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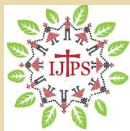


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Preface

The 5-th issue of *International Journal of Theology, Philosophy and Science* (November 2019) presents scientific and theoretical articles on various aspects, all of them centred on the area of Philosophy, Theology, and Science.

In the first article: *THE BAYESIAN ANTINOMY RESOLVED*, Robert SHEARER and William SHEARER explore the Bayes' theorem. Conclusion that one ultimately reaches regarding the miracles hinges on the dependencies between the reported testimonies. The next work is called: *WRESTLING WITH THE GOD WHO WEEPS: FYODOR DOSTOEVSKY AND THE PHILOSOPHY OF JOSEPH SMITH* and it belongs to Spencer B. JUDD. After that, the paper entitled: *BYZANTINE HESYCHASM IN THE LIFE OF THE ORTHODOX CHURCH*, written by Adrian IGNAT is a short presentation of how the *Prayer of the heart* (the hesychast Prayer) has evolved over the centuries, but also a comparative analysis of the rationalist way of thinking.

The next study, by Florea ȘTEFAN, presents the issue: *COMMUNICATION AS SACRED AND MISSIONARY ACT*. The study deepens the sacramental meaning of the 'word' as a means of communion and perfection for man. The paper of Traian-Alexandru MIU, entitled: *THE MASS MEDIA AND THE CHRISTIAN VALUES* explores power and influence of information on the contemporary society.

Frank A. PIONTEK signs the subsequent article: *TIME HAS GONE TODAY*. In this essay the author proposes to address features of Time in Science and Philosophy, then emphasizes those findings in reference to Philosophical Theology, predominately in Theodicy. The following academic pursue is that of Ramona Nicoleta ARIEȘAN, called: *WHAT IS MORALLY GOOD?* in which the author, starting from a personal point of view, proposes what does the morality means, how it is perceived and the way can affect us.

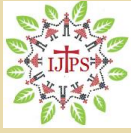
POLITICAL ONTO-THEOLOGIES OR TOWARDS A POLITICAL METAPHYSICS. SOME CRITICAL ANALOGIES FROM PLATO TO JÜRGEN MOLTMANN is the article presented by Spiros MAKRIS, in which the author shows the new Political Theology and post-fundamental political onto-theologies, in the sense of a radical *onto-theologia negativa*, brought to the forefront of contemporary social, political and ethical theory the essential issues of ontological, theological and moral interpretation of the political. *HAVE WE FORGOTTEN THE 7TH ECUMENICAL COUNCIL? ERRORS CONCERNING THE WORSHIP OF THE ICONS IN CONTEMPORARY ROMANIAN LITURGICAL PRACTICE* is the issue presented by Dumitru VANCA. The paper raises the theme of the mispractice of consecrating icons, as taught by the Church as a result of the iconoclastic debate in the 8th century (Nicaea, 787).

THE LAST PROPHET OF THE OLD TESTAMENT is the final article of volume presented by Mihail TEODORESCU, who presents the prophets of the Old Testament ends up with John the Baptist, The Forerunner of God, declared to be "the greatest man among those born from women".

The scientific content presented in the current issue of *International Journal of Theology, Philosophy and Science* distinguishes the opportunity to examine the altogether truth-claims found in Theology, Philosophy, and Science, as well as the methods laid out by every discipline and the meanings derived from them. This is both the aim and the scientific task of IFIASA International Journal of Theology, Philosophy and Science.

November 2019,

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THE BAYESIAN ANTINOMY RESOLVED

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ABSTRACT

Philosophers have used Bayes' theorem in their arguments both for and against the existence of miracles for nearly three centuries. The use of this probability rule in opposing arguments suggests an antinomy in the literature. We suggest that this paradox is due not to an inherent flaw in the theorem, but rather is the result of the authors' inherent belief systems. We review the literature in this debate, explain the different positions, and resolve the antinomy.

Keywords: Miracles; Bayes Theorem; Probability; Existence of God ;

INTRODUCTION

John Maynard Keynes once stated of Reverend Bayes' famous probability theorem, 'No other formula in the alchemy of logic has exerted more astonishing powers. For it has established the existence of God from the premise of total ignorance; and it has measured with numerical precision the probability that the sun will rise tomorrow'.¹ Yet the metaphysical and religious application of Bayes' theorem in assessing the probability of the Divine has been an issue of more contention than Keynes' words suggest. The use of Bayes' theorem to prove or disprove miracles (and by extension, God) has resulted in an ongoing argument between philosophers over the last three centuries. Hume², Sobel^{3,4}, Owen⁵, and other skeptics have sought to prove that the infinitesimal probability of a miracle's occurrence makes them impossible to rationally utilize as evidence. Babbage⁶, Schlesinger⁷, Otte⁸, Holder⁹, Earman¹⁰, and other believers have sought situations in which testimony is

¹ John Keynes, *A Treatise on Probability* (London: Macmillan and Company, 1921), 90-91.

² David Hume, "Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals," reprinted from 1777 edition, 3rd edition, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 114-115.

³ Jordan Sobel, "On the Evidence of Testimony for Miracles: A Bayesian Interpretation of David Hume's Analysis," *Philosophical Quarterly* 37, (1987): 166-186.

⁴ Jordan Sobel, "Hume's Theorem on Testimony Sufficient to Establish a Miracle," *Philosophical Quarterly* 163, (1991): 229-237.

⁵ David Owen, "Hume Versus Price on Miracles and Prior Probabilities: Testimony and the Bayesian Calculation," *Philosophical Quarterly* 147, (1987): 187-202.

⁶ Charles Babbage, *The Ninth Bridgewater Treatise: A Fragment*, 2nd edition (London: John Murray, 1838) 121-130.

⁷ George Schlesinger, "Miracle and Probabilities," *Noûs* 2, (1987): 219-232.

⁸ Richard Otte, "Schlesinger and Miracles," *Faith and Philosophy* 10, (1993): 93-98.

⁹ Rodney Holder, "Hume on Miracles: Bayesian Interpretation, Multiple Testimony, and the Existence of God," *Brit. J. Phil. Sci.* 49, (1998): 49-65.

¹⁰ John Earman, "Bayes, Hume, Price, and Miracles," *Proceedings of the British Academy* 113, (2002): 91-109.



sufficiently reliable to justify belief in miracles. The theorem therefore produces an antinomy, providing strong arguments both for and against belief in the occurrence of miraculous events. We will show that this antinomy arises from a failure to consider all possible dependencies between testimonies and that the theorem provides a necessary but not sufficient condition to prove either argument.

1. HUME'S ARGUMENT AGAINST MIRACLES

The method of investigating the rationality of supernatural belief from a conditional probabilistic perspective originated with the English philosopher David Hume. Concerned with separating metaphysical fact from baseless belief, Hume dedicated a portion of his *Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding* to the study of the relationship between miraculous events, the testimonies concerning them, and the rationality of the subsequent beliefs they foster in humankind. Such an inquiry required a robust and consistent definition of a miracle as semantic variation in the term's use would inevitably lead to a lack of objectivity, which would in turn make room for disagreement over what constitutes sufficient evidence for the Divine. Hume defined a miracle as 'a violation of the laws of nature ...'¹¹ and for the purposes of this paper we shall hold to this definition. Additionally Hume asserted a necessary condition for knowing that one has seen such a divinely imposed event: '... no testimony is sufficient to establish a miracle, unless the testimony be of such a kind, that its falsehood would be more miraculous, than the fact'.¹² Hume's argument is fundamentally a probabilistic one. If, after observing an event, the likelihood that the event was miraculous given a testimony does not exceed the likelihood that the event was non-miracle given the same testimony, then the testimony should be regarded as false and the event as non-miraculous. Hume's logic is sound; he just lacked the proper formulation as Reverend Price published Bayes' conditional probability theorem several years after Hume's *Inquiry*.

2. THE BAYESIAN ARGUMENT AGAINST MIRACLES

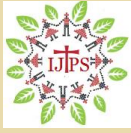
This argument of Hume's is convenient for study because when applied to Bayes' Theorem it allows us to view miraculous events and the testimonies about them in probabilistic terms. We start with the reasonable assumption that if miracles exist, then they are rare. We then define *M* as a miraculous event and *T* as the testimony that a miraculous event occurred. We are of course interested in calculating the probability that a miracle occurred given a testimony. Applying Bayes theorem to these events yields the following.

$$P(M|T) = \frac{P(T, M)}{P(T)} = \frac{P(T, M)}{P(T, M) + P(T, \sim M)} = \frac{P(T|M)P(M)}{P(T|M)P(M) + P(T|\sim M)P(\sim M)}$$

It follows by Hume's logic that in the situation where $P(M|T)$ exceeds one half, one can rationally justify belief in a miraculous event, and thereby form a foundation for metaphysical belief. While it would seem from Hume's work that he viewed such convincing testimony as impossible, and that he ultimately sought to discredit the rational foundations of religion, this Bayesian interpretation of his work provides us with a mathematical tool for assessing the probability that any event is the product of Divine intervention. Armed with such a tool, it is no surprise that over the centuries several authors

¹¹ Hume, "Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals," 93.

¹² *Ibid*, 91.



have sought to use it to prove and disprove the actions of the Divine. ‘Few arguments have excited greater attention, and produced more attempts at refutation, than the celebrated one of David Hume, respecting miracles; and it might be added, that more sophistry has been advanced against it, than its author employed in the whole of his writings’¹³. For Hume, and others like him who seek to discredit religion, the conditions for a credible testimony of a miracle appear so steep that the probability of God’s existence touches the infinitesimal. Speaking of Hume’s personal view Sobel concludes, ‘Hume does not give an example of such testimony. He strongly suspected that there never have been actual examples – that “it will be impossible to find such in all the history. From absence of even a fanciful example of such testimony we should, I think, conclude that he found it impossible to imagine one.”’¹⁴. Bayes’ theorem appears to reinforce the impossibility of finding a testimony so unfalsifiable that its miraculous implications must be true. ‘Applying the elementary techniques of probability theory vindicates Hume’s view that when we receive a report of a miraculous event then the probability that the event has actually taken place is smaller than the probability that in fact it has not, ...’¹⁵ (Schlesinger 1987: 225). Consider the following example. We assume that miraculous events are rare that reported testimonies are somewhat reliable. An application of Bayes’ Theorem yields the following probability.

$$P(M) = 0.001 \quad P(T|M) = 0.90 \quad P(T|\sim M) = 0.20$$

$$P(M|T) = \frac{P(T|M)P(M)}{P(T|M)P(M) + P(T|\sim M)P(\sim M)} = \frac{(0.90)(0.001)}{(0.90)(0.001) + (0.20)(0.999)} = 0.0045$$

$$P(M|T) = 0.45\%$$

The testimony has increased the likelihood that the observed event was miraculous, but falls far short of the established criterion. As Hume thought, the extreme unlikeliness of a miracle supersedes a highly reliable testimony. The question then becomes, ‘in what situations then, should we consider a testified event to be miraculous?’ Manipulation of Bayes’ theorem yields the answer.

$$P(M|T) = \frac{P(T|M)P(M)}{P(T|M)P(M) + P(T|\sim M)P(\sim M)} = \frac{1}{1 + \frac{P(T|\sim M)P(\sim M)}{P(T|M)P(M)}} = \frac{1}{1 + \frac{P(T,\sim M)}{P(T,M)}}$$

$$\begin{aligned} P(M|T) > 0.5 &\Rightarrow P(T, M) > P(T, \sim M) \\ &\Rightarrow P(T|M)P(M) > P(T|\sim M)P(\sim M) \\ &\Rightarrow P(T|M) \gg P(T|\sim M) \end{aligned}$$

A miraculous event requires a testimony which is far more likely given a miraculous event than given a mundane event. Or as Hume recognized a testimony for which, ‘... its falsehood would be more miraculous (i.e. less likely), than the fact.’

¹³ Babbage, “The Ninth Bridgewater Treatise: A Fragment,” 120.

¹⁴ Sobel, “On the Evidence of Testimony for Miracles: A Bayesian Interpretation of David Hume’s Analysis,” 187.

¹⁵ Schlesinger, “Miracle and Probabilities,” 226.



3. THE BAYESIAN ARGUMENT FOR MIRACLES

For those defending the Deist perspective, Bayes' theorem also provides a defense against skeptical reproach. 'The cynicism remains just cynicism unless it is backed by an argument showing that, in principle, the witnesses cannot be minimally reliable and independent when the alleged miracle is ascribed to system of religion'¹⁶. The most powerful rebuttal to the Atheist position comes in the form of multiple testimonies. Babbage first introduced this idea, and when paired with Bayes' theorem the implications seem to support the rational belief in God. With multiple independent witnesses, the number of testimonies eventually overpowers the extreme unlikeliness of the miracle. The probability of a miraculous event and n testimonies is obtained from the product of independent probabilities.

$$P(T_n, T_{n-1}, \dots, T_1, M) = P(T_n|M)P(T_{n-1}|M) \times \dots \times P(T_1|M)P(M) = P(T|M)^n P(M)$$

The last equality holds only if each conditional event $T_i|M$ has the same probability. The probability of a miracle, given multiple independent testimonies can then be calculated as follows.

$$P(M|T_n, T_{n-1}, \dots, T_1) = \frac{P(T|M)^n P(M)}{P(T|M)^n P(M) + P(T|\sim M)^n P(\sim M)} = \frac{1}{1 + \left(\frac{P(T|\sim M)}{P(T|M)}\right)^n \frac{P(\sim M)}{P(M)}}$$

If the witnesses are all more reliable than not, then as the number of testimonies increases, the $\left(\frac{P(T|\sim M)}{P(T|M)}\right)^n$ term converges to zero and $P(M|T_n, T_{n-1}, \dots, T_1)$ converges to one.

The implications are thus, '... provided we assume that independent witnesses can be found of whose testimony it can be stated that it is more probable that it is true than that it is false, we can always assign a number of witnesses which will, according to Hume's argument, prove the truth of a miracle'¹⁷. The multiple, independent witnesses argument has not been without criticism. Kruskal¹⁸ and others have pointed out that the very existence of independent witnesses to the same miraculous event is suspect. Even Babbage recognized this flaw in his own writings. More nuanced approaches, such as Holder's¹⁹ and Tucker's²⁰ have attempted to resolve the issues with Babbage's argument, but the debate rages on unabated.

4. THE ANTINOMY RESOLVED

We suggest that unaccounted for factors allow for such irreconcilably different conclusions from the same basic argument. Further, a simplistic application of Bayes' theorem to Hume's formulations fails to capture the complexity of the involved probabilities. Fortunately, Hume's framework allows for subtle manipulations that can be easily translated into mathematical terms. By changing basic assumptions about the individuals involved with

¹⁶ Earman, "Bayes, Hume, Price, and Miracles," 102.

¹⁷ Babbage, "The Ninth Bridgewater Treatise: A Fragment," 131.

¹⁸ William Kruskal, "Miracles and Statistics: The Casual Assumption of Independence," *Journal of the American Statistical Association* 83, (1988): 929-940.

¹⁹ Holder, "Hume on Miracles: Bayesian Interpretation, Multiple Testimony, and the Existence of God," 49-65.

²⁰ Aviezer Tucker, "Miracles, Historical Testimonies, and Probabilities," *History and Theory* 44, (2005): 373-390.

the sighting of a miracle, it becomes possible to observe the varying probabilities. As seen in the Bayesian argument for miracles, the assumption of independence is a glaring oversimplification of the issue at hand. William Kruskal, former president of the American Statistical Association, chided this kind of mathematical laziness saying:

‘... one may well ask why the assumption of independence is so widespread. One answer is ignorance. ... Far more important than simple ignorance, in my opinion, is seductive simplicity. It is so easy to multiply marginal probabilities, formulas simplify, and manipulation is relatively smooth, so the investigator neglects dependence, or hopes that it makes little difference. Sometimes the hope is realized, but more often dependence can make a tremendous difference’ (1988: 933).

While considering the testimonies about miracles, simple and elegant mathematics must also be consistent with reality. Humans do not function in isolation; our words and actions influence each other. All human testimony is inherently dependent on other human action. In this context, the probability of a miraculous event and n testimonies is obtained from the product of conditional probabilities.

$$P(T_n, T_{n-1}, \dots, T_1, M) = P(T_n, T_{n-1}, \dots, T_1 | M) \times \dots \times P(T_1 | M) P(M)$$

If we assume that an individual’s perception of an event is influenced by the perception and testimonies of others who also witnessed the event, then the Bayesian approach to yields the following formulation for n testimonies.

$$\begin{aligned} P(M | T_n, T_{n-1}, \dots, T_1) &= \frac{P(T_n, T_{n-1}, \dots, T_1, M)}{P(T_n, T_{n-1}, \dots, T_1, M) + P(T_n, T_{n-1}, \dots, T_1, \sim M)} \\ &= \frac{P(T_n, T_{n-1}, \dots, T_1 | M) P(M)}{P(T_n, T_{n-1}, \dots, T_1 | M) P(M) + P(T_n, T_{n-1}, \dots, T_1 | \sim M) P(\sim M)} \\ &= \frac{1}{1 + \left(\left[\frac{P(T_n | \sim M, T_{n-1}, T_{n-2}, \dots, T_1)}{P(T_n | M, T_{n-1}, T_{n-2}, \dots, T_1)} \right] \left[\frac{P(T_{n-1} | \sim M, T_{n-2}, T_{n-3}, \dots, T_1)}{P(T_{n-1} | M, T_{n-2}, T_{n-3}, \dots, T_1)} \right] \times \dots \times \left[\frac{P(T_1 | \sim M)}{P(T_1 | M)} \right] \left[\frac{P(\sim M)}{P(M)} \right] \right)} \end{aligned}$$

The issue then becomes the nature of the dependencies. How does an earlier testimony affect future testimonies? Consider the case where two individuals observe a possibly miraculous event. If the first person’s testimony increases the likelihood that the second person testifies the opposite, then $P(T_2 | T_1, \sim M) > P(T_2 | T_1, M)$. Continuing with our earlier example, we add such a second observer.

$$P(M) = 0.001 \quad P(T_1 | M) = 0.90 \quad P(T_1 | \sim M) = 0.20$$

$$P(T_2 | T_1, M) = 0.30 \quad P(T_2 | T_1, \sim M) = 0.70$$

$$P(M | T_2, T_1) = \frac{1}{1 + \left(\left[\frac{P(T_2 | T_1, \sim M)}{P(T_2 | T_1, M)} \right] \left[\frac{P(T_1 | \sim M)}{P(T_1 | M)} \right] \left(\frac{P(\sim M)}{P(M)} \right) \right)} = \frac{1}{1 + \left[\left(\frac{0.70}{0.30} \right) \left(\frac{0.20}{0.90} \right) \left(\frac{0.999}{0.001} \right) \right]}$$



$$P(M|T_2, T_1) = 0.0019 = 0.19\%$$

As we saw earlier, the first testimony increased the probability of a miraculous event, but now the contrary second testimony has decreased the probability. Given both testimonies, the event appears even more mundane. By further increasing the number of contrarian testimonies it is possible to have the probability converge to zero (assuming the availability of an infinite number of testimonies). If however, the first person’s testimony increases the likelihood that the second person testifies in the same manner, then $P(T_2|T_1, \sim M) < P(T_2|T_1, M)$. Revisiting our example we find the following.

$$P(M) = 0.001 \quad P(T_1|M) = 0.90 \quad P(T_1|\sim M) = 0.20$$

$$P(T_2|T_1, M) = 0.95 \quad P(T_2|T_1, \sim M) = 0.15$$

$$P(M|T_2, T_1) = \frac{1}{1 + \left(\frac{P(T_2|\sim M, T_1)}{P(T_2|M, T_1)} \right) \left[\frac{P(T_1|\sim M)}{P(T_1|M)} \right] \left(\frac{P(\sim M)}{P(M)} \right)} = \frac{1}{1 + \left[\left(\frac{0.15}{0.95} \right) \left(\frac{0.20}{0.90} \right) \left(\frac{0.999}{0.001} \right) \right]}$$

$$P(M|T_2, T_1) = 0.0277 = 2.77\%$$

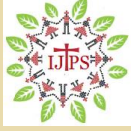
Now both testimonies increase the likelihood of a miraculous event. Again, by further increasing the number of testimonies it is possible, in a manner similar to Babbage’s independent testimonies argument, to have the probability converge to one. We therefore conclude that given dependent testimonies, $P(M|T_n, T_{n-1}, \dots, T_1)$ can converge to either one or zero. We can envision cases in which both types of dependency exist. It is just as easy to imagine a crowd of Agnostics swayed by a fervent Atheist as it is to imagine a group of Deists influenced by a charismatic priest. ‘It is important to point out that we should grant Hume only that it is unreasonable for a non-Deist to accept miracle stories as credible. For a Deist, on the other hand, it is quite rational to pay credence to such stories’²¹. Or as Otte noted, ‘once we assume God exists the testimony becomes irrelevant to the miracle’²².

CONCLUSION

The antinomy is thus resolved. The conclusion that one reaches in the end regarding miracles depends on the dependencies between the reported testimonies. As such, one can only show that an event may or may not be miraculous. Proof is beyond our reach with Bayes’ theorem.

²¹ Schlesinger, “Miracle and Probabilities,” 226.

²² Otte, “Schlesinger and Miracles,” 95.



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WRESTLING WITH THE GOD WHO WEEPS: FYODOR DOSTOEVSKY AND THE PHILOSOPHY OF JOSEPH SMITH

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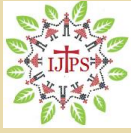
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“Strange! that you should not have suspected years ago—centuries, ages, eons, ago! —for you have existed, companionless, through all the eternities. Strange, indeed, that you should not have suspected that your universe and its contents were only dreams, visions, fiction! Strange, because they are so frankly and hysterically insane—like all dreams: a God who could make good children as easily as bad, yet preferred to make bad ones; who could have made every one of them happy, yet never made a single happy one; who made them prize their bitter life, yet stingily cut it short; who gave his angels eternal happiness unearned, yet required his other children to earn it; who gave his angels painless lives, yet cursed his other children with biting miseries and maladies of mind and body; who mouths justice and invented hell—mouths mercy and invented hell—mouths Golden Rules, and forgiveness multiplied by seventy times seven, and invented hell; who mouths morals to other people and has none himself; who frowns upon crimes, yet commits them all; who created man without invitation, then tries to shuffle the responsibility for man’s acts upon man, instead of honorably placing it where it belongs, upon himself; and finally, with altogether divine obtuseness, invites this poor, abused slave to worship him!”

-Mark Twain, *The Mysterious Stranger*

ABSTRACT

*This paper contains three acts, so to speak, each part analyzing approaches to the philosophical Problem of Evil within the 19th century. This is done by juxtaposing some of the strongest arguments over the Problem of Evil. Before going into the arguments themselves, I survey the movements of the 19th century and specifically examine a 19th century piece of art by Alexander Leloir, symbolizing man’s struggle with God, and use his image as my model for channeling the following two arguments. I then examine a piece of literature from the 19th century, *The Brothers Karamazov*, by Fyodor Dostoevsky, focusing specifically on his character Ivan Karamazov’s critique of God in regard to the suffering of children and the innocent. Ivan gives one of the best articulations of the atheist critique of God’s amorality and allowance of evil. Following that, I examine the religious philosophy of a 19th century figure, Joseph Smith, whose contributions I attempt to show provide a valid theodicy for acquitting God from the Problem of Evil, due to the conception of God, Mankind, and a christogenic cosmos that Smith introduces. While an entire exhaustive treatment on the problem of evil would require a lot more space than this paper can presently afford, this is a synthesized account of the compelling arguments of each side. This paper isn’t to invalidate or delegitimize past, present, and future suffering. The rationalization of evil, even if it be with profound meaning, isn’t sufficient on its own to eradicate the consequences of evil, nor to fully comfort its victims. This exercise might untangle webs of logical confusion and cognitive dissonance, but it does not in of itself end the poverty in third world countries,*



horrific wars and acts of terror, bullying, prejudice, or homelessness, to name a few examples. I recognize that explanations for the horrors of history can sound trite and trivial, almost at times an insult. Even if Smith's position proves logically coherent, I recognize this paper has only solved the logical problem of evil rather than the actual problem of evil in our world. It simply seeks to understand the problem and examine ways that make it meaningful, rather than eradicating it. The problem cannot be solved through a logical proof on a chalkboard or in an argument through a paper. Nevertheless, all action is derived from how we think and what we desire, which in turn can be impacted by words and ideas, and for that I believe this paper holds relevant value. Hopefully these chambers of reflection serve as a catalyst to action, to contribute a verse into the lessening of others' suffering.

Keywords: Wrestling; God who Weeps; Fyodor Dostoevsky; Philosophy of Joseph Smith;

INTRODUCTION

Theodicy is bred upon a lamentable tendency we have as humans to use more time theorizing the reasons behind suffering than actually alleviating it. Be that as it may, the paradoxical proposal of the dual existence of both a loving God and genuine evil is one that is a psychological burden of cognitive dissonance for billions, a burden likewise in need of alleviation and thus explanation. In addition to evil's attack to our happiness, there is no greater threat to belief in a personal, loving God than in the Problem of Evil. Philosopher Truman Madsen has accurately articulated the *existential* problem that we are faced with in his book *Eternal Man*:

Let us walk into a hospital: Here. This newborn infant with the lovely face. She could not have worthier parents. But she was born in total paralysis and is blind. The doctors do not know if she will survive. And if she does . . . This bed is empty. Its occupant, a quivering psychotic with a wild stare, is upstairs undergoing shock treatment. He collapsed when his wife and two children were maimed in a fire, one beyond recognition. Over here is a surgeon who had a rare brain disease and asked his closest friend to operate. The operation failed; and he has been, for nearly three years, a human vegetable. His friend has since committed suicide. Somewhere tonight the families of these souls are crying themselves to sleep. Now, if your arm will hold out, write as many zeros after a "1" as will portray similar reenactments of these scenes that are, or have been, or may be, on this planet. *And that will be one thread in the tapestry of human misery* (Madsen 39).

The diversity and intensity of suffering on this planet is staggering: genocide, homelessness, war, mental illness or insanity, natural disasters, divided families, selves divided, injustice, torture, disease, inequality, poverty, loneliness...these are but a few on the endless list. The *logical* dilemma of suffering was concisely summarized by the philosopher Epicurus when he asked, "Is God willing to prevent evil, but is not able? Then he is not omnipotent. Is he able, but not willing? Then he is malevolent. Is he both willing and able? Then whence cometh evil? Is he neither willing nor able? Then why call him God?" (Lactantius 494). But our dilemma is more than just an academic toy but, as Madsen points out, is in fact a real-world problem we all grapple with. Any mention of Auschwitz, Sandy Hook, or 9/11 brings immediate reverence as we ponder over this most devastating problem that has probed more adults to ask 'Why?' than their two-year-old kids. Why, indeed? Some examine all this and conclude that there is no inherent purpose behind it all, behind any of it. Mankind is simply coercively thrust into a short existence of meaninglessness and chaos in godless geometric space, where evil reigns with blood and horror, all before disappearing into oblivion with the vast death of the solar system into an abyss of nothingness. Solving



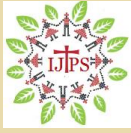
the problem of evil (logical or existential) is a most relevant quest then, as it is inextricably tied to the terrifying questions surrounding the ultimate signification of, what is for some, the burden of existence. Any “solution”, though, to be sufficient, should strive for Rabbi Irving Greenberg’s high standard for theodicy made to those attempting rationalizations for the horrors at Auschwitz: “No statement, theological or otherwise, should be made that would not be credible in the presence of burning children”(Irving 253). Diverse approaches have been taken over the last two millennia, from Plato to Augustine, to Buddha and Leibniz, but especially through monumental explorations in human thought in the 19th century, such as from Fyodor Dostoevsky and Joseph Smith. It was that particular century that put God on trial yet again, allowing the emergence of some of His most fierce prosecutors as well as a new, revolutionary theodicy.

1. OF RELIGIONS AND REVOLUTIONS

Terryl Givens, a professor of intellectual history, has written in his article, “Lightning out of Heaven”, of the influential shifts in the intellectual atmosphere of the 18th and 19th centuries that have largely impacted our modern discussions of God. The combination of the Age of Enlightenment with the Romantic movement brought about, “an irrepressible optimism about human potential, a growing embrace of human dignity and freedom as the birthright of every man, and, in many cases, doubts that such values and aspirations could be compatible with...oppressive, inflexible orthodoxies, rigid hierarchies, and stultifying systems of religion that almost universally emphasized human depravity, inherent guilt, and arbitrary omnipotence” (Givens 3). The general mood evoked from religion at that time was of despair over the tragic nature of the human condition. In response to being ruled by monarchies, masters, and machines, these centuries were marked by myriad revolts. What resulted was not just a time of political, social, or industrial revolution, but also theological revolution. This new environment allowed previously unconventional ideas to gain traction and spread quickly. Reactions ranged from radical new views of God to atheism.

On January 21st, 1793, King Louis of France was beheaded. Existentialist philosopher Albert Camus referred to that execution as “the crux of our contemporary history.” Why? Since Louis’s appointment as king was thought to be by divine right rather than a democratic system, rebellion against him was also seen as rebellion against God (Givens). This act of exiling God marked the beginning of the rapid decline of God’s former unquestioned status in the West. It was this revolt against Deity that would inspire others to similarly stand up against holes in the holy. This motivation derived in part from dissatisfaction with dominant theology’s limitedness and constant resort to mystery to account for the behavior and purposes of God, not to mention the repression of alternative, but unorthodox, rationales. In his article, “No Small and Cramped Eternities”, Givens describes some of the underlying gnawing anxieties as such:

The questions that Christian theology has by and large resisted the urge to adjudicate are legion. What of the time *before* Creation? What was God doing then? What of God’s other dominions? Another mystery it falls not to theology to explain. Why is there man at all? For Milton, the boldest exponent of theodicy before Parley Pratt, it was to deprive Satan of bragging rights in having suborned a third of heaven’s angels. The scriptures, however, are silent. What of human destiny in the worlds beyond? What is man being saved *for*? Dante thought a state of eternal, rapturous contemplation, and few have proffered more specifics than that. Post-redemption theology is an oxymoron. So *traditional* theology, in other words, confines itself to defining the terms and conditions of a very limited concept of salvation, of a soul of unknown beginnings, from an evil of unknown origin, to prepare for a future of



unknown nature, all in accordance with the inscrutable will of a God who is beyond human comprehending (Givens).

Givens notes that the theologian Augustine, when famously asked what God was doing before creation, was tempted to respond, “creating hell for people who ask such impudent questions” (2). While Augustine was an intellectual by all accounts, this avoidant reply perfectly characterizes the type of anti-intellectual inquisition to inquiry that later church leaders would exercise, including to issues of suffering and inequality, instead appealing to mystery or incomprehensibility. This tension that arose from strict “orthodoxy”, would unsuspectingly fuel the rationally repressed and the subsequent religious revolutions, allowing the emergence of new religious thought and prompting an avalanche of inspiration for art and literature.

2. JACOB’S WRESTLE

One 19th century example of art’s theodic exploration of mankind’s struggle with God is Alexander Leloir’s painting, *Jacob Wrestling the Angel*, produced in 1865. This painting depicts the biblical story of Jacob, who while in isolation and concern for his family’s safety, confronts a celestial being (Genesis 32). Many Christian and Jewish scholars’ interpretations actually have Jacob wrestling God Himself rather than an angel (Berger, Kowitz).

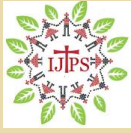
Jacob’s plight is quite symbolic of the intellectual entanglement that occurs in the search of theodicy. Instead of a simple miracle, easily received by a simple prayer, Jacob’s reward is received after a prolonged wrestle with God. His hip is dislocated and he wrestles through the dark of night. Upon the break of dawn, after passing the trial, he is given the blessing of a new name, Israel, which means “He who struggles with God” .

Hugh Nibley notices that “the word conventionally translated as ‘wrestled’ can just as well mean ‘embrace’” (Nibley 243). Regardless of the actual intent of the word, these little insights offer two differing reactions, both to the painting and the problem of evil. Leloir’s painting majestically depicted a biblical symbol of suffering and the cognitive dissonance we have at a Being who supposedly has the power and the motive to deliver us but doesn’t. With Nibley’s alternative insight, the story is instead a symbol of mankind’s life long journey and struggle with God that begins as a wrestle and transforms into embrace.

3. IVAN KARAMAZOV

One of the greatest books in literature that likewise touches on the paradox of suffering in the world is *The Brothers Karamazov* by Fyodor Dostoevsky. Dostoevsky was praised by countless intellectuals throughout history such as Camus, Einstein, Sartre, and Nietzsche for his psychological and philosophical insights. Freud considered him, next to Shakespeare, as the greatest writer of all time. Published in 1880, this book is the tale of three brothers, Alyosha (a monk), Ivan (a hard skeptic), and Dmitri (who remains morally divided throughout the story). The story is filled with each brother’s journey showing their strengths and struggles, all while discussing human nature, God, morality, and human suffering. In an epic dialogue between Ivan and Alyosha, Ivan goes on a sophisticated diatribe with detailed stories of the torture of children and a cost/benefit analysis of salvation and allegiance to God. Ivan, representing the unspoken doubters of the generation, was bold enough to confront and reject the God of his contemporaries.

Ivan isn’t simply torn over the question of the logical possibility of the existence of an omnipotent God with a universe filled with evil, but rather is concerned why anyone



would seriously believe this being is one worthy of our love. What really sears his soul is the “notion that an all-powerful, perfect, and self-sufficient deity, that required no world and no other being beside Himself, would create a world full of sinners whose fate would be temporal suffering here and eternal suffering hereafter (McLachlan)¹. His basis for doubt in God, *not* as he notes in His *existence*, but in His *goodness*, is based in this challenge:

Imagine that you are creating a fabric of human destiny with the object of making men happy in the end, giving them peace and rest at last, but that it was essential and inevitable to torture to death only one tiny creature—that baby beating its breast with its fist, for instance—and to found that edifice on its unavenged tears, would you consent to be the architect on those conditions? (Dostoevsky 308).

The ethical dilemma Ivan sees God facing, is whether His great plan would be worth the necessity of allowing the torture of *at least* one unfortunate child in the scope of mankind’s history (although the dilemma at hand really extends to millions of other children through history, not just one) for the happiness and eventual salvation of all others. It’s hard enough to answer this challenge when *we* are posed the question, but Ivan points out that the absurdity its grossly more unethical if you are God. If you are almighty, omnipotent God, (with whom nothing is supposedly impossible, and who is responsible for creating all the rules of how things work in the universe, including how to be saved) why even consider a world on such conditions in the first place, when you could have done otherwise? When you could have made a means of salvation without such extreme needless suffering? Why should the higher harmony of heaven be built on the suffering and innocent suffering of others? “Surely [even] I haven't suffered simply that I, my crimes and my sufferings, may manure the soil of the future harmony for somebody else” (307). Why create a universe that necessitates that our happiness in Heaven only comes at the expense of others inevitably suffering in Hell, (on earth and in the afterlife)?

Ivan questions whether the prices of mortality are worth the “diabolical good” and harmony of everlasting heaven. To highlight the disturbing paradox of the classical Christian plan of salvation, he shares a story of the torture of a five-year-old from abusive parents:

This poor child of five was subjected to every possible torture by those cultivated parents. They beat her, thrashed her, kicked her for no reason till her body was one bruise. Then, they went to greater refinements of cruelty—shut her up all night in the cold and frost in a privy, and because she didn't ask to be taken up at night (as though a child of five sleeping its angelic, sound sleep could be trained to wake and ask), they smeared her face and filled her mouth with excrement, and it was her mother, *her mother* did this. And that mother could sleep, hearing the poor child's groans! The child screams. But at last the child cannot scream, it gasps, 'Daddy daddy!' Can you understand why a little creature, who can't even understand what's done to her, should beat her little aching heart with her tiny fist in the dark and the cold, and weep her meek unresentful tears to dear, kind God to protect her? Do you understand that, friend and brother, you pious and humble novice? Do you understand why this infamy must be and is permitted? Without it, I am told, man could not have existed on earth, for he could not have known good and evil. Why should he know that diabolical good and evil when it costs so much? Why, the whole world of knowledge is not worth that child's prayer to dear, kind God (Dostoevsky 306)!

¹Due to the properties of self-aseity and absolute perfection ascribed to God (as many theologians strictly hold to), He would lack nothing and would have no need to change. Being compelled to change, for whatever reason, would imply that He lacks something, and would need some sort of further development which would contradict the principle of absolute perfection.



Can you imagine yourself, much less God, hearing this tender, desperate prayer for rescue and deliverance from torture from this innocent angel and responding with silence, inaction, or cold indifference?

Ivan does not entirely sympathize with the suffering of adults as he can conceive of potential reasons that justifies their suffering, "Men are themselves to blame, I suppose; they were given paradise, they wanted freedom, and stole fire from heaven, though they knew they would become unhappy, so there is no need to pity them" (305). Seeing adults as inherently sinful and evil, he sees them as deserving of such suffering to pay for their crimes.

But what of suffering of those who committed no crime? As Ivan elaborates, "I want to see with my own eyes the hind lie down with the lion and the victim rise up and embrace his murderer. I want to be there when everyone suddenly understands what it has all been for. All the religions of the world are built on this longing, and I am a believer. But then there are the children, and what am I to do about them? If it is really true that they must share responsibility for all their fathers' crimes, such a truth is not of this world and is beyond my comprehension" (306). Ivan then proceeds with an additional story of a boy who accidentally hurts a powerful general's favorite dog. For his offense, the child is stripped naked, tortured, and torn to pieces by a pack of dogs, with his mother forced to watch. What of justice and harmony here? "Some jester will say, perhaps, that the child would have grown up and have sinned, but you see he didn't grow up, he was torn to pieces by the dogs, at eight years old. Why should they, too, furnish material to enrich the soil for the harmony of the future?", asks Ivan (306). His critique of Christianity's cosmic salvation climaxes in ultimate confusion over the atonement of innocent suffering (rather than sin) and with open rebellion against God:

I understand, of course, what an upheaval of the universe it will be when the mother embraces the fiend who threw her child to the dogs, and all three cry aloud with tears, 'Thou art just, O Lord!' then, of course, the crown of knowledge will be reached and all will be made clear. But what pulls me up here is that I can't accept that harmony. I renounce the higher harmony altogether. It's not worth the tears of that one tortured child who beat itself on the breast with its little fist and prayed in its stinking outhouse, with its unexpiated tears to 'dear, kind God!' It's not worth it, because those tears are unatoned for. They must be atoned for, or there can be no harmony. But how? How are you going to atone for them? Is it possible? By their being avenged? But what do I care for avenging them? What do I care for a hell for oppressors? What good can hell do, since those children have already been tortured? And what becomes of harmony, if there is hell? I want to forgive. I want to embrace. I don't want more suffering. And if the sufferings of children go to swell the sum of sufferings which was necessary to pay for truth, then I protest that the truth is not worth such a price. I don't want the mother to embrace the oppressor who threw her son to the dogs! She dare not forgive him! Let her forgive him for herself, if she will, let her forgive the torturer for the immeasurable suffering of her mother's heart. But the sufferings of her tortured child she has no right to forgive; she dare not forgive the torturer, even if the child were to forgive him! And if that is so, if they dare not forgive, what becomes of harmony? Is there in the whole world a being who would have the right to forgive and could forgive? I don't want harmony. From love for humanity I don't want it. I would rather be left with the unavenged suffering. I would rather remain with my unavenged suffering and unsatisfied indignation, even if I were wrong. Besides, too high a price is asked for harmony.

For the absolute contradiction of God's supposed absolute goodness with an allowance of such atrocious suffering to undeserving innocent children, Ivan tells Alyosha, "In all humility, I cannot understand why the world is arranged as it is. It's not God that I don't accept, Alyosha, only I most respectfully return him the ticket" (308). Torn over the



absurdity of the unjust, lop-sided reality God created, he returns his ticket to heaven rather than adore and bow to an unjust God. Ivan concludes that “the world stands on absurdities”, that the devil is an anthropomorphic projection created in the image of humanity, and that if God does exist, He is as equally void of goodness (304).²

Interestingly, despite the seriousness of his argument through Ivan, Dostoevsky was a believer in God till his death. How he reconciled a belief with these self-projected doubts are unknown, but this Dostoevskian theme of an individual divided in schizophrenic tension was a common one that he projected onto many of his characters and stories. Through the character of Ivan, Dostoevsky did not shy from honestly confronting the problematic inconsistencies of some of his own beliefs, thus revealing some of the core problems with which he was wrestling with God. Ivan’s argument is not just challenging, it is one that Dostoevsky and his characters could never refute. Dostoevsky readily recognized in letters to editors the insufficiency of Alyosha’s attempts to morally and aesthetically (not just rationally) justify belief in God with the reality of extreme evils, a position that Ivan so terribly slaughtered. Ivan’s entire reaction to God, of a morally and rationally justified rebel against ultimate authority, foreshadowed the critique, anger, and incredulity that many would have towards God in the coming century even to our present day to conclude, in harmony with atheists, existentialists, and Nietzsche, that God is dead.

4. JOSEPH SMITH

A contemporary thinker of the 19th century who indirectly proposed new ideas on the problem of evil was Joseph Smith³, a religious iconoclast termed by famous literary critic Harold Bloom as “a religious genius” for his audacious and provocative thinking (Bloom 95). Smith, with Ivan, likewise rejected the dominant depiction of God in their time, but instead of returning the ticket or resorting to atheism, Smith introduced new approaches to many of the paradoxes that had surrounded God for centuries, including the philosophical problem of evil. While there have been various approaches to the troubles of theodicy⁴, Smith swiftly cut several Gordian knots by introducing revolutionary views of God, mankind, and their relationship, through multiple books and discourses he claimed to be inspired revelations from God rather than simply theological speculations.⁵ These understudied monumental works include the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, the Pearl of Great Price, and the King Follet Discourse, all of which Smith delivered before being murdered at 38.

One of the most potent factors hindering a solution to the problem of evil had been the centuries-long rigid orthodoxy of classical Christianity on various points of God’s,

² For Ivan’s entire argument well worth reading see *Works Cited-Brothers Karamazov Dialogue*.

³ For the most updated and exhaustive biography of Smith: *Rough Stone Rolling* by Columbia’s Richard Bushman. For an additional biography, see *Joseph Smith the Prophet* by Truman Madsen.

⁴ Among other views, Augustine held that evil was simply the absence of good. This view is held by Roman Catholicism. Buddhism and Christian Science see evil as illusory. Leibniz and Spinoza saw evil as perspectival, that from a complete understanding of all events and their purposes, what we currently deem evil will not be deemed evil from that complete perspective. Smith’s views can be seen partially as perspectival, but mainly as instrumentalist. Smith rejects evil as illusory and sees it as genuinely real.

⁵ While my paper is titled the philosophy of Joseph Smith, it’s important to know that while his thoughts have made several valuable contributions to philosophical discussion, he did not claim to be technically philosophizing, nor did he have any competent academic background for the work he produced. His works usually came through sporadic breakthroughs of insight, not drafted and edited papers after months of research and reflection, nor as a thoroughly systematic finished product.



man's, and the universe's nature and motives. Much of historical Christian conception of God can be derived, not to the Bible, but to 4th century man-made creeds, unbiblical in content, extra-biblical in derivation, that attempted to reinvent the God of the Bible to fit their modern-day philosophies. This official depiction of the Christian God came about not by revelation from God himself, but by majority vote by the bishops of the 4th century⁶. What arose from the creeds of various councils and church theologians is what has been called the God of the Philosophers, a God who was platonized by Augustine and aristotized by Thomas Aquinas⁷. Philosopher William James put it best about this absolutization of God: "Odd evolution from the God of David's psalms!"(James 410)⁸. The problematic Hellenizing of original Christianity, the unfortunate marriage of Jewish religion with Greek metaphysics, established new assumptions about God in absolutistic terms, such as absolute power, absolute goodness, absolute foreknowledge, and absolute creation, or creation from nothing. Competing views of God eventually were officially ruled out, exiled as split-offs, and the new Greek conception of the Christian God became the standard for centuries, largely unquestioned and unchallenged by kings, theologians, or peasants. It wasn't until the 19th century that Smith, at only 14 years old, pointed out, "The emperor has no clothes", or in other words, "The emperor is drenched in Greek clothes!" (Madsen).

Of God

Smith's theodic solutions came in part by stripping away premises and assumptions that had led to centuries of philosophical entanglement, thus getting out of many classical problems by never having to go into them. This accomplishment came by viewing God's capacities in terms of maximal potentiality rather than the neo-platonic concept of absolutism. On top of many changes, one of its most important was abandoning the idea of creation ex nihilo, or creation of something out of nothing. Apart from its inherent illogicality, it also has problematic implications relating to the problem of evil. Philosophers have long noticed that if God created everything, then ultimately, *He* was responsible for all the evil in the world, having created evil or a world and beings with the capacity to do so. Additionally, having absolute foreknowledge means that He would have *knowingly* created a chaotic cosmos for which most of humanity would experience immense suffering, not to mention consigning the majority of humans (billions upon billions) by His criteria for salvation, to eternal hell fire. Smith proposed a new idea of creation, salvation, and the nature of the universe. Instead of creation ex nihilo, creation was done by organizing and refining raw self-existent eternal matter, fashioning order into the chaos of an eternal cosmos. This view saw creation as comparable to building a ship from simpler materials, rather than waving a magic wand and forcing an object into existence from nothingness into being. Matter, time, and law, then, being eternal, are all uncreated, uncreatable, and indestructible. They have no beginning, they just *are*. This aligns with claims of modern

⁶The Nicene Creed was "made formal and given weight by majority vote and supported after much struggle by later assemblies, notably at Chalcedon (AD 451) –likewise by majority vote. Such was the determining process. Thus agreement was arrived at, and became dogma widely accepted down to our day" (MacMullen, 7). - "Voting about God in the Early Church Councils".

⁷See articles by Nels F.S. Ferre, Norbert Samuelson, Robin Atfield, Karl Rahner, James Barr, John Barton, Lee McDonald, James Sanders, and James VanderKam in Works Cited. See Judah Halvie, Pascal, and Martin Buber for further references. Also, for a list of the absolutistic qualities of the classical Christian God see Works Cited-[Properties of the classical Christian God](#).

⁸"I can hardly conceive of anything more different from the absolute, than the God, say, of David or Isaiah" (James 54, Varieties).



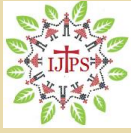
physicist Peter Lynds that the universe is ultimately without beginning or end. In an attempt to address the Primordial Existential Question, “Why is there something rather than nothing?”, as well as Kant’s paradox, Lynds argues for “a universe in which time is cyclic, without beginning or end, exists eternally, and yet, in relation to time is also finite”⁹ (Lynds 8). Philosophers Blake Ostler and David Paulsen explain the significance of these new conceptions Smith introduced:

Smith affirmed that God is related to and hence conditioned by an eternal environment that, because it is not totally his creation, is not absolutely subject to divine fiat. The importance of this fundamental departure from traditional theology can hardly be overstated. Smith taught that God is a dynamic being involved in progression and process of time who intervenes to bring order out of chaos. God did not bring into being the ultimate constituents of the cosmos nor the space-time matrix that defines it. Hence, unlike the Necessary Being of classical theology who alone could not *not* exist and on whom all else is dependent for existence, the God of Joseph Smith confronts realities that exist of metaphysical necessity independently of His own creative activity (Ostler and Paulsen).

Reviewing historical cases of science and religion’s eroding relationship, Givens noted that, “In the aftermath of Sir Isaac Newton’s momentous decipherment of the laws of the universe, the French scientist Pierre-Simon de Laplace famously told Napoleon, in his philosophical euphoria, that he no longer had need of God to make sense of creation”. Secular science could henceforth exile God from His universe (Givens 3). But Smith solved this traditional rivalry between God and science by reinscribing God into the universe neither as a product nor producer of it or all of its laws, but rather as a being eternally co-existent with the totality of reality¹⁰ (McMurrin). God was revealed to be a being whose

⁹“Based on the conjecture that rather than the second law of thermodynamics inevitably be breached as matter approaches a big crunch or a black hole singularity, the order of events should reverse, a model of the universe that resolves a number of longstanding problems and paradoxes in cosmology is presented. A universe that has no beginning (and no need for one), no ending, but yet is finite, is without singularities, precludes time travel, in which events are neither determined by initial or final conditions, and problems such as why the universe has a low entropy past, or conditions at the big bang appear to be so special, require no causal explanation, is the result” (Lynds).

¹⁰“Sagan believes that somehow with no conscious planning, no one to prevision the outcome, somehow there was a conspiracy in the random world of chance that from two atoms, some proto-plasmic combination occurred and life emerged and from that pseudopodium, a biological term for a toothless cell, more complex life emerged until now I am surrounded by remarkable persons who are alive and conscious and capable of all kinds of things, including rational thought. This view also comes to a kind of pessimism because there is no known immortality for selves, selves die and disintegrate, and it is entirely possible that in due time we will all experience that vast and total death and there will be no life and no consciousness left in the universe. When those who want to apply the teleological argument that want to say “how do you account for the incredible amount of order and harmony in the universe?”, and then say it would be 1 chance over...all the zeros you can write, that this world with this kind of order and with life could have sprung up by chance. And the answers of these persons would be: “all I need is one. One over whatever because that’s what we have, we have an infinity in the universe”. By the same principle, if it could happen once, then even after the so-called total death of the universe, it could happen again. To say it couldn’t, is to say what they don’t want to say, “oh you had at least one chance of that”. And its also possible isn’t it, that sometime in the remote and infinite future, one person who has emerged simply by chance could gain sufficient knowledge and power over the universe to perpetuate life and thus introduce immortality into the universe? And is it not even then possible that there’s one chance over infinity that one person could emerge as...God? Having all the qualities and attributes we have heretofore assigned to Him? To say, “No that could never happen” is not a very plausible position for a person who insists that by chance you came into existence” (Madsen). Such arguments that speculate on how theosis can naturally occur in an evolving universe inspire new philosophical movements, like Transhumanism, to speculate on our future godlike abilities that may be achieved through human progress, transforming human life and capacity in the process into god-like beings. David Pearce summarizes possibilities transhumanists hope to actualize across



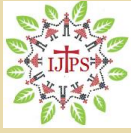
power came from knowledge and mastery of the self-existent laws of the universe rather than by inherently limitless ability to break, create, or contradict those laws. All events, even atypical phenomenon in nature, can be rationally and scientifically explained without having to conclude that its laws have been contradicted. For example, it is possible to lift tons of steel into the air by virtue of a jet engine and airfoil without revoking the law of gravity (Ostler). Smith implies that any activity attributed to God would also occur in similar scientific harmony. Because God is conditioned by an environment of eternal laws that are out of his power to break, God's activity isn't only incidentally compatible with logic and physics, it is *necessarily* compatible. For example, Brigham Young inferred from Smith's foundational teachings that if God intervenes with Earth's nature in the future he would do so by "sending forth his angels who are well instructed in chemistry, [to] separate the elements and make new combinations thereof" (Young 15:127). Due to this broader understanding of godliness, Smith saw education as a religious responsibility and academic scholarship as a form of worship (Doctrine and Covenants 93:19).

Thus, there is no magic wand in creation or miracles. God's maximal power entails that He can bring about all state of affairs that are consistent with the natures of eternal existences. Not even God has the power to make a four-sided triangle or a circular square, to force self-fulfillment onto free agents, or to organize an atom of oxygen and two atoms of hydrogen without the properties of water emerging. Miracle thus is not violation of law but a fulfillment of some higher or yet undiscovered law. From God's point of view, there are no miracles (McMurrin). Smith recorded, "The glory of God is intelligence or, in other words, light and truth" (Doctrine and Covenants 93:36). God is neither anti-scientific nor anti-intellectual, but His power comes in part from, not in spite of, possessing and accumulating knowledge of truth and light of all kinds, spiritual and secular.¹¹

By creating a naturalistic theology, this important insight merges the classically unbridgeable chasm between God and science (that still persists today), by collapsing the spiritual and the temporal into one sphere and one continuum, rather than dual natures of realities. Smith claimed that there is no such thing as immaterial substance. Everything, including spirits, angels, God, and mind are all ultimately of a material nature. Denouncing religious supernaturalism, yet embracing theology from the perspective of scientific materialism in a monistic cosmology, provided a rare metaphysical unified solution to the either/or character of physicalist/dualist metaphysics, the significance of which cannot be overstated. All this further explained the relation and extent of God's capacities with the physical universe and its laws, the relevance of which aids in understanding suffering that occurs from natural disasters. Smith's theodic success comes here by accounting for natural evils out of the impossibility of the simultaneous compossibility of certain desired outcomes (see Ostler's conclusion in Formal Proof), as well as God's relation to working with principles of matter as it is and fundamentally operates. This differs from the classical view in which God, with perfect power could have created the world without earthquakes, but due

three main areas: "Superintelligence, to radically enhance intellectual abilities, Superlongevity, there is no immutable law of nature that says organic robots must grow old anymore than silicon robots. Thus this seeks to understand the aging process, and assure that everyone who wants to can live an indefinite healthy lifespan, Superhappiness, to phase out substrates of suffering, and recalibrate the hedonic treadmill"(Pearce).

¹¹In saying, "We are saved no faster than we gain knowledge", Smith offers a unique idea on the meaning of salvation by correlating, and in some sense equating, the acquisition of knowledge or understanding (spiritual, experiential, and intellectual) with one's acquisition of salvation (*History of the Church*, 4:588). Richard Bushman's argues that the inverse is also true: we gain knowledge no faster than we are "saved".



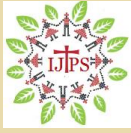
to some arbitrary inscrutable intent of His, didn't. Ostler and Paulsen summarize how this new view of God's relationship with materiality and cosmos affect issues of theodicy with natural evils:

Smith maintained that matter has inherent tendencies that are eternal. In other words, God could not create matter out of nothing, he could not create matter that is not already extant in space-time, and he could not create the laws that define how matter acts once it is organized. Rather, the natural tendencies of organized matter are based on eternal principles. For example, not even God could organize an atom of oxygen and two atoms of hydrogen without the properties of water emerging from this organization. If God organizes oxygen and hydrogen into a water molecule, it has a natural tendency to freeze at 32 degrees Fahrenheit. Because these natural tendencies of organized matter exist independently of God's creative fiat, the possibility of indiscriminate natural evils is endemic to any creation God could bring about. Indeed, if God creates water, the possibility that persons may drown is also present (Ostler and Paulsen).

This view of a God limited by a body, by being inside an eternal cosmos, and by eternal laws, lead some to misunderstand the meaning of the term limited in technical descriptions of God. Ostler notes, "Calling a being, who knows every thought that you've ever had and every atom on the planet Jupiter, 'limited' and over-focusing on God's limits is missing the point [of the technical philosophical use of the word]"¹². By revealing God as maximally powerful, instead of absolutely so, Smith's God remains supremely capable in every possible aspect *that is possible*. If Smith's God is limited it is only by self-limitation, by the impossible, or by co-existing eternal realities. For example, it is not possible for God to contradict logic (creating 4-sided triangles, forcing people to commit free acts), to trespass physical law, nor to perform metaphysical impossibilities (creating something out of nothing). This novel view of God, "captured the interests of talented theologians from all corners of occidental religion" (McMurrin). Many proponents (not just of the possibility but of the preference) for a limited God, have risen in the 20th century, such as in the Practical theism of William James, in Process theism, and most recently in Open theism.

William James notes that it has been historically common across many schools of thought to conceive of God as infinite and absolute but wonders where is the warrant for jumping to this conclusion and necessitating it. "All that the facts require is that the power should be larger than our conscious selves. Anything larger will do, if only it be large enough to trust for the next step. It need not be infinite [or absolute]" (p.413). James argues that it does not follow that if God is finite instead of absolute that He should not remain the most important existence to acknowledge, if that being is maximally or sufficiently powerful enough to achieve His and our purposes. James concludes that this kind of a God is pragmatically more meaningful and closer to the biblical depiction of God than orthodox theology presents. In Process theism, Alfred North Whitehead argues that God is in some sense limited by being involved in temporal processes and therefore not absolute, but passible and mutable. Open theism argues that since the future is open and indeterminate,

¹²Ostler elaborates: "Technically everybody who isn't a pantheist believes that God is finite in some respects, [even though classical Christians typically classify God as infinite] because for pantheism God is the whole of reality. The minute you say that God isn't the whole of reality you've got to delimit God in some respect and the minute you do that, He's no longer logically infinite he's now delimited in some sense. Everybody believes that God is finite in some sense who believes that God is personal. There are certain limitations for God but limitations aren't necessarily bad. For instance, limitations in cruelty, ignorance and stupidity are good things. God can't make cruelty to simultaneously be love. Limitations in and of themselves are not necessarily bad."



this must limit God's absolute knowledge. Instead of knowing all things absolutely, He has maximal knowledge of all things that are possible to be known at the present time. These are three movements since Smith's death that have brought ideas he held from the margins of orthodoxy and the realm of blasphemy to the theological center.

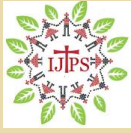
Of Ethics

By naturalizing God, Smith likewise naturalized the ethics of God. The controversy surrounding God's relation with ethics originates with Plato's Euthyphro Dilemma. Plato essentially asks, "Is something morally good because it is commanded by God, or does God command it because it is morally good?" In other words, is morality invented or discovered? Is God an engineer of morality or an expert of morality? Is morality dependent on God for its existence or does it exist independently? Leibniz noted that your answer to this question determines, "whether justice and goodness are arbitrary or whether they belong to the necessary and eternal truths about the nature of things". This is a paradox for classic Christianity, because either option holds implications that are problematic and unacceptable for the orthodox. If you pick the first horn, morality becomes arbitrary and trivial, at the whim of what God decides. If you pick the second horn, morality is then independent of God, but for the orthodox this contradicts claims of omnipotence, making God limited. For example, if Law was not created by God, then being bound by some law He has no control to alter, this limits His omnipotence, His sovereignty, and His freedom. To maintain an Alexandrian interpretation of perfection for the platonized Christian God, the first horn became the preferred position.

To defend the existence of God, many theologians have argued that morality cannot exist without a God, so if there is to be morality, there must be a God. This belief persisted for centuries in the consciousness of believers in the western world. But Dostoevsky, in the *Brothers Karamazov*, challenges this premise in his famous thought that, "If there is no God, anything is permitted." If upon the assumption that the only way for morality to exist it is necessary that there is a God, but in fact there is no God, then there is no morality. If there is no law-creator, then there is ultimately no law, goes the argument. If no law, no punishment and no cosmic system of accountability. As Sartre has mentioned, it was this logical sequence that birthed existentialism in an attempt to figure out how one should then live in such a godless, lawless world.

Because Smith rejects classical assumptions about God, he can uniquely respond to Dostoevsky's ideas on the subject of God's relation, not just to evil, but to ethics. Due to Smith's position that the universe and its laws are just as eternal as God (that moral and physical laws were not created by God *ex nihilo*), and that God is not absolute, he can favor the second horn without dilemma. Smith thus maintains that morality (of which God is an expert and example, not an engineer) is independently built into the nature of reality, making Him more of a law-giver than a law-creator. By taking the second horn without apology, Smith can dismiss Dostoevsky's comment that "if there is no God, everything is permitted". Both the premise and the conclusion become misleading in a universe that does not necessitate that morality can only exist if there is a God. With this naturalization of God's relation to ethics, Madsen observes that:

Neither God, nor law tell you what you *must* do. That's a fiction. They tell you what the inevitable consequences will be of what you choose to do. [That isn't coercive, that is a declaration of reality. Consequences follow on certain courses of action, even in the absence of God.] Here is an absolute that is not obsolete. Jesus is thus against selfishness and sin not



because He is the giant spoil sport [or for other arbitrary reasons]. Just the other way around. He is against sin and selfishness because he is against despondency, and melancholy, and morbidity, and against the shrinking of our capacity for fulfillment. Having become the ultimate expert, including by experientially paying the awful price of a universal atonement, He is entitled to alert us to reality.

God's relation to humanity is then as a eudemonistic guide to help individuals navigate the journey of eternity in progressive fashion, to make aware the inevitable consequences of alternative choices. Givens observes that "Positing the independent existence of eternal law suggests that God is divinely perfect *as a consequence* of his deliberate, willful embrace of, and compliance with, those laws." In Smith's cosmology it is simple, God is not just the most powerful, He is the happiest, both as a result of harmonizing with eternal law. God's involvement with mankind is based in helping others to celestialize life in quality to make it worth immortalizing in quantity. This can only be accomplished by living in accordance with, as He does, ultimate natural patterns and principles that result in maximal happiness, rather than as an uncorrelated result of just superstitiously doing what He could've arbitrarily told you to do. Smith declared, "If you wish to go where God is, you must be like God, or in other words, possess the principles [and attributes] which God possesses" (History of the Church, 4:588). This is so because for Smith, heaven is not as much a geographical location, as it is a state of being that is attained as a consequence of accumulated decisions and one's willingness to grow (rather than a club that you can only enter upon Someone else's approval). In another instance when told that his radical thoughts would take him and his followers to hell for blasphemy, Smith remarked, "And if we go to hell, we will turn the devils out of doors and make a heaven of it. Where this people are, there is good society [because of the way they live and love each other]. What do we care where we are, if the society be good?" (History of the Church, 5:517). Smith noticed that the special ingredient that made heaven heavenly and hell a nightmare for its members wasn't due to the location itself, nor because an omnipotent being had consigned one there, but rather as a natural result of the way one lived. We are punished consequentially *by* our sins, not *for* them. If God doesn't control nor incur the natural consequences of what we do, then we self-determine many of the consequences we receive, and as a result, "We are our own tormentors and condemners".¹³

Of Mankind

Perhaps more radical and revolutionary than Smith's new conceptions of God, was his revolutionary understanding of Mankind. These ideas radicalize Mankind's origin, nature, freedom, identity, and potential. Givens has observed that "The dominant religious views of mankind in the 19th century saw man as created out of nothing, crippled from his birth with a depraved nature, often enjoying little or no freedom of the will, and limited in his potential by a jealous god. No wonder that by the 19th century some societies were rebelling against kings and church alike, believing that both were an enemy to man and his eternal soul" (Givens 7). The 19th century soul was one possessed of tension, filled with cosmic poetry expressing the limitless ambition and potentiality of Mankind on one hand, yet repressed all around with religions of limitation and despair, that instead stressed self-depravity, hellfire, and the inscrutable will and purposes of God. It had been a presumption for centuries that our souls were created *ex nihilo* by God upon being born in the world.

¹³ Smith also didn't believe in any sort of literal Hell-fire. Hell was a state of mind of misery, the condition of which wasn't actually a lake of fire and brimstone, but that metaphorically felt like one.



Smith went against this concept and instead introduced the mind shattering idea that, “Man was also in the beginning with God” (Doctrine and Covenants, 93:29). This idea stated that each person lived pre-mortally, or before their birth on earth, with God in heaven as a conscious individual before the world was even created.

But Smith went a step farther. “*Spirits have no beginning*; they existed before, they shall have no end, they shall exist after, they are eternal” (Abraham 3:18). Most are comfortable with the idea of a forever forward, but have you ever considered a forever backwards?¹⁴ What are the implications of a symmetrical eternity, instead of the dominantly depicted, lop-sided *aeternitas a parte post*¹⁵? The infinite regress of both mind and self. Each individual is eternally self-existent, with a beginningless beginning. Mind has no birthday and memory no first. In one of the most optimistic and ennobling perspectives, Smith saw Mankind as eternally existent in time, inherently innocent and embryonically divine in nature, inherently free in capacity, and infinitely perfectible in potential.

This eternalization of matter, freedom, law, and intelligence or selfhood, has many implications for theodicy upon the premise that selfhood existed pre-mortally or eternally. One of the great complaints over existence in this tumultuous world is that we are “conceived without consent, wrenched whimpering into an alien universe”, subject to predicaments we are not responsible for creating yet instantly inherit upon birth (Maxwell 1). 19th century theologian Edward Beecher likewise struggled with this paradox expressing the irony that, “Pain, sickness, and death come on the human race antecedent to the development of reason. *Such a constitution resembles punishment applied in anticipation of a crime...* [But calling total depravity] voluntary seems like removing a difficulty by language only. In short, original, native, entire depravity is a hard doctrine to be explained... The question is, is not the present system a malevolent one? . . . Evil exists. If it does prove malevolence in God, we are lost... We cannot analyze the thing” (Beecher). However, if we conceive of each individual pre-existing before mortal life, having consciously chosen to enter into such an experience, then there is no coercion involved and God is not to blame for our predicament. Our dilemma is not that we have been conceived without consent, but that we are forced to be free. William James accurately echoed Smith’s conception of mankind’s pre-mortal perspective when he remarked:

Suppose that the world’s author put the case to you before creation, saying: “I am going to make a world not certain to be saved, a world the perfection of which shall be conditional merely, the condition being that each several agent does its own ‘level best.’ I offer you the choice of taking part in such a world. Its safety, you see, is unwarranted. It is a real adventure, with real danger, yet it may win through. It is a social scheme of cooperative work genuinely to be done. Will you join the procession? Will you trust yourself and trust the other agents enough to face the risk?” (290-91).

¹⁴ M. F. Burnyeat, a Cambridge classical scholar, noted, “Many believe that their soul will survive death. Rather few, I imagine, believe that it also pre-existed their birth. The religions that have shaped Western culture are so inhospitable to the idea of pre-existence that you probably reject the thought out of hand, for no good reason” (Burnyeat). Other historical proponents of the pre-existence of the soul include Origen and atheistic Cambridge philosopher, John McTaggart (who found a person’s premortal existence massively more intellectually compelling than a belief in its immortality.)

¹⁵ Meaning a view of existence where you suddenly come into existence at a certain point in time and then live forever forward. This is a common view for those who consider afterlife a possibility. But there are other views that could be considered logically possible. What if you suddenly exist for only 100 years and then suddenly cease to exist, having never existed before and never to exist again. What if you eternally existed before but at some future moment in time you will cease to ever exist again? Smith’s view is that you eternally existed before in some sense, and will eternally exist afterwards, hence that Man is really an eternal Being.



Upon this premise of pre-mortality, the correct response to the complaint “I didn’t ask to be born”, would be “Oh yes you did”, and to the frustrated query “God, why did you get me into this?”, Smith would counter, “Why did you get you into this?”.

Man and woman then, like God, are neither products nor producers of the universe, but self-derived, self-determined, co-eternal beings. Smith believed God’s role to be as a guide to Mankind’s progress to maximal happiness through the eternities, even to the extent He Himself possessed. Seeing Mankind’s intelligence and infinitude as unoriginated and indestructible was an analysis of human nature that was a “stirring, compelling, and exciting synthesis that presented a spiritually hungry humankind, with a God who ‘was good, and the good can never have any jealousy of anything. And being free from jealousy, He desired that all things should be as like himself as they could be’” (Givens 10). God isn’t anthropomorphic, rather Man is theomorphic. Within this context of cosmic christogenesis¹⁶, Smith saw the purpose of mortal life as a school and gymnasium of soul-stretching whereby humans grew experientially in a world of necessary oppositions of joy and suffering, where they would learn to choose, choose to learn, or choose to stagnate their progress.

Smith’s cosmology of post-mortal life, called Eternal Progression, was no small and cramped eternity¹⁷. In this afterlife, “there are no angelic choirs passively basking in the glory of their God, but Faustian strivers endlessly seeking to shape themselves into progressively better beings, eternally working to impose order and form on an infinitely malleable cosmos...The human body and soul, then, are constituted for the amassing of experience in ever-greater variety and intensity, [secularly and spiritually]” (Givens, *Rainbows over the Rain*, 4). The end, or rather the ongoing, goal was in part to create a god-like life of happiness and moral elevation, to be like, and thus share in the joy experienced by, the Christ. This paradise of progression was predicated, however, upon the necessary university of mortality with its essential encounters with evil.

Of Evil

Smith’s theodicy proposed an instrumentalist view of necessary suffering in the process of salvation. A perfectly (or maximally) good God is not perfectly good just for seeking to eliminate all unnecessary evil, but also for maximizing all potential happiness so far as is within His power. God’s work isn’t to protect people from any exposure to suffering, but to accomplish these dual desires. But God Himself is powerless to get us to the greater good of total fulfillment except through the operation of mortality, which entails suffering and freedom. To assume that God could avoid such conditions by simply forcing self-realization upon an undeveloped, self-existent, and free agent is just as logically inconsistent as to say God could create a 4-sided triangle. Both contradict rules of logic. The latter is to misunderstand geometry as the former is to misunderstand fulfillment and freedom. Smith’s view that some suffering is necessary and unavoidable, yet instrumental to achieve certain greater goods, is comparable to paying the essential, but beneficial price of working out at a gym to maintain or promote health. There simply isn’t a way to buy

¹⁶ From Teilhard de Chardin, French philosopher and Jesuit priest, this is the idea that the ultimate purpose of the cosmos is to evolve people to become exactly like Jesus Christ in attributes of maximal love, goodness, knowledge, and capacity (Lyons 39). For me this idea is identical to ideas like theosis, but specifies concretely Smith’s intended meaning of the type of being one could potentially become by harmonizing with His teachings, being changed by the atonement, and being refined through the process of mortality and beyond.

¹⁷ This is an allusion to G.K. Chesterton: “There is such a thing as a small and cramped eternity. You may see it in many modern religions” (Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, 12).



muscles off Amazon and have them shipped to you. Nor can virtue be developed by simply reading about it in a library. Some things can only be developed experientially. For example, physical fitness is never achieved, nor any worthwhile accomplishment, without any degree of suffering experienced in the process. Suffering then is not necessarily purposeless or trivial, it is meaningful if it can reap growth and transform us positively. The only way for physical growth in our muscles is through stress, pain, and sacrifice. Similarly in God's sanctifying process, there is no other way. The *only* way for soul-stretching and the kind of development that leads to being fully Christlike is upon this same principle of experiencing dynamic tension with genuine distress and opposition. Madsen notes that,

It isn't sufficient to ask, 'Could God have prevented the blindness that afflicts that newborn child?' 'Could God have healed such and such a person who was born without a spine?' 'Could God reverse the ravages of disease in those who are suffering from all these forms of terminal cancer?' Of course, He has the power to do those things! Then, why doesn't He? Ah, because we don't ask the right question, which is, 'Can He do *compossible* things? Can He achieve the purposes of mortality in our lives and at the same time eradicate all suffering and evil? And the answer is, 'No, He cannot'.

The value of Smith's instrumental view of evil can only arise, however, from the premises he makes about the motives and capacities of God, Mankind, and the universe. This same explanation is unavailable to the classical God whose purposes for creating mankind and mortality are covered in mystery. Why is there man at all? What is man being saved *for*? Is there no other way for an omnipotent God to accomplish whatever his purposes may be without putting us through such a painful process? As Mark Twain observed, it is troubling to say evil and suffering in this life is really essential and instrumental if the purpose of life is (as many classical Christians hold) only to selflessly glorify a God who "gave his angels eternal happiness unearned, yet requires his *children* to earn it; gave his angels painless lives, yet cursed his children with biting miseries and maladies of mind and body...Who could have made every one of them happy, yet never made a single happy one; who made them prize their bitter life, yet stingily cut it short". Where is the justification for creating people in a world of havoc when you omnipotently could have created them happy in heaven? Perhaps there are reasons, but scripture is silent on the matter. As we have before mentioned, Givens notes that the consequence of all this was a, "*traditional* theology that confines itself to defining the terms and conditions of a very limited concept of salvation, of a soul of unknown beginnings, from an evil of unknown origin, to prepare for a future of unknown nature, all in accordance with the inscrutable will of a God who is beyond human comprehending".

But what of unnecessary suffering, the type which the universe would be, all things considered, better without? This is the type of suffering that you or God have the power to eradicate and to do so would *not* interfere with achieving other objectives you have for allowing greater goods. *Unnecessary* suffering does exist in addition to *potentially instrumental* suffering. Not all pain necessarily leads to improvement, hence pain need not be sought after, but rather should be sought to be eradicated in its needless forms rather than wishfully justified with illusory meaning. Smith's God allows instrumental suffering to occur, but does all in His power to eliminate unnecessary suffering that occurs in the world.¹⁸

¹⁸Sin is a type of self-inflicted unnecessary suffering, hence why there is so much emphasis from God on eliminating it from the world.



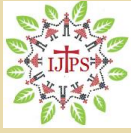
Can there be self-fulfillment without a self? Can there be a self without autonomously free self-determination? Can there be self-determination without alternative choices? Are genuine alternatives possible without genuine oppositions? If selves cannot act independently for themselves, then there is no existence of a genuine self.¹⁹ Existence of genuine identity depends on genuine freedom which depends on genuine oppositions to choose from. Otherwise we regress from being subjects who act to objects acted upon (Doctrine and Covenants 93:30). Self-fulfillment emerges as a potential option by an eternal cosmos of natural opposition in all things and in all possible choices (the good and the bad, the bitter and the sweet). Smith saw this law of opposites as an irrevocable, yet valuable condition inherently built into the universe's structure of possibilities. Encountering oppositions, such as suffering, can be instrumentally beneficial because they allow one to become acutely aware of certain truths and develop certain moral virtues that otherwise could not be acquired. "By proving contraries, truth is made manifest" (Smith, History of the Church 6:248). Further explaining how, Ostler notes:

It is true that we do not need to be unkind in order to be kind; however, it does not follow that we could know and *appreciate* what kindness is unless we had some idea of what it would be like for persons not to be kind. [While it is not the case] that every good *always* requires an off-setting evil to exist (an ontological issue), opposition is essential to our *knowledge* of both good and evil (an epistemological issue). Tasting the bitterness of evil in the world affords us an opportunity to know and learn to prize what otherwise we could not appreciate. There *are* virtues, then, that require opposition in order to be realized. Lehi, an ancient Hebrew prophet of the Book of Mormon, argues that God's purpose in creating humankind was to make it possible for us to know joy. As a condition to experiencing this joy, it is necessary to be able to choose between good and evil and to experience both bitter and sweet. While it is not necessary to be unkind to be kind, it is necessary to have genuine choices among good and evil alternatives to be free in a morally significant sense. Indeed, F. R. Tennant has argued that our concept of good has meaning only when related to concepts of opposition, such as temptation, courage, and compassion. Courage is developed through facing real challenges, compassion comes about as a response to the presence of pain and suffering, and temptation exists only where there is the possibility of choosing evil (Ostler 209).

Much of the *unnecessary* evil and suffering in the world are *moral evils* that derive from the essential freedom of Mankind, whether by self-inflicting harm or being harmed by others, intentionally or accidentally. While freedom is an essential element for fulfillment, the extent of Mankind's moral depravity is not, since by ex nihilo creation and omnipotence, the classical God could have created any type of persons He wanted. Notwithstanding this, He still created people who He knew by absolute foreknowledge would be inclined to abuse this freedom and cause unnecessary suffering in so great an amount. Twain found it absolutely puzzling why an omnipotent God, "who could make good children as easily as bad, preferred to make bad ones". By creating mankind ex nihilo, God is responsible for determining where to place mankind's degree of moral sensitivity between the two extremes of moral perfection and moral depravity. Paulsen and Ostler explain why the classical God's particular placement along the spectrum of moral sensitivity is unjustifiable:

There is no reason why God could not have made human beings significantly more virtuous than they are. Why not, for example, give them some significant reduction in their sometimes-overwhelming tendencies toward selfishness that lead to violence, rape, stealing, and other such behaviors? Why could God not have increased their natural aversion to violence? Why could he not have made them more morally sensitive or more intelligent and compassionate so

¹⁹Moral actions are most significant not when we do what is right, but when we *choose* to do what is right.



as to see the consequences of their actions on others? Such creative choices on God's part might have narrowed the options over which mortals' own choices might range, but such limitations are entirely compatible with a strong notion of self-determinative freedom and with God's soul-making objectives (Ostler and Paulsen).

Known more specifically as the *evidential* problem of evil, this begs the question not just why does evil exist, but why quantitatively and qualitatively so much of it unnecessarily exists. Why does it exist in such unnecessary extremes in diversity and intensity? Classical theologians have long responded that evil must exist in some respects for the will to be free. True, but this does nothing to solve the evidential problem of evil. The problem is not that the will is free, but that the will was created by God to be free and capable enough to the point of committing horrifying acts that are not instrumental to God's purposes. If by ex nihilo God is responsible for mankind's moral sensitivity, inclinations, and tendencies, surely God could have prevented extremes like Hitlers and Stalins from arising, or the prevalence of other terrible crimes, without betraying freedom.

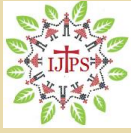
A perfectly good and powerful God will eliminate all unnecessary evil. It is unnecessary that our human nature be as morally deficient as it is for freedom to exist. It does not follow that the existence of moral weakness or inclinations to violence or other vices of any kind are incompatible with the goodness of God. It is problematic, however, that a God who claims absolute creation and absolute power could have created us to a more moral degree, thus eliminating unnecessary atrocities while not overriding our freedom, but didn't. The classical God is thus left unjustified for allowing various extremes of unnecessary forms of suffering from *moral* and *natural* evils that are in His power to eradicate.

For Smith, however, "God never had the option of creating persons from nothing with just the characteristics he wanted" (Paulsen and Ostler). Individuals are uncreated and eternal. God never gave us our freedom, we instead eternally possessed self-determinacy. God, then, is *not* transitively responsible for our morally extreme choices.²⁰ Our level of moral sensitivity was (and is) self-determined and enhanced at our own pace. God can't then determine the extent of one's moral sensitivity, but helps one advance from wherever they currently reside along that spectrum. Smith's God is thus justified in allowing evil to exist for Himself to (1) remain consistent with eternal individuals' free will, (2) to remain consistent with eternal laws, and (3) to not prevent us from greater possession of joy in quantity and quality (Ostler, see Formal Proof in Works Cited).

Though possessing a formal education equivalent to that of a third grader, the uneducated and untrained Joseph Smith proposed a unique philosophy that has been recognized, even by Smith's critics such as Carl Mosser of Notre Dame, as a valid solution to the *logical, evidential, moral, natural, and existential* problems of evil, one of history's most profound paradoxes (Mosser, 217). In so doing, Smith revealed a God who answered to Ivan's criticisms rationally, morally, and aesthetically.

Of Meaning

²⁰ Even if evil were to be attributed to Satan, God can't be blamed for Satan's influence, since He didn't even create him. Lucifer, an eternally existent being, created or chose to become Satan. This is another problematic issue with classical orthodoxy that I will avoid to investigate in this paper.



Albert Camus famously began *The Myth of Sisyphus* with the line, “There is but one truly serious philosophical problem, and that is suicide.”²¹ The most important question of philosophy is, “Is life worth living?” This is one of the ultimate questions upon which the problem of evil is founded. Here in lies the significant intersection between theodicy and existentialism. While Ivan and Joseph join in rejecting the God of Christian orthodoxy, it is in this that they most clearly diverge with distinct cost/benefit analyses of life and salvation. Having inherited a neo-platonic set of premises of an absolutistic God, Calvinistic and Augustinian views of a depraved, fallen mankind under the bondage of original sin, and existentialist views of the apparent absurdity of life, Ivan rationally rejects the purposes of God, unable to reconcile His supposed goodness with the torture of children. Ivan would have rejected James’s invitation (to join the procession of mortality) in rebellion to an immoral system of salvation, favoring with his grand inquisitor security from mortality, rather than freedom to participate in it.

Some thus exaggerate suffering enough to eventually conclude that life is meaningless. But if existence is truly absurd, it can’t be meaningful to say so (Madsen). Saying one lives in an absurd world is really to say that one knows that it should be different. For all their claims of meaninglessness, most existentialists ironically seem pretty happy when they win literary prizes. Does celebrating despair, then, deserve to pass as heroism? Or is this demonstration of supposed raw honesty actually a sophisticated form of cowardice, a hallucination of sick minds incapable of seeing meaning? (That is a paper for another day.)

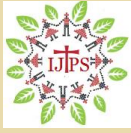
In stark contrast to Ivan, Smith reveals a material, non-absolute God who is justified in allowing evil to allow individuals to achieve maximal joy. Upon these notions of soul-making and christogenesis, suffering (instead of making life meaningless) can actually endow life with majestic meaning.

To be or not to be? In contrast to Hamlet and Camus, this is not the question. For Smith, no one can choose to be or not to be. What is the question then? The question is not one of *being*, but of *becoming*. To become more or not to become more? This is the question that eternal beings, void of the possibility of non-existence, must answer (Madsen).

The God who Weeps

To Smith, God likewise wrestles with evil. In one of Smith’s revelatory recoveries of an ancient religious text, The Book of Moses, the prophet Enoch is taken to heaven and sees a startling sight: God weeping. Enoch is baffled that the God he had always envisioned to be so almighty as to be detached from and unfazed by the acute sufferings of this world, a God who had created the infinite universe filled with galaxies and planets, to actually be touched by the everyday pains we, grains of sand in this cosmic beach, feel. Enoch recounts these feelings to a now more humanized God, asking Him how it is *possible* that He can cry and why He should at all? God explains His dilemma. He sees the consequential misery that awaits, not mere creations, but His literal children, and he wishes to help them to alleviate their sorrows, but they reject His attempts to do so. Knowing that His children will suffer unnecessarily so, why not weep? Especially over those prodigals who don’t return home? God’s motivation for involvement with the human race is *not* as a moral police officer constantly looking to catch lawbreakers, a judge yearning to punish anyone who sins, or a

²¹ While Camus would argue that while he accepted that life was absurd, he would argue that that didn’t justify suicide. To do so is to let death and life have dominion over you. One must instead rebel, create meaning, and live in the absurd in heroic rejection of death.



divine referee trying to tag us off on third base (Holland). Rather He is interested as a father trying to alleviate all unnecessary suffering as is possible to allow maximum joy.

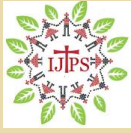
Smith's insights introduced a weeping God, who even in the eternities suffered with the sorrow of others, an image of God which emphasizes his *infinite empathy* and vulnerability, rather than the typical emphasis of God's *infinite power*. This insight converts Aristotle's image of God from the "Unmoved Mover" into the "Most Moved Mover". When flooding the earth, rather than doing so in rage, God wept as he did so, His tears corresponding to the rain of the flood, for the misery of His children²².

But Smith's Christ, though involved and personal like the Father, does not get away with mere spectator suffering. He forever leaves the realm of spectator and fully becomes the ultimate participator and expert of the human experience. Smith's conception of Atonement, like every other theologian, is undeveloped and unclear in its specific mechanics. Smith was clear, however, that the figure Jesus Christ was the keystone in the plan of eternal progression and in the christogenic conversion of undeveloped and handicapped souls to ever improving Christlike beings of infinite capacities for goodness and light. Unlike in other theologies, Smith's Christ does not simply atone for the sins of the world, but in addition, suffers all the joys and tattles of the universe's (not just this planet's) *suffering*. In this multidimensional atonement, the universal Christ infuses the entire human history of experience into his being²³. This process perfects him in capability for his role as Savior and Judge. Both these roles are revolutionized as Christ gains perfect experiential knowledge of our experiences and is now a perfect expert on how to heal and make whole any experience. Now knowing firsthand the ultimate brokenness of Mankind, He knows how to justly and mercifully judge, and most especially, *pardon*. This Atonement expands the suffering of Jesus from simply suffering the punishment for our sins, to having duplicated in his senses the exact pains, doubts, fears, depressions, and deaths that have occurred or could in the universe.

The dark and absurd depths that Christ would have had to descend to in Smith's vision of cosmic Atonement aligns with remarks from Albert Camus (who in this case was ironically following Dostoevsky) when he said that Christ could only really incarnate the 'human drama' if he shared that which marks it as most absurd: sharing with Mankind a genuine belief and a genuine fear as he was suffering, that in reality there would be no resurrection, that he was being tortured and killed for no reason, that it was all meaningless, and that his whole mission that he had lived and died for was all a lie. Christ would have to descend below all things. Whether He weeps in sympathy by observation or by pure empathy in the shared, duplicated experience of suffering, the Jesus of Joseph Smith is one who is not only *not* limited to atoning only for sins, *nor* spared from the accumulated suffering and evil of the universe, He is the most exposed to its exquisiteness. The crux of theodicy and the problem of evil centers on the case of Christ in the tragic irony that The Most Innocent suffers the most, suffers as if guilty of everything. Joseph ultimately concludes that the Christ, though not the source of our suffering, is the source to *overcome*

²² God's capacity to weep, does not reduce or weaken Him, it instead magnifies Him as a being worthy of worship.

²³ Jesus suffered for the victims, as well as the victimizers and the villains, with incomprehensible grace, like Hugo's priest to Valjean. This was, in part, to eternalize and equalize the possibility of redemption and fulfillment upon the condition of every person's will and effort to change. Smith said, "There is never a time when the spirit is too old to approach God" (Smith 191).



evil and suffering, instrumentally converting it into one's moral improvement and an acquisition of joy in greater depth.

Whence then cometh Evil? While some like Jacob and Ivan prefer to wrestle against God, others like Smith and Madsen see the wrestle to be *with* God *against* evil, rather than against God himself. Shifts in the intellectual climate over the last centuries have sparked divergent reactions to this issue, almost all of some revolutionary response to the accumulated degeneracies of past generations. Even with human advancements, such as in technological innovations and humanitarian efforts, the problem of evil and suffering is far from being *exiled* from our world. With new insights such as those discussed in this paper, evil will ever evaporate as a philosophical conundrum. Yet regardless of our reconciliations with reason, we must all confront this existential Goliath *experientially*. With so much needless suffering still scarring our world and seared in our memories, our journey with Jacob (or Sisyphus?) is an uphill climb. The wrestle with this weeping God goes on, some finishing the long dark night returning the ticket, others in sacred, fulfilling embrace.

Formal Proof of Joseph Smith's Theodicy (Ostler):

1. God is almighty, omniscient, all-good, and exists.
2. God is conditioned by the existence of coeternal realities such as:
 - a. Intelligences (necessarily existing selves).
 - b. Chaotic mass/energy.
 - c. Moral principles.
 - d. Physical laws defining time, space and matter.
3. God is almighty if he can bring about the optimal realization of potential among states of affairs (i.e., states of affairs consistent with there being other ontological realities).
4. A perfectly good being prevents all the evil and promotes all the good it can without thereby preventing a greater good.
5. Moral evils occur and God justifiably allows them because:
 - a. Human nature is uncreated (2a).
 - b. Humans are inherently self-determining and categorically free (2a).
 - c. Humans are morally imperfect and potentially perfectible (2a, 2c).
 - d. God's purpose in creation is to provide the opportunity for intellectual and moral development of persons (2a, 4).
 - e. Moral opposition is necessary to moral development (2a, 2c).
 - f. God did not create human nature either virtuous or depraved (5a, 5b).
 - g. Humans sometimes choose evil (5b, 5c).
 - h. God is justified in not contravening human evil choices (3, 4, 5d, 5e).
6. Natural evils occur and God is not blameworthy for them because:
 - a. Chaotic mass/energy is uncreated (2b).
 - b. The laws governing mass/energy are eternal and independent of God (2b, 2d).
 - c. Some of these laws require that mass/energy be organized on causal principles (2d).
 - d. Adverse physical circumstances may enhance moral and intellectual development of intelligences (2a, 2c, 5c).
 - e. The nature of causal principles is such that many indiscriminant natural



- evils occur (6a, 6b, 6c).
f. God may justifiably allow some natural evils (3, 4, 6d).
7. Whatever evils occur are:
- Unpreventable by God consistent with individual autonomy.
 - Unpreventable by God without thereby preventing a greater good.
 - Unpreventable by God consistent with eternal laws.

Properties of the classical God of Christianity

The classical God of Christianity is utterly distinct from all realities other than Himself and who possesses all of the following characteristics:

- **Causal Ultimacy**, being the temporal and/or metaphysical source of all realities other than divine nature itself;

- **Complete Sovereignty**, or unrivaled (incontestable) power and dominion over all reality;

- **Eternity**, being timeless and immutable and thus outside of space and time; simple, not having a composite nature, not being comprised of parts, hence, being literally incorruptible.

- God participates in no genus or species, thus exists as **Pure Being**;

- He possesses the famous "**Omni's**":

- **Omniscience**, having complete, infallible knowledge of everything that can be known, including the future;

- **Omnipotence**, being capable of precipitating (causing) any event or situation the bringing about of which (a) is not logically impossible and (b) is not incompatible with other attributes of the divine nature;

- **Omnipresence** or immutability (changelessness), existing outside and independently of the stream of temporal events and thus ever present; and finally,

- **Omnibenevolence**, being absolutely and infallibly good, incapable of moral error, malice, or wrongdoing.

- Other properties include: Impassibility, Aseity, Goodness, Graciousness, Holiness, Immanence, Impeccability, Incomprehensibility, Incorporeality, Infinity, Jealousy, Love, Mission, Mystery, Oneness, Providence, Righteousness, Simplicity, Transcendence, Trinity, Veracity, Wrath.

- God is also unique in that She or He possesses the foregoing attributes in ways that could not conceivably be duplicated or even remotely imitated (McLachlan).

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Brothers Karamazov Dialogue

"I must make one confession" Ivan began. "I could never understand how one can love one's neighbours. It's just one's neighbours, to my mind, that one can't love, though one might love those at a distance. I once read somewhere of John the Merciful, a saint, that when a hungry, frozen beggar came to him, he took him into his bed, held him in his arms, and began breathing into his mouth, which was putrid and loathsome from some awful disease. I am convinced that he did that from 'self-laceration,' from the self-laceration of falsity, for the sake of the charity imposed by duty, as a penance laid on him. For anyone to love a man, he must be hidden, for as soon as he shows his face, love is gone."

"Father Zossima has talked of that more than once," observed Alyosha; "he, too, said that the face of a man often hinders many people not practised in love, from loving him. But yet there's a great deal of love in mankind, and almost Christ-like love. I know that myself, Ivan."

"Well, I know nothing of it so far, and can't understand it, and the innumerable mass of mankind are with me there. The question is, whether that's due to men's bad qualities or whether it's inherent in their nature. To my thinking, Christ-like love for men is a miracle impossible on earth. He was God. But we are not gods. Suppose I, for instance, suffer intensely. Another can never know how much I suffer, because he is another and not I. And what's more, a man is rarely ready to admit another's suffering (as though it were a distinction). Why won't he admit it, do you think? Because I smell unpleasant, because I have a stupid face, because I once trod on his foot. Besides, there is suffering and suffering; degrading, humiliating suffering such as humbles me—hunger, for instance—my benefactor will perhaps allow me; but when you come to higher suffering—for an idea, for instance—he will very rarely admit that, perhaps because my face strikes him as not at all what he fancies a man should have who suffers for an idea. And so he deprives me instantly of his favour, and not at all from badness of heart. Beggars, especially genteel beggars, ought never to show themselves, but to ask for charity through the newspapers. One can love one's neighbours in the abstract, or even at a distance, but at close quarters it's almost impossible. If it were as on the stage, in the ballet, where if beggars come in, they wear silken rags and tattered lace and beg for alms dancing gracefully, then one might like looking at them. But



even then we should not love them. But enough of that. I simply wanted to show you my point of view. I meant to speak of the suffering of mankind generally, but we had better confine ourselves to the sufferings of the children. That reduces the scope of my argument to a tenth of what it would be. Still we'd better keep to the children, though it does weaken my case. But, in the first place, children can be loved even at close quarters, even when they are dirty, even when they are ugly (I fancy, though, children never are ugly). The second reason why I won't speak of grown-up people is that, besides being disgusting and unworthy of love, they have a compensation—they've eaten the apple and know good and evil, and they have become 'like gods.' They go on eating it still. But the children haven't eaten anything, and are so far innocent. Are you fond of children, Alyosha? I know you are, and you will understand why I prefer to speak of them. If they, too, suffer horribly on earth, they must suffer for their fathers' sins, they must be punished for their fathers, who have eaten the apple; but that reasoning is of the other world and is incomprehensible for the heart of man here on earth. The innocent must not suffer for another's sins, and especially such innocents! You may be surprised at me, Alyosha, but I am awfully fond of children, too. And observe, cruel people, the violent, the rapacious, the Karamazovs are sometimes very fond of children. Children while they are quite little—up to seven, for instance—are so remote from grown-up people they are different creatures, as it were, of a different species. I knew a criminal in prison who had, in the course of his career as a burglar, murdered whole families, including several children. But when he was in prison, he had a strange affection for them. He spent all his time at his window, watching the children playing in the prison yard. He trained one little boy to come up to his window and made great friends with him... You don't know why I am telling you all this, Alyosha? My head aches and I am sad."

"You speak with a strange air," observed Alyosha uneasily, "as though you were not quite yourself."

The Inhumanity of Man

"By the way, a Bulgarian I met lately in Moscow," Ivan went on, seeming not to hear his brother's words, "told me about the crimes committed by Turks and Circassians in all parts of Bulgaria through fear of a general rising of the Slavs. They burn villages, murder, outrage women and children, they nail their prisoners by the ears to the fences, leave them so till morning, and in the morning they hang them—all sorts of things you can't imagine. People talk sometimes of bestial cruelty, but that's a great injustice and insult to the beasts; a beast can never be so cruel as a man, so artistically cruel. The tiger only tears and gnaws, that's all he can do. He would never think of nailing people by the ears, even if he were able to do it. These Turks took a pleasure in torturing children,—too; cutting the unborn child from the mothers womb, and tossing babies up in the air and catching them on the points of their bayonets before their mothers' eyes. Doing it before the mothers' eyes was what gave zest to the amusement. Here is another scene that I thought very interesting. Imagine a trembling mother with her baby in her arms, a circle of invading Turks around her. They've planned a diversion: they pet the baby, laugh to make it laugh. They succeed, the baby laughs. At that moment a Turk points a pistol four inches from the baby's face. The baby laughs with glee, holds out its little hands to the pistol, and he pulls the trigger in the baby's face and blows out its brains. Artistic, wasn't it? By the way, Turks are particularly fond of sweet things, they say."

"Brother, what are you driving at?" asked Alyosha.

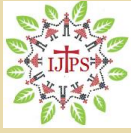
"I think if the devil doesn't exist, but man has created him, he has created him in his own



image and likeness."

"Just as he did God, then?" observed Alyosha. "It's wonderful how you can turn words,' as Polonius says in Hamlet," laughed Ivan. "You turn my words against me. Well, I am glad. Yours must be a fine God, if man created Him in his image and likeness. You asked just now what I was driving at. You see, I am fond of collecting certain facts, and, would you believe, I even copy anecdotes of a certain sort from newspapers and books, and I've already got a fine collection. The Turks, of course, have gone into it, but they are foreigners. I have specimens from home that are even better than the Turks. You know we prefer beating—rods and scourges—that's our national institution. Nailing ears is unthinkable for us, for we are, after all, Europeans. But the rod and the scourge we have always with us and they cannot be taken from us. Abroad now they scarcely do any beating. Manners are more humane, or laws have been passed, so that they don't dare to flog men now. But they make up for it in another way just as national as ours. And so national that it would be practically impossible among us, though I believe we are being inoculated with it, since the religious movement began in our aristocracy. I have a charming pamphlet, translated from the French, describing how, quite recently, five years ago, a murderer, Richard, was executed—a young man, I believe, of three and twenty, who repented and was converted to the Christian faith at the very scaffold. This Richard was an illegitimate child who was given as a child of six by his parents to some shepherds on the Swiss mountains. They brought him up to work for them. He grew up like a little wild beast among them. The shepherds taught him nothing, and scarcely fed or clothed him, but sent him out at seven to herd the flock in cold and wet, and no one hesitated or scrupled to treat him so."

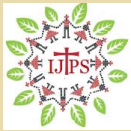
"Quite the contrary, they thought they had every right, for Richard had been given to them as a chattel, and they did not even see the necessity of feeding him. Richard himself describes how in those years, like the Prodigal Son in the Gospel, he longed to eat of the mash given to the pigs, which were fattened for sale. But they wouldn't even give that, and beat him when he stole from the pigs. And that was how he spent all his childhood and his youth, till he grew up and was strong enough to go away and be a thief. The savage began to earn his living as a day labourer in Geneva. He drank what he earned, he lived like a brute, and finished by killing and robbing an old man. He was caught, tried, and condemned to death. They are not sentimentalists there. And in prison he was immediately surrounded by pastors, members of Christian brotherhoods, philanthropic ladies, and the like. They taught him to read and write in prison, and expounded the Gospel to him. They exhorted him, worked upon him, drummed at him incessantly, till at last he solemnly confessed his crime. He was converted. He wrote to the court himself that he was a monster, but that in the end God had vouchsafed him light and shown grace. All Geneva was in excitement about him—all philanthropic and religious Geneva. All the aristocratic and well-bred society of the town rushed to the prison, kissed Richard and embraced him; 'You are our brother, you have found grace.' And Richard does nothing but weep with emotion, 'Yes, I've found grace! All my youth and childhood I was glad of pigs' food, but now even I have found grace. I am dying in the Lord.' 'Yes, Richard, die in the Lord; you have shed blood and must die. Though it's not your fault that you knew not the Lord, when you coveted the pigs' food and were beaten for stealing it (which was very wrong of you, for stealing is forbidden); but you've shed blood and you must die.' And on the last day, Richard, perfectly limp, did nothing but cry and repeat every minute: 'This is my happiest day. I am going to the Lord.' 'Yes,' cry the pastors and the judges and philanthropic ladies. 'This is the happiest day of your life, for you are going to the Lord!' They all walk or drive to the scaffold in procession behind the prison van.



At the scaffold they call to Richard: 'Die, brother, die in the Lord, for even thou hast found grace!' And so, covered with his brothers' kisses, Richard is dragged on to the scaffold, and led to the guillotine. And they chopped off his head in brotherly fashion, because he had found grace. Yes, that's characteristic."

"That pamphlet is translated into Russian by some Russian philanthropists of aristocratic rank and evangelical aspirations, and has been distributed gratis for the enlightenment of the people. The case of Richard is interesting because it's national. Though to us it's absurd to cut off a man's head, because he has become our brother and has found grace, yet we have our own specialty, which is all but worse. Our historical pastime is the direct satisfaction of inflicting pain. There are lines in Nekrassov describing how a peasant lashes a horse on the eyes, 'on its meek eyes,' everyone must have seen it. It's peculiarly Russian. He describes how a feeble little nag has foundered under too heavy a load and cannot move. The peasant beats it, beats it savagely, beats it at last not knowing what he is doing in the intoxication of cruelty, thrashes it mercilessly over and over again. 'However weak you are, you must pull, if you die for it.' The nag strains, and then he begins lashing the poor defenceless creature on its weeping, on its 'meek eyes.' The frantic beast tugs and draws the load, trembling all over, gasping for breath, moving sideways, with a sort of unnatural spasmodic action—it's awful in Nekrassov. But that only a horse, and God has horses to be beaten. So the Tatars have taught us, and they left us the knout as a remembrance of it. But men, too, can be beaten. A well-educated, cultured gentleman and his wife beat their own child with a birch-rod, a girl of seven. I have an exact account of it. The papa was glad that the birch was covered with twigs. 'It stings more,' said he, and so he began stinging his daughter. I know for a fact there are people who at every blow are worked up to sensuality, to literal sensuality, which increases progressively at every blow they inflict. They beat for a minute, for five minutes, for ten minutes, more often and more savagely. The child screams. At last the child cannot scream, it gasps, 'Daddy daddy!' By some diabolical unseemly chance the case was brought into court. A counsel is engaged. The Russian people have long called a barrister 'a conscience for hire.' The counsel protests in his client's defence. 'It's such a simple thing,' he says, 'an everyday domestic event. A father corrects his child. To our shame be it said, it is brought into court.' The jury, convinced by him, give a favourable verdict. The public roars with delight that the torturer is acquitted. Ah, pity I wasn't there! I would have proposed to raise a subscription in his honour! Charming pictures. But I've still better things about children. I've collected a great, great deal about Russian children, Alyosha. There was a little girl of five who was hated by her father and mother, 'most worthy and respectable people, of good education and breeding.' You see, I must repeat again, it is a peculiar characteristic of many people, this love of torturing children, and children only. To all other types of humanity these torturers behave mildly and benevolently, like cultivated and humane Europeans; but they are very fond of tormenting children, even fond of children themselves in that sense. it's just their defencelessness that tempts the tormentor, just the angelic confidence of the child who has no refuge and no appeal, that sets his vile blood on fire. In every man, of course, a demon lies hidden—the demon of rage, the demon of lustful heat at the screams of the tortured victim, the demon of lawlessness let off the chain, the demon of diseases that follow on vice, gout, kidney disease, and so on."

"This poor child of five was subjected to every possible torture by those cultivated parents. They beat her, thrashed her, kicked her for no reason till her body was one bruise. Then, they went to greater refinements of cruelty—shut her up all night in the cold and frost in a privy,



and because she didn't ask to be taken up at night (as though a child of five sleeping its angelic, sound sleep could be trained to wake and ask), they smeared her face and filled her mouth with excrement, and it was her mother, her mother did this. And that mother could sleep, hearing the poor child's groans! Can you understand why a little creature, who can't even understand what's done to her, should beat her little aching heart with her tiny fist in the dark and the cold, and weep her meek unresentful tears to dear, kind God to protect her? Do you understand that, friend and brother, you pious and humble novice? Do you understand why this infamy must be and is permitted? Without it, I am told, man could not have existed on earth, for he could not have known good and evil. Why should he know that diabolical good and evil when it costs so much? Why, the whole world of knowledge is not worth that child's prayer to dear, kind God! I say nothing of the sufferings of grown-up people, they have eaten the apple, damn them, and the devil take them all! But these little ones! I am making you suffer, Alyosha, you are not yourself. I'll leave off if you like."

"Nevermind. I want to suffer too," muttered Alyosha.

The Death of an Innocent Child

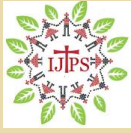
"One picture, only one more, because it's so curious, so characteristic, and I have only just read it in some collection of Russian antiquities. I've forgotten the name. I must look it up. It was in the darkest days of serfdom at the beginning of the century, and long live the Liberator of the People! There was in those days a general of aristocratic connections, the owner of great estates, one of those men—somewhat exceptional, I believe, even then—who, retiring from the service into a life of leisure, are convinced that they've earned absolute power over the lives of their subjects. There were such men then. So our general, settled on his property of two thousand souls, lives in pomp, and domineers over his poor neighbours as though they were dependents and buffoons. He has kennels of hundreds of hounds and nearly a hundred dog-boys—all mounted, and in uniform. One day a serf-boy, a little child of eight, threw a stone in play and hurt the paw of the general's favourite hound. 'Why is my favourite dog lame?' He is told that the boy threw a stone that hurt the dog's paw. 'So you did it.' The general looked the child up and down. 'Take him.' He was taken—taken from his mother and kept shut up all night. Early that morning the general comes out on horseback, with the hounds, his dependents, dog-boys, and huntsmen, all mounted around him in full hunting parade. The servants are summoned for their edification, and in front of them all stands the mother of the child. The child is brought from the lock-up. It's a gloomy, cold, foggy, autumn day, a capital day for hunting. The general orders the child to be undressed; the child is stripped naked. He shivers, numb with terror, not daring to cry... 'Make him run,' commands the general. 'Run! run!' shout the dog-boys. The boy runs... 'At him!' yells the general, and he sets the whole pack of hounds on the child. The hounds catch him, and tear him to pieces before his mother's eyes!...I believe the general was afterwards declared incapable of administering his estates. Well—what did he deserve? To be shot? To be shot for the satisfaction of our moral feelings? Speak, Alyosha!"

"To be shot," murmured Alyosha, lifting his eyes to Ivan with a pale, twisted smile.

"Bravo!" cried Ivan delighted. "If even you say so... You're a pretty monk! So there is a little devil sitting in your heart, Alyosha Karamazov!"

"What I said was absurd, but..."

"That's just the point, that 'but!'" cried Ivan. "Let me tell you, novice, that the absurd is only too necessary on earth. The world stands on absurdities, and perhaps nothing would have come to pass in it without them. We know what we know!"



"What do you know?"

"I understand nothing," Ivan went on, as though in delirium. "I don't want to understand anything now. I want to stick to the fact. I made up my mind long ago not to understand. If I try to understand anything, I shall be false to the fact, and I have determined to stick to the fact."

"Why are you trying me?" Alyosha cried, with sudden distress. "Will you say what you mean at last?"

"Of course, I will; that's what I've been leading up to. You are dear to me, I don't want to let you go, and I won't give you up to your Zossima."

Ivan for a minute was silent, his face became all at once very sad.

The Problem of Evil

"Listen! I took the case of children only to make my case clearer. Of the other tears of humanity with which the earth is soaked from its crust to its centre, I will say nothing. I have narrowed my subject on purpose. I am a bug, and I recognise in all humility that I cannot understand why the world is arranged as it is. Men are themselves to blame, I suppose; they were given paradise, they wanted freedom, and stole fire from heaven, though they knew they would become unhappy, so there is no need to pity them. With my pitiful, earthly, Euclidian understanding, all I know is that there is suffering and that there are none guilty; that cause follows effect, simply and directly; that everything flows and finds its level—but that's only Euclidian nonsense, I know that, and I can't consent to live by it! What comfort is it to me that there are none guilty and that cause follows effect simply and directly, and that I know it?—I must have justice, or I will destroy myself. And not justice in some remote infinite time and space, but here on earth, and that I could see myself. I have believed in it. I want to see it, and if I am dead by then, let me rise again, for if it all happens without me, it will be too unfair. Surely I haven't suffered simply that I, my crimes and my sufferings, may manure the soil of the future harmony for somebody else. I want to see with my own eyes the hind lie down with the lion and the victim rise up and embrace his murderer. I want to be there when everyone suddenly understands what it has all been for. All the religions of the world are built on this longing, and I am a believer. But then there are the children, and what am I to do about them? That's a question I can't answer. For the hundredth time I repeat, there are numbers of questions, but I've only taken the children, because in their case what I mean is so unanswerably clear. Listen! If all must suffer to pay for the eternal harmony, what have children to do with it, tell me, please? It's beyond all comprehension why they should suffer, and why they should pay for the harmony. Why should they, too, furnish material to enrich the soil for the harmony of the future? I understand solidarity in sin among men. I understand solidarity in retribution, too; but there can be no such solidarity with children. And if it is really true that they must share responsibility for all their fathers' crimes, such a truth is not of this world and is beyond my comprehension. Some jester will say, perhaps, that the child would have grown up and have sinned, but you see he didn't grow up, he was torn to pieces by the dogs, at eight years old. Oh, Alyosha, I am not blaspheming! I understand, of course, what an upheaval of the universe it will be when everything in heaven and earth blends in one hymn of praise and everything that lives and has lived cries aloud: 'Thou art just, O Lord, for Thy ways are revealed.' When the mother embraces the fiend who threw her child to the dogs, and all three cry aloud with tears, 'Thou art just, O Lord!' then, of course, the crown of knowledge will be reached and all will be made clear. But what pulls me up here is that I can't accept that harmony. And while I am on earth, I



make haste to take my own measures. You see, Alyosha, perhaps it really may happen that if I live to that moment, or rise again to see it, I, too, perhaps, may cry aloud with the rest, looking at the mother embracing the child's torturer, "Thou art just, O Lord!" but I don't want to cry aloud then. While there is still time, I hasten to protect myself, and so I renounce the higher harmony altogether. It's not worth the tears of that one tortured child who beat itself on the breast with its little fist and prayed in its stinking outhouse, with its unexpiated tears to 'dear, kind God!' It's not worth it, because those tears are unatoned for. They must be atoned for, or there can be no harmony. But how? How are you going to atone for them? Is it possible? By their being avenged? But what do I care for avenging them? What do I care for a hell for oppressors? What good can hell do, since those children have already been tortured? And what becomes of harmony, if there is hell? I want to forgive. I want to embrace. I don't want more suffering. And if the sufferings of children go to swell the sum of sufferings which was necessary to pay for truth, then I protest that the truth is not worth such a price. I don't want the mother to embrace the oppressor who threw her son to the dogs! She dare not forgive him! Let her forgive him for herself, if she will, let her forgive the torturer for the immeasurable suffering of her mother's heart. But the sufferings of her tortured child she has no right to forgive; she dare not forgive the torturer, even if the child were to forgive him! And if that is so, if they dare not forgive, what becomes of harmony? Is there in the whole world a being who would have the right to forgive and could forgive? I don't want harmony. From love for humanity I don't want it. I would rather be left with the unavenged suffering. I would rather remain with my unavenged suffering and unsatisfied indignation, even if I were wrong. Besides, too high a price is asked for harmony; it's beyond our means to pay so much to enter on it. And so I hasten to give back my entrance ticket, and if I am an honest man I am bound to give it back as soon as possible. And that I am doing. It's not God that I don't accept, Alyosha, only I most respectfully return him the ticket."

"That's rebellion," murmured Alyosha, looking down.

"Rebellion? I am sorry you call it that," said Ivan earnestly. "One can hardly live in rebellion, and I want to live. Tell me yourself, I challenge your answer. Imagine that you are creating a fabric of human destiny with the object of making men happy in the end, giving them peace and rest at last, but that it was essential and inevitable to torture to death only one tiny creature—that baby beating its breast with its fist, for instance—and to found that edifice on its unavenged tears, would you consent to be the architect on those conditions? Tell me, and tell the truth."

"No, I wouldn't consent," said Alyosha softly



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BYZANTINE HESYCHASM IN THE LIFE OF THE ORTHODOX CHURCH

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ABSTRACT

In spite of the historical vicissitudes through which the Orthodox Church passed, monasticism represented for the Church a pillar of stability and fidelity to the Gospel teachings and Christian living. Practicing the prayer of the heart, of contemplation in complete silence, of a severe ascension give the possibility to the hesychast monks to see the uncreated light that the Holy Apostles saw on Mount Tabor, at the Transfiguration of Our Lord. The one who strongly supported the hesychast doctrine was Saint Gregory Palamas. The present study attempts to make a short presentation of how the prayer of the heart (the hesychast prayer) has evolved over the centuries, but also a comparative analysis of the rationalist way of thinking, inspired by Catholic schooling, with the hesychast tradition, specific to the Orthodox Church. Also, the study presents some historical landmarks regarding the practice of the hesychast life in the Romanian lands.

Keywords: hesychasm; monasticism; heart's prayer; hermit; Eastern Church; divine light;

INTRODUCTION

Condemned by the representatives of the West (*for the West, the Easterners were born of heresies and even heretics*¹), the East is the meeting place for religious and philosophical ideas, the meeting of specific cultures and spiritualities, with profound implications for the history of human culture and civilization. „*Motherland of religions par excellence, the East is also the place of monasticism*”². Human society has, over time, faced various challenges and temptations.

Confidence in the own lights of reason, without the light of God, has removed man from his Creator, feeding his mind with pride. Christian humility and continued prayer were the *medicines* recommended by the Church.

The monks knew how to make the best use of these two *medicines*, living according to the model of the Saviour Jesus Christ. Thus, says Patriarch Daniel, “*whenever there is a spiritual crisis in history, it was monasticism that, in the face of rationalism and secularization, brought the lights of Tabor. It is full of meanings and we think that the tension, which has existed for centuries, has not been sufficiently reflected. XIV thereafter,*

¹ This was one of the accusations brought by the Latins to the Easterners near the Great Schism - 1054. See Nicolae Chifăr, *Istoria creștinismului*, vol. I, Editura Universității „Lucian Blaga”, Sibiu, 2008, p. 330.

² André Scrima, *Despre isihasm*, Editura Humanitas, București, 2003, p. 23.



between the light that comes from human reasoning, reductionism and impoverishment, on the one hand, and the light that comes from prayer, on the other. There is an unseen battle in us between the intelligence separated from God and the human intelligence united with God through prayer”³.

1. PRAYER OF THE HEART IN EASTERN MONASTICISM

In an attempt to present and define *hesychasm*, the historian John Meyendorff presented him as “a monastic movement whose beginnings go back in time to the desert’s parents and, of course, cannot claim to be the only one representing Orthodox mysticism”⁴. The term *hesychasm* comes from the Greek language (hesycha exact silence, contemplation) and defines the way of life adopted by the atoned monks under the influence of the writings of Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagite and Saint Simeon the New Theologian⁵.

This way of life goes up to the beginnings of monasticism⁶. The desert, next to the cross, represented for the first Christians “the test of truth for human creation... The ultimate meaning of the monastic desert is paschal”⁷. The call of the wilderness is understood as the hermit’s call, that of “the perfect part of life with God, for God and through God.”⁸ Monasticism “forsakes the world, to bless it immediately from the wilderness and to carry it constantly in its prayers”⁹

Saint Anthony the Great¹⁰ is considered to be the spiritual parent, “Avva”, the hermit monastic life (hermitages). Beside him, Saint Pahomie is the one who will lay the foundations of the monastic (to be obtained) monastic life. Saint Basil the Great and Saint Theodore the Studite will elaborate rules for monastic living. Organized within the Church, monasticism “continued the prophetic function that the Old Testament had already recognized. He represented the counterbalance for a toff and drowsy Church, which had received with great ease in his bosom the Greek-Roman multitudes and who, without making conscience-making processes, profited by the breadth of the «most faithful rulers»”¹¹.

The primary form of Jesus’ prayer seems to have been Kyrie eleison (*Lord Have Mercy!*). Its constant repetition in the Eastern liturgies dates back to the time of the Desert Fathers. Evagrie Pontic considered that “being a theologian means really praying, and if you really pray you are a theologian”¹². This is a paraphrase of the sixth happiness, which illuminates the eternal renewal of the monk or Christian existence. “The renewal of the spirit, the conversion, says Saint Isaac the Sir, is always welcome for all, for sinners as well as for the righteous, who are in search of salvation. The perfection knows no bounds, so the perfection of the perfect ones is nothing but perfection”¹³.

³ † IPS Daniel, Mitropolitul Moldovei și Sucevei, *Vocație și destin filocalic la români*, în vol. „Românii în reînnoirea isihastă”, Editura Trinitas, Iași, 1997, p. 13.

⁴ John Meyendorff, *Sfântul Grigorie Palamas și mistica ortodoxă*, Editura Humanitas, București, 2007, p. 15.

⁵ Nicolae Chifăr, *Istoria creștinismului*, vol. II, Editura Universității „Lucian Blaga”, Sibiu, 2008, p. 44.

⁶ J. Bois, *Les hésychastes avant le XIV-e siècle*, în „Echos d’Orient”, 1901, t. V.

⁷ André Scrima, *op. cit.*, pp. 25 și 26.

⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 28.

⁹ Paul Evdokimov, *Ortodoxia*, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1996, p. 24.

¹⁰ Relevant aspects of St. Anthony the Great’s life can be found at Sfântul Atanasie cel Mare, *Viața cuviosului părintelui nostru Antonie*, traducere de Pr. Dumitru Fecioru în colecția PSB (Părinți și scriitori bisericești), vol. 16, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1988.

¹¹ John Meyendorff, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

¹² Evagrie Ponticul, *Traité de l’oraison*, 60, Paris, 1960.

¹³ Cf. André Scrima, *op. cit.*, p. 40.



Evagrie Pontic is the first great coder of the monastic doctrine about the prayer. Saint Macarie the Egyptian, the teacher of Evagrie, considered that the monk's continuous prayer does not have the purpose of releasing the spirit of the body from the prison, but it gives the possibility of man to access from here, from the earth, to an eschatological reality, the kingdom of God, which encompasses His spirit and body in divine communion. Thus, "*Evagrie and Macarie defined all the essential elements of the later spiritual tradition of the Eastern monks*"¹⁴.

The synthesis of the two great Eastern ascetics was made by the Diadoc of Fotice and Saint John the Scaler. Thus, the prayer of Evagrie's mind became in the East, the prayer of the heart, a personal prayer addressed to the Incarnate Word, the prayer of Jesus or the *remembrance of the Word*, which occupies the main place. "*In Orthodoxy a form of permanent prayer is practiced, the prayer of the heart or mind on the altar of the heart or of the sensitivity full of love and mercy in which Christ is with His love and mercy*"¹⁵.

After the erection of the famous monastery of Saint Catherine on Mount Sinai by Emperor Justinian (6th century), St. John the Scaler - living here - will make it famous throughout the East. In his famous *Paradise Staircase*, St. John speaks of invoking the Name of Jesus in prayer, but also the practice of linking Jesus' prayer to breathing. This practice will be adopted by the hesychasts - in the fourteenth century¹⁶. He is even trying to define an hesychast. "*An hesychast is the one who says, «My heart is strengthened» (Ps. 57: 8). An hesychast is the one who says, «I sleep, but my heart watches» (Cant. 5,2). Close the sanctum - door in front of the body, the door of your lips in front of the words, the inner door in front of the devils*"¹⁷.

The name of St. Gregory Sinaitus is related to the time spent at the Sinai monastery, where the traditions of St. John the Scaler were alive. St. Gregory renewed the contemplative life in Mount Athos. He considered that the integrity of the spirit is the only purpose of any contemplation. The "*remembrance of God*", necessary for true life, must be restored by the hesychasts in himself. "*A scholar at «perfect peace» (Hesychia), Gregory Sinait prefers the hermit path to community monasticism as he himself lived in Sinai and as he existed in the great Byzantine monasteries*"¹⁸.

Established later in Paroria, St. Gregory Sinaitus will spread hesychasm in all Slavic countries. Among the disciples of St. Gregory Sinaitus are also Romanian monks, as noted by the Metropolitan Tit Simeirea¹⁹. The historian Răzvan Theodorescu considered that "*the existence of a Romanian monasticism before the second half of the fourteenth century, with some echoes of the monastic life of the Balkan Peninsula from prominent centres, such as that of Chalcidica (Athos), or closer, such as those of Paroria and Kelifarevo ... can be suspected with some basics, some modest wooden or even stone sketes, whose memory has not been preserved, being able to gather together, on the Danube or under the mountain, in the vast forest or hilly regions, on the monks who, far from the cities ..., will have organized*

¹⁴ John Meyendorff, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

¹⁵ Dumitru Stăniloae, *Rugăciunea lui Iisus și experiența Duhului Sfânt*, Editura Deisis, Sibiu, 2003, p. 49.

¹⁶ John Meyendorff, *op. cit.*, pp. 41-42.

¹⁷ Sfântul Ioan Scărarul, *Scara*, Treapta 27 (Despre pustnicie (liniște) și singurătate), în „Filocalia”, vol. IX, traducere Pr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru Stăniloae, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1980, p. 394.

¹⁸ John Meyendorff, *op. cit.*, p. 71.

¹⁹ Tit Simeirea, *Monahismul în Țara Românească înainte de 1379*, în „Biserica Ortodoxă Română”, XC (1972), nr. 7-8, p. 675.



*their existence according to the canons of the Orthodox monastic dinner... before the appearance of the first documentary known monasteries in Moldova and Walachia*²⁰.

St. Gregory of Nyssa and St. Maximus the Confessor dealt with deifying - in their works. For St. Gregory of Nyssa the spiritual ascent is similar to the ascent of Moses on Mount Sinai²¹. Thus, some essential coordinates of the Christian doctrine of the knowledge of God are established: the mystery of the darkness where God is found and where Moses was allowed to see Him becomes an image of the unknowable which is revealed to man.

Saint Maximus the Confessor, speaking of the knowledge of God, says that “*we can share with God in what He communicates to us, but He remains indivisible in His being that cannot be communicated*”²². For St. Maximus, deification is a totally supernatural fact, a work of the Almighty God freely emerging from His transcendence, while remaining essentially unknowable. Pure prayer gives a knowledge of God. Thus, Jesus Christ is intimately present in the heart of the Christian.²³

Living in the tenth century, Saint Simeon the New Theologian engages contemporaries with his famous hymns about love. He emphasizes the idea of participating in the divine light, considering that the resurrection begins here, before moving on to the other world. According to Saint Simeon the New Theologian, the divine light shines in the Church, with the same brightness as in the time of the Apostles²⁴.

Saint Simeon the New Theologian addresses the hesychasts, telling them to be “*like those who went up with Jesus on the Tabor and contemplated the flashing light, the preparation of His garments and the light of His face*”²⁵. In order to reach this state the hesychast may resemble Moses, who climbs alone on the top of the mountain and enters the cloud. “*He who comes here will not only see the back of God, but will be consciously in front of Him...; he will first be initiated into the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, then give his laws to others; it will be illuminated, after which it will enlighten others...*”²⁶.

In his visions, St. Simeon finds two important things: he identifies the light with Christ, and Christ lives in the heart of man especially through love. This conception explains why the hesychast gave such importance to the invocation of the Saviour Jesus Christ.²⁷ “*His doctrine takes over, once again, the traditional themes of Eastern monasticism in order to set them on the contemplation of the mystery of the Holy Spirit, as an inward source of light and life of the person*”²⁸.

The Hesychast doctrine was crystallized and presented by St. Gregory Palamas (14th century). He is learning that it is not impossible to see the light of divinity, uncreated,

²⁰ Răzvan Theodorescu, *Bizanț, Balcani, Occident la începuturile culturii medievale românești (secolele X-XIV)*, București, 1974, pp. 219-220.

²¹ Sfântul Grigorie de Nyssa, *Despre viața lui Moise*, Editura Sfântul Gheorghe Vechi, București, 1995.

²² Cf. Vladimir Lossky, *Teologia mistică a Bisericii de Răsărit*, traducere de Pr. Vasile Răducă, Editura Anastasia, București, 1993, p. 102.

²³ John Meyendorff, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

²⁴ Paul Evdokimov, *Ortodoxia*, p. 28.

²⁵ *Ibidem*.

²⁶ Sfântul Simeon Noul Teolog, *Chapitres theologiques, gnostiques et pratiques*, I, 79, „Source Chretienne”, vol. 51, Paris, 1957, p. 64.

²⁷ Thomas Spidlik, *op. cit.*, p. 320.

²⁸ André Scrima, *op. cit.*, p. 49.



immaterial and incorruptible, identical with the light of Tabor. *“It is only a work, an energy and a power of God, which radiates from His unseen being without being identical with it”*²⁹.

Varlaam of Calabria is the one who stands up against the hesychast doctrine preached by Saint Gregory Palamas and the Athonite monks. He considered that the light that the Apostles saw on Mount Tabor was created, because if it were not created it would be equal to the Divinity. Therefore, he will accuse the hesychasts of deifying.

The Council of Constantinople of 1341 will decide that the hesychast doctrine is orthodox. Varlaam will be condemned and will leave for Italy, where he will be appointed bishop of Gerace in 1342. The 1345 Synod of Constantinople will condemn Saint Gregory Palama and the hesychast doctrine.

The next two councils held in Constantinople (1347 and 1351) will approve the hesychast doctrine. These two councils will proclaim the hesychast doctrine as the official doctrine of the Orthodox Church. The essence of the hesychast doctrine that prevailed in Orthodoxy *“lies in the fact that the being of God, inaccessible to man, and His divine energies are not separate, though they differ and form a unity, but until man the divine energies or powers come, not the being of God, for God in His being remains inaccessible to people”*³⁰.

In Byzantine monasticism, pure prayer was fully identified with the prayer of Jesus and the mysticism of the Word. Despite the fact that in the hesychast prayer it seems that we ask for mercy for our person: *“Lord, Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me the sinner”*, taking into account the fact that all our sins are committed to our brothers, we pray and for better relations with them or for them not to be touched by our injustices. Saint Isaac the Sir says: *“He who, by mentioning God, honours all man, finds help from all men through the hidden will of God. And he who defends the unrighteous has God fighting for himself. He who gives his arm to the help of his neighbour receives the arm of God in his help”*³¹.

The prayer of the heart to the Athonite hesychasts is accompanied by a psychosomatic technique. Saint Nicodemus Aghiorite inserts the hesychast texts in his *Philocalia* and attributes the following fruits to the *“prayer of the mind”*: detachment of sensitive things, humility, perfect cleansing, unbridled joy, etc.³²

2. SAINT GREGORY PALAMA AND THE HESYCHAST CONTROVERSY

Mount Athos represented for the whole Orthodox Church a unique focal point and centre of spiritual life, *“a place where patient and peaceful islands flourish, with prayer, fasting and asceticism.”*³³ Among the well-known church servants who lived here are St. Gregory Palama, of whom Nichifor Calist Xantopul, his contemporary and biographer, said that he *“performed the mysteries of the priesthood as one who had no body and was, so to speak, outside of himself, that the souls of those who looked at him repented only by seeing him”*³⁴. The conflict between cataphatic and apophatic, as modes of knowing God,

²⁹ Pr. Prof. Ioan Rămureanu, Pr. Prof. Milan Şesan, Pr. Prof. Teodor Bodogae, *Istoria Bisericească Universală*, vol. II, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1993, p. 64.

³⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 66.

³¹ Sfântul Isaac Sirul, *Cuvântarea 73*, FR X, 1981, p. 282.

³² Tomas Spidlik, *Spiritualitatea Răsăritului creștin*, vol. II (Rugăciunea), Editura Deisis, Sibiu, 1998, p. 323.

³³ Bishop Veniamin, *De la situation des moines slaves au Mont-Athos* (referat citit la Conferința Bisericească Inter-Ortodoxă de la Moscova, din iulie 1948), în „Actes de la Conference des Eglises autocephales orthodoxes”, vol. II, Moscova, 1952, p. 333.

³⁴ A se vedea *Sinaxarul* din rânduiala Utreniei la Duminica a II-a din Postul Mare, în ***, *Triod*, ediția a V-a, Tipografia Cărților Bisericești, București, 1945, p. 290.



materialized in the fourteenth century in the conflict of the hesychast life. For the cataphatic (affirmative) theology, in the western sense, from the concept of being of God his attributes are deduced: his simplicity and unity. *"The ontological laws apply to God as Being"*³⁵.

In apophatic theology the being of God is absolutely transcendent, immanent being only His manifestation in the world. God "exits us" through His energies and is fully present in them. *"The energies are common to all the hypostasis of the Holy Trinity, they are uncreated and are accessible to the creature. They do not strike in unity, indivisibility and divine simplicity, just as the differences between hypostases do not make God a compound"*³⁶.

The controversy between the atoned monks - the Eastern mystique - and the western scholasticism is based on the confrontation between the spiritual knowledge of God and the scholastic rationalism. If the Eastern mystic affirmed the *deification* of man or his union with God through the uncreated grace that springs from the divine being, the western school emphasized the imitation of God on the part of man through his own efforts, this not uniting with God through uncreated grace, but through created one, which keeps man in isolation from God³⁷. Starting from the same premises, the theologian Paul Evdokimov said that *"the Islamism radically separates the East of Rome"*³⁸.

The western scholastic, starting from the meaning of the doctrine of Toma d'Aquino – *Deus est actus purus* – came to the conclusion that there is no difference between the being of God and his energies, which are created. This makes human deification impossible. The followers of these rationalist ideas were Varlaam of Calabria, Nichifor Gregoras, Dimitrie Kydones³⁹, canonist Constantin Armenopoulos, Grigorios Achindinos, but also the ecumenical patriarch John XIV Kalekas. For them, *"only the arguments of reason have value, and any intuitive understanding of a mystical nature is declared a source of wandering; the inner enlightenment is accused even of the materialization of God"*⁴⁰.

In the controversy with Varlaam of Calabria, St. Gregory Palama makes biblical and patristic arguments about the fact that both the light on the Tabor and the light that the righteous see in this world are uncreated and eternal. That is why, Varlaam will write a series of writings against the hesychasts, to which St. Gregory will answer them.

The controversy is based on three themes: the value of science, the value of prayer and the character of the light seen by the Apostles on Tabor. Trying to approximate the science of faith, the value of science and prayer, Varlaam considered that *"The scriptures of those inspired by God and the wisdom of them have the same purpose as the wisdom that comes from the profane sciences. For in all things it is the same truth, whether it be given directly to the Apostles of God from the beginning, or whether we find it by study. The sciences lead to the truth given to the Apostles of God and help us a lot, to ascend to the original non-material models of things"*⁴¹.

³⁵ Paul Evdokimov, *Ortodoxia*, p. 30.

³⁶ *Ibidem*.

³⁷ Dumitru Stăniloae, *Viața și învățătura Sfântului Grigorie Palama*, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 2006, p. 5.

³⁸ Paul Evdokimov, *Ortodoxia*, p. 28.

³⁹ Dimitrie Kydones, in his letter to his friend Caloferos, is excited to read Toma d'Aquino's *Summa Theologica*. "Through him our faith is armed with all possible evidence." His brother, Prohor, states: "Whoever knows the wisdom of God, knows the essence of God." Cf. *ibidem*, p. 29.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*.

⁴¹ Sfântul Grigorie Palama, *Tratatul I din triada II*, Cod. Coisl., f. 142 r., apud Dumitru Stăniloae, *Viața și învățătura Sfântului Grigorie Palama*, p. 36.



Saint Gregory Palama does not agree with this way of appreciating the Divine wisdom of the Spirit as well as that of the springs of the profane sciences. To speak thus would mean, says St. Gregory, not to have the experience of the divine gift. *“And he thinks that those given by the Spirit can be analysed with the help of reason, appealing to its distinctions and syllogisms. In reality, they know only the Spirit Who is in the One who receives His gifts”*⁴².

St. Gregory does not reject profane culture. For him, however, the culture of the world is not confused with theology. *“Theology means not the descent of the Lord through an intellectual endeavour to represent Him in the horizontal coordinates of human reason, but the elevation of the human mind, through an intensification of the power of penetration, into the divine coordinates”*⁴³.

The victory obtained by Saint Gregory Palama in the confrontation with Varlaam de Calabria, is the victory of Christian humanism over the pagan humanism of rebirth. In the opinion of historian John Meyendorff, the Orthodox Church had to make a choice in the fourteenth century: on the one hand the unitary conception of man, based on the Bible; on the other hand, an intellectualist spiritualism that affirmed the independence or autonomy of the human intellect with respect to matter and which denied that the real deification of man is possible from here on earth⁴⁴.

3. HESYCHASM FOR ROMANIAN PEOPLE

The Romanian countries represented in the history of the Orthodox Church, along with Russia, a real Byzantium after Byzantium⁴⁵. *“Besides, after the collapse of Byzantium and after the fall of the Serbian and Bulgarian countries, the only protection shield for the whole Christian East conquered by the Turks, we were the only ones left, the Romanians. That is why, Romanian Countries were the edge of escape when poor monks «had nowhere to turn their heads or reach out»”*⁴⁶.

As promoters and supports for Orthodoxy under Ottoman oppression, the Romanian countries have been and remain a wonderful spread of cultures, at the contact between the East and the West of Europe⁴⁷. Identifying itself with the history, culture and spirituality of the Romanian people, the Orthodox Church on these lands stood beside it both in times of trial and in moments of joy. The need for prayer, for the living of God of the Romanian clergy and believers was made in the Church, *“the place where we go to the resurrection, the resurrection laboratory”*⁴⁸.

Even though there are no monasteries in Romania, but only monasteries, the Orthodox believers have known and know where there are monks bent for spiritual life, researching them. Thus, the spiritual thirst of the people is tempered by the continuous prayer of the heart, which rages from among these living beings.

⁴² Dumitru Stăniloae, *Viața și învățătura Sfântului Grigorie Palama*, p. 42.

⁴³ Pr. Prep. Dr. Răzvan Andrei Ionescu, Lect. Dr. Adrian Nicolae Lemeni, *Teologie ortodoxă și știință*, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 2006, p. 168.

⁴⁴ John Meyendorff, *op. cit.*, p. 174.

⁴⁵ Nicolae Iorga, *Bizanț după Bizanț*, Editura 100+1 Gramar, București, 2002.

⁴⁶ Prof. Diac. Gh. I. Moisescu, *Contribuția românească pentru susținerea Muntelui Athos în decursul veacurilor*, în „Ortodoxia”, V (1953), nr. 2, pp. 239-240.

⁴⁷ The general expression on this aspect is that the Romanian Orthodox Church was and is a true bridge between East and West.

⁴⁸ Dumitru Stăniloae, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, vol. II, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1978, p. 226.



Coming to the Romanian countries through some worthy living, the hesychasm was present in our Romanian monasteries bearing greater fruit. Here it is worth remembering the role and importance of the Scythians monks, Saint John Casian and Dionysius Exiguus in the life of Romanian monasticism. Also, the living hermits at the bend of the Carpathians continued the way of prayer and life specific to the Christian East.

In the fourteenth century, the coming of Saint Nicodemus from Tismana reorganized the monastic life, boosting the spiritual life with elements of hesychast life. *“He, setting a new order in the Romanian monasticism, founded the great monasteries in Tismana and Vodița (in the region of Oltenia), while his disciples raised in Neamț and Bistrita monasteries in Moldova. Soon to be filled with monasteries and cloisters, Romania will play the role of a real turning point in the history of Orthodox monasticism”*⁴⁹.

There is a general consensus on Saint Nicodemus of Tismana that he “was a follower of hesychasm”⁵⁰. From his correspondence with the patriarch Eftimie de Târnovo, an apprentice of St. Theodosius, we see the *hesychast* spirit.

The arrival in the Romanian Country of the Hieronymite Hariton, the protos of Mount Athos, as metropolitan of the Romanian Country, but also of the Holy Niphon, the former ecumenical patriarch, reorganizing the church life in the Romanian Country, strengthened the spiritual connections between the Romanians and Mount Athos. The material support offered by Vladislav I for the erection of the Cutlumuș monastery, the greatest monastery of the Romanian Country, under the abbot Hariton, made that more and more Romanian monks set in this monastery. One of these Romanian monks, Melchizedek, reached the monastery’s ecumene (1370-1375). Before he came to Athos, he had been a archpriest, named Mihai. Another Romanian abbot was the Hieronymite Jacob⁵¹.

In Moldavia, starting with Alexander the Kind, the works of some hesychast authors such as St. Gregory the Sinaite and the patriarch of Philotheus are brought, being translated into the Church Slavonic⁵². There were some hermitage churches in the Buzau mountains or near the Putna monastery, some hermit monks such as Daniil Sihastru, are just as many reasons for affirming the hesychast life for the Romanians.

Father Ioanichie Bălan from the Bistrița monastery in Moldova has prepared a study dedicated to the lives of Romanian hermits from the 15th to the 20th century. Introducing these hermitage monasteries he says: *“In the tradition of the Tazlau monastery (built in 1497), as in the case of the other monasteries, it was the custom to live around the numerous hermits. They were among the most fortified monastery dwellers, who longed for a solitary hermit life. For this, they were obliged to spend the first years of the public life, in order to learn the mysteries of the spiritual life. With blessing they then went to the mountain, either as disciples of other elders, or alone or with other cohabitants. There they occupied one of the free caves or built their own wooden, stone or earthen huts. Each of them kept in touch with the monastery he belonged to. Every Saturday they descended from the mountain, received their «secret» granted by the ecumene (bread, bread, vegetables, fruits, salt), confessed to the monastery’s patron, the next day they took Communion and again went to*

⁴⁹ André Scrima, *op. cit.*, pp. 51-52.

⁵⁰ E. Norocel, *Sf. Eftimie, ultimul patriarh de Târnovo și legăturile lui cu Țările Române*, în „Biserica Ortodoxă Română”, LXXXIV (1966), nr. 5-6, pp. 565-570.

⁵¹ L. Lemerle, *Actes de Cutlumuș*, Paris, 1946, nr. 30-31. A se vedea și Răzvan Theodorescu, *op. cit.*, p. 246; Dumitru Stăniloae, *Isihaști sau sihaștrii și rugăciunea lui Iisus în tradiția ortodoxiei românești*, în vol. „Filocalia”, VIII, Editura Humanitas, București, 2002, p. 528.

⁵² Răzvan Theodorescu, *op. cit.*, p. 341.



*their sanctums. The permanent occupation of the hermit priests was the holy prayer of Jesus*⁵³.

This hesychast way of life will continue in the Romanian monasteries until the time of Paisie Velicikovski. Before going to Athos and wearing the monastic robe, Paisie lived in Romanian monasteries such as: Dălhăuți, Trăisteni and Cârnu. *“When the young Paisie emigrated to the Romanian countries, he had already been preceded by a whole generation of his compatriots who, in the high orthodox culture climate of the Romanian environment, had been able to bring to fruition the germs of their own genius and spirituality ... Not in Athos, where yet he spends 17 years, from 1746 to 1763, Paisie breathed the tradition of hesychast Athos is just the ideal reference and the “depository” of the patristic writings that Paisie will endeavour to study with relentless zeal. The life model, the living example of the hesychast tradition, Paisie discovers and makes it flourish widely in the Romanian Principalities...*⁵⁴.

The hermitages and hermits from the Romanian Countries played a multiple role in the lives of the Romanian people: through continuous prayer they kept the flame of our Orthodox faith; they strengthened with the word and the prayer the Romanian believers in the vicissitudes of history, especially in the confrontation with the great powers that surrounded us; with the advice they strengthened our voivodes (an example is the advice given by Saint Daniil Sihu of Stephan the Great voivode); they urged the voivodes and the boyars to build churches and monasteries for the faithful Romanian people. *“Then the hermits came to the aid of the people with the advice, the confession, the rebuke and the exhortation. The monks, the hermits, the hermits who fled the world loved the people the most, prayed for them constantly. This wanderers of the mountains, these friends of the Carpathians, these inhabitants of the woods were at the same time the closest advisers of the voivodes ... All the voivodes had as religious and secretive confidants the monks and hermits. In them they had the greatest confidence, the greatest hope, they opened their hearts, their counsel was kept with sanctity, from them they asked for prayer and blessing when they left to defend their faith and their ancestral land”*⁵⁵.

CONCLUSION

The popularity of these hermits among the Romanian people is also seen from the use of the name hermit. *“To no other Orthodox people, says Father Dumitru Stăniloae, the name of the hermit did not become so popular, it was not kept with this broad and popular resonance, because neither the hesychast way of monastery was kept the same”*⁵⁶.

From the fifteenth century, on the Romanian territory we can talk about the hermits such as: the pious Joseph of the Church; Hieronymite Sisoe, the disciple of Daniil Sihu; the pious Ghelasie from Râmeț; the hermit Antonie from Iezerul Vâlcei; Hieronymite Irodion, the abbot of the Lainici monastery; Saint Calinic of Cernica; Abbot Ioanichie;

⁵³ Ierom. Ioanichie Bălan, *Chipuri de călugări îmbunătățiți din mănăstirile românești*, vol. I, Editura Mănăstirii Sihăstria, 2009, p. 200.

⁵⁴ Elia Citterio, *La scuola filocalica di Paisij Velichkovskij e la Filocalia di Nicodimo Aghiorita. Un confronto in „Amore del Bello. Studi sulla Filocalia. Atti del „Simposio Internazionale sulla Filocalia”. Pontificio Collegio Greco”*, Roma, novembre 1989, Comunita di Bose, 1991, pp. 189-190 apud Virgil Căndea, *Locul spiritualității românești în reînnoirea isihastă*, în vol. „România în reînnoirea isihastă”, Editura Trinitas, Iași, 1997, pp. 27-28.

⁵⁵ Ierom. Ioanichie Bălan, *op. cit.*, p. 273.

⁵⁶ Dumitru Stăniloae, *Isihăști sau sihaștrii și rugăciunea lui Iisus în tradiția ortodoxiei românești*, p. 533.



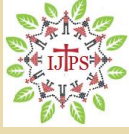
“Grandfather Gheorghe”, etc.⁵⁷ “They learn the teachings of purifying passions and the method of incessant prayer. In this way it spiritualizes its nature so that it becomes permeable to the Holy Spirit and to the divine light, just as Christ on Tabor. Then this light, which is at the same time a divine energy, radiates it both as spirituality, supernatural power and endless love for people”⁵⁸.

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⁵⁷ Many of these hermits were canonized by the Romanian Orthodox Church after 1989, because "God is wonderful in His Saints, the God of Israel" (Ps. 67, 36).

⁵⁸ Idem, *Rugăciunea lui Iisus și experiența Duhului Sfânt*, p. 143.



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COMMUNICATION AS SACRED AND MISSIONARY ACT. A CONTEMPORARY ETHICAL NECESSITY

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ABSTRACT

This study deepens the sacramental meaning of the 'word' as a means of communion and perfection for man. The incarnation of the Word of God and Christianity, by and large, led to the change of our paradigm of civilization. The Church uses today the word to promote its pastoral mission, as fundamental means of inculturation and as tool for deepening human communion and solidarity. The word has a sacramental perspective and always implies dignity and responsibility. The Christian civilization is one founded on the word, which is the reason it best expresses the dignity and the divine greatness of the word. The Church cannot stand apart in front of the social effects of technological progress of media, as it strongly affects people's lives, for better or worse, as used, with or without discernment.

Keywords: word; communication; communion; sacred; Church; language;

INTRODUCTION

Language is a peculiar human gift, awarded by the Creator, which sets him apart from all other living beings. The *word* is specific to man; it is a main instrument of thinking, relationships, communication and communion with his neighbor. It is proper for man to relate through language, to create bridges with his neighbor. God Himself communicates with man through the *word*, and from this point of view, the most eloquent is the event of the Son of God's Incarnation. The Word became flesh (John 1,14), which shows that God has sanctified the language in the highest degree; He made his language out of our language or rather our language is a reflection of His language.¹

From this perspective language is a privilege, but also a sacramental act. Once we pray and communicate with God, the divine grace descends through the Holy Sacraments and hierurgy, sacramental works that involve the *word*.

The *word* is an invocation. It is the extension or externalization of the thought of our heart; it is the externalization or projection of our own way of being and relating. Through *word* we emanate a form of our personality, an imprint of what we are and what we want to communicate.

Because it is inherent to man, as an ontological given, but also a form of communication used by God Himself, the *word* is a sacred act, because its purpose is to

¹ Virgil NEMOIANU, *Jocurile divinității. Gândire, libertate și religie la sfârșit de mileniu (The games of Divinity. Thought, Freedom and Religion at the end of the millennium)*, Polirom, Iași, 2000, p. 38.



support our salvation, the relationship with God and our neighbors, in our specific form of communication.

Language participates at our salvation, contributes to it or to our decay. It pierces, as St. Apostle Paul says, even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit or of body and soul (Hebrews 4:12) and we all know that a foolish spoken word can destroy a life-long relationship. It is true that few people have the delicacy and wisdom to truly understand what the real meaning of the *word* is and what immense power it has in it, so as to use this blessed and human instrument in the most appropriate way.

The Philokalia includes an immense delicacy and tenderness of the relationship in the vision of the Desert Fathers who, by purifying themselves, rediscovered the true power and the authentic meaning of the *word*.

The *word* is a true *stairway to heaven* or hell, depending on the way we use it; it is also the bearer of the good within us or manifestation of the vice and sin that gnaws us.²

Language is one of the most important aspects of anthropology and soteriology because it is the one that can gain or lose salvation depending on its proper or inadequate use.

From its very beginning, Christianity claimed itself as a *religion of the word*, of the book, which is the reason at the foundation of the Christian event stays the *Holy Scripture*, a collection of *words* inspired by the Holy Spirit, and the *Holy Tradition*, an inspired collection as well, both being aspects of the living and inspired working word, so dynamic in our history.

1. COMMUNICATION AS SACRED AND MISSIONARY ACT

Revelation in the biblical sense is a mysterious process, a direct communication from God to man for his salvation. It is the word of God inspired by the Holy Spirit. In the New Testament frameworks, revelation is identified with the gracious iconography by which God is fully and plenary revealed in Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Son of God. "Revelation also means the revealing of hidden mysteries, communicating some teachings about God, but it is also the *good news (euangelion)*, the gospel of salvation and the grace of salvation in Christ. In this sense, Christ is the Revelator and the divine revelation itself, our Savior and our salvation"³.

The ontological arguments that support the importance of communication and communion for human-specific conscious actions in the process of perfection can be synthesized from a logical, scriptural and patristic point of view as follows:

a) God is Person – and the person assumes loving communion, creating the man out of love, He wants to reveal Himself to man.

b) Man, created as a person, is capable of communion. Being an **image of God**, man is endowed with reason, so that he can know God.

c) After falling into sin, the *image of God in man* was not completely destroyed, but only a deterioration (darkening) of the image was produced. Man remains capable of communion with God after falling.

d) The world is created by God as a gift for man; it is a means of dialogue between God and man, a dialogue in which man is called to continually discover God in creation.

² ***, *Etica în Internet. Biserica și Internetul* (Ethics in the Internet. The Church and the Internet), Consiliul Pontifical pentru Comunicații Sociale Ercis, Iași, 2002, p. 12.

³ Pr. Prof. Ion BRIA, „*Despre revelația dumnezeiască*” (*On the divine revelation*), in: *Glasul Bisericii*, Year XXII (1964), no. 3-4, p.184.



It is worth noting that the emergence and spread of Christianity is the one that gave dignity to the *word* and operated the transition from oral culture to the written one, because the Word alone was embodied and gave us the opportunity to materialize what we used to transmit through lively voice. The Incarnate Word made our human *word* tangible, gave it dignity and charged it with great responsibility, for our own salvation and for our neighbor's likewise. Thus, in the early epoch of the Church the *apostolic Letters* appear, which are copied by as many Christian communities, followed then by the *gospels* and in this manner the *word* is becoming an important part of the worship of God, a fundamental part of our culture that is gaining another development and other valences.

Our culture is word-based and relies on the Incarnation of the Son of God, and the European civilization, with its great peaks is nothing but the fruit of Christianity exclusively, while the other contributions, i.e. Judaic and Greco-Roman are only marginally formal.

The *word* of God gets united with the *word* of man and builds up our Christian and European civilization and culture, which is thereby a revealed culture that has supernatural meaning and goals, but more than that it gives immense dignity to the word.

Between dignity and responsibility, between the *word* of God and the *word* of man, behold! – these are the boundaries of the Christian civilization of the *word*, mirrored in the Holy Tradition and in the Holy Scripture.

The *word* is the skeleton of our European and Romanian culture and civilization as well, and this comes out of everything that has been created, even from *word* as image, icon and painting though some argue that image have dethroned the word⁴.

Europe is a civilization of the *word*, founded on Christianity which in its turn is built on the Incarnation of God's Son, such that is not randomly that our culture is a drag-net culture, interwoven through words.

The immense dignity of the *word* is given by the fact that God is the one who utters: *Let there be light!*, and all the other utterances, which show that man, imitating God in the act of the *word*, goes confidently on the path of salvation, and between the word of man and the word of the Lord our salvation is to be written.

The sacredness of the *word* is an inner reality of it because it is God's creation and a gift to us, given for a particular purpose and therefore to use it inappropriately means to dishonor the Giver, to offend the one who expects us to use the word as an instrument of communion and perfection, and not as a means of separation and discord, isolation and evil.

Communication is a natural human act, ontologically necessary and practically fundamental, which represents not only the reaction to the need of the immediate, but especially a proper way of sharing something from one's own ontology. "Man is a person, an image of God, because there is a possibility of an answer to the call to love of God. Through his psychosomatic functions, man administers this possibility, responds positively or negatively to the call of God, leads his existence either to life, which means relationship, or to death which signifies separation from God."⁵

The act of communication is deeply a religious one. God the Son Incarnate is also called Logos, that is reason, but the term also means communication; also within the Holy

⁴ Giovanni SARTORI, *Homo videns. Imbecilizarea prin televiziune și post-gândirea (Homo videns. Idiotizing through television and post-reasoning)*, transl. into Romanian by Mihai Elin, București, Humanitas, 2005, p. 11.

⁵ Christos YANNARAS, *Abecedar al credinței (Elements of Faith: An Introduction to Orthodox Theology)*, transl. in Romanian by Rev. Dr. Constantin Coman, Bizantină, București, 1996, p. 85



Trinity, we are talking about communication and relational fellowship⁶. In other words, between communication and communion there is a close, strong and even inseparable connection.⁷

Man is a social being, that is, he has the ability to communicate, the openness and the vocation to communicate that is inscribed in his ontological datum, in the image of God within him. In fact, this is also the main argument of the possibility and necessity of our communication with God. We, as persons naturally have the ability to communicate inscribed in the divine depth within us.

From this perspective, the act of communication is a sacred one, because it pertains to the will of God, who created us as rational beings, once He is the Supreme Reason. To communicate is therefore the most natural human act, and, at the same time, it is the act that sets us in relation with the Creator.

By his creative status as a dialogue partner of God, man is a dynamic being; his whole life presents as a continuous tension that invokes the grace of the life-giving Holy Spirit. Thus the Christian life is characterized by incorporation and living in Christ towards the eternal things. Man who bears the image of God is both person and nature (πρωτόπῳ καὶ πῆσῃ), or more precisely, the person who assumes nature (being) and reveals it. Ontologically man is called to knowledge.

Thus, the human nature is fundamentally crossed by the mystery of love as an impulse that pushes people from within to a natural communion. The eternal value of the human person, the uniqueness of his being realized through the unity of the contrasts that man represents as body and soul, discovers that the person is not brought into the world by God in isolation, as an abstract uniform realization, separate from nature, from being.

The person presents himself in the complex context of the bonds of love and care manifested to himself and to other persons distinct from him, but who share the same common nature, in which the divine presence dwells in secret. Thus, it is reflected in humanity, through the creation of man in the image, the existential way of being like God, achieved through the dialogue of love between the persons of the Holy Trinity and the human persons, without mixing and without confusion, by the grace that reconcile those created with the uncreated ones.

The orthodox teaching does not conceive of human nature without grace, because grace as uncreated divine energy, which springs from the divine being, understood as the common energy of the three hypostases, is poured out personally through the Holy Spirit, through the risen and exalted humanity of Christ, in the sacramental framework of the Church through the Holy Sacraments, for the purpose of our salvation and sanctification. This process, seen as a continuous Pentecost, is actually the communion with Christ in the Holy Spirit, who exalts humanity to its true way of existence. The man's heroic aspiration to God can be understood by the fact that through the life breath of the Holy Spirit appears into man a 'you' of God, who is the image of God-You. God creates from nothing a dialogue partner in a biological organism through the spiritual blowing of grace, which produces an ontological spiritual breath that gets updated in the interpersonal conscious relationship.

The human subject participates in the divine life. Man has, through creation, the opportunity to transform into grace and to be like God: "In this sense, the orthodox anthropology is the ontology of deification ..."⁸

⁶ *Le Culte de l'Internet. Une menace pour le lien social?*, La Découverte, Paris, 1999, p. 104.

⁷ J.-Cl. MONOD, *Écrire à l'heure du tout message*, Flammarion, Paris, 2015, p. 66



By grace, as uncreated energy, the anabasic, the irreducible (διάσπῆμα) distance between the image and the divine archetype can be crossed by the absolute powerlessness of any mixture: "what has been done after the image means that it resembles the pattern... But it is quite different than its model if we consider the characteristics of its nature. For if the human mind were entirely God, it would no longer be his image, and it is precisely in the characteristics of the unborn nature that the image is revealed; in these properties the built nature shows the model..."⁹

We could, therefore, say that man is a communicative and of relationship being, open to his fellows and to God, and the act of communicating is also a means that contributes to his salvation.

Communication is related to anthropology and soteriology, but also to eschatology, because during the process from image to likeness, which has an always renewing character and without end, communication plays an important role.

From the moral point of view, the correct communication is the one which means that man relates to his neighbor without getting caught in the slavery of sin, and this is the desire. But we know it is not so, and yet man is subject to sin, and communication is also altered by sin. The work of the redemption of the God the Son Incarnate included this aspect of communication more precisely, and Jesus the Lord gave the real depth of communication, making it a stairway to heaven, a gate of renewal and a way of transfiguration.

That is why the Holy Sacraments and hierurgy, through which the grace of God enters our lives, have an aspect that pertains to communication, to the sacredness of communication, and through volitional effort, we transform the sacredness of communication into the sanctity of communication, that is, from ontological given to the renewal, by the Divine-human synergism.

The Church as the mysterious Body of Christ contains within the Spirit of truth (John 15:26, Romans 8:26), which gives her the ability to know the revealed truth and to keep it. The Holy Fathers testify that the Church is based on the same faith, on the community of faith preached by the special hierarchy that comes from Christ through the apostolic succession. To communicate, therefore, has a doctrinal aspect, which belongs to the image of God, a moral one concerning its truth and non-alteration, and a soteriological one concerning our perfection or salvation, in addition to the eschatological one, which concerns the participation in grace in the eternal life.

Morality is not a notion that is shaped by the "stories" crossed by humanity. Morality is a stable, integral, resonant concept, which does not subordinate to the times but, on the contrary, subordinates them. This cannot acquire shades, because it is not a trivial thing, a style of clothing, architecture, not even a philosophical current, which some can fashion unconditionally.

The novelty of the moral perspective of the Church refers both to the holistic integration of communication, and as a sacred act, in the process of deepening communion and social cohesion, but also to specifying and developing certain ethical principles and creating an integrative vision of the act of communication, as a social, relational and sacred act. Certainly, the reality of the transcendental, religious life is the revealed foundation in which to communicate means the natural human existence specific to human.

⁸ Paul EVDOCHIMOV, *Ortodoxia (The Orthodoxy)*, transl. into Romanian by Irineu Ioan Popa, Institutul Biblic si de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București 1996, p. 103

⁹ St. Gregory of Nyssa, *Despre suflet și înviere (About the soul and resurrection)*, in: *PSB*, vol. 30, Institutul Biblic si de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București 1998, pp. 359 - 360.



From the beginning, through what we started to call 'process of inculturation', the Church has used the word as a means of promoting the Gospel, as a tool for purifying the Greek-Roman culture, for spiritualizing and transfiguration of, it as well. Thus, the Church took the forms of expressing the Greco-Roman culture to which it gave new Christian content, i.e. it "baptized" them, in such a way as to be easy to penetrate into the ancient mentality, but to carry not pagan but Christian ideas, not paganism but Christianity.

On the same principle, in each epoch, the Church took over something from the culture of that time, using the word as a means of encounter and transfiguration.

Coming to the present times, the Church looked, at first, to the media with some fear, perhaps because of the fact that for so many centuries it has carried out its pastoral-missionary activity, using the classical means of preaching; however, we must not rely too much on this ecclesial conservatism, especially if we remember that the Church has always taken the newest means of communication in order to promote the Gospel, from papyrus and parchment, up to the use of printing press or radio.

Today, the use of the Internet, 'the new evangelization forum'¹⁰, or 'the new Areopagus', or the use of television, mobile communications or of the presentations on electronic, magnetic or purely informational media, does not represent – we firmly believe – a danger in terms of superficiality in the presentation of the redemptive message.

Of course, the case of excessive use of such means, without a serious discernment and without a clear and intelligent strategy can create problems of understanding, reception or deepening.

The presence of the Church in the public space through the media is an urgent and permanent duty, because it is a charitable gesture to proclaim the word of God as effectively as possible.¹¹

Jesus and the Apostles used all the modern means of their time to present their message, so that no means of communication should be denied or removed from the strategy of preaching the divine word.

Promoting light, justice, joy, bringing hope and comfort is always, not only permitted, but compulsory for any Christian.

Those who raise the issue that the Church is a private business (and that from the Enlightenment epoch onwards) and is not fair to manifest publicly or that it would aggress the free-thinking person with its message, do so out of false and dangerous *political correctness*, because, as long as the Church promotes its values, it cannot be against the man and his deepest interests.

The Church must value the use of all means of social communication that use or have the word as a vehicle, because it must preach the word of salvation to all, and impregnate with the divine seal of the transforming love of God everyone and everything¹². To the extent that the postmodern man seeks immediate salvation, he must increasingly resort to modern, institutionalized procedures, which society so willingly offers today.

¹⁰ IOAN PAUL al II-lea (JOHN PAUL the second), *Internetul: un nou forum pentru proclamarea Evangheliei. Mesaj cu ocazia celei de a XXXVI-a Zi Mondială a Comunicațiilor Sociale* (The Internet: a new forum for proclaiming the Gospel. Message on the occasion of the XXXVI-th World Social Communications Day, 12 May 2002, Presa Bună, Iași, 2002, p. 4.

¹¹ BENEDICT XVI, *Mesajul pentru a 45-a Zi Mondială a Comunicațiilor Sociale* (The message for the 45th World Day of Social Communications), 2011.

¹² V.: <https://ziarullumina.ro/repere-si-idei/internetul-intre-comunicare-si-izolare-15816.html>



The mission in the urban milieu is one of the urgent problems of the Church in the contemporary society. Due to the policies of the communist regime, the country's major cities experienced impressive population growth, while the Church was hindered from constructing places of worship. To all this, we can add the religious formalism that many of the believers grown up in the communist period exhibit, and the carelessness of those shaped in the spirit of postmodern thought, who participate from a social impulse at the Church' life and activity. For the Christian world, the acceptance of the responsibility to get involved in the process of straightening the different postmodern social mindsets that must conform to the essence of the way of thinking in Christ is already a great challenge.

The role of Christian moral education is essential to the health of contemporary society. "The first step, fundamental in order to achieve this 'cultural tower', consists in the formation of the moral consciousness regarding the immeasurable and immaterial value of each human life. It is very important for you to rediscover the intact connection between life and freedom and to discover the constitutive link that unites freedom with truth."¹³

Any religious community should be defined by spiritual health. Because postmodern society gives us the image of a spiritually amputated community, the concrete solutions are given by Church programs, by counseling programs, and religious and humanistic psychotherapy.¹⁴

CONCLUSION

Today, we notice a change in our paradigm of culture and civilization, after switching to written culture, after the emergence of the typography and of the Internet, the use of the new technical means of social communication has radically changed our way of perceiving the world, our neighbors, God and civilization.

Fruit of human intelligence, the mass media have the duty to emphasize the communitarian spirit, the solidarity between people, the law and love, thus directly contributing to the creation of a society, which are still more human and closer to the wishes of people.

Apart from the information popularizing of public interest, the mass media is also responsible for the spread of the authentic culture, of the splendor of the truth¹⁵, of the perennial values of humanity, which have not only informative but also formative purpose. The end of the cultural act consists in a deeper "humanization" of man.

Going into the depths of his being, man inevitably discovers God, in the very depths of his soul, lying at the foundations of civilization and human culture itself¹⁶. The active commitment to serve the man, his education, turns the media into a main instrument with whose aid the cultural model of the 21-st century operates.

Nothing ever had a greater influence on our society, as the media today. Serving the truth, communications indirectly serve that "unknown God" (Acts 17:23), the God of whom the Apostle Paul spoke in the Athenian Areopagus. That is why every person engaged in the

¹³ Encyclical Letter *Evangelium Vitae*, 96. (Personal translation)

¹⁴ Alvin TOFFLER, *Șocul viitorului (Future Shock)*, transl. into Romanian by Silviu Brucan, Politică, București, 1973, p. 56.

¹⁵ IOAN PAUL al II-lea (JOHN PAUL the second), *Veritatis Splendor*, 1, in: IOAN PAUL al II-lea, *Enciclice*, Editura Arhiepiscopiei Romano-Catolice de Bucuresti, București, 2008, p. 497.

¹⁶ I. MĂRTINĂ, *Cultura și educația în Doctrina Socială a Bisericii* (Culture and Education in the Social Doctrine of the Church), Universitatea din București, 2004, p. 243. V. <https://ziarullumina.ro/actualitate-religioasa/regionale/banat/internetul-un-nou-mijloc-de-pastoratie-109728.html>



field of communications that serve the truth, serve deeply our humanity and the Creator at the same time¹⁷.

If the printing press, the radio and the television, by their specific language, proclaim truths congruent to the Great Truth, inform and educate, yet we cannot fail to notice a certain alienation that this illusion of false communion creates, only on the basis of information. The human community is based on direct, unmediated, personal dialogue, so anything else cannot take the place of true communion.¹⁸

It is neither better nor worse than the previous ones, but it is certainly something different, which is why we do not have to categorize hierarchically or criticize the written culture in relation to the virtual one, but only consider that our young people relate differently to the word.

That the youngsters read more or less is relative, not even the old generations were too much fond with lecturing; on the contrary, now they read more, even messages, or postings on Facebook or online newspapers, or articles of all kinds.

This important virtual space is the **new mission field of the Church**, not just a tactical field for services, or a marketing space for companies; it is a space in which we must be present and proclaim the word, we must be ready to support the christening or re-christening of both the new generations and the old ones.

Social networks can contribute *to a better mutual understanding of different traditions and to the consolidation of faith communities*¹⁹, as a space for new manifestation of the word; they also represent a new missionary space, the 'new Areopagus of our time', in which we must be, unmistakably, the new missionaries, who can bring peace and liberation²⁰.

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¹⁷ <https://ziarullumina.ro/actualitate-religioasa/regionale/banat/internetul-un-nou-mijloc-de-pastoratie-109728.html>

¹⁸ Cf. Jean Claude LARCHET, *Captivi in Internet*, Sophia, Bucuresti, 2018, p. 54.

¹⁹ <https://basilica.ro/patriarhul-daniel-despre-utilizarea-retelelor-de-socializare-si-a-internetului/>

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THE MASS MEDIA AND THE CHRISTIAN VALUES

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“I am the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14, 6)

ABSTRACT

The present society is characterized by greed for information. The mass media, considered the “fourth power in the state”, feeds the “thirst” of the mankind for sensational news, the “hunger” for novel, being enslaved to the pleasures of entertainment, getting manipulated and bringing a feeling of anxiety for the soul. With numerous means of communication available (such as: printing, audio and video recordings, internet, television, etc.), the mass media has captured the interest of the people, having all the means by which information, advertising and culture can be mass-propagated. Christian values are neglected, being replaced by the ideals of the postmodern world: fun, laziness, neglect of spiritual things, etc. Often having strategic and/or material interests, the mass media is used to reach its targets by the so-called fake news. The church has the capacity to christen the mass media efforts, so that the latter aims to build the man and his spiritual progress. The power that the mass media has today must be used for the purpose of getting closer to God and to people. Goodness, love, dignity, truth, integrity must be the fundamental values that spring from the media landscape.

Keywords: the mass media; values; fake news; manipulation; information;

INTRODUCTION

The mass media has an overwhelming influence on the contemporary society due to the impressive input of information it propagates, often acquiring the valences of an ideology that does not take into account the Christian moral values. The man's appetite for information is aroused by the mass media concern that he will always be curious. Distracted with worries, often in states of disorder and anxiety, the greedy for information man has the desire to “savor” the latest gossip.

Of course, there is also the alternative to “healthy” mass media that aims to preserve and proclaim the truth in such a way that the human being can use the advantages of such an informational approach in a beneficial way. There is a fierce battle between the mass media that has as interest the imposition of a secularized lifestyle and the mass media that aims for the man to follow the right “way” by strengthening Christian values. Whether talking about the press, radio, television, cinema or the internet, directly or indirectly, the mass media is spreading its influence throughout the human society. The era that we live in has been defined as “a consumer society”, but we must differentiate between the dramatic reality of exaggerated consumption, known as consumerism, and what is really wanted, that is thrift and moderation.



1. THE DEFINING CHARACTERISTICS OF THE MASS MEDIA

The term “mass media”, originating from English, refers to those technologies that aim to reach a mass audience. It designates the means of communication aimed at disseminating information to as many people as possible. That is why when talking about the mass media we refer to the means by which information, advertising and culture are mass-propagated, being able to influence a very large number of people.¹

Tomi T. Ahonen, in his book *Mobile as 7th of the Mass Media: Cellphone, Cameraphone, iPhone, Smartphone*, talking about the mass media evolution since the advent of the printing until the present, lists seven main means of mass information:

- 1) the printing (books, newspapers, magazines, posters, etc.) – starting with the end of the 15th century;
- 2) audio recordings (cylinders, vinyl discs, cassettes, CDs, DVDs, etc.) – from the end of the 19th century;
- 3) the cinema – from the beginning of the 20th century;
- 4) the radio – from the beginning of the 20th century;
- 5) the television - from the middle of the 20th century;
- 6) the Internet – from the '90s;
- 7) the mobile phones – from the beginning of the 21st century.²

It is obvious that today, since it has at its disposal all the seven means listed above, the mass media enjoys omnipresence in society, exercising an overwhelming influence at social level, either directly or indirectly. The influx of information is unstoppable. Wherever you look, or whatever you listen to, it is impossible not to encounter the means by which the mass media interacts with you. Thus, interaction is inevitable!

Technology has led us to live in the so-called “information society”, a “revolutionary” age in which the innovations of the 20th century are experiencing exceptional development. Fiber optics, numerous satellites, terrestrial data transmission networks meant for today’s society a true informational “boom”.

2. THE MASS MEDIA INFLUENCE ON CHRISTIAN VALUES

Nowadays, the mass media is characterized by the major influx of breaking news, by promoting stardom, entertainment, non-values just to gain “rating”³ and „subscribers”⁴.

Filtering information has become the real problem of the society we live in. The “sift” of information is required, but for this to be done expeditiously and with discernment

¹ Steven Coleman, „What Is Mass Media? - Definition, Types, Influence & Examples”, Chapter 11 / Lesson 19, see: <https://study.com/academy/lesson/what-is-mass-media-definition-types-influence-examples.html>, retrieved on 18.09.2019;

² Dave Duarte, „The 7 Mass Media and the 4th Screen”, 19, January 2009, see: <https://www.daveduarte.co.za/blog/2009/1/19/the-7-mass-media-and-the-4th-screen.html>, retrieved on 18.09.2019;

³ *Rating* = term that comes from English, where it means the evaluation of something, on the basis of quality and quantity criterion, or both. Today, this term is used mainly to analyze the audience and the marketing of television and radio stations, representing the degree of receptivity of certain programs broadcast by them. General (total) rating means the ratio between the number of viewers at a given time and the potential viewers who have access to a television set (which could be viewers).

⁴ *Subscriber* = that comes from English, which can be translated by the terms: *subscriber*, *signer*, *contractor*, *etc.* The term is used in Romanian to designate people who subscribe to certain online media channels (such as Youtube, sites selling various products, news sites, etc.). The provider aims to both publicize and increase personal benefits, and the subscriber to benefit from what the provider offers (services, information, promotions, etc.).



we must cultivate in our personal lives a strong connection with the One who is “the way, the truth and the life” (John 14, 6), that is, with Jesus Christ, the source of good thinking, good work, firm decisions and error-free life. In other words, it is necessary for the present human being to adhere with all conviction to Christian values. A moral life today means getting rid of the manipulation of the mass media, being anchored in reality, but without allowing the “fashion” of the time, the secularizing spirit, the non-values be imposed on you.

The mass media offers a wide range of content, some of which are relevant to the lives of the people who access them, others that are revealed in order to gain rating and, consequently, money, but also the so-called “fake news”⁵ and “alternative facts”⁶, which are forms of false information that have been taken over by social networks and spread (“shared”) on a planetary scale, most often validated as journalistic acts (World Economic Forum 2014⁷). The access of an increasing number of people to Internet services has led to the spread of fake news in Romania, too, especially in certain key moments, when the purpose is also facilitated through “fabricated” news⁸. “According to the results of the Eurobarometer survey, conducted by the European Commission, in February 2018, more than half of the Romanians (59%) trust the news posted on the socializing platforms, without checking them, Romania being, from this point of view, first in Europe. The majority of respondents (79%) claim that they can distinguish fake news, and 1 in 5 Romanians share the read information.”⁹

As stated above, one of the Christian values that anchor us in Christ is the truth, He Himself being the source of truth and He who loves the truth and hates the lie: “Lying lips [are] abomination to the LORD: but they that deal truly [are] his delight” (Proverbs 12, 22). Truth is the path to dignity, morality, justice and peace, while lying is causing great harm to both man and society, resulting in fear, mistrust and social decline.

Starting from the “golden rule” of Christian morality, which says: “Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets” (Matthew 7, 12) or “And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise” (Luke 6, 31), we can argue the importance of anchoring in the truth. No one likes to be lied to or manipulated by hiding the truth. Of course, there are times when the human being should not find out certain things that would bring greater harm to the soul and body, but this must be thought of very carefully.

⁵ „Fake news” = phrase coming from English, false news

⁶ „Alternative facts” = phrase coming from English. This expression was first used on January 22, 2017 by Kellyanne Conway, US President Donald Trump’s adviser, during a press meeting to defend Sen Spicer, the White House spokesman, who had made a false statement about the number of people who participated in Donald Trump’s investing ceremony as President of the United States of America. During an interview with Chuck Todd in which he was asked to explain why Spicer lied, Kellyanne Conway said that Spicer gave the public “alternative facts.” Todd replied, “Look, alternative facts are not facts. They are fake.” (Eric Bradner, „Conway: Trump White House offered alternative ‘facts’ on crowd size”, CNN, January 23, 2017, see <https://edition.cnn.com/2017/01/22/politics/kellyanne-conway-alternative-facts/index.html>, retrieved on 18.09.2019).

⁷ Marju Himma-Kadakas, „Alternative facts and fake news entering journalistic content production cycle”, in *Cosmopolitan Civil Societies Journal*, Vol. 9, Nr. 2, 2017, p. 26, see: <https://doi.org/10.5130/ccs.v9i2.5469>, retrieved on 18.09.2019.

⁸ Grigore Iuliana, Andrada Halgaș, „«Fabricate» pentru România. Interese ascunse în știrile false”, 9 January 2019, see: <https://intelligence.sri.ro/fabricate-pentru-romania-interese-ascunse-stirile-false/>, retrieved on 18.09.2019.

⁹ Ibidem.



The mass media pursues certain interests when distributing incorrect information in the public space. Thus, fake news is spread for two types of stakes:

- „a) strategic ones – used as part of the informational offensive of a state or an organization, in order to manipulate the population, in the sense of activating it in support of ideas or, on the contrary, producing a state of apathy, disinterest, mistrust, disappointment;
- b) material ones – strictly aim at obtaining financial gains.”¹⁰

Of course, the so-called “false news” can be found in the media, the difference between these and fake news being made only at the level of intentionality: the first ones are spread out of ignorance or misinterpretations, without the purpose of manipulation, while fake news is propagated with the precise intention of manipulating public opinion. “One of the most common prototypes of fake news in the domestic level corresponds to the tabloid, sensationalist style, focused on publishing clickbait news (with shocking titles that do not support the content), which contain exaggerations and do not cite the source of information. They aim to increase the number of people who access them and, implicitly, the popularity and earnings of the source.”¹¹ It does not matter if the good name and integrity of certain people are harmed, goodwill, moral education, promotion of values are not taken into account. On the contrary, non-values are those that are promoted because they keep the audience at high levels. The promotion of entertainment is the most useful weapon with which the population is conquered. The vigil prayer has been replaced by various “shows”, icons by pornographic images, tolerance by violence. We see more and more people who are isolated, developing serious forms of depression. The large flow of information leads to depersonalization and loss of self-awareness.

The statement that the press/mass media is “state power”¹² requires some clarification. First of all, we must reflect on the fact that the power of the mass media resides in the force with which it propagates information among people. But we must not go beyond the fact that it is also coordinated by people. If those who have this power are attached to the Christian values and promote them, if they were educated in the spirit of authentic values, and they are concerned with their perpetuation in order to create a better human society, if they are fervent sons of the Church, then the power what was given to them will produce positive results. On the other hand, if what they pursue is the interest in acquiring material goods, then we must be careful about what they produce.

According to Law 41/1994, the press (*in extenso* the mass media with all its channels) “has three functions: the function of informing, training and entertaining. Various press bodies can shape their profile by shifting the focus to one or the other of the three functions, so the danger is not in this shift of accent. Each function, taken separately, contains a latent, virtual danger. In this sense, information can become misinformation (also with the help of information, apparently true), training can become manipulation (distortion of a belief), and entertainment can become a modern-erotic-erotomaniac cancan, if not worse.”¹³ The content of news in the mass media often hides the real intent. Often the message carries with it the structural change of life concepts, of the idea of communion, of moral principles, operating in depth on human relations. Media messages are even patterns

¹⁰ Ibidem.

¹¹ Ibidem.

¹² Tudor Cățineanu, „Cele trei puteri ale statului și încă una, în plus. Episodul trei: Presa”, published on 13, December, 2015, 12:52, see: https://adevarul.ro/news/politica/cele-trei-puteri-statului-incea-una-plus-episodul-trei-presa-1_566d4ccd7d919ed50e2d6201/index.html, retrieved on 18.09.2019.

¹³ Ibidem.



of relationship and perception that are required and that change the traditional structures of the family.¹⁴

3. THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH AND THE MASS MEDIA

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. (John 1, 1-3). The word is the basis of divine creation, being identified with God himself by the Holy Apostle and Evangelist John. The word is the way in which people engage in dialogue, communicate, know each other and build relationships based on love. Therefore, the foundation of interpersonal relationships is the word. It is the one that feeds people so that spiritual gaps no longer exist. The word is the bearer of truth, justice, good and beautiful.

At the same time, the word can carry with it the seeds of division, hatred, envy, manipulation, etc. With a word you can tear down a whole good arrangement, you can fill the hearts of your fellows with things that are not useful and which are destined for ruin. The change of the meaning of the word, whose purpose is that of making people grow and develop, leads to the distortion of the image of God in man. We are distracted by what we are talking about and how we are talking. Today, there is an unstoppable flow of words that we must be able to sift, select according to their importance in the act of personal growing. We need to choose those words that nourish us spiritually, which contain values and are not meaningless.

In the “world of Flight”¹⁵, as Max Picard called it, meaning the era we live in, “reading a sentence from the language of this world is like jumping from one ruin of the word to another, and there seem to be holes between these ruins. It is no longer like in the *world of Faith*, where the sentence begins with the subject and unfolds over the predicate and object. The entire column of the subject appears overturned. (...) Words do not follow one another voluntarily, but are put in by force; there is no coordination in the sentence, but only tears. Each word points in a different direction, but does not know which one. Anarchy dominates in the sentence and, therefore, the idea does not progress as when the sentence develops from subject to object, but it is chipped and thrown from there to there. The idea, which seeks a connection with order, and through the hierarchy of order, with God, will be isolated in the anarchic language and there will be virtually nothing left of it, or perhaps something isolated, without content. An idea will not come from the sentence, but something sad and lonely. (...) Man will dare to express in this language even the most dangerous things”¹⁶.

The mass media operates with words, and in most cases it is subject to linguistic principles and the purpose of this “world of Flight”. The role of the Church is precisely to direct all the steps taken by the word to the “world of Faith”. The evangelical message of the Church has the capacity to christen the efforts of the mass media, so that the latter aims to build the man and his spiritual progress. The power that the media has today must be used for the purpose of getting closer to God and to people, of love for all the gifts received from the Almighty God, of cultivating virtues.

¹⁴ Jean Baudrillard, „Marshall MacLuhan, Understanding Media: the Extensions of Man”, in *L'Homme et la société*, no. 5, 1967, p. 229.

¹⁵ Max Picard, *Fuga de Dumnezeu*, Rom. translation by Patricia Merfu and Pr. George Remete, Ed. Anastasia, București, 1998, p. 21.

¹⁶ Ibidem, pp. 93-94.



The mission of the Church is to bring light where the mass media has contributed to its loss by entire communities or where it is about to extinguish it. The word has within itself the creative force of the One who created it and sowed it from the beginning, therefore it is necessary to re-establish it in the natural order, sowing it on the fertile ground so as to bear fruit and then quench the thirst of man for the Absolute.

In the context of expanding the number of media channels, the Church, being a community that relies on communication, is due to preach the message of God's love for each person, to make all people partakers of the spiritual values they inherited and treasured, to give birth to social networks that do not fall apart from the purpose of creating communions based on love. Of course, it is not at all an easy thing to do away with the vortex created by the speed with which the media has developed today. The Church can encounter countless obstacles in the fight to Christianize the message of the media. "The problem for the Church does not stem from the fact that it communicates or communicates in parallel with the media. This is basically one of the axes of its mission. It is born and grows from the communication of Jesus Christ to the world through the transmitter of the Father who is the Holy Spirit. The difficulty is that the media and its means constantly produce meaningful revolutions, produce events instead of describing them, change the meaning of space, time, create new social landscapes, encode the whole reality in the spirit of Babel, switching the keys of modern language – from now post-modern – in a code in which the imaginary becomes more real than the real, the artificial more natural than the natural and the indirect information more direct than the most direct of the information (Duilio Corgnali, *Le nuove frontiere della comunicazione. Verso una società dell'informazione*, in *Credero Oggi*, (86). no-2 1995, Ed- Messaggero Padova, pp.5-17)." These changes in the communication matrix congest the Christian understanding of the world, falsely converting into excessive emissions the otherwise mediocre messages of a false social-political messiah."¹⁷

The Church has the duty to also engage in the media process, and thus to materialize its preaching vocation, giving people the chance of good communication with both their fellows and with God. Media ethics must be a constant concern of the Church and society, so that people are educated in the spirit of good life, of receiving the truth, of the exercise of the good for a common goal.

CONCLUSION

Nowadays, the mass media is an important opinion-maker, with an overwhelming social receptivity rate, which is why the people employed in the media structures must guide themselves according to moral principles when deciding what they communicate. If they consider that communication that has as essence the truth, objectivity and correctness is necessary, they will be true professionals who are campaigning for people's good.

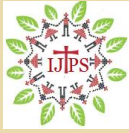
People need to be protected from the fabrication of news aimed at manipulating and destroying the traditional family, distancing from Christian values, and personal interests. Goodness, love, dignity, truth, integrity must be the fundamental values that spring from the media landscape, and for this to happen, the Church must capitalize on the experience gained over the centuries. The struggle can be considered extremely tough, but we must not forget that God is the Word itself, and we, as bearers of the Word, have the ability to transmit it, to be for all of us "way, truth and life"!

¹⁷ Pr. Conf. Univ. Dr. Constantin Necula, „Biserica și mass-media, dinamica unei provocări pastorale”, see: <https://www.crestinortodox.ro/editoriale/biserica-mass-media-dinamica-unei-provocari-pastorale-70105.html>, retrieved on 19.09.2019.



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TIME HAS GONE TODAY

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ABSTRACT

This essay proposes to address features of Time in Science and Philosophy then emphasize those findings in reference to Philosophical Theology, predominately in Theodicy. Those disciplines all have produced a number of longstanding and contrasting viewpoints regarding Time. Positions will be presented to emphasize incongruent standpoints in those disciplines to substantiate the concept that a new Philosophy of Time is needed and how that thinking impacts our understanding of the problem of evil or Theodicy. The predominant linear view of time obfuscates our understanding of Time and Evil. The Platonic concept of anamnesis is amended here as the preeminent concept of Time and also how Time as anamnesis pertains to Omniscience and the problem of evil. Time flows backwards not forwards. We are already completed but we unfurl in Time because we have forgotten how we freely chose ourselves. Omniscience knows this; we don't remember and now live that forgetfulness. A Book of Life is written, we cannot recall our page number..

Keywords: Philosophy of Time; Philosophy of Science; Metaphysics; Theodicy;

INTRODUCTION

There are a number of longstanding incongruences found in the Philosophy of Time. There are a number of longstanding incongruences found when studying the problem of evil. Inge adjoins that excepting the problem of evil, Time is the hardest in all of philosophy¹. Time is also thought to be the most disconcerting of all the obstacles to a thoroughly penetrating account of existence; as the mathematical physicist Weyl says "Explain time? Not without explaining existence. Explain existence? Not without explaining time"².

Others contend that cosmology relates to theology while developing in time³ and that there is a profound connection between the philosophy of time, cosmology, and metaphysics⁴. Still others see that the theoretical edifice of science is not very different from that of theology⁵ and that there is an intensification of the dialogue between science and religion⁶.

Some maintain current generally accepted ontological views are consistent with time in modern science⁷. Others counter that the epistemological status of many of those views are far from established, highly speculative or not even addressed⁸. For Plank, science cannot solve the ultimate mystery of nature; because we are part of nature and therefore part of the mystery we are trying to solve⁹. Yet, Reichenbach states that if there is a solution to the philosophical problem of Time, it is written down in the equations of mathematical physics¹⁰. However, mathematics (and its implications for physics) have been shown by Gödel to lack final systemization and are not free from internal contradiction¹¹. By using



pure logic alone, it is impossible to refute anyone claiming the universe was created an hour ago¹². Hence “physics has no far-reaching meaning for reality, just as formal logic, for example, has no far-reaching meaning in the realm of truth”¹³. Time, it appears has as many different meanings as there are theoretical frameworks for doing physics¹⁴.

Yet the most common scientific strategy is to avoid the how and why of cosmology, metaphysics and Time and turn to language, or logic and to the structures of texts¹⁵. Thus, some maintain a metaphysical chasm persists between science and theology¹⁶; while Rahner thinks the sciences have or are close to replacing philosophy as a key theology partner¹⁷. It seems the considerations of Time and Theology are still in the eye of the beholder.

1. SO WHAT TIME IS IT?

The orthodox view of Time, from Boethius to the present day, has been typically seen from the present into the past and projected into the future¹⁸. Many hold this arrow of time as the primary, objective reality in a linear orientation towards the future¹⁹. Christianity, Islam and Judaism all have such a deeply linear view of time²⁰. Swinburne²¹ also agrees that Time is linear. Bergson’s view of Time as duration is also linear²². The linear view of Time, also called the asymmetry of time never changes its direction of flow and is a psychological time, which each of us {*presumably (mine)*} experiences as a present moment moving to the future²³.

Evolution science also purports there can be only a linear view of time since natural selection cannot work with any “illusory” arrows of time; so if natural selection cannot work, then empirical science is orphaned²⁴. Yet during most of the timeframes through which the very small evolutionary variations occur; *no* advantage has been gained nor any reason why such were preserved by “natural selection”²⁵. Natural selection is a tautology in explanation, since it always must look backward; it assumes linearity and is unable to predict its own impending course and thus is blind to what will happen in the future²⁶. Evolution also presupposes a theatre within which natural selection takes place²⁷. Dawkins takes for granted the existence of physio-chemical material that “is a precondition of the possibility of evolution”; hence evolution cannot explain its own existence²⁸. Its’ arrow of time is not at all posited as a basic law of physics; where equations do not specify a unique direction of time²⁹ and thus consequently controverts evolution³⁰. Quantum theory further denies all meaning to the notions of before and after in the world of the very small so: “Time is in trouble”³¹. The stubbornly persistent illusion between past, present and future from Einstein³² remains. And so, what Time is it?

Divergent positions regarding Time, its theoretical approach and views presented from science were shown to emphasize and substantiate the concept that a new or different philosophy of time is needed. Perhaps it is now time for Time to be brought to light³³.

2. TIME AND TIME AGAIN IN PHILOSOPHY:

That Number is Time was a tenet of Greek philosophy from Plato & Aristotle onwards³⁴. Aristotle explores if Time exists or not and what sort of movement it is³⁵. Plato asserted that time imitates eternity and “*is*” stands as an inaccurate expression regarding some modes of time³⁶; while any learning whatsoever is recollection³⁷ while any knowledge can be known only through that recollection which comes from anamnesis³⁸. From McTaggart we have the unreality of time³⁹ and also the A, B, C’s of Time⁴⁰. Rogers asks if the future *exists* now or not⁴¹. Sprigge, like Einstein, contends that the contrast between past-present-future is less than it seems⁴². Or is it that the becoming of us and the becoming of



time are the same thing: decoherence⁴³. Then again, McTaggart adds Spinoza, Kant, Schopenhauer, Bradley and almost all mysticism to the illusion of time school⁴⁴. Yet a nihilist counterpart to any mysticism, Time from Meillassoux, is capable of destroying becoming itself and bringing forth death⁴⁵. Heidegger asks who is Time and presupposes that Time is a being or entity⁴⁶. Rahner also looked at Time as a creation⁴⁷. Augustine stated we cannot truly say that time is, because it tends not to be⁴⁸. Hegel proposed time as that being which, in as much as it is, is not, and in as much as it is not is⁴⁹. Numerous thinkers posit the future of Time as prominent. Plotinus contended that what exists potentially proceeds from what later is actual⁵⁰. Von Bertalanffy portrays a philosophy of Nicolas of Cusa, which relates that “whatever we do or think has been in us, i.e., latency”⁵¹. Kant has our earthly life as only a “becoming” and should be credited to us exactly *as if we were already in full possession of it (mine)*; to this we only have a capability of receiving⁵². Schelling argued that the ruling dimension is the future; the time in time⁵³. Heidegger states the past of Dasein is something that already goes ahead of it, often referencing its “futural” character⁵⁴.

Whitehead and Merleau-Ponty accept nature as an unfurling⁵⁵. Rahner has the historicity of man *unfolding* (mine) towards a historical fulfillment⁵⁶. McCall describes his branching view of time where all branching lies not in the past or present but exclusively and concretely in the future⁵⁷. Augustine recalls how should I know forgetfulness if I did not remember it⁵⁸ or he might call this remembering of our past “Illumination”⁵⁹.

Whitehead also contends a general reference to “Beyond” in the event is a must to have any reference at all⁶⁰. For Pannenberg; appearance is the arrival of the future; something moving more that it is as it presently appears to me⁶¹. Or that Time has two movements, procession and return; “the way forward is the way back, the way back is the way forward”⁶². For Wyle time *awakens* (mine) to a life one point one after another as a section of this world comes to life then passes like a *picture* (mine)⁶³. To Leftow, “events occur in the frozen simultaneity of eternity, but also follow one another in time”⁶⁴.

3. THE TIMES?

We have implied existence, which is implying or not implying time and whether time is an entity or a being. We have time in trouble, different, disconcerting, created, destructive, developing, assembled, designated, or just merely the measurement of the sensorium. We have the linear view of time, the psychological view of time, the illusion of time, the futural view of time or not, the non-nature of time, the decoherence view of time, the unfolding or not of time, the mystical view of time, and the unfurling and the unreality of time. We have Time as number, equation, latency, becoming, appearance, connected or avoided, awakened, eternal, frozen or only present; beyond ,branched, temporal, posited or not; unspecified or not, closed or not. Time is and is not; becoming or not, is not and is; is not yet but is no more. After Augustine, shall I ask the question; “What is time”⁶⁵?

Given all these variations in the portrayals of Time; is it seems clear why Gödel suggested philosophers need to change their views of time⁶⁶?

Additionally, if there is no such thing as time in the usual sense⁶⁷; perhaps we need a new philosophy of time⁶⁸? Moreover, Theology also needs a new direction⁶⁹. Upon delivering a variety of similarly disparate views of Theodicy, another view of Time and the problem of evil will be presented.



4. THEODICY:

One of the oldest and most venerable issues dealt with by philosophical theology is the problem of evil or theodicy, where God is omnipotent and perfectly good yet there is much evil in the world⁷⁰.

Hume notes the old questions from Epicurus' are unanswered: "Is he willing to prevent evil and not able then he is impotent or is he willing to prevent evil and not willing than he is malevolent. Is he both able and willing, whence then is evil⁷¹? Thus a general purpose of a theodicy is to ascribe to God some *reason* that would morally justify his permission of the evil and suffering we find in our world⁷² while also addressing God's relationship to Time; since throughout the history of philosophy practically every philosopher has considered God's relationship to Time⁷³. Views in Theodicy like those in the sciences regarding Time are diverse.

Ricoeur thought that the problem of evil drew philosophy to its own limit⁷⁴. Some argue theodicy is possibly the least satisfactory area in theology⁷⁵. Others investigating traditional defenses of God, note that if the road to hell is paved with good intentions, the road to heaven is paved with failed theodicies⁷⁶. Kant eschews metaphysical questions of theodicy⁷⁷. Whitehead's Theodicy denies Omnipotence, as God can only function as a persuasive agency⁷⁸. Royce states we regret evil has "being"⁷⁹. Swinburne says that lacking a theodicy, evil counts against the existence of God⁸⁰; while the "*escamotage*" of Christian Theology is to solve the drama of divine justice⁸¹. To Sartre, the evils perpetrated in Auschwitz, Cambodia and the like are irredeemable⁸². Galbraith sets out Roth's anti-theodicy of God; who is "everlastingly guilty-where the degrees here run from gross negligence to murder⁸³. Roth also calls it an irresponsible fact that God sets the boundaries of our life and being yet lives elsewhere⁸⁴. Schellenberg declares "the weakness of evidence for theism is itself evidence against it, that is, why would God be hidden from us"⁸⁵? Spinoza has evil rather imagined than real⁸⁶; others that evil is an illusion⁸⁷ or not⁸⁸.

We are also considered too immature to fathom horrendous evils⁸⁹ (Adams 1990, 217). Then again, God is dead⁹⁰ while Meillassoux proposes there is a nihilist counterpart to the hypothesis of an all powerful God which could also be maintained⁹¹.

It is also thought that the numerous theodical conditions found in that literature are all logically related to each other⁹². Here we see thirty two chapters of numerous and wide ranging positions and strategies regarding the problem of evil⁹³. Most all of those chapters are elsewhere consolidated into twenty one major topics of Western solutions while *Vedic*, *Brahmanic*, *Upanisadic* and *Bhagavad-Gita* solutions from Indian sources addressing the problem of evil are also surveyed⁹⁴. Additionally, we have two dozen or so theodical essays⁹⁵ and six volumes in the philosophy of evil across classic cultures and times⁹⁶. None of those comprehensive works or any of the previously presented futural views incorporates any view of Time as a solution to the problem of evil.

Anamnestic Time and Theodicy:

By accepting the predominant linear conception of time and our presumed and assumed psychological flow of time from the present into the future; we obfuscate our understanding of Time and also of evil.

Time is not marching on but is flowing backwards, not forwards. Time is an unfolding, a spooling back, a repeat; the unravelling and unwinding of our life in the Omniscient "DVD/Blue Ray". We think we have a linear view of Time but we are recollecting what we have lived, since we have forgotten it. Time is that DVD evidence; the



record of what we have volitionally done; the logical and natural consequences from our anamnestic view of now.

Omniscience knows this, we forgot, and now experience that anamnesis here, remembered from there. Before the world begins and before being unfolds- God defines God individually to all- a Subject that none are free to avoid⁹⁷. Yet we try and blame God. We are already complete yet we forgot how we did it; so we live and recall it. God is wholly present to every point in time; which is immediately present to God⁹⁸ but, significantly, not to us. Time reveals what we did, how we did it and why we did it as we become unhidden from ourselves in a Time prior to Time.

5. DIVINE NONOMNISCIENCE, ANAMNESTIC TIME AND FREE WILL:

Several ideas surround the proposal of free will which humanity used to vacate itself from Goodness. Leibniz argued that “God could not give the creature all without making of it a God”⁹⁹. Caputo asserts that God as creator was working with elements that signified a certain limit on Gods power¹⁰⁰. Bugiulescu stresses that man is the only being created by God who has the ability be like his Creator¹⁰¹ while “being free from the boundaries imposed by His nature”¹⁰². Plantinga argues “Omnipotence cannot create free creatures to initiate the possibility of moral evil while simultaneously prohibiting its actuality”¹⁰³. Choo and Goh recently defended objections to Plantinga’s argument for Free Will and then extended them¹⁰⁴. Real freedom says Rahner “must include the possibility of rejecting God”¹⁰⁵. So we chose the non-Good and rejected God.

The logical consequences of our choosing not-God were shown to us instantaneously with our rejection of the Good. All creation occurred all at once¹⁰⁶; as everything God does, God does in a single act; all at once”¹⁰⁷. From a “God’s eye view, the whole of time exists, there is no passing moment called the present”¹⁰⁸. Creation and the *end thereof* thus occurred *simultaneously*. God knows all that He ever knows; including *events that to us are future; as our lives are played out* (mine)¹⁰⁹. Thus, from God’s perspective, our DVD was “being” rewound for us; showing ourselves to ourselves in what has been called the eschatological moment¹¹⁰. Our Film started rewinding immediately at our mistaken selection, as we are shown the consequences of our free choice of God rejection; individually, throughout Time; not unlike the story of the Descent as a symbolic turning away from God into the self¹¹¹.

We chose very badly and forgot and continue on with very bad choices and forget. As a result, the Realm before the choice was and is now no longer. We are our own unknown happenings in the eschatological moment; now recalling how we got there. Our limited frame of reference often seems to be the “present”; much like many previously displayed views of Time. Some of those views of Time were futural in scope yet none proposed the anamnestic view of Time where the forgotten eschatological moment is the frame of reference.

All is past and is not, but is: while we do not recall our chosen choice. That choice was simultaneously presented at the eschatological moment, now anamnastically lived. We forget that Time is the replay of Divine Justice, showing us the lack of our implementation of it; displaying the free willed rejection of God to ourselves. So how is God responsible for our free actions to choose the non-Good; or evil, without making us automatons?

But to Phillips, such a free will defense position to evil cannot be left to God’s creation of free beings where from that freedom alone “everything thereafter is their responsibility”¹¹². Why not? The ramifications of that freedom to reject God must be proportional to the act of rejection. The “thereafters” from Phillips are logical consequences



from the rejected Good. In what kingdom do you give up, renunciate or otherwise renounce your citizenship and then expect to be protected by that rejected realm? Is denaturalization; where the chosen loss of citizenship is enacted by a kingdom dishonest, unlawful or prohibited? Evil is that which ought not to be and exists as only an infringement or opposition to an Ideal¹¹³; and a very rejected and infringed upon Ideal at that.

Rejecting Goodness is not unlike what Hunt clearly describes as the consequences of accidental necessity where conditions that are not necessary (since they could have turned out differently) having once occurred, limit what going forward is possible. The stone didn't have to be thrown into the water but was and nothing can be done to prevent the ensuing ripples¹¹⁴. We recall the options to throw or not, threw and did not like the waves. We would like to erase the picture, disregard, and ignore that which we did as it is being recalled from the existing finality.

The Anamnestic Theodicy presented here addresses the previously exhibited issues like the 'escamotage' and the related drama surrounding the "guilt" and "irredeemable" nonsense attributed by some to God. Time is that which is shown to us as a history of what we did. It reveals our free will and the magnitude of maladies therefrom. Who would not like to be freed from the consequences of their evil actions? We would not believe what was about to occur as the flowing consequences of the choice. The chaos of it all was staggering. We assumed we could never do such things. Yet Time documents and is the evidence of the evils we freely committed; since any and all prohibitions against any expression of free will, no matter how egregious were forbidden. Why focus on our own evils when we can blame someone else? To this end, Augustine notes that men are ready to accuse anything for their sins but themselves¹¹⁵. Our self, much of which is described by Hick¹¹⁶; is however already complete, yet we forgot how we did it.

As we wandered from God and Gods boundaries we descended to a dark abyss¹¹⁷. When we left Omnipotency and the Divine Realm, blinded to our volition, which moved us into our non-God chaos. Augustine thought this chaotic motion themed to disturbance and disorder and was a special event, an anomaly¹¹⁸ or perhaps - a "hyper-chaos"¹¹⁹.

The created agent draws others to itself by similarity, likeness or conversion to its own end¹²⁰. Recall that just recently we managed to conduct the great World Wars and Auschwitz and also see Stalin, Mao, King Leopold and the Khmer Rouge in action. These are "illusions"? We are "too immature to fathom" the evils we perpetrate? Are we forced to do what we do? All events in the Great Film called Time are just waiting for our instantiations. We await our time to do our time; our free deeds in our unrecollected time.

Time, the unwinding of the Film in the Divine DVD, is what we do not want to see at all. As Rahner put it; "we do not know how we stand before God but no one can decline his nature and return his ticket"¹²¹: which is to say that "we do not know that everything will end well"¹²². Theistic contingency conjectures and statements like "will", "will not", "what might", "what might not" and natural knowledge like "What Could Be" or "Middle Knowledge"¹²³ are unimportant. All these are irrelevant to God. They are but our imaginings since All is past. There is no reality except what has occurred. Omniscience knows this, we forgot. The proper subject and object of such contingency statements and the multitude of the possible could or could nots are our own musings about our own predictions and predilections i.e., our own forgotten choices.

Leibniz thought that God's foreknowledge renders all the future certain and determined¹²⁴. It is, since Time is our own completed but anamnastically unknown happening in the concluding moment; "currently" recalled but generally forgotten as to how



we got there. The consequences of our Free Will are reconciled with any notion of Theological Determinism since Omniscience knows our outcomes but displays the unrestricted spectacle we have forgotten to us. The classical account that divine omniscience knows all truths¹²⁵ is maintained, since the anamnestic view of Time is the rewind DVD.

The DVD of our self and the evil we created are complete, but we forgot and forget how we did it. Our Time shows us to ourselves. Evil will end at the end of time; when the film runs out at the eschatological moment. We are finally in total recall at the end.

A Book of Life is written, we do not recall our page number.

CONCLUSION:

Science and Philosophy have produced a number of longstanding and contrasting viewpoints regarding Time. Many incongruent standpoints in those disciplines present themselves as indicators to substantiate the concept that a new Philosophy of Time is needed and how that thinking impacts our understanding of the problem of evil or Theodicy.

The predominant linear view of time obfuscates our understanding of Time and Evil. The Platonic concept of anamnesis is amended here as the preeminent concept of Time and also how Time as anamnesis pertains to Omniscience and the problem of evil. Time flows backwards not forwards. We are already completed but we unfurl in Time because we have forgotten how we freely chose ourselves. Omniscience knows this; we don't remember and now live that forgetfulness. All is Past, a Book of Life is written, and we forgot our page number.

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WHAT IS MORALLY GOOD?

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to show, starting from a personal point of view, what morality means, how it is perceived and how it can affect us. It is an interesting field that holds a lot of meaning. It might just be the reason why we are who we are as people, why we do the things that we do and we believe in them so much. Looking at it from a different angle, for some at least, it might seem as a bad idea as it can stand between them as individuals and reaching their goals without minding their surroundings whether there are people involved or just things. We might never fully understand what is morally good but at least we know that we are doing everything that we can to try and improve our knowledge, to try and improve our own ways of seeing and perceiving life, to try and improve us as persons as human beings. Also, this might be just what we need in order to be able to actually make a difference in this world, to make people believe in something, but most importantly to make them believe in their-selves. Because when one believes in something, when one has personal values, when one can make the difference between good and bad, one can change the world.

Keywords: moral; human being; philosophy; life; believe;

HOW TO PERCEIVE SOMETHING THAT IS MORAL

Defining something that is both good and moral is quite the task. But it is something that this paper is trying to do. Putting into perspective different perceptions and thoughts regarding this subject, giving the opportunity for the people who read it to start a conversation on these bases, an opportunity to address it however they want and to get others involved is something that it's hoped to be achieved with this paper and this matter.

In general, something that is moral is also something that is good. We rarely associate the moral part of life or the moral part of things with a bad or negative aspect. This might be an interesting aspect but is also a general one. Yet, we cannot say that there is no such thing as a bad aspect, a bad reason, a bad person a bad event or bad, just like a general aspect. Thus, this subject is both known and unknown because although there have been a lot of attempts at trying to explain what is good and what is bad it is still an aspect that is being looked at different by different people.

“The moral philosopher seems to be theorizing about something with which she has little engagement (as suggested by the sharp contrast between the inner and the outer spaces), perhaps because she is scared of, or baffled by the object of her attention, or rather because this very condition is somewhat imposed on her by dynamics internal to the intellectual game she is supposedly playing, and whose validity she might be starting to



question.”¹ At some point in our own lives we start to question pretty much everything that we do. It is something normal and it is to be expected because as the day goes on or as the action goes on we start to rethink what we said or what we did and we start to question if it was right or if maybe, after all, we should have gone in a different direction. Being moral does not mean that we do everything the right way and on the first try. It could actually mean that we are able to realize what we did and how it can affect others and more than that, moving one step further, it can be the defying aspect which guides us through this journey called life.

“[...] philosophical ethics should drop its foundational pretences and rather acquire an exhortative tone – that is, it should help us deal with the difficulties of the moral life often caused by our own attitudes toward our ordinary practices and their reflective counterparts and desiderata.”² In theory this might sound like it is not a difficult task to achieve but the real life may see things from a different point of view. Everything that we do or that we do not do is going through a filter somewhere in our minds but also somewhere in our hearts. Even though at a first glance we might think a situation is not as bad as it seems, at a deeper search and at a more profound level of thinking and looking at something we might just realize that what we thought at the previous level was not just wrong but was morally unacceptable.

“Broadly understood, intuitional ethics would include some right reason theories, some types of deontology, moral sensism, and psychological approbative types of ethics. [...] we will simply understand intuitionism as the -ethics that concentrates on the subjective attitude of the moral agent, rather than on the results of his action, in discussing what is morally good or bad.”³ On a different note, even though it might take some time for a human being to reach a final conclusion regarding the moral aspect of a particular situation or the moral aspect of one or more of his particular actions, we can say that we always experience the presence of something that we cannot explain. And that is the intuition, or what I like to call the right hand of morality. I say that because intuition is something that we all have, just like the moral aspect, it is something that we can sense and something that we can learn how to control, just like the other aspect, but at the same time it is also something that requires time in order to perfect.

Having this ability can lead us to better results in life simply because it might be easier for us to understand what we did wrong, how we got there, what is the philosophy behind it and what can we do to improve us as people in the future. Also, it might lead us to a better understanding of why others behave a certain way or why they judge us simply by our actions. “We make certain judgments of approbation or disapprobation of the conduct of other persons and these other-directed views and feelings are fundamental to ethics. When we attempt to judge our own conduct~ we reverse the process, as it were, and try to see ourselves as others see us.”⁴

For a human being this might be the most difficult aspect of this life. It is not easy to look at yourself in the mirror and realize just who you really are and how exactly you got to that place. Now, understanding how someone else looks at you is a completely different aspect located on a completely different level. It is a very hard time and a very hard journey. But it is the moral thing to do. And it will also bring a lot of joy in the end as it helps us

¹ Sarin Marchetti, *Ethics and Philosophical Critique in William James*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2015, p.4

² Ibidem, p.18

³ Vernon J. Bourke, *History of Ethics*, New York, Image Books, 1970, p.12

⁴ Ibidem, p.18



grow as persons in general. On a more particular aspect, it is also the right thing to do because it will lead us to a better understanding of someone else and it will help us when we are faced with criticism because we will be able to understand where someone is coming from and more importantly how they got to that place, what is their life philosophy and maybe even confront our moral beliefs with their own. And I say confront not because of the violent part but because of the fact that it will imply a profound discussion about what is wrong and what is right, about what they understand by having a moral attitude and by doing good in life and just putting everything out on the line.

“To say that the supreme principle of morality is binding on us (human agents) is to imply that we have an obligation to act in accordance with it. We ought to but, as a result of privileging inclinations over duty, might not follow its dictates. The same could also be said for any nonhuman rational agents who had characteristics, for example, natural cravings, on the basis of which they might act contrary to the supreme principle. The supreme principle’s being binding on these agents would imply that they had an obligation to act in accordance with it.”⁵

It is not easy to live a moral life. It is even harder to try and teach others how to do the same and how to accept that what they might see and perceive as being moral might not be the same for the people that are putting it out there. A moral aspect is both a subjective and an objective one and it is up to us to resolve a situation, to put everything into place and sort things out. We are all humans after all and we make mistakes but if we have an open mind and if we are willing to discuss what is happening we can agree on different solutions to improve ourselves. Morality is hard to understand and harder to apply. But it is not impossible. If we make a joint effort and put our minds to it. And most importantly, if we believe in what we do we can move mountains.

1. THE GOOD AND THE BAD

“[...] regarding Kant’s basic concept to fit the supreme principle of morality. First, as we will see, there is more to Kant’s concept of the supreme principle of morality than is captured in this basic concept. There are more features that, in Kant’s view, the supreme principle would have to possess. It would, for example, have to be such that a proponent of its being the supreme principle of morality could coherently claim that obeying it “from duty” would have moral worth.”⁶

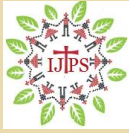
Just doing things because it is the right thing to do it may sound like it is something moral but as far as I am concerned it clearly isn’t. Just because someone tells you to do something does not mean that you should. Just because someone is doing something does not mean that you should. I believe that there is good moral but also bad moral. And these are some aspects that are crucial in life because we need to be able to distinguish between the both of them in order to make the right call. And after all it is what separates the good from the bad not just as far as actions are concerned but also as far as people and different behaviors are involved.

Also, *“Kant makes it clear that, according to him, commonsense morality is committed to the view that absolute necessity and wide universal validity must be features of the supreme principle of morality.”⁷* It is something that I believe as well because like I said

⁵ Samuel J. Kerstein, *Kant’s Search for the Supreme Principle of Morality*, United Kingdom, Cambridge University Press, 2002, p.2

⁶ Ibidem, p.3

⁷ Ibidem



before, we need to be able to distinguish between what is good and what is bad. On a higher level this might lead to more important aspects such as health, religion, education and even life in general. It is also thought that there is something more profound to this level of understanding something that requires years of hard work and dedication in order to be achieved. We might think that everything that we do is both good and moral but in the end it may come back to us on a different way than it was expected. And only then may see and learn that we were wrong and that the greater good decided that what we did was nowhere near it. *“When a system is malfunctioning—when a young man becomes a drug addict and desperately steals jewelry from his grandmother or, when on a whim, someone carjacks an innocent stranger—one might explain this behavior by looking at the failure of the subsystems of knowledge, purpose, and affect. An attitude devoid of moral reflection indicates a damaged knowledge system. Apathy is symptomatic of a deadened sense of purpose, and a network of enterprise in such a case would be anemic and have no meaningful organization at all.”*⁸

The bad in good is just like life as we know it in general. We need bad in order to compare it to something else and realize that it is bad and see what good looks like or what it feels like. Despite our actions, we might not be able to realize right away that we do not belong to the good moral part. Even harder than that it would be for us to realize that we are heading towards the bad and the negative spectrum. Yes, it is easy to say that we need to find and keep the right balance between good and bad while maintaining ourselves in the moral cluster of this day to day life. The hard part comes when we see the truth, when we feel on our own skin what we did to others and when we understand what life and what morality are really about. It is a very difficult task but I can say out loud that it is worth it. *“In fact the very existence of morality (a fact which Kant takes as given) presupposes a rational and autonomous dimension to the self. For if our decisions were always merely mechanically determined, then it would make no sense—in the way that morality demands—for us to hold people responsible for their actions, and to assign praise and blame accordingly. On these terms, the supersensible self must be presumed to be both rational and free.”*⁹

First and foremost, we cannot hold someone responsible for what they did if we do not understand why they did it. And we can only understand that if we are able to explain it to someone else. And this is the general logic behind life and behind everything. It would be quite an act of racism I might say to hold someone responsible for their actions just by simply knowing that they did it. Yes, it is extremely difficult to want to understand others but if we cannot do it then we cannot expect others to just do it for us. To be both good and moral, to understand morality and to let it rule your life and lead you to a better place and make you a better person is a full-time journey but it is filled with rewards and the destination is just simply amazing.

CONCLUSION

What I was looking for with this paper was to show that there is a common way towards morality, that there is both good and bad in life and that we are all people, we are all human beings. What that means is the fact that we all live and breath on this planet, we all have a say in what is going on, we all carry a weight on our shoulders and we will all be

⁸ Doris B. Wallace, *Education, Arts, And Morality. Creative Journeys*, New York, Kluwer Academic, 2005, p.87

⁹ Paul Crowther, *The Kantian Sublime*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1989, pp.17-18



judge based on our actions, on our thought, on our ways of perceiving this world. We need to try and improve ourselves, we need to try and understand why someone is doing something that might seem wrong at a first glance but is just fine once we understand it. Philosophy, in general, helps us identify patterns that are linked to this life, helps us realize that they were there this whole time and even more that that it can also help us realize that we can use them to our own advantage.

Like I said it is a difficult task, it is a very difficult road but it is worth it. Because at the end of the way, without something good, without something moral what is there left? We might we all alone but if can live like that then we have reached a higher level of understanding and also a higher level of appreciating life. We know so many thing about it, we know maybe a few definition that we use when we are talking about morality but we really need to feel it on our own skin in order for us to be able to fully comprehend it.

This journey called life is not just amazing but is something that we thrive for and something that we really desire. We need to keep it, to improve it and to mage both good and morality a general aspect that defines it.

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- [5] Marchetti Sarin , *Ethics and Philosophical Critique in William James*, London, Palgrave Macmilla, 2015



POLITICAL ONTO-THEOLOGIES OR TOWARDS A POLITICAL METAPHYSICS SOME CRITICAL ANALOGIES FROM PLATO TO JÜRGEN MOLTSMANN

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ABSTRACT

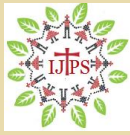
The fruitful revival of political onto-theology in the 20th century, just in the heart of the so-called Weimar Renaissance, is connected not only with the revised image of the Middle Ages, but also with the total recall of the problem evil in the epicenter of late modernity, due to the bloody and barbaric World Wars. Both New Political Theology and post-fundamental political onto-theologies, in the sense of a radical onto-theologia negativa, brought to the forefront of contemporary social, political and ethical theory the essential issues of ontological, theological and moral interpretation of the political. It is not by accident that New Political Theology comes to the postwar theoretical and experiential scene as a rival against Schmittian political theology. Now, the focal point of analysis is not political power, in the sense of state sovereignty, but a radical return to the forgotten theologian principles of Christology and Trinitarianism. As far as New Political Theology is concerned, the new content of political theology pursues more the republican and democratic aspects of a Crucified God on the Cross next to Jesus Christ, the poor and the pariahs. It is no coincidence that Moltmannian theology of hope is seen, in the final analysis, as a political theologia crucis. It is important to add that a significant role in the non-Schmittian political theology of the 20th century plays the messianic and/or apocalyptic Jewish political theology with apparent Marxist connotations and strong links with Critical Theory.

Keywords: political onto-theology; Plato; Jürgen Moltmann; pluralism;

1. ARCHETYPAL ONTO-THEOLOGIES: FROM PLATO TO HEIDEGGER

Plato is the founder of political onto-theology. He exemplifies the whole thing of political onto-theology with the famous allegory of the cave. Actually, the Platonic cave is the city; the republic; the polis. Within Platonic metaphysics, which is mainly represented in Plato's famous work *Republic* (in Greek: Πολιτεία)¹, the cave is regarded as the place of *politics*. Citizens approach onto-theological truth only as shadow. The onto-theological foundation of politics, i.e. *the political*, is situated outside cave in the Platonic outer land of *The Good* (in Greek: Το Αγαθό). Only the philosopher (-king) can approach the outer land of real onto-theological truth. Undoubtedly, this is a dangerous voyage as all space trips are. It presupposes the long tenure of *vita contemplativa* (in Greek: θεωρητικός βίος). The ideal

¹ Plato, *Republic*, Dover Thrift Editions, United States, 2000 (Translated by Benjamin Jowett).



philosopher or the ideal mediator between the faulty reality of the city shades and the authentic onto-theological reality of 'The Good' is Socrates himself. But when Socrates returns to the polis from this risky travel in the outer land of onto-theological foundation people lead him straight to death. They do not want to listen to the philosophical truth². They prefer to live in the cave just being surrounded by flashing shadows. Platonic political onto-theology is marked by Plato's *trauma*. Since then, every political onto-theology in the long-term Western Tradition of political thought has been stigmatized by the traumatic and tragic death of Socrates.

St. Augustine is the Plato of the Christian Age. St. Augustine adopts the Platonic allegory of the cave for the sake of Christianity. He builds a Christian-led political onto-theology by dividing the entire universe into two cities: i) a *City of God*, i.e. the onto-theological foundation or the so-called 'the political', and ii) an *Earthly City*, i.e. the city in the meaning of politics³. Once more, the real epicenter of the universe is located outside of the Platonic cave. The real life is situated in an outer land so far away from the human faulty reality. Instead of Socrates, Christian theology puts Jesus Christ as the ideal mediator between City of God and Earthly City. But unfortunately, as in the tragic case of Socrates, Jesus has the same deadly fate as Socrates had before him. He dies on the Holy Cross as a humiliated Crucified God⁴. Since then, every Western political onto-theology is definitely haunted by the death of Jesus. Christianity's trauma is the tragic and brutal end of Jesus. The citizens of Earthly City do not want to listen to the truth coming from the City of God. They prefer to live in the Platonic cave among flashing shadows and distorted images.

(1st CRITICAL NOTE) Following in Marx's footsteps, as he did with Hegel, Hannah Arendt makes a critical reverse in the political onto-theology of Western Tradition. She puts Augustine's feet back on the ground. Actually, she prioritizes the Earthly City against the City of God. In Latin terms, she brings to light *amor mundi* instead of *amor Dei*. In this vein, she builds a *republican* or Aristotelian-driven political onto-theology in which the truth is situated within the city walls and the critical holder and/or mediator of it is the *thoughtful and responsible citizen* itself (see Aristotelian *phronesis*)⁵.

Western onto-theology is based on two spiritual pillars. On the one hand is the Plato-inspired *transcendence* of St. Augustine. In this sort of theology, the foundation of the world is situated in an outer holly land, i.e. City of God. Within the theoretical ranks of Augustinian onto-theology dominates the pure metaphysics of God. On the other hand is the onto-theology of Apostle Paul⁶. In this case, onto-theology of transcendence is transformed into onto-theology of *immanence*. The center of gravity is transferred towards the side of Jesus Christ himself. Apostle Paul, who is actually the founder of the Christian Church, perceives the body of Jesus Christ as the body of the Church itself. The immanence of

² Plato, *Five Dialogues*, Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., United States of America, 2002, p. 21 (Translated by G. M. A. Grube).

³ Saint Augustine, *City of God*, Random House, Inc., New York, 1958.

⁴ J. B. Phillips, *The New Testament in New English (Revised Edition)*, Touchstone Book, New York, 1995.

⁵ Spiros Makris, "Aristotle in Hannah Arendt's Republicanism. From homo faber to homo politicus", In: *Annuaire International Des Droits De L' Homme*, Volume IX, 2015-2016, Issy-les-Moulineaux Cedex, Paris: L.G.D.J. lextensoéditions (2017), pp. 535-563 and Spiros Makris, "Public sphere as 'ultimum refugium'. The philosophical, political and ethical theory of Hannah Arendt", In: *International Journal of Theology, Philosophy and Science*, Vol. 3, No. 4 (2019), pp. 77-92.

⁶ E. P. Sanders, *Paul. The Apostle's Life, Letters and Thought*, Fortress Press, U.S.A., 2015 and Jacob Taubes, *The Political Theology of Paul*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, California, 2004 (Translated by Dana Hollander).



Corpus Christi puts Earthly City in the heart of the world. The holy land is no longer the City of God but the Holy Cross. In fact, Pauline onto-theology is a *theologia crucis*. From the 12th century, at the end of Middle Ages, until the Protestant Reformation, or the beginning of the Modernity, the onto-theology of *Corpus Christi* turns into the dominant political theory. Political power is divided into two bodies: i) a *mortal body*, that is represented from the dead King; ii) an *immortal body*, that is symbolized by the signifier of power itself. In the field of growing democratic theory, *Corpus Christi* is gradually transformed into the *Corpus Mysticum* (i.e. the Church as the mystical body of Christ)⁷. Since then, the immortal body of political power is identified with the body of democratic multitude.

(2nd CRITICAL NOTE) Ernst Kantorowicz, the famous German-Jew political historian, who fled to the U.S. after the rise of Nazi in power in 1933, as did most of the greatest thinkers of the so-called Weimar era (1919-1933), scrutinizes and analyzes in-depth this critical reverse within the practical and theoretical process of the medieval political onto-theology⁸.

In 1789, when the body of Louis XVI is beheaded, *Corpus Mysticum* is turned into an *empty place*; and *empty signifier*. Since then, political onto-theology of democracy is realized, as Claude Lefort brilliantly claims, in the sense of an unstoppable and sometimes entirely tragic *dissolution of the markers of certainty*⁹. From then on, nothing can be taken for granted. All the traditional onto-theological *foundations* (e.g. God, State or King) have been ruined. This is the actual meaning of the famous painting of Paul Klee, once more from the Weimar era, that Walter Benjamin inspirationally transforms into the idea of political onto-theology of *Angelus Novus*. In fact, human history is regarded as a tragic course where the documents of civilization are actually documents of murderous barbarity¹⁰. In Shakespearean terms, in the words of Hamlet, *the time is out of joint*¹¹. In Kantian lexicon, everything is possible now either *radical good* or *radical evil*¹². The new holder of political power, *the People* itself, lives in a frenzy condition of absolute openness and emptiness. So, each time democracy moves towards its absolute closure, the (Freudian: see *unheimlich*) monster of Totalitarianism comes to the fore¹³. This is the well-known *democratic paradox* or the paradox of *democratic immanence* (i.e. Spinozian conatus)¹⁴.

⁷ Henri Cardinal de Lubac SJ, *Corpus Mysticum. The Eucharist and the Church in the Middle Ages*, University of the Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, Indiana, 2006 (Translated by Gemma Simmonds CJ with Richard Price and Christopher Stephens) and Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies. A Study in Medieval Political Theology*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 2016.

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⁹ Claude Lefort, *Democracy and Political Theory*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1988, p. 19 (Translated by David Macey) and Spiros Makris, "Democracy as a 'form of society'. Claude Lefort's post-foundational approach", In: 13th Conference of the European Sociological Association. (Un)Making Europe: Capitalism, Solidarities, Subjectivities. ESA 2017 Athens 29. 08 – 01. 09. Abstract Book, European Sociological Association, Hellenic Sociological Society, European Sociological Association, Paris, 2017, pp. 739-740.

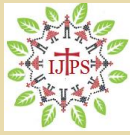
¹⁰ Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings, Volume 4, 1938-1940*, Harvard University Press, U.S.A., 2016, p. 392.

¹¹ William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, New York, 2012.

¹² Immanuel Kant, *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason and Other Writings*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2018 (Translated by Allen Wood).

¹³ Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny*, Penguin Books, London, 2003 (Translated by David McLintock).

¹⁴ Chantal Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, Verso, London and New York, 2009 and Benedict de Spinoza, *Ethics*, Penguin Books, London, 1996 (Translated by Edwin Curley).



(3rd CRITICAL NOTE) Because of this entirely paradoxical character of democracy, Jacques Derrida determines democracy as the onto-theological field of a *possible impossibility* par excellence. In this paradoxical respect, democracy is seen by Derrida as a *spectrality* or as an *aporia* (i.e. an irresolvable internal contradiction; or an unresolved question beyond the Hegelian *Aufhebung**) that haunts our lives. In this specific regard, this *democracy to come* loses its traditional onto-theological attributes and is transformed into a *hauntology* (see from ontology to hauntology)¹⁵.

* In Hegelian philosophy *Aufhebung* is the process by which the conflict between two opposed or contrasting things or ideas is resolved by the emergence of a new idea, which both preserves and transcends them; in English: *sublation*/LEXICO Powered by Oxford (see Hegelian and thereby Marxian materialist dialectics of ‘thesis, antithesis, synthesis’)¹⁶.

It is commonplace that the end of Western metaphysics or, in other words, onto-theology is taking place within the oeuvre of the eminent German philosopher Martin Heidegger. For most of the specialists in the relevant field of Continental Philosophy, Heidegger and his work represent a strong venture for the radical *deconstruction* of Western onto-theology. Thus, it is no accident that the overwhelming majority of them claim that Martin Heidegger after Friedrich Nietzsche must be seriously perceived as the actual founder of *postmodern* philosophy; or *discourse analysis*; or philosophical *hermeneutics*¹⁷. In fact, the systematic critique of Western metaphysics within the fruitful Heideggerian thought chiefly concerns the challenge of Western *foundationalism* whether ontological or theological. More specifically, Martin Heidegger puts both onto-theological *transcendence* and *immanence* under question. Figuratively speaking, he transfers the onto-theological center of gravity far away from the Platonic outer land as well as the Platonic cave to a darkened and ambiguous place (it could be seen as something like the Freudian *Id*, i.e. unconscious physical energy or Spinozian *conatus*) exactly beneath the polis. If polis represents for Heidegger the metonymy of *the political*, then he draws further the origins of it beneath its visible and tangible foundations in a *post-metaphysical* place like Hades, which is actually an *Abgrund*, that is to say an *abyss*; a *chaos*; or a *chasm*¹⁸. Thereby, it is no coincidence that Heidegger is seen as the ‘patriarch’ of *post-foundational* thought or even the radical trend of *anti-foundationalism* that under conditions may leads to a sort of post-metaphysical *relativism*, *agnosticism* or Nietzschean *nihilism*¹⁹.

Actually, by radicalized Platonic *realism* through Medieval *nominalism* (see ‘nomina nuda tenemus’: we hold empty names), Heidegger brings to focus the linguistic, hermeneutic and rhetorical strength of Western philosophy in the sense of *philosophizing* or *thinking*. If the so-called *linguistic turn* from 1960s onwards could be traced in Heidegger’s famous *Kehre* (i.e. turn), then contemporary philosophy is definitely hermeneutic venture²⁰. In this specific vein, Heideggerian *Abgrund* must be seen as a philosophical endeavor opening up the (impossible: see here the Derridean reception of Heidegger in the case of the *democracy*

¹⁵ Simon Morgan Wortham, *The Derrida Dictionary*, Continuum, London and New York, 2010, pp. 34-35.

¹⁶ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2018, pp. 69-70).

¹⁷ John D. Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1987.

¹⁸ Frank Schalow and Alfred Denker, *Historical Dictionary of Heidegger’s Philosophy* (Second Edition), The Scarecrow Press, Inc., Lanham, Toronto, Plymouth, UK, 2010, p. 45.

¹⁹ Oliver Marchart, *Post-Foundational Political Thought: Political Difference in Nancy, Lefort, Badiou and Laclau*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2007, p. 11.

²⁰ Richard E. Palmer, *Hermeneutics. Interpretation Theory in Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, and Gadamer*, Northwestern University Press, Evanston, 1969.



to come) possibilities or the horizons of understanding creatively and freely the crucial question of the *meaning of Being*. In contemporary political onto-theology, Heidegger's influence is but enormous and continuous through different intellectual and spiritual trajectories. The common denominator of this impact consists of the fact that Heideggerian *Abgrund* is conceived as the starting point of the so-called *post-foundational* or even *anti-foundational* political thought. Even Cornelius Castoriadis, who seems to criticize, at first glance, Heideggerian philosophy, builds a sort of social ontology that approaches the pre-Socratic elements of Heidegger's theory about an *abyssal foundation*²¹.

In this regard, *the political* represents a kind of Platonic *Khôra*²²; a chaotic field of almost impossible possibilities that give birth either to *radical good* or to *radical evil*. From this point of view, Friedrich Nietzsche must be regarded as the re-founder of contemporary post-metaphysical philosophy of Being. Thus, in a free translation and in a proportional manner, the question about *political Being* remains, in the last analysis, a critical and thorny question about the quintessence and the function of *political metaphysics* itself. Thus, I have coined this concept here in order to render apparent the question of Political Being within the conceptual, epistemological and methodological framework of Western philosophy as a whole.

1. LUTHERAN THEOLOGY AND POLITICAL ONTO-THEOLOGY

Deus absconditus	Theology of the Cross
Deus: Absent. Topos: Darkness. Theology: <i>Negative Theology</i> or <i>Apophatic Theology</i> in the terms of the Orthodox tradition. Key-concept: Transcendence. Influences: Plato and Dionysius the Areopagite.	Deus: Present. Topos: The light of passion on the Cross. Theology: <i>Theologia crucis</i> . Key-concept: Immanence. Influences: Apostle Paul.

Undoubtedly, one of the most thorny and conflictual questions in the long course of Western philosophical and theological tradition, that going through the tradition of political and ethical thought in the sense of *political metaphysics* or the hiddenness of *Political Being* (i.e. the question about the political foundation), is the question of *deus absconditus*²³. Actually, the question of *deus absconditus* brings to the fore the critical question about the specific *nature*, the concrete *name* and ultimately the special *topos* (i.e. this hidden place) of God. From this point of view, onto-theology of God could be seen as an *onto-theology of divine topos*. Without doubt, the whole problématique is full of mystery and sui generis obscurantism. To put in a nutshell, it is like to try to *fumble* (or to trace or to detect) into the profound secrets of the divine itself²⁴.

In fact, the topos of hidden God is *darkness*. Unquestionably, it is a topos beyond the human rationale or, in other words, the finite human logic. Martin Luther, who is apparently

²¹ Suzi Adams, Castoriadis's Ontology. Being and Creation, Fordham University Press, New York, 2011, pp.4-5.

²² Jacques Derrida, On the Name, Stanford University Press, Stanford, California, 1995 (Translated by David Wood, John B. Leavey, Jr., and Ian McLeod), p. 89.

²³ Marius Timmann Mjaaland, The Hidden God. Luther, Philosophy, and Political Theology, Indiana University Press, Bloomington and Indianapolis, 2016.

²⁴ Marius Timmann Mjaaland, The Hidden God. Luther, Philosophy, and Political Theology, Indiana University Press, Bloomington and Indianapolis, 2016, pp. 87-100.



the great reformer (see Reformation) of Western onto-theology and thereby the actual founder of modern political onto-theology, claims that trying to construct an image of God is almost *in vain*. Thus, at the end of the day, theology of *deus absconditus* sounds like an *onto-theology of divine topos* or, to put it another way, an onto-theology regarding the special place of God, if there is something like that. Drawing his inspiration from Dionysius the Areopagite (therefore here the whole thing is connected with Athenian democracy; Areopagus hill in Acropolis; and of course the apostle Paul himself whom Dionysius heard in Athens preaching the Word of God), Martin Luther initially identifies divine topos with darkness itself (that is to say this *mysterious* darkness that surrounds Jesus's passion on the Holy Cross and which is described almost poetically in the Gospel). It is worth noting that this paradoxical darkness during noon [see Good Friday] shocked the young Dionysius. Thereby, paraphrasing Heidegger, it could be claimed that God is hiding *in-the-darkness*. God is invisible and thus, in the final analysis, He remains an absolutely non comprehensible entity. His nature or His substance or His divine topos remains impassable from the finite human reason²⁵.

As in Platonic metaphysics, God's divine topos is located beyond the human rationale (i.e. Plato's [allegory of the] cave). In this respect, theology of *deus absconditus* is entirely constructed as a *negative theology* (theologia negativa) or²⁶, in pure terms of Orthodox Christian tradition, an *apophatic theology*²⁷. God is perceived as something negative. Actually, God is a negation. Aristotelian rules of logic are not enough to solve the question of God. Undoubtedly, theologia negativa must be regarded as a *Mystical Theology*²⁸. Linguistically speaking, God's name (or Word stricto sensu) is a word without a real referent. It could be said that God is the archetypal symbol of *empty signifier*²⁹. Poetically speaking, and paraphrasing here the Greek Nobel laureate poet George Seferis, God looks like an 'empty shirt', i.e. a shirt without a specific and tangible body (see real referent). God is the Hidden One³⁰; an entity without a positive name that corresponds to a very tangible referent.

It is now easier to try to build a didactic analogy with the Political Being. In a proportional framework regarding negative political onto-theology, the name of the Political Being (i.e. the name of God in Derridean terms) must be seen as an empty signifier too; almost as an empty topos. Claude Lefort strongly claims that modern power (that is the image of political power since French Revolution) is an *empty place*³¹ and due to this critical onto-theological condition its paradoxical referent is *democracy* itself (the so-called

²⁵ John Dillenberger, *Hidden and Revealed. The interpretation of Luther's deus absconditus and its significance for religious thought*, Muhleberg Press, Philadelphia, 1953.

²⁶ Oliver Davies and Denis Turner (eds), *Silence and the Word. Negative Theology and Incarnation*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2002; Arthur Bradley, *Negative Theology and Modern French Philosophy*, Routledge, London and New York, 2014 and Harold Coward and Toby Foshay (eds), *Derrida and Negative Theology*, State University of New York Press, Albany, 1992.

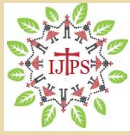
²⁷ Paul Rorem, *The Dionysian Mystical Theology*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 2015.

²⁸ Marius Timmann Mjaaland, *The Hidden God. Luther, Philosophy, and Political Theology*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington and Indianapolis, 2016, p. 91.

²⁹ Ernesto Laclau, *Emancipation(s)*, Verso, London and New York, 1996, p. 36.

³⁰ Marius Timmann Mjaaland, *The Hidden God. Luther, Philosophy, and Political Theology*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington and Indianapolis, 2016, p. 91.

³¹ Claude Lefort, *Democracy and Political Theory*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1988, p. 17.



democratic paradox according to Chantal Mouffe³²; or *democracy to-come* in Jacques Derrida's lexicon)³³.

In fact, this is one aspect of Lutheran theology. The other aspect concerns a theology where God is becoming visible through Jesus Christ on the Cross. In this case, Martin Luther builds the so-called *Theology of Cross* (theologia crucis)³⁴. God's divine topos is the place of Cross. Hidden God is becoming visible on the Cross through or next to the suffering Christ. So, God is now present in-the-world as a Crucified and suffering God³⁵. Now, the theological background comes straight from Apostle Paul and Pauline theology. It is worth noting that this critical *turn* in Lutheran theology is a *bodily* and *political* turn. Actually, we are a few steps away from modern political onto-theology. The specific and tangible body of Jesus Christ (and thus the hidden and mysterious 'body' of God) is transformed into the visible topos of the divine suffering on the Cross. The body of Jesus is conceived as the clear sign of God's invisibility. In poetic terms, the 'divine shirt' (or Jesus Christ's burial shroud; see also 'Tourine shroud'; or *Sacra Sindone*; or *Sindone di Torino*) has now a very specific body, i.e. the body of Christ (*Corpus Christi*)³⁶.

Nevertheless, Theology of Cross must not be seen as an updated, so to speak, Pauline Christology. In fact, it must be considered more as a radical Political Christology³⁷. The Platonic *transcendence* and the apophatic flavour of Dionysius the Areopagite are transformed into a *political immanence*. The new topos of political onto-theology is no longer this dark, strange, liquid and in the final analysis *apocosmic* (i.e. transcendental) Platonic Khôra, i.e. an outer land so far away from the human beings. In contrast, the new place of political onto-theology is the Platonic cave itself. If it is necessary to put some of the great figures of contemporary political onto-theology within this Lutheran double-faced theological context, it could be claimed that Martin Heidegger eventually forms a sort of apophatic or negative eschatological ontology (i.e. *foundational ontology*)³⁸. Carl Schmitt finds himself somewhere in the middle of this theological continuum, since he actually builds a Christian-inspired political onto-theology in which *deus absconditus* is ultimately

³² Chantal Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, Verso, London and New York, 2009.

³³ Jacques Derrida, *Rogues. Two Essays on Reason*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, California, 2005 (Translated by Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas), p. 78.

³⁴ Walter Von Loewenich, *Luther's Theology of the Cross*, Augsburg Publishing House, Minneapolis, 1976 (Translated by Herber J. A. Bouman); Alister E. McGrath, *Luther's Theology of the Cross*, Blackwell Publishers Ltd., Oxford, 2000; Daniel M. Deutschlander, *The Theology of the Cross. Reflections on His Cross and Ours*, Northwestern Publishing House, Milwaukee, WI, 2008 and Gerhard O. Forde, *Theologian of the Cross. Reflections on Luther's Heidelberg Disputation, 1518*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan / Cambridge, U.K., 1997.

³⁵ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God. The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, MN, 1993 (Translated by R. A. Wilson and John Bowden).

³⁶ Henri Cardinal de Lubac SJ, *Corpus Mysticum. The Eucharist and the Church in the Middle Ages*, University of the Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, Indiana, 2006 (Translated by Gemma Simmonds CJ with Richard Price and Christopher Stephens); Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies. A Study in Medieval Political Theology*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 2016 and Chris Boesel & Catherine Keller (eds), *Apophatic Bodies. Negative Theology, Incarnation, and Relationality*, Fordham University Press, United States of America, 2010.

³⁷ Raymund Schwager, "Christology", In: Peter Scott and William T. Cavanaugh (eds), *The Blackwell Companion to Political Theology*, Blackwell Publishing, Oxford, 2005 (Translated by Karl Möller), pp. 348-362.

³⁸ Judith Wolfe, *Heidegger and Theology*, Bloomsbury, London, New Delhi, New York, Sydney, 2014 and Judith Wolfe, *Heidegger's Eschatology. Theological Horizons in Martin Heidegger's Early Work*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2015.



embodied into the modern *Leviathan*, i.e. the well-known Hobbesian State³⁹. On the opposite side of this theological line is placed the case of New Political Theology of Jürgen Moltmann, where the political onto-theology is a pure *theologia crucis*; or a Political Christology; or a political onto-theology of immanent; where the visibility of human politics is represented by *Corpus Christi*⁴⁰.

Politically speaking, the two first versions of Lutheran onto-theology, both in the cases of Martin Heidegger and Carl Schmitt, led to a ‘hard-line’, so to speak, political onto-theology that brought to the fore either an onto-theological nihilism (where Martin Heidegger must be seen as a political idealist)⁴¹ or a strong state that historically during 20th century approached the far limits of an authoritarian even totalitarian state (in this case Carl Schmitt must be considered as a pure political realist)⁴². The other Lutheran side of political onto-theology leads to democracy in a twofold sense: either in the sense of the political onto-theology of Claude Lefort, where the empty place of power (or God, or King in the Middle Ages and during the era of Absolutism) is embodied, after the French Revolution, into the body (symbolically, a body without head: see Louis XVI) of *democratic multitude*⁴³; or in the sense of New Political Theology of Jürgen Moltmann, where the modern political onto-theology is coming to the fore as a radical *New Trinitarianism* (see the traditional question of *perichoresis*)⁴⁴. In this regard, at the end of the day, this all-powerful and invisible *deus absconditus* is turned into a suffering God next to the poor and *pariahs*. This is nearly a *socialist theology* which has explicitly been affected by the postwar rise of Western Marxism, Critical Theory and the so-called New Social Movements⁴⁵.

2. THE DIDACTIC CASE OF NEW POLITICAL THEOLOGY

Such as both politics and *the political* since Aristotle concern broadly the critical question of human collectivity and by extension the equally important issue of the optimum government in the same way Western theology constitutes a complex phenomenon that beyond the activities of catechesis and proselytism poses at the epicenter of liturgical life so many critical and thorny questions, as the question of human being itself, the question of the existence of God and His relation to the world, the question of social and political forms and the like⁴⁶. Thereby, *political theology*, as an interdisciplinary subject, constitutes a major field, scrutinizing, analyzing and criticizing in-depth the political, psychological, social,

³⁹ Michael Hollerich, “Carl Schmitt”, In: Peter Scott and William T. Cavanaugh (eds), *The Blackwell Companion to Political Theology*, Blackwell Publishing, Oxford, 2005, pp. 107-122.

⁴⁰ Alister E. McGrath, *Historical Theology. An Introduction to the History of Christian Thought*, Willey-Blackwell, Oxford, 1998, p. 195.

⁴¹ Laurence Paul Hemming, Bogdan Costea, Kostas Amiridis (eds), *The Movement of Nihilism. Heidegger’s Thinking After Nietzsche*, Bloomsbury, London, New Delhi, New York, Sydney, 2011.

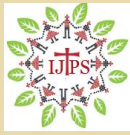
⁴² Eckard Bolsinger, *The Autonomy of the Political. Carl Schmitt and Lenin’s Political Realism*, Greenwood Press, Westport, Connecticut, London, 2001.

⁴³ Claude Lefort, *The Political Forms of Modern Society. Bureaucracy, Democracy, Totalitarianism*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1986, p. 292.

⁴⁴ Nicholas Adams, “Jürgen Moltmann”, In: Peter Scott and William T. Cavanaugh (eds), *The Blackwell Companion to Political Theology*, Blackwell Publishing, Oxford, 2005, pp. 227-240.

⁴⁵ Jürgen Moltmann, “European Political Theology”, In: Craig Hovey, Elizabeth Phillips (eds), *Christian Political Theology*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2015, pp. 3-22.

⁴⁶ Alister E. McGrath, *Historical Theology. An Introduction to the History of Christian Thought*, Willey-Blackwell, Oxford, 1998.



moral and even economic illustrations or interpretations of the tripartite relationship amongst human beings, society and God⁴⁷.

Although, the concept of theology and especially the notion of political theology preexist Christianity, to the extent that the first traces of political theology can be detected within the rich intellectual and experiential tradition of both Stoic philosophy and then ancient Rome, under the auspices of either the well-known *mythical theology*⁴⁸ or the so-called *natural theology*⁴⁹ or a sort of political theology that is associated with city gods in the sense of a *civic religion*⁵⁰, political theology refers to Christianity and especially both to apostle Paul and the great Christian theologians after him (see Patristic Period c. 100-451)⁵¹. More specifically and although we talk about the Jewish political theology⁵² and also the Islamic political theology⁵³, political theology is definitely concerned with the life above all the passion of Jesus Christ on the Cross. From this viewpoint, it is no coincidence that *Christology* consists of the hard core of the so-called *New Political Theology*⁵⁴.

Since the 1960s, Carl Schmitt's political theology ceases to be the only way of understanding the entire theoretical project of contemporary political theology. The emergence of New Political Theology, chiefly through the oeuvre of German protestant theologian Jürgen Moltmann, has enriched further the intellectual approaches of Continental Philosophy. Political theology on the whole brings the crucial questions of both ontology and theology into a shiny light, creating an absolutely new and fresh philosophical and theoretical concern about politics and *the political* itself. Thus, in parallel, the postwar social and political theory is taking the character of a novel political onto-theology of public sphere, freedom and democracy as well. From this groundbreaking perspective, it is no accident that from Hannah Arendt⁵⁵, Leo Strauss and Ernst Kantorowicz to Claude Lefort, Cornelius Castoriadis and Giorgio Agamben, to name only a few of them, contemporary political theory has been developed first and foremost as a systematic political onto-theology. It is noteworthy that at the heart of this new disciplinary development of contemporary political onto-theology is situated the famous *Weimar Renaissance*⁵⁶. The political evilness of Nazism and by extension Totalitarianism posed the account of political

⁴⁷ Elizabeth Phillips, *Political Theology. A Guide to the Perplexed*, T & T Clark, London and New York, 2012.

⁴⁸ Edith Hamilton, *Timeless Tales of Gods and Heroes (75th Anniversary Edition)*, Black Dog & Leventhal Publishers, New York, 2017.

⁴⁹ William Lane Craig and J. P. Moreland (eds), *The Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology*, Wiley-Blackwell, Oxford, 2012.

⁵⁰ John Scheid, *An Introduction to Roman Religion*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington & Indianapolis, 2003 (Translated by Janet Lloyd).

⁵¹ Alister E. McGrath, *Historical Theology. An Introduction to the History of Christian Thought*, Willey-Blackwell, Oxford, 1998, p. 16.

⁵² Peter Ochs, "Abrahamic Theo-politics: A Jewish View", In: Peter Scott and William T. Cavanaugh (eds), *The Blackwell Companion to Political Theology*, Blackwell Publishing, Oxford, 2005, pp. 519-534.

⁵³ Bustami Mohamed Khir, "The Islamic Quest for Sociopolitical Justice", In: Peter Scott and William T. Cavanaugh (eds), *The Blackwell Companion to Political Theology*, Blackwell Publishing, Oxford, 2005, pp. 503-518.

⁵⁴ Nicholas Adams, "Jürgen Moltmann", In: Peter Scott and William T. Cavanaugh (eds), *The Blackwell Companion to Political Theology*, Blackwell Publishing, Oxford, 2005, pp. 230-234.

⁵⁵ John Kiess, *Hannah Arendt and Theology*, Bloomsbury, London, New Delhi, New York, Sydney, 2016.

⁵⁶ Leonard V. Kaplan, and Rudy Koshar (eds), *The Weimar Moment. Liberalism, Political Theology, and Law*, Lexington Books, Lanham, Boulder, New York, Toronto, Plymouth, UK, 2012; Graham Hammill & Julia Reihard Lupton (eds), *Political Theology and Early Modernity*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 2012. Andrew Gibson, *Modernity and the Political Fix*, Bloomsbury, London, New Delhi, New York, Sydney, 2019.



onto-theology anew, as a strong necessity within the postwar historical and philosophical context. According to Theodor Adorno, Auschwitz has changed the conventional meaning of Western Metaphysics⁵⁷. Therefore, by summarizing the sentiment after WWII, Hans Jonas speaks about the inevitable need to rethink the meaning of God after Auschwitz⁵⁸.

The convergence between politics and theology has transformed into a strong *condition* within modernity, despite the fact that European Enlightenment tried hard to impose the image of secularization on the Western tradition. From Plato and St. Augustine until Jürgen Moltmann, the founder of the New Political Theology, passing through the Renaissance of the 12th century in the late Middle Ages, when the theory about *Corpus Christi* was gradually turned into *Corpus Mysticum* and then into *body politic*, with both Christ and His vicar on earth King having two bodies, one mortal and the other immortal, symbolizing the eternity and continuation of political power itself, political onto-theology has become the dominant philosophical, theoretical and ethical condition of Modernity as a whole⁵⁹. This ambivalent and risky movement of modernity towards a *Promethean* onto-theology is determined by Albert Camus as *metaphysical rebellion*⁶⁰. In this new onto-theological image, Prometheus, Sisyphus and Jesus Christ call God Himself to put his back beneath the Cross. Golgotha is becoming the democratic fate of a Crucified God⁶¹. Since the French Revolution and up until today, the poor and pariahs of bourgeois democracy, as a new *collective Prometheus*, give political metaphysics a new and radical content⁶². *Democratization* of both politics and theology is coming to the fore as a strong onto-theological demand. The rise of Political Christology and particularly New Political Theology must be interpreted within this definitely new, liquid and radical historical context. In Derridean jargon, democracy is seen now as a messianic condition; as an *aporia*; as a *theologia negativa*; as an unfulfilled desire; or, in other words, as a *democracy-to-come*⁶³. The unhealed trauma of Jesus on the Cross is becoming the unhealed trauma of democracy itself. If democracy is in the last analysis a *theology without sovereignty* then New Political Theology could be regarded as a democratic political theology⁶⁴.

The revival of this fertile relationship between politics and theology in the 20th century is taking place within the tragic context of WWI and WWII as well as the dramatic *intermedium* of interwar period. Weimar historical moment and Nazi's crimes against humanity put the basis for this new theological and political *osmosis* within the contemporary Western tradition. It is no coincidence that Jürgen Moltmann used to repeat as a monotonous refrain in most of his seminal books that New Political Theology must be

⁵⁷ Theodor Adorno, *Metaphysics. Concepts and Problems*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2001 (Translated by Edmund Jephcott).

⁵⁸ Hans Jonas, *Mortality and Morality: A Search for the Good after Auschwitz*, Northwestern University Press, Evanston, Illinois, 1996, p. 131.

⁵⁹ Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies. A Study in Medieval Political Theology*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 2016.

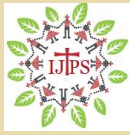
⁶⁰ Albert Camus, *The Rebel*, Penguin Books, London, 2000 (Translated by Anthony Bower), p. 29.

⁶¹ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God. The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, MN, 1993 (Translated by R. A. Wilson and John Bowden).

⁶² Jeffrey W. Robbins, *Radical Democracy and Political Theology*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2011.

⁶³ John D. Caputo, *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida. Religion Without Religion*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1997.

⁶⁴ Jeffrey W. Robbins, *Radical Democracy and Political Theology*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2011, p. 174.



perceived as the metonymy of Christian theology after Auschwitz⁶⁵. In fact, New Political Theology reveals the social and political significance of the constitutive question about the existence of God after Auschwitz. New Political Theology brings to light once more the *problem of evil* and the relevant problem of *Theodicy*. So, New Political Theology does not concern the Schmittean question of *state sovereignty*. New Political Theology was coined as a new term in order to draw a clear-cut distinction from the conventional meaning of the term as it was used by the famous German jurist and political thinker Carl Schmitt in the beginning of the Weimar era⁶⁶. In the case of Schmitt, political theology concerns the theological justification of state sovereignty through a symbolical reading of Catholicism and Absolutism⁶⁷. Without doubt, behind Schmittean political theology lies the view of *Restoration* and the image of a world where Christ and church give political power a sacred and transcendental character⁶⁸. Contrary to this, New Political Theology does not refer to any form of *politicization of theology*. However, it does not refer to a *sanctification of politics*. Having as a starting point Jesus Christ himself and especially his passion on the Cross, it aims to the social and political activation of Christian theology against injustice, oppression, exploitation and poverty, situations that Jesus experienced over the course of his life. For Hannah Arendt, Jesus of Nazareth must be seen as a new Socrates, i.e. as the new archetype of *conscious pariah*⁶⁹.

New Political Theology is born as a *theology of hope* for the pariahs of the postwar neo-capitalist world and by having this specific meaning, as Moltmann has pointed out so many times, it brings to the fore the importance of Karl Marx's thought, the significance of the heretical theology of the famous Franciscan Order, and above all the essential role of the Christian *martyrology* against all forms of despotism, tyranny and Totalitarianism⁷⁰. Within the ranks of Christian martyrdom against Nazism, the figures of the German protestant theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who was murdered by the Nazis⁷¹, and the Catholic St. Edith Stein, who was killed in Auschwitz⁷², stand out. Thereby, New Political Theology draws attention on the human and social *liberation*, as well as the *emancipation* of human beings against power and especially power in the form of *hubris*, *arrogance* and *autocracy*. It is no accident that Jürgen Moltmann determines New Political Theology as a form of self-

⁶⁵ Jürgen Moltmann, "European Political Theology", In: Craig Hovey, Elizabeth Phillips (eds), *Christian Political Theology*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2015, p. 1.

⁶⁶ Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology. Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 2012 (Translated by George Schwab) and Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology II. The Myth of the Closure of any Political Theology*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2008 (Translated by Michael Hoelzl and Graham Ward).

⁶⁷ Carl Schmitt, *Roman Catholicism and Political Form*, Greenwood Press, Westport, Connecticut, London, 1996 (Translated by G. L. Ulmen).

⁶⁸ Carl Schmitt, *Political Romanticism*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, England, 1986 (Translated by Guy Oakes).

⁶⁹ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Second Edition), The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, London, 1998, p. 238 and Hannah Arendt, *The Jewish Writings*, Schocken Books, New York, 2007, p. 275.

⁷⁰ Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope. On the Ground and the Implications of a Christian Eschatology*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1993 (Translated by James W. Leitch) and Jürgen Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ. Christology in Messianic Dimensions*, SCM Press, London, 1999 (Translated by Margaret Kohl), pp. 196-212.

⁷¹ John W. de Gruchy (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2005.

⁷² Mary Catharine Baseheart, S.C.N., *Person in the World. Introduction to the Philosophy of Edith Stein*, Springer-Science+Business Media, B.V., Dordrecht, 1997.



criticism within the Christian church, through the expectancy of a *Critical Theology*⁷³. Consequently, throughout the 20th century, New Political Theology goes hand in hand, so to speak, with Continental Philosophy, Critical Theory and the so called New Social Movements, creating strong links with Contemporary Political Theory in a sense that sometimes it is difficult to distinguish the theologian from the political philosopher and so theology from political theory. From this standpoint, it is difficult to say with certainty whether Moltmann is a theologian or an eminent social and political philosopher or whether Giorgio Agamben is a political theorist or a famous representative of the contemporary political theology⁷⁴.

The enlargement of political and theological field during the 20th century, due to the tragic character of human history, brought once more the thorny issue of the presence of God in-the-world to the epicenter of public sphere. In fact, New Political Theology overturns the image of *deus absconditus* and by doing so challenges the theologian doctrine of *divine apathy*. Therefore, God appears to the world through the Crucified Christ or actually through the passion of Jesus on the Cross. Moltmann talks about a *Crucified God* who is entering into the world and by his presence on the Cross just next to His Son not only gets rid of the image of an apathetic divinity but, contrary to this perception, suffers next to the people as a *primus inter pares*. According to this new image of God, He turns out to be a *fellow human*; a *fellow citizen*; an equal among equals; or, in other words, a personification of the well-known human condition of Aristotelian *political friendship*. Thus, God by His presence on the Cross becomes a *sufferer* for the sake of people. New Political Theology apart from being a dynamic version of *Christology* constitutes an entirely radical ontological and moral question about the theological aspects of human life; of polis as such; or, by paraphrasing St. Augustine, as the question about City of God which exists next to Earthly City. Polis seems now a 'New Haven – New Earth'⁷⁵.

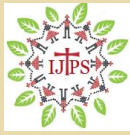
Undoubtedly, the socio-political connotations of Moltmannian New Political Theology are *revolutionary*. It is no accident that in most of the cases it is defined as *socialist theology*. It is clear that since WWII, after the tragic aftermath of Auschwitz, in a world that faces new onto-theological issues under the dominance of neo-capitalism, Christian theology tries consciously and systematically to *re-approach* the human world through a new and fresh viewpoint. In this vein, the *Second Vatican Council*, which convoked by Pope John XXII on 11 October 1962 (1962-1965), the *World Conference on Church and Society*, that took place in Geneva in 1966, and the *World Council of Churches*, that was held in Uppsala in 1968, gave an image both of a new Christian theology and a new Christian Church that eagerly wanted to redefine their relationships with society and politics by using novel terms and fresh perspectives. Christian approach is no longer considered as a private topic or a conventional form of transcendence through pray. From then on, Christian theology is chiefly regarded as a matter of *social solidarity*, *public interest*, *common good* and awareness for the fellow human⁷⁶. For example, within the ranks of Catholic theology,

⁷³ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God. The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, MN, 1993 (Translated by R. A. Wilson and John Bowden), p. 317.

⁷⁴ Giorgio Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory. For a Theological Genealogy of Economy and Government*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, California, 2011 (Translated by Lorenzo Chiesa with Matteo Mandarini).

⁷⁵ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Coming of God. Christian Eschatology*, SCM Press LTD, London, 1996 (Translated by Margaret Kohl), p. 257.

⁷⁶ Jürgen Moltmann, *Experiences in Theology. Ways and Forms of Christian Theology*, SCM Press, London, 2000 (Translated by Margaret Kohl), pp. 183-289.



characteristic are the cases of the French philosopher Jacques Maritain and the German Catholic theologian Johann-Baptist Metz, that opened up the field for the coming of New Political Theology as a *political Christology* where Jesus Christ is approached as the absolute ideal of *common life* and, as Hannah Arendt says, as a clear instance of *acting in concert*⁷⁷. Gradually, New Political Theology has radically changed the content of the famous *doctrine of the Trinity* (i.e. One God, Three Persons). Now, interrelations between the three persons of God (i.e. the Father, Son and Holy Spirit) are no longer *patriarchal* but relations of *brotherhood* and/or *sisterhood, fellowship* and *partnership*⁷⁸.

Especially in postwar Germany, within the context of *denazification*, Christian theology tried to rebuild its broken bonds with society. According to Hans Jonas, Western theology should *re-defined* its relationship with the phenomenon of God after Auschwitz, by putting in a public view *the problem of evil*, as well as the question of *Theodicy*: i.e. if the God is omnipotent, omnibenevolent and omniscient, then how does evil occurs (see *unde malum*: ‘what is the origin of the evil’)? It is so interesting that within the framework of Jewish political theology, through the ontological principle of *tzimtzum*⁷⁹, God exists only as a divine entity of *non-dominaton*. In pure Aristotelian terms, this is a republican God. To put it in a nutshell, this is a God, Who in order to be atoned before mankind after Auschwitz, *makes room* not only for the other Trinitarian persons, but for the people as a whole.

This new political and social condition within the Trinity draws its inspiration from Patristic theology and has defined as *perichoresis* (from Greek: ‘περιχώρησις’, i.e. ‘περι’/around and ‘χωρείν’/make room; in Latin: *Circumincession*)⁸⁰. Perichoresis constitutes the defining element within Trinitarian theology of Jürgen Moltmann and also the eminent Greek Orthodox theologian John Zizioulas⁸¹. Actually, the image of God or more specifically, the condition of *Triune God* is turned into a condition of perichoresis. It is worth pointing out that political onto-theology of perichoresis is closely associated with the theology of *Communio*⁸². It is noteworthy that Hans Urs von Balthasar and Henri de Lubac approach *theodramatics* through the liturgical action of the sacrament of *Eucharist*, where the Christian congregation is seen as a quasi-political community in the Aristotelian sense: i.e. political community as *political friendship*⁸³. In this specific regard, theology of perichoresis transforms Christian onto-theology into a *hermeneutics* of common or apostolic life as was probably the daily life of proto-Christians in the era of Christian commons (in Greek: ‘κοινόβιο’, i.e. common life). Then, in the far distant age of proto-Orthodox

⁷⁷ Jacques Maritain, *Scholasticism and Politics*, Liberty Fund, Indianapolis, 2011 (Translated by Mortimer J. Adler); Johann-Baptist Metz and Jürgen Moltmann, *Faith and the Future. Essays on Theology, Solidarity, and Modernity*, SCM Press, London, 2012 and Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition (Second Edition)*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, London, 1998, p. 198 (“The polis [...] is the organization of the people as it arises out of acting and speaking together”).

⁷⁸ Jürgen Moltmann, *Experiences in Theology. Ways and Forms of Christian Theology*, SCM Press, London, 2000 (Translated by Margaret Kohl), pp. 303-343.

⁷⁹ Hans Jonas, *Mortality and Morality: A Search for the Good after Auschwitz*, Northwestern University Press, Evanston, Illinois, 1996, p. 131.

⁸⁰ Slobodan Stamatović, “The meaning of perichoresis”, In: *Open Theology*, 2 (2016), pp. 303-323.

⁸¹ Jürgen Moltmann, *Experiences in Theology. Ways and Forms of Christian Theology*, SCM Press, London, 2000 (Translated by Margaret Kohl), pp. 303-343 and John D. Zizioulas, *The One and the Many. Studies on God, Man, the Church and the World Today*, Sebastian Press, California, 2010.

⁸² John D. Zizioulas, *Communion & Otherness*, T & T Clark, London and New York, 2009, p. 286.

⁸³ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama. Theological Dramatic Theory. I: Prolegomena*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 1988 (Translated by Graham Harrison).



Christianity, the critical matter was not about leadership of Christians or monasteries but about common life and *martyrdom*.

In Latin America, the convergence of Catholicism with Western Marxism in favor of pariahs of the continent, brought to the fore the so-called *Liberation Theology*⁸⁴. In North America, within the broader context of the so-called *New Social Movements* (see for example women's movement; human rights movement; gay rights movement; peace movement; ecology movement etc.) Christian theology and political theory joined their forces against racism and sexism. Giving rise to a second generation of political theology, American political theology, under the auspices of the *Public Theology*, the *Post-liberal Theology*, the *Radical Orthodoxy*, the *Feminist Theology*, the *Black Theology* and the *Queer Theology*⁸⁵, laid the basis for the academic recognition and the disciplinary autonomy of this specific field of thought and action which must be seen as New Political Theology on the whole. In our days, New Political Theology constitutes a structural and fertile source of contemporary social, political and ethical theory⁸⁶.

3. JÜRGEN MOLTSMANN AND THE DIDACTIC CASE OF POLITICAL THEOLOGY OF THE CROSS

Within the ranks of contemporary political onto-theology, dominant is the figure of the famous German protestant theologian Jürgen Moltmann. He defines political theology as *new* in the sense of a political theology that is entirely distinguished from Schmittian political theology. This *new* suggests that it has not the character of a new political ethics but that it is a political *awakening* of Western theology itself. As he clarifies further and further upon that, New Political Theology does not concern political systems. Also, he underlines that it does not concern a politics that takes a theological form but it means that Western theology adopts a new spiritual vehicle in order to *re-establish* itself in-the-world and for the love of the world (see the concept of *amor mundi* in Hannah Arendt: “the human world is always the product of man's *amor mundi*, a human artifice whose potential immortality is always subject to the mortality of those who build it and the natality of those who come to

⁸⁴ Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation. History, Politics, and Salvation* (15th Anniversary Edition), Orbis Books, New York (Translated by Sister Caridad Inda and John Eagleson).

⁸⁵ Elizabeth Phillips, *Political Theology. A Guide to the Perplexed*, T & T Clark, London and New York, 2012, pp. 42-54.

⁸⁶ Dorothee Soelle, *Political Theology*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1974; Paul Lakeland, *Freedom in Christ. An Introduction to Political Theology*, Fordham University Press, New York, 1986; John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Michigan, 1994; John Milbank, *Theology & Social Theory. Beyond Secular Reason*, Blackwell Publishing, Oxford, 2006; Thia Cooper, *Controversies in Political Theology*, SCM Press, London, 2007; Michael Kirwan, *Political Theology. A New Introduction*, Darton, Longman & Todd Ltd., London, 2008; Péter Losonczi and Aakash Singh (eds), *From Political Theory to Political Theology. Religious Challenges and Prospects for Democracy*, Continuum, London and New York, 2010; William T. Cavanaugh, Jeffrey W. Bailey, Graig Hovey (eds), *An Eerdmans Reader in Contemporary Political Theology*, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Michigan, 2012; Simon Critchley, *The Faith of the Faithless. Experiments in Political Theology*, Verso, London and New York, 2012; Clayton Crockett, *Radical Political Theology*, Columbia University Press, New York, Chichester, West Sussex, 2013; Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, Klaus Tanner, Michael Welker (eds), *Political Theology. Contemporary Challenges and Future Directions*, Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, Kentucky, 2013; Michael Jon Kessler, *Political Theology for a Plural Age*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2013; Carl A. Raschke, *Force of God. Political Theology and the Crisis of Liberal Democracy*, Columbia University Press, West Sussex, 2015 and Péter Losonczi, Mika Luoma-Aho and Aakash Singh (eds), *The Future of Political Theology. Religious and Theological Perspectives*, Routledge, London and New York, 2016.



live in it'')⁸⁷. Thereby, for Moltmann the point is not the *politicization* of Christian theology or the *pietization* (see piety) of politics. In contrast, New Political Theology pursues the re-start of Christian theology within public sphere for the sake of pariahs and poor people. A Christian theology worthy of the name, Moltmann claims, that is a *theo-logy* either as the *logos of God* (in Greek: *λόγος*) or as a *logos about God* or as an equal *dia-logue* with Him, can be realized only when this *dia-logue* can take place within the onto-theological field of *the political* in the meaning of a field, as Karl Jaspers says, that concerns the human *boundary situations** (*boundary situation is an immanent *threshold* that points to transcendence), i.e. both existence, suffering, struggle, guilt, fear, the knowledge of my death and the death of a loved one themselves⁸⁸.

No doubt, New Political Theology, both activist and spiritual (see *vita activa* and *vita contemplativa*), tries to re-establish Spinozian or Straussian *theologico-political problem* in the heart of public space by deconstructing the individualistic (in the sense of egoistic) and mostly passive character of the traditional political onto-theology, either metaphysical or ethical⁸⁹. Like mythical Hercules, New Political Theology stands at the crossroads and from that ambivalent and boundary threshold scrutinizes in-depth the paradoxical possibilities between Christian messianic eschatology and the hard neo-capitalist reality⁹⁰. Drawing its inspirations from a wide range background extended from biblical texts to contemporary Western theology, New Political Theology is formulated as a radical hermeneutical reflection about society and politics in late modernity⁹¹. From this specific point of view, new hermeneutics of political onto-theology is perceived not as a typical venture concerning the field of theological literature, but as a *performative praxis* that concerns the socio-political *event* itself⁹². New Political Theology poses Christian theology in the epicenter of public life either as a *Critical Theology* or as a *critical hermeneutics* of neo-capitalism. For Moltmann, New Political Theology expresses the need for a new *eschatological liberation* of ordinary people in-the-world and for the sake of the world (*amor Dei + amor mundi = human liberation and emancipation*)⁹³. *Polis* is identified now as the actual epicenter of this new post-metaphysical thought or political metaphysics. Therefore, human liberation is seen as a political phenomenon in the sense of an Aristotelian friendship. Trinity is no longer a *patriarchal* phenomenon but the actual expression of *brotherhood* and/or *sisterhood*. The 'God-Father' of traditional theology or Absolutism in political modernity or even a Descartes-driven psychoanalysis of an egoistic cogito is rejected for the sake of a republican and democratic Trinitarianism. This genre of deconstructive and performative analysis is defined by Moltmann as *Trinitarian hermeneutics*⁹⁴.

⁸⁷ Hannah Arendt, *The Promise of Politics*, Schocken Books, New York, 2005, p. 203.

⁸⁸ Karl Jaspers, *Philosophy*. Volume 2, The Univeristy of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 1970 (Translated by E. B. Ashton), pp. 177-222.

⁸⁹ Leo Strauss, *Spinoza's Critique of Religion*, The Univeristy of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 1997 (Translated by E. M. Sinclair) and Heinrich Meier, *Leo Strauss and the Theologico-Political Problem*, Cambridge Univeristy Press, Cambridge, 2007 (Translated by Marcus Brainard).

⁹⁰ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ. Christology in Messianic Dimensions*, SCM Press, London, 1999 (Translated by Margaret Kohl), pp. 73-150.

⁹¹ Jürgen Moltmann, *Experiences in Theology. Ways and Forms of Christian Theology*, SCM Press, London, 2000 (Translated by Margaret Kohl), pp. 87-150.

⁹² Alain Badiou, *Being and Event*, Continuum, London and New York, 2007 (Translated by Oliver Feltham).

⁹³ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Coming of God. Christian Eschatology*, SCM Press LTD, London, 1996 (Translated by Margaret Kohl), pp. 129-339.

⁹⁴ Jürgen Moltmann, *Experiences in Theology. Ways and Forms of Christian Theology*, SCM Press, London, 2000 (Translated by Margaret Kohl), p. 134.



Contrary to Schmittian political theology or according to approaches like this of Eric Voegelin, who analyzes the case of *political religion*⁹⁵, Moltmannian theory rejects *paganism* where political religion concerns a state religion that is actually a system of power with religious connotations. As far as Moltmann is concerned, Jesus Christ, with his altruistic ethos and his tragic passion, strongly challenges the dominant image of a political religion during the Roman era by bringing to focus the radical case of a theologian approach that perceives community beyond *dominance* and *sovereignty*. In fact, New Political Theology demonstrates the republican and by extension democratic elements of Jesus's life, within which *vita activa* and *vita contemplativa* are articulated anew, in the sense of Aristotelian friendship. Jesus Christ was a *primus inter pares* amongst his disciples and he was appearing in the public sphere as a *conscious pariah* himself.

It is worth noting here that this kind of Christian political theology took place at the end of the interwar period within the work of the German theologian Erik Peterson. In his seminal book *Monotheism as Political Problem*⁹⁶, Erik Peterson rejects Schmittian political theology where Monotheism is perceived actually as a *theological monarchism*. According to this approach, which is initially expressed in Carl Schmitt's famous treatise entitled *Political Theology*⁹⁷, One and all-powerful God is equivalent to One and all-powerful Monarch. The whole universe is based on the absolutely strict logic *One God – One Reason – One World*. In fact, Christian theology turns into a theological justification of a *global imperialism*. In other words, *Pax Romana* signifies both realization and apotheosis of this monarchical approach of Christianity where *One God* corresponds to *One Emperor* to *One Church* to *One Kingdom*⁹⁸.

According to New Political Theology, theological deconstruction of politico-theological Monotheism is taking place through the activation of the doctrine of the Trinity. Christianity is no longer the transformation of *Pax Christi* to *Pax Romana*. Christianity concerns first and foremost the *revelation* of Trinitarian community⁹⁹. Christian God is no longer identified as Caesar and Power, but as Crucified God¹⁰⁰. From this viewpoint, Christian faith is seen neither as a state religion, nor as a state ideology, but rather, as an *ecumenical faith*¹⁰¹. For Peterson, Christian theology cannot be a political theology. According to Moltmann, this is exactly the field on which New Political Theology rises. In the epicenter of New Political Theology, Moltmann places Jesus on the Cross. New Political Theology is taking place as a *Theology of the Cross*¹⁰². What is at stake here is not the power

⁹⁵ Eric Voegelin, *Modernity Without Restraint. Volume 5. The Political Religions; The New Science of Politics; And Science, Politics, And Gnosticism*, University of Missouri Press, Columbia and London, 2000.

⁹⁶ Erik Peterson, *Theological Tractates*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, California, 2011.

⁹⁷ Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology. Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 2012 (Translated by George Schwab).

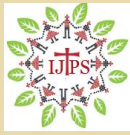
⁹⁸ Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology II. The Myth of the Closure of any Political Theology*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2008 (Translated by Michael Hoelzl and Graham Ward).

⁹⁹ Jürgen Moltmann, *Experiences in Theology. Ways and Forms of Christian Theology*, SCM Press, London, 2000 (Translated by Margaret Kohl), p. 328.

¹⁰⁰ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God. The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, MN, 1993 (Translated by R. A. Wilson and John Bowden), pp. 200-290.

¹⁰¹ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God. The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, MN, 1993 (Translated by R. A. Wilson and John Bowden), pp. 7-31.

¹⁰² Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God. The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, MN, 1993 (Translated by R. A. Wilson and John Bowden), p. 65.



in the conventional sense, but the passion of Jesus on the Cross. It is no accident that Jesus Christ was crucified as an archetypal rebel against Pax Romana and every kind of power.

Through Crucified Jesus, New Political Theology radically challenges all the established political and religious forms of power especially the so-called political and religious *idols*. It is no accident that Moltmann claims that as a *theologia crucis*, New Political Theology must be considered first and foremost as a *theology of pariahs*. Christian community is seen as a new Aristotelian polis, which is governed by the principles of *love, equality and friendship*. As Arendt points out, Aristotelian polis does not concern *ἀρχειν* (rule), but *αρχή*, in the sense of Augustinian *natality*, i.e. either a new beginning or a new political foundation¹⁰³. Cross is now the real *emblem* of this new Earthly city in which pariahs, the poor and the wretched, dominate without dominance (see Derrida's 'messianic without messianism')¹⁰⁴. Just next to Jesus on the Cross appears God Himself as a Crucified God. This is the most critical moment of Theodramatics. Through Theology of Cross, Christian Trinity is transformed into a community of *awareness, care, equality and solidarity*. Following in Martin Luther's footsteps, who claims that the Cross is our only safe and true theology, Moltmann turns New Political Theology into a *Critical Theology* both for established Christian Church and secular power (see *Gelasius's two swords theory*)¹⁰⁵.

As far as Moltmann is concerned, the historical and spiritual origins of New Political Theology must be detected in postwar Germany¹⁰⁶. In fact, Auschwitz brought to focus both the problem of evil and Theodicy anew, sharply challenging the conventional wisdom regarding the theologico-political problem¹⁰⁷. For Moltmann, Auschwitz has become the locus theologicus of postwar era. However, it is noteworthy that Auschwitz has not been put only as a turning point for the Western modernity itself (i.e. whatever Leo Strauss defines as *crisis of modernity*)¹⁰⁸, but, at the same time, as a strong symptom of the crisis of Western theology as well as the Christian Church. Moltmann claims that the *privatization* of Christian faith led to the phenomenon of 'German Christians', which was actually the 'nazification' of one part of German Protestantism. This is because, in contrast, he provides the profile of Dietrich Bonhoeffer as the ideal model of a zealous Christian who moved from theological to political resistance. "His martyrdom", stresses Moltmann, "was a political martyrdom for Christ's sake"¹⁰⁹. As Arendt with Jesus, he sees in the case of Dietrich Bonhoeffer a Christian who resists against absolute evil with passion and radicalness¹¹⁰. Thus, New Political Theology announces the total recall of Christian theology at the heart of public

¹⁰³ Hannah Arendt, *The Promise of Politics*, Schocken Books, New York, 2005, p. 91.

¹⁰⁴ Franz Fanon, *The Wretched of the World*, Grove Press, New York, 2004 (Translated by Richard Philcox) and Jacques Derrida, *Spectres of Marx. The State of Debt, the Work of Mourning and the International*, Routledge, New York and London, 2006 (Translated by Peggy Kamuf), p. 227.

¹⁰⁵ Oliver O'Donovan and Joan Lockwood O'Donovan (eds), *From Irenaeus to Grotius. A Sourcebook in Christian Political Thought 100-1625*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan / Cambridge, UK, 1999, p. 177.

¹⁰⁶ Jürgen Moltmann, "European Political Theology", In: Craig Hovey, Elizabeth Phillips (eds), *Christian Political Theology*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2015, pp. 8-14.

¹⁰⁷ Stanley Rosen, "Leo Strauss and the 'Theologico-Political Predicament'", In: Steven B. Smith (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Leo Strauss*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2009, pp. 41-62.

¹⁰⁸ Liisi Keedus, *The Crisis of German Historicism. The Early Political Thought of Hannah Arendt and Leo Strauss*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2015.

¹⁰⁹ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ. Christology in Messianic Dimensions*, SCM Press, London, 1999 (Translated by Margaret Kohl), p. 201.

¹¹⁰ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition (Second Edition)*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, London, 1998, pp. 236-243.



sphere, close to the poor and the pariahs of the polis, for the sake of justice, freedom, solidarity and peace.

From the 1960s onwards, New Political Theology arises as a strong spiritual and practical *need* within radical ranks of postwar Western theology, both Catholic and Protestant. From the very beginning, it is in open communication with the most liberal groups of Critical Theory and Western Marxism. In this vein, Jürgen Moltmann strongly claims that New Political Theology represents the first clear sign of a *post-Marxist theology*, so to speak, where next to pariah-Jesus is coming to focus Marxist critique of the conservative and sometimes reactionary character of Christian religion. So, it is no accident that he draws his initial theological inspiration from the so-called *messianic* and *eschatological Marxism* that is articulated around the figure of Ernst Bloch and his seminal oeuvre on the *principle of hope* (1938-1959)¹¹¹. In fact, it could be claimed that New Political Theology is stemming from the deep intellectual trajectories of postwar Continental Philosophy as a *Theology of Hope*. Therefore, New Political Theology is not identified as a typical academic theology, but, in pure Marxian or Gramscian terms, as a *theology of praxis*; as a theology of social and political protest for the sake of pariahs in the neo-capitalist world.

Moltmann explicitly clarifies that is quite wrong for us to identify New Political Theology either with liberal Protestantism or moral Catholicism, meaning by that, either the case of the famous Catholic theologian and founder of New Political Theology Johann Baptist Metz or Catholic Social Ethics, or even other relevant political theologies as the case of Jacques Maritain. Contrary to liberal theologies that from a sociological standpoint must be perceived as theologies of middle classes, New Political Theology draws its inspiration from the *evangelical* origins of *anti-establishment theology* of Karl Barth, as well as the anti-Nazi resistance of the biggest part of German Protestantism, i.e. Confessing Church. As mentioned above, within the ranks of Confessing Church he distinguishes the figure of the contemporary martyr Dietrich Bonhoeffer who was killed by the Nazi both as a passionate Christian theologian and as a political rebel. It is apparent that New Political is coming to the fore as a sort of theology which resists any form of *political violence* and *economic exploitation*. By doing this, it pursues its *revolutionary* and *redemptive* principles within the biblical texts, especially the Gospels, putting special emphasis on the life and death of Jesus Christ. In this respect, it shares a lot with *Christian Socialism*. Thus, New Political Theology has a twofold character: on the one hand, it arises as a *Critical Theology*, i.e. a theological *self-criticism* within Christian Church. On the other hand, it has the character of a *Western self-criticism*, due to the fact of the profound crisis of capitalist modernity and Western neo-colonialism (see *Theology of Liberations*)¹¹². For example, Franz Fanon's political theology could be interpreted as a sort of a *post-colonialist political theology*¹¹³.

In addition, it is worth reminding that New Political Theology arises as a theoretical and experiential *opponent* against Carl Schmitt's political theology. For this concrete aim,

¹¹¹ Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope. On the Ground and the Implications of a Christian Eschatology*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1993 (Translated by James W. Leitch); Jürgen Moltmann, *Ethics of Hope*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, MN, 2012 (Translated by Margaret Kohl); Jacob Taubes, *Occidental Eschatology*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, California, 2009 (Translated by David Ratmoko), p. 164 and Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, Volume One, Volume Two and Volume Three, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1986 (Translated by Neville Plaice, Stephen Plaice, & Paul Knight).

¹¹² Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God. The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, MN, 1993 (Translated by R. A. Wilson and John Bowden), pp. 335-338.

¹¹³ Franz Fanon, *The Wretched of the World*, Grove Press, New York, 2004 (Translated by Richard Philcox).



Moltmann transforms New Political Theology from a *theologia crucis* into a *democratized Trinitarian Theology*. Moltmann's main goal is to bring to light the reactionary, anti-revolutionary, anti-democratic and authoritarian character of Schmittian political theology. For Moltmann, Carl Schmitt chiefly tries to restore the monarchic spirit of European Absolutism. More specifically, he tries to show how *theological monotheism* turns into a *political monarchism*, by using either the Christian tradition of *original sin* or the Hobbesian political realism about the inherent *evilness* of human nature. In this Schmittian approach, both God and State constitute a Janus. So, Christ Himself, Christology and by extension Christianity are subjugated to the irresistible *lure* of state sovereignty¹¹⁴.

New Political Theology as *Political Christology* does not concern political power itself or public image of Leviathan, but aims to the *awakening* of Christian theology for the sake of the poor and the pariahs. As far as New Political Theology is concerned, Jesus Christ cannot be the ideal archetype either of Cesar or modern secular power. By doing this, New Political Theology radically changes the content and meaning of traditional political onto-theology. As we have seen above, this kind of *non-monotheistic* and *non-monarchical* political theology draws its basic inspirations from Patristic principle of *perichoresis* (or 'tzimtzum' according to the tradition of Jewish political theology)¹¹⁵. In this regard, *Christian Trinitarianism* must not be perceived as a theological field in which God dominates as an authoritarian Father, but in contrary, it must be seen as a theological field that prevails the feeling of *communal love* or, in other words, a kind of community in which brotherhood and/or sisterhood predominates, instead of a social system with a vertical image of power.

According to the theological principle of perichoresis, Trinitarian life, that is society itself, is not based on the dominance of a single person (i.e. God or a political leader), but on the basis of a communal and fellow life where *one person gives room to the other*. From this point of view, Trinity is essentially transformed into a *non-hierarchical* community of *equal* persons, as the citizen-friends coexist in the Aristotelian polis. For New Political Theology, Trinity does not refer either to a divine *self-consciousness* (see Hegel) or a divine *self-revelation* (see Karl Barth) or a divine *self-communication* (Karl Rahner), but to a form of *co-existence* and/or *co-operation from below*. The image of fellowship overturns the image of an omnipotent and omniscient God. Therefore, the model of social and political life changes radically. Instead of a God in the sense of a *pater familias*, we have now a communal life in the sense of brotherhood and/or sisterhood. According to Moltmann, political society is considered as a *perichoretic society*, where social relationship constitutes a kind of perichoresis or, in other words, a relationship where one gives plenty of room to the other¹¹⁶.

Individuality as well as the egoistic individualism of the Monarch is *dissolved* for the sake of communal life, *fraternity* and united equality of fellow citizens. Actually, faceless individual turns into a concrete *person* and political community is regarded as a *congregation* of thoughtful and responsible personalities. This is the actual meaning of

¹¹⁴ Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology. Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 2012 (Translated by George Schwab) and Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology II. The Myth of the Closure of any Political Theology*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2008 (Translated by Michael Hoelzl and Graham Ward).

¹¹⁵ Slobodan Stamatović, "The meaning of perichoresis", In: *Open Theology*, 2 (2016), pp. 303-323.

¹¹⁶ Jürgen Moltmann, *Experiences in Theology. Ways and Forms of Christian Theology*, SCM Press, London, 2000 (Translated by Margaret Kohl), pp. 321-323.



Aristotelian *κοινωνείν* (socializing) where the socio-political relationship has the onto-theological status of an *apophatic* (see negative) event, i.e. socializing is something that is being understandable beyond the power of reason, just within the sphere of a *miraculous* and *apocalyptic* encounter with the Other (i.e. Jesus Christ or God Himself). In fact, the conventional state sovereignty is transformed into a *perichoretic community*. For Jürgen Moltmann, the ontological space of human existence is always common and *interchangeable*. Thus, egoistic possession and selfish ownership of power give their place to an unconditional and perpetual perichoresis to the Other; to our fellow citizens; to our brothers and sisters generally speaking¹¹⁷. God, through Jesus on the Cross, ceases to be an authoritarian Father (see Freudian or Lacanian notion about power as ‘The-Name-of-the-Father’)¹¹⁸ and so is perceived as a brother and/or a sister who gives us room in order we to *co-exist*. At the end of the day, New Political Theology is seen as a pure *Ethical* and *Political Christology* or, in other words, as a theory about political power as *non-power*; *non-dominance*; *non-sovereignty*; non-monarchical power; non-patriarchal power; by and large, as a non-hierarchical (so horizontal), communal and fraternal sort of anti-power.

This radical Political Christology of *Communal Trinitarianism* implies that New Political Theology is transformed from a typical *theologia crucis* to a revolutionary political Theology of the Cross. Fraternal God is seen as a *co-suffering* pariah on the Cross just next to Jesus Christ, for the sake of poor people. Crucified God, as a suffering metonymy of Jesus Christ on the Cross of martyrdom, constitutes the major symbol of New Political Theology. Community means suffer and *co-suffer* with and for my fraternity. Reminding Abraham Lincoln’s famous saying about ‘the government of the people, by the people, for the people’, Moltmann asserts that this new political community signifies a new socio-political relationship where each human being lives *with* each Other and *in* each Other. To the extent that God Himself gets rid of His *apathy*, human being fills from *sympathy* for the fellow human. In order to reveal this new image of God, Moltmann brings to the fore the biblical image of *Shekchina*. Now, God Himself dwells in-the-world as a pariah-God. Monotheistic Trinitarianism gives room to perichoretic Trinitarianism. Political community is identified with social *proximity*. By formulating a *pneumatological Trinitarianism* à la Karl Barth, Moltmann leads us beyond Western modernity to a postmodern world, which is characterized by the integral unity of God and people. In Spinozian terms, maybe this new brave world is a *pantheistic Trinitarianism*. Since then, the job of human salvation does not belong to Popes or Monarchs but to the new political community of *Shekchina*. Trinity writes Moltmann “is our social programme”¹¹⁹.

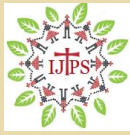
SOME CONCLUSIONS OR THE DIDACTIC CASE OF POST-FOUNDATIONAL POLITICAL ONTO-THEOLOGY

The fruitful revival of political onto-theology in the 20th century, just in the heart of the so-called *Weimar Renaissance*, is connected not only with the revised image of Middle Ages, but also with the total recall of the *problem of evil* in the epicenter of late modernity,

¹¹⁷ Spiros Makris, “Emmanuel Levinas on Hospitality. Ethical and Political Aspects”, In: *International Journal of Theology, Philosophy and Science*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (2018), pp. 79-96 and Spiros Makris, “Public sphere as ‘ultimum refugium’. The philosophical, political and ethical theory of Hannah Arendt”, In: *International Journal of Theology, Philosophy and Science*, Vol. 3, No. 4 (2019), pp. 77-92.

¹¹⁸ Jacques Lacan, *On the Names-of-the-Father*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2013 (Translated by Bruce Fink).

¹¹⁹ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God. The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, MN, 1993 (Translated by R. A. Wilson and John Bowden), p. 332.



due to the bloody and barbaric World Wars. Both *New Political Theology*, as well as *post-fundamental political onto-theologies* in the sense of a radical *onto-theologia negativa*, brought to the forefront of contemporary social, political and ethical theory the essential issues of ontological, theological and moral interpretation of *the political*. It is no coincidence that New Political Theology comes to the postwar theoretical and experiential scene as a rival against Schmittian political theology. Now, the focal point of analysis is not political power in the sense of *state sovereignty*, but a radical return to the forgotten theologian principles of Christology and Trinitarianism. As far as New Political Theology is concerned, the new content of political theology pursues more the *republican* and *democratic* aspects of a Crucified God on the Cross next to Jesus Christ, the poor and the pariahs. It is no coincidence that Moltmannian *theology of hope* is seen, in the final analysis, as a political *theologia crucis*. It is important to add that a significant role in the non-Schmittian political theology of the 20th century is played by the *messianic* and/or *apocalyptic* Jewish political theology (see for example the political theology of Walter Benjamin)¹²⁰, with apparent Marxist connotations and strong links with *Critical Theory*.

On the other hand, contemporary political onto-theologia, either as a *ontologia negativa* or as a *theologia negativa*, pursues beyond the conventional foundations of politics (i.e. Platonic Forms, God, King, State etc.) the creative power of Spinoza's *conatus* either as an abyssal foundation (see the Heidegger's *Abgrund*) or as a volcanic *magma* full of forms and meanings (see Castoriadis' social ontology about *vis formandi*). In this sense, *political metaphysics* is seen as a theoretical effort to interpret political societies in perpetuity. Thus, from Ernst Kantorowicz to Claude Lefort or from Leo Strauss and Walter Benjamin to Jürgen Moltmann and Giorgio Agamben, with the controversial figures of Heidegger and Schmitt to dominate the whole scene as the two theoretical pillars of both Weimar Renaissance and Continental philosophy, contemporary political onto-theologies have largely *re-newed* the content and the meanings of contemporary social, political and ethical theory. This enormous philosophical project, which tends to radically *re-define* ontological, theological and ethical borderlines of *the political*, seems like a frenetic leap to the chaos of democratic *multitude*, but without being entrapped in simplistic teleological or eschatological interpretations¹²¹.

Post-foundational character of contemporary social and political theory in the sense of a pure onto-theologia negativa actually indicates the *opening-up* towards a new kind of *messianism* and *eschatology* of *the political* itself. Contemporary political onto-theologies are considered more and more as a new *post-metaphysical* field, where politics is governed by the hard elements of *fluidity*, *contingency* and *indeterminacy*. The whole thing is defined by Jacques Derrida as a *messianic without messianism* or alternatively as a *democracy to come*. In its extreme version, this new onto-theological project of *the political* takes the radical form of *anti-foundationalism* where the theological element has been absorbed into the ontological one¹²². This new desire for *deus absconditus* is moving now within the fields

¹²⁰ Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, Volume 4, 1938-1940, Harvard University Press, U.S.A., 2016 and Walter Benjamin, *Reflections. Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*, Schocken Books, New York, 1978 (Translated by Edmund Jephcott), p. 277 and p. 312.

¹²¹ Jeffrey W. Robbins, *Radical Democracy and Political Theology*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2011.

¹²² Oliver Marchart, *Post-Foundational Political Thought: Political Difference in Nancy, Lefort, Badiou and Laclau*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2007 and Tomas Martila, *Post-Foundational Discourse Analysis. From Political Difference to Empirical Research*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2015.



of a radical ontological, political and, in the last analysis, moral contingency and *undecidability*, where both Democracy and Totalitarianism are not regarded as two different political regimes, but as the two *spectral* poles across a *continuum* or a common onto-theological polarity. In fact, both Democracy and Totalitarianism are flowing unstoppably as interchangeable ontological and political *spectralities* on an onto-theological continuum, where politics is experienced as an absolutely *risky* phenomenon. According to Zygmunt Bauman, this is the human condition of a *liquid modernity* or in the case of Nietzsche-inspired Jean Baudrillard, we live now in the era of the *transparency of evil*¹²³.

In this perspective, while contemporary political onto-theologies illustrate the impasses of globalized neo-capitalism, at the same time, they demonstrate the profound and radical socio-political changes in the era of late modernity. This onto-theological *ambiguity* maybe indicates Moltmann's hope for some new opportunities concerning the Aristotelian principle of *well-being* (in Greek: ευδαιμονία). It is noteworthy that etymologically speaking *eudaemonia* is a compound word which comes after 'eu' (meaning well) and 'daimon' (daemon; in Greek: δαιμόνιον) which refers to a *deity* or a *guardian spirit*. Thus, if polis is the realization of social and *collectivity*, that is something more than the typical political community, then political onto-theology concerns the deep origins of it or, to put it another way, this *hidden deity* (i.e. deus absconditus) that dwells in the basement of the political building. In mythological terms, *political metaphysics* is concerned with this ambiguous *political monster* or political Minotaur that is hiding beneath the city walls. It is worth noting that uncertainty, ambiguity and contingency of *the political* in the new ontological, theological and moral approaches do not lead towards a *heterodox relativism*. Instead, the condition of *liquidity* reestablishes the critical relationship between *vita activa* and *vita contemplativa* within the philosophical framework of a *Socratic skepticism* where *the political* depends both on human *pluralism* and *alterity*. In this specific area of onto-theological analysis, dominant is the figure of Hannah Arendt. Leading the movement of a postwar Aristotelian renaissance, she brings to light the onto-theological principles of *personal responsibility* and *thoughtfulness* as the backbone of thinking itself or what Heidegger defines as *philosophizing* in the Technological Age. If reflective thinking is the quintessence of political metaphysics then New Political Theology is a didactic case on how theologia crisis could be interpreted as a political Theology of the Cross.

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HAVE WE FORGOTTEN THE 7TH ECUMENICAL COUNCIL? ERRORS CONCERNING THE WORSHIP OF THE ICONS IN CONTEMPORARY ROMANIAN LITURGICAL PRACTICE

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ABSTRACT

In marked contrast to the orthodox theology and practice of worshiping holy icons, as taught by the Church as a result of the iconoclastic debate in 8th century (Nicaea, 787), Romanian Christians attitudes and practices today are not only erroneous, but sometimes even contradict the decisions and teaching of the Holy Fathers. These deviations also have affected the currently practice of worshiping. For example, the Euchologion endorsed for the Romanian Church today stipulates that icons are blessed in a liturgical service (I think can be used both words; during , but also through), although this was rejected by the Fathers and by usual customs of the 8th century.

Another misunderstanding of the Tradition spirit in the official worship of the Church are irregularities in Christians' private life of faith. Various practices here seem to reflect ideas which are not in line with the doctrine of the Orthodox Church. For example, many faithful place the icons in their homes to hinge on the dimensions of the wall and not always on the east side walls of the house. Sometimes they arrange icons in a way that makes it impossible to touch and kiss them, thus deviating from what the most important Fathers who defended the worship of icons have prescribed. Sometimes the faithful intermingle family pictures with their icons, thus misleading onlookers to stipulate a misplaced "holiness" for such family members.

Keywords: icons; today liturgical practice; wrong attitudes; liturgy;

INTRODUCTION

Apart from some specialists, for whom the sacred images were just an object of study, the theology of the icons remained totally unknown to the Western world, both Catholic and Protestant. Only at the beginning of the previous century a group of well established theologians, especially Russians (Florenski¹, Ouspensky², Evdokimov³ etc.) have begun to introduce them to the world from a different perspective. Due to their efforts,

¹ P. Florenski, *On the Icon*, in *Eastern Church Review* 8 (1976) 11-37; Idem, *Iconostasul* trad. rom. B. Buzilă, Bucharest, Edit. Anastasia, 2009.

² L. Uspensky, *The Theology of the icon* trad. rom. E. Dreveci, Cluj Napoca, Edit. Renașterea/Edit. Patmos, 2005.

³ P. Evdokimov, *The Art of the icon: a theology of beauty*, trad. rom. G. Moga și P. Moga, Bucharest, Edit. Sophia, 2014.



orthodox theology would shed some light on one of its much-ignored aspects - the theology of the icons - an issue which gave cohorts of saints to the Church and has dogmatically presented the last doctrinal problems before the Great Schism. Once seen as ugly, unesthetic and obviously far from the realistic anatomy of the well known masterpieces of Da Vinci, Michelangelo, Rafael and Tizian, the image of Christ the Lord, of the Virgin or of other saints were now seen in a new light. Beyond the snobbish and exotic curiosity of some, beyond the scientific interest of others, the icons were revealing a spiritual world full of unknown depths to the open-hearted one. Some Western Theology Faculties begin to include courses of iconology in their curriculum and books about the theory and the theology of the icons will appear. The ascetic and dark images, which were filiform and without relation to time, started to replace the paintings of the Renaissance which you were accustomed to in the catholic monasteries, offices and houses.

The Western 'iconological revolution' reached Romania quite late. With a few small exceptions of theologians who had studied in Western Europe, by the '80s the range of studies and articles related to the theology of the icons was quite limited, - presenting a marked contrast to the reality from the 'field'; the houses of the Romanians, especially in Transylvania, which continued to be filled with polygraphic copies of well known Renaissance paintings. Is there anyone who does not remember of the Holy Family, doves and the Christ child, of Coronatio Virginis and of Christ praying in the garden of Gethsemane? And although you can still find some of these copies in many homes, the connection which Romanians have with the authentic icons is beginning to change.

But, even if theologians and scholars have gained a better understanding, the devotional practices as well as the connection, which Christians have with the icons, does not always reflect the correct attitude, according to the theology developed by the Elders of 8th and 9th centuries, but it is almost opposite in some situations.

1. THE CONTRADICTION BETWEEN DOCTRINE AND CONTEMPORARY PRACTICE

In order to demonstrate this contradiction between the doctrine, proclaimed and upheld in the official literature of the Romanian Orthodox Church, and the contemporary liturgical practice, we will analyze a few examples.

The mistaken quest for consecration

When acquiring an icon, the majority of the Romanians hasten to the priest and ask for the consecration of it; sometimes, even the priest and the bishops who are giving icons to the believers, make sure that these have the stamp 'consecrated', to ascertain its sacramental power. This custom is totally contrary to the old practice of the Church.

As Father Stephan Bigham makes clear⁴, this is a catholic novelty, introduced in the liturgical cursus through Petru Movilă's Euchologion (1646), which was contaminated by Western practices. This *Euchologion* proposes five consecration prayers⁵, according to the

⁴ S. Bigham, „Does the Blessing of Icons Agree with or Contradict the Tradition of the Orthodox Church?“, în *Orthodox Art Journals*, at: <https://www.orthodoxartsjournal.org/does-the-blessing-of-icons-agree-with-or-contradict-the-tradition-of-the-orthodox-church/> (accesat în 4.11.2017) Translated in Romanian in *Pemptousia*: “Sfintirea” icoanelor: o practică în contradicție cu Tradiția Bisericii – 2, Available online at <http://www.pemptousia.ro/2013/10/sfintirea-icoanelor-o-practica-in-contradictie-cu-traditia-bisericii-partea-a-doua/> (aces at în 4.11.2017). The same study, with small changes was published in the volume *Ce este icoana ?*, Edit. Reîntregirea, Alba Iulia, 2009.

⁵ The ritual proposed by Petru Movilă, identical to all five types of prayers, is amply structured within a complex ritual with blessing and conclusion, a psalm, a complex prayer and a prayer with the head bowed down, suitable



importance of the persons they represent: of the Holy Trinity, of Christ and Festive days, of Virgin Mary, of the saints and of the consecration of the icons with more scenes. The national churches, which were under the influence of Slavonic languages, have partially or totally introduced these consecration prayers⁶, while the Churches under Greek influence introduced through the *Euchologion* from 1730, only one small consecration prayer, associated with anointing the four corners of the icon.

This practice of consecrating some particular objects, among which we find the icons as well, entirely contradicts the 'orthodox solution' approved during the time of the iconoclast dispute, - a solution which entirely and undoubtedly repudiates the liturgical practice proposed in the current *Euchologion*. At that time, the iconodules answered to iconoclast accusations by pointing out that the Church doesn't even have consecration prayers, through which the icons achieve a sacred character: neither the Cross, nor the Holy Gospel and the icons need consecration, as their holiness comes from within, and from their relation with archetype:

'Many of the sacred objects which we have do not need a consecration prayer because their own name claims that they are holy and full of grace. As a result, we honour and we kiss them as they are venerable objects. And so, even without a consecration prayer we are praising the sign of the life giving Holy Cross. Because its shape is suffice enough for us to receive the blessing, with the honour which we give it when we do its cross sign on our foreheads; and even when we make the sign of the cross with our fingers in the air, like a seal, we hope that it will banish all the devils. We do the same when we write the name of a saint on an icon, and so transferring the honour of the prototype onto the icon; while kissing it and praising it, we become part of its holiness (the prototype); moreover, we kiss different consecrated objects which we have, in doing so we are expressing our hope that we will receive their blessing'⁷

When the trend of consecration prayers reached Greece as well in the 19th century, Nicodemus the Hagiorite (From the Athos Mount) opposed it; his view reflects the fact that this practice was a new and unknown phenomenon to the Greek texts printed in the 17th century and that it wasn't wide spread. His arguments were simple, clear and according to what had been established in the 8th century, decisions which Nicodemus quotes:

'1). It is not necessary to anoint the holy icons with myron (or chrism oil), nor to have them sanctified by the bishop with special prayers: because we do not adore the holy icons because they are anointed or have had prayers said over them, but irrespectively, as soon as we lay eyes on a holy icon, without pausing to examine into the possibility of its having been anointed or having had a special prayer said over it, we at once proceed to pay adoration to it both on the account of the name of the Saint and on the account of the likeness it bears to the original. That is why in Act 6 of the present Council, the Council of the iconomachs in the region of Copronymus disparaged the holy icons by asserting that the name of the pictures neither has any sacred prayer sanctifying it, in order that from what is common it might be transferred to what is holy, but that, on the contrary, it (st. the picture)

troparia and a supplication with an epiclesis shape.

⁶ For example, the first Romanian *euchologions* (Dosoftei – Iași, 1681; Zoba – Alba Iulia, 1689; Mitrofan – Buzău, 1702; Antim – Râmnic, 1706) did not contain these prayers. The version from Bucharest, 2002, shows only three types of consecrations (of Christ and of Festive days, of Virgin Mary and of saints), while the last version (Bucharest, 2013) adds the one for the Holy Trinity.

⁷ MANSI, *Sinodul de la NICEEA II, XIII, APUD Icon and Logos: Sources in Eighth-Century Iconoclasm*, Daniel Sahas (ed.), Toronto, Ontario, University of TORONTO Press, 1986.



remains common and dishonorable (i.e., not entitled to honor), just as the painter made it. To these allegations the holy Seventh Council replied through Deacon Epiphanius, by asserting that it did not say that any special prayer is said over the icons, but said that like many other sacred objects they were incapable of receiving (benefit from) any special prayer; but, on the contrary from their very name they are replete with grace and sanctity, in the same way that the shape of the vivifying Cross is, which is entitled to veneration and adoration among us in spite of the fact that it is made without having any special prayer said over it; and we believe that with its shape alone we acquire sanctity, and with the adoration which we pay to it, and the marking of it upon our forehead, and the seal of it which is made in the air with the hope of chasing away the demons. Likewise, in the same way that we have many sacred vessels, and kiss and embrace them fondly, and hope to receive sanctity from them, in spite of the fact that they have not had any special prayers said over them, so and in like manner by fondly kissing and embracing and paying honorary adoration to a holy icon that has not had special prayers said over it we partake of sanctity, and are analogically lifted up and carried back to the honor of the original through the name of the icon. But if the iconomachs cannot assert that the sacred vessels are dishonorable and common because of their not having had any special prayers said over them for the purpose of sanctifying them, but are just as the waver, the painter, and the goldsmith finished them, yet they regard them as holy and precious; in the same way they ought to regard the venerable icons as holy and precious and sacred even though they have not had any special prayers said over them to sanctify them.

2).The holy icons do not need any special prayer or any application of myron (or chrism), because, according to Dositheus (p. 658 of the Dodecabiblus) it is only the Papists (or Roman Catholics) that perpetrate the iniquity of qualifying pictures with certain prayers and devotions. For they boast that the Pope manufactures pictures from pure wax, holy oil, and water of sanctification, and that he reads marvellous prayers over them, and that because of these special features these pictures perform miracles (just as they lyingly state that Leo III sent such a picture to King Charles of France, and he revered it; and that Pope Urban sent another picture to John Paleologus, and this one was honored with a litany in the Church). Do you see that the prayer which is read over holy pictures is a Papal affair, and not Orthodox; and that it is a modern affair, and not an ancient one? For this reason no such prayer can be found anywhere in the ancient manuscript Euchologia. In fact, we have noticed that this prayer is not even found in Euchologia printed only a hundred years ago! 3). It becomes evident that holy icons do not need any special prayer or application of myron (i.e., holy oil), because the pictures painted on the walls of churches, and in their naves and in their aisles, and in general in streets and on doors, and on the sacred vessels, are never anointed with myron and never any special prayer said over them, and yet, in spite of this, adoration is paid to them relatively and honorarily by all on account of the likeness they bear to the originals. [...]This same view is confirmed also by Dositheus (p. 655 of the Dodecabiblus). Plato the very learned Archbishop of Moscow notes in connection with the second commandment of the Decalogue in his Orthodox Catechism that one must not think one picture holier than another, nor expect more from one picture than from another, or place greater trust in one than in another.’⁸

⁸ ‘The Rudder’, *Prolegomena on the Ecumenical Seventh Council*, Available online at : http://s3.amazonaws.com/orthodox/The_Rudder.pdf (Accessed: 22/04/2018), pp 419-420



The common procedure of placing the icons contravenes the Church doctrine regarding the adoration of the holy icons

The parietal placement of the icons sometime excludes their role for worship

As we know, the function of the holy icons is: charismatic and liturgical, doctrinaire and apologetical, anamnestic-historical and esthetical. Unfortunately, the way we place the icons in the public and domestic spaces, reveals an attitude which overturns the hierarchy of the attributes and of the liturgical functions of the holy icons. Although the aesthetic function of the icons is considered to be secondary, it often prevails. Therefore, the icons are placed according to the available space, and not according to liturgical concerns. We are often more concerned about the aesthetical 'balance' when placing the icon on the wall than the fact that the Holy Fathers imposed that the icon shall be venerated through touch and kissing. This can be seen in large spaces such as conference rooms, classrooms etc., where the icons are placed medially at 4-5 metres height and where they can only be seen; this makes impossible the idea of touching or kissing them.

The parietal placement of the icons excludes their orienting role

Often a further aspect of the functional-liturgical character of the icons is forgotten – their orientation. The orientation towards East during prayer was a rigorous⁹ practice within the primary Church and the axial orientation of the church (pronaos, naos, altar) was suggesting a progressive movement towards sunrise. Even the houses in the villages had the icon placed 'on the eastern wall'. This liturgical geography referred to the transcendence of time and through this entering a metaphysical dimension, testifying to the eschatological hope of the Church. Nowadays, many of the icons which 'decorate' the public and domestic spaces, are placed according to the pragmatic function of the room and disregard the old principle of liturgical orientation. The liturgical orientation towards East 'disappeared,' making room for an aesthetical pragmatism. Today, we can see that the way in which the icons are displayed in the private and public spaces, mostly reveals our aesthetical needs, because in most of the situations the icons are placed according to the location of the window, the door, the furniture etc., the icon is no longer orientated in space but it only has a decorative function. Funnily enough, sometimes the prayer at the table is said facing the plates, the icons from the classrooms are placed above the blackboard or the teacher's desk. In consequence, we are facing a new authority and a new spiritual orientation principle: the food, the desk, and the emptiness.

The parietal placement of the icons discounts the sacramental hierarchy

Even the way in which we combine different sacred images is not always the most appropriate. For example, in some institutional spaces (deaneries, bishoprics, parsonages), the icons of Christ and Virgin Mary, and even the sign of the Holy Cross, is flanked by portraits of ruling bishops and metropolitans. This way of displaying the images should be avoided because it brings a sort of leveling, of homogenisation of the sacredness. No bishop would argue the fact that his image should be placed on a different wall than the one where the icon of Christ of Virgin Mary is positioned, because he is aware of his own humbleness as well as of the flattery of his inferiors. This is why we believe that more discernment is needed when choosing the place where the icons would be set. It would be wise to never display the images of the living on the same wall with the holy icons, not even to mention that placing them at the same level is forbidden.

⁹ Uwe Michael Lang, *Turning Towards the Lord: Orientation in Liturgical Prayer*, San Francisco, California, Ignatius Press, 2004.



Desacralisation through the abuse of usage

The Quinisext Council (692 AD), through its 73rd Canon, imposed the interdiction of the cross sign being displayed on the floor:

‘Since the life-giving cross has shewn to us Salvation, we should be careful that we render due honour to that by which we were saved from the ancient fall. Wherefore, in mind, in word, in feeling giving veneration (προσκύνησιν) to it, we command that the figure of the cross, which some have placed on the floor, be entirely removed therefrom, lest the trophy of the victory won for us be desecrated by the trampling under foot of those who walk over it. Therefore those who from this present represent on the pavement the sign of the cross, we decree are to be cut off.’¹⁰

By taking into account the dogmatic essence of this Canon¹¹, we shall observe the intention of the participants at the council to protect the Christian symbols from profanation by being displayed in unsuitable places. For this reason, we should reconsider our attitude towards the frequent reproductions which appear in newspapers – even in the daily and periodical papers of different dioceses of the Romanian Patriarchate- or by hanging them in spaces where frequently indecent attitudes and actions are taking place. Not one single Christian would feel comfortable knowing that some icons found in the newspapers would end up in the bin. The time when Christians used to cut the holy images from the magazines is long gone, but the reproduction of billions of holy images seen everywhere, is diluting the perception of their sacredness.

Although some say that the reproductions from the newspapers are not icons, the meaning which the Holy Fathers gave to the word *eikon* is a general reference to image; for this reason, the Greeks have always used the term *eikon* together with the syntagma ‘*ta aghia*’ (the holy icons). Even if in current Romanian language there is a difference between *image* and *icon*, we need to acknowledge the fact that the icon is not just a portable image, painted on wood but it is the holy image reproduced through any technical methods and on any kind of material. Or this is what we should understand from St Theodore Studite affirmation: ‘Based on the icon’s nature, we call its visible reality not ‘Christ’, not even ‘image of Christ’, but wood, paint, gold, silver, or some other material employed. Yet based upon the image of the person depicted, the icon is called ‘Christ’ or ‘image of Christ’; ‘Christ’ because of the identity in name, ‘image of Christ’ because of the relationship.’¹²

These considerations must have motivated the prohibition of displaying holy images on clergy robes, excepting the ones wore by bishops.

¹⁰ P. Schaff, *The Canons Of The Council in Trullo; Often Called The Quinisext Council*, at: http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/03d/0691-0691_Synodum_Constantinopolitanum_Canones_%5BSchaff%5D,_EN.pdf (Accessed: 22.04.2018) p. 570.

¹¹ Nikolai Afanasiev observed that we should never idolize the canons; that they should be interpreted in their dogmatic essence and not in their historical and temporal forms, which are difficult to be totally comprehended by all generations. ‘The ‘Canons are shaping the dogma under the manners of some norms which must be followed in the life of the church to be in accordance with the dogmatical values. The Canons are some sort of canonical explanation of the dogmas at a certain point in Church history; they are in fact an old source, a code of conduct of the life of the Church, revealing the truth on the order of the life in Church, but rather following the historical existence than showing the truth in its absolute forms.’ (‘Canoanele Bisericii: schimbabile sau neschimbabile?’), în *Jivoie Predanie*, Paris, 1936, YMCA Press, pp. 82-96 (trad. I. Nistea, disponibil pe <http://www.nistea.com/Afan2.htm>, accessat la 1.11.2017)

¹² D. Clayton, *The 7th Ecumenical Council and St Theodore the Studite on Holy Icons*, Available online at: <https://www.scribd.com/doc/31367329/The-7th-Ecumenical-Council-and-St-Theodore-the-Studite-on-Holy-Icons> (Accessed: 22/04/2018) p. 6.



This should be the reason why we must pay more attention when choosing to reproduce these holy images of Christ, Virgin Mary and other saints on either book covers, newspapers, magazines, or even as 'icons' given to the faithful. I don't even want to mention the fact that I have seen holy images on cuffs and pens, on paper bags, on touristic materials, on folders etc. I believe that displaying the holy images on such materials is making them seem vulgar and this only created controversies which would be detrimental for the cult of the holy icons. Although these reproductions seem to highlight Christ's charismatic presence within our life, we should be more considerate when allowing for the icons to be hanged in clubs, restaurants or in any other place where these would not be truly worshiped. Otherwise, the ones who displayed them in such places, must see them more as talisman, or as a object which would banish evil omens.

CONCLUSION

What can we do? In order for errors not to be perpetuated among the faithful, the Church, be it institutionally – through decisions and norms, or particularly – through the pastoral mission of bringing awareness to the clergy and the faithful, must intensify the doctrinal catechesis, for a correct and full understanding of the Church teaching on icons. Is it not only through the word but through the images as well, that errors are transmitted, - as obvious from the way in which the modern world is ruled by images. Of course, we cannot go back in time. Even if we do so, what is the reference point we choose? The Church cult before the iconoclasm, the Golden century or the Church of the Gospel? The Church is a living organism; it is dynamic; sometimes with setbacks and even errors. But our duty is that, once we identify these errors, to eliminate these errors. The faith must be in conformity with the practice and vice versa: *Lex orandi lex credendi*.

Some clear, practical and simple decisions must be taken:

As to the mis-practice of consecrating icons, the fact that people have become accustomed to such services makes it un-advisable for the Holy Synod to correct matters by returning to the old liturgical practices of before the 17th century and to purify the *Euchologion* from all the 'altered' services. Fr. Bigham therefore proposes instead a re-naming, for example as '*The office of commencement of an icon*', or '*The office of the first investiture*', or something like that¹³. Here the epiclesis formula should either be removed or replaced with one that would relate to the teaching of the Church, according to which the icon is sanctified through the relation with the prototype and through the registration of its name.

As to our dealing with icons in daily life, we shall

- advise the priests and the faithful on always placing the icons in their private homes, offices and public spaces on the eastern wall, the place towards which we need to be orientated during prayer;
- avoid the display of the icons of Christ, Virgin Mary etc. alongside the family photos, images with our bishops due to the duty we have of not to inducing the idea of placing them (the relatives, etc.) in the same sacred level;
- be reserved when we choose to print reproductions of icons in magazines and church periodicals, or on book covers, knowing that these reproductions are icons as well. The risk of them ending in the bin or being desecrated is too great.

¹³ S. Bigham, *idem*.



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THE LAST PROPHET OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

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ABSTRACT

The prophets of the Old Testament end with John the Baptist, The Forerunner of God, declared to be "the greatest man among those born from women". His spiritual elevation is impressive, because he cumulates in himself the revolutionary effort of all the prophets, in a life loved entirely in the devotion of the noble cause for which he was born. His message which recalls the necessity for spiritual renewal for the human soul is always valid.

Keywords: sin; awareness; redemption; purification; renewal;

INTRODUCTION

The supernatural Revelation of the Old Testament belongs, as an initiative, to the providential work of God, through which He picked the humans, on the basis of His foreseeing knowledge (Jer. 1, 5), to fulfill concrete tasks. These humans would act through deeds (individual, or catalyzing entire masses, like Moses, or the Judges), or would speak in the name of Yahve, to express in a complex way the divine will. Chosen people always have significant names, which express the essence of the mission they have assumed.¹

The trail of the prophets is partially known, as the books of the Old Testament have managed to record personalities and deeds, along with the preservation of the prophetic writings themselves. At the same time, we can evaluate in a broad picture, the prophetic message of the Old Testament, to discover and underline their essential mission, beyond just the conservation struggle of the Jewish people in the boundaries of the revealed monotheism, which is the messianic mission, to announce the One that was about to come for the salvation of the world. From a Christian perspective, this is the main message of the prophets of the Old Testament, their kind historically ending which the Incarnation of Messiah, God's anointed One, the last prophet of the Old Testament², St. John the Baptist literally presenting Him to the world.

1. THE BIRTH OF THE FORERUNNER, A DIVINE WORK

Born from a priestly family, from Zachariah and Elisabeth, St. John the Baptist represents the complete character of the prophet, bypassing in his spiritual stature even the elegant greatness of Isaiah, the self-sacrifice of Jeremiah, the dynamic and all the way up to obscurity vision of Ezekiel, and even the time-piercing power of Daniel. This comparison is valid because it is fundamented on Christ's appreciation of John, when He declares him, in an admirative way, to be "the greatest" man, among those "born from women" (Mt. 11, 11).

¹ *Studiul Vechiului Testament, pentru Institutele teologice*, Ed. IBMBOR, București, 1983, pp. 222, 234, 245

² Pr. Prof. Dr. Ioan Bria, *Dicționar de Teologie Ortodoxă*, Ed. IBMBOR, București, 1994, p. 287



The events that gravitated around the birth of St. John are known due to Luke the Evangelist, he himself being a soul caught in the net of divine revelations to present to the world the Mystery of its salvation. The first event in his work is the majestic and convincing apparition of archangel Gabriel in the Holy of the temple, before the priest Zachariah, who entered that area through drawing lots, which, in the religious atmosphere of the Old Testament, would always mean the expression of the divine will.³ Called to a special service, Zachariah (whose name means “*God remembers*”⁴, signifying the divine appreciation regarding virtues and consistent prayer), receives the news of the birth of his only son and the name that he needs to bear, John, which is also very significant. “*God showed mercy*”⁵ could refer to the fulfilling of a lifetime prayers for the birth of this child, but it applies more to the divine plan of the world’s salvation that needs to contain a certain development of events, which imply the participation of a forerunner of Messiah. From just and pure parents before God, a holy man is about to be borne, whose life will not bring joy just to his family, but to an entire people through which they will return to “*their Lord God*”. This holy man will be “*armed*” with the “*spirit and power of Elijah*”, to fulfill his mission, which was to bring the heart to its fundamental vocation, the awakening of love that unites the humans and guides them to the love among them and towards God (Luke 1, 15-17).

The conception of the Forerunner in the womb of Elisabeth’s remains a mystery until the time when the child’s conception could not be hidden anymore. At the fulfilling of the nine months, Elisabeth gives birth to John, and in the 8th day, in the presence of relatives and friends, the circumcision ritual takes place (Genesis 17, 23; Exodus 4, 25). The general intention to name the child after his father, Zachariah, as an underlining of God’s love, Who remembers the prayers of the His just ones, is discarded by the parents who are consequent to the instructions of archangel Gabriel. John would be his name, through which it is showed God’s mercy towards the childless parents’ prayers, but also His mercy towards humankind who was lost the sin’s darkness. The birth of the Forerunner is directly tied to the recently incarnation of the One who he will announce, the One who will fulfill all, the Savior Jesus Christ. The confirmation of the name by the priest Zachariah, acknowledges the validity of the angelic prophecy, lifting the punishment bestowed upon him. He is able to speak again, praising and blessing God, and Zachariah is fulfilled with the Holy Spirit and prophesizes. His words bring praise and blessings to God, Who searched His people and redeemed him, as He announced it through His prophets. Through an heir of David’s house He gave the power of salvation to the human against his enemy, death. This salvation takes place through God’s mercy towards the humans, fulfilling His promise to Abraham, the father of the Jewish people. And all of these were done so that the humans, cleansed by sins, to be able to serve God in holiness and justice during all their lives. As for his son, John, he will be the prophet of The Most High One, walking before the face of God to prepare His way. The preparation of the Jewish people takes place through the warning regarding the imminence of salvation, salvation which is gained only through the forgives of the sins by the Sunrise from above. This Person, who searched the humans through mercy, wishes to enlighten those who stay in the dark and in the shadow of death and to set straight the steps of humans on the path of their reconciliation with God (Luke 1, 67-80).

³ Pr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru Abrudan, Diac. Prof. Dr. Emilian Cornițescu, *Arheologie biblică*, Ed. IBMBOR, București, 1994, pp. 152, 242

⁴ Pr. Dr. Ioan Mircea, *Dicționar al Noului Testament*, Ed. IBMBOR, București, 1995, p. 573

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 228



The childhood of St. John will develop under the handprint of the providential work of the Holy Spirit, but also due to the fact that the child grew in a house of prayer and of Gods, being circumcised and dedicated to God.⁶ His definitive formation will take place through his life in the desert until the day he will show himself to Israel, that is until the beginning of his mission, a period of time spent in meditation and prayer, away from the temptations which often overwhelm, in the social community, most young people. His school was prayer, meditation, the Law, the Prophets and the divine Revelation.

2. THE MISSION OF THE FORERUNNER

When the time came, God called John from meditation and prayer to preaching, “*in the fifteenth year of the rule of the Cezar Tiberius, when Pilat from Pont was the prosecutor of Judaea, Herod, the tetrarch of Abilene, in the days of hierarchs Anna and Caiafa*” (Luke 3, 1-2). The 15th year of rule of the roman emperor Tiberius would correspond approximatively to the year 26 A.D., this being the first year from the ten years of governing of Pilat from Pontus in Judaea (26-36 A.D.).⁷

The people were impressed by this public appearance, because the image of the Forerunner was touching the people’s souls, expressing sincerity and total devotion to his assumed cause. His clothes and food were austere, but fit for his prophetic mission. The camel hair had a rough fabric, rigid, a cloth wore by poor people, or by those who were mourning and repenting.⁸ Such a cloth St. John wore, having a lather belt around his hips. Locusts and wild honey was his usual food. This image was hiding although a great spiritual force, because, when St. John left the desert to preach, he spoke “*with the spirit and power of Elijah*” (Luke 1, 17; Mark 1, 6). Being called by God at this service, John was a forerunning beacon of the true Light, a morning star which announced the sunrise, a voice, an exclamation, a call before clear and explicit words⁹ that Messiah was about to say.

His call said: “*Redeem yourselves because the Kingdom of God is upon us!*” (Mt. 3, 2). With this message the Savior Christ will begin His public activity which His Forerunner prepared for Him (Mt. 4, 17). The meaning of this urge is the following: the compulsion of one’s own conscience investigation, the awareness and recognition of one’s sins, the decision to not sin anymore, the fight against temptations and sins, the preparation for a life in God.¹⁰

The mission, activity, and role that St. John the Baptist had to fulfill were part of the salvation plan of humankind. That is why two prophets of the Old Testament had the vision of his mission, speaking about him way before his time. The prophet Malachi announced the existence of the Forerunner, who would have an angelic life and service: “*See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple. The messenger of the covenant in whom you delight – indeed, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts*” (Malachi 3, 1).

And the prophet Isaiah will underline the content of his preaching, with the desired and expected spiritual transformations in the souls of his listeners. “*A voice cries out: “In the*

⁶ Pr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, Vol. III, Ed. IBMBOR, București, 1997, p. 45

⁷ Pr. prof. dr. Vasile Mihoc, Lect. dr. Daniel Mihoc, Pr. asist. Ioan Mihoc, *Introducere în studiul Noului Testament, Curs pentru anul I*, Sibiu, 2007, p. 65

⁸ Pr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru Abrudan, Diac. Prof. Dr. Emilian Cornițescu, *op. cit.*, pp. 119, 143

⁹ Sf. Chiril al Alexandriei, *Comentar la evanghelia după Luca*, Ed. Pelerinul Român, Oradea, 1998, p. 30

¹⁰ Pr. Dr. Ioan Mircea, *op. cit.*, p. 406-407



wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.” (40, 3-5). This prophecy contains also an atemporal message and wordy of following it for whoever wishes salvation, because the spiritual transformations which will come into the world, although they seem imminent in the time of Isaiah, will be fulfilled centuries later in the time of John the Baptist, who preached to the people in a time when the Saviour didn't show himself to the world (Luke 3, 4-6).

3. THE SERMON OF SF. JOHN THE BAPTIST

So, the voice of John was calling in the Judea's desert: *“The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth; and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.’”* (Luke 3, 4-6). The stated command: *“Prepare the way of the Lord”* means: *“prepare for receiving the commands which Christ will give. Make it stop all the symbols, figures and types, stop thinking about the crooked!”*.¹¹ The symbolism of the words is evident, the “way” representing the direction through which the human being go to physically, but most of all spiritually, a language found in the Old Testament at Isaiah: *“the way of the righteous is level; O Just One, you make smooth the path of the righteous”* (26, 7).

The way can lead to evil if it is winding, because the objectives of evil are deceitful and changing, offering a temporal good, perishable, which belongs only to this life. The way that leads to good is always straight, coherent, having a well defined and stable goal, which is the Kingdom of Heavens. This way is easy to walk on for the human consequent to his spiritual aspirations, being helped continuously also by God through His grace. The transformation is appropriate for the soul, which was made bun and fare by God. Removing the slag of sins, the soul renews his spiritual powers, being reinforced through the grace. Sinners, however, have crooked ways and twisted paths, wishing always something else, but always from the perishable ones (Wisdom 2, 15).

Deep walleyes and angulous peeks from the path of the human, mentioned in the prophecy, are understood as the spiritual obstacles. These will be made smooth through the destruction of the sin in the body of the humans, due to the redeeming sacrifice of Jesus Christ, Who killed in the body the law of sin. *“The devil being removed, the way towards salvation is much more easier”*.¹² At the same time, the possibility of salvation is offered to all humans, not just to the Jews, because *“all the nations you have made shall come and bow down before you, O Lord”* (Psalm 86, 9).

St. Theofilact of Bulgaria (1004-1107 A.D.)¹³ interprets in this way the sermon of St. John the Baptist: *“The way of the Lord is the Gospel, the New Law, and the twisted ways – the commands of the Old Law. So, it says: be ready for the evangelic joy, and he commands of the Law make them smooth, that is spiritual, because the Spirit is smooth. So, when you will see the Jews that physically they understand the Law, then you will understand that they have not made the ways smooth, that is they do not understand the spiritual Law”*.¹⁴

¹¹ Sf. Chiril al Alexandriei, *op. cit.*, p. 30

¹² *Ibidem*, p. 32

¹³ Pr. Prof. Dr. Ioan Bria, *op. cit.*, p. 381

¹⁴ Sf. Teofilact al Bulgariei, *Tâlcuirea Sf. Evanghelii de la Matei și Marcu*, Ed. Sofia, 1998, p. 24



Sf. John is called an angel, in the sense of his dispatch from God (John 1, 6), which offers him absolute credibility, not being anything humanly in his words, but the teaching of the One who sent him, and he is the emissary that delivers the news.¹⁵ As the spiritual group of the angels who serve God, which through their immaterial nature don't care about anything organic, bodily, so does John the Baptist dedicate himself soul and body to the mission entrusted to him. His body doesn't have value, that is why he eats whatever is offered to him, and dresses with what he can, a rough cloth, cheap and uncomfortable, which doesn't protect him from the cold of the night and scorching heat of the day.¹⁶ His preaching focuses on the imminence of the establishment of the Kingdom of heavens, establishment which is imminent as the interval of time necessary for an axe to hit a tree (Mt. 3, 10), which delays the spiritual joy, in order to attract attention to the divine judgement and wrath that will show up on the Day of the Lord¹⁷ (Mt. 3, 7, 10, 12), of which no one can be absolved, not even due to their membership to Abraham's kind (Mt. 3, 9).

The necessity for redemption was determined by the imminent arrival of a Person of great importance. That is why, any pride had to be discarded so that the human can be aware of his sins, and so, repenting, he could meet Messiah. The Kingdom of heavens is offered in this life as a road and objective that needs to be pursued. The beginning of this road is here, by the receipt of the earnest of the future goods, and those who walk on this road, gaining through grace, good deeds and spiritual purity, reach its end which is in heavens.

But the voice of John the Baptist also knew to rebuke painfully, because not all who sought him were ready to receive the redemption baptism. The Old Law prescribed Levitical cleansings in case of impurity, but without indicating the interior spiritual aspects necessary for real purification (Leviticus 14, 8; 15, 5-8; 16, 24). The Pharisees and Sadducees, but also certain people who were not willing to change their lives (Luke 3, 7), driven by the general enthusiasm of John's listeners, or by their own hypocrisy, were trying to not appear below those preoccupied by spirituality. That is why, they also come to be baptised, but are rejected with heavy words: *"You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruit worthy of repentance. Do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our ancestor'; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. Even now the axe is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire"* (Mt. 3, 7-10).

St. John the Baptist reproves them with harshness knowing their short-mindedness and hypocrisy. The fruits of redemption are the just and good deed, which does not bring offence to one's close one, the awareness of sins and the desire to repent, the spiritualization of the relation between the human and God. Pride cannot be useful, and it is also more in vain if it is substantiated on a genealogical descendance from someone who earned merits due to his own virtues. The Jews, but most of all Pharisees and the Sadducees, in their pride, were often pointing out that the Jewish people has as parent Abraham, who became worthy of the promise that his heirs would have many descendants, and the protection of God (Gen. 15, 6). His descendants are the heirs to the promise that was given to him. But, if Abraham, due to his faith that was considered just in the eyes of God (Rom. 4, 3; Gal. 3, 6), was also named *"the friend of God"* (Jacob 2, 23), the same cannot be said about his descendants, who abandoned the living of the faith to empty ritualism, who will not enjoy the same reward:

¹⁵ Sf. Ioan Gură de Aur, *Comentar la Evanghelia de la Ioan*, Ed. Pelerinul Român, Oradea, 1997, p. 77

¹⁶ Pr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru Abrudan, Diac. Prof. Dr. Emilian Cornițescu, *op. cit.*, p. 58

¹⁷ Xavier Leon-Dufour, *Vocabular de Teologie Biblică*, Ed. Arhiepiscopiei Romano-Catolice de București, 2001, p. 554



“Whoever commits sin is the slave of sin” (John 8, 34). That is why, St. John warns them through the axe that is ready at the roots of the unfruitful trees, about the danger of God’s wrath ready to punish evil.

The preaching activity of St. John is not confined just to the preaching of redemption. St. Evangelist Luke presents also other teachings of St. John addressed to the crowds: “Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise” (Luke 3, 11). This indicates the importance of mercy, which constitutes the key to harmony among people.¹⁸ His advice continue, being addressed to tax collectors and soldiers. Those who gather taxes he advises them to not do more than what is requested of them, that is to fall into the sin of greed and love of earthly possessions, doing injustice to their own kind. Those who had the responsibility of safeguarding the public order, the soldiers who could easily recur to force abuse and constraint, having credibility in the face of the authorities, he advises them to not oppress anyone, to not be without mercy, to not accuse anyone unjustly, and to be satisfied with their payment (Luke 3, 10-14).

We notice that these advice target the development of certain virtues in the human souls, such as: mercy, the loving of one’s kind, justice, fairness, honesty, humbleness. The advice seek to stimulate and develop a basis of socio-moral conduct, pursuing a spiritual transformation of the human, an awareness development of him, so that he can receive the true teaching that was about to be revealed. Pursuing such a high and new purpose than the one that the understanding of the Law provided at that time, of course repentance is not preached through the understanding of the Old Testament. St. John does not recommend the offering of sacrifices for sins, according to the Jewish ritual¹⁹, as it is prescribed in Leviticus (4, 27-35; 5, 1-19; 6, 2-7). He pursues the implementation of a conduct specific to the messianic time, the clearness of the mind, the heart’s childhood purity, and the sharpness of the spirit, to receive the teachings that were about to be revealed.²⁰

The advice record in the Gospel of St. Luke, the only one that presents more thoroughly the life and activity of St. John the Baptist, does not contain the full content of the sermons of St. John, but it represents them. The Evangelist confesses that St. John the Baptist was preaching the people the “good news”, the Gospel (Luke 3, 18), under the form of the spiritual transformation to which the human was called, while also preaching many other things. The overwhelming personality of the last prophet of the Old Testament, the devotement of his service, the purity of his heart, his burning desire for human spiritual renewal through redemption, his lack of interest regarding the material goods, naturally arose the question among the Jewish people who was waiting for the salvation promised: “Isn’t this Christ?” (Luke 3, 15). All the Evangelist confess that John never dared to use for personal gain the trust and appreciation that was showed to him, but he confessed to all that Someone else is Christ: “The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit” (Mark 1, 7-8; Mt. 3, 11; Luke 3, 16). St. John the Baptist continues: “His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and will gather his wheat into the granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire” (Mt. 3, 12; Luke 3, 17). The statement that the Saviour will baptise with “Holy Spirit and fire” does not exclude water as a matter for this Holy Mystery which will be done in the Church, because it does not refer to baptism as matter or procedure, but it refers to the

¹⁸ Pr. Dr. Ioan Mircea, *op. cit.*, p. 315

¹⁹ Pr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru Abrudan, Diac. Prof. Dr. Emilian Cornișescu, *op. cit.*, p. 268

²⁰ Xavier Leon-Dufour, *op. cit.*, p. 555



effects of the Baptism Mystery, which are the total purification from sin. These words indicate also the superiority of the Christian baptism compared to the baptism that he was doing²¹, and for which he was preparing them for.²² The question: “*Isn't he Christ?*” also preoccupied the religious rulers of the Jewish people from Jerusalem. They sent to him priests and Levites from among the Pharisees to get a clear answer, from John himself. St. Evangelist John, who before he became an apprentice of Christ, was an apprentice of John the Baptist (John 1, 35), probably witnessed this dialogue. That is why he presents it with accuracy, highlighting the insistences of the Pharisees: “*who are you? So that we can give an answer to those who sent us*” (John 1, 22).

Understanding that those who were asking him were seeking to identify him with Messiah, John the Baptist confesses openly that he is not Christ, nor Elijah (an old belief, based on the text from Malachi 3, 23, which stated that this prophet, resurrected, will activate before Messiah), nor the prophet that Moses spoke about (Deut. 18, 15). John is an unclear call that comes before the enlightening word. He is the stuttering voice of the Old Law, which does not enlighten fully like the law what brings salvation.²³ But this voice speaks with strength, trust, and freedom, indicting the fulfilment of Isaiah prophecy in himself (40, 2-3), fulfilment which, if understood correctly, speaks about The One that will come after him, The One who truly is Messiah.

To the insistences to find out from where did he get permission to baptize others, or what is the motivation of this baptism, John replies with gentleness and modesty, that he baptises with water, that is he does not offer the forgiveness of the sins, but, being witness to the glory of God, as one sent by Him (John 1, 16), he knows he is a path opener, a guide towards the spiritual baptism of Whom, although He is among them, they do not know Him yet, because He has not revealed Himself yet.

The footwear that John referred to, represent the incarnation of Christ, and the belt signify the bondage of the sins that he could not break, because the Saviour was without sin or guile, in contrast with the people who were confessing their sins at Jordan. The belt could also signify the way of the Saviour's incarnation, without any means to be broken or untied by humans.²⁴ St. John Chrysostom remarks in this sense: “*If the Jews wouldn't have heard anything about Jesus Christ, before they saw Him, if they would have received this great and wonderful confession only by seeing Him, the simplicity and poorness of His clothes would have diminished His glory. Jesus Christ was walking on the streets dressed simple and poorly so that all dared freely and with ease to approach Him and talk to Him*”.²⁵

4. THE BAPTISM WITH WATER

The sober stature of the prophet enlightens at the river Jordan, electrifying his listeners hearts. He receives their confession of sins (Mt. 3, 6), the concrete proof of their desire to get rid of the old human in them, subjected to sin and death, to be granted the baptism in the river Jordan as a seen sign of their renewal which must dominate their lives from now on. Everything happens in a simple mater, without any ceremony, which makes the humans gestures and their sincere expression more natural. The cleansing of sins, as the water washes the dirt from the body, or the clothes, does not happen, he himself confessing

²¹ Pr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru Radu, *Îndrumări misionare*, Ed. IBMBOR, București, 1986, p. 515

²² Xavier Leon-Dufour, *op. cit.*, p. 555

²³ Sf. Teofilact al Bulgariei, *op. cit.*, p. 39

²⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 42

²⁵ Sf. Ioan Gură de Aur, *op. cit.*, p. 63



that the baptism of holy Spirit and fire (Luke 3, 16) is needed for that. But for the people now this baptism with water is sufficient, because it offers them the feeling and the trust that they can change their lives, opposing sin, because they have become aware of their need to become closer to God, as a purpose and fulfilment of their lives. All of Palestine is roused by this emotional thought and many go to the river Jordan to receive the baptism of repentance.

The most intense moment of John the Baptist's activity is the granting of the repentance baptism to our Saviour Christ, event which happens according to Evangelist John, the second day of the inquiring visit of the Pharisees from Jerusalem (John 1, 29). This moment is presented by all Evangelists, but each of them with different details, which, put together in their natural order, provide a complete image of the event.

The Evangelist John mentions the proclamation of Jesus' messianism by John the Baptist, during their first public meeting, before the act of the baptism: "*Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! This is he of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me.' I myself did not know him; but I came baptizing with water for this reason, that he might be revealed to Israel*" (John 1, 29-31).

The Evangelist Matthew completes the biblical narrative by presenting the dialogue that took place between them before the baptism: "*John would have prevented him, saying, 'I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?'*" But Jesus answered him, "*Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfil all righteousness.*" Then he consented" (Mt. 3, 14-15). The Evangelists Mark and Luke present directly the baptism event, pointing out not the act itself but what significantly happened right after it: "*And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, 'This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased'*" (Mt. 3, 16-17; Mark 1, 9-11). From the text's formulation, at Evangelist Mark we deduct that only Jesus sees the heavens open and the Spirit of God like a dove alighting on Him, which represents a gesture of investiture which fulfils the prophecies (Isaiah 11, 2; 42, 1; 61, 1).²⁶ The voice from the heaven appears to be addressed to him directly, as a recognition and confirmation: "*This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased*" (Mark 1, 11).

Evangelist Luke, writing his Gospel for the "*peoples*"²⁷, presents a few special aspects. The Saviour is baptised after all the people who came that day to John are baptised. The theophany happens when our Saviour was praying after the receipt of the baptism. The Holy Spirit alights on Him physically (σωματικο), in a visible way for everyone. The voice from heaven is heard confirming the Saviour's filiation in this unique posture, by the kenotic God. The words are the same as those from St. Evangelist Mark's Gospel (Luke 3, 21-22). "*The recognition of Jesus as the Son announces the adoptive filiation of the believers, a participation to that of Jesus and a consequence of the Holy Spirit's grace (Gal. 4, 6)*"²⁸

This is the peak moment of the activity of John the Baptist and the fulfilment of his mission: the proclamation of Messiah before the Jewish people that was prepared to receive Him, the confession of John regarding Him, the confirmation of His divine filiation from the Father and John, along with the alighting of the Holy Spirit on Him. "*The Son of God incarnated, although He did not need this rebirth through Baptism, because he was from the beginning born from the Spirit, accepts the Baptism for us humans, to be in this regard the first human who is baptised through water and Spirit. Through this He united the Spirit in*

²⁶ Xavier Leon-Dufour, *op. cit.*, p. 80

²⁷ Pr. prof. dr. Vasile Mihoc, Lect. dr. Daniel Mihoc, Pr. asist. Ioan Mihoc, *op. cit.*, p. 85

²⁸ Xavier Leon-Dufour, *op. cit.*, p. 80



Him in an actual way with the water which is also the support of life, this time of the life no longer subjected to death, as it is fully united with the Spirit. In this way Christ fulfilled forever all the justice through which He will cloth again all the humans who will believe.”²⁹

With John’s baptism also our Saviour was baptised, not because He needed it to be cleaned of sins, He being the God-Human, but to underline the importance and the work of the Baptism which He will establish and to reveal God to the world, The One in three folded Persons, in Whose name we should also be baptised.³⁰ *“The Saviour received the first the Holy Spirit, although He Himself was the giver of the Spirit, so that this dignity to come to us through Him and so we would have gift of bearing the Holy Spirit”.*³¹

The Saviour does as a human an act of humbleness, of submission towards the divine will, receiving the baptism of redemption which symbolizes the cleansing of sins. The dove is the most appropriate bird (the only one used as a purification sacrifice for the poor ones at the temple: Lev. 1, 14, Nr. 6, 10), to represent a loving, patient and receptive to the humans’ sorrows God.³² The Evangelist John continues the biblical narrative by mentioning the reaction of John the Baptist: *“And John testified, ‘I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’ And I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God”*” (John 1, 32-34).

Truly John the Baptist fulfils his mission by showing everyone who is The One Who he has announced since then: The One who would bring salvation to all humans. This when the Saviour exits anonymity and shows Himself to the people of Israel through the Father’s confirmation, is chronologically framed in the life of our Saviour by Evangelist Luke. Our Saviour had *“around thirty years”* (Luke 3, 23), which indicates also the age of John the Baptist at that time, who was older by six months than our Saviour.

John the Baptist did not know our Saviour, because he lived in the desert, but when He came to the river Jordan, by seeing Him, he knew in spirit that that One is the One who he had announced,³³ as he also recognised Him when he moved in the womb of Elisabeth (Luke 1, 41). He points out indirectly the lack of sin of our Saviour, by refusing initially to baptise Him, because He did not need to go through this act. Our Saviour wishes however to be baptised for the fulfilment of the future significances, knowing that the time will also come when His glory will be no longer hidden. He is referring to the justice that needs to be fulfilled, which is the Law, because the human nature was cursed because it could not fulfil the Law. *“So, because I fulfilled the others of the Law and all that I am lacking is to get baptised, do that too, I will release the human nature from the curse because that is what fits Me”.*³⁴ St. John Chrysostom notes that *“Jesus Christ did not need John’s baptism, nor another one, but the Baptism needed literary the power of Jesus Christ, because what it still lacked was the supreme good, the grace of the Holy Spirit”.*³⁵

St. John the Baptist did not have the power to offer the Holy Spirit through his baptism. Those who would get baptised by him did not know that the Holy Spirit exists

²⁹ Pr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru Stăniloae, *op. cit.*, p. 27

³⁰ Pr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru Radu, *op. cit.*, p. 514

³¹ Sf. Chiril al Alexandriei, *op. cit.*, p. 35

³² Xavier Leon-Dufour, *op. cit.*, p. 566

³³ Sf. Ioan Gură de Aur, *op. cit.*, p. 85

³⁴ Sf. Teofilact al Bulgariei, *op. cit.*, p. 27

³⁵ Sf. Ioan Gură de Aur, *op. cit.*, p. 84



(Acts 19, 2). As we observe in the John's Gospel, the Forerunner insists on the fact that he did not know our Saviour. St. John Chrysostom says that the Forerunner does in this way so that no one can consider that he makes such a confession about Him based on their kinship.³⁶ He confessed about Jesus from Nazareth that He is the Messiah prophesized by the prophets, even to his own apprentices (John 1, 35-36), indicating in this way The One that full of humbleness was about to sacrifice Himself for everyone's sins.

The mission of the Forerunner was fulfilled, as he also admits: "*but I came baptizing with water for this reason, that he might be revealed to Israel*" (John 1, 31). The well-known personality of the Forerunner represents a guarantee for his claims regarding our Saviour Christ. That One was going to grow, while he was going to shrink (John 3, 30), that is why we see that the Forerunner announces and confesses about Him to everyone. A part of his apprentices will follow now the true Teacher, God's Lamb, the Saviour of the world. He is the Groom in Who's hand the friend of the Groom (St. John the Baptist), brings the hand of His bride, His Church (Eph. 5, 23-29), that is the souls of the humans convinced by his sermon and the example of his life.³⁷

5. GOD'S CONFESSION ABOUT JOHN THE BAPTIST

A special event in the life of our Saviour is the visit of John's apprentices, in the time when their teacher was in the Herod's prison. Hearing about Jesus' deeds, John sends to Him two of his apprentices asking Him: "*'Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?'* Jesus answered them, *'Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them. And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me'*" (Mt. 11, 4-6; Luke 7, 22-23). "*Jesus had just then cured many people of diseases, plagues, and evil spirits, and had given sight to many who were blind*" (Luke 7, 20-21).

This moment arouses certain reasonings regarding what needs to be understood regarding John and his apprentices. Disbelief, impatience, or moment of conviction? St. John Chrysostom offers maybe the most appropriate and acceptable explanation regarding such a question, that stirred contradictory hypotheses over time.³⁸ St. John the Baptist confines to his apprentices a pretext doubt, so that his apprentices who were fine with their teacher's shrinking, seeing our Saviour miracles, to understand themselves that Jesus is the Messiah, and so, to follow His teachings from that moment forward. The question asked by his apprentices would express actually a misunderstanding about our Saviour, and that is that He appears as the Lamb that lifts the sins of the world and not as a vigilante God, as John the Baptist publicly announced Him, ready to snatch and punish all unfaithfulness.³⁹

Surely John knew about the sacrificial mission of our Saviour, because he named Him "*the Lamb of God*" at Jordan (John 1, 36), which naturally refers to the daily sacrifice of lambs on the temple's altar as a holocaust.⁴⁰ And also our Saviour answer confirms Him as Lamb, as God emptied of His glory (Phil. 2, 7-8), incarnated due to His love for the

³⁶ *Ibidem*

³⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 88

³⁸ St. Theofilact of Bulgaria, commentating this text, reminded also some's opinion which tied the question "*Are the one who is to come?*" to the possibility of our Saviour descent all the way to hell, therefore willing to say "*Are you the one who also comes even in hell?*". This perspective is also wrong, because the Forerunner "*being greater than the prophets, knew about Christ's crucifixion and His descent to hell*". Sf. Teofilact al Bulgariiei, *op. cit.*, p. 64

³⁹ *Noul Testament*, comentat de Î.P.S. Bartolomeu Anania, p. 20

⁴⁰ Pr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru Abrudan, Diac. Prof. Dr. Emilian Cornișescu, *op. cit.*, p. 266-267



human, to straighten him from the inside, so that anyone who believes in Him will not perish, but will have eternal life: *“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life”* (John 3, 16-17). He will also come as a Judge, when He will decide to end all times (John 5, 22), judging us as being one of us, the Son of Man. Therefore, St. John the Baptist could not doubt the messianism of our Saviour after he saw with his own eyes the alight of the Holy Spirit on Him at the river Jordan, but his apprentices, being attached to him to understand the reality, were opposed to our Saviour and His apprentices (John 3, 25-36).

For those who ask Him, our Saviour demonstrates on the spot His divine power (Luke 7, 20-21), through the deeds that were prophesized in the Old Testament and characterised Messiah activity, then He freely quotes from these prophets (Mt. 11, 6; Luke 7, 22). The texts to which He is referring to are the following:

1. Isaiah 35, 5: *“Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped”*;
2. Isaiah 61, 1: *“he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners”*;
3. Isaiah 29, 18: *“On that day the deaf shall hear the words of the scroll, and out of their gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind shall see”*;
4. Ezekiel (chap. 37) and Daniel (12, 2) speak about the resurrection of the dead as a specific messianic act.

Our Saviour’s demonstration ends with a small reprimand for the general lack of faith in Him, not just that of John’s apprentices: *“blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me”* (Luke 7, 23). From here we understand that people cannot be forced to understand reality, because the personal sins darken the eyes of the mind and only through effort the human can succeed. Many times our Saviour says: *“Whoever has ears, let him hear”* (Mt. 11, 15), that is whoever is not satisfied with a superficial explanation, but focuses his spirit and mind, he who is cleansed of sins, that one will be able to understand the divine truth. This is actually the human’s obligation. As the messianic prophecies were fulfilling in front of everyone, then, He who does all that is inevitably the Messiah! Such a conclusion should have been deducted by everyone.

After the departure of John’s apprentices, so that the witnesses would not form a wrong idea, the Saviour admits in front of everyone St. John the Baptist merits and this is the key point of all the appreciations of the last prophet of the Old Testament. Jesus says that John is not like human who has an unstable faith, changing it like a reed that bends at the slightest bow of the wind (Mt. 11, 7-8). His steadfastness is founded on the austere life that he has, which lacks soft clothes, offers and pleasures that weaken the soul. His steadfastness towards the truth and justice is observed also in the fact that now John is imprisoned because he dared to say the truth and to condemn the violence, no matter the consequences.⁴¹

“What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet” (Mt. 11, 9). These words underline the fact that the prophetic mission of John indicate the fundament of his steadfastness. He is a man truly inspired by God, His *“mouth”* towards the humans,⁴² a prophet who was also announced four centuries earlier by another prophet, Malachi (3, 1). He is more than a prophet, because, unlike the others, he did not just announce the Messiah, he also saw Him, presenting Him thus to the world. Even Malachi’s

⁴¹ Xavier Leon-Dufour, *op. cit.*, p. 554

⁴² This is a popular projection about the prophets of the Old Testament. XXX, *Studiul Vechiului Testament, pentru Institutetele teologice*, p. 215



prophecy names him the “*angel*” of God, indicating his purpose as an emissary of the divine commands to the humans,⁴³ but also the pure life that he lived, without sin, truly angelic.

The mission granted to the Forerunner encompassed the spiritual preparation of the humans for the greeting of Messiah, the baptism of redemption for the awareness of the sinful state,⁴⁴ the consequent and competent confession of the messianism of Jesus Christ, the announcing of the imminent establishment of the kingdom of heavens. The redemption aroused from John’s sermons would naturally attract the forgives of the sins by our Saviour.⁴⁵ And, to be more convincing, our Saviour recognises the following truth: St. John is the greatest man born from women, but the smallest one in the kingdom of heavens (Mt. 11, 11). This comparison does not include our Saviour too, because He is not born from a woman, that is through a natural way, having an earthly father, but He is born before the time by the Father (John 1, 1-5) and incarnated Himself through Virgin Mary.

John is born from a woman, through a natural way, bearing the guilt of the ancestral sin (Job 15, 14; 25, 4), but he is “*the corollary and the end of the Old Testament, the one who announces and prepares the kingdom of heavens, but he does not start it. He continues to be the bridge between what it was and what will be*”⁴⁶, bridge which, being organically tied to what it was, humanity without the saving grace gained from the Baptism, determines that the greatest one under the Law to be the smallest one under the grace. The Law came through Moses, but the grace and truth through Jesus Christ (John 1, 17). As conclusion, St. John is greater than all the prophets of the Old Testament, because those also prophesized about Messiah Who was about to come, while he is also contemporary and forerunner.

Our Saviour continues: “*From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force. For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John came; and if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come*” (Mt. 11, 12-14). So, the kingdom of heavens is gained through struggle, a struggle with one’s own weaknesses and vices, but also the struggle with the temptations offered by the devil. The one who insists, persevere and take it by “*assault*”, that is they dedicate themselves entirely to this action, those are also the ones who conquer it. St. Ap. Paul said: “*So I do not run (for the prize) aimlessly, nor do I box as though beating the air; but I punish my body and enslave it, so that after proclaiming to others I myself should not be disqualified*” (I Cor. 9, 26-27).

St. John ends the cycle of the prophets of the Old Testament, but also the period when the Jews were guiding themselves by the Law, because our Saviour Christ is the fulfilment and the end of the Law. The prophets announced and the sacrifices prefigured Messiah, but now all are fulfilled in the person of the Son of God, Who incarnated Himself and offers a new perspective to the human. The Messiah has a Forerunner whom was known by all those around our Saviour and who deserves all the consideration and admiration, being associated by our Saviour with the prophet Elijah, whose coming before the great and frightening Day of the Lord was prophesized by also Malachi (3, 23-24). He would have the role to turn around the hearths of the parents towards their sons and the hearths of the sons towards their parents, so that God would not come and strike the country with course. This role was fulfilled by St. John the Baptist himself through divine command.

⁴³ Pr. Dr. Ioan Mircea, *op. cit.*, p. 259

⁴⁴ Xavier Leon-Dufour, *op. cit.*, p. 80

⁴⁵ Sf. Teofilact al Bulgariei, *op. cit.*, p. 65

⁴⁶ *Noul Testament*, comentat de Î.P.S. Bartolomeu Anania, p. 20



The Jews, not understanding the humble coming of Jesus from Nazareth, expected a triumphal coming of the Messiah, associated with the judgment of the whole world (Isaiah 3, 13-14; Joel 2, 1-14). In their perspective, they believed that the prophet Elijah must first come to prepare those needed for such a kingdom, but such an emissary had been sent in the person of St. John the Baptist (Mt. 11, 14). In spite of his mission of overwhelming importance, the Jews judged him arbitrarily, humanely, evaluating him based on his way of living, a hyperbolic person who seeks exaltation by isolation in the desert, precisely because he has a demon: "*For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon'*" (Mt. 11, 18). And the Son of Man, Who behaves like a normal man, on the contrary, they considered him insatiable: "*the Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds*" (Mt. 11, 19). Beyond people's opinions and appreciations, God's wisdom proves its validity over time, through its deeds, effects and consequences. The Jews are unstable in their appreciation, like the children who do not like the songs of mourning, nor those of the whistle, that is, neither John's harshness, nor the freedom and joy full of the Saviour's love.⁴⁷ St. Theophilact offers yet another reason why the Pharisees and Scholars denied Jesus's messianism. Taking as a pretext the prophecy of Malachi (3:23), which announced the coming of Elijah before the coming of the Messiah, they did not know that there are two comings of Christ. The first coming – a humble one, to which John was a forerunner, and the second coming in glory, to judge the world. Before this end, Elijah will come, "*who will put all in place*", which means that all the Jews who will be obedient will return to the faith in Messiah.⁴⁸

The association between St. John the Baptist and the Prophet Elijah will be repeated by the Saviour also on the night of the Transfiguration, on mount Tabor (Mt. 17, 1-13). After the wonderful event, in which they were able to observe the prophet Elijah himself, Peter, James and John, descending down the mountain with our Saviour, they asked Him: "*Why, then, do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?' He replied, 'Elijah is indeed coming and will restore all things; but I tell you that Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him, but they did to him whatever they pleased. So also the Son of Man is about to suffer at their hands.'* Then the disciples understood that he was speaking to them about John the Baptist" (Mt. 17, 10-13). This occasion again emphasizes the spiritual stature of the last prophet of the Old Testament, a man devoted to the service of God until his own death. A narrow-mindedness clouded by sin could not comprehend the truth about the mission which St. John fulfilled. For this reason, the Jews judged him in various ways, from a superficial judgement to a total disregard, all the way to its killing, a crime to which no one from that time opposed, which will draw the fault over all. Saint John's sermon would condemn the spiritual void of the Jewish people, the lack of understanding the true meaning of the law of Moses, dry ritualism and the entire moral decline. In this preaching for faith, justice and truth, wishing to prepare the souls of the people for the kingdom of heavens which was about to be founded, without looking at the face of man, St. John also criticized the tetrarch Herod who, besides other evil acts, had taken as his wife Irodiada, the wife of his brother Philip (4 BC - 34 AD),⁴⁹ one of the sons of Herod the Great, the tetrarch of Ituri and of Trachonitis, Gaulanida, Auranida and Batana (Luke 3, 1).⁵⁰ This marriage did not fit the requirements of

⁴⁷ Sf. Teofilact al Bulgariei, *op. cit.*, p. 67

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 105

⁴⁹ Pr. prof. dr. Vasile Mihoc, Lect. dr. Daniel Mihoc, Pr. asist. Ioan Mihoc, *op. cit.*, p. 22

⁵⁰ Pr. Dr. Ioan Mircea, *op. cit.*, p. 234



the Levira, but was an adultery, setting a bad example for the morality of the people. Due to the sustained reproaches of St. John the Baptist, who accused him openly before the people and undermined his authority and, listening only to his wife's intrigues, who hated John and wished his death, Herod imprisons him, even though he acknowledged in his hearth that he is right (Mt. 14, 5; Luke 3, 19-20; Mark 6, 17-20).

The occasion for the murder came up at a good moment, on the birthday of the tetrarch Herod, celebrated with his governors, the captains of the army and the eminent ones from Galilee (Mark 6, 21), in the city of Macherus, located two leagues from the Asphalt Lake (Dead Sea),⁵¹ near the border with Arabia, with whose king, Aretas, was at war with.⁵² The dance of Salome, the drunkenness of the drinks, the reckless promise before the witnesses, all these signs of moral decadence together led together to the beheading of John the Baptist (Mt. 14, 3-11; Mark 6, 17-28). St. Theophilact makes the following comparison: "*Herod represents the Jewish people who took a woman, that is, the deceitful and unbridled glory, whose daughter dances even now at the Jews. Her deceitful dance is the knowledge of the Scriptures, because they deceive themselves by believing that they can know the Scriptures, which is not true, because they cut off John's head, which is the word of the prophecy, and the Head of the prophecy, that is, Christ, they did not receive. Therefore, though they have the prophetic word, this is without the Head, that is, without Christ*".⁵³

6. THE LAST PROPHET OF THE OLD TESTAMENT'S REVELATION

St. John the Baptist had to close a stage of the supernatural revelation. The Forerunner was not only prophesied by some prophets of the Old Testament, but, not at all coincidental, resembles some of them, both in the spiritual stature and in the repetition of certain fundamental themes from the prophetic "*repertoire*", which are concisely resumed, but expressively, because they are still valid.

At St. John the Baptist we do not find the theme of idolatry so vehement in some pre-exilic prophets (Isaiah 1, 21; Jeremiah 3, 1-13), but it contains the fundamental aspect of the altered relationship between the human and God, which consists in the existence of sin, more or less aware of them. This is why his fundamental theme is repentance, as a need for the cleansing of souls through awareness, regret, soul pain, a decision of rectification and concrete gesture in confessing and casting out sins, to receive the concrete act of cleansing and renewal - baptism with water.

St. John the Baptist resembles best the prophet Amos of the eighth century BC,⁵⁴ under the following aspects: preaching sobriety; whipping the vices and announcing the punishments.⁵⁵ Indeed, we distinguish a certain sobriety in the prophetic stature of St. John, in many respects, starting with the first impression he creates. His clothing is of a poor man, but also of a penitent, a harsh cloth which carves the skin of the body in an attitude of whipping the instincts and sinful thoughts, which spring from laxity caused by the benefits of life. The sobriety is also expressed by his food, offered by God from nature. Honey and locusts mean unimproved food through variety, preparation, heating, or seasoning that enchants the taste. It is a simple, natural, common food, but sufficient for the man preoccupied with spirituality. And, as a result of these two aspects, the words of the

⁵¹ Protos Olivian Bindiu, *Cuvânt la nașterea Sf. Ioan Botezătorul*, în *Glasul Bisericii*, nr. 3, 1988, p. 33

⁵² Pr. prof. dr. Vasile Mihoc, Lect. dr. Daniel Mihoc, Pr. asist. Ioan Mihoc, *op. cit.*, p. 20

⁵³ Sf. Teofilact al Bulgariei, *op. cit.*, p. 211

⁵⁴ *Studiul Vechiului Testament, pentru Institutetele teologice*, p. 269

⁵⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 272



Forerunner are full of sobriety, both through concision and message. "*Repent!*" he called continually, for a time, in the desert of Judea, emphasizing this fundamental spiritual need for the salvation of humans.

The theme of repentance is also found in the missionary program of other prophets, with certain nuances. The prophet Ezekiel points out the need for repentance as an exhortation from Yahweh to his people, the return from unrighteousness by discarding unbelief (18, 30). Hosea urges the people to find appropriate prayers for the expression of repentance to replace the blood sacrifices with the sincerity of the heart (14, 13). And Joel warns that only repentance could bring a blessing on the descendants, as an offering and a sacrifice before the Lord (2, 14).

Repentance requires concrete deeds (Jonah 3, 10), with the confession of sin (Zechariah 1, 6), being a true return from sin to the true God (Jude 5, 19). Repentance wipes away sin by fulfilling the will of God (Ezra 10, 11), ensuring steadfastness in his ways (2 Samuel 22, 22). God, in His wisdom and in the desire to continually pour His mercy upon the humans, does not hasten to punish the mistakes of the humans, but gives them time, approaching "*slowly*" toward them, "*giving them space for repentance*" (Proverbs 12, 10).

And as an effervescent expression of repentance we can observe the example of David (2 Samuel 12, 16), or the deep prayer of Manasseh (1, 8). The theme of repentance in the midst of judgment also plays an important role in the prayer of King Solomon,⁵⁶ at the sanctification of the temple (1 Kings 8, 33-53).

The profound devotion of the Forerunner to his mission can be found in the lives of other prophets. Isaiah was killed by the command of King Manasseh, according to a tradition, through the cutting with the saw.⁵⁷ Jeremiah is the concrete example of the martyr prophet, who upholds the cause of his mission at any cost, resorting insistently to symbolic acts to persuade the audience (chap. 18-20), beyond the force of his word. He struggles with the opposition of the false prophets, with the diplomatic wishes of the kings of his time and with the divisive from God idolatry, intertwined with the moral neglect of the people. A powerless and dramatic assistance to a disaster, he himself dying, according to a rabbinical variant, from the hand of an idolatrous Jew in Egypt.⁵⁸

The devotion of the prophetic cause, the complete dedication in the mission, regardless of the reactions of the people, or consequences, is also encountered in the mission finally accepted by Iona, at the risk of his own life, in the midst of the Assyrian unbelievers (3, 3-10). And the obedience of the faithful human to God, especially in assuming the mission to which he is called, is best expressed by the prophet Amos: "*If the lion roars, who will not be afraid? And if the Lord speaks, who will not prophesize?*"(3, 8).

John the Baptist also resembles Elijah the Tishvite in several respects. He invoked fire from heaven to prove the presence of the true God in creation (1 Kings 18, 36-39), St. John showed the world our Saviour Christ himself, the Son of God incarnate, The One who was to baptize with fire (Luke 3, 16). Both of them had to deal with the unbelief and vicious abandonment of the Jews from the demands of their vital communion with God, wearing approximately the same clothing and creating the same image before the audience.⁵⁹ They both live the mystery of human's encounter with God in the superlative way, within the

⁵⁶ *Introducere în studiul Vechiului Testament, Pentateuhul și cărțile istorice*, Ed. Casa cărții, Oradea, 2016, p. 392

⁵⁷ *Studiul Vechiului Testament, pentru Institutetele teologice*, p. 223

⁵⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 235

⁵⁹ *Introducere în studiul Vechiului Testament, Pentateuhul și cărțile istorice*, p. 393



limits of human endurance and dialogue with Him (1 Kings 19, 10). Both face the opposition of the representatives of the world power who do not support criticism and react harshly, trying to eliminate the opponent (1 Kings 19, 1-3; Mt. 14, 1-11).

CONCLUSIONS

The Saviour's statement: "*there has not risen from among those born of women any greater than John the Baptist*" (Mt. 11, 11), expresses a great truth combined with a feeling of admiration and gratitude for the one who was a very special man, an angel in the body, a prophet who has completely fulfilled his entrusted mission. The forerunner came like a flame before the sun, being foretold in the Old Law by the unextinguished flame burning in the first part of the tent.⁶⁰ The Jews enjoyed his presence and activity for a short time, and then left him. That is why the Saviour also says of him, "*He was a burning and shining lamp, and you were willing to rejoice for a while in his light*" (John 5, 35).

Like the One who incarnated Himself for our salvation, the birth and life of Saint John the Baptist were arranged by God in His great wisdom, "*For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?*" (Rom. 11,34). The divine providence was received greatly in the soul and life of this man, giving us a sublime example of faith and devotion in the person of whom was to be called in the history of the Church, the Forerunner and the Baptizer of the Lord.

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⁶⁰ Sf. Chiril al Alexandriei, *op. cit.*, p. 12



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