

Time is given to us to be lived. It enters into our definition because time itself is „a form of created existence”<sup>13</sup>. The question of Blessed Augustine - What did God do before he created everything (before time existed) - is a sophism to which he also replies: „He did not do anything involving time”<sup>14</sup>. With this observation, we come to the definition delivered by Jean-Yves Lacoste and mentioned above, that „Time is the horizon of what I am”.

However, time is not just an interval that hosts our dwelling, nor a simple path to be travelled, but we ourselves are the ones who give meaning and finality to time by the way we „inhabit the aporia of time”<sup>15</sup>.

## 2. TIME - LOCALIZATION

„Time is organically linked to space and cannot be conceived in its absence. They were created instantaneously. In other words, both time and space were created outside of time by the will of God: «In the beginning» means ... and the beginning of time. As a dimension of material creation, time began at the same time as the universe”<sup>16</sup>. In the same way, St. Basil the Great interprets the verse «In the beginning God made heaven and earth» (Genesis 1:1). He observes that „just as the beginning of a road is not yet a road, nor is the beginning of a house yet a house, so the beginning of time is not yet time, nor even part of time”<sup>17</sup>. Father Stăniloae affirms the clear distinction between the nature of eternity and the nature of time, that is to say, the way in which time came into being: „Time did not appear in the existence that exists by itself from eternity, but it must have come into being, a temporal existence must have appeared that is distinct from that existing from eternity, not as an emanation of it, but created by it”<sup>18</sup>. The same is revealed by theologian Vladimir Lossky, analysing creation from a double perspective, both temporal and eternal. Moreover, describing the triggering moment of time, he draws an analogy between the biblical account of the creation of the world and the prologue of the Gospel of John. Both biblical places reveal moments of beginning or, in other words, we are dealing with two distinct and valid beginnings. «In the beginning was the Word» (John 1:1), writes St. John, and the book of Genesis states, «In the beginning God made heaven and earth» (Genesis 1:1). The author invokes Origen, saying that „God created everything in His Word, therefore, throughout all eternity, in Himself. ... Saint John evokes an eternal beginning, that of the Word ... on the other hand, the call to existence of the world gives rise to time. In an ontological sense, the Genesis is thus secondary to the Prologue of St. John”<sup>19</sup>.

<sup>12</sup> George Mantzarides, Time and Human Life, <https://pemtpousia.com/2021/01/time-and-human-life/>.

<sup>13</sup> Drd. Daniel Ciobotea, „Timpul și valoarea lui pentru mântuire în Ortodoxie”, in revista Ortodoxia, XXIX (1977), nr. 2, p. 196.

<sup>14</sup> Brandon F. Gallaher, „Chalice of Eternity: An Orthodox Theology of Time”, in St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly 57:1 (2013) 5-35, p. 8.

<sup>15</sup> Jean-Yves Lacoste, Timpul – o fenomenologie teologică, Deisis, Sibiu, 2005, p. 78.

<sup>16</sup> Alexandros Kalomiros, Sfinții Părinți despre originile și destinul omului și cosmosului, Editura Deisis, Sibiu, 1998, p. 6.

<sup>17</sup> George Mantzarides, Life and Time according to Basil the Great, <https://pemtpousia.com/2021/01/life-and-time-according-to-basil-the-great-1/>.

<sup>18</sup> Preotul Profesor Dumitru Stăniloae, Sfânta Treime sau La început a fost Iubirea, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune Ortodoxă, București, 2012, p. 14.

<sup>19</sup> Vladimir Lossky, Introducere în teologia ortodoxă, ediție electronică, Editura Apologeticum, 2006, p. 28.





There is a consensus that time is born together with creation, time being a dimension of creation. It is difficult, however, to specify their simultaneity in the act of creation: „The creature appears in an instant at once, eternal and temporal, at the boundary of eternity with time. The beginning ... is a kind of timeless instantaneity in itself, but whose creative explosion gives birth to time. It is the point of the touch of the divine will with what henceforth becomes and lasts”<sup>20</sup>. We will develop this idea when we discuss liturgical time, because the first day of creation (the first day in time) coincides with the eighth day of creation, which, though in time, opens time; this is the mystery by which the two meet and overlap<sup>21</sup>.

Returning to the question of Blessed Augustine, mentioned above, about the so-called inactivity of God prior to time and, consequently, the very uselessness of a God apart from time (What did God do before there was time?), Father Serghei Bulgakov offers us a synthesis of great depth. Time did not appear in time, and yes, there is something that precedes it. A time without a beginning is unthinkable because it would undermine the very foundations of time. Simply put, time without beginning would not be time: „You do not anticipate time with time, otherwise you would not have anticipated all time. But You anticipate all times with Your past eternity without beginning, which has always been Your own, and with it You also anticipate all future times, which only come and immediately become past times, while You also are, and Your years do not escape. Therefore there was not a time when Thou remainedest idle, for time itself is Thy work. ... Therefore the word before is inapplicable where there is no time”<sup>22</sup>. Saint Dionysius the Areopagite attributes to God the quality of divine and mysterious principle of the birth of time: „All time and eternity is from Him. ... He has pre-existence and super-existence in abundance. He established existence as such. God is to be glorified both as eternity and as time, as the culprit of all time and eternity, as that which is ancient of days, as that which is before time and above time, and as that which presupposes times and terms”<sup>23</sup>. In the time line, the mention of change, as an immediate indicator of temporality, is obligatory. Not only man, but everything that comes into being in time „derives its existence from an initial change: the transition from non-being to being. ... This change manifests itself as movement, as the contingent articulation of time and space”<sup>24</sup>.

It seems inappropriate to talk about the place of an aspatial phenomenon, which fills everything but cannot be located at a point or delimited three-dimensionally. However, if time is a dimension of creation, we can say that its place, cosmically bounded, is creation itself. Closer to home, the exponent of creation with the greatest space allocated to time is the human person. And the place in which man stores and validates time is consciousness: „Time has consciousness as its place. But it does not generate it; temporality is correlative to being-in-the-world and corporeality .... But it constitutes it”<sup>25</sup>. This is where all forms of time dwell, including what some thinkers call „bad time.”<sup>26</sup>. For humans, time means relationship and becoming; movement itself translates as a characteristic of time

<sup>20</sup> Drd. D. Ciobotea, „Timpul și valoarea lui pentru mântuire...”, p. 196.

<sup>21</sup> V. Lossky, *Introducere în teologia ortodoxă*, p. 29.

<sup>22</sup> Serghei Bulgakov, *Lumina neînserată. Contemplații și reflecții metafizice*, Anastasia, București, 1999, p. 274.

<sup>23</sup> S. Bulgakov, *Lumina neînserată...*, pp. 274-275.

<sup>24</sup> Ieromonah Makarios Simonopetritul, *Triodul explicat. Mistagogia timpului liturgic*, ediția a III-a, Deisis, Sibiu, 2008, p. 119.

<sup>25</sup> J.-Y. Lacoste, *Timpul – o fenomenologie teologică*, p. 155.

<sup>26</sup> B. F. Gallaher, „Chalice of Eternity...”, p. 19.



appropriated in the human program. Man manifests himself by being aware of his position in time, and this reality is claimed at the level of consciousness: „The consciousness of time is the empirical function of the manifestation of living beings. ... Time ... is the relation to the person, the dual relation as presence, the emergence from the concealment of non-relation measured as time. Beings appear in the horizon of the person and not in the horizon of time; the person delimits the manifestation of beings, while time measures this manifestation, it is the measure of the personal relation to beings”<sup>27</sup>.

The only true relationship that leads to the fulfilment of the person has as its premise and manifestation love. Without love, man becomes vindictive and his relationship to his surroundings is altered. He then „suffocates within space and wants to kill his time. He eliminates spatial distances by the means he possesses and transfers his relations to utopian planes that are subject only to time, which he cannot control. This becomes the new place of encounter with others. And because this time is unposed or lacking in sustenance, it creates in man a sense of emptiness and the need for self-affirmation”<sup>28</sup>.

We can say that man himself can be seen as a place of time. When we say man, we refer both to his individuality and to the universal aspect of creation, of which man is the prime exponent. So it is not nature that was created for time, but time that was created for nature and simultaneously with nature. The place of time implies a new category, namely that of the presence.

### 3. LITURGICAL TIME

The Church is one of a series of institutions that have a place in history, but it does not merely occupy a place in history, it marks history in a way that changes its course and substance. How does it do this? By the fact that it stands at the confluence of meta-history and history: „The historical Church, concrete, clearly delimited in time and space, brings together in it earth and heaven, humans and angels, the living and the dead, sinners and saints, the created and the uncreated. ... The Church can be defined as the «place» where time and eternity meet, as they met before in the person of the incarnate Logos”<sup>29</sup>. Moreover, in Christ, time itself undergoes a transformation, in that „He assumes the time of wickedness in order to fill it with eternity, to transfigure it, to deify it”<sup>30</sup>.

Father Holbea states, in this sense: „The Church is the new reality of history, which extends from the Incarnation to the Parousia as a continuation of the Divine Economy. Christ is that «yesterday and today and forever the same» (Hebrews 13:8). ... The Church, therefore, keeps time under her power. This means that the Church's time can neither be lost nor threaten her. ... In the life of the Church there is also the dimension of expectation”<sup>31</sup>. One of the Lenten hymns captures the Christian's personal experience of the confluence of time and eternity: „In the church of your glory we seem to be in heaven, O Mother of God, you heavenly door; open to us the doors of your mercy...”<sup>32</sup>, which is why time spent in the

<sup>27</sup> C. Yannaras, *Persoană și eros*, pp. 145-147.

<sup>28</sup> Georgios I. Mantzaridis, *Morala creștină*, Editura Bizantină, București, 2006, p. 426.

<sup>29</sup> Drd. D. Ciobotea, „Timpul și valoarea lui pentru mântuire...”, p. 200.

<sup>30</sup> Ier. M. Simonopetritul, *Triodul explicat...*, p. 380.

<sup>31</sup> Lector Dr. Gheorghe Holbea, „Timpul: între chronos și kairos”, in: *Timp și Spațiu. O abordare din perspectiva științelor umaniste*, Facultatea de Teologie Ortodoxă „Patriarhul Justinian Marina”, Editura Universității din București, 2006, pp. 98; 100-101.

<sup>32</sup> <https://ziarullumina.ro/teologie-si-spiritualitate/theologica/in-biserica-slavei-tale-in-cer-ni-se-pare-a-sta-71917.html> (accesat la 15.03.2021).



liturgical life is nothing other than the present or „salvation time”<sup>33</sup>. The Apostle Paul repeatedly draws attention to this aspect, but we will mention only one place: «In due time I listened to you, and on the day of salvation I helped you; now is the due time, now is the day of salvation» (2 Corinthians 6:2). In the preamble to the Mass, before the pronouncement of the Great Blessing, which sets and opens the prospect of the kingdom and therefore of eternity, the deacon says: „The time (καιρος) is to serve the Lord. Bless, Father!”<sup>34</sup>. Father Scrima tells us that „The Liturgy announces the eschaton not by breaking or suspending time, but by its rhythm. ... The essential relationship is now no longer that between past, present and future, ... but between the seen and the unseen. [It is what he also called] «the time of the Mystery»”<sup>35</sup>. Penetrating the Holy Mass with the senses of the spiritual man, Father Arsenie Papacioc said, „Is it a small thing to save a world in an hour and a half, two, while you do the Holy Liturgy?”<sup>36</sup>.

In spite of appearances, attributed to its contemplative vocation, Orthodoxy calls for an extremely serious use of time as being, on the one hand, unrepeatable, but, on the other hand, precisely because of this irrepeatability, becoming an extremely precious resource in the pursuit of the desire for salvation. The indiscriminate use of time, this resource of salvation, is disapproved of by Father Arsenius, even in the context of liturgical time: „Some have a stupid principle: to take Communion in order to make up for the time you spent uncommunicated. ... It is not time that decides but the breaking of the heart”<sup>37</sup>. This is why great men of life, such as Father Arsenius, have taken up with the utmost responsibility the exhortation of St. Paul the Apostle: «Take heed to yourselves how you walk, not as the unwise, but as the wise, redeeming the time, for the evil days are» (Ephesians 5:16-17). Ava Dorotheus asks rhetorically, „Who will give us this time if we lose it?”<sup>38</sup>.

The uniqueness of time must also be affirmed. There is no alternative to temporality in temporality, and this further emphasizes the importance that the Christian must attach to time. Deploring a so-called lack of time is not a solution in itself. Father Stăniloae's explanation is more than telling: „We will not have another time in which to repair what we have broken in our being, in the time of now. We do not relativize the importance of this time as in reincarnationist theories. If we devalue this time, we would consistently devalue every other time. We would never arrive at true seriousness and absolute good. Everything would become an eternal boredom. But to devalue an eternal temporality is to never value taking notice of ourselves in eternity. ... We often waste time, not using it to know and fulfill ourselves. The fact that our time is short does not prevent us from fulfilling its purpose. It is precisely the shortness of time that demands a concentrated attention to ourselves”<sup>39</sup>.

The whole architectural and liturgical ensemble speaks to us of this exit from time made possible by liturgical time, an exit in which both (historical) time and our destiny are fulfilled: „As soon as we step into an Orthodox church, we step into another world - another realm. We leave our everyday world to enter the world of the eternal - and thus have the

<sup>33</sup> Drd. D. Ciobotea, „Timpul și valoarea lui pentru mântuire...”, p. 200.

<sup>34</sup> Liturghier, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune Ortodoxă, București, 2012, p. 132.

<sup>35</sup> Ioan Alexandru Tofan, Omul lăuntric. André Scrima și fizionomia experienței spirituale, Humanitas, București, 2019, p. 132.

<sup>36</sup> Ne vorbește Părintele Arsenie, vol. 2, ediție îngrijită de Arhimandrit Ioanichie Bălan, Editura Mănăstirea Sihăstria, Vânători, 2004, p. 27.

<sup>37</sup> Ne vorbește Părintele Arsenie, vol. 2, p. 13.

<sup>38</sup> Ava Dorotei, in: Filocalia sfințelor nevoițe ale desăvârșirii, vol. 9, Humanitas, București, 2011, p. 501.

<sup>39</sup> Pr. Prof. Dumitru Stăniloae, in: Filocalia sfințelor nevoițe ale desăvârșirii, vol. 9, Humanitas, București, 2011, pp. 501-502.



opportunity to foretaste the heavenly kingdom of God. ... In an Orthodox church, through its icons and services, we enter two worlds; with one foot in temporality and the other in eternity. We are thus given the opportunity to transcend the sense of everyday temporality and welcome the transfigured and redeemed time of the Kingdom of Heaven<sup>40</sup>.

It must be said that this access to the realm of the heavenly kingdom takes us into a kind of contemporaneity, a presence of heavenly origin, rightly called „liturgical contemporaneity”<sup>41</sup>, in which „the whole history of salvation is evoked: vespers represents the messianic time of the Old Testament, the utrology - the dawn of Christ's activity, and the midday meal has an eschatological character of tension in hope towards the future kingdom”<sup>42</sup>. Sacred/liturgical time is different and totally opposed to decadent time. Decadent time brings the movement into question in its aspect of disintegration, decomposition, abrupt finality, implacable destiny. We would be tempted to assume that sacred time, in antithesis, would invoke changelessness, immutability, passivity. However, this is not so, for it too has its own dynamics, through which we find our fulfilment. Only liturgical time induces a new human category in history, which is the holy. Now, the saint is that human being who „fully assumes history”<sup>43</sup>. In this respect angels serve as the most suggestive examples, representing a kind of oxymoron: „eternal beings subject to change”<sup>44</sup>. Here a new distinction is made, designed to clarify forms of existence according to their temporal/temporal/eternal framework, and this distinction refers to the notions or quality of created vs. uncreated. In this key, we can deduce that there are three modes of being: „Some Fathers, including St. Basil the Great and St. Maximus Confessor, spoke of three modes of being (time - chronos, the ages or eternity of the created - eon, and eternal or uncreated eternity - aidios, aidiotēs and sometimes aionios and often even proaionios or pre-eternity, which is ateleutetos or without end), not just the two categories of time and eternity”<sup>45</sup>. Father Andrei Scrima defines the eon as „the commensurable time of eternity, but distinct from the eternity of God. It is eternity «compassionate» with temporality. There is, indeed, a kind of discontinuity, of discretion that passes beneath time; at this level you discover a presence, a face”<sup>46</sup>. In order to clarify this point, we bring back into writing Saint Maximus Confessor, who elaborates like no other: „The eternity of the intelligible world is a created eternity: Portions, truths, the unchanging structures of the cosmos, the geometry of ideas governing creation, the network of mathematical essences, all these constitute the aeon; the aeonic eternity, which has a beginning, like time (hence its name, since it has its beginning «in the age», en aioni, by the passage from non-being to being), but which remains unchanged, subject to a timeless existence. This aeonian eternity is immutable: it gives the world coherence and clarity. ... The aeon is still time, time is the moving aeon, and only their coexistence, their intertwining, allows us to conceive of time. The aeon is related to the angelic world. Angels and humans participate together in time and eon, but in different ways”<sup>47</sup>.

<sup>40</sup> Dr. Jane M. deVyver, *The Experience of Time and Eternity in Orthodox Worship*, <https://www.johnsanidopoulos.com/2010/05/experience-of-time-and-eternity-in.html> (accesat la 22.02.2021).

<sup>41</sup> Drd. D. Ciobotea, „Timpul și valoarea lui pentru mântuire...”, p. 201.

<sup>42</sup> Drd. D. Ciobotea, „Timpul și valoarea lui pentru mântuire...”, p. 201.

<sup>43</sup> Paul Evdochimov, *Iubirea nebună a lui Dumnezeu*, Editura Anastasia, București, 1992, p. 25, p. 70.

<sup>44</sup> B. F. Gallaher, „Chalice of Eternity...”, p. 11.

<sup>45</sup> B. F. Gallaher, „Chalice of Eternity...”, p. 11.

<sup>46</sup> André Scrima, *Timpul Rugului Aprins. Maestrul spiritual în tradiția răsăriteană*, ediția a II-a, revăzută, Humanitas, București, 2000, p. 94.

<sup>47</sup> V. LOSSKY, *Introducere în teologia ortodoxă*, p. 30.



As a conclusion to this idea, the Fathers consider as valid for Orthodoxy only two categories of being, based on the categorical distinction between created and uncreated: „Temporality in the dual form of time (sentient creation: *chronos*) and the ages of created beings (supersensible creation: *eon*) in contradistinction to eternity (*aidiotes*), the eternity of the divine uncreated before the ages (*proaionios*), as a negative or apophatic category meant to emphasize the unknowability of God, i.e., that He is the «unoriginal origin - *archen anarchon*»<sup>48</sup>.

Incorporated into the Church's spiritual metabolism, time, which has now become the property of those who are an organic part of the Church, changes its dimensions and properties. Thus it is that the baptized are on an upward trajectory, and time is their ally. The program of life begun at baptism continues in and through the Church, and time metamorphoses: „Some Fathers of Orthodoxy have even called the time of the present life the sixth or preparation day par excellence - *παρασκευή*. For those who are in continual preparation, earthly life is like a single day equal to itself, according to the expression of St. Gregory the Theologian: «all human life is a day to those who are in desire (live it in love)». For this reason the Apostle exhorts: «while we have time, let us do good to all» (Galatians 6:10)<sup>49</sup>.

The services that are celebrated in the Church are a mirror of the heavenly divine service. In fact, it is impossible to make a clear separation between the two, since the very reason for the Church's divine service lies in its close correspondence, even to the point of simultaneity, with the heavenly one. Angels participate with men in the most important moment of the invocation of the Holy Spirit: „A vital component in Orthodox services is the experience of time. There are a number of aspects of Orthodox liturgical practice which are designed to convey that what we celebrate in the Divine Liturgy is a reflection of the heavenly Liturgy, in which we participate through the uninterrupted singing of the angels who stand before the throne of God in heaven, and in which we leave the world of temporality and its concept of earthly time (*chronos*) and step into the dimension of transfigured and redeemed time (*kairos*)<sup>50</sup>.

#### 4. AN ONTOLOGICAL JOURNEY INTO TEMPORALITY: THE INSTANT AND PRESENCE

Time is not an unlimited resource, much less a place of passive installation in a comfort zone which, by its inert nature, cancels any future horizon and perspective. We are called to conquer the „beautiful and the moment that carries within itself transfigurations of life<sup>51</sup>. This is where the role of the moment as a power to assume the present comes in: „The instant redeems lost time. Every instant of our lives is a potential instant of rising from sin, of our salvation, a divine opportunity. ... Every instant must be taken seriously, as if it could be our last. ... The importance of the present instant is linked above all to the fact that it is the only instant given to us in a certain way by God. ... There are two essential meanings of the word «now» in the New Testament: a) through «now» history is experienced as something present; b) this «now» in the New Testament constitutes a period in time charged with eternity<sup>52</sup>.

<sup>48</sup> B. F. Gallaher, „Chalice of Eternity...”, p. 14.

<sup>49</sup> Drd. D. Ciobotea, „Timpul și valoarea lui pentru mântuire...”, p. 206.

<sup>50</sup> J. M. deVyver, *The Experience of Time and Eternity in Orthodox Worship*.

<sup>51</sup> Arhimandrit Arsenie Papacioc, *Epistole*, Editura Accent Print, Suceava, 2015, p. 36.

<sup>52</sup> Lect. Dr. G. Holbea, „Timpul: între *chronos* și *kairos*”, pp. 96-98.



We understand that „The world and time must become the space and time of our salvation”<sup>53</sup>. Through the exhortations that Father Arsenius Papacioc, for example, offered to all those who came to find an answer, an encouragement or a comfort, he placed a very great emphasis on living the present as a continuous reality, a reality suggested and captured in the power of the moment. With the firm exhortation: „Have a state of continuous presence”<sup>54</sup>, correlated with the well-known saying: „every moment is a time and every sigh can be a prayer”<sup>55</sup>, father reveals to us both the depths of the inner man and the breadth of the personal, intimate relationship with God, which also introduces man to the spiritual dimensions of existence. C.S. Lewis's insights are again eloquent: „Men live in time, but the Enemy [God] sorts them out for eternity. Which means, I think, that His desire is that they should focus on two things above all: eternity as such and that moment of time which they call the present. This is because the present is the particular point at which time meets eternity. The human experience of the present moment, and it alone, is analogous to how the Enemy [God] embraces reality in its entirety; it alone gives them freedom and manifestation in the act”<sup>56</sup>.

Ava Dorotei urged us „Let us be awake while we have time”<sup>57</sup>, and for this, „only the awareness of death will give life this awakening and depth, will give life life life, will make it so intense that its totality will be brought back to the immediate moment. This is how the ascetics have struggled with mindlessness, carelessness”<sup>58</sup>. The sanctification of man also implies an implicit effort to sanctify time, to redeem time and to open temporality to the horizon of eternity. «May he, according to the riches of his glory, give you that by his Spirit you may be strengthened in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; rooted and grounded in love, that you may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and depth and height, and to know the love of Christ which is beyond knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God» (Ephesians 3:16-19).

We insist on the importance of the moment and on the need to be anchored, this being the mark and confirmation of a conscious, full assumption of one's own existence: „You must first conquer God and he will appoint us. The great mistake made by almost everyone is that he sees God as a stranger to his own struggle, to his own neediness, and thinks that it is only by what he does that he reaches this goal: the acquisition of the Kingdom. No! You have to have this sense of finesse to recognize the presence of grace in every moment within you. If you succeed in seeing the Kingdom of Heaven within you every moment, it is a good move - a divine inspiration”<sup>59</sup>.

Andrei Pleșu gives us a definition of the moment that is worth mentioning: „When we talk about the moment, we do not mean the over-valuing of the moment, but its de-temporalization. ... We emerge from the fluidity of time through the «pin-ear» of an illuminating instant. The true moment ... is timeless, as the point is aspatial. ... Without the presence of such a subject, the world is non-local and non-temporal. ... For a subject that is

<sup>53</sup> Lect. Dr. G. Holbea, „Timpul: între chronos și kairos”, p. 94.

<sup>54</sup> Arhimandrit Arsenie Papacioc, Cuvânt despre bucuria duhovnicească. Convorbiri, ediția a II-a, Eikon, Cluj-Napoca, 2003, p. 203.

<sup>55</sup> Arhimandrit Arsenie Papacioc, Veșnicia ascunsă într-o clipă, Reîntregirea, Alba Iulia, 2004, p. 122.

<sup>56</sup> Clive Staples Lewis, Sfaturile unui diavol bătrân către unul mai tânăr, Humanitas, București, pp. 77-78.

<sup>57</sup> Ava Dorotei, in: Filocalia sfintelor nevoițe ale desăvârșirii, vol. 9, Humanitas, București, 2011, p. 511.

<sup>58</sup> Mitropolitul Antonie de Suroj, Viața, boala, moartea, Editura Sophia, București, 2015, p. 158.

<sup>59</sup> Ieromonah Benedict Stancu, Iată duhovnicul: Părintele Arsenie Papacioc, ediție integrală, Editura Sophia, București, 2010, p. 111.



not spatially located and not temporally situated, all aspects of space and time are co-present”<sup>60</sup>.

In the church, for example, the passage of time is no longer limited to what is implied by its primary meaning, but is overcome, being „the passage of a presence, of the Spirit who discreetly floods the world”<sup>61</sup>. The loss of time, which we spoke about in the previous pages, has a not insignificant relevance in terms of assuming the moment as a present time in a state of continuous presence. This is a matter designed to define man in relation to his projection into eternity: „Not only time in general has an absolute value, but every moment. ... The loss of time itself becomes a habit. It is not only an external matter, but an internal one”<sup>62</sup>. For Remi Brague, relevant is only time that can be experienced, lived or at least imagined<sup>63</sup>. From an eschatological perspective, the loss of time has catastrophic consequences: „God has given you time to build your eternal salvation. Do not waste it!”<sup>64</sup>. Life is lived neither in the past nor in the future but, above all, in the present. The deficient assumption of the present coincides with the state of self-forgetfulness or dispersion<sup>65</sup>. In our defining moments, we objectively cherish the time of our lives and weigh the weight of the moment: „How would we behave towards each other if the present moment were the only moment we had and if this moment should express all the love and care we have for each other”<sup>66</sup>? We discover, spontaneously, „the value of time as an existential dimension”<sup>67</sup>. In what follows, we will see the valences of the present and the moment, which the present concentrates qualitatively rather than quantitatively.

A number of Christian thinkers even assume that the only reality of time is the moment, the others being only extensions of it in memory (the past) and/or intuition (the future). From a Christian perspective, one can make nuances of substance characteristic of the temporal moment by which the quality of the moment is defined: „the moment of creation, when the attainment of eternity initiates paradisaic dynamism; the moment of the fall, when the attainment of relative nothingness, to which human freedom turns, introduces into the time of the beginning being for death; and the moment of the resurrection, from which a transfigured duration emerges, not so that paradisaic temporality may be restored from nothing, but so that time, itself fallen, may henceforth become the receptacle of eternity”<sup>68</sup>.

Between moment and presence there is a close connection of an inner nature, a connection that also gives rise to a dilemma, because „it is incomprehensible how a 'moment' could have appeared in an eternity, in which time and evolution could have begun”<sup>69</sup>. The explanation leads us to „God, the only self-existence”<sup>70</sup>. Time can be in our consciousness through protention and retention, protention anticipating the future or even letting an

<sup>60</sup> Andrei Pleșu, *Minima moralia. Elemente pentru o etică a intervalului*, Humanitas, București, 2017, pp. 65-66.

<sup>61</sup> I. A. Tofan, *Omul lăuntric...*, p. 135.

<sup>62</sup> Pr. Prof. D. Stăniloae, *Filocalia sfintelor nevoițe ale desăvârșirii*, vol. 9, Humanitas, București, 2011, p. 511.

<sup>63</sup> Remi Brague, *Modern cu moderație. Timpurile moderne sau inventarea unei înșelăciuni*, Spandugino, București, 2022, p. 233.

<sup>64</sup> Arhimandrit Sofronie, *Din viață și din Duh*, ed. a 2-a, rev., Reîntregirea, Alba Iulia, 2014, p. 59.

<sup>65</sup> Pr. Prof. D. Stăniloae, *Filocalia sfintelor nevoițe ale desăvârșirii*, vol. 9, p. 511.

<sup>66</sup> Mitr. A. de Suroj, *Viața, boala, moartea*, p. 90.

<sup>67</sup> A. Scrima, *Antropologia apofatică*, p. 276.

<sup>68</sup> Olivier Clément, *Hristos a înviat! Cuvinte despre sărbătorile creștine*, Renașterea, Cluj-Napoca, 2017, p. 9.

<sup>69</sup> Pr. Prof. D. Stăniloae, *Sfânta Treime sau La început a fost Iubirea*, p. 11.

<sup>70</sup> Pr. Prof. D. Stăniloae, *Sfânta Treime sau La început a fost Iubirea*, p. 11.



imaginary future invade and confiscate the present, and retention ensuring continuity by retaining the past in memory, which is natural up to a certain point, beyond which it becomes a masked utopia. So the present is, according to some, the only reality of time, the moment of its consummation: „in short, the past and the future, according to a theological tradition of time, are unreal and only the present moment (the moment), as an image of eternity, is real”<sup>71</sup>, because „the image of eternity itself is manifested in every moment of self-consciousness”<sup>72</sup>.

That continuous presence that fully assumes the moment can only be realized in the full manner of human creative manifestation. Now, this manifestation leads us to the prototype after which we were created, the incarnate Logos, Jesus Christ. Both his coming into history and the manner of his presence are marked by - and confirm - the rule of love: «For God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whoever believing in Him should not perish but have eternal life. That God did not send his Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world through him might be saved» (John 3, 16-17). Further, this rule is part of our nature and is meant to overwhelm and become our nature, which is possible only to the extent that we remain consistent with the program begun at baptism, that of fulfilling the likeness, the conformity to the Image after which we were created. Now, this becoming in the likeness of God knows only one valid way, the way of love: «Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love has not known God, for God is love» (1 John 4:7-8). Through love we are established in the moment: „the present and love are manifestations and prefigurations of the eternal present and eternal love, of God”<sup>73</sup>.

We are faced with a new challenge; that of giving a definition to the instant / moment / present. To paraphrase Vladimir Lossky <sup>74</sup>, we turn our attention to St. Basil the Great, who considers that the first moment of time, the moment of its appearance, is not time, arguing his idea on the analogy of a road; the beginning of a journey is not the journey. In the dynamism of time, the moment cannot be captured, nor can it constitute time; it is more a section in time. The moment cannot be considered a point in time either, because, as St. Augustine points out, the boundary between past and future is liquid and impossible to capture. The difficulty of this approach led some, like the philosopher Zeno, to reduce time to absurdity by the fact that it could simultaneously be both motion and rest. The one who captures the quality of the moment with great finesse is Plato: „Plato had a remarkable conception of the «moment» which, he said, is not time but a boundary and, through it, an opening to eternity. The present without dimension, without duration reveals itself as a presence of eternity”<sup>75</sup>. This understanding brings us quite close to the dimensions of the moment, all the more so because the moment is a false trail when we try to place it between its chronological frames, between past and future. It is not in this external aspect that the moment can be captured, but in the inner categories of being. In this way, the moment is made permanent or, through it, the possessor of the moment enters a state of continuous presence. The moment expands, becoming timeless time. According to this reasoning, the relevance of temporality changes, the moment is no longer claimed in the dispute between past and future: „The present, which is always swallowed up by the past and moves towards

<sup>71</sup> B. F. Gallaher, „Chalice of Eternity...”, p. 9.

<sup>72</sup> B. F. Gallaher, „Chalice of Eternity...”, p. 9.

<sup>73</sup> Pr. Dr. G. I. Mantzaridis, *Morala creștină II*, p. 427.

<sup>74</sup> V. Lossky, *Introducere în teologia ortodoxă*, p. 29.

<sup>75</sup> V. Lossky, *Introducere în teologia ortodoxă*, p. 29.





the future, is a kind of dimensionless point, moving in the ocean of neonal existence: of the semi-existence of past and future - of the already- and still-undefined”<sup>76</sup>.

The instant is a special category of time, which does not unfold horizontally, but has its dynamics vertically. It is therefore only apparently part of the sequential temporality of the past and the future, neither of which has any legitimacy in claiming the moment. In fact, the ratio of forces is exactly the opposite; it is the moment that claims both, because in the moment, as in a timeless and dimensionless present, the horizon of time and the natural necessity of eternity as its purpose and fulfilment open up: „it is the time in which the past is kept whole, and the present opens up to the immensity of the ages: it is the «memorial of the Kingdom», the fact of relating to God, of being wholly present before the Eternal God. ... The lived time represents a very intimate interaction between its mathematical form and its existential content”<sup>77</sup>. Now, in this key, the three notions invoked by Tudor Arghezi are vital parts of the ontological mechanism of the moment/moment, manifesting as a result of: „the ticking of the heart, consciousness and intelligence”<sup>78</sup>. We can now assume that death would remain the only unknown in the equation of time and that, if this chapter were resolved, time would change its constitution and have finality in itself, not beyond itself: „perhaps it would be legitimate to bracket death in order to liberate a present time, the meaning of which it no longer possesses; ... the theological tradition, almost all of it, has denied this suggestion and tried to produce the concept of an eternity for man”<sup>79</sup>. We say that theology has done nothing but ascertain, crystallize and affirm eternity as the only valid resolution of time.

The difficulty of defining time, of placing it in a category of thought that covers, to a considerable extent, the subject, is hidden behind the definition of the moment. The moment/the instant is the sensitive point in the discussion of time, because it is the most fluid reality of temporality. „Man does not experience isolated moments, but through memory, hope and imagination he creates for himself that continuous moment which he feels each time as present. But the present is also particularly important for man, because it is in it that the future is decided and the past is judged”<sup>80</sup>. The Orthodox theology of the time offers the most convincing keys to understanding the theme, which is not only a theme of thought, but a theme of life. In this sense, Father Dumitru Stăniloae considers the moment as the element of dynamism of time, its inner spring and that which ensures the combustion of time: „The present moment is always a moment that expands in the hope of another time. It is not only a present moment”<sup>81</sup>.

As I said, the moment is a timeless moment, more than and beyond a mere section in time. In this sense, the combination of the moment and presence is of maximum depth and topicality. Here is how Father Andrei Scrima puts it: „Temporality is the realm of illusion and sufficient exteriority, built on «having» (it is entering into alliance with space); atemporality is on «being». And you are, you have an identity, when you are permanently what you are; and you are not so except in God, when you feel that you have your roots in the transcendent”<sup>82</sup>. Presence has a double valence; on the one hand, you are involved, the

<sup>76</sup> S. Bulgakov, *Lumina neînserată...*, p. 271.

<sup>77</sup> Paul Evdochimov, *Ortodoxia*, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1996, p. 223.

<sup>78</sup> Tudor Arghezi, „Ziua, momentul, condeiul și cuvântul”, în: Ovidiu Pecican, *România și Europa mediană: contribuții la tipologia culturală a Europei*, Editura Polirom, Iași, 2021, p. 345.

<sup>79</sup> J.-Y. Lacoste, *Timpul – o fenomenologie teologică*, p. 122.

<sup>80</sup> G. I. Mantzaridis, *Morala creștină*, p. 417.

<sup>81</sup> D. Stăniloae, „Timp și veșnicie”, p. 9.

<sup>82</sup> A. Scrima, *Antropologia apofatică*, p. 253.



personal subject of your own presence, but, on the other hand, God is involved as a relationship in presence. Moreover, my presence in relation and relationship to God's presence reveals a kinship of myself with God: „The seal of His image, imprinted on our being, shows that it belongs to Him and He, in turn, belongs to it. The ultimate word that can be uttered for understanding the divine image of the creature is therefore «a presence»: a presence is all that is innermost and deepest in the soul. ... It is in presence that the antinomy of the incomprehensibility of the image is resolved and overcome: a presence is «something», «a configuration» (or rather a structure), but not a limited figure; but it can only be understood through real contact, through an impression that only it «as presence» can give, and not through its conceptual substitutes. (This is what St. Gregory of Nyssa somewhere calls «the sense of presence», opposed to and superior to discursive intelligence.) For the profound man, for the interior man, the relationship with God unfolds on the dimensions of presence, ... God being here more present to him than his own presence. ... The category of presence also fulfils an essentially anthropological function: it is constituted as the dynamic centre”<sup>83</sup>.

We can say that continuous presence is the only valid condition of being of the human person. Outside this sphere, man becomes a marginal of his own life, and his anchorage in time is off-centre. These aspects go far beyond the sphere of the so-called theology of hope, in which the present is seen as a stage, a necessary and useful instrument, a rudder of destiny, through which one can influence the itinerary of the future. The liturgical expression „now and for ever and ever” finds its succinct explanation, applied to our subject, in the theologian Georgios Mantzaridis: „«Now» operates the synthesis of all the dimensions of time, it widens itself by becoming «for ever» and is taken up into divine eternity. As the body of Christ, «the One who is and the One who was and the One who is to come» (Revelation 1:4)”<sup>84</sup>, and all of this is centered on a firm hope: „The strength of the Christian rests on the expectation of the Kingdom of God. And this, in turn, already exists in the present and nourishes the Christian life”<sup>85</sup>.

The liturgical expression concerning the events that happened in time and/or are commemorated liturgically, in which we participate through the phenomenon of liturgical contemporaneity, although they may be temporally framed long before us, makes explicit reference to the new timeless dimension, the continuous presence: „Kairos is the time of the present moment. Today Christ is born! Today Christ is risen! Today Christ is baptized! This is the day of salvation! Kairos is also the «fullness of time», when eternity enters and pervades our fallen earthly existence, transfiguring it and us, in which we are given the gift of capturing in temporality a moment in the presence of God. This is the realm of what might be called «religious experience - or having a personal experience with God»; it is the present moment of repentance and change. We have stepped into a Kairos where we are surprised and don't even notice/feel the dynamics of temporality”<sup>86</sup>.

Each moment is a time which, together with the sigh-prayer, can be a turning point in the path of our temporality. It is about the power of the moment to redeem time (see the case of the Dysmas robber), about the chance with which each moment is endowed, and about the fact that the moment is delivered to us with the possibility of a personal climax. Each moment can be a starting moment, it can be the beginning of a life changed for the

<sup>83</sup> A. Scrima, *Antropologia apofatică*, p. 123.

<sup>84</sup> G. I. Mantzaridis, *Morala creștină*, p. 420.

<sup>85</sup> G. I. Mantzaridis, *Morala creștină*, p. 421.

<sup>86</sup> B. F. Gallaher, „Chalice of Eternity...”, pp. 1-2.



better; it is a resource that must be realised and exploited. I was saying that the strength of the moment lies not in the time-quantity elements, but in the qualitative aspects of time; it is a dense time, a section, a gate in time. In this sense, the moment can be seen as a perpetual chance for salvation: „The instant can redeem lost time when communion with God is restored in it. ... If the moment were not a bridge or a syncopation of passage, there could be no lever for the sinner to launch himself from the dimension of «lost-time» into another dimension: «redemption-time». For the sinner's repentance, the moment is a new beginning, which rhymes, spiritually speaking, with a new «creation» of time, because in it a new «birth» of the ins”<sup>87</sup>.

A very important aspect, which concerns the substance of time and, implicitly, of the moment, tells us that a real anchoring in time is possible through a state of presence, and this presence finds its most appropriate frame of manifestation in the moment. You can only be present in the moment, in the moment actually lived, in a personal and personal way. The moment of rising or redeeming past time establishes us in the truth, thus becoming a mark or measure for „understanding the truth (non-hiding)”<sup>88</sup>.

Truth becomes personal and assumed, it leaves the sphere of theoretical discourse and becomes part of a person's life. At the same time, the moment becomes a unique space, a space par excellence of the affirmation of the person, but not anyway, but affirmation in truth. The moment and the present thus become defining for a complete Christian anthropology; they become that unique, par excellence „space of personal presence”<sup>89</sup>. That is why the present focused in the moment is the place of the „Dimensionlessness of personal immediacy. John Damascene defines the now as time «without quantity», and Basil the Great relates the now to the divine «perception» of time, time that knows no movement or change. Maxim Confessor sees in the now the truth of «still time», that is, of «the age». ... The age is the time of the fulfilment of man's personal relationship with God, because time «is motionless» only when «nature unites, unites itself directly with the Providence»<sup>90</sup>.

Another fact of presence and of the moment is revealed to us. Life closed in time lasts as long as it is not invalidated by death. Beyond death, we can think of the person as an absence rather than a presence, and the moment of death as a last measure in the portal of life. However, by the consistency of the lived moments, man can last beyond the moment of death, through the manifestations or inheritance of his moments. This is why, in a painting, its creator is also present, beyond the horizon of temporality<sup>91</sup>. Here, once again, the power and depths of the moment are revealed to us, as „an uninterrupted duration of communion”<sup>92</sup>. It is essential „to communicate inwardly with the Truth, not to wait for its foundation from outside, objectively, from the desperate flow of Time towards a truth that justifies it”<sup>93</sup>. The culminating point of uninterrupted communion is the Eucharistic moment, part of liturgical time and its determining fact: „The Eucharist, repeated and thus unchanging and always a present possibility of communion, suspends the past and the future in the immediacy of presence: The offering and making of the Eucharist is an act of universal existential unity, which abolishes all existential, moral or temporal differences: the living and the dead, the

<sup>87</sup> Drd. D. Ciobotea, „Timpul și valoarea lui pentru mântuire...”, p. 200.

<sup>88</sup> C. Yannaras, *Persoană și eros*, p. 147.

<sup>89</sup> C. Yannaras, *Persoană și eros*, p. 155.

<sup>90</sup> C. Yannaras, *Persoană și eros*, p. 149.

<sup>91</sup> C. Yannaras, *Persoană și eros*, p. 156.

<sup>92</sup> C. Yannaras, *Persoană și eros*, p. 160.

<sup>93</sup> A. Scrima, *Antropologia apofatică*, p. 311.



near and the far, the holy and the sinful, the former and the latter are all present here and now «before» Christ and «in Christ» - in the immediacy of the personal relationship with him<sup>94</sup>.

In the hierarchy of things done by man, we place the priesthood very high, at the intersection of time and eternity, and this precisely for its eucharistic reason. „«Now» becomes the vow of eternity, transfigured into «for ever» and there are always two points «for ever and ever»<sup>95</sup>.

Without this kind of continuous presence, the consciousness of time cannot be assumed with clarity of mind. A reality expressed like this: „Until the fall of the forefathers, the unit of measure of time was blissful eternity, the consciousness of what St. Maximus Confessor calls «the state of existing forever in good»<sup>96</sup>. Time knows no routine or monotony, because it constantly reinvents itself, and this property of time shapes the present: „The centre of being is at the same time a present that continually reappears<sup>97</sup>, and on this reasoning we understand as native „inclination towards permanence<sup>98</sup>. Assuming that every moment is time, we understand that time is in our hands and that it is not the quantity of time that matters, but its quality, which ultimately translates into our relationship to time. Again, reference is made to inner coordinates: „The heart is the place and time of our salvation<sup>99</sup>. That is why there is a special category of people who know how to anchor themselves in time, but not in the sense of settling or abandoning themselves in time, but in the sense of seizing or appropriating it. We are now discussing the category of the saint. For him, time is: „the place of chance - of a determinism of another order than the physical, which intervenes with a special meaning in the life of being. ... Therefore, a capital act for our spiritual fulfilment is the discovery of the law and work of time, which transforms beings under the power of circumstances and chance. This means creating time, which is essentially a divine task<sup>100</sup>.

Even if one can invoke the possibility of a pseudo-exit from time, a break in contact with time<sup>101</sup>, it is only in the state of presence that time regains its true density, and relations with otherness will find their proper path: „If we were fully present for each other, we could rightly expect miracles to happen. To be fully present to one another is to help others to personally experience God's love<sup>102</sup>.

Moreover, the human being is also not the definitive place of time, because, on the one hand, it is impossible for man to live „in a pure present<sup>103</sup>, and, on the other hand, it is itself conjugated with time, for a higher meaning and a complete fulfilment. „Temporality and corporeality are really housed in God. There is room in the Absolute for a body and for time; they do not vanish in contact with its divinity<sup>104</sup>.

## CONCLUSIONS

<sup>94</sup> C. Yannaras, *Persoană și eros*, pp. 167-168.

<sup>95</sup> Georgios Mantzaridis, „Hristos și Timpul”, in: *Revista teologică, Studii și articole*, V (1995), nr. 2, p. 92.

<sup>96</sup> Lect. Dr. G. Holbea, „Timpul: între chronos și kairos”, p. 94.

<sup>97</sup> A. Scrima, *Antropologia apofatică*, p. 209.

<sup>98</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Sfaturile unui diavol bătrân către unul mai tânăr*, p. 128.

<sup>99</sup> Arhim. A. Papacioc, *Epistole*, p. 196.

<sup>100</sup> A. Scrima, *Antropologia apofatică*, p. 208.

<sup>101</sup> Aldous Huxley, *Minunata lume nouă*, Editura Polirom, Iași, 2011, p. 150.

<sup>102</sup> Anthony M. Coniaris, *Taina persoanei – calea către Dumnezeu*, Editura Sophia, București, 2012, p. 154.

<sup>103</sup> J.-Y. Lacoste, *Timpul – o fenomenologie teologică*, p. 115.

<sup>104</sup> J.-Y. Lacoste, *Timpul – o fenomenologie teologică*, p. 87.



We can make a logical reduction to the equation of time, in which a very important place is occupied by the human person. Time and man are the poles of a discussion in which the premises are volatile, and advantage tends to favour one or the other of the poles. Either time manifests itself with the force of an implacable destiny in the face of which man can only resign himself or, in the best cases, can trick time, or time is incorporated and transfigured in the plane of the mystery in which man is established on a spiritual level, managing to imprint time with an ascending, sacred dynamic. Hence a whole suite of implications and variations. The loss of time throws man into a suicidal complicity from a soteriological perspective, just as the genuine anchoring in time implies the valorization of the moment and the access, as in a section through time, to imperishable realities.

If the major challenge of temporality is the reversal of poles and the gaining of human control and levers for conditioning time, the key to resolving the equation of temporality lies not outside but in a radical interiority, in the very inner being of the human being. We have access to these registers only in the spiritual corridors of existence. In this sense, the space par excellence is the liturgical one, in which time too is transfigured and changes its substance. We break down the definition of time as a sequence - past, present and future - and access its deeper registers, such as the moment and presence, new aspects that give time a vertical dynamic, transcending its horizontal nature.

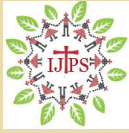
Time is most acutely felt at the level of consciousness, where it can disguise itself in a past that is forcibly legitimised in the present or, conversely, in a future that rushes to manifest itself, violently compromising the moment. We hope that the above lines will bring the benefits, at least, of a reading that will challenge the reader towards his inner dimensions.

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## SATAN IN THE KINGDOM OF GOD: EXPLORING CENTRAL MOTIFS IN LUKE'S GOSPEL

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### ABSTRACT

*This essay identifies and discusses some of the salient features contained in the central motifs employed in Luke's gospel. It begins by addressing the key controversies involved in Lukan biblical scholarship such as the Theophilus reference in the Prologue; the Pauline connection; Luke's stated purpose for writing his gospel; and Luke's alleged concerns with imperial Rome. Then it proceeds to examine the central organizing principle or leitmotif of Luke's gospel, the messianic identity of Christ, in relation to other dominant theological themes such as righteousness, Holy Spirit, gentiles, religious conflict, Satan, and Kingdom of God, as well as the core issues involved within each motif. The essay finds that the Satan motif is the most prevalent in Luke's gospel especially in relation to the Kingdom of God concept. In fact, references to Satan or variations thereof are so dominant that it is not only one of the great hallmarks of the public ministry of Christ but, as well, absolutely central to a comprehensive understanding of Luke's gospel. The Satan belief is such a core tenet of the Christian faith, it is safe to say that without it all other central Christian doctrines and concepts, and authentic Christian belief itself, would stand on very shaky grounds indeed.*

**Keywords:** *motif, leitmotif, Theophilus; Satan; Kingdom of God, righteous; Holy Spirit; religious conflict; gentile;*

### INTRODUCTION

A few highly salient issues need to be considered before we delve into the scholarly literature on Luke's Gospel to identify dominant motifs. Although Luke in his prologue presumably dedicates his book to a distinguished patron named Theophilus<sup>1</sup>, once again we have a Gospel in which it seems like the reader knows the identity of the author when, in fact, the author does not explicitly identify himself. It's almost as if 'Luke', for some reason (not to mention perhaps other Gospel writers), deliberately adopted a protective authorship mode of anonymity<sup>2</sup>. Consequently, the conspiracy theories abound in biblical scholarship.

However, this reference to Theophilus, whether an actual person or simply an honorary title or something else altogether, is more than simply a passing mention. Among other things, it serves to make clear why Luke is writing his Gospel right from the beginning, very much unlike Mark and Matthew:

"Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile an account of things accomplished among us...as they were handed down...by those who...were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, it seemed fitting for me as well...to write it out for you...so that you may know the exact truth about the things you have been taught" (Luke 1:1-4).

The truth about what? Answer: all the things that happened in the life of Jesus. So, then, to confirm the identity of Christ is the prime motivation for Luke writing his Gospel. His Gospel is his story of "the exact truth" of Jesus Christ. Arguably, then, it could be argued



that the leitmotif of Luke's Gospel is the messianic identity of Christ or the true identity of Jesus as savior of both Israel (Jewish people) and the rest of humanity (Gentiles).

Many examples can be proffered to illustrate this point. When the angel Gabriel is talking to the Virgin Mary about how she will conceive Jesus in her womb, he names Jesus as "...the Son of the Most High" that will be given "...the throne of His father David..." (Luke 1:32-33). Luke (1:68-69) then mentions that Zacharias in his prophecy blessed the Lord God of Israel for bestowing redemption upon His people by raising up a horn of salvation from "the house of David His servant". During Jesus' birth in Bethlehem when the angel appeared before some shepherds who were staying out in the fields at night watching over their flock and said to them, "...I bring you good news of great joy...for today in the city of David there has been born for you a savior..." (Luke 2:10-11).

Proving divine identity integrally linked to Jewish Scriptural tradition is a major concern. There is divine confirmation of Jesus's identity as the Son of God when "...the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in bodily form like a dove, and a voice came out of heaven, 'You are My beloved Son...'" (Luke 3:21-22). When Jesus was led around in the wilderness by the Spirit to be tempted voraciously by the devil, Jesus's identity as the Son of God is again confirmed. In the elaborate listing of the genealogy of Jesus, we see that he was the Son of Joseph from the house of David, "...the son of Jacob, the son of Isaac, the son of Abraham...the son of Adam, the son of God (Luke 3:23-38).

Another crucial point to remember about Luke's Gospel, of course, is the Pauline connection, so to speak. In Christian tradition, the anonymous author of Luke's Gospel had been intimately associated with the apostle Paul, accompanying him on missionary work<sup>3</sup>. Many passages throughout the New Testament make clear that the early church was quite aware of both Paul's distinguished relationship with Christ and the traditions of a 'Luke' who was believed to be Paul's co-worker (Nickle, 2001). In the Acts of the Apostles, Luke continually employs "we" to describe the Pauline missions with which he is directly involved, which Biblical scholars argue lends considerable credence to the claim that he was actually present at the times referred to (Bartlet, 1911). As well, in 2 Tim 4:11 Paul says, "only Luke is with me", when he is in Rome near the end of his life, a claim which is also affirmed by Luke himself in Acts 28:16. Clearly, then, Paul and Luke knew each other intimately. It is highly likely, then, that Luke preached the very same gospel as Paul with a heavy emphasis on the salvation message for the Jews. This probably explains why there's so much Jewish apologetics in Luke's writings, whereas Paul is emphasizing salvation for both Jews and gentiles (Wright, 2020; Pope Benedict XVI, 2017).

Another pivotal point to consider when trying to understand Luke's Gospel is that he wanted to write "an orderly account of the events" (Luke 1:1-3) which occurred in the life and teachings of Jesus Christ that was adequate to satisfy the needs of his own community, his central audience (Nickle, 2001). His gospel was not intended to be read in combination with the other gospels but, rather, to replace them as a more "orderly account". Given that Luke's intended purpose was to write an account of Jesus's life more accurate than all others, it is simply an irony of history that it turned out to be otherwise.

As it turned out, Luke apparently invested too much confidence in the historical accuracy of his sources including Mark's Gospel. That means that Luke was less interested in correcting any historical inaccuracies in Mark or any other sources than he was in expanding or enriching those accounts with additional sources. As well, he wanted to be more persuasive in his defense of Christianity than were the other gospels. In other words, Luke wanted to write a bestselling and persuasive apologia or defense of Christianity that





was applicable beyond his own community to the preaching and teaching of the Christian mission. As Nickle is at pains to point out, it is also highly likely that Luke wanted to address his gospel to a special community of Gentiles in first-century Greek society who found the Jewish religion quite appealing. There were many Gentiles who partook in Jewish rituals and customs and who attended synagogues and celebrated many Jewish festivals but without fully converting to Judaism. The Jews called them ‘friends of God’ or ‘God-lovers’, believers of God that were very devout and already familiar with the messianic writings in Jewish religious traditions. Perhaps Luke’s reference to “Theophilus” in the prologue of his gospel refers to this particular community of people<sup>4</sup>.

Lastly, Luke is also making an effort to address the concerns of imperial Rome in his apologetics. His reference to the “most excellent” Theophilus was, at that time, a very common way of talking about top government authority figures. After all, it was a time when Roman government officials were likely to view Christians as subversive dissidents, a bunch of rabble rousers hellbent on tearing down the fabric of Roman society by promoting worship of the king of the Jews rather than the Emperor of Rome. Sensing their authority under threat, Hebrew priests and scribes were perhaps all too eager to promote such suspicions.

Therefore, it is likely that Luke wanted to clarify any misgivings or misunderstandings which powerful Roman officials may have been entertaining about Christian worshippers. The fact that Luke was the only author in the New Testament to explicitly mention the names of Roman emperors in his writings lends considerable credence to this major point (Luke 2:1; 3:1/Acts 11:28; 18:2). As it turns out, then, Luke’s very first words in his gospel referring to “Theophilus” is not at all as casual and perfunctory as it might seem at first reading.

Now that we have outlined a few central considerations that need to be borne in mind as we attempt to understand Luke’s Gospel, we are now in a much better position to discuss some of its major thematic components. Then we will try to understand how these core thematic components tend to be governed by central theological principles and interests. The heavily repeated thematic content of Luke’s Gospel may be much more relevant to achieving a sound understanding of Luke’s particular theology of Christianity than is the uncertain question about authorship identity.

Regardless of who actually authored Luke’s Gospel (and its sequel, the Acts of the Apostles), together the two-volume set makes up more than 25% of the New Testament. This amount of text easily surpasses the contributions of any other ‘author’ of the New Testament (Perkins, 2007; Nickle, 2001). Therefore, a thorough thematic analysis would certainly appear to be warranted.

## 1. EXPLORING CENTRAL MOTIFS IN LUKE’S GOSPEL

### I – The Righteousness Motif

„ As mentioned earlier, the leitmotif of Luke’s Gospel from start to finish appears to be the messianic identity of Christ. It is the dominant thematic principle in relation to which all other themes and theological issues are organized. That is why Luke initiates his gospel by firmly linking that messianic identity to the prophecies contained in Hebrew writings and to Hebrew genealogy. The ‘Son of David’ in Luke 1:32-33 becomes the ‘Lord’ in Luke 1:43 becomes “God my Savior” on Mary’s lips in Luke 1:47 becomes the “Savior...Christ the Lord” in Luke 2:11 when an angel stands before shepherds to announce the birth of Jesus – a



solid message of messiahship rooted in Jewish religious tradition carried through to the end of Luke's Gospel (Perkins, 2007).

However, in addition to the 'messianic' organizing principle of Luke's Gospel, there are several other dominant themes repeated in various guises throughout the text that play a central role in Luke's theological narrative. We will now investigate some of these dominant motifs in greater depth. Several other themes and related concepts also figure prominently in Luke's Gospel, but they are mentioned less frequently and not emphasized and elaborated upon as much in Luke's writings. For example, discussions about prayer, women, the marginalized, and sympathy for the poor are all noted by Luke, but they don't appear to be of central importance to Lukan theology (Nickle, 2001). Hence our focus here will be to extract dominant motifs that do appear to play a central theological role.

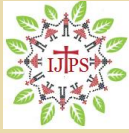
Although rarely explicitly identified as such by Biblical writers in the scholarly literature or otherwise, the righteousness motif is a dominant underlying theme in various parts of Luke's Gospel as well as in several other gospels and biblical writings in general (Kenyon, 2020; Vickers, 2006). In fact, it's mentioned over 500 times in the Old Testament and more than 200 times in the New Testament. Clearly, then, righteousness<sup>5</sup> not only plays a central role in Luke's theology, but also within the Christian faith from its inception to its Jewish roots. We find it in the Sermon of the Mount, in Matthew when Jesus is talking to John the Baptist during His own baptism, in the Proverbs and Psalms, everywhere.

Not surprisingly, we find it throughout Luke. It is emphasized at the very beginning at Luke 1:6 to describe the foretelling of the birth of John the Baptist, where a priest named Zacharias and his wife Elizabeth are both described as being "righteous in the sight of God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and requirements of the Lord". Later, eight days after John the Baptist is born and he is taken to baptism and circumcision Zacharias prophesies that his child "Might serve Him (God) without fear, in holiness and righteousness" (Luke 1:74-75). How appropriate that the term 'righteousness' here is applied to a child who will later baptize Jesus.

After eight days had passed in regards to the birth of Jesus. Luke 2:21-35 mentions that Jesus was brought to the temple in Jerusalem "to present Him to the Lord". At that time, there was a man called Simeon who was "righteous and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel; and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before the Lord's Christ" (i.e. God's 'messiah'). Simeon goes into the temple, takes little Jesus into his arms blessing God and blessing his parents while uttering solemn statements and prophecies linking the child Jesus with salvation, glory to Israel, and the light of revelation to Gentiles. These are theological issues concerning 'righteousness' that concern attribute of God, not man.

Later, on the Sabbath when Jesus goes into the house of one of the leaders of the Pharisees to eat some bread with a man sitting at the table in front of Him who was suffering from dropsy, the issue of righteousness arises once again. The Pharisees are watching Him closely to see if He will do anything which they define as against religious policy on the Sabbath. Wisely, Jesus asks the Pharisees and lawyers sitting at the table: "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath, or not?" (Luke 14:3). They refused to answer, so Jesus simply proceeds with healing the man.

Then He proceeds to recount a number of parables to communicate certain principles to the Pharisees such as the parable of the guests and the parable of the dinner (Luke 14:7-15; 16-24) because Jesus is noticing that people around the table were jockeying for seats of honor at the table. In the guest parable, Jesus says to them forthrightly: "...when



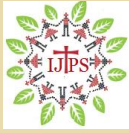
you give a reception, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, since they do not have the means to repay you; for you will be paid at the resurrection of the righteous” (Luke 14:14). It is crucial to note here that a core Christian concept is introduced in the same phrase parallel to the ‘righteous’ term, namely, ‘resurrection’. The pivotal significance of the link between God, righteousness, salvation, and the core Christian concept of resurrection was intimated earlier and will become clearer as we proceed.

When He is passing between Samaria and Galilee on His way to Jerusalem, there is a series of discussions that occur between Jesus and His disciples about the ‘Kingdom of God’, the signs of the ‘Second Coming’, and several key parables that underscore the significance of righteousness. Especially in reference to the parables on prayer, Jesus brings up a parable about a widow who went begging to a judge to provide her with legal protection against an opponent. The judge refused to satisfy the widow’s request for a long time, but eventually decided to provide it because the widow continually bothered him to get it despite constant refusals.

The judge decided to give the legal protection not on the basis of principle but, rather, because “by continually coming she will wear me out”. Jesus tells His disciples to really “hear what the unrighteous judge said, a “judge who did not fear God and did not respect man”. The superficial lesson to learn here is that God will not delay in rendering appropriate justice to His elect (Christians); he will surely provide swift justice to his chosen people. The real issue is faithfulness and righteousness in the eyes of God, and in the end God will settle all accounts according to the dictates of righteous justice, not selfish irritation as it was for the unrighteous judge in this parable. A righteous God will not delay in answering the cries of his persecuted elect.

The parable of the Pharisee and the Publican, Luke (18: 9-17) refers to the concept of righteousness. This time, he addresses the issue of the appearance of righteousness in terms of two men walking into the temple to pray – a Pharisee and a tax collector. “God, I thank you that I am not like other people,” prays the Pharisee. “I fast twice a week; I pay tithes (taxes)...” However, the tax collector some distance away, unwilling to lift up his eyes towards heaven, is singing a different tune to God: “God, be merciful to me, the sinner!” Jesus responds: “I tell you, this man went to his house justified rather than the other”.

Here the crucial consideration is that being self-righteous is not the same as being righteous because self-righteousness is not conduct with humility and humbleness but, rather, pretentiousness. ‘Appearing’ righteous is not ‘being’ righteous, in other words. God’s mercy can provide justification to a person engaging in prayer with humility, but the self-righteousness of a person can prevent the justification of God’s mercy from reaching that person. That’s why asking from God and praying to God must be conducted with a humble, gracious attitude. Pharisees were praying about how great they were in pompous self-righteousness while looking down upon all others with contempt as menial irredeemable sinners. The last important reference to righteousness in Luke’s Gospel is telling indeed, as it occurs immediately after Jesus has died while hanging on the cross. To put it succinctly, Jesus is hanging dead on the cross and now his body is a grave danger. Nowhere in the Bible does it say that any of His disciples were brave enough to present themselves to Pontius Pilate to make a direct request for the body of Jesus. None of them had the financial means to provide a decent internment, so it was likely that His body would have been thrown into a mass grave dug for social wrongdoers and indigent criminals.



In the Jewish community, this was the common fate of condemned malefactors who tended not to receive a burial at all (Dt 21: 22-23). That's when a man named Joseph, "a member of the Council, a good and righteous man (he had not consented to their plan of action), a man from Arimathea, a city of the Jews, who was waiting for the kingdom of God; this man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus" (Luke 23: 50-51).

Since this man was described as "righteous" by Luke, "prominent" by Mark (15:43), a "rich man...who himself had become a disciple of Jesus" by Matthew (27: 57), a "disciple of Jesus, but a secret one for fear of the Jews" by John (19:38), most Biblical scholars believe that "Joseph" had actually been either a member of the Council of the high priest that had conspired to kill Jesus or a high member of the great Sanhedrin, the central assembly of elders (known as 'rabbis' later after the destruction of the Second Temple) who had been appointed to sit as 'judges' in Jewish courts in every city in ancient Israel to decide on disputed cases. Cases that could not be firmly decided at these individual local 'city' courts by what came to be known as the 'lower Sanhedrin' were normally appealed to the Great Sanhedrin in Jerusalem which acted very much like a Supreme Court.

The fact that such a man could even safely approach a Roman Emperor to make such a request would seem to imply that Pilate immediately recognized the Honorable 'Joseph' as a judge sitting in the Great Sanhedrin or Supreme Court of Jerusalem through previous knowledge or dealings with him, and consequently "ordered (the body of Christ) to be given to him" (Matthew 27: 58). Clearly, he held an exalted position in the context of both Jewish and Roman society and culture.

Now, what exactly made this man Joseph so 'righteous' beyond providing for proper internment of the body of Jesus, if anything more? Well, it should be noted that in making such a request the news would surely spread widely and quickly across both the Jewish and Gentile communities. Such a man would have to be powerful enough and rich enough not to fear the possible adverse consequences of doing so. If it had not previously been clear to other religious leaders and authorities, especially other members of the Jewish high council that he had not agreed with their decisions and actions to plot for the death of Christ, then certainly the request for the body of Christ and payment for internment made it 100% clear. Joseph certainly had to review in his mind how dangerous such a request from the emperor could be for him, personally. It was a time of tremendous desperation and sorrow and pain of heart for Joseph, no doubt, who wanted to make things 'right' in the eyes of God. And that's exactly what made him 'righteous'.

## 2. THE HOLY SPIRIT MOTIF

The Holy Spirit is another highly dominant organizing theme in Luke's Gospel and even more central in the Acts of the Apostles, its companion writing by Luke. Once again, we find the Holy Spirit at work right from the very first chapter in reference to the birth of John the Baptist foretold. The words come directly from the angel's mouth, and it bears repeating a lengthy portion here as it ties quite nicely into our previous discussion about righteousness. The angel who appears to Zacharias the priest and father-to-be states that his wife Elizabeth would bear a son "great in the sight of the Lord...who will be filled with the Holy Spirit while yet in his mother's womb...and who will turn many of the sons of Israel back to the Lord their God...turn the hearts of the fathers...and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous, so as to make ready a people prepared for the Lord" (Luke 1:13-17).



Now, after Jesus responds to messengers sent to Him directly to inquire if He was “the Expected One” written about by the prophets while He is in the midst of performing a series of healings and exorcisms. He turns to tell the crowd that John is “more than a prophet”, “no one greater among those born of women”, a “messenger” sent by God Himself to prepare His way (Luke 7: 19-28). Among other things, the fact the John the Baptist was *filled with the Holy Spirit* from conception in the womb demonstrates the powerful sovereignty of God. More importantly, the Holy Spirit empowered John the Baptist for the transcendental role he was to play in preparing the ground for Christ.

To ensure that this way would be prepared adequately, God manifested Himself in the form of the Holy Spirit within John the Baptist at conception. Furthermore, the Holy Spirit was the sovereign empowerment of God within John to ensure an *effective ministry*. In fact, the power of the Holy Spirit in the ministry of John the Baptist is so miraculous that when a pregnant Mary goes to visit the impregnated mother Elizabeth, Luke says “the baby leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit”; Elizabeth tells Mary that “when the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby leaped in my womb for joy” (Luke 1: 41-43). Lastly, the Holy Spirit also provides the fuel to ensure the unwavering resolute commitment of John the Baptist to God’s plan for putting into place a solid foundation for the earthly ministry of Jesus.

The role of the Holy Spirit in guiding the public ministry of Christ in Lukan theology is extensively emphasized in many other passages in Luke’s Gospel, as Nickle (2001) points out. Often times, it is referred to in tandem with the issue of righteousness, as noted above in relation to the “righteous and devout” Simeon who greets Mary and Joseph with the child Jesus in the Jerusalem temple. When John the Baptist starts to baptize people in the river Jordan, he tells those he baptizes just how fiery the Holy Spirit will soon get (Luke 3:16):

“As for me, I baptize you with water; but One is coming who  
Is mightier than I, and I am not fit to untie the thong of His  
Sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.”

Just a little afterwards in the same chapter, Jesus is baptized by John the Baptist. While He stands there praying, Luke tells us “... heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in bodily form like a dove” (3:21-22). Shortly after that, Jesus was “filled with the Holy Spirit”, and then He was escorted “by the Spirit in the wilderness for forty days” for a different kind of ‘baptism’, so to speak, namely, to be “tempted by the devil” on an empty stomach for the entire duration (Luke 4:1-2).

When the devil had finally given up, the power of the Holy Spirit led Jesus back to Galilee where He “began teaching in their synagogues” (Luke 4:14-15). As will be remembered, the event in Nazareth that ignited His public ministry was when Jesus entered the synagogue on the Sabbath (“as was His custom”) and read from the book of Isaiah, in which it was written and which Jesus repeated: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me” (Luke 4: 16-18). Clearly, the bond between the Holy Spirit and Hebrew writings was firmly cemented by this inaugural event.

Later in Luke, we learn that the Holy Spirit is hard at work when Jesus commissions a group of 70 disciples to go ahead of Him to preach the Gospel. After Jesus had appointed these disciples and provided them with powers to heal the sick, exorcise demons, and other miraculous abilities, he sent them out in pairs to every city which He Himself had planned to go. After they had returned, Luke tells us that the seventy disciples reported back to Jesus joyfully: “Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name” (Luke 10:17). Jesus tells them not to rejoice too much that He has given them authority to “tread on serpents and



scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing will injure you”. Luke tells us that Jesus immediately “rejoiced greatly in the Holy Spirit” (Luke 10: 19-21). So, then, now the Holy Spirit is linked to the *commissioning of the disciples* and the *spreading of the gospel* as well as to perfect *authority over every evil*.

In Chapter 12, we get a commanding sense of just how important the Holy Spirit is in the theology of Luke. In this chapter, Jesus proclaims several warnings against the hypocrisy and hidden motives of the Pharisees who believe that evil things can be done and said in the dark without God knowing about it. Don’t fear the one who can kill the body and do no more harm to you, Jesus warns. Instead, “fear the One who, after He has killed, has authority to cast into hell; yes, I tell you, fear Him!” (Luke 12: 5).

It is precisely at this point where it gets really spicy, spiritually speaking, relative to the Holy Spirit. Shockingly, Jesus goes on to tell the people and disciples around Him that it may be forgiven if anyone speaks a word against the Son of Man; “but he who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him”. The point here is that blasphemy<sup>6</sup> against the Holy Spirit is an absolutely unforgiveable eternal sin, also noted by Mark (3:29) and Matthew (12:31-32). By acting in this way, the implication is that the person is rejecting the offer of eternal life by God, rejecting the offer of salvation by Jesus Christ.

Within Christianity, the offer of salvation by God to humanity is a gift freely offered by God which graciously includes the forgiveness of sin. So, then, not to accept God’s free offer of the forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ, this eternal mistake cannot be forgiven because it effectively prevents the Holy Spirit from entering your ‘being’, your existence. As such, it means that you cannot be sanctified, your uncleaned soul, your unrighteousness, cannot be redeemed by God. People who engage in rejecting God’s gift of salvation by blaspheming against the Holy Spirit voluntarily exclude themselves from God’s forgiveness of sin.

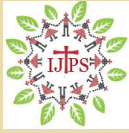
Later in the same chapter, Jesus refers to the Holy Spirit again when He senses that His disciples may be worried about what political rulers or religious authorities might do to them if they openly proclaim themselves to be followers of Christ and preach the Gospel. He tells them not to worry if they face great adversity or opposition from powerful authorities because the Holy Spirit is living within them and working through them. He says to them (Luke 12: 11-12):

“...do not worry about how or what you are to speak in your defense, or what you are to say; for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say.”

In other words, the Holy Spirit will empower God believers to know what to say and how to behave especially in times of great troubles and tribulations before the faces of authority or the principalities of power, whether synagogue authorities or otherwise. It is not unreasonable to view this particular function of the Holy Spirit in Lukan theology (as well as in Christianity proper) as part and parcel of spiritual weaponry to assist believers engaged in spiritual warfare.

Indeed, it is often spoken about using conceptual language commonly applied to warfare such as ‘shield’, ‘breastplate’, ‘armor’, and so forth. God believers would be the medium through which the Holy Spirit itself would speak as primary weaponry. Therefore, if these words from the Holy Spirit would be ignored, denied, or condemned, it would be the same as ignoring, denying, or condemning God Himself.

Either explicitly or implicitly, the Holy Spirit plays a highly significant role in other parts of Luke’s Gospel. For example, as we learned in Luke 3, Jesus was described as being



“filled with the Holy Spirit” when engaged in His ministry outside in the various communities and cities and synagogues He visited. However, the explicit and implied activity of the Holy Spirit is not only everywhere throughout the life and teachings of Jesus, but also fervently at work is the ancient history of the Hebrews. It is a primary tool with which God fulfills salvific functions in sacred history through the prophets and other writers of Hebrew Scripture. It will be noted that it was through the Holy Spirit that Isaiah predicted Christ would become incarnate.

Later, when Christ the Messiah expected according to these ancient Hebrew writings was actually incarnated in the flesh and began His public ministry performing all kinds of healings, exorcisms, and a great variety of other miraculous deeds, Luke makes it clear that at that time and afterwards the Holy Spirit was present and actively working to guide the Christian church in its missionary function. That is why Luke literally ends his gospel with a blatant reference to the Holy Spirit coming out of the mouth of a resurrected Christ just moments before His ascension:

“And behold, I am sending forth the promise of My Father upon you; but you are to stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.” (Luke 24: 49)

What does Jesus mean by saying “promise of my Father” and “clothed with power from on high”? Evidently, it doesn’t mean that they will be converted into Worldwide Wrestling Federation champions or great military generals nor given great insurmountable overwhelming physical human strength of any kind whatsoever. It means that they will be given some of the sovereign power of almighty God. The power that comes directly from God is the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Jesus clearly stated that the Father had promised Him to send the Holy Spirit “upon” them from above in heaven.

So, then, they were to receive an all-powerful pill fortified with great spiritual vitamins and minerals, so to speak, so that they could have bountiful power of knowledge, wisdom, understanding, love, courage. Evidently, this means that it would be sent as a spiritual nutritional powerhouse to impregnate their souls with the armor of unassailable God belief. Surely, it is not by coincidence that Luke ends his gospel in this way. It is even much less of a coincidence, then, that Luke follows up the primacy of the Holy Spirit in his gospel by making it the dominant motif of his companion volume, the Acts of the Apostles.

### 3. THE GENTILE MOTIF

The next dominant thematic thread that runs through Luke’s Gospel is the Gentile motif. This should not be surprising or bewildering in any respect since we know that Luke himself was likely the only Gentile among Paul’s associates during his missionary work even by Paul’s own admission. Still, there doesn’t seem to be enough conclusive evidence of such within Luke’s own writings for a positive determination to be made. What we do know is that he was intimately knowledgeable about Hebrew Scripture and could link that scripture to the life and teachings of Jesus Christ, recognizing the Jewish roots and linkages of Jesus wherever he felt they could be legitimately claimed like the genealogy and prophetic ties.

However, it is also true that Luke strongly extends his gospel of salvation to include Gentiles in ways that are not at all emphasized by the other Gospel writers save for Paul. In other words, for Luke salvation is not exclusive Hebrew territory. Rather, the Gospel of Christ is universal in character even though it is undeniably historically rooted in ancient Hebrew Scripture. Jews do not have a monopoly on ‘redemption’ in the Gospel of Christ according to Luke.



This fact seems to suggest that Luke was paying homage to Jewish religious traditions in order to avoid any conflicts with those religious authorities while, at the same time, extending olive branches to Greek Gentile Christians. What is emphasized throughout Luke's Gospel, therefore, is the universal application of the Gospel to all gentiles beyond the Jewish community.

Therefore, despite incessant references to Jewish heritage wherever they could be made, Luke's Gospel still exhibits a very strong thematic tendency to emphasize or underscore Gentile application of the Gospel. To this effect, we come across direct references to Gentiles very early on. Recall that Jesus had been presented to the temple in Jerusalem eight days after His birth when Simeon the "righteous and devout" had blessed Him and His parents. During that event, Simeon holds the infant Jesus in his arms giving blessings to God, describing Jesus as "a light of revelation to the Gentiles" (Luke 2: 32).

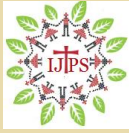
During his very lengthy and detailed genealogy of Jesus, Luke (3: 23-28) begins with the son of Joseph and ends with the son of Adam, the father of the human race in Genesis (2:20). Here we can see the genealogical extension of God's saving grace through Christ to all humanity, Gentiles included. We see this same extension of God's salvation through Christ to Gentiles in when Jesus agrees to heal the beloved servant of a Roman officer (Luke 7: 1-10). What is very interesting about this event is that the centurion had asked Jewish elders that he knew to ask Jesus to save the life of his servant, describing the Roman soldier as "worthy for You to grant this to him".

What happens at this point is much more than very interesting, however, in terms of the universalistic application of the Gospel to Gentiles. Jesus starts on His way with the elders towards the centurion's house. But as He reaches sight of the house, the soldier sends out friends to stop Jesus from proceeding any further. They passed on a message from the soldier that he thought himself unworthy to welcome Jesus into his house, even unworthy to come out to see Him. So, the soldier requested Jesus to "just say the word, and my servant will be healed". Completely astonished, Jesus turns and addresses the crowd that is with Him at the time: "I say to you, not even in Israel have I found such great faith". By the time the messengers return to the soldier's house, the servant had been fully healed.

The question arises: Why would a first-century gentile military force of Roman occupiers in Judea and Galilee be portrayed in such positive ways by a Gospel writer in the New Testament especially when they were not exactly fondly viewed by most Hebrews at the time? Obviously, Luke as a Gentile is not worried about portraying the Romans in this manner when his point is to extend the saving grace of God's salvation through Christ. The Roman centurion's profound response to the presence of Jesus and the Gospel message as well as the clearly demonstrated faith in His messianic identity by also seeking Him out to heal his dying servant.

This humble representative of the great Roman oppressive state first seeks out Jesus for help through friends and then sends out Jewish elders to speak on his behalf when Jesus approaches his house. The centurion's faith in the Gospel of Jesus is clear when he makes clear he believes Jesus could heal his servant by His Word from a distance with no need to enter the house at all. Like the Roman centurion receives authority from above to command his soldiers as he sees fit, so, too, does the centurion recognize that Jesus possesses authority from above to heal his dying servant without entering his house. Additionally, the humble self-perception of the centurion as being "unworthy" speaks to the righteousness of his attitude and character in the eyes of Jesus. By the end of this event, the clear message





conveyed by Luke is that Gentiles are capable of having and practicing “great faith”, so salvation cannot and should not be denied to them.

However, in the very next mention of Gentiles in Luke’s Gospel, the lovely picture of Gentile reception to the Gospel of Christ is completely reversed as Jesus explains to an emotionally shaken Peter and the rest of his disciples what exactly will happen to Him once they enter Jerusalem:

“Behold, we are going to Jerusalem, and all the things which written through the prophets about the Son of Man will be accomplished. For He will be handed over to the Gentiles, and will be mocked and mistreated and spit upon, and after they have scourged Him, they will kill Him; and the third day He will rise again” (Luke 18: 31-33).

Here it is remarkable, to say the very least, that the Gentile author of Luke’s Gospel as described by Paul himself in one of his epistles (“not of the circumcision”) quotes Jesus as saying in no uncertain terms that His murderers are “Gentiles”.

Yet, it is precisely to those pagan Gentiles outside of the Jewish nation that the offer of salvation and forgiveness for the remission of sins is being extended; salvation is being offered from the Hebrew covenant people to the non-Hebrew non-covenant pagan Gentile population. Yet, Jesus says in Luke that the Gentiles “will kill Him” as He informs his disciples what will happen to happen to Him just before they enter Jerusalem for the last time before His death.

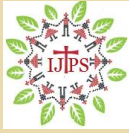
So, then, why is it that Jesus inside his hometown synagogue says in Luke 4:24, “no prophet is welcome in his hometown”? Following the same passage, Jesus then immediately rebukes Israel for not helping anyone in the time of great famine during the days of Elijah and for not helping many of the lepers. Then we are told by Luke (4:28-29) that:

“All the people in the synagogue were filled with rage as they heard these things; and they got up and drove Him out of the city, and led Him to the brow of the hill on which their city had been built, in order to throw Him down the cliff”

At the very beginning of Luke’s Gospel, we have Jews in Jesus’s hometown “filled with rage” trying to kill Him! Already Jesus is being rejected by members of His own culture, by the Jewish people, in what appears to be a trial run for His grim persecution and execution later in Luke’s Gospel.

More importantly, it’s exactly that inflamed rejection by the majority of Jewish people that presages the extension of the covenantal promise of salvation from the Jewish nation to all of humanity. Remember, Jesus at this time is in a synagogue first reading from the book of Isaiah just before He talks about people suffering from the great famine and leprosy not being helped by Jewish leaders during the days of Elijah. He is not on the street or by the lakeshore or at the foot of a mountain or in some other remote place preaching to a crowd outside like Luke recounts so many times later in his Gospel. He is in the heart of religious authority in Nazareth, the synagogue, the gatekeepers of Jewish culture.

This is a highly salient factor to consider in our attempt to understand how Luke employs the Gentile motif in his Gospel since it is repeated elsewhere in Luke’s writings. It is also salient because Jesus notes in the passage above that He will be “handed over” or delivered to the Gentiles, that is, to secular authority, to be “scourged” and then “killed”. Exactly who could he be referring to? Exactly who will hand Him over to be killed? Answer: Jewish religious authorities. So, then, who is really responsible for the persecution,



crucifixion, and death of Christ? The religious authorities who from the beginning of Luke kicked Him out of His hometown synagogue and tried to throw Him over a cliff to His death and eventually delivered Him to be executed OR the gentile Roman State who performed that execution?

Therefore, it's not by coincidence that we find considerable Roman apologia in Luke's Gospel since Romans are Gentiles. In many passages in Luke where he contrasts Gentiles with Jews, for example, the Gentiles seem to be tinted a bit more favorably. For example, standing with a crowd just a few meters away from the Roman centurion's house just before Jesus heals his servant who lays dying, Jesus turns to the crowd with him and describes the centurion in the following manner: "I say to you, not even in Israel have I found such great faith" (Luke 7:9).

Now, keep in mind that later it is precisely gentile Roman soldiers and Heads of State that will put Jesus to death. Remarkable, to say the least. Another poignant example of Gentile apologia in Luke's Gospel concerns the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican tax collector who go to pray in the Temple. The Jewish Pharisee is described as being self-righteous and contemptuous of others; the gentile Publican tax collector is described as a sinner humbly asking God for mercy. "I tell you," Jesus says, this man (i.e. Publican) went to his house justified rather than the other". If that's not gentile apologetics, then the meaning of the word apology is unknown.

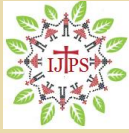
When Luke is recounting what Jesus said about the things to come (21:10-24), Gentiles play a role: "Jerusalem will be tramp-pled under foot by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled". Then again much more apologetically presented is the exclamation of the gentile Roman centurion after Jesus "breathed His last" hanging on the cross and he witnessed many supernatural events that had occurred: "Certainly this man was innocent". Coming from a gentile Roman centurion, that's a lot more sympathy than Jesus had received from Jewish religious authorities who conspired to kill Him.

#### **4. RELIGIOUS CONFLICT MOTIF**

This is precisely why Luke heavily emphasizes the conflict between the teachings of Jesus and those of Jewish religious authorities wherever He goes and whatever He does. The religious conflict motif is pronounced in Luke's Gospel right from the moment they are first introduced in Chapter 4 when Jesus is preaching inside the synagogue in His own hometown, as mentioned earlier. From that point onwards, that antagonism is not only continual, but also intense and hateful bordering on rageful.

Religious authorities are portrayed by Luke as constantly attempting to entrap Jesus into saying and doing things that are religiously and legally condemnable and criminal such as blasphemy. They are portrayed as feeling threatened by the teachings and activities of Jesus like a revolutionary attempting to overthrow the existing religious order. By the time Luke has completed his gospel, there is no doubt readers' minds exactly who he felt were primarily responsible for the persecution, crucifixion, and death of Jesus – the religious authorities incessantly trying to eradicate Him from Jewish society.

Since there are so many examples of Jewish religious antagonism to the teachings of Jesus in Luke's Gospel, just a few poignant examples beyond the hometown synagogue attempt to throw him over a cliff will perhaps suffice to make Luke's sentiments about the responsibility of religious authorities. For example, when Jesus and His disciples were walking through a grainfield on a Sabbath while eating some of the heads of grain, some of the Pharisees who were present confront Jesus: "Why do you do what is not lawful on the



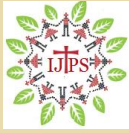
Sabbath?”. Jesus responds to giving an example from Jewish Scripture when King David and some of his men entered the Temple and unlawfully ate consecrated bread. And just in case the Pharisees didn’t understand His point, Jesus said to them: “The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath”. A relatively mild example of religious conflict in Luke compared to the earlier cliff debacle. However, just two passages later Luke mentions how on another Sabbath “the Pharisees were watching Him closely to see if He healed on the Sabbath, so that they might find reason to accuse Him”. In that synagogue, Jesus noticed a man sitting there whose hand was withered. He tells that man to get up and come forward, and then Jesus looks at the Pharisees and asks them: “Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath, to save a life or to destroy it?” The Pharisees don’t answer Him, so Jesus looks at them all and then commands the man to stretch out his hand. He complies and his hand is restored. Luke says the Pharisees were so “filled with rage that they discussed together what they might do to Jesus” (Luke 6: 1-11). Now that is a pointed example of intense conflict with Jewish religious authorities, to be sure.

In the last example, Luke is the one pointing out the intense antagonism of religious authority towards Jesus. In Chapter 9, however, after He has performed the miracle of feeding 5,000 people with very little bread and fish, the existence of deadly conflict with Jewish religious authorities is confirmed by Jesus Himself. Jesus is talking to His disciples about who the people say that He is, and Peter says “The Christ of God”. At exactly that point, Jesus orders them not to say anything to anyone about that, then informs them: “The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed and be raised up on the third day” (Luke 9: 18-22). Conflict in spades, to be sure, between Jesus and Jewish religious authorities that ends up looking like an assassination plot.

In Chapter 12, just before Jesus starts talking to a large crowd, he turns to His disciples and says: “Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy” (Luke 12: 1). This is a fairly damning description of the Pharisees coming out of Jesus’s mouth. The implication is that it only takes a little bit of hypocrisy to corrupt the thinking of a great multitude of people, just like it takes just a little bit of yeast (leaven) to convert a small piece of dough into a large loaf of bread. Leaven spreads the bread like hypocrisy spreads into much greater hypocrisy. What exactly is this hypocrisy of the Pharisees that Jesus feels compelled to warn His disciples about? Perhaps it is self-righteousness appearing as righteousness and holiness and thinking of itself as such. The worst kind of hypocrite, of course, and the deadliest kind of hypocrite, is the hypocrite that does not know himself to be a hypocrite. Surely, this was the kind of hypocrisy that Jesus attributed to the Pharisees.

A much more poignant example of the hostility between Jesus and Jewish religious authorities occurs when Jesus enters the Temple and starts to kick out the sellers and traders, telling them that they had turned His house into “a robber’s den”. Here Jesus is purifying or cleansing the Temple, not just teaching or preaching the Gospel in it. Since Jesus didn’t have the outward appearance of some who had undergone formal rabbinical training, kicking out traders from the Temple was a highly inflammatory thing to do, religiously speaking. As well, it must have been felt as condescending to them answering a question with a question that could not be safely answered and then ending up not answering their question at all.

In the very next passage, it should not be surprising when Luke tells us that the “chief priests and the scribes and the leading men among the people were trying to destroy Him...” (Luke 19: 46-47). Later in the same temple Jesus is teaching the people and preaching the gospel when the chief priests, scribes, and elders directly confront Him: “Tell us by what



authority You are doing these things, and who is the one who gave You this authority?" (Luke 20: 1-2).

It is clear here that Jewish authorities felt that their own positions of authority in the eyes of the people were being threatened. After all, these Jewish religious authorities were essentially a religious aristocracy enjoying lives of comfort, safety, privilege, status, wealth, and authority, all of which were threatened by the teachings, preaching, and activities of Christ. At the conclusion of Chapter 20, Jesus tells His disciples while many people are listening precisely what he detests about the scribes, focusing heavily on the 'appearance' of righteousness, honor, humility, respectfulness:

"Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and love respectful greetings in the market places, and chief seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets, who devour widows' houses, and for appearance's sake offer long prayers. These will receive greater condemnation" (Luke 20: 46-47).

Just in case it wasn't clear in previous examples exactly what Jesus found so utterly repulsive about the behavior of Jewish religious authorities, here it is made crystal clear, that is, the 'appearance' of righteousness. Recall our previous discussion about the dominance of the righteousness motif in Luke's Gospel. Pretending to be pious is an unconscionable and unpardonable sin. Rather than seeking honor that comes from humble worship of God alone, the scribes were defrauding poor widows, abusing prayer by using it as a pretense to engage in wicked worldly conduct, and coveting wealth, privilege, and status, loving the things of the world through pride and ambition that exalt their power rather than humbly worshipping and fearing God.

It is certainly not by coincidence that both Matthew and Luke devote entire sections where Jesus is uttering woes upon the Pharisees after they had invited Him to have lunch with them. The Pharisees happen to notice that Jesus did not wash ceremonially before starting to eat His meal. Jesus rebukes them in no uncertain terms, again referring to the 'appearance': "Now you Pharisees clean the inside and the outside of the cup and of the platter; but inside of you, you are full of robbery and wickedness. You foolish ones" (Luke 11: 39).

A better example for condemning the 'appearance' of righteousness could hardly be imagined. Righteousness refers to what is 'inside' a person or spirit, not what is 'outside' (robes, seats in the synagogue, respectful greetings in the marketplace, and the like). The first priority of Christ is the inner cleanliness of the soul rather than the showy rituals about outer cleanliness of the body like the Pharisees criticized Him for.

## 5. SATAN MOTIF

The next core thematic thread running through Luke's Gospel is the Satan motif. In fact, references to Satan (either directly or indirectly as demons, the devil, legion, Beelzebub, unclean spirits, and so forth) are so dominant in Luke's writings and also widespread within the other gospels that it is safe to say it is one of the great hallmarks of the public ministry of Jesus Christ. As such, it is not only central to a comprehensive understanding of Lukan theology but, much more importantly, one of the core tenets of the Christian faith itself. This means that without genuine belief in the existence of Satan, authentic Christian belief stands on very shaky grounds indeed.



This is one of the core central tenets informing the Lukan gospel narrative, and that's why Luke attaches great prominence to Satan in the public ministry of Jesus from the beginning. Cosmologically speaking, from the Lukan theological viewpoint it is not really the Romans, the Gentiles, or even the chief priests and scribes and elders of the religious courts that are the enemies of Jesus but, rather, Satan. Luke's gospel narrative is operating as much at the timeless cosmological level as it is operating at the temporal physical level of human events.

Indeed, the chief diabolical foe of Jesus and the essential root of the alleged 'conflict' between God and the authority figures in the world is Satan. Satan is the Professor Moriarty of Jesus's public ministry, so to speak. Indeed, it doesn't take a theological genius to notice that this notion of the existence of a central cosmological enemy strongly implies the previous occurrence of some other cosmological event that functions to explain the existence of evil and provides a spiritual background framing the appearance of Christ.

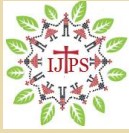
We see this quite clearly at the very beginning of Luke's Gospel when it is assumed that Satan rules over the world wreaking all manner of havoc, sickness, affliction, and suffering upon human beings; Satan or evil is 'bonded' to human beings and vice versa, human beings are bonded to evil. The certain cosmological message framing Luke's Gospel is that Satan or Satanic agents are holding human beings in bondage. Not only this, but Luke notes that these Satanic agents seem to be aware that God has sent Jesus to emasculate and destroy them through putting into place on earth a 'Kingdom of God'. That is to say, these Satanic agents know who Jesus is (Luke 4:34; 8:28).

In fact, in the many synagogues in Galilee where Jesus began His public ministry, Luke tells us that the many demons that were "coming out" of the people were shouting, 'You are the Son of God!' at Him. As a response, Jesus "would not allow them to speak, because they knew Him to be the Christ" (Luke 4:41). Curiously enough, however, people are not aware of who He is or at the very least they are a bit slow in fully realizing it (9:7-9, 18-20). Cosmologically speaking, therefore, demons seem to be in the know, as they say, whereas human beings appear to be clueless, at least at first.

The implication here is that God came to earth as Jesus as the Messiah specifically to displace or forcibly push aside the dominant position of Satanic spiritual forces in human existence and to offer humanity entrance into His 'Kingdom'. Further, the implied claim here is that the other core concepts of the Christian faith such as salvation, sin, forgiveness, redemption, repentance, and especially creation, cannot be adequately understood apart from fully comprehending the role of Satan in Luke's narrative.

So, then, let us now proceed to provide a few poignant examples of the role of Satanic forces in Luke's Gospel. Readers need to keep in mind as we proceed, however, that there is a cosmological plot working itself out within Luke's narrative. In a manner of speaking, various human agents seem to be caught in a cosmological power struggle between Satan and God. The forces of Satan are constantly plotting not only to afflict human beings with every kind of trouble, conflict, pain, and suffering imaginable but, also, to sabotage and destroy Jesus. After all, Genesis claims that human beings were evidently created by a loving God, not Satanic forces, which seems to imply that the cosmological battle framing Luke's Gospel is not between human beings and God but, rather, Satan and God. All that having been said, let's begin with our Satanic examples in Luke's narrative.

The first explicit mention of Satanic agents occurs in Chapter 4 after Jesus returned from being baptized by John in the River Jordan. Then he was "led around" the "wilderness" by the Holy Spirit for 40 days<sup>7</sup> to be "tempted by the devil", eating absolutely nothing during



the entire time. So then, immediately after Jesus's baptism, the cosmological battle begins implying that Satanic forces are already aware of His Messianic identity.

In the darkness of the wilderness, the spirit of Jesus is repeatedly and mercilessly assaulted (tempted?) by Satan to turn stone into bread to feed His hungry flesh, to be rewarded with all the kingdoms of the world if He only worships Satan, and to jump from the pinnacle of the Temple to prove that He is the Son of God. Jesus responds to every temptation effectively with several "it is written" introductory phrases invoking Judaic law and Hebrew Scriptures.

Then later in the same chapter, a Satanic agent in the form of "the spirit of an unclean demon" who had taken possession of a man in a synagogue in Capernaum where Jesus was teaching cries out loudly:

"Let us alone! What business do we have with each other,  
Jesus of Nazareth? Have You come to destroy us? I know who  
You are – the Holy One of God!"

Jesus rebukes the demon and says authoritatively: "Be quiet and come out of him!" It is precisely at that point that the demon reacts violently towards the body of the man, "throwing him down in the midst of the people," but coming out without harming him (Luke 4:33-35). Luke says right afterwards that the people witnessing the exorcism were all amazed and wondered about the authority and power of Jesus to command "unclean spirits".

Unclean spirits taking possession of human bodies and then either committing violence against those bodies or making the possessed people act in bizarre ways literally permeates Luke's narrative (Luke 8:27-29; 9:39, 42). It is also the case that Satanic agents quite enjoy working together to possess a human being. For example, when Jesus sailed to Gerasenes just the opposite of Galilee and came onto shore, He was confronted by a man without clothes from the city who was possessed with demons who was "living in the tombs" or cemetery. We are told that this man had been "seized many times" by this "unclean spirit". Consequently, he had been placed in chains and shackles and under guard, yet "the demon" would always manage to "break his bonds and drive him into the desert"! Now, strictly speaking, those acts are fairly solid examples of violent actions.

Subsequently, the man falls down in front of Jesus and, repeating a phrase uttered above by a previous demon, says loudly, "What business do we have with each other, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg You, do not torment me". This time, Jesus asks the man (demon?) his name, to which the demon in the man replies, "Legion", since many demons had taken possession of the man, Luke tells us. The demons started begging Jesus not to destroy them, imploring Him instead to permit them to enter a herd of swine that had been grazing nearby. Jesus grants this permission, and with the herdsmen watching in shock, the demons lead the entire herd off a cliff into the lake to be drowned (Luke 8:27-39).

One of the key messages that Luke is communicating here is NOT that God nor Christ nor Christian believers collectively nor the Christian faith system itself doesn't care about animals. Rather, Satanic forces are capable of delivering enormous pain, suffering, and death to animals as well as to human beings because Genesis stipulates clearly that everything God has created is "good", whereas Satanic forces are opposed to God and all God's Creation, and that opposition is "evil".

The next poignant example of Satanic forces committing violence occurs just after the transfiguration of Christ on a mountain where he had gone up with His disciples Peter, John, and James to pray, but ends up glowing as he's talking to Moses and the great Hebrew prophet Elijah! As Jesus is coming down from that mountain the next day, he is confronted



by a large crowd. A man from that crowd starts to beg Him to take a look at his “only” son and, in that very moment, Satanic forces go to work. They “seize” him, make him scream, throw him into a convulsion with mouth foaming, and “maul” him as they leave his body, much like a bear or wolf or dog mauls prey, a very vivid picture of what it means for demons to commit violence against a human body.

All this time, that same man is trying to walk forwards and approach Jesus for help with his ailing only son. He rebukes His disciples severely after He’s informed that the man had approached them for help unsuccessfully before approach Jesus for help, for which Jesus rebukes His disciples severely. Jesus orders the man to “bring your son here”, but as he persists in moving forwards, the same demon returns to “slam him to the ground and throw him into a convulsion”. Jesus then immediately exorcises the “unclean spirit” and heals the boy.

Surely, a more dramatic version of Satanic possession and violence against human beings could hardly be imagined. This particular example makes clear that Satanic agents are perfectly capable of returning to their human hosts, if you will, in order to wreak more havoc and mayhem and pain, a trait we see repeated at many other places through Biblical passages. In fact, Satanic agents returning with “friends” to do much more serious damage to humans with porous or unguarded spiritual walls around their souls was a major Lukan theological preoccupation and a fearful Christian concern:

“When the *unclean spirit* goes out of a man, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, and not finding any, it says, “I will return to my house from which I came”.  
(Luke 11: 24).

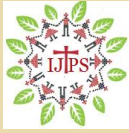
So, then, what happens if the unclean spirit returns and finds the house well-cleaned and guarded?

“Then it goes and takes along seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they go in and live there; and the last state of that man becomes worse than the first” (Luke 11: 26)

Precisely at this point in Chapter 9, it is not at all by coincidence Luke mentioned that all the people were amazed about God’s greatness in all that Jesus was doing, but pulls His disciples aside while saying, “Let these words sink into your ears; for the Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men”. Here Jesus for a second time issues prophetic words about His coming death, referring to it precisely at the moment when everyone is awing about the glory of God in dealing with the violent demon possession of an “only” little boy. What’s the theological point of doing this? The question is: Is it possible to understand this assertion by Jesus from a Lukan theological viewpoint? Answer: Yes indeed.

The theological point here is that demon exorcism and the passion of Jesus is intimately bound up with the mystery of humanity’s salvation in the meaning of the cross. Jesus is imploring His disciples not to get too carried away by the wonder and amazement of people about His miraculous deeds and to stay focused on the heavy price that Jesus had to pay for their salvation, although “they were afraid to ask Him about this statement”. In other words, let it sink deeply into your ears really means let it penetrate profoundly to the center of your heart, and remember.

Committing all forms of violence against human beings and animals by taking possession of them and compelling them to behave in bizarre ways is not the only portrait of Satanic forces scripted into Luke’s narrative. As we learned in an earlier example with reference to the “Legion” designation, Satanic agents in biblical writings are known are



known by many names all of which absolutely permeate almost every part of both the Old and New Testaments as a dominant motif – NOT just Luke’s Gospel. Just a few other Satanic designations will no doubt make clear here the extent to which the Satanic motif is so intensely present in many guises within Luke Biblical accounts of Jesus’s life and teachings.

First of all, the name “Satan” itself (Luke 10:18; 11:18; 13:6; 22:3, 31) or some other designation for the leader of evil supernatural agents such as “Beelzebub” (Luke 11:15) are employed prolifically. The name “devil” is used on a number of occasions (among them Luke 4:2; 8:12). Satanic agents are also sometimes described as “evil spirits” (Luke 7:21; 8:2) and demon(s) (Luke 7:33; 9:49; 10:17; 11:14-15). As well, there is an almost viral proliferation of Satanic forces in Luke known as “unclean spirit(s)” or “unclean demon(s)” causing trouble, sufferings, illnesses, and ailments of every kind in a great variety of different contexts that Jesus deals with directly and effectively without difficulty, once again demonstrating that He is the Son of God (Luke 6:18; 8:29; 9:42; 11:24).

Jesus confronts and demobilizes Satanic agents in other ways throughout Luke’s Gospel, and it’s crucial to point out here that He never loses a battle against Satanic agents, one or many, leaders or foot soldiers. For example, He successfully performs a series of exorcisms as hinted above (Luke 4:33-37; 8:26-33; 9:37-43). Typically, Jesus is confronted by or meets a human being suffering from demonic possession and then has a conversation with that person and demon, after which at some point fairly soon Jesus commands the demon to be gone. The demon immediately obeys Jesus, but usually not without engaging in some kind of symbolic spiteful gesture as an insulting slap in the face both to Christ and to God. If there are any witnesses to these events, and commonly there are, they all just look on in shock.

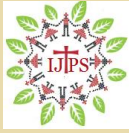
Not only this, but Luke makes sure to tell his readers that Jesus bestowed his disciples (implying all other Christian followers?) with very similar powers during passages referring to the Commission when Jesus gave His 12 disciples “power and authority over all demons and to heal diseases” (Luke 9:1) and especially at the Ascension when He promises to send them “the promise of My Father” or Holy Spirit (Luke 24:49). So, then, in Lukan theology it is abundantly clear that supernatural powers against Satanic forces can indeed be delegated.

The great number and variety of miraculous healings of serious mental and physical afflictions in Luke are absolutely remarkable, to be sure, as they demonstrate visually the great powers God possesses over life and death. In fact, in some of these cases Jesus has no problem whatsoever healing people by raising them from the dead, just as He Himself will later be raised from the dead by God. For example, soon after Jesus heals the servant of the centurion who had demonstrated more great faith than could be found in all of Israel (Luke 7:9), He approaches the city gate of Nain and notices a dead man being carried out in an open coffin who was the only son of a widowed mother weeping behind.

Jesus feels compassion, tells the weeping mother not to weep, walks up to the coffin and touches it, the procession halting. “Young man, I say to you, arise!” Jesus commands. The young man sits up and starts to speak, and Jesus returns him to his mother, while shock and fear grips onlookers and witnesses (Luke 7:11-16). Apparently, Jesus resurrecting the dead was a rather common part of Jesus’s public ministry, according to Luke.

Another highly significant example of the crucial link between Jesus’s healing practices and the core Christian principle of salvation occurs after Jesus returns from Gerasenes across the water opposite Galilee. A crowd of people were waiting for Jesus by the lakeshore. None other than a synagogue official named Jairus throws himself at Jesus’s





feet begging Him to come to his house to save his only daughter of 12 years old who was dying. Jesus continues walking with the crowd pressing up against Him. As He does so, a woman who had been hemorrhaging uncontrollably for twelve years intentionally touched the fringe of His cloak, and immediately she was healed completely. As Jesus senses what has happened, the woman drops before Him trembling and explaining why she had touched His cloak: “Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace”, Jesus replies. No sexual discrimination there, and the strong logical implication by Jesus’s words is that faith itself possess healing power.

Now back to the dying 12-year-old only daughter of the synagogue official, Jairus. While Jesus was still speaking to the woman who had been healed by touching his cloak, someone from the house of the synagogue official ran up to inform him that “your daughter has died; do not trouble the Teacher anymore”. However, when Jesus heard these words, he states assuredly: “Do not be afraid any longer; only believe, and she will be made well”. Jesus then goes to the synagogue official’s house and gives strict instructions not to let anyone enter the dead girl’s room except His disciples Peter, John, and James as well as the dead girl’s parents.

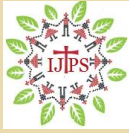
They all enter, everyone starts weeping and lamenting for the dead girl, but Jesus tells them to stop weeping since the girl “has not died, but is asleep”. They start laughing at Jesus, for they saw they she had died. Jesus takes the child’s hand and commands, “Child, arise!”, and then the girl’s “spirit returned, and she got up immediately; and He gave orders for something to be given to her to eat”, just as Jesus Himself would later do after His own resurrection to prove to His disciples that He had indeed resurrected (Luke 8:49-56).

What are the theological messages that Luke wishes to impart to his readers. The first lesson is that death holds dominion over all humanity of age, gender, or any other factor, a cruel enemy that makes no distinctions in afflicting everyone sooner or later. The ugly and the beautiful, the strong and the weak, the rich and the poor, the young and the old, the lucky and the unfortunate, the well-fit and the physically disabled they must all suffer the same fate.

Nothing of human or worldly power can keep the sword of death away from our bodies. The more important theological point to be gleaned from these examples is that Jesus Christ through God the Father has power to restore life at the instant of command. Jesus resurrected the widow’s only son and the synagogue official’s only young daughter during His public ministry living on Earth, proving the almighty power of God the Father over death.

To prove this point, just in case more proof would be needed, God the Father resurrected Christ. Like it says in other parts of the Bible, in doing so Christ has delivered humanity from the fear of death by overcoming it Himself; He has “abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel...” (2 Tim 1:10). Through His own death and resurrection, Christ “rendered powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil”, that he might “free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives” (Heb 2:14-15).

Through His resurrection, Christ has proven that “he who believes has eternal life” (John 6:47). As Jesus Himself said to Martha, the sister of Lazarus, whom he later resurrects from the dead: “I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if, and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die” (John 11:25-26). Paul confirms this in many places in the Bible: “For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain” (Phil 1:21).



The biblical message about the meaning and central significance of the resurrection of Christ is perfectly clear, namely, Christ came to heal the death afflicting humanity. The theological message of Luke's Gospel is that healing through the resurrection of the dead while Christ was on Earth is a dry run for when the resurrection of Christ heals our death and provides us with access to his eternal kingdom.

When John the Baptist had sent messengers to Jesus asking Him if he was "the Expected One, or do we look for someone else?", Luke tells us that at the very moment Jesus was asked that question He had been engaged in many miraculous healings like restoring sight to the blind, exorcising evil spirits, and curing diseases. Most significantly, however, Luke's narrative recounts Jesus's response to those messengers:

"Go and report to John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up..." (Luke 7:18-23)

Lastly, what's more, in the healing and exorcising practices of Jesus there is no sexual discrimination, as the passages about Jesus defending the sinful alabaster woman anointing Christ while weeping and wiping the tears from His feet with her hair during a meal at the Pharisee's house makes clear (Luke 7:37-50). Shortly thereafter, Luke tells us that Jesus began going from city to city and village to village specifically ministering to women while the 12 disciples and "some women" were with Him:

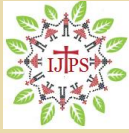
"women who had been healed of evil spirits and sicknesses: Mary who was called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others...." (Luke 8:1-3).

## 6. KINGDOM OF GOD MOTIF

The last dominant thematic thread running through the fabric of Luke's Gospel that we will be reviewing is the Kingdom of God motif. In many ways, this motif is the most significant theological theme of Luke's theology although it is possible to entertain different views about it. For example, some believe it is a 'kingdom' already present in physical worldly existence while others claim it is a state of being yet to be established in the future. Some believe it is an actual physical place in material existence, while others claim it exists in another spiritual dimension of time and place not subject to the limits of physical reality. The central issues of time and place in this motif will be addressed later.

Although the kingdom of God motif has already been intimated or suggested within several previous motifs reviewed here, especially the Satan motif, it requires unique attention here because it appears to function as a comprehensive concept around which many other concepts, tenets, and principles of the Christian faith are organized. As well, since this concept in Luke is indeed a dominant theme in the life and teachings of Jesus, not to mention the entire Gospel itself, a few general preliminary historical and etymological comments about it are required before we discuss specific Lukan references.

Luke's first reference occurs just two short passages following the passage already noted above where "demons" are shouting at Jesus from within many Galilean synagogues just before Jesus removes them from people, "You are the Son of God!" He tells readers that when the day came for Jesus to leave Galilee, he disappeared to a remote place to be alone. But crowds eventually found Him, imploring Him not to leave them. Jesus responded to



them: “I must preach the kingdom of God to the other cities also, for I was sent for this purpose” (Luke 4:42-43).

Here Jesus points out to the crowds that he was “sent”, implying that someone had sent Him with a message to deliver. He was a messenger with a mission or a calling to share “the *kingdom of God*” with “other cities”, not only Galilee. The implication is that God the Father “sent” his messenger Christ with a message or calling or mission to share “the *kingdom of God*” with as many people in as many places as possible to all those who were willing to listen. That’s why Jesus could not stay in Galilee to continue teaching and healing as the people desired although the many crowds of people searching for Jesus who had been trying to find some time alone away from the crowd also tells us something important about the ‘kingdom of God’ motif in Luke.

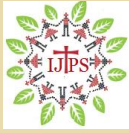
For one thing, it’s ‘the people’ searching for Him and eventually begging Him to stay, not religious authorities or political rulers, as far as we know from Luke. Evidently, the bulk of the Galileans were greatly impressed with the preaching of Jesus and their lives benefitted from it greatly in real, concrete ways that they could understand and appreciate. Much more than that, the great number of miraculous instantaneous healings of serious diseases and illnesses by Jesus (including Simon’s mother-in-law) surely convinced people about God’s power through Christ. Christ in the real, concrete life experience of people was showing them that God the Father loved human beings enough to eliminate their pain and sufferings.

But God’s power was shown to be not restricted to the physical world in many of those healings because they involved removing Satanic forces. To those people, this meant that God didn’t only have power to heal diseases, illnesses, and physical deformities. The more important cosmological message here is that God has sovereign power over Satan and all manner of Satanic opposition operating through various agencies: “demons”, “unclean demons”, “unclean spirits”, “evil spirits”, and so forth, and those Satanic agents were captained by Beelzebub.

Those people understood that through great miracles of healing, God through Christ is able to offer a new physical life. Through power over Satanic agents believed to be exploiting human flesh as hosts, however, God through Christ is able to offer new life to the soul of human beings, a new spiritual life uncontaminated or uncorrupted by Satanic forces. God through Christ heals sickness and disease, indeed; but more importantly, God through Christ heals the souls of human beings. That’s why Luke (19:10) says that Christ came to save souls, “to save that which was lost”.

The point here is to emphasize that God’s Words are the healing power for the human soul, the spiritual food for the human spirit. Therefore, the people of Galilee were being indirectly told by Jesus that the most proper behavior for them is not to prevent Him from leaving Galilee but, rather, to spread God’s Word far and wide, to worship God the Father with thanks and humility, and to live consistently according to His Words. That is precisely the underlying cosmological message here at the very beginning of Luke’s narrative.

The next time that the kingdom of God is mentioned is when Jesus proclaims the beatitudes during the Sermon on the Mount (Luke 6:20). The context is crucial here because it speaks to the significance of other major themes in Lukan theology such as the Satan motif, for example. Jesus had come down from a mountain where he had spent the entire night in prayer to God, calling all of His disciples close to Him and choosing twelve of them as His apostles. Then He stands at some kind of great open level place with a large crowd of His disciples close by and a massive throng of people from Judea, Jerusalem, and the coastal regions of Tyre and Sidon who had come to be healed, to be cured of unclean spirits, or just



to hear what He had to say. The massive throng of people were struggling just to touch Him because “power was coming from Him and healing them all”. Jesus turns to His disciples and the very first words that come out of His mouth according to Luke: “Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God” (Luke 6:20)

The first thing to notice is the context. “Those who were troubled with unclean spirits” and those with “diseases” had come to be “cured” by Jesus. A large throng of people from far and wide who were afflicted by diseases and unclean spirits had come to be “healed”. It’s difficult to believe that such a large throng were mostly well-placed people within their own geographical communities living a fairly comfortable life, people of wealth, power, privilege, position, authority, and the like, however modest the actual amounts of any of these status indicators might have been. It’s doubtful that the various rulers of any of their communities were present or even sent representatives.

On the other hand, Matthew’s Gospel talks about Jesus’s first statement in the same Sermon on the Mount a little differently:

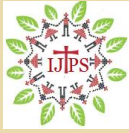
“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for there is the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:3).

The two fundamental differences between Matthew and Luke here are clear. Matthew changes “poor” to the phrase “poor in spirit” and “kingdom of God” to “kingdom of heaven”. What concerns us here is the “poor in spirit” expression. The classical theological explanation is the assertion that it refers to people who suddenly realize that they are spiritually poor, not materially poor. This interpretation is especially popular among evangelical Christians whose intense religious beliefs may lead them to emphasize ‘spiritual poverty’, ‘mourning’ for their sins, and other such cross-topic metaphorical applications.

To modern ‘liberal’ ears, poverty usually refers to a state of extreme material deprivation like no food, shelter, or clothing, living on the street, and the like. The metaphor of ‘mourning’ usually refers to the subject of death, not feeling guilty about immoral behavior or feeling sad about its disappearance or eradication. Of course, no one will argue that spiritual poverty is irrelevant to Christianity. The gospels are replete with stories about various people realizing the severe error of their ways when living without God front and center in their lives from kings to tax collectors to prostitutes to adulterers to thieves, and more. Therefore, the recognition that our spirit is shallow and empty without God is a valid part of the Christian faith.

However, it’s just as difficult to believe here that Jesus is NOT referring to those people who are ‘poor in spirit’. Remember, many if not most of the people who came from far and wide to see Him came with a great variety of ailments of one sort or another, many of them even “troubled by unclean spirits”, Luke tells us. Perhaps it’s safe to say that nothing is quite as effective in grinding down the life spirit or joie de vivre of a person than sustained illness, disease, or psychological “troubles” more than severe material poverty. Anyone who’s ever been that dirt poor can surely testify to that fact. Jesus realized exactly who He was talking to in the large crowd around Him, people who were broken in spirit because they were at the bottom of the social heap, so to speak.

The New Testament Greek has two different words with two different connotations meaning ‘poor’. It could very well be that it’s a translative variational emphasis with Luke using one translation and Matthew the other. One word means everyday struggling just to take care of very basic needs, while the other refers to dirt poverty, as they say, the absolute poorest dregs of society, the poorest of the poor. This interpretation also makes sense especially when placed in the context of the other “Blessed” statements Jesus makes. These



statements refer to various emotional states required to heal the broken spirit of life which the hammer of grinding poverty has inflicted upon people.

What all of this really means from a reader or listener point of view is that perhaps one gospel writer is emphasizing one aspect of poverty while the other gospel writer is highlighting another aspect of poverty. Therefore, it's likely that both interpretations are applicable in this context. Further, the various woes to the rich, the well-fed, the comfortable, and the well-spoken of just a few verses after the initial 'poor' reference in Luke seems to provide additional support for this interpretation. The next reference to kingdom of God in Luke comes in Chapter 8 when the discussion revolves around ministering to women and the parable of the Sower. It occurs just after Jesus while dining at the Pharisee's house has defended the faith of the sinful alabaster woman who had come from the city to anoint Jesus with her perfume and tears fallen on His feet wiped away by her own hair. Luke says that:

“Soon afterwards, He began going from one city and village to another, proclaiming and preaching the kingdom of God. The twelve were with Him” (Luke 8:1).

It is significant that this chapter is one of the only chapters in Luke where the kingdom of God is mentioned consonant with the phrase “word of God” more than once, twice by Jesus Himself. The first time Jesus is explaining to confused disciples what the Parable of the Sower means: “Now the parable is this: the seed is the word of God”. The other occurs while Jesus is recounting the Parable of the Lamp to a large crowd and he's interrupted by people informing Him that His mother and brothers were waiting to see Him, to which He responds: “My mother and My brothers are these who hear the word of God and do it” (Luke 8:11, 21).

It doesn't take a theological rocket scientist to comprehend that here Jesus in Luke is referring to the kingdom of God introduced to the soil of the Earth in the form of the word of God. The other reference to the kingdom of God in Chapter 8 seems to confirm this point where Jesus explains to His questioning disciples why He's using parables to preach:

“To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God, but to the rest it is in parables, so that seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand” (Luke 8:10).

Clearly, once again, interpretation here should be contextual. Both references to the 'kingdom of God' interpreted from within a 'word of God' context means that the values, principles, and doctrines of the Gospel are presented as the 'word of God'. The intention is to impart to receptive minds and hearts unique spiritual knowledge conceived as a special gift from God residing in a timeless place called heaven. The kingdom of God has come down from heaven to Earth in the form of the word of God, and Jesus was at that time proclaiming and preaching the word of God as the “kingdom of God” from city to city and village to village precisely because that's exactly where it came from.

However, it was being delivered to people whose spirits had not been fed the word of God, who were not the citizens of heaven, so to speak. So, then, Jesus as sovereign Teacher had to select a pedagogical technique that could successfully deliver the word of God to 'aliens' (those who were empty of or without the word of God) so that their spiritual soil may be properly fertilized (by that seed).

The next time Luke mentions Kingdom of God is several times in Chapter 9 when Jesus provides for the ministry of the twelve apostles and defines the exacting parameters of discipleship. Before commissioning the apostles, he bestows upon them great powers and



authority including “over all the demons and to heal diseases. And He sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to perform healing” (Luke 9:1-2). He gives them specific instructions and sends them out. Sometime later, the apostles return and report back to Him all that they had done as the crowds followed Jesus also listening to these reports. Jesus welcomes the eavesdropping, turns to the crowd afterwards, and then starts “speaking to them about the kingdom of God and curing those who had need of healing” (Luke 9:11).

In these verses, the cosmological concept of the kingdom of God is tied together with the worldly concepts of power and authority. The Greek word for ‘power’ means the ability to act powerfully with the right and authority, and here that right is reserved to Jesus. Since God the Father who created and sustains all in the universe is working through Jesus His messenger, the ‘messiah’, then it stands to reason that Jesus has ultimate authority over demons and disease. Presumably, that’s why it is repeated so many times throughout the Bible that all authority belongs to God.

By logical extension, that means that any and all authority human beings may have are merely delegated authority, a gift from God the Father through Jesus. So, then, it should be used in wise stewardship, without self-righteousness, pride, or arrogance. All worldly power and authority, therefore, is a gift from the kingdom of God and, as such, should be employed to honor God by doing good for others and not to seek power for its own sake and our own aggrandizement. That’s why it is linked to healing activities by Jesus and the apostles.

The next time kingdom of God is mentioned in Chapter 9 is when Jesus is talking with His disciples after feeding a large crowd of 5,000 people with only five loaves of bread and two fish. He says that those who are shamed of Him and His words will themselves receive His shame when he comes into His glory. Then He adds this proviso:

“But I say to you truthfully, there are some of those standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God” (Luke 9:27)

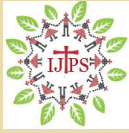
Here again, kingdom of God is mentioned with the word death in the same sentence, seemingly implying that some of the people present will make it to heaven after death where they will see God, and some won’t. It could also imply that Jesus is talking about His Second Coming when He establishes or transfers His kingdom of God from heaven to Earth. However, the fact that the very next verse begins a long section on the transfiguration of Christ on a mountain with Peter, John, and James present as witnesses, it is highly likely here that Jesus is referring to the fact that some of those disciples He was talking to at the time would be eye witnesses to the ‘royal splendor’ of His transfiguration, another Greek meaning of the word ‘kingdom’.

Further down the same chapter, Luke mentions that Jesus talks about the kingdom of God when He’s setting the standards for authentic discipleship. As Jesus and the apostles are walking along the road, people noticing Him and offering to follow Him unconditionally. Jesus also approaches some people along the way and asks them to Him. But some of them hesitate and make excuses. On two occasions when someone wishes to bury his dead father and the other wishes to say goodbye to his family first before following Him, Jesus responds:

“...Allow the dead to bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim everywhere the kingdom of God” (Luke 9:60)

“...No one after putting His hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God” (Luke 9:62)

Here one thing is for certain, “let the dead bury the dead” does not mean that the dead resurrect or come back to life to bury dead people. So, then, obviously the phrase



cannot and should not be interpreted literally. What appears to be meant is that spiritual responsibilities to God are more important than worldly responsibilities such as burying the dead. On the other hand, in this case the dead are already dead; the father has already died; death is already done, so going back will not undo that death. However, 'possible' these interpretations are to make, it is unlikely to be the meaning intended by Jesus especially since dead people don't bury dead people, literally.

It is much more like that Jesus here is referring to the other people back home to which the man was returning to bury his dead father. It seems to imply that those people were spiritually dead, irredeemably solid unbelievers engaged in ungodly worldly beliefs and practices. Perhaps one of those routine behavioral practices was burial ceremonies and rituals which Jesus found to be repulsive and ungodly. If we interpret this phrase as a central doctrine of God the Father through Christ rather than just a passing condescension of some kind, then the interpretative meaning widens to other possibilities more consistent with other Biblical passages.

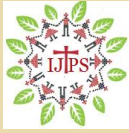
For example, one possible interpretation along these lines is that Jesus was warning the man not to allow himself to be heavily burdened by participation in the ungodly practices, ceremonies, rituals, and other pagan behaviors of unbelievers. Pagan ceremonies and rituals for death at that time involved heavy drinking and drunkenness, lewd dancing and sexual escapades, eating gluttonously and sacrificing food to demonic gods of various sorts, and much more ungodly behaviors. In other words, they engaged heavily in various forms of necrolatry or attaching sentimental reverence to the dead. Merriam-Webster defines it as a superstitious worship or veneration of the dead. As such, it can be viewed as a form of idolatry.

As well, it should be noted here that cults of the dead were very popular in and around ancient Israel at the time. Engaging in these behaviors was tantamount to engaging in fellowship with evil, so it was specifically prohibited and warned against at many places in the Bible. Jesus was evidently aware of this (just to name a few - Cor 6:15-18; 7; 10-22; Psalm 106: 28-29; Mark 6: 29; Dt 34: 5-6; Is 5: 12-14; 1 Jn 2:16).

The last example of the kingdom of God given in a lengthy chapter 9 of Luke's Gospel refers to the plow metaphor used by Jesus quoted earlier, but worth re-quoting here: "No one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:62). First of all, it's not at all surprising that Jesus would employ a series of agricultural metaphors when trying to communicate effectively and efficiently the values, principles, and doctrines of the kingdom of God to a largely agricultural audience. That was an agricultural time period when every earned a living mainly from growing crops on land.

So, then, everyone would know what it meant to 'plow' something and how important it was to be done properly. Everyone working in the fields of crops everywhere had to concentrate on their specific assigned tasks at hand in a very careful and responsible manner if those crops were to be harvested in a productive and timely manner and then ending on somebody's table in good condition to promote human health. For those people assigned the task of plowing, they needed to concentrate even more intensely on the job they were doing once they started.

The best way to have done it was to move forward being careful not to leave anything behind in the plowing process. Leaving something behind would cause the plowman to always look back, and always looking back would make it much more likely than usual that he would not plow in a straight line as he should. If this occurred, it would



cause serious seeding and crop growth problems which, in turn, would yield less than a desirable full harvest.

Now, when Jesus applied this metaphor to the spiritual job of preaching the Gospel of the kingdom of God, the messages communicated are largely self-evident. Putting one's body and mind at work undertaking this spiritual job means that the Gospel is the plow that is going to be sent into the field of humanity to harvest as many as possible into the kingdom of God. This spiritual plowman must commit himself to God without any worldly distractions, that is, without "looking back". That spiritual plowman must commit his life to God by repenting of his sinful nature by receiving the Holy Spirit through baptism.

## CONCLUSIONS

In other words, here Jesus is demanding that each of His followers be a plowman by going out into the world and plowing it properly for harvesting believers. Jesus is saying that God is commanding humanity to come out of the world with baskets filled with the good fruits of your diligent harvesting techniques. The message to the plowman is never try to go back into that world, never "looking back" in regret or doubt, by giving in to the endless pleasures it might offer in terms of pride, power, desires of the flesh, or other worldly features. Jesus wanted discipleship, and as disciples he expected nothing less than forfeiture of the whole heart to God.

The message is clear. If Jesus gives somebody the job of spiritual plowman, that person must stand firm in the field and not let go of the plow. 'Looking back' would make it much more likely that they would let go of the plow, meaning they might return to their previous sinful disposition. That means they wouldn't finish the spiritual job that God has assigned to them. In effect, this would make them unfit "for the kingdom of God", as Jesus commented in Luke.

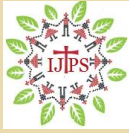
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## THE REASONS (LOGOI) OF CREATION, PREMISES OF THE FULFILMENT OF GOD'S ETERNAL PLAN

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### ABSTRACT

*The reasons (logoi) of creation, premises for the fulfilment of God's eternal plan. In order for the world to move towards the purpose for which it was created and to share in God's grace, it must have been created with this capacity and predisposition. It must be capable of receiving the grace that sanctifies it and of containing certain potencies that are actualized in the sense intended by the Creator. These potencies have been much spoken of in Orthodox theology, and are known as the rations (logoi) of creatures.*

**Keywords:** *reason; creation; deification; priesthood; man;*

### INTRODUCTION

We know through revelation that the world is created by God through His will, wisdom and power. It does not emanate from God and is not part of Him, but is brought into existence out of nothing. This clear distinction between creation and Creator is of crucial importance, showing us that without a relationship to God that transcends creation, the latter is meaningless, locked in a cyclicity that leads nowhere. Moreover, without its Creator the world returns to the non-being from which it was raised, since it is not eternal but dependent on God.

Another very important point is that since it has an intelligent Creator who brought it into existence, there must be a precise reason and purpose to it, which also gives the creation a meaning and purpose that it must reach.<sup>1</sup>

The movement towards this goal, which is the perfect development of the world in the direction envisaged by the Creator from the beginning, would not be possible, however, if creation had not been provided with the necessary means. More precisely, it must have in its constitution the powers that must be actualized in order to achieve perfection. At the same time, since we are talking about a personal Creator, there is also a need for an alter-ego of His, who represents the impersonal world and puts it in the fullest connection with Himself, for what can be this finality to which creation must attain, if not the sharing of the supreme good which is found only in communion with God.

### 1. REASON FOR CREATION

We see that the world, with its every element, has a certain order and nothing exists without directly or indirectly influencing something else. It is a rational composition in which any deviation of its components has visible consequences. This fact leads us to

<sup>1</sup> Jean-Claude LARCHET, *Îndumnezeirea omului la Sfântul Maxim Mărturisitorul* (The deification of man in Saint Maxim the Confessor), trad. Marinela BOJIN, Ed. Basilica, București, 2019, pp. 103–105.



believe that it does not originate in an accidental act.<sup>2</sup> It cannot be a matter of chance, but clearly there is an intelligent Creator, a supreme Reason, which is the origin of the reason of each thing and the interdependence of all.<sup>3</sup>

At the same time, this perfect, all-knowing and all-powerful Creator, who is none other than God, cannot be compelled by anything or anyone outside to create the world, as this would be contrary to His omnipotence. At the same time, God could not be provoked by any internal necessity to create the world (Acts 17:25), nor could there be any kind of necessity in God, since necessity contradicts His aseity and perfection, since He is the only Being in Himself (Jas. 3:14; Acts 5:26). God is the full Existence of happiness, power, glory. No one can add anything and no one can push Him to do anything. Therefore, creation is a voluntary, free and unnecessary act of God.<sup>4</sup>

Therefore, if the world did not come into being by accident, but was rationally created by God<sup>5</sup> and at the same time it was not created out of any necessity of His, it means that the reason for creation can only be to give Him something, to show His goodness and love outwardly.

"Therefore, this God-World, wisdom, power, He also built the human nature, not that He was compelled to do so by anything, but He brought man into the world, only and only from an outpouring of His love. And this, because His light was not to remain hidden, His greatness undivulged and His goodness unrequited, nor any other attributes which we see in the divine nature, could not remain inactive, so that no one could partake of them or feast on them."<sup>6</sup>

Out of kindness, He willed that there should be creatures to share His love. We can thus say that love and goodness are the deepest motivation of creation.<sup>7</sup>

"For the Good and Precious God was not content with the contemplation of Himself, but, in His bountiful goodness, willed that beings might appear who could enjoy His benefits and partake of His goodness. Therefore He brought into being from non-being all things seen and unseen, and man, who is made up of things seen and unseen, as he thinks, creates; and thought becomes work, being made real by the Word and perfected by the Spirit."<sup>8</sup>

Therefore, if God's reason for creating the world is goodness and love, then there must be a well-defined purpose that is also linked to these qualities of the Creator.

<sup>2</sup> Pr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă (Orthodox Dogmatic Theology)*, vol. I, E.I.B.M.O., București, 2010, pp. 10–11.

<sup>3</sup> Adrian LEMENI, *Sensul eshatologic al creației (The eschatological sense of creation)*, Ed. ASAB, București, 2007, p. 124.

<sup>4</sup> Pr. Prof. Dr. D. STĂNILOAE, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă (Orthodox Dogmatic Theology)*, vol. I, p. 352.

<sup>5</sup> Pr. Prof. Vasile RĂDUCĂ, „Grija Bisericii față de mediul ambiant” („The Church's concern for the environment”), în *Studii Teologice*, nr. 3/1990, p. 112.

<sup>6</sup> SFÂNTUL GRIGORE DE NYSSA, *Oratio catehetica magna*, P.G. 45, 21 BC [trad. rom. SFÂNTUL GRIGORIE DE NYSSA, *Marele cuvânt catehetic sau despre învățământul religios (The great catechetical word or on religious education)*], în: *Scrieri (II)*, PSB 30, trad. Pr. Prof. Dr. Teodor Bodogae, E.I.B.M.B.O.R., București, 1998, p. 294.].

<sup>7</sup> SFÂNTUL IUSTIN POPOVICI, *Dogmatica Bisericii Ortodoxe (Dogmatics of the Orthodox Church)*, vol. I, trad. Diac. Zarko MARKOVSKI, Ed. Doxologia, Iași, 2016, p. 315; Pr. Prof. Dr. D. STĂNILOAE, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă (Orthodox Dogmatic Theology)*, vol. I, p. 352.

<sup>8</sup> SFÂNTUL IOAN DAMASCHIN, *Expositio fidei orthodoxae*, II, 2, PG 94, 864C [trad. rom. SFÂNTUL IOAN DAMASCHIN, *Dogmatica (Dogmatics)*, II, 2, trad. pr. Dumitru Fecioru, Apologeticum, București, 2001, p. 37.



## 2. THE PURPOSE FOR CREATION

As I said, bringing the world into existence neither adds to nor subtracts from God. Nor, however, can it be said that the world is something superfluous. God does not create anything that does not have a precise purpose and destination. Everything that is created has a well-founded reason:<sup>9</sup> "The Lord hath made all things every man for his own purpose, even the wicked for the day of evil." (Prov. 16:4).

The world has not only a transient value for the knowledge of God, but its reasons persist in the eschaton.<sup>10</sup> In the perspective of eternity, "the rays of creatures, far from becoming superfluous, after the revealed contemplation of God will show us the fruitfulness of divine Reason and will be an exemplification of it, just as the rays of the sun are a manifestation and an exemplification of His light. In other words, when we contemplate God revealed, we will contemplate the reason of things in Himself, and not in things as now."<sup>11</sup>

Holy Scripture makes it clear what the purpose of all creation is: "In Him all things were made" (Col. 1:16; Eph. 3:9; Heb. 1:2), "for whom are all things" (Heb. 2:10), "He is the Omega" (Rev. 1:8), the goal of all things is that "God may be all in all" (I Cor. 15:28).<sup>12</sup> Everything was made for God (Rom. 11:36; Heb. 2:10) and can find its ultimate meaning only in Him. So the purpose of creation is in God. If everything is created out of His goodness and love, it tends to share more and more in this goodness and love, it tends towards sharing in Him:

"And as goodness turns all to itself and is the proper gatherer of the shared as the beginning and unifying deity, and all desire after it as the beginner, the sustainer, the goal, so goodness is (as Scripture says) that from which all have taken existence and are, as products of the perfect cause and in which all are maintained, guarded and held as in an all-embracing bosom and to which all turn as to the proper end of each. According to him all are desired, the knowing and rational in a knowing way, the sensing in a sensing way, the senseless by innate movement of vital desire, and the lifeless and simply existing, only by the capacity of the fraternal sharing."<sup>13</sup>

<sup>9</sup> SILVESTRU-EPISCOP DE CANEV, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă (Orthodox Dogmatic Theology)*, vol. IV, trad. ARHIM. GHERASIM MIRON, Ed. Credința Strămoșească, București, 2001, pp. 100–102.

<sup>10</sup> Polycarp SHERWOOD, *St. Maximus the confessor: The ascetic life. The four centuries on charity*, Longmans, Green and Co, Londra, 1955, pp. 54–55.

<sup>11</sup> Pr. Prof. Dr. D. STĂNILOAE, *Teologia Ascetică și Mistică Ortodoxă (Orthodox Ascetic and Mystical Theology)*, Ed. Basilica, București, 2019, pp. 25–26.

<sup>12</sup> SFÂNTUL IUSTIN POPOVICI, *Dogmatica Bisericii Ortodoxe (Dogmatics of the Orthodox Church)*, vol. I, pp. 316–317.

<sup>13</sup> SFÂNTUL DIONISIE AREOPAGITUL, *De Divinis Nominibus*, IV, 4, PG 3, 700 [trad. rom. SFÂNTUL DIONISIE AREOPAGITUL, *Despre Numinile Dumnezeiești (About Divine Names)*, în: *Opere complete*, trad. PR. PROF. DR. DUMITRU STĂNILOAE, Ed. Paideia, București, 1996, p. 147]. „Să înaintăm deci cu cuvântul la bunătatea însăși pe care teologii (autorii Scripturii) o atribuie prin excelență dumnezeirii mai presus de dumnezeire și o deosebesc de toate, cum socotesc, numind bunătate însăși existența dumnezeiască (obârșia dumnezeiască) care prin însuși faptul că e binele, ca bine ființial (prin ființă), întinde bunătatea la toate cele ce sunt. De fapt, precum soarele nostru, nu prin cugetare sau voință, ci prin însuși faptul că este, luminează toate care participă la lumina lui după rațiunea puterii lor, așa și binele mai presus de soare, prin însăși existența lui, ca arhetipul ridicat mai presus de chipul lui obscur, transmite tuturor, pe măsura lor, razele întregii bunătăți.” (“Let us therefore turn with the word to goodness itself, which the theologians (the authors of Scripture) attribute by excellence to deity above deity, and distinguish it from all, as they reckon, calling goodness itself divine existence (divine origin), which by the very fact that it is good, as the ultimate good (by being), extends goodness to all that is. In fact, just as our sun, not by thought or will, but by the very fact that it is, illuminates all who partake of its light according to the reason of their power, so the good above the sun, by its very existence, as the archetype raised above its obscure image, transmits to all, in their measure, the rays of all



Specifically, God, being absolute Goodness and Love, wanted to manifest outwardly these attributes of His.<sup>14</sup> Thus, He brought creation into existence as a reflection of His perfection (not as an emanation) to share His love and happiness.<sup>15</sup> So God's eternal plan was this sharing of Himself<sup>16</sup> of creation, or in other words of its deification.<sup>17</sup>

"All the creatures of God, contemplated by us by nature, with the help of proper knowledge and knowledge, reveal to us in a mysterious way the reasons according to which they were made, and reveal to us by them the purpose placed by God in each creature. In this sense it is also said: 'The heavens declare the glory of God, and the work of his hands proclaims his strength' (Ps. 18:2). And eternal power and godliness is Providence, which holds things together and the work of deifying those held by it."<sup>18</sup>

"God, having created the prime reasons and the universal essences of things, still works to this day, not only sustaining them in existence, but also bringing into actuality, unfolding and constituting the given parts virtually into essences (...). Through this the grace that ennobles all will be revealed in full work. It is the work of which God Himself and the Word, Who became man for it says: "My Father is working until now, and I am working" (John. 5:17)."<sup>19</sup>

All creatures are created to share in the glory and love of God. All gravitate towards Him in this sense, manifesting their adherence in their own way. Inanimate things, though without self-consciousness, express in their own way, even by mere existence and beauty, the glory of God: Ps. 18:1-5; 49:6; 96:6. Facets possessing a rational soul express themselves by free will both in words and especially in deeds: Sirach 38:6; Mt. 6:10; 22:37; Gal. 4, 6; In. 17, 3; Acts 17, 28; Colos. 1, 10.<sup>20</sup> The latter, more than the others, have the special purpose

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goodness"). SFANTUL DIONISIE AREOPAGITUL, De Divinis Nominibus, IV, 1, coll. PG 3, 694BC [trad. rom. SFANTUL DIONISIE AREOPAGITUL, Despre Numinile Dumnezeiești (About Divine Names), pp. 145–146].

<sup>14</sup> „Căci Dumnezeu este bun, mai bine zis, izvorul a toată bunătatea. Iar Cel Bun nu pizmuiește pe nimeni. De aceea, nepizmuind existența nimănui, a făcut toate din cele ce nu sunt, prin Cuvântul Său, Domnul nostru Iisus Hristos. ("For God is good, or rather, the source of all goodness. And the Good One does not pity anyone. Therefore, not pitying the existence of any, he made all things that are not, through his Word, our Lord Jesus Christ.)" SFANTUL ATANASIE CEL MARE, Oratio de Incarnatione Verbi, I, 3, PG 25, 101AB [trad. rom. SFANTUL ATANASIE CEL MARE, Despre întruparea Cuvântului (On the Incarnation of the Logos), I, 3, PSB 15, E.I.B.M.B.O.R., Bucuresti, 1987, p. 92.].

<sup>15</sup> Numeroase pasaje scripturistice fac referință la crearea lumii din bunătatea și iubirea absolută a lui Dumnezeu și la menirea creației de a se împărtăși de acestea: (Numerous scriptural passages refer to the creation of the world out of God's absolute goodness and love and the creation's purpose to share in it:) Ps. 8,10; 35, 10; 39, 6, 9; 103, 24; 144, 9; Is. 40, 26; 49, 15; Dan. 3, 56; I Paralip. 16, 13; In. 2, 6; Tit 3, 4; I Tim. 2, 4; Apoc. 4, 11. SILVESTRU-EPISCOPI DE CANEV, Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă (Orthodox Dogmatic Theology), vol. IV, p. 102.

<sup>16</sup> Nu poate fi vorba despre o contopire sau o identificare a creației cu Creatorul, ci ne referim la o împărtășire de harul lui Dumnezeu, nu de ființa Sa. (There can be no question of a merging or identification of creation with the Creator, but we refer to a sharing of God's grace, not His being.)

<sup>17</sup> SFANTUL MAXIM MĂRTURISITORUL, Epistolae, 24, coll. PG 91, 609C [trad. rom. SFANTUL MAXIM MĂRTURISITORUL, Epistole (Epistles), 24, PSB 81, E.I.B.M.B.O.R., Bucuresti, 1990, p. 163; Pr. Prof. Dr. D. STĂNILOAE, Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă (Orthodox Dogmatic Theology), vol. II, E.I.B.M.O., București, 2010, p. 337.

<sup>18</sup> SFANTUL MAXIM MĂRTURISITORUL, Quaestiones ad Thalassium, 13, 293D-296C [trad. rom. SFANTUL MAXIM MĂRTURISITORUL, Răspunsuri către Talasie (Replies to Thalassie), Filocalia 3, trad. Pr. Prof. Dr. D. STĂNILOAE, Ed. Apologeticum, Bucuresti, 2005. 13, pp. 69–70.].

<sup>19</sup> SFANTUL MAXIM MĂRTURISITORUL, Quaestiones ad Thalassium, 2, PG 90, 272AB [trad. rom. SFANTUL MAXIM MĂRTURISITORUL, 2, Răspunsuri către Talasie (Replies to Thalassie), pp. 44–45].

<sup>20</sup> SILVESTRU-EPISCOPI DE CANEV, Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă (Orthodox Dogmatic Theology), vol. IV, p. 104.



of moral and spiritual development.<sup>21</sup> (Mt. 5, 48; II Cor. 3, 18; Efes. 1, 4; 2, 10.) by their perfection influencing the others.

"The world is, without doubt, intended for the glory of God the Father, whose act of creation it is in a special way, He being the beginningless Origin. It is the Holy Spirit who fulfils the counsel of creation, bringing the work of revelation begun through the Son, and so the world is a fundamental gift of love between the Father and the Son. This gift of the Holy Spirit, uniting the world with the Father and the Son, is the ultimate possibility of uniting creation with the Trinity."<sup>22</sup>

"Having made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure, as he purposed in himself before, to the fullness of time, that in Christ all things in heaven and on earth should be made one, all things in him" (Eph. 1:9-10).

So the reason for creation is the goodness of God who wants all creatures to share in the love of the innermost being according to their ability to receive it. Thus, the goal becomes clear, that of ever deeper communion with God, i.e. of deification.<sup>23</sup>

### 3. LOGOS AND LOGOI

In order for the world to move towards the purpose for which it was created and to share God, it must have been created with this capacity and predisposition. It must be capable of receiving the grace that sanctifies it and of containing certain potencies that are actualized in the sense intended by the Creator. These potencies have been much spoken of in Orthodox theology, and are known as the rations (*logoi*) of creatures.

In the theology of St Maximus Confessor, the logos of a creature represents its reason for being, in a double sense: both the principle according to which it exists and the end it must reach. It is the intention according to which God created everything and, at the same time, the purpose for which it was created. In short, *logoi* are the embodiment of God's will in all created things.<sup>24</sup>

The logoi (*logoi*) make each created being unique, giving it its own purpose and value in relation to God. Thus, there are logoi that place creatures in a certain species, in a certain genus, that give creatures certain qualities, etc.<sup>25</sup> These reasons are at the same time the principles by which God governs the relations between creatures and which ensure the cohesion and order of the whole cosmos.

The Logos of a creature is not only the creative intention according to which God will at a given moment put from potency into act a certain thing, that is, the model or archetype of the created, but it is also the finality to which creation is to attain. Nor is it

<sup>21</sup> SILVESTRU-EPISCOPI DE CANEV, Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă (Orthodox Dogmatic Theology), vol. IV, p. 105.

<sup>22</sup> Hans Urs von BALTHASAR, Crèation et Trinité apud. ADRIAN LEMENI, Sensul eschatologic al creației (The eschatological sense of creation), p. 119.

<sup>23</sup> Omul, în calitate de făptură rațională, poate răspunde iubirii Dumnezeuiești, unindu-se tot mai intim cu Creatorul. Totodată, (omul) fiind în legătură cu restul creației, va trage după sine întreg cosmosul care se va împărtăși de îndumnezeirea persoanei umane. (Man, as a rational creature, can respond to God's love by uniting himself ever more intimately with the Creator. At the same time, (man) being in connection with the rest of creation, will draw the whole cosmos after him, which will share in the deification of the human person).

<sup>24</sup> SFÂNTUL MAXIM MĂRTURISITORUL, Quæstiones ad Thalassium, 64, PG 90, 709 [trad. rom. SFÂNTUL MAXIM MĂRTURISITORUL, Răspunsuri către Talasie (Replies to Thalassie), pp. 431–432].

<sup>25</sup> SFÂNTUL MAXIM MĂRTURISITORUL, Ambigua, Io., 7, PG 91, 1077C [trad. rom. SFÂNTUL MAXIM MĂRTURISITORUL, Ambigua, Io., 7, p. 80]; J.-C. LARCHET, Îndumnezeirea omului... (The deification of man...), p. 112.



merely the indication of this finality and the principle which directs creation towards it, but it is the virtual fulfilment in God, the as yet unfulfilled perfection of creation.<sup>26</sup> By moving towards this fulfilment of the purpose for which it was created and achieving this purpose, creation is restored to the logos according to which it was created. The movement of the creature will coincide with God's plan, and the creature will be deified, in the sense that it will find its place in the logos existing in God, specifically designed for it.<sup>27</sup> "He who does not corrupt the reason (logos) of his being, pre-existent in God, becomes in God through mindfulness; he moves in God according to the reason (logos) of his good being, pre-existent in God, working through virtues, and lives in God according to the reason (logos) of his eternal being, pre-existent in God."<sup>28</sup>

Therefore, we can say that the reasons of things converge in the Logos of God. He is both the principle of their existence and their finality. In Him these Logoi have their origin, existing there from all time.<sup>29</sup> However, it must be said that their existence in the Logos does not mean that the world existed before its creation. The presence of the world's reasons in God is only a virtuality of the world, a potential existence that comes into being only at the moment of creation. To do otherwise would be to accept the dualistic view that the matter from which the world was created is also eternal in the likeness of God.

At the same time, the fact that the reasons of the world are pre-existent in the Logos of God does not mean that they are identified with God. The Logos is totally transcendent in relation to them. St Maximus Confessor says that the reasons of creation were prepared (*prokatartithentes*)<sup>30</sup> or fulfilled (*simblirosas*),<sup>31</sup> actions that show their creation, even if a creation prior to the actual creation.<sup>32</sup>

Nor are the reasons of things emanations of the divine being. They are manifestations, not of being, but of the will of God; therefore St. Dionysius Pseudo-Areopagite also calls these logoi and voiri (*thelimata*)<sup>33</sup> divine.<sup>34</sup> We can therefore say that the reasons of things are seals of God's will in creation or divine intentions in relation to the world, because through them the Creator's plan is expressed in creation.<sup>35</sup>

To better understand the *raison d'être* of creation, we can refer to its iconic character. In the Christian view, the world is not confused with God, as it is in Greek philosophies and pantheistic religions. There can be no ontological continuity between created and uncreated nature. Yet creation speaks of its Creator "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the work of his hands proclaims his strength" (Ps. 18:1-2). Thus, creation acts as an icon

<sup>26</sup> SFÂNTUL MAXIM MĂRTURISITORUL, *Quaestiones ad Thalassium*, 2, PG 90, 272AB [trad. rom. SFÂNTUL MAXIM MĂRTURISITORUL, 2, Răspunsuri către Talasie (Replies to Thalassie), pp. 44–45].

<sup>27</sup> P. SHERWOOD, *The Earlier Ambigua...*, p. 169.

<sup>28</sup> SFÂNTUL MAXIM MĂRTURISITORUL, *Ambigua, Io.*, 7f, PG 91, 1084B [trad. rom. SFÂNTUL MAXIM MĂRTURISITORUL, *Ambigua, Io.*, 7, p. 86].

<sup>29</sup> LARS THUMBERG, *Microcosm and Mediator. The Theological Anthropology of Maximus the Confessor*, Open Court Publishing Company, Illinois, 1995, pp. 75–76.

<sup>30</sup> SFÂNTUL MAXIM MĂRTURISITORUL, *Quaestiones ad Thalassium*, 13, PG 90, 293D [trad. rom. SFÂNTUL MAXIM MĂRTURISITORUL, *Răspunsuri către Talasie (Replies to Thalassie)*, 13, pp. 69].

<sup>31</sup> SFÂNTUL MAXIM MĂRTURISITORUL, *Quaestiones ad Thalassium*, 2, PG 90, 272A [trad. rom. SFÂNTUL MAXIM MĂRTURISITORUL, *Răspunsuri către Talasie (Replies to Thalassie)*, 2, pp. 44].

<sup>32</sup> J.-C. LARCHET, *Îndumnezeirea omului...* (The deification of man...), p. 118.

<sup>33</sup> SFANTUL DIONISIE AREOPAGITUL, *De Divinis Nominibus*, V, 5-10, PG 3, 820A-825B [trad. rom. SFÂNTUL DIONISIE AREOPAGITUL, *Despre Numirile Dumnezeiești (About Divine Names)*, pp. 159–161].

<sup>34</sup> P. SHERWOOD, *The Earlier Ambigua...*, p. 176.

<sup>35</sup> J.-C. LARCHET, *Îndumnezeirea omului...* (The deification of man...), p. 114.





referring to the Archetype. The reasons of things are not consubstantial with the Logos, but icons of Him. They refer to Him, but are not identical with Him.

So the iconic character of creation shows us that it is not of one being with God, but is related to Him. The world must therefore be understood in relation to God. Any autonomous understanding of the world only turns it into an idol. Anything reduced to itself and treated as having its ultimate meaning in itself is transformed from an icon into an idol, is obscured and placed as a wall between God and man.<sup>36</sup>

Turning now to the purpose for which the world was created, and knowing what has been said about its reasons in the Supreme Reason, we can show clearly why creation has all the prerequisites for becoming divine. The world's readiness for transfiguration is given by its connection with the Logos.<sup>37</sup> The whole cosmos is created by the Word of God, having its *raison d'être* in connection with the Supreme Reason.<sup>38</sup> We reaffirm, however, that the reasons of things are created, unlike the Logos which is uncreated, being one of the persons of the Holy Trinity, and therefore there can be no pantheistic confusion with God, deification presupposing another kind of connection.

This connection is closely related to the Incarnation of the Son of God.<sup>39</sup> By the Logos becoming man, a bridge is created between the created and the uncreated, without the uncreated becoming created or vice versa. The creature thus acquires the possibility of uniting with the Creator; man together with the world, which he represents and sums up, unites with Christ, thus achieving his deification and the transfiguration of the world (which is a passion of the deification of man, and therefore an deification in relation to him). The link is similar to the hypostatic union between the uncreated divine nature and the created human nature of the Saviour. They are united, as we learn from the wording of the Fourth Ecumenical Council, "unchanged, unmixed, undivided, undivided."<sup>40</sup> Thus the created nature does not change into the uncreated, does not mix, does not divide and is not separated from it. Similarly, nature too can unite with God in solidarity with man, but it does not identify with and become God.<sup>41</sup>

Even before the Incarnation, the world's reasoning tended towards the Logos, but could never arrive at a real union, or rather, a real communion with Him (the term union can also lead us to pantheistic fusion). The communion with God's grace was from without; man could see the uncreated light, but as something external with which he could not have a perfect union.<sup>42</sup> After the incarnation, man who has become a member of the Church, and therefore part of the body of Christ, perceives grace as something within himself and can share God through grace in an organic, full way.<sup>43</sup>

So once again we see the close connection between the reasons of things and the Logos of God by which creation can reach the most intimate union with God and achieve the purpose for which it was created:

<sup>36</sup> ADRIAN LEMENI, *Sensul eschatologic al creației* (The eschatological sense of creation), p. 114.

<sup>37</sup> P. SHERWOOD, *The Earlier Ambigua...*, pp. 177–178.

<sup>38</sup> A. LEMENI, *Sensul eschatologic al creației* (The eschatological sense of creation), p. 118.

<sup>39</sup> N. RUSSELL, *The doctrine of deification...*, p. 7.

<sup>40</sup> SFÂNTUL IOAN DAMASCHIN, *Expositio fidei orthodoxae*, III, 3, coll. PG 94, 988B [trad. rom. SFÂNTUL IOAN DAMASCHIN, *Dogmatica* (Dogmatics), III, 3, p. 84.].

<sup>41</sup> J.-C. LARCHET, *Îndumnezeirea omului...* (The deification of man...), pp. 115–116.

<sup>42</sup> Panayotis NELLAS, *Omul, animal îndumnezeit* (Man, a deified animal), trad. diac. Ioan I. Ică jr, Ed. Deisis, Sibiu, 2009, pp. 158–159.

<sup>43</sup> Ierotheos VLACHOS, *Dogmatica empirică a Bisericii Ortodoxe Sobornicești* (The Empirical Dogmatics of the Catholic Orthodox Church), vol. I, trad. TATIANA PETRACHE, Ed. Doxologia, Iași, 2014, pp. 342–346.



"In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and God was the Word. It was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him; and without him nothing was made that was made" (John. 1:1-3). "Having made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, as he purposed in himself before, that all things should be made one in Christ, things in heaven and things on earth, all things in him" (Eph. 1:9-10). "This is the image of the unseen God, who was born before all flesh. For in him were all things made, things in heaven and on earth, things seen and unseen, whether thrones or rulers or beginners or masters. All things were made through Him and for Him. He is before all, and all things are established through Him; and He is the Head of the Body which is the Church. (Col. 1:15-18) "After that God spoke to our fathers by the prophets on many occasions and in many ways, in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also made the ages; who, being the brightness of his glory and the image of his being, and holding all things by the word of his power, after he had by himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of glory in the highest (. ...) (Heb. 1:2-3).

Therefore, the reasons of all creatures have both their origin and their unity in the divine Logos, and through them God is present in creation, and creation is in relation to Him and has its ultimate purpose in Him:

"Having the reasons of what was made existing in Him from before the ages, by His goodness He created out of nothing the visible and invisible building, as One who made all things with reason and wisdom in due time, both the general and the individual. For we believe that there prevails a reason for the creation of angels, a reason for each of the beings and powers that make up the world above, a reason for men, a reason for all those who have received existence from God, not to name them all individually. It is properly one and the same Reason, which by its infinity and transcendence is in itself and for itself unbounded and unbounded, being beyond all creation and the distinction and variety which exist and are conceived in it, showing itself and multiplying itself out of goodness in all that are in it, according to the measure of each, and recapitulating (bringing back) all in itself. Through Her exist and persist, and in Her are those made, since through Her they were made and to Her they were made; and persisting and moving, they partake of God. For since they were made by God, all things partake of God according to their measure, whether by understanding (mind), or by reason, or by feeling, or by vital movement, or by their natural or acquired skill, as the great reckons. God-discoverer Dionysius Areopagite"<sup>44</sup>

So we see that the reasons of the world are not just God's creative intentions. Their role does not only stop at bringing creatures into existence and preserving them, but they also represent the premises for the fulfilment of their purpose. They point to the goal that creation is meant to reach, namely union in grace with God, and they direct the world towards that goal.<sup>45</sup> The creation of the world according to these divine wills is the first step towards deification, and the free movement given by God to creation is the means by which it can advance towards the actualization of its potency, potency given by these logoi. When man, for example, reaches his final goal by working with divine grace and takes the world with him, then we can say that he is restored according to the logos according to which he was created; by placing his freedom in the work of God's will, he makes his existence

<sup>44</sup> SFÂNTUL MAXIM MĂRTURISITORUL, Ambigua, Io., 7, PG 91, 1080AB [SFÂNTUL MAXIM MĂRTURISITORUL, Ambigua, Io., 7, pp. 80–81].

<sup>45</sup> P. SHERWOOD, The Earlier Ambigua..., p. 169.



coincide with the normative principle according to which he was created,<sup>46</sup> as Saint Maxim the Confessor says:

"He who does not corrupt the reason (logos) of his being, pre-existent in God, becomes in God through mindfulness; he moves in God according to the reason (logos) of his good being, pre-existent in God, working through virtues, and lives in God according to the reason (logos) of his eternal being, pre-existent in God".

## CONCLUSIONS

Another thing we notice is that the divine plan for the deification of man and, through him, of all creation, leaves rational creatures (angels and humans) the option of not carrying it out, because this plan involves dialogue and love, and these require not only the divine initiative but also the response of the creature.<sup>47</sup> Therefore, the reasons of facts do not predetermine them, but only offer them the possibility of deification, and they can also move contrary to these logoi according to which they were created.<sup>48</sup>

It must also be said that the fulfilment of the potential given by the reasons for creation will not be fully realized until the end of time. Even if the actualization of the potentialities inscribed in each creature begins now, the completion of this process belongs to the eighth day.<sup>49</sup> This consummation at the end of time represents, for all creation, the attainment of the final goal towards which all creation is oriented and directed by its reasons:

"The deification is the concentration (*periohi*) and the end (*peras*) of all time and ages and of those in time and ages. And the concentration and end of times and ages and of those in them is the inseparable union of the true beginning and end in the saved."<sup>50</sup>

In conclusion, we can say that all created things can and should be seen from the perspective of the divine plan according to which they were created<sup>51</sup> and that the creation, becoming and salvation of creatures must be related to their final goal, which is deification.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> J.-C. LARCHET, Îndumnezeirea omului... (The deification of man...), pp. 120–121.

<sup>47</sup> SFÂNTUL MAXIM MĂRTURISITORUL, Ambigua, Io., 7, PG 91, 1073CD [trad. rom. SFÂNTUL MAXIM MĂRTURISITORUL, Ambigua, Io., 7, p. 74].

<sup>48</sup> J.-C. LARCHET, Îndumnezeirea omului... (The deification of man...), p. 123.

<sup>49</sup> SFÂNTUL MAXIM MĂRTURISITORUL, *Capita theologiae et aconomiae*, II, 25, PG 90, 1136B [trad. rom. SFÂNTUL MAXIM MĂRTURISITORUL, *Capete teologice sau gnostice (Theological or gnostic heads)*, II, 25, Filocalia 2, Ed. Apologeticum, București, 2005, p. 222.].

<sup>50</sup> SFÂNTUL MAXIM MĂRTURISITORUL, *Quaestiones ad Thalassium*, 59, PG 90, 609A [trad. rom. SFÂNTUL MAXIM MĂRTURISITORUL, *Răspunsuri către Talasie (Replies to Thalassie)*, 59, p. 347].

<sup>51</sup> P. SHERWOOD, *The Earlier Ambigua...*, p. 177.

<sup>52</sup> J.-C. LARCHET, Îndumnezeirea omului... (The deification of man...), p. 124.



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## ELEMENTS OF ORTHODOX TRIADOLOGY PRESENT IN THE WORK OF SAINT MAXIMUS THE CONFESSOR

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### ABSTRACT

*The Holy Father Maximus the Confessor represented the maximum of the theological discourse of his time, when the monothelite and monophysite heresies had reached maximum and worrying proportions. The present article has the purpose of bringing to light the triadological dimension of Saint Maximus' theology, so necessary in the context of the desire to calm the state of disturbance caused by the scission in the heart of the Church, which in fact represented also a separation at the social level.*

**Keywords:** *Incarnation; Triadology; Christology; appropriation; perichoresis; heresy; grace;*

### INTRODUCTION

Saint Maximus the Confessor, a great Holy Father of the 7th century, was a great defender of Orthodoxy against the threats of heresies (monothelism and monophysitism). His undoubted merit was that, in the context of the theological-spiritual crisis that was grinding both the spiritual growth of Christians and the fate of the Empire, being inspired by the Holy Spirit, "he preached the divine faith in a clear way and taught us to believe that Christ it is in two natures and with two volitions and energies".

### 1. TRINITY'S PERICHORESIS AND APPROPRIATION<sup>1</sup>

Saint Maximus affirms the following regarding the unity of divine Being (Nature), as well as the relations of *appropriation* of the three divine Persons: "*One is God, because divinity is one: Unity without beginning, simple, above nature, without parts and undivided. One and the same is unity and Trinity; The same whole unity, and the same whole Trinity; the same whole unity according to being(nature), and the same whole Trinity according to hypostases (hypostasis). For the Godhead (divinity) is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and divinity is in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.*"<sup>2</sup>

We therefore understand that all the Three divine Persons share equally in the quality of divinity, having equally the same being (nature). Having the same being (nature), They also have the same degree of holiness, if we can say so, understanding by this the fact that

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1 The divine appropriation is a characteristic specific only to the three divine Persons by virtue of which each individual divine Person (within the three divine Persons) can be defined using the characteristics of the Other two Persons. For example, I call God the Father the Creator of the world, but we can also call the Son and the Holy Spirit Creators, because they also participated alongside the Father in the act of creating the unseen and seen worlds from nothing, and man (The Creation 1: 26)

2 Saint Maximus the Confessor, The two hundred chapters on the knowledge of God and the economy of the incarnation of the Son of God, the second hundred., chapter 1, în vol. Pr. Prof. PhD. Dumitru Stăniloae, Philokalia 2, (București: Editura Harisma, 1993), 179



the Three Persons are perfect in holiness and are the source of holiness. The uncreated energies, that is, divine grace, that spring forth from the being/nature (common to the Three Divine Persons) and is given to men.

The sharing of grace with men is the very sanctification (holiness) of the latter. About the divinity of the three Persons, Saint Maximus affirms the fact that: "*The same (divinity) is complete in the whole Father; and the Father is whole in the whole divinity. And the same (divinity) is whole in the whole Son; and the Son is whole in the whole divinity. And the same (divinity) is whole in the whole Holy Spirit; and the Holy Spirit is whole in the whole divinity.*"<sup>3</sup> We understand from this that each divine person shares to the maximum the holiness proper to the divine nature, not being the case that this holiness will ever be consumed or exhausted, because (holiness) being an attribute of the Uncreated and Infinite God, it is uncreated and inexhaustible.

People can access God's holiness, thus sanctifying themselves, without thereby consuming or exhausting the *reserves* of holiness. Saints or even people who have already been saved and are in Heaven, following our prayers for them (for those who have not yet reached perfect holiness, but are still in a lower step in Heaven)<sup>4</sup> they can climb from glory to glory endlessly. Holiness, for the Saints, is not a static and boring existential state, but dynamic, sharing in the divine grace, that is alive and working.

The divinity is whole in each divine Person "*for the divinity is not divided, nor is God imperfect, (as) the Father or the Son or the Holy Spirit. But whole is the same (divinity), perfect, in perfect form, in the Father who is perfect; and the same (divinity) whole, perfect, in perfect form, in the Son who is perfect; and the same (divinity) whole, perfect, in perfect form, in the Spirit who is perfect.*"<sup>5</sup>

Concerning the *Trinity perichoresis*<sup>6</sup> it is confessed that: "*The Father is whole in the whole Son<sup>7</sup> and in the whole Holy Spirit in perfect manner(form); and whole is the Son in the whole Father and in the whole Holy Spirit, in perfect manner(form); and whole is the Holy Spirit in the whole Father and in the whole Son, in perfect manner(form). Therefore the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are (one) God. For one and the same is the being(nature), the power, and the work of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, neither existing, nor being understood one without the other.*"<sup>8</sup> Therefore, we understand the fact that all Three Divine Persons participated and always participate in all acts specific to the divine providence.

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3 Saint Maximus the Confessor, The two hundred chapters on the knowledge of God and the economy of the incarnation of the Son of God, the second hundred, chapter 1, 179

4 Prin această afirmație, nu sunt de acord cu doctrina greșită a existenței Purgatoriului, ca stare și loc de curățire a păcatelor, aflat între Rai și Iad.

5 Saint Maximus the Confessor, The two hundred chapters on the knowledge of God and the economy of the incarnation of the Son of God, the second hundred, chapter 1, 180

6 Perichoresis is the quality specific only to the Three Persons of the Holy Trinity, according to which They coexist in a state of mutual loving interpenetration or conpenetration, without identifying (confusing) One with the Other, but always remaining distinct by virtue of their own divine hypostasis.

7 The following verses are telling about the indwelling of the Father in the Son (perihoretically): "If you had known Me, you would also have known My Father; but from now on you know Him and have seen Him [...] Jesus said to him: I have been with you so long and you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father. How do you say: Show us the Father? [...] If I had not done among them things that no one else had done, they would not have sin; but now they have seen Me and hated Me and My Father" (John 14: 7, 9; 15: 24).

8 Saint Maximus the Confessor, The two hundred chapters on the knowledge of God and the economy of the incarnation of the Son of God, the second hundred, chapter 1, 180





In this sense we understand the fact that at the creation of the world, although we call the Father the *Creator*, yet the Son and the Holy Spirit equally participated in the act of creating the unseen and the seen world. Regarding the act of Redemption of the human race attributed to Christ (which includes the Conception, the Birth, the Persecution by Herod, the childhood in full obedience to His Mother and the Righteous Joseph, the Baptism, the messianic activity for three and a half years, The Holy Passions voluntarily assumed and made concrete by: appearing before Pilate and the crowd, scourging, mocking, enduring the betrayals of Peter and Judas, Crucifixion, mocking by the fact that Christ was crucified naked on the Cross on purpose, impaling in the ribs, the tasting of vinegar and gall offered as anesthetic, the burial, the Descent into Hell with the soul, the Resurrection and the Ascension to Heaven), we must take into account that the Father and the Holy Spirit also participated actively and equally in these, through the Son who is of the same nature with Them.

Also, regarding the Descent of the Holy Spirit, this was not just a saving action specific to the Holy Spirit *alone*, but was a co-action, with the Father and the Son equally participating, revealing Himself through the Spirit. All sanctification prayers are not attributed only to the Holy Spirit, but bear *the Trinitarian seal*, exemplified within the ephonyms that have a doxological character equally attributed to the Persons of the Most Holy Trinity.

In this sense, we only mention the Prayer for the blessing of the willow on Palm Sunday, whose formula is: "*These stalwarts are blessed and sanctified, by sprinkling them with this holy water, in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.*"<sup>9</sup> and the Prayer of the blessing of the bread which is popularly called *Pascha*: "*Almighty God and Lord [...] look to this bread and bless it (so we address the Father) and sanctify it. That You are the source of blessing and the giver of healings and to You, the Father without beginning, we raise glory, together with Your Only-Begotten Son and Your Most Holy and good and life-giving Spirit, now and ever and to the ages of ages. Amen.*"<sup>10</sup>

## 2. CHRISTOLOGY HAS ITS ORIGINS IN TRIADODOLOGY

The eternal Logos - Christ – has become man and thus revealed, to angels and men, "*the secret eternally hidden and unknown to angels*"<sup>11</sup> the Father's economy: "*The great counsel of God and the Father is the silent and unknown mystery of the economy, which, fulfilling it through the Incarnation, the only-begotten Son discovered, becoming an Angel (Angel in a figurative sense, i.e. messenger) of the great pre-eternal counsel of God-the-Father. In the same way, becomes an angel of the great pre-eternal counsel of God the Father the one who knows the reason (meaning) of the mystery and rises endlessly by deed and reason above all so much so, that he reaches the One who had descended so much.*"<sup>12</sup>

In other words, man can too, and is even meant to discover the divine mysteries, which he can share with others as understandings, purposes, reasons or divine meanings that bring holiness. Spiritual people and the holy father (who receives confessions) in turn, become *angels of great counsel*, in a figurative sense, as messengers of God among people.

9 Liturghier (Missal), (Bucharest: The Biblical and Orthodox Mission Institute Publishing House, 2012), 416

10 Liturghier, 417

11 Catavasier or small Octoechos, (Bucharest: The Biblical and Orthodox Mission Institute of the Romanian Orthodox Church Publishing House, 2002), 131

12 Saint Maximus the Confessor, The two hundred chapters on the knowledge of God and the economy of the incarnation of the Son of God, the second hundred,, chapter 23, 187



Christ is the mediator between the Father and people, and through His Ascension to Heaven he shows us the fact that our true homeland is the heavenly one: *"For those who search according to the flesh the teaching about God, the Lord does not ascend to the Father; but for those who search it according to the spirit, through contemplations, He ascended to the Father. Let us not, therefore, hold down forever the One who came down for the love of men; but let us go up to the Father together with Him, leaving the earth and the things of the earth, so that He will not say to us what was said to the Jews who remained unrighteous: "I am going where you cannot come" (John 8: 21) for without the Word, it is impossible to reach the Father of the Word."*<sup>13</sup> The Ascension of the Lord, fixed in history at the time of 40 days after the Resurrection, should not discourage us, but on the contrary, it should be the cause of giving spiritual vitality that propels us towards an even greater spiritual aschesis. When he talks about detaching the heart from earthly things, Saint Maximus wants to emphasize the fact that if we want to follow Christ, we must not get confused (entangled) with the affairs of life that drag us down from a spiritual point of view.

Thus, man must regain his status as *anthropos*<sup>14</sup> through repentance and his status as *Israel*. We specify here the fact that in the biblical Hebrew language, the name *Israel* was actually a phrase, respectively *Iš* (man/mind), *ra* (who sees/looks at Him), *el* (God).<sup>15</sup> The Most Holy Trinity did not isolate themselves from humanity after the fall, but maintained contact with it more indirectly, through the Prophets and other holy men. This is because God is eternal interpersonal communion, which enables Him to directly enter into a relationship of love with humans who are beings conditioned by time.<sup>16</sup> The one who fulfills the divine commandments, receives in himself the grace of the presence of the Most Holy Trinity in a mysterious and felt way, because: *"The word of God and the Father is hidden in each of His commandments; and God the Father is whole and undivided in His whole Word in natural manner. He who therefore receives the divine commandment and fulfills it, receives the Word of God found in it. And he who received the Word through the commandments, also received through Him the Father who is in Him naturally"*<sup>17</sup>, and the Holy Spirit, who is in Him naturally. For he said: *"Amen I say to you, whoever receives the One whom I will send receives Me; and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me"* (John 13: 20). So the one who received a commandment and fulfilled it, secretly received the Holy Trinity."<sup>18</sup> Regarding the heresy of the proceeding of the Holy Spirit and from the Son, Saint Maximus did not appropriate it. He regarded the Father as *"the only source of the (proceeding of) the Holy Spirit."*<sup>19</sup>

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13 Saint Maximus the Confessor, The two hundred chapters on the knowledge of God and the economy of the incarnation of the Son of God, the second hundred, chapter 47, 195

14 In the Greek language, the term *o anthropos* means one who looks up and tends to the heavenly heights.

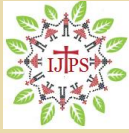
15 Elder Joseph the Vatopedine, Vatopedine Catechesis, (Iași: Doxologia Publishing House, 2021), 264

16 Pr. Prof. PhD. Dumitru Stăniloae, Orthodox Dogmatic Theology, vol. 1, (Bucharest: The Biblical and Orthodox Mission Institute Publishing House, 2010), 183

17 By virtue of the unity of divine Being (Nature).

18 Saint Maximus the Confessor, The two hundred chapters on the knowledge of God and the economy of the incarnation of the Son of God, the second hundred, chapter 71, 203

19 Jean-Claude Larchet, Saint Maximus the Confessor, mediator între Răsărit și Apus, (Iași, Editura Doxologia, 2010), 62



In his work entitled *Short interpretation of the prayer Our Father*, Saint Maximus states: "*The teaching of Christ exhorts us*<sup>20</sup>, *who are called by grace through faith to the knowledge of the truth, to know a single Nature and power of the Godhead, that is, a single God, contemplated in the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, subsisting essentially as a single uncaused Mind, begetting the only Word without beginning, subsisting after nature, and source of the only eternal Life subsisting by nature as the Holy Spirit. It teaches us to know the Trinity in unity and the unity in Trinity.*"<sup>21</sup> From the Lord's Prayer (*Our Father's Prayer*), given by the Lord Christ to the Apostles and all believers, to the express desire of the disciples to have a model of prayer even from the One who is its recipient, so, from this prayer of divine origin, we learn that Christ is in a relationship by nature with the Father and the Holy Spirit.

Right from the start, Christ calls God our Father (Matthew 6: 9), wanting to emphasize the fact that He is the Son of the Father by Nature, and we humans are His sons only by grace. On the other hand, when we say the first request of the seven present in this prayer, that is, Hallowed be Your name, the Holy Spirit is invoked indirectly through Whom the name of God is sanctified in us, not in the sense that it would not be holy enough (let it not be believed that we contribute to the increase of God's holiness!), but in the sense that through our good deeds God must be glorified, according to the words of Christ: "*Let your light shine before men, so that they see your good deeds and glorify your Father who is in heaven*" (Matthew 5: 16).

## CONCLUSIONS

From the above, we note that the Holy Father Maximus the Confessor paid special attention to the triadological doctrine, knowing that in the context of his era, triadological disputes were the order of the day, because the Monothelite heresy and the Monophysite heresy represented a subtle distortion of understanding in the orthodox form of the intratrinitarian relationships. Saint Maximus, referring to the eternal coexistence, before all ages, of all three divine Persons, testifies that the Son and the Spirit did not appear after the Father, somewhat after Him, but that all three divine Hypostases exist *by nature, from eternity*. In other words, there was *no time* when the three divine Persons did not exist simultaneously.

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20 In order to avoid a possible pleonasm, we have replaced the term teaches us, present in the original Maximian writing, with the term exhorts us, in the sense that through teaching we are urged towards the practice of faith.

21 Saint Maximus the Confessor, Brief interpretation of the Our Father prayer, in vol. Pr. Prof. PhD. Dumitru Stăniloae, Philokalia 2, (Bucharest: Harisma Publishing House, 1993), 274



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## THE RATIONAL EXPRESSION OF THE SUPREME BEING IN KANTIAN THEORETICAL PHILOSOPHY VERSUS THE EXPERIENCE OF THE PERSONAL GOD IN THEOLOGY

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### ABSTRACT

*Man has always aspired towards the highest knowledge. Thus philosophy, as the science of sciences, has tried, starting from what could be expressed rationally, to explain the existence or the possibility of man's knowledge of the existence of the Supreme Being, as designated by Immanuel Kant. The questions that can be raised are: can human reason grasp the transcendental meanings of the Supreme Being? Can philosophical reason be overcome by theological knowledge, as a result of experiencing the Personal God? The answer to these questions can only be expressed through an analysis of Kant's rational arguments alongside the mode of knowledge proposed by theology.*

**Keywords:** *Kant, theoretical philosophy, God, theology;*

### INTRODUCTION

For the German philosopher, expressing the idea of God starts from the rejection of any traditional meaning of this philosophical concept. The analysis of his work on this topic reveals a criticism directly expressed in the use of this concept in traditional metaphysics, Kant's desire being to highlight the limits of reason and implicitly the limits of the possibility of scientific knowledge.

The idea of God, or the Supreme Being as it is referred to in Kantian philosophy, is a central topic of his research, as he radically criticizes the way the Supreme Being is perceived in philosophical research. His critique focuses mainly on dogmatic metaphysics, metaphysics that consider God to be the absolute principle.

Immanuel Kant is therefore the philosopher who seeks to express the possibility of the existence of the supreme Being by denying any theological argument. Using the transcendental method, Kant expresses the limits of reason in understanding this concept, concluding that rationality cannot embrace the Idea of pure reason and cannot integrate it into certain patterns of knowledge, hence the limits of knowledge.

### 1. EXPRESSING THE CONCEPT OF GOD IN THE KANTIAN VIEW

When we examine Immanuel Kant's philosophy, we see that the central theme of the practical section of his philosophy is the Idea of God, while in the theoretical section he brings to the fore the Idea of pure reason. This pure reason is also referred to by Kant as the supreme Being, the latter being the necessary expression of an ideal, which may not exist in reality. Practically speaking, the idea of God refers to an ideal concept of existence, which might not exist in reality.



The idea of the supreme Being can be sketched at the level of reason as an unconditioned whole, and the object of this ideal relates imperatively only to reason and not to experience. By referring eminently to reason, we speak of the supreme being as of *ens summum*, for human rationality cannot think of a being above the latter<sup>1</sup>.

Everything that can be comprehended by reason exists in subordination to the Supreme Being. This relation, as Kant points out, cannot have an objective nature, but only a formal one, that of the idea in relation to the concept, hence again the idea that the supreme Being can exist only in intellect, not also in reality.

It follows from this formal character of the idea in relation to the concept that human rationality cannot know the existence of the supreme Being. Also, the possibility of the non-existence of the supreme Being in reality cannot be demonstrated argumentatively because of the limitation of reason. Thinking of the Supreme Being as the supreme reality inevitably leads to the idea of God in the sense of transcendental theology.

From the perspective of the analysis of Kantian theoretical philosophy, the Supreme Being is merely the ideal "in which the diversity of intuitions is fulfilled"<sup>2</sup>, but she does not exist in reality, so she cannot influence the determination of things. Speculative thinking defines the Supreme Being first as a representation, then as an experienceable object of reality, and finally in her personified version as God. Kant totally rejects speculative thinking as a misrepresentation of the supreme Being, as she is not "the supreme condition of the determination of things"<sup>3</sup>.

The rationality of the human person builds its arguments of demonstration starting from what is contingent, looking for a cause that is a condition, naturally arriving at the cause that necessarily exists. This necessarily existing cause is defined by reason as "the original principle of all things"<sup>4</sup>.

#### a) The Ontological Argument in Kant's Philosophy

Although the concept of pure reason expresses by itself the necessity of the existence of a supreme being, yet it cannot be demonstrated, remaining at the level of an Idea. In Kant's thought, the ontological argument is based upon two characteristics by which it could be explained:

1. The expressing of the impossibility of proving the non-existence of the Supreme Being
2. The importance of using concrete examples in the demonstration

The German philosopher points out that such argumentation, which refers to certain categories of judgments, for example those of geometry, without appealing to concrete facts, can lead to erroneous conclusions. The principle of identity can therefore define an object as given, and the intellect, taking it as such, presents it as being necessary. It follows therefore that the supreme Being, if received by the intellect as a given, and therefore absolutely necessary, is conceived arbitrarily, and that She, the Being, does not exist in reality, but has a form only in the intellect that thinks her. The final conclusion of such a concept is that it can exist if it does not contradict itself. However, by the identity judgement it can be concluded that there is an imminent danger of contradiction when the predicate is suppressed. Suppression, on the other hand, of the subject naturally leads to the suppression of the predicate, and here there can be no question of contradiction, for the thing in itself does not

<sup>1</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critica rațiunii pure*, București, IRI, 1998, p.448.

<sup>2</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critica rațiunii pure...*, p. 449.

<sup>3</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critica rațiunii pure...*, p. 451.

<sup>4</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critica rațiunii pure...*, p. 453.



exist. This analysis applied to the supreme Being denotes an error of reasoning since the existence of the object of the concept is inserted by reason into the possible concept. The suppression of the concept leads to the suppression of its content, and therefore of the existence of the object, which would lead to a contradiction, since the supreme Being is considered by the intellect to be absolutely necessary. The laws of knowledge require by themselves that the judgment of reason be synthetic. No such judgement can be made of the Supreme Being. There remains, therefore, the analytical judgment, but the latter is based upon thought and not upon experience.

Kant concludes that the Supreme Being can only be the subject of thought, but human reason cannot judge the existence of something without recourse to sensible intuition. So, Kant does not seek to argue for the non-existence of the Supreme Being on the grounds that arguing for it would generate confusion to the same degree as trying to prove her existence. According to the German thinker, proving the existence or non-existence of the supreme Being brings no benefit to knowledge "since the judgment about the existence of the supreme Being is in fact an analytical one, aiming only at the possibility of this concept"<sup>5</sup>.

#### **b) The Cosmological Argument in Kantian Philosophy**

The presentation of the cosmological argument in Kantian philosophy starts from the premise presented by Leibniz: "if something exists, there must also be an absolutely necessary being. But at least I do exist, so there must also exist an absolutely necessary being"<sup>6</sup>. The basis of this argument therefore belongs to the category of natural causality. This causality is defined by the idea that every phenomenon must imperatively have a cause that determines it, and this causality continues up to the absolutely necessary cause, a cause uncaused by anything outside itself. The cosmological argument, referring to the world, in the Kantian view, must omit the empirical qualities of the objects, and by this characteristic it differs from the physical-theological argument.

According to the cosmological argument, analysed from the perspective of the German philosopher, the supreme Being must be "completely determined by her concept"<sup>7</sup>, thus necessarily concluding her existence. Kant points out that this argument also turns out to be in error like the ontological one, being in fact another form of proof of the ontological one. The German philosopher does not take into account the necessary **experience** for this argument, considering it irrelevant in the demonstration of the existence of the supreme Being, since empirical data do not provide a clear, rational structure of the properties that determine the supreme Being. Kantian philosophy argues in this case also that the mentioned properties are only at the conceptual level and cannot be supported in the demonstration that must be made through the cosmological argument. Moreover, the use of the principle of causality is only applicable in the phenomenal realm, "in the demonstration of the existence of a being that transcends the empirical"<sup>8</sup>.

It follows from the above that the German philosopher, in the cosmological argument, admits the possibility of the existence of a supreme Being, but only at the level of thought, and he cannot achieve the demonstration of the fact that the supreme Being necessarily exists, because the limitation of reason reveals his inability to identify a concept with absolute necessity.

<sup>5</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critica rațiunii pure...*, p. 461.

<sup>6</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critica rațiunii pure...*, p. 463.

<sup>7</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critica rațiunii pure...*, p. 463.

<sup>8</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critica rațiunii pure...*, p. 466.



### c) The Physico-Theological Argument in Kant's Philosophy

In the philosophy of the great German thinker, the physico-theological argument is based upon determined experience. This argument starts from the fact that the phenomena of the given world are organised by a rational Principle. It follows from this that there is a cause of the given world as intelligence based on causality through freedom<sup>9</sup>. Starting from the present order in the organisation of the world, it is concluded that there is a rational cause. For the definition of this cause to be complete, it is imperative that it should hold everything in itself. Kant adds to this idea by noting that "superlatives of perfection are assumed by the observer in proportion to the size of the things observed"<sup>10</sup>, from which it follows that the relationship between that which is determined and the absolute of the supreme Being is achievable only on the empirical level.

For Kant, the recourse of the physico-theological argument to the foundations of the cosmological argument and implicitly to those of the ontological argument, as we have pointed out above, cannot demonstrate the existence of the necessary supreme Being, since it is still made up of transcendental concepts<sup>11</sup>. The conclusion Kant reaches is that the existence of the Supreme Being can only be demonstrated by a synthetic judgment based upon forms of sensible intuition. It follows that the existence of the Supreme Being, in the view of Kantian philosophy, is only an ideal of pure reason.

### d) Conclusions of Kantian thinking on the demonstration of the existence of the supreme Being and his reference to theology

The German philosopher, by the arguments presented so far, demonstrates, from the perspective of philosophical reason, that the existence of the necessary supreme Being is impossible to be asserted. However, he does not totally exclude the possibility of the existence of the Supreme Being in the form of the ideal of pure reason. According to speculative reason, he emphasises the importance of the existence of such a being for the foundation of unity, this Supreme Cause being, at the rational level, the universal organiser.

The problem that Kant points out is that reason transforms this formal principle into a hypostatic principle. It follows that "the ideal of human reason is a formal condition of thought, not a material and hypostatic condition of existence"<sup>12</sup>.

Analysing the theological arguments, Kant systematizes them by presenting two main types of theology:

- a) Theology that emphasizes reason
- b) Theology that focuses on revelation

Depending on the various forms it may take, theology in Kant's view can be transcendental and natural. In the first form, the object is expressed by purely transcendental concepts, and in the second form, nature-related concepts are used.

Following this classification, Kant concludes that the necessary supreme Being can only be an ideal of speculative reason, and that the existence in reality of such a Being cannot be philosophically demonstrated. All predicates that strictly pertain to the transcendental sphere can only belong to transcendental theology. Kant's final view is that such transcendental theology adds nothing to knowledge, because God cannot be known through intellect.

<sup>9</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critica rațiunii pure...*, p. 466.

<sup>10</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critica rațiunii pure...*, p. 467.

<sup>11</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critica rațiunii pure...*, p. 476.

<sup>12</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critica rațiunii pure...*, p. 477.





## 2. EXPERIENCING THE PERSONAL GOD IN THEOLOGY

The human person is the dichotomous being constituted by God through a special act. Being by creation dichotomous, the human person cannot be defined by her rational side alone, but she remains at the same time a mystery.

Rationality will never be able to express the mystery, for it is the mystery of the crown of creation that actually explains rationality. Being limited, the reason can only capture small elements of the mystery of man, the mystery having as its first condition to be experienced and only afterwards to be explained by means of reason. The mystery, therefore, invites reason to participate in the discovery of God by experiencing his love, so that it can then create, as far as the intellect is able, the necessary information about the existence of God and the possibility of the human person to live in Him.

The balanced relationship between the rationality and spirituality of the human being has the benefit of excluding both what can be defined as total apophaticism and also the autonomy of reason. The correct application of this relationship has the effect of facilitating "the personal encounter between God and man, in a continuous dynamic towards eschaton"<sup>13</sup>.

There can be no confusion between the knowledge that philosophy speaks about and dogma, but neither can there be a separation of the two. Philosophy, by the strictly rational analysis it carries out, cancels the transcendence of faith and implicitly the revelation as a given. The dichotomy of the human nature cannot therefore be separated, making use of reason alone in the analysis, thus cancelling out the wholeness of man, for through his spiritual side he always tends towards the transcendence of God. Through its spiritual side, the matter of the body can know the possibility of being spiritualized. Man's soul, being interior to the body, can transfigure the latter, as Father Stăniloae pointed out in *The Orthodox Theology about the mystery of transfigured matter*. The matter and the soul of the human person cannot be thought of separately, as they are complementary elements belonging to the same reality. There can be no separation between these constitutive elements of man, but only a distinction.

For a correct understanding of anthropology, it is imperative to have recourse to what theology defines as the spiritual dimension, as it contains the demonstration of the possibility of the transfiguration of man in the light of the grace of Christ.<sup>14</sup> Through the collaboration between reason and the spiritual dimension of the knowledge of God, the whole universe no longer presents itself as coming from nowhere and heading towards nowhere for, through its correct relation to the Creator, through the uncreated divine energies present in creation, both philosophy and theology actually present in one sense the aspiration towards absolute knowledge. This knowledge can be experienced in God, man always reaching out to Him, living in His personal love, God Himself being the Trinity of Persons. Thus, through his spiritual side, man goes beyond the limits imposed by reason, fulfilling his vocation to reach the state of deification through grace. Moreover, the world itself has a rational structure, a structure given by the Divine Reason present in it, through the uncreated divine energies, and this rational structure of the world requires to be discovered by man, in the cooperation of reason and spiritual experience.

The process of knowledge cannot be limited only by the reason used by philosophy, as man has the duty to make a balanced synthesis between the cataphatic and apophatic

<sup>13</sup> Pr. Cristinel Ioja, *Rațiune și mistică în Teologia Ortodoxă*, Ed. Universității Aurel Vlaicu, Arad, 2008, p. 130.

<sup>14</sup> Pr. Conf. Univ. Dr. Ștefan Buchiu, *Dogmă și Teologie*, vol. II, Editura Sigma, București, 2006, pp. 101-105.



aspects of reality. These two aspects are found at every level of existence, the difference between them being only in the depth and method of knowledge. Only in this way can knowledge bring real added value, giving up one-sided approaches, thus demonstrating existence not only through the "rational, analytical aspect, but above all in the theonomical, mystical, and mystery dimension."<sup>15</sup>

By applying this way of knowing, which encompasses both reason and the mystical experience through the soul, man will understand the correct way of relating both to God and to the universe. Limiting knowledge to reason alone implies a regression of the human nature, and man thereby becomes the self-centred, all-sufficient being who limits knowledge and truth to his own rational limitation.

Kant's philosophy, by its strict recourse to what can be demonstrated rationally, can only have a hint of the existence and mystery of God, but can never express the full truth, which is only proper to Revelation. From a theological perspective, authentic knowledge requires from the start the involvement in its process of all the potentialities of human nature.

#### **a) Knowing God through experiencing interpersonal communion**

Anthropological analysis shows, starting from the dichotomous structure of the human person, that in order to reach the knowledge of God, not of His being which remains totally unknowable to the human being, but through Revelation, it is imperative to experience interpersonal communion.

The act of the incarnation of the Logos results in the encounter between God's will to manifest himself personally and the cognitive structure of the human person, who possesses within himself all the aptitudes necessary for knowing the Creator<sup>16</sup>. This idea, taken from Saint John, emphasizes that the act of knowing God requires a state of communion with the Creator, a state human reason aspires to. For man to progress in knowledge, it is necessary to strengthen him through grace, without which the synergy between the Divine and the human cannot be achieved.<sup>17</sup> The knowledge of God through personal experience is based upon the free and personal manifestation of God and the participation of the human person through reason and faith in this synergetic act.

The Kantian analysis presented above, due to rational limitation, turns God into an impersonal object, and knowledge cannot rise above the formal distinctions resulting from the categories that human reason achieves. This substantialist philosophy creates a rift between God and man in terms of both knowledge and the possibility of human beings to experience life in Him. Philosophy has not grasped in its analysis what theology defines as God's dynamic presence, through divine grace, in human persons and in the totality of the created.

Through His attributes, God actually descends into the mind of man, offering to reason through this descent the meanings of transcendence which have their source only in the divine being<sup>18</sup>. Through the divine attributes, the human being is called to experience life in God while still on earth, through uncreated divine energies. The fact that man is created by God means that he has the necessary attributes for apophatic perception of the Creator.

<sup>15</sup> Pr. Cristinel Ioja, *Rațiune și mistică...*, p. 317-318.

<sup>16</sup> Pr. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Cunoașterea lui Dumnezeu la Sfântul Ioan Gură de Aur, în Ortodoxia*, IX, 1957, 4, p. 563.

<sup>17</sup> Sfântul Ioan Gură de Aur, *Omilia a III-a. Despre necunoașterea lui Dumnezeu*, trad. de W.A. Prager, Editura Herald, București, 2004, p. 564.

<sup>18</sup> Pr. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Cunoașterea lui Dumnezeu...*, p. 565.



”The attributes of God are the expression of the perception of the infinite through finite concepts”<sup>19</sup>. Starting from the Divine attributes, the Persons of the Holy Trinity can be defined cataphatically, ”as eternal plenary existence, bearing within themselves the structure of the supreme interpersonal communion”<sup>20</sup>.

The persons of the Holy Trinity and the uncreated divine grace are therefore by definition apophatic in nature, requiring *per se* the participation of human persons in living in God's love. It follows that knowledge of God has a personal character, since God defines Himself as the Trinity of Persons. The apophaticism of the Person is particularly important, as it is reconciled with the revelation of Self which is defined by apophaticism. ”The Persons of the Holy Trinity are free to reveal themselves, remaining precisely in the act of apophatic revelation”<sup>21</sup>.

In the knowledge of God, it is more important to analyse the apophaticism of the Persons of the Holy Trinity than the apophaticism of the divine being, for the being opens herself to knowledge through the Person, through the uncreated divine energy that the human person can perceive. Thus, ”the Being that remains beyond experience, but we can nevertheless feel her as the source of all that we experience, subsists in the Person”<sup>22</sup>. It follows that all acts of the divine Persons, through uncreated energies, are experienceable by human persons. Therefore, in the process of knowing God, philosophical reason is not enough, for apophatic knowledge has the Person as its foundation.

Divine Being cannot be approached strictly rationally, as Kantian philosophy attempts to, for this can only mean introducing an obvious separation between Being and Person. The theological knowledge of God is based upon the dialogue between human persons and the Divine Persons, thus on the real, sincere dialogue between man and God.

## **b) Knowing God through Asceticism and Mysticism**

This form of knowledge aims at the union by grace of man with God, and man's knowledge of God resulting from this mystical union is impossible to be expressed within the limits imposed by the reason of philosophy. The advancement of the human person with the help of divine grace towards the state of deification is possible through asceticism. The work of the ascetic exercises brings with it the confirmation of the mystical experience, a life which the sure reason, deprived of the spiritual elements, cannot experience and understand.

The human person's journey towards deification by grace has three stages: purification, enlightenment, and perfection. Only through the fulfilment of these stages can one speak of experiencing life in Christ at the highest level, certainly within the limits of human nature.<sup>23</sup>

The experience of this way of living by the human person shows that the specificity of knowing God through asceticism and mysticism is based upon the mystery of the Holy Trinity. This is why Father Stăniloae affirms that this form of knowledge ”does not

<sup>19</sup> Pr. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Cunoașterea lui Dumnezeu...*, p. 566.

<sup>20</sup> Pr. Ștefan Buchiu, *Cunoașterea apofatică în gândirea părintelui Dumitru Stăniloae*, Ed. Basilica, București, 2013, p. 68.

<sup>21</sup> Pr. Ștefan Buchiu, *Cunoașterea apofatică...*, p. 85.

<sup>22</sup> Pr. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, Vol. I, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1978, p.123.

<sup>23</sup> Pr. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Teologia Morală Ortodoxă*, Vol. III, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1981, p. 31.



rationalize the Mystery of God..., it does not keep God distant from us, nor does it lead us to merge with Him...."<sup>24</sup>.

The elements of knowledge through asceticism and mysticism are called virtues, and they change the human person in a real, ontological way. Every virtue freely and consciously practised by man represents a step forward on the path of perfection leading to the experience of life in Christ. Humility, for example, "is a giant leap towards knowledge..., it is the awareness that divine infinity pervades everything and everyone around us"<sup>25</sup>.

Once in a state of purification, man lives a life in Christ through contemplation, going beyond the limits imposed by philosophical reason. In this state man no longer lives for himself but, through selfless love, acquires a new vision of the world, knowing the real meaning of all that is created, and this knowledge "is the first prerequisite for the knowledge of God"<sup>26</sup>.

The second premise of knowledge according to the ascetical-mystical analysis consists in man's reception of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. This denotes that the human person has reached the state of enlightenment. Now the knowledge of God is achieved not through reason, but through the power of the Holy Spirit as the Person of the Holy Trinity. This kind of knowledge means "the knowledge of the mind returned to its spirit from the dispersion of the surface..., all things become transparent to the one who knows in the spirit"<sup>27</sup>.

The knowledge of reality beyond the materiality of the world, subjected to strictly rational analysis, is based upon spiritual experience, the direct, free, and conscious participation of the human person in the life in God, through the grace of the Holy Spirit. Moreover, the work of the Holy Spirit cannot be excluded from the process of knowledge, for through the act of supernatural revelation, the Holy Spirit gives man the divine grace necessary for deification, and thus for experiencing life in God. Therefore, the knowledge of God is achieved through the Holy Spirit, but this knowledge imperatively requires man to come out of the state of sin. Submission to sin means threatening the soul and subjecting it to matter, and such a soul, subject to sin, cannot raise himself, by grace, to the knowledge that is above nature.

True ascetic-mystical knowledge of God can only be achieved through the process of man's purification, and without this process assumed by man, all knowledge is strictly limited to rational possibilities. It is through asceticism and mysticism that the "encounter in love with the Personal God really takes place"<sup>28</sup>.

Through prayer, man goes beyond the materiality of the world, beyond intellectual knowledge, and thus reaches an apophatic state, the prerequisite for the encounter between creature and uncreated light. "It is an apophaticism experienced in an existential way of the presence of God"<sup>29</sup>. Through prayer and faith, man's knowledge does not remain at the stage of "rational exercise, nor at an impersonal pantheistic absolute in the Neoplatonic sense, but believes in the Personal God"<sup>30</sup>.

<sup>24</sup> Pr. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Teologia Morală...*, p. 31.

<sup>25</sup> Pr. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Teologia Morală...*, p. 31

<sup>26</sup> Pr. Ștefan Buchiu, *Cunoașterea apofatică...*, p. 192.

<sup>27</sup> Pr. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Teologia Morală...*, p. 162.

<sup>28</sup> Pr. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Iisus Hristos, lumina lumii și îndumnezeitorul omului*, Editura Anastasia, București, 1993, p. 132.

<sup>29</sup> Pr. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Teologia Morală...*, p. 200.

<sup>30</sup> Sfântul Grigorie Palama, *Despre sfânta lumina*, în *Filocalia*, vol. VII, trad. de Pr. Dumitru Stăniloae, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1977, p. 341.



The apophatic knowledge that man can attain through asceticism and mysticism, going beyond the limits of reason, can be defined as "an ecstasy of inner silence, a total cessation of thought before the divine mystery"<sup>31</sup>. The finality of such knowledge is achieved by seeing God in the light. Here God's closeness to man is ineffable, the latter experiencing the Creator's love in a real way, experiencing it as a power through which man overcomes the limits of his being and participates in the life in God. Therefore, love is the highest degree of knowledge of God, it is the power through which the perfect approach between the divine and the human takes place.

## CONCLUSIONS

From all the above we can conclude that man has a dichotomous structure by nature, and this structure cannot be divided even in the process of knowledge. If Kantian theoretical philosophy aimed at demonstrating that the Supreme Being is in fact an ideal concept of existence, but which in reality may not exist, theology relates to God in a personalistic way, i.e. the human person relates to her Creator, who is the Trinity of Persons. Basically, in Kantian philosophy, the supreme Being, because she cannot be grasped by reason and implicitly by philosophical demonstration, it leads to the denial of her existence. Kant's attempt to penetrate the transcendent mystery of God by rational demonstration alone has proved to reach a wrong conclusion, in the sense that if rationally, using the intellect, we cannot build up a demonstration of the existence of the supreme Being, it does not mean that God does not really exist.

The theological demonstration, which starts from the dichotomy of the human being, proves that the transformation of God into an impersonal power is the premise of the loss, in the philosophy of the German thinker, of the very subject of the demonstration. The existence of a Personal God experienced through theological means brings a plus to knowledge, not only because God, through the act of Revelation, makes Himself knowable to human nature, but also because man, having emerged from the bonds of materiality, can easily overcome the limitation caused by reason, thus experiencing the live in the love of God through uncreated divine grace.

Thus theology, by expressing the nature of the person and by its asceticism and mysticism, demonstrates man's ability to raise himself to a transcendent knowledge of God, where He is the absolute love the crown of His creation naturally strives for.

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<sup>31</sup> Pr. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Teologia Morală...*, p. 211.



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- [9] Stăniloae, Pr. Dumitru, Iisus Hristos, lumina lumii și îndumnezeitorul omului, Editura Anastasia, București, 1993
- [10] Stăniloae, Pr. Dumitru, Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă, Vol. I, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1978





divine qualities—violate the prohibition? Two, the Tree of Eternity would prolong the life of the eater. Why would God—being Merciful—prohibit the eating of such a beneficent tree? Three, if it is contended that God wanted to test Adam, then question arises why test by prohibition of a beneficent tree? It would be more rational to prohibit some harmful substance like alcohol. Four, why was Adam made a Prophet after repentance? That would mean that sinning and repenting stands on a higher pedestal than not-sinching and act as an encouragement to sin. Thus, so interpreted, there arises a conflict between sound belief and reason.

We make an alternative reading of the related verses to resolve this conflict. We propose that God wanted Adam to eat of the tree. Adam's sin was that he did not eat it forthwith. God forgave him for this minor sin, and made him a Prophet in the light of the major advancement made by Adam by eating of the tree. In this way we resolve the conflict between sound belief in the Quran and reason.

### Method

In his seminal article Ahmad von Denffer lays out the conditions (in sequence of importance) that author of a Tafsir must fulfill:

1. Be sound in belief ('aqida).
2. Well-grounded in the knowledge of Arabic and its rules as a language.
3. Well-grounded in other sciences that are connected with the study of the Qur'an (e.g. 'ilm al-riwaya).
4. Have the ability for precise comprehension.
5. Abstain from the use of mere opinion.
6. Begin the Tafsir of the Qur'an with the Qur'an.
7. Seek guidance from the words and explanations of the Prophet.
8. Refer to the reports from the sahaba.
9. Consider the reports from the tabi'un.
10. Consult the opinions of other eminent scholars.<sup>4</sup>

Unquestionably, "sound belief" is the first and foremost of the requirement for a tafsir. Elaborating on this point editors of the *Australian Journal of Islamic Studies* referring to Bediuzzaman Said Nursi (1877-1960) say, "the enemies of Muslims are not other religions, political factions, scientific advances, etc., but ignorance, poverty and disunity. Against these enemies, the Muslim should wage jihad with the weapons of knowledge, science and hard work."<sup>5</sup> Thus "knowledge and science" are lifted up from No 3 to higher in the sequence. Again, Mahsheed Ansari says in the same *Journal*, "Nursi's and Iqbal's prophetologies were reconstructed with the continuing notions that had developed in the classical period, with a 'new methodology' of prominently adopting scientific and rational sciences."<sup>6</sup> Following these exegetes, we walk on the two legs of "sound belief" as noted by von Denffer and "knowledge, science and hard work" as noted by Nursi and Iqbal in making the current interpretation.

<sup>4</sup> Ahmad von Denffer, An Introduction to the Sciences of the Qur'an, [https://islamicbulletin.org/free\\_downloads/quran/ul\\_umal\\_quran.pdf](https://islamicbulletin.org/free_downloads/quran/ul_umal_quran.pdf).

<sup>5</sup> David R. Law, "Editor's Introduction: Said Nursi and Prophethood." *Australian Journal of Islamic Studies* 2: 2 (2017), 1-5.

<sup>6</sup> Mahsheed Ansari, "Nursi And Iqbal On Mi'Rāj: The Metaphysical Dimension Of The Prophet's Ascension," *Australian Journal of Islamic Studies* 2:2 (2017), 37.





An explanation is in order regarding condition No. 2, i.e., knowledge of Arabic, mentioned by von Denffer. This author does not know Arabic, however, he has consulted with scholars having knowledge of the Arabic language. Also, Al-Ghazali believed the Qur'an to contain hidden meanings which could be misunderstood if one relied solely on the literal Arabic. Hence, he argued, hadith is necessary to understand and explain the literal and actual meaning of the Qur'an.<sup>7</sup> We shall show that our interpretation is consistent with the hadith. Further the Editors of the *Australian Journal of Islamic Studies* say "Islamic exegetical activity is not unidirectional from the Arab world to non-Arab Muslim communities. Rather, it is a dynamic dialogue, a call and response."<sup>8</sup> Our view is that the two legs of "sound belief" and "knowledge, science and hard work" compensate for knowledge of Arabic especially when consulted with scholars knowing the language.

Conditions Nos. 4 and 5 are general in nature and entirely accepted. Our interpretation is also entirely compliant with conditions Nos. 6 and 7 (the Quran and the Hadith) though it challenges the understandings of the sahaba, tabi'un and eminent scholars—conditions Nos. 8, 9 and 10.

Thus, this work veers towards reason and sidelines sahaba, tabi'un eminent scholars in case of a conflict. In giving importance to reason, it falls in the category of al-ra'y which was approved by the Prophet when he sent Mu'adh bin Jabal to Yemen.<sup>9</sup>

We note that Tafsir al-ra'y has been declared haram on the basis of the following hadith: "From Ibn 'Abbas: Allah's messenger said: "He who says (something) concerning the Qur'an without knowledge, he has taken his seat of fire."<sup>10</sup> However, this hadith has been explained in two ways:

- That no one should say of the Qur'an what is not from the sahaba or tabi'un.
- That no one should say of the Qur'an what he knows to be otherwise.

We rely on the latter meaning that one should not say something about the Qur'an what he knows to be otherwise.

In conclusion, the present work relies heavily on reason and is consistent with the Quran and Hadith. It considers but more often does not agree with the interpretations made by the sahaba, tabi'un and eminent scholars.

## 1. THE EARLIER COVENANT

The conventional understanding is that Adam made the wrongdoing of eating of the Tree of Eternity in violation of the prohibition of God. We give below the conventional narrative sequentially. We shall give our understanding next. We have marked item 3 in this conventional sequence as "blank." This will be inserted in our alternative understanding.

1. God made Adam viceregent, 2:30.
2. God taught Adam names, 2:31.
3. (blank).
4. God asked the angels to prostrate before Adam, 2:34 and 20:116.
5. God prohibited Adam from eating of the Tree, 2:35, 7:19 and 20:117.

<sup>7</sup> Ali Suleiman Ali, *A Brief Introduction to Qur'anic Exegesis*, Herndon: International Institute of Islamic Thought (2018), 14.

<sup>8</sup> Hakan Coruh and Peter G. Riddell. "Editors' Introduction: Tafsir in the Non-Arab Muslim World – I." *Australian Journal of Islamic Studies* 6:4 (2021), 1-3.

<sup>9</sup> Mishkat al-masabih, quoted in Ali Suleiman Ali, *A Brief Introduction to Qur'anic Exegesis*, Herndon: International Institute of Islamic Thought (2018).

<sup>10</sup> Ibn Taimiya quoted in Ali, *A Brief Introduction*.



6. Satan persuaded Adam and Eve to eat of the Tree of Eternity, 2:36, 7:20 and 20:120.
7. They ate of the Tree and became aware of having committed the wrong of eating of the Tree, 7:22 and 20:121. The attention of Prophet Mohammad was drawn to to this wrongdoing of Adam in 20:115.
8. Adam repented for this major wrongdoing, 2:37 and 7:23.
9. God forgave and guided him, 7:24-25 and 20:122.

In our view this understanding raises the four questions noted in the Introduction: How could Adam—endowed with divine qualities—violate the prohibition? Two, why would God—being Merciful—prohibit the eating of such a beneficent tree? Three, why would God test by prohibition of a beneficent tree? Four, why was Adam made a Prophet after having sinned even though he repented?

We suggest an alternative possibility below. We have marked the differences from the conventional understanding in italics:

1. God made Adam viceregent, 2:30.
2. God taught Adam names, 2:31.
3. God made an earlier covenant with Adam of eating of the Tree of Eternity. God found not in him determination to follow this earlier covenant, 20:115.
4. God asked the angels to prostrate before Adam, 2:34 and 20:116.
5. God prohibited Adam from eating of the Tree *as a negative order to prompt him to eat of the Tree*, 2:35, 7:19 and 20:117.
6. Satan persuaded him and Eve to eat of the Tree, 2:36, 7:20 and 20:120. They ate of the Tree and became aware of having committed the wrong of *not-eating* of the Tree, 7:22 and 20:121.
7. They ate of the Tree and became aware of having committed the wrong of *not eating* of the Tree, 7:22 and 20:121.
8. Adam repented for this *minor* wrongdoing, 2:37 and 7:23.
9. God forgave him and guided him, 7:24-25 and 20:122.

The key differences between the two alternatives is in the understanding of two verses. First verse is 20:115: “And We had already taken a promise from Adam before, but he forgot; and We found not in him determination.” The conventional understanding is that this Ayat draws attention of Prophet Mohammad to the earlier wrongdoing by Adam that is mentioned in 7:22 and 20:121. Our alternative understanding is that this Ayat tells of an earlier promise made by Adam himself to God.

The second verse is 2:35 repeated in 7:19 and 20:117: “And We said, ‘O Adam, dwell, you and your wife, in Paradise and eat therefrom in abundance from wherever you will. But do not approach this tree lest you be among the wrongdoers’ (2:35). The conventional understanding is that this command was literally true. The alternative understanding is that this command was given as a “negative order” to prompt Adam to eat of the Tree.

We find that the Quran and hadith are consistent with both the possibilities. At the same time, both the understandings are fraught with difficulties. The conventional understanding raises the question that why would God prohibit Adam from eating of the Tree of Eternity since He is Merciful? The alternate understanding is challenged by interpreting the words of God as a “negative order.” With this preface we present our alternative understanding and highlight the difficulties in both the understandings in the concluding section of this paper.

Sequence of Events in 2:30-31 and 20:115



We have placed 2:30 and 2:31 before 20:115 in the above sequence. This requires an explanation. We have to arrive at the sequence of events given in Suras 2, 7 and 20. The common anchor between these Suras is provided by the following two Ayats.

1. God asked the angels to prostrate before Adam, 2:34 and 20:116.
2. God prohibited Adam from eating of the Tree, 2:35, 7:19 and 20:117.

The Quran gives different modules in the two Suras before these common anchors:

Sura 2: God made Adam viceregent (2:30) and God taught Adam names, (2:31).

Sura 20: God made an earlier covenant, God found in not in him determination to follow this earlier covenant (20:115).

Ayat 2:31 says that God taught names to Adam. Laleh Bakhtiar, President of the Institute of conventional Psychology and translator of the Quran, explains that by “the ‘names of everything’ we infer that it means the knowledge (*al-‘ilm*) of everything.”<sup>11</sup> The earlier covenant was related to the Tree of Eternity in the chronological reading proposed by us. It is obvious that Adam would have known the the name of the Tree when he made the earlier covenant in 20:115 if the covenant was related to the Tree. Thus, the events mentioned in 2:31 and earlier would have taken place before the events mentioned in 20:115. For this reason we have placed 2:31 before 20:115 above.

20:115 is a Headline or Chronological?

The next question is whether 20:115 should be read as a short headline to 20:116-121 as done in the conventional understanding; or it should be read chronologically in continuity with 20:116-121 as proposed by us. The first argument in favour of the conventional view is that the word “*walaqad*” in 20:115 is often used to denote a headline as done in 11:25 and 14:5. However, it is also used to stress a point without acting as a headline as in 17:70 and 54:32. Hence the use of the word “*walaqad*” in 20:115 only denotes the possibility of it being a headline. Its is also consistent with a chronological reading.

The second argument in favour of the conventional view is that the chronology of events is often reversed in the Ayats. For example, 2:67-87 tells of sacrificing a cow before the demand to see God face-to-face; while 4:153 tells of seeing God first and making the golden calf later. The implication is that the placing of 20:115 before 20:116-121 does not necessarily mean that the events described in 20:115 took place before the events described in 20:116-121. 20:115 could tell of events that took place after the events mentioned in 20:116-121. Accordingly, 20:115 could tell of telling of the wrongdoing of Adam to Prophet Mohammad long after the events mentioned in 20:116-121 took place. Once again, such reversal only denotes the possibility. The above example does not mean that every sequence of event told later in the Quran should necessarily be reversed. Therefore, the verses could also tell of events in continuity.

Past- or Future Forgetting

Even if we understand the events of 20:115 to have taken place before those of 20:117, question arises whether the terms “forgot” and “found” in 20:115 refer to the covenant that had already been made before the events of 20:115 took place; or the terms “forgot” and “found” refer to the forgetting and finding that may taken place after the events of 20:115 took place. In the former case, the term “forget” would refer to the forgetting of the earlier unspecified covenant before God prohibited Adam from eating of the Tree in 2:35, 7:19 and 20:117. In the latter case these terms would be understood in the future tense

<sup>11</sup> Laleh Bakhtiar, *Quranic Psychology of the Self: A Textbook on Islamic Moral Psychology*, 2019, <https://dokumen.pub/qdownload/quranic-psychology-of-the-self-a-textbook-on-islamic-moral-psychology-ilm-an-nafs-1567446418-9781567446418.html>, 10.



such as “will forget” and “will find.” Read in this way, this Ayat could tell that Adam will forget the prohibition at a later time, that is, when Satan persuaded him to eat of the Tree as suggested in the conventional understanding.

We examined the use of the word *fanasiya* used for “forgot” in 20:115:7 and its variants as given at the Quranic Arabic Corpus website. We found that 21 times it is used in the past tense and three times in the future tense. All the eight english translations on the website use past tense “forgot.”<sup>12</sup> We then examined the use of the word *najid*, used for “found,” in 20:115:9 and its variants. We found that 35 times it is used in the past tense and 32 times in the future tense. All the eight english translations on the website use past tense “found.”<sup>13</sup>

The word “forgot” is clearly used in the past tense both in usages as well as in translations. The word “found” is used equally in past- and future tense in usages but in past tense in translations. Since “forgot” is clearly used in the past tense, therefore, its conjunct “found,” we suggest, may also be read in the past tense. In view of above, we understand that the “forgetting” and “finding” would refer to the covenant that was made in the past, that is, before the subsequent command of not-eating of the Tree was made in 20:117.

#### Earlier Covenant: Eat of the Tree

We consider that the earlier covenant in 20:115 was made with Adam in the light of above discussion. Question still remains though what was the nature of this earlier covenant? Whether it was of “not eating” of the Tree in the conventional perspective, or it was of “eating” of the Tree in our alternative perspective? The conventional tafsirs consider this earlier covenant to be that of “not-eating” of the tree.

Qurtubi says, “Ibn ‘Abbās said, ‘Ādam forgot (*nasiya*) the covenant with his Lord and so was named *insān*.’ He said, ‘Ādam forgot and so his descendants forgot.’ This is borne out in the Qur’an when God says: ‘We made a contract with Ādam before, but he forgot’ (20:115).”<sup>14</sup>

Al-Tustari says “The first instance of forgetfulness (*nisyan*) that took place in Paradise was the forgetfulness of Adam.” The commentator elaborates in a footnote: “The covenant that is being referred to here is the pact that God took from Adam in Paradise that he would not-eat of the tree, and Tustari’s words appear to be an allusion to 20:115.”<sup>15</sup>

In both the above cases, however, the reference to 20:115 is weak. In the case of al-Qurtubi it is mentioned in brackets and in the case of al-Tustari it is a comment by the commentator. Yet, most contemporary exegetes follow the conventional approach of saying that the earlier covenant was that of not-eating of the Tree.<sup>16</sup>

We find that this interpretation does not pass the test of rationality. The earlier covenant could not be of *not-eating* of the Tree because, had Adam forgot this earlier covenant and eaten of the Tree, his wrongdoing would already have become apparent to him and there would be no occasion for the wrongdoing to become apparent to him later in 20:121. Thus, we suggest that the earlier covenant was that Adam would *eat* of the Tree. He did not eat of the Tree hence God “found not in him determination” as told in 20:115.

<sup>12</sup> Quranic Arabic Corpus, “nsy,” [https://corpus.quran.com/qurandictionary.jsp?q=nsy#\(20:115:7\)](https://corpus.quran.com/qurandictionary.jsp?q=nsy#(20:115:7)).

<sup>13</sup> Quranic Arabic Corpus, “wjd,” [https://corpus.quran.com/qurandictionary.jsp?q=wjd#\(20:115:9\)](https://corpus.quran.com/qurandictionary.jsp?q=wjd#(20:115:9)).

<sup>14</sup> Aisha Bewley, Tafsir al-Qurtubi: Vol 1, n.d. Bradford: Diwan Press (n.d.), 98.

<sup>15</sup> Annabel Keeler and Ali Keeler Trans, Tafsir al-Tustari, Louisville: Royal Aal al-Bayat Institute of Islamic Thought (2011), 17.

<sup>16</sup> for example, Mikulicova, Adam’s story.

An unclear (*mutashaabih*) verse of the Quran has necessarily to be interpreted in light of the clear (*muhkam*) verses.<sup>17</sup> The explanation (*ijtihad*) must be consistent with the clear verses.<sup>18</sup> In the present case, the nature of the earlier covenant is unclear while the statement that God “found not in him determination” is clear. Hence, the earlier covenant has to be understood in a way that Adam had failed to show determination in adhering to the covenant. To this end the earlier covenant being that of the command to *eat* of the Tree would be consistent with the Ayat. Adam was commanded to eat of the Tree, he did not eat of it; he forgot and did not show determination of *eating* of the Tree. This understanding is consistent with the clear words of the Quran though it creates other problems that we shall discuss shortly.

In making this interpretation, in addition to Nursi and Iqbal, we rely Egyptian jurist Abu Ja‘far Ṭahāwī, a “flag bearer of orthodox Islam,” who says that where two interpretations of a hadith are possible, it is “probable that our Prophet sws intended one of these meanings...or our Prophet sws may have intended a meaning other than these two meanings which we have not come across yet nor has our level of knowledge reached it till now, and from God do we ask for success.”<sup>19</sup>

#### Revisiting the Tafsirs on the Earlier Covenant

We revisit the tafsirs by Qurtubi and Al-Tustari given previously in the light of this discussion. Qurtubi says, “Ādam forgot (*nasiya*) the covenant with his Lord... This is borne out in the Qur’an when God says: ‘We made a contract with Ādam before, but he forgot’ (20:115).” We suggest that this forgetting is amenable to both possibilities. Adam could have forgotten the earlier covenant of “eating” or “not eating.”

Al-Tustari says “The first instance of forgetfulness (*nisyan*) that took place in Paradise was the forgetfulness of Adam.” The commentator elaborates that Tustari’s words appear to be an allusion to 20:115.”<sup>20</sup> Once again, this forgetting is amenable to both possibilities. Adam could have forgotten the earlier covenant of “eating” or “not eating.”

Other commentators do not associate 20:115 with the Tree. The Shias hold that the earlier covenant was regarding Prophet Mohammad and the Imams: “God covenanted the succession of Muhammad and [the] Imams with Adam. He did not have any firm resolve for his covenant.”<sup>21</sup> Another suggestion is that the earlier covenant “includes the stipulation that his [Adam’s] descendants will not serve Satan but rather serve God.”<sup>22</sup> This is not the occasion to dwell into these understandings that are not related to the Tree. It suffices to say that these understandings do not stand against our suggestion that the earlier covenant was that of eating of the Tree.

<sup>17</sup> Abu Zeean Afdal, “Question # 290: The Clear (al-Muhkam) and Unclear (Al-Mutashaabih) Verses of the Qur’an,” Students of Knowledge: Learn the Deen of Allah with us, Apr 2, 2018, <https://studentsofknowledge.org/question-290-the-clear-al-muhkam-and-unclear-al-mutashaabih-verses-of-the-quran/>.

<sup>18</sup> Hossein Atrak, “A Critical Study of Muslim Theologians’ Justifications of Adam’s Sin,” *Journal of Contemporary Islamic Studies*, 4:1 (2022), 41.

<sup>19</sup> Mir Sadeq Ansari, “The Use of Historical Information in Conducting Content Criticism on Hadith,” *Australian Journal of Islamic Studies* 5:3 (2020), 40.

<sup>20</sup> Keeler, *Tafsir al-Tustari*, 17.

<sup>21</sup> Serdar Demirel, “The impact of hadith perception on disputes between ahl al-Sunnah and al-Shi‘ah al-Imamiyyah al-Ithna ‘Ashariyyah,” *Intellectual Discourse*; Kuala Lumpur 19: 2, (2011), <https://quran.com/en/20:115/tafsirs/en-tafsir-maarif-ul-quran>.

<sup>22</sup> Gordon Nickel, “Adam (Person), V. Islam,” *Encyclopedia of the Bible and its Reception*, Walter de Gruyter, Berlin/New York (2009), 322.



## 2. PROHIBITION AS A “NEGATIVE ORDER”

We have suggested above that the earlier covenant was that Adam would *eat* of the Tree. He did not eat of the Tree. Then God prohibited Adam from eating of the Tree in 2:35, 7:19 and 20:117. We suggest God made this prohibition as a *negative order* to prompt Adam to eat of the Tree.

“Negative Order”: Merciful vs. Truthful

Modern psychology provides evidence of beneficial results of a negative order in certain situations. Roxanna Erickson Klein, registered nurse and licensed professional counsellor, Dallas, Texas, tells us:

...patients need hope and encouragement. Sometimes, these are more readily accepted, if negated. Negative suggestion is like “reverse psychology,” it is most effective when some part of the patient does not respond well to direction, or is overly pessimistic.<sup>23</sup>

Sherry Buffington, Dallas based doctor of psychology and the originator of Accelerated Mind Patterning says:

The subconscious mind does not recognize negatives... So when we say “I choose not to overeat,” the subconscious sees only overeat.<sup>24</sup>

In other words, if you want someone to eat, you may actually say “do not-eat.” The subconscious mind will hear it as “do eat.” Richard Campbell, author of *Dark Psychology* says:

It is often believed that the subconscious mind cannot hear negatives. Instead, any negatives communicated to the subconscious mind are interpreted as positives. For example, if you were to tell someone, do not go peeking into my room when I am away, that person is likely to interpret this subconsciously as, do go peeking into my room when I am away. This is probably the reason why there are so many exasperated parents of kids who seem to do the exact opposite of what they are told not to do.<sup>25</sup>

These studies indicate that a negative order can prompt a person to act in a desired way. We may consider if God may have given such an order. An example of a similar “negative order” is available within the Quran:

And what struck you on the day the two armies met [on the day of Uhud] was by permission of God that He might make evident the [true] believers (3:166).

God knew that the Muslims would face a setback. Yet God gave them permission to march on so that “He might make evident the believers.” Similarly God may have given a “negative order” to make evident the beneficent qualities of the Tree of Eternity to Adam. Jamshed Akhtar, author of *In Search Of Our Origins: How the Quran Can Help In Scientific Research*, Practitioner of Unani Medicine M A Hashmi, and writer Shakeel Ahmad Siddiqui have said to this writer that negative order is possible. Hashmi elaborated that it was the nature of man to do what is prohibited.

Three arguments are given against the above suggestion. First argument is that God does not speak untruth. The question here is which attribute of God is to be given priority when there is an inter-se contradiction between them? The attribute of “Mercifulness” (1.2)

<sup>23</sup> Roxanna Erickson Klein and Dan Short, “The Form & Function of Hypnotic Suggestion,” Tokyo, 2016, <http://www.iamdrshort.com/Workshops/Tokyo%202016%20Suggestion%20II%20Form.pdf>.

<sup>24</sup> Sherry Buffington, “The 24 Unbreakable Rules of the Subconscious Mind,” <http://banishblocks.com/MBenefits/The24UnbreakableRulesoftheSubconsciousMind.pdf>, 2014.

<sup>25</sup> Richard Campbell, “Dark Psychology: Super Advanced Techniques to Persuade Anyone, Secretly Manipulate People and Influence their Behaviour without them noticing (Emotional, Body Language, NLP, Psychology Tricks),” (2019), <https://es.1lib.in/book/11235934/4843d8>.



requires that God gave a negative suggestion because that would lead Adam to eat of the tree and live a long life. On the other hand, the attribute “Affirmer of Truth” (6:62, 22:6, 23:116, 24:25, 69:23) requires that God not give the same since it would be literally untruth. We feel that the attribute of Mercifulness should be given priority since it is stated in the beginning of every chapter except one and in numerous other places of the Holy Quran; while the attribute of Truth is given only in selected Suras.

The second objection is that if the command in 2:35, 7:19 and 20:117 could be read as a “negative order,” then other commands such as in 2:187, 6:151, 6:152, 17:32, 17:34, etc., must be similarly understood as negative orders. We suggest that a command has to be examined on case-by-case basis whether it would lead to Mercifulness if understood as a positive-or negative order. The principle of negative order cannot be applied indiscriminately. In the present case, the negative order was given to prompt Adam to eat of the Tree of Eternity and live a long life. Such an order would fulfil God’s Mercifulness and would be acceptable.

The third argument is regarding the interpretation of the command in 2:35, 7:19 and 20:117 prohibiting Adam from eating of the Tree. This command can be interpreted either way. To give an example, the mother may say to the child “do not go out to play.” The command is clear. However, whether the mother has said this as a positive order and actually wants the child to go out and play; or she has said this as a negative order and actually wants the child to stay inside cannot be determined from a study of these words alone. The mother’s intention has to be learnt from the context. If the child was sick and the doctor had advised her not to go out and play; then the mother’s command “do not go out to play” may be understood as a positive order. If, on the other hand, the child was healthy and lazy and the doctor had advised her to go out and play; then the mother’s command “do not go out to play” may be understood as a negative order. In the present case, we understand that God wanted Adam to eat of the Tree but he was lazy hence God’s command “do not go eat of the Tree” could be a negative order.

Bidah

It can be alleged that a “negative order” is a Bidah. Generally, a Bidah is frowned upon. However, two Hadiths say:

Whoever *introduced a beneficiary action* in Islam will be rewarded for his practice as well as for the practice of the people who follow him, without lessening their reward. Whoever *introduced a bad practice* in Islam will take the sin for it as well as the sin of the people who follow him, without lessening their sin.<sup>26</sup>

“Narrated Aisha: Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) said, ‘If somebody innovates something which is not in harmony with the principles of our religion, that thing is rejected.’”<sup>27</sup>

The Minhaj-ul-Quran website clarifies that the context in the second Hadith above was that of possible disputes between the followers of the four initial Khalifas regarding interpretations of the Quran:

O my companions, those who live after me will, very soon, see a lot of differences among you. Stick to my path and the path of the Rightly Guided Khalifas. Abstain from

<sup>26</sup> Sahih Muslim n.d. 4:1856.

<sup>27</sup> Bukhari n.d. (Narrated Aisha: Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) said, ‘If somebody innovates something which is not in harmony with the principles of our religion, that thing is rejected).

innovations, for every kind of innovation is a Bid'ah, and every Bid'ah is misguidance and all misguidance leads to hellfire.<sup>28</sup>

In that particular situation, the Prophet said that the people should follow the Khalifas and not innovate themselves. The result is that an innovation that is consistent with the Qur'an and advances knowledge is not only acceptable but welcome as said in Sahih Muslim in the first quote above. We suggest our "innovation," if it be so termed, falls in this category since it resolves the four questions given in the introduction.

### 3. SATAN PERSUADED ADAM TO EAT OF THE TREE

We have suggested so far that the earlier covenant was that Adam would *eat* of the Tree. Then God prohibited Adam from eating of the Tree as a *negative order*.

Satan Made Apparent Their Evil of Not Eating

Adam did not-eat of the Tree even after God gave him the negative order, however. Then, in the conventional understanding:

Satan whispered to them to make apparent to them that which was concealed from them of *their private parts [swathinama]*. He said, 'Your Lord did not forbid you this tree except that you become angels or become of the immortal' (7:20).

Satan "made them *fall [fadallāhumā]* through deception. And when they tasted of the tree, their *private parts [swathinama]* became apparent to them, and they began to fasten together over themselves from the *leaves [waraqī]* of Paradise. And their Lord called to them, "Did I not forbid you from that tree and tell you that Satan is to you a clear enemy?" (7:22).

We consider the three words given in italics in detail.

*Swathinama*. It is used both in 3:20 and 7:22. The Quranic Arabic Corpus says the triliteral root "sīn wāw hamza" occurs 167 times in the Quran, in 12 derived forms. These 12 forms are given below with the meanings given in brackets:

- 30 times as the form I verb sāa (سَاءَ) (to be evil)
- five times as the form IV verb asāa (أَسَاءَ) (to do evil)
- twice as the noun aswa (أَسْوَأُ) (the worst)
- once as the noun sūā (سُوْأَى) (the evil)
- 50 times as the noun sū (سُوء) (horrible, evil, harm)
- nine times as the noun saw (سَوء) (of the evil, evil)
- five times as the noun sawāt (سَوَاءت) (their shame)
- twice as the noun sawat (سَوَاءة) (the dead body)
- four times as the nominal sayyi (سَيِّئِي) (of evil)
- 22 times as the nominal sayyi-at (سَيِّئَةٌ) (evil, misfortune, bad)
- 36 times as the noun sayyiāt (سَيِّئَات) (evil deeds, misdeeds)
- once as the form IV active participle musī (مُسِيء) (the evildoer)

The meaning in 162 of 167 usages is connected with "evil." The meaning in 5 of 167 usages is "shame." It is used as "*sawāt*" in these five usages. Thus, the first point is that the translation of "shame" as "private parts" is made by exegetes and is not given in the Quran. The second point is that, given the large number of times that "*swathinama*" is used in the sense of "evil," the usage as "*sawāt*" too may also be understood in the sense of evil or wrongdoing. It is notable that the five times it is used as *sawāt* in 7:20, 7:22, 7:26, 7:27,

<sup>28</sup> Zahid Iqbal, "The Concept of Bid'ah," Minhaj-ul-Quran, 2007, <https://www.minhaj.org/english/tid/2935/The-Concept-of-Bid-ah.html>.





20:121 are all related with the narrative of Adam. The understanding of “*swathinama*” as private parts is not attested outside the narrative of Adam in the Quran. “*Swathinama*,” therefore, may refer to the shame of wrongdoing as in a person being shamed for stealing and may not have any connection with the private parts

*Fadallāhumā*. This word is translated as “*fall*” in the above verses. The Quranic Arabic Corpus says the trilateral root “*dāl lām lām*” occurs eight times in the Quran in three usages. These usages are given below with the meanings given in brackets:

- seven times as verb *dalla* (دَلَّى), of which six times as *adullukum*, *adulluka*, *adullukum*, *nadullukum*, *dallahum*, *adullukum* (show you, direct you, guide you); and one time as *fadallāhumā* (so he made them fall).
- once as the noun *dalīl* (دَلِيل) (an indication).

In seven out of eight times the word “*fadallāhumā*” and its variants are used “to show, direct, guide, indicate” and only once as “fall.” This one usage in 7:22, therefore, could also be understood in a positive sense of guiding.

*Waraqī*. This word is conventionally translated as physical leaves that grow in plants. The same reference to leaves is made in 7:26:

O children of Adam, We have bestowed upon you *clothing* [[libāsan](#)] to conceal your private parts [*swathinama*] and as adornment. But the *clothing* [[walibāsu](#)] of righteousness - that is best. That is from the signs of Allah that perhaps they will remember (7:26).

The word used for leaves-as-clothing in both instances in this Ayat are derived from the root *lām bā sīn*. In the second instance, the “[walibāsu](#) of righteousness” indicates that leaves-as-clothing cannot be used for physical leaves-or-clothing because the physical leaves-as-clothing does not itself have righteousness. Thus, the “[walibāsu](#)” or leaves-as-clothing can be used in a psychological sense, say, of “knowledge.” Thus, although not said explicitly, the word [libāsan](#) used in the first instance could also be understood as “knowledge.” This interpretation is supported by the mention of [libāsan](#) in the first instance as an “adornment.” Now, leaves that are fragile and decaying would hardly be an adornment. On the other hand, knowledge of righteousness would certainly be an adornment. We have already explained above that the word *swathinama* can be understood as “wrongdoing.” This interpretation is supported by 7:27 where it is said:

O children of Adam, let not Satan tempt you as he removed your parents from Paradise, stripping them of their [libāsahumā](#) to show them their [sawātihimā](#)... (7:27).

Here it is said that clothing [libāsahumā](#) was stripped to show the evil [sawātihimā](#). The sequence in this Ayat is that first [libāsahumā](#) was stripped, then [sawātihimā](#) was shown. This leads to a contradiction. If [libāsahumā](#) is understood as physical leaves, then quite clearly, there was no clothing that could be stripped before [sawātihimā](#) was shown. The physical clothing was worn, if at all, after the [sawātihimā](#) was revealed. On the other hand if [libāsahumā](#) is understood as knowledge and is understood to include “false knowledge;” then it could indeed be stripped before [sawātihimā](#) or evil was shown. Conclusion is that leaves or [libāsan](#) can be understood as “knowledge.” Now, the event of covering with leaves is similar in 7:22 and 7:26-27, therefore, *waraqī* in 7:22 may be read in conjunction with *libas* in 7:26-27 and may also indicate “knowledge.”

The last point to be considered is the character of Satan. He persuaded Adam and Eve to eat of the Tree. If Satan indeed was an enemy then the eating of the Tree would be a negative event. However, we have suggested that the eating of the Tree was a positive event. Question arises how can Satan—the awowed enemy—lead to knowledge?



We see that oftentimes that actions of a bad person can lead to good results. The criminals sometimes turn approvers and help turn in their fellow criminals.<sup>29</sup> That does not mean that they are not criminals. Similarly, Satan may generally be evil but in a particular instance he may have had a positive role of “showing, directing, guiding” as indicated in the word “*fadallāhumā*” as discussed above. Allah may have warned Adam that Satan was an enemy generally and they should not befriend him on the basis of this particular exception. Accordingly we may render 7:20 and 7:22 as follows:

Satan whispered to them to make apparent to them that which was concealed from them of their evil [swathinama]. He said, ‘Your Lord did not forbid you this tree except that [you get knowledge and you] become angels or become of the immortal (7:20).

The Satan “made them *realize their evil [fadallāhumā]* through deception. And when they tasted of the tree, their *evil [swathinama]* became apparent to them, and they began to fasten together over themselves from the *knowledge [waraqī]* of Paradise. And their Lord called to them, “Did I not forbid you from that tree [*as a negative order*] and tell you that Satan is to you a clear enemy [*generally, except this particular instance*]?” (7:22).

We have undertaken exegesis of 7:20 and 7:22 above. Other Ayats relating to Adam’s wrongdoing may be understood similarly:

And We said, “O Adam, dwell, you and your wife, in Paradise and eat therefrom in [ease and] abundance from wherever you will. But do not approach this tree [*as a negative order*], lest you be among the wrongdoers” (2:35).

And Adam and his wife ate of it, and their evil [*of not-eating of the Tree earlier*] became apparent to them, and they began to fasten over themselves from the knowledge of Paradise. And Adam disobeyed his Lord and made evil [*in delaying of the eating*] (20:121).

In this way the Ayats relating to the eating of the Tree can be understood as suggested by us.

#### Hadiths of Eating or Not-eating of the Tree

Having shown that the Quran could indicate that God gave a negative order, we now turn to the Hadiths. The first Hadith is:

Narrated by Abu Huraira: People went to Adam to intercede for them with the Lord. “On that Adam will reply, ‘My Lord is so angry as He has never been before and will never be in future; (besides), He forbade me (to eat from) the tree, *but I disobeyed* (Him), (I am worried about) myself’ Go to somebody else; go to Noah.”<sup>30</sup>

Note the words “to eat from” have been given in brackets and interpolated. It would, therefore, be equally acceptable to interpolate the words “He forbade me (*to abstain from*)” meaning thereby a positive order to eat.

This hadith is found in many versions. However, none of the versions explicitly indicate the nature of the wrongdoing done by Adam. We give below only the relevant sentence for brevity and we have given the relevant words in italics:

(Adam) will say: I am not the one, and he will mention to them and complain of *the sin* that he committed.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Tosanai Lal, “Difference between accomplice, approver and co-accused?” Law Times Journal, November 5, 2020, <https://lawtimesjournal.in/difference-between-accomplice-approver-and-co-accused/>.

<sup>30</sup> Bukhari 055:556.

<sup>31</sup> Hadith No:4312, Narrated/Authority of Anas bin Malik, From:Sunan Ibn Majah. Chapter 40, The Chapters on Ascetism (Zuhd) <https://ahadith.co.uk/hadithnarrated.php?page=42&n=Anas+bin+Malik>.



He would say: I am not in a position to do this, and would *recall his error*, and would fight shy of his Lord on account of that; go to Noah the first messenger (after me) sent by Allah.<sup>32</sup>

He would say: I am *not fit* to do this, but go to Ibrabim (peace be upon him) for he is the Friend of Allah.<sup>33</sup>

And he will say: I am not in a position [to do that] - and he will *mention his wrongdoing* and will feel ashamed and will say: Go to Noah, for he is the first messenger that Allah sent to the inhabitants of the earth.<sup>34</sup>

In all these versions there is no mention as to what was the sin, error or wrongdoing made by Adam. These Hadith are equally consistent with both the possibilities. Two more Hadiths refer to the unspecified error of Adam though the context is different:

Abu Hurayrah (may Allah be pleased with him) reported that the Messenger of Allah (may Allah's peace and blessings be upon him) said: "At the end of Adam's life, when the angel of death came to him, Adam said: 'Do I not have forty years remaining?' He said: 'Did you not give them to your son Dawūd?' He said: 'Adam denied, so his offspring denied; Adam forgot, so his offspring forgot; and Adam sinned, so his offspring sinned.'"<sup>35</sup>

It is narrated on the authority of Abu Huraira and Hudhaifa that the Messenger of Allah (may peace be upon him) said: Allah, the Blessed and Exalted, would gather people. The believers would stand till the Paradise would be brought near them. They would come to Adam and say: O our father, open for us the Paradise. He would say: What turned ye out from the Paradise was the sin of your father Adam. I am not in a position to do that; better go to my son Ibrahim, the Friend of Allah.<sup>36</sup>

These Hadith also do not specify whether the error of Adam was that of eating of the tree or not eating of the tree. In conclusion we submit that the Hadiths are consistent with both the possibilities and we can rely on reason to discern the nature of the error as done by us.

#### Companions on the Prohibition of Eating

Now we come to the sayings of the companions, successors, and scholars of subsequent generations. We rely on al-Tabri's seminal work. We find that while there is silence or lack of clarity in the Quran and the Hadiths regarding the earlier covenant, the companions are silent about the earlier covenant in 20:115 and only refer to the later prohibition made in 2:35, 7:19 and 20:117. Here, they always say that the prohibition was that of "not eating" of the tree and Adam sinned by eating of the same.

Ibn Humayd-Salamah-Ibn Ishaq: When God gave him a spouse and made for him a comfort (sakan) from his own person, He said to him face to face: Adam, dwell you and

<sup>32</sup> Sahih Muslim Book 1, Hadith Number 373, Sahih Muslim Book 1. Faith, Chapter :The lowest of the ranks in Paradise, <https://hadithcollection.com/sahihmuslim/sahih-muslim-book-01-faith/sahih-muslim-book-001-hadith-number-0373>.

<sup>33</sup> Hadith No:377, Narrated/Authority of Mabad bin Hilal al Anazi, <https://ahadith.co.uk/chapter.php?page=38&cid=6&rows=10>.

<sup>34</sup> Hadith 36, Forty Hadith Qudsi, <https://sunnah.com/qudsi40:36>.

<sup>35</sup> <https://hadeethenc.com/en/browse/hadith/10408> Sahih/Authentic.

<sup>36</sup> Hadith No:380, From:Sahih Muslim. Chapter 1, Faith (Kitab Al Iman) <http://ahadith.co.uk/permalink-hadith-3243>



your spouse in Paradise! Eat freely of its plenty wherever you wish, but do not go near this tree, or you will be wrongdoers."<sup>37</sup>

Musa b. Harun al-Hamdani-'Amr b. Hammad-Asbat-al Suddi-Abu Malik and Abu Salih-Ibn 'Abbas. Also (al-Suddi)-Murrah al-Hamdani-Ibn Masud and some (other) companions of the Prophet: When God said to Adam: "Dwell you and your spouse in Paradise! Eat freely of its plenty wherever you wish, but do not go near this tree, or you will be wrongdoers..."<sup>38</sup>

al-Hasan b. Yahya-'Abd al-Razzaq-'Umar b. 'Abd al-Rahman b. Muhrib<sup>681</sup> -Wahb b. Munabbih: When God settled Adam and his spouse in Paradise, He forbade him that tree. The tree's branches were intertwined, and it bore fruit which the angels ate to live eternally. That was the fruit which God forbade Adam and his spouse to eat.<sup>39</sup>

al-Qasim b. al-Hasan-al-Husayn b. Dawud Hajjaj-Abu Ma'shar-Muhammad b. Qays: God forbade Adam and Eve to eat from one tree in Paradise, but (otherwise) they could freely eat of its plenty wherever they wished.<sup>40</sup>

We accept that our exegesis is contra that of the companions given above. However, at stake here is the resolution of the four questions given in the Introduction on the touchstone of rationality. Given that these sources are placed at sequence 8, 9 and 10 by von Denffer, we follow reason and ignore these comments. It cannot be ruled out that these interpretations may have been redacted from the Biblical tradition in later days.

#### Tafsirs of Eating of the Tree

Now we consider the conventional understandings of the wrongdoing of eating of the Tree mentioned in 7:22 and 20:121.

Most commentators say that the wrongdoing was of eating of the Tree. Qurtubi says, "Do not go near it to eat from it. It is said that it means 'do not touch it' or 'do not go close to it.'"<sup>41</sup>

Ibn Abbas said: "We did not find him patience in staying away from the eating from the accursed tree, and perseverance in adhering to the command."<sup>42</sup>

A possible exception is Maududi who does not disclose the nature of the wrong done by Adam: "This means that he disobeyed the command because he lacked the firmness of purpose and not because of intentional rebellion. He did not say: I don't care for God. If it is His command, let it be. I will do whatever I like. Who is God to intervene in my private affairs?"<sup>43</sup>

We submit that these comments require reconsideration because they do not adequately explain why Merciful God would prohibit eating of the Tree of Eternity.

#### Contemporary Scholars on Adam's Sin

<sup>37</sup> Franz Rosenthal, *General Introduction and From the Creation to the Flood, Volume I, The History of al-Tabari*, Albany, New York:Suny Press (1989), 274.

<sup>38</sup> Rosenthal, *The History of al-Tabari*, 275.

<sup>39</sup> Rosenthal, *The History of al-Tabari*, 277.

<sup>40</sup> Rosenthal, *The History of al-Tabari*, 278.

<sup>41</sup> Bewley, *Tafsir al-Qurtubi*, 184.

<sup>42</sup> Malika Khan, "People In The Quran:The Story Of Adam And Eve In The Quran," Mar 17, 2021, <https://www.getquranic.com/people-in-the-quran-the-story-of-adam-and-eve-in-the-quran/>.

<sup>43</sup> Maududi, *Tafsir on 20:115*, <https://myislam.org/surah-taha/ayat-115/>.



One explanation offered is that Adam was tempted by Iblis or, alternatively, by Eve.<sup>44</sup> The question still remains how did Adam—endowed with reason and divine qualities—allow himself to be tempted by them?

Seyyed Hossein Nasr says “the pact that God made with Adam refers to His telling him not to approach the tree; By aforesaid is meant either before Adam’s actual eating from the tree or, more generally, before the coming of the Prophet Muhammad ...”<sup>45</sup>

Hossein Atrak has mentioned a number of explanations on this point among which are 1) God’s prohibition was not obligatory but advisory; 2) He committed the sin out of oblivion or mistake; and 3) It was a minor transgression.<sup>46</sup> Once again the question remains how did Adam—endowed with reason and divine qualities—allow such a violation of advice or mistake or minor sin to happen?

Another explanation mentioned by Atrak is that Adam was not a prophet when he committed the alleged sin.<sup>47</sup> However, he had been—endowed with reason and divine qualities. Yet another explanation is this this sin took place in the heaven.<sup>48</sup> However, heaven and sin are by definition contradictory.

Yet another explanation offered is that the subsequent repentance of his transgression wiped out his sin as indicated in a Hadith: “The one who repents from sin is like one who did not sin.”<sup>49</sup> The first point here is that “like one who did not sin” not the same as “one who did not sin.” He is similar but not the same. Secondly, Adam would be a sinner from the time of the transgression to the time of repentance.

Perhaps the most charitable explanation was offered by poet Iqbal. He said: The purpose of the Quranic legend of the Fall is “to indicate man’s rise from a primitive state of instinctive appetite to the conscious possession of a free self, capable of doubt and disobedience.”<sup>50</sup> Iqbal is here concerned with the positive consequences of violating the prohibition made by God. Such positive implications of the eating of the prohibited tree have been noted by other scholars as well.<sup>51</sup> The positive implication notwithstanding these scholars accept that Adam did violate the prohibition made by God.

In the result, we find a consensus that Adam did violate the prohibition made by God in eating of the Tree. However, such a violation is incongruent with him being endowed with reason and divine qualities hence, we submit, requires reconsideration.

#### Other Explanations of Wrongdoing

Now we consider some other explanations of Adam’s wrongdoing.

*Test.* It is contented that God wanted to test Adam hence prohibited eating of the Tree. Tabari says “Now we shall discuss how God tested the obedience of our father Adam

<sup>44</sup> Roohi Tahir, Repentance, Redemption, & Salvation: An Islamic Framework, Yaqeen Institute for Islamic Research, Irving, Texas, February 5, 2018, <https://yaqeeninstitute.org/read/paper/repentanceredemption-salvation-an-islamic-framework>; Mohammad Zarasi, “God’s Seduction in Heaven and the Turning Point in Satan’s Character: The Qur’anic Perspective,” *Al-BayĀn – Journal of Qur’Ān and Ḥadīth Studies* 14 (2016), 140; Hibba Abugideiri, “Allegorical Gender: The Figure of Eve Revisited,” *The American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* 13:4.

<sup>45</sup> Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *The Study Quran*, New York: Harper One (2015).

<sup>46</sup> Atrak, *A Critical Study*, 1.

<sup>47</sup> Atrak, *A Critical Study*, 1.

<sup>48</sup> Atrak, *A Critical Study*, 1.

<sup>49</sup> Sunan Ibn Majah 4250, Book 37, Hadith 151, <https://sunnah.com/ibnmajah:4250>.

<sup>50</sup> M. Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, 67–68, quoted in Muhammad Maroof Shah, *Iqbal’s Interpretation of the Legend of the Fall: A Critique*, Intellectual Discourse, 2009, 17: 2, 207.

<sup>51</sup> Abugideiri, *Allegorical Gender*, 14.



and afflicted him (for failing the test)...<sup>52</sup> Qurtubi says “What is correct is to believe that God forbade Ādam a particular tree and then he went to it and disobeyed Him by eating from it. The tree was a test.”<sup>53</sup>

The Quran does not tell of the prohibition as a test. That said, the prohibition can be explained as a test in both the conventional and alternative understandings. In the conventional understanding, God asked Adam not to eat of the Tree as a positive order, and he failed when he ate prompted by the Satan. In the alternative understanding, God asked Adam not to eat of the Tree as a negative order, and he failed when he did not eat until prompted by the Satan. Both views are consistent with Adam failing the test irrespective of whether the test was of eating or not-eating of the Tree.

*Minor wrong.* Qurtubi says that “scholars disagree about whether the Prophets can commit minor wrong actions, for which they are punished, or not, although there is a consensus that they are protected from major wrong actions and every vice in which there is disgrace or imperfection. At-Ṭabarī and other fuqahā’, mutakallimūn and hadith scholars say that minor wrong actions are possible for them, while the Shi‘ites maintain that they are protected from all of that.”<sup>54</sup>

More recently Hossein Atrak from the University of Zanjan, Iran says, “Some theologians believe that prophets are allowed to commit a minor sin both intentionally and unintentionally before being assigned as prophets and unintentionally as prophets maintain that Adam's sin was a minor sin before his prophethood.”<sup>55</sup> In this view, the wrong of not-eating that would be of even lesser degree than eating because not-eating does not involve any self-volition on part of the wrongdoer.

*Unintentional Mistake.* Mufti Muhammad Shafi writes in his tafsir on 20:115 that Adam “was overtaken forgetting and since forgetting something is beyond one's control and volition it does not constitute sin. There is a Hadith which says My followers will not be held liable for mistakes and unmindfulness.”<sup>56</sup> In this view, the forgetting could be either of eating or not-eating of the Tree.

*Advisory Command.* Atrak explains that God's forbiddance falls in two categories:

a) God's obligatory forbidding command (*Nahye Mulawī*) refers to necessary prohibition of an act by Him without permission to do it due to its very high corruptive consequences.

b) Advisory forbidding command (*Nahye Irshādī*) which demonstrates that it is better to leave an act because of low corruption in it. Nevertheless, one is completely permitted to do it. God advises us to leave it, but He does not seriously expect us to abandon it. As a result, He neither upbraids nor punishes us for it in Doomsday.<sup>57</sup>

Atrak holds that Adam only committed an advisory forbiddance which is not a sin or even a wrong.<sup>58</sup> In this view, the advisory could be of the command of either eating or not-eating of the Tree.

<sup>52</sup> Rosenthal, The History of al-Tabari, 274-275.

<sup>53</sup> Bewley, Tafsir al-Qurtubi, 186.

<sup>54</sup> Bewley, Tafsir al-Qurtubi, 188.

<sup>55</sup> Atrak, A Critical Study, 35.

<sup>56</sup> Mufti Muhammad Shafi, n.d., Maarif-ul-Quran, <https://quran.com/en/20:115/tafsirs/en-tafsir-maarif-ul-quran>.

<sup>57</sup> Atrak, A Critical Study, 33.

<sup>58</sup> Atrak, A Critical Study, 33.

#### 4. GOD CHOSE AND FORGAVE

Hereafter, the narrative is available in Suras 2, 7 and 20 in parallel. Adam asked for forgiveness (7:23; 2 and 20 are silent). This could be asking for forgiveness for eating of the Tree despite the prohibition in the conventional understanding; or asking for forgiveness for not-eating of the Tree despite having been given the negative order in the alternative understanding.

God chose and guided Adam (20:122, Suras 2 and 7 are silent). God chose and guided Adam after he asked for forgiveness for eating of the Tree despite the prohibition in the conventional understanding; or God chose and guided Adam after he asked for forgiveness for not-eating of the Tree soon enough in the alternative understanding. Both scenarios are consistent with Adam being the first repentant<sup>59</sup> and that repentance wipes out past sin.<sup>60</sup>

God directed Adam to descend as enemies (2:36, 7:24, 20:123). The “enemies” in these Ayats could refer to the animosities that may arise in the property disputes. Studies indicate that the development of agriculture was possible only if man could establish his control over the land that he cultivated. This entailed the “violence” of keeping others out of fields cultivated by oneself. Thus, anthropologists say:

(In the evolution of man) of paramount significance, is social “domestication” with new means of molding community identity and interaction, whose very essence changed; these range from bonding through kinship, exchange networks, craft specialization, feasting, and so on, to rivalry, political boundaries, and intra- and intercommunity *confrontational violence*.<sup>61</sup>

The advent of farming around 12 millennia ago was a cultural as well as technological revolution... This Holocene revolution was not sparked by a superior technology. It occurred because possession of the wealth of farmers-crops, dwellings, and animals-could be unambiguously demarcated and defended. This facilitated the spread of new property rights that were advantageous to the groups adopting them.<sup>62</sup>

These observations suggest that guarding the cultivation and the animosity that it entailed was a necessary step required for the multiplication of humankind. This animosity may be mentioned in the Quran saying that God directed Adam to descend as enemies.

Adam was directed to obtain livelihood and enjoyment after descending (2:36, 7:24, 20 is silent). Among the seven translations given on Quran.com website, Sahih International, Muhammad Sarwar, Mohsin Khan and Arberry give the word “enjoyment” or “benefit;” while Pickthall, Yusuf Ali and Shakir give neutral descriptions such as “condition.” Thus, the balance of evidence suggest that there was enjoyment in store for Adam on the earth. The agricultural cultivation undertaken by Adam may have provide plentiful food and enjoyment. The suggestion that Adam was to live 1000 years but the angel of death came after 960 years does not contradict the “enjoyment” that Adam had for the 960 years that he lived.<sup>63</sup>

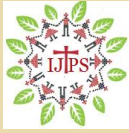
<sup>59</sup> Mikulicova, Adam’s story, 277.

<sup>60</sup> Tahir, Repentance.

<sup>61</sup> A. Goring-Morris, Nigel and Anna Belfer-Cohen, “Neolithization Processes in the Levant: The Outer Envelope,” *Current Anthropology* 52:Supplement 4 (2011), Italics provided.

<sup>62</sup> Samuel Bowles and Jung-Kyoo Choi, “Coevolution of farming and private property during the early Holocene,” in *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 110:22 (2013).

<sup>63</sup> Aisha Stacey, “The Story of Adam (part 1 of 5): The First Man,” IslamReligion.com, 2008, <https://www.islamreligion.com/articles/1190/viewall/story-of-adam/>.



God gave Adam guidance and inspiration (2:37-38 and 20:123-125, 7 is silent). God gave Adam inspiration after he asked for forgiveness.

The narrative of Adam ends here. Question remains whether Adam was “punished” hence was in a worse situation than in Paradise; or he was better off after eating of the Tree. We once again refer to the removal of Adam from Paradise:

But Satan caused them to slip out of it and removed them from that [condition] in which they had been (2:36).

As said previously, this Ayat says that Adam and Eve were in a happy state and the Satan made them slip out of it. One understanding is that this was a regressive step. They lost their happy state. Our alternative understanding is that their slipping broke the stultifying primitive happiness, gave them knowledge and opened the path for them to come forth to God. Consider the following:

On the day when the earth will be changed to other than this earth and the heavens also And they will *come forth unto God*, The One The Almighty (14:48).

How can ye reject the faith in God? Seeing that ye were without life, and He gave you life; then will He cause you to die, and will again bring you to life; and again *to Him will ye return* (2:28)

These Ayats tell that all souls will come forth to God. Adam and Eve, however, were in a state of primitive happiness and did not make effort to “come forth” or to “return to” God. The eating of the Tree and acquisition of knowledge may be a step towards this coming forth unto God hence can be positive.

Secondly, the line of noble persons—Habil, Nuh, Ibrahim and Moosa descended from Adam. Thus V. A. Mohamad Ashrof of Forum for Faith and Fraternity, Kochi says, “The tree which provides eternity suggests one’s lineage through children and generations.”

Thirdly, a Hadith says that Friday is the best day because, among others, on this day Adam was expelled from Paradise.<sup>64</sup> If Adam had actually done wrong then the day of punishment would not be the “best.”

It is possible, therefore, that God rewarded Adam for eating of the Tree, albeit after he made the wrongdoing of delay in doing the same, and punished him for the minor wrong of delay while rewarding him for the major march of progress that he unleashed.

## CONCLUSIONS

The conventional understanding is good: God taught Adam the names of all things, He prohibited Adam from eating of the Tree, Satan persuaded Eve and Adam to eat of the Tree, Adam and Eve ate of the Tree, this transgression by Adam was told to Prophet Mohammad as violation of the earlier covenant in 20:115, Adam got knowledge of righteousness, he repented, God forgave him for his transgression and they became the progenitors of Habil, Nuh, Ibrahim and Moosa.

Our results show that an alternative understanding is also possible: The earlier covenant made by God with Adam was to eat of the Tree, Adam did not-eat of it, God gave him a “negative order” to prompt him to eat of it, Adam still did not-eat of the Tree, then Satan assured him that God actually wanted him to eat of the Tree, Adam and Eve ate of the Tree, they got knowledge of righteousness, they recognized their mistake of not-eating of the Tree, God forgave them for this transgression, and they became the progenitors of Habil,

<sup>64</sup> Muslim, Sahih, n.d. Edited by: Mika'il al-Almany, 1st edition, [https://d1.islamhouse.com/data/en/ih\\_books/single/en\\_Sahih\\_Muslim.pdf](https://d1.islamhouse.com/data/en/ih_books/single/en_Sahih_Muslim.pdf), 4:1856.





Nuh, Ibrahim and Moosa. This alternative understanding draws support from modern psychology and anthropology and may help explain the Quranic narrative of Adam to the modern mind.

We are aware that both understandings are fraught with difficulties. The conventional understanding of God actually commanding *not-eating* of the Tree stands contra the Mercifulness of God that is a fundamental tenet of Islam. The alternative understanding that God commanding *eating* of the Tree interprets God's prohibition of not-eating of the Tree as a negative order—which is not explicitly said in the Quran.

It is not possible to determine which of these is the true import of the Quran. Only God knows best. That said, the alternative understanding suggested by us may be considered.

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