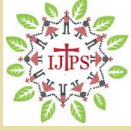


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Preface

The 14th issue of the International Journal of Theology, Philosophy and Science (May 2024) contains scientific research articles centered on the subjects of Philosophy, Theology, and Science.

The first article is *THE IMAGE OF GOD IN THE HUMAN BEING OR THE IDENTITY OF MAN AS A PERSON*, signed by Ph.D. Professor Marin BUGIULESCU. *The person presents himself in the complex context of the bonds of love and care manifested towards himself and other different persons, who share the same common nature in which the divine presence mysteriously dwells.*

The next article has the title: *SINNERS AS BEASTS: SOME EARLY PATRISTIC VIEWS OF ANIMALS IN ECCLESIASTES*. In this essay Ph.D. Professor Marc GRENIER proposes an initial attempt to decipher early patristic views on animals by critically examining the responses of five eminent early Christian thinkers. *The general patristic view was that since animals are not rational, differ in language and speech, and don't have souls, among other key differences, life for them terminates on earth, access to the afterlife denied. Significantly, these claims about animals were made largely without a comprehensive exploration of other biblical texts pertinent to the issue of animal afterlife.* The next study, by Assistant Lecturer Ph.D. Nicușor MORLOVA, Florina BĂLAN, Corneliu-Dragoș BĂLAN, Nicușor TUCĂ, has title *THE CONFLUENCE BETWEEN CHRISTIANITY AND NEOPLATONISM: TRIADODOLOGY AND ANTHROPOLOGY. Was Christianity Hellenized or was philosophy Christianized? It is a dilemma that has sparked numerous discussions and conflicting opinions to this day.* *ARGUMENTS REGARDING THE EXISTENCE OF GOD IN THE WORK MONOLOGION* is the article presented by Georgiana-Cerasela NIȚU.

THE TRANSHUMANISM – PARADIGM OF SECULARIZATION AN ORTHODOX PERSPECTIVE is the scientific research presented by Cătălin-Dumitru VOȘLOBAN. *The phenomenology of secularization is in a continuous change, generated by the alterability of all main aspects of life: the socio-political, cultural, and human psycho-physiological environment, all these being affected by the technology and lifestyle specific to the 21st century.* Francesca RIOTTO, Marcello LEONELLO, Giovanni FAZIO proposes for our readers the article entitled: *THE THOUGHT OF THOMAS AQUINAS. A SWORD OF DAMOCLES ON THE RADIATIVE PROCESS.*

JURISPRUDENCE OF CONFESSION SECRET AS LEGISLATIVE BIAS, is the article of our Journal, presented by Ph.D. Ionuț VLĂDESCU. *Starting the scientific approach from the term jurisprudence applied to the secret of confession in the mystery of confession, we find ourselves faced with a major problem, namely: that of the dichotomy of defining the canon by the institution of the Church.* In next paper Nicolae GAVRILĂ presents the theme *OLD AGE AND YOUTH IN THE MYSTERY OF MAN'S PERSONAL RECONCILIATION WITH GOD* - the view pint of Eastern spirituality about life and death. In the last paper research, Bogdan-Georgian TUDOR proposes to our readers some patristic *REFLECTIONS ON CREATION: THE "NORMATIVE MAN" THROUGH THE LENS OF SAINT GREGORY OF NYSSA'S ANTHROPOLOGY.*

The scientific articles presented in the current issue of *International Journal of Theology, Philosophy and Science* is very actual for our society and examine the importance of argument found in the theology, philosophy and sciences.

Prof. Constantin Denis Dănuț BOBOC,
IFIASA, ROMANIA



THE IMAGE OF GOD IN THE HUMAN BEING OR THE IDENTITY OF MAN AS A PERSON

Ph.D. Marin BUGIULESCU,

Member of 'Dumitru Stăniloae' Scientific and Interdisciplinary
Research Centre, 'Valahia' University, Târgoviște,
ROMANIA

E-mail: m_bugiulescu@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

Man by his being is par excellence a dynamic organism, towards the eternal. Man is fundamentally penetrated by the mystery of love that pushes people from the inside towards a natural communion, which reveals the personal and conscious existence in time and space, incorporated in an indissociable psychosomatic unit, with immeasurable psychic depth; free, master, rational, creator of holiness (man sanctifies the place), knower, etc. These are the attributes that eloquently reveal the true constitution of man. The eternal value of the human person, the uniqueness of his being realized through the unity of contrasts that man represents as body and soul, shows that the person is not brought into the world by God in isolation, as a uniform abstract achievement, separated from nature, from being. The person presents himself in the complex context of the bonds of love and care manifested towards himself and towards other persons different from him, but who share the same common nature in which the divine presence mysteriously dwells.

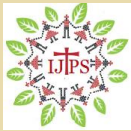
Keywords: *Persona; communion; spirituality; Christian theology analysis.*

INTRODUCTION

Following the teachings of the Apostle Paul, the Holy Fathers tell us about the love of God, Who makes man in His own image (Genesis 1:26), thus revealing the One who is His Image, that is, Christ himself. Man is not only in the image of God, but he can become the abode of the Holy Trinity, acquiring the likeness; the house of our soul being prepared by the Holy Spirit for Her coming. The human soul is the icon of the Trinity. Through man, who is the image of God, we know the image of the Son (or the Son) and through the Image, the Father Himself, but also through the fact that people can live in communication, with each other and between them and God, we can deduce our likeness to God and the possibility of the indwelling of the Trinity in us. Let us be sons, but not like the Son, gods but not like Himself, let us be like the Father, but not Father (Genesis 4,32).

The renowned Romanian professor of Theology, Father Dumitru Stăniloae shows that a God without love, without eternal attention towards someone, is not God. Our God is a God who pours out, who communicates, who wants to "share"¹. The Holy Trinity, as the existence of supreme love, is the model and target of man. If there had not been a Son of God, communion with the Father and the Holy Spirit, communication of love, there would not have been the desire to give birth to other people, who would love the Father, and He would love them as his own sons.

¹ Dumitru Stăniloae, *Sfânta Treime sau la început a fost iubirea*, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 2002, p. 47.



1. CHRISTIAN ANTHROPOLOGY

Christian anthropology rests on the two basic coordinates revealed in Holy Scripture: Man is in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1, 26). The man having the image of God is able to develop freely and consciously towards the likeness of God, by this development is understood as a progressive communication horizontally, that is, within social relations and a rise towards God vertically.

Saint John the Apostle says that our God is love, it is communication of love in Himself, but also with man, with His entire creation. Thus, God created man out of love, in love and for love. Man, as the image of God, constantly strives towards His Image, his existence is a response to the divine call.

In the biblical description of creation, God took dust from the earth, made man and breathed into him the breath of life, and man became a living being (Genesis 2, 7). Through His breath, God planted in man the biological life, but also the spiritual life, of understanding and communication with the divinity.

Father Stăniloae marks this moment, as the one in which God puts in man, the understanding and free soul forever. From this moment, God enters into communion with the soul implanted in man, emerging the communion of man with his Creator. Through the soul, man gets to know God, feels His call and can respond to Him. Surrendering to God's breath of life gives birth to a "you" of God in man, who is "His image", because this "you" can also say "I" but above all it can say to God "You".²

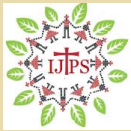
The breath of God is His own Spirit, which at the same time becomes the principle of our existence. Man is truly man, because he has the breath of God's Spirit in him, and he is not truly free unless this Spirit inspires him. The Holy Spirit makes man the image of God. The image of God in man is a dynamic essence, since the fundamental attribute of man is freedom. God is Spirit and where God's spirit is, there is freedom (II Corinthians 3, 17).

Based on his freedom, man can live in Jesus Christ and then he is a spiritual human being or he can live apart from Him and then he is either a carnal man subject to biological experiences or a spiritual man who progresses only in the spiritual, cultural, but not in the spiritual. The freedom with which the human person is endowed is the secret of love, its guarantee, therefore, man must choose for himself what he wants to be: a man alienated from life or a son of God. The state of distinction of the man created by God as the "crown of creation" is indicated by the biblical account of Genesis (1, 26) "And God said: let us make man in our image and likeness. . . ." The image and likeness of God in man become existential requirements for participation in the divine life.

Because man is the image of God by nature and in an uncreated way, he must be man by the good will of God, in a created way. God by nature is love, kindness. He does not create man for any other reason than because He is good. The perfection of His goodness is shown in the fact that He brings man from non-existence to existence and overwhelms him with all goods. God made humanity partaker of all goods.

In His being, God is uncontained, unnamed, unknown, but through His uncreated energies He is felt, known and named. The same thing happens with man, we know the human being only in its manifestations, but what man is in his being, we cannot know. All these energies manifested by the human being come from the depths of our being, but the being is more than these energies, since we cannot know it in its essence.

² Dumitru Stăniloae, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, vol I, Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1991, p. 47.



As the image of the Triune God in persons, man is a personal being, permanently in dialogue with a personal God, who revealed himself in the Old Testament through the prophets, through the pillar of fire, through the burning stake that was not consumed and in The New Testament through His Son Incarnated in the Person of Jesus Christ, so through a divine-human person.

This dialogue is meant to last continuously, He gives man a meaning. The "image" of man gives him the power of conscious and free communication with God, and the "likeness" means becoming the image, deification, actualized through the interpenetration of grace and freedom, through obedience and free love. Thus, the image is the starting point of this dialogue, and "resemblance" offers man the possibility of continuous ontological fulfillment.³

God who created us in His image is a personal God, He is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, He is God One in Being and triune in Person. Man is a person because he reflects his archetype, his model. The fact of being a person is the most essential quality of the image of God in man.

2. PERSON, COMMUNION AND SPIRITUALITY

The person has spirituality as a fundamental characteristic, but it is realized only in communication. Man must be understood as a personal subject, capable of asking questions and giving answers only in the personal communion in which he finds his true identity.

This personal relationship is inscribed in man from creation by the fact that God, his Creator is a triune God in persons. Creation itself is the act of the interpersonal relationship between God the Father and the Holy Spirit. So man is created precisely to reflect these personal relationships, to manifest himself in personal relationships with his peers. Likeness is precisely the realization of the image through man's personal relationships with God and his fellow men. The human being is realized in and through people, through dialogue, exchange of words, in understanding and love for each other. Due to the fact that they are special, they complement each other. Thus, that "maintaining and updating the unity of being and the variety of people is done through communication that moves towards more and more free communion between people. Man, as a created being, but the highest among created existences, can say "I am" only in relation to "you are", "he is", framed in "we are"⁴. This fact does not show that when we approach each other through communication and love, we resemble the Holy Trinity, as our prototype.

The communion of persons with each other is the condition of the encounter with God. Through communion we discover more and more God in ourselves and in each other. The more people are united in God, the more they communicate with each other through love and the more they are united with each other, the more they resemble the Holy Trinity. Significant for the community character of the image, of the person, is the fact that in the book of Creation, it speaks of "image" in relation to the creation of man as a pair. "And God made man in His own image; in the image of God he made him male and female. "Genesis 1, 27. The creation of the first human person by the Person of God, as well as the second one, but from the first person, reveals to us the dyadic dimension of man's constitutive love.

God gave man the power to love and an ability to make him worthy of being loved, through the uniqueness of each one. Father Stăniloae said: "I can love if I want to endlessly

³ Dumitru Stăniloae, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, p. 292.

⁴ Dumitru Stăniloae, *Chipul nemuritor al lui Dumnezeu*, p. 403



another person, because through my union with God and through the power given to me by Him, I can extend and renew my love."⁵

God's love for us is a call and a help to deepen his image in us, to make us like him, and love can only be answered with love. Our response to love is a joy for God, but not a necessary love but a joy springing from love, because "the heavens were not created in the image of God, nor the moon, nor the sun, nor the beauty of the stars, nothing that we see in creation, but only man, image and likeness of beauty, imprint of the true divinity, vessel of the happy life, seal of the true light, towards which, having your eyes fixed, you become what she is and you will imitate by the brilliance of your own purity, on The one that is already reflected in you."⁶

The image of the human person, as an ontological structure sealed by love, tends towards communion, and similarity is the activation of this structure. God did not create a world forced to love him, but creates it with the risk that it will not respond to His love, that is, through an act of humility, which can be considered a sacrifice in relation to His omnipotence. In time and space, man discovered that the first and last argument for the existence of God and his existence, as the image of God, is the love that the Holy Apostle Paul says never dies.

3. SIN- THE FAILURE OF MAN BROKEN FROM COMMUNION WITH GOD

Man as a person, created by the divine person in His image, is endowed with freedom. According to the classic definition, freedom is related to the faculty of choice. Saint Maximus the Confessor, however, states the opposite: the need to choose is a precursor to true freedom. True freedom is a total drive directed towards God, towards good, without knowing any sign of question or hesitation. Man united with God, follows the good spontaneously, choice no longer conditions his freedom. "In its highest form, freedom is an activity that produces its own reasons and supports them. Similarly, the act of a Saint surpasses any preference".⁷

Thus, freedom as a sign of spiritual power and holiness is not only a gift, but also a result of one's own effort. Giving man this gift, God wanted it to grow in its freedom, to strengthen it through effort and its own will.

The commandment given to the first man, itself called for his freedom, God thereby asking him to remain free and grow in freedom. "In this way, creation is a help given to man to live in relational harmony, in which he himself was created. The moment man, as a created hypostasis, decides to stop listening to what God told him, he removes God from the first place, thus attacking the hierarchy of relational truth. The consequence is that all relationships immediately break down. Suddenly the created no longer reminds man of God, but will be presented to him as food for his self-oriented appetite.

In the beginning man talked with God and to God, then after accepting the temptation, he talks to the snake about God, thinking about Him, but without God. Man, created as a relational, dialogic reality, cannot do without dialogue, it is very important who is his interlocutor because man becomes what he loves, desires, contemplates and if his interlocutor is replaced by an object, or by himself, man will become more and more like him. "Man's temptation is to do, like God, as the serpent tells him, and as he wants: you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Genesis 3, 5).

⁵ Dumitru Stăniloae, *Studii de Teologie Dogmatică*, p. 226..

⁶ Pr. Vasile Răducă, *Antropologia Sfântului Grigorie de Nyssa*, IBMOR, București, 1996, p. 110.

⁷ Paul Evdochimov, *Înnoirea spiritului*, Editura Pandora, București, 1997 p. 23.



Father Dumitru Stăniloae identifies disobedience as the formal cause of man's fall from God: "sin is disobedience, leaving the connection with God who has life in Him and clinging to created things, which cannot give true life".⁸

Through this act, man internally breaks away from God, interrupts the dialogue of love. He no longer answers to God, believing that by this he affirms his freedom. But this act was the beginning of selfish closure in itself, man becoming his own slave. Man is truly free, only if he is also free to himself. The ontological structure of the image of God in man bears the seal of love. Sin is an act within love, a wound of it that produces suffering.

Making himself a transgressor of obedience, man turns away from the love of God, towards himself and towards material things. Separated from the love of God, he separates his knowledge of love, of good, for the purpose of his affirmation. Being in communion with God, man knows good and evil. "In love there is a tendency to know through the love of the other and with his love".⁹

The alienation from communion with God, of the human person, darkens his "image", but cannot cancel it. Man keeps the image of his Creator, but he can no longer step on the path of likeness. St. Gregory Palamas, declares that, the image remained, but the man lost his stability, which is one with the likeness. Paradoxical is the fact that, although it is an image, it cannot manifest itself steadily as an image, clearly, but is permeated by a certain ambiguity, duplicity.

In other words, Saint Gregory of Nyssa affirms the same fact: "through sin, man does not lose his image as an ontological fact of his being, but the possibility to make functional the gifts with which God has endowed him and to receive the beauty of the prototype because of evil which covered the image like mud. The image remains whole, but, it remains ineffective, because of the destruction of the ability to resemble God, although existing, the image is silenced."¹⁰

This silence and duplicity of the image of man, which mirrored the image of God before the fall, is the consequence of alienation from the life-giving breath of God's Spirit. The Spirit of God, which merged with man's freedom without canceling it, but leading it towards God, is removed by man precisely in the name of freedom. Man affirms his autonomy, autonomy through which he wants to be free and master of himself, of those around him and of God. Spirit is the true freedom, but man tries to be free, losing his freedom and enslaving himself to his passions.

Man's passions and passions will support his claim to be an autonomous person, distancing him from God and closing him in himself. The body overshadows the soul through its selfish desires, reducing the sensitivity of the conscience and therefore the transparency for God and for fellow humans.

But, even if the voice of conscience is suppressed, man does not lose his quality as a responsible being, towards God and towards his fellow men.

"Adam cried out in lamentation: Woe is me! He who was once the king of all God's creatures, now I have become a slave, by a lawless counsel. Christian teaching claims that through the fall of God's love, creation, from the transparent curtain of love between us and God, became an opaque wall, to some extent, no longer being a reason for union, but for separation between us. People have distorted and covered each other's image with unlove and malice. The earth was also defiled by the disobedience of the first man and his

⁸ Dumitru Stăniloae, *Teologia Dogmatică*, vol I, p. 468.

⁹ Marko Rupnik, *Cuvinte despre Om. Persoana-ființă a Paștelui*, p. 164.

¹⁰ Pr. Vasile Răducă, *Antropologia Sfântului Grigorie de Nyssa*, p. 223.



descendants, sometimes to the point of being stained with the blood of crimes, of wars generated by their selfishness, envy and greed. The exclusively desired world covered the brother and the God of conscience."¹¹

No longer recognizing God as the Father, man no longer recognizes his fellow man as a brother. Oriented towards himself and towards the earth, man forgets to look up and around, or to say "you", "we" without interest or envy.

Far from the source of life, man feels "empty", vulnerable. The fear of death, unknown before, takes over man's life. With God, near Him, man felt that he was sharing Life, which he is still looking for, but in the material things that cannot be given to him. This state of man, contrary to his nature, in which he seeks and desires life, but moving in a wrong direction, is the starting point of the Holy Fathers in the teaching of "clothes of leather". So that man could survive, God clothed him through His mercy, "in clothes of skin" according to the biblical story. (Genesis 3, 21). These were added to man after the fall, and do not represent a constitutive element of his original nature. Because, "proper and conforming to nature is for humans the life similar to the divine nature".¹² "Leather clothes", according to the Holy Fathers, express biological mortality, considered by them, a second nature of man after breaking the commandment. But it is not about death, but about mortality, about a life in death. Saint Gregory of Nyssa explains this fact to us in Interpretation of the Singing of Songs: "mortality entered the succession of the born. That is why a dead life was handed down to us, life itself killing us in a way."¹³

Mortality is characteristic of the irrational nature, and man dressing with it, puts on this alien nature, living from now on its life and attributes. This life imposed by his new state is dead or irrational, because it is material. It refers to the entire psychosomatic organism of man, by no means exclusively to the body, nor is it identified with it. Psychic functions also became, together with bodily functions, "corporeal", forming, according to Saint Gregory of Nyssa, alongside the body. "the covering of the heart. . . the fleshly garment of the old man."¹⁴ Panayotis Nellas, identifies as the content of the "leather clothes": the cultivation of the land, the professions, the sciences, the fine arts, politics, all the activities and functions through which man lives in this world. "Leather clothes" have a bi-form character, being on the one hand, a consequence of sin, as a degradation of the "image of God" in man; and on the other hand, they are effects of God's wise and loving economy, being a new garment thanks to which man survives in the new improper conditions, generated by his fall. Breaking communion with God, man moves away from true life, becoming familiar with death, which is equivalent to breaking primordial communion and alienation from good. Two paths are now open to man, unknown before: "Behold, life and death are before men, and whatever they like will be given to them." (Meaning of Is Sir. 15, 17). Man's disobedience produces a fundamental deviation, which Saint Irenaeus of Lyon considers necessary to make man aware of his limits and his great calling.

The new state, contrary to human nature, is not a punishment of God's justice. Adam's slavery is the natural consequence of his defeat. The laws of creation continue to function, but in a disorderly manner, the Greek theologian Nellas tells us, and involves man in this overturned functionality, tormenting him. "The punishment that the subjugated justice

¹¹ Dumitru Stăniloae, *Teologia Dogmatică*, vol I, p 484.

¹² Panayotis Nellas, *Omul-animal îndumnezeit*, trad și studiu introductiv diacon Ioan Ică jr., Ed. Deisis, Sibiu 1999, p. 25.

¹³ Pr. Vasile Răducă, *Antropologia Sfântului Grigorie de Nyssa*, p. 251.

¹⁴ Panayotis Nellas, *Omul-animal îndumnezeit*, p. 29.



of creation brings upon man would be eternal, if the justice and goodness of God had not intervened to correct the justice of creation, transforming with love for people, internally, the "punishment" into a "cure". Thus, healing the wound and destroying "the disgrace that is sin".¹⁵ Suffering and death come against sin, and God allowed them not as a punishment, but rather as a cure for someone who got sick, St Nicholas Cabasilas tells us.

St. Gregory of Nyssa sees biological death as following the first one stemming from the breaking of communion with God and understands it as a "cleansing of evil. "If the first one is created by man, the second one is imposed like a cure for the first one: "so that the sin that has become us in a certain co-natural way, does not become eternal, the present vessel falls apart in death through better care; so that after the evil will be corrected, human nature will be reconstituted in the life restored from the beginning, without being mixed with evil".¹⁶

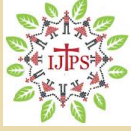
The human person as the image of God is a great mystery, it is the mystery of the divine seal on the earthly human nature, which is revealed only after a purification and cleansing of passions that illuminates and establishes the mind in the above, having as its target and daily virtue the virtue, in order to acquire salvation by appropriating the reconciliation made by Christ's sacrifice, which restores the harmony lost through sin, harmony supported by the unifying atmosphere of grace achieved in connection with God. Through the power of knowledge and the freedom to choose, man tends towards God, but he can only know Him in the harmonic relationship, and by knowing Him, he cannot surpass Him, because this knowledge is absolute and divine. Man knows the truth through cooperation with God, through the working power of grace given by Christ, but he does not use this power only as a tool that works alone and forces it to work. He freely performs everything that leads him to salvation, salvation being the very will of God who deifies, being realized in the relational connection both with God and with fellow men, which makes humanity to be likened to the existence first given by the breath of the Spirit Saint. The fulfillment of creation according to the image and its likeness to the Creator can only be done in a direct relationship with Christ, who becomes like us so that we can become like Him, a relationship revealed through the work of the Holy Spirit.

CONCLUSION

Man, a psycho-physical being, created in the image of God, has in his reason both the divine origin and the goal towards which he must go, receiving as a crowning glory, full existence. Man is the image of the Son of God, as the Son is the image of the Father, who by naming him, he becomes enlightened according to the image of the Son, and simultaneously according to the Image of the Holy Trinity. The creation of man in the image implies the natural implementation in his nature of all the necessary means by which to become like God. The image is so constitutive of man, that "creation after the image" actually means participation in the Archetype. Man and creation are theological existences, which participate through uncreated divine energies, which cross the deified humanity of Christ and through Him the whole man, to God. Man is an iconic being. A living icon full of divine beauty, which constantly leads its existence in dependence on its own nature, in which the Spirit of God dwells as in a temple, which encourages interpersonal communion, dependence that is achieved in a dialogical and loving relationship.

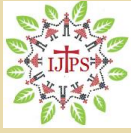
¹⁵ Panayotis Nellas, *Omni-animal îndumnezeit*, p. 58.

¹⁶ Pr. Vasile Răducă, *Antropologia Sfântului Grigorie de Nyssa*, p. 228.



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SINNERS AS BEASTS: SOME EARLY PATRISTIC VIEWS OF ANIMALS IN ECCLESIASTES

Ph.D. Professor Marc GRENIER,
Chang Jung Christian University,
TAIWAN,
Email: meshiya121453@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

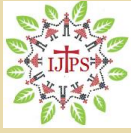
This essay constitutes an initial attempt to decipher early patristic views on animals by critically examining the responses of five eminent early Christian thinkers to the man-beast references contained in Ecclesiastes 3: 18-21: Thaumaturgus (213 – 270 AD), Didymus the Blind (313 – 398 AD), Chrysostom (347 – 407 AD), Jerome (347 – 420 AD), and Augustine (354 – 430 AD). Salient patterns of interpretation are identified and discussed in comparative terms contrasting ancient Hebraic and conventional biblical views with early patristic views as needed. Overall, the general finding here is that most of these early Christian thinkers (save Augustine) were heavily inclined not to interpret these verses contextually nor in Qoheleth's own terms nor within the range of ancient Hebraic theology and cosmology. Instead, they tended to substitute Qoheleth's terms and rewrite verses to arrive at entirely different meanings, concluding that Qoheleth was contrasting righteous human beings with depraved, wicked, sinful, or faithless people, not animals per se. The general patristic view was that since animals are not rational, differ in language and speech, and don't have souls, among other key differences, life for them terminates on earth, access to the afterlife denied. Significantly, these claims about animals were made largely without a comprehensive exploration of other biblical texts pertinent to the issue of animal afterlife.

Keywords: *Qoheleth; Ecclesiastes; beasts; biblical perspective; righteous; wicked; spirit; soul; breath; Church Fathers; exegesis; eisegesis; biblical perspective; Christological paradigm; Hebrew Bible;*

INTRODUCTION

If you have read the text of Ecclesiastes¹, you will no doubt recall that Qoheleth argues a similar fate awaits animals or 'beasts' and the 'sons of men' in Eccl 3: 18-21. They

¹ For the uninitiated, Ecclesiastes is classified as part of the Ketuvim (or "writings") of the Hebrew Bible. In the Christian tradition, it belongs to the Wisdom literature of the Old Testament. The English title is commonly understood to be a Latin transliteration from a Greek translation of a Hebrew word variously spelt (Kohelet, Koheleth, Qohelet, Qoheleth). As you will note, here we adopt the Qoheleth spelling. The author is unnamed and introduces himself as "son of David, king in Jerusalem" and only returns with his own voice at the very end of the book to summarize what the character Qoheleth has said and to provide his own reflections on these statements. In a brief manner of speaking, the basic premise of the book is that all of life is vanity, futile, or simply 'vapor' or 'hevel' in Hebrew. Since the lives of both the wise and the foolish end in death, it follows that no eternal meaning can be ascribed to earthly human life with any degree of certitude. Therefore, enjoy the simple pleasures of life since they are gifts from God, fear Him reverentially, and obey His commandments, for that is the duty of humanity. There are many controversies surrounding this biblical text including authorship, date, title, structure, and several other hot-button philosophical issues such as hedonism, pessimism, and existentialism. Although they are important issues to resolve within contemporary biblical scholarship, we are



both die, possess identical breaths, and go to the same place in the earth at death. But Qoheleth admits at the end of those verses with much less certainty as to where the ‘breaths’² of animals versus humanity go after death. On the one hand, all of earthly human life is ‘vapor’ or ‘hevel’ in Hebrew, to which we can ascribe no eternal meaning; on the other hand, enjoy God’s gifts of simple pleasures, fear Him adoringly, obey His commandments, and hope for the best divine judgment in the afterlife. Even though the contradictions abound, the ancient Hebraic message remains clear. From this perspective, then, the ‘breaths’ of the sons of men would have to equate to their souls, presumably not merely the biological life-giving force. And, of course, adopting a Christological perspective, there would be no reason for the breaths or souls of the sons of men to return to God other than to enable God to judge the earthly behavior of those to whom it was given since Genesis makes clear from whence that breath was derived.

In terms of how animals are conceived within this perspective, however, the story is less clear. According to Genesis, animals were created by God in a different way and for a different purpose than human beings. Still, God cares deeply about each and every living creature of his creation all of which He declared as being good. Therefore, the assumption is that animals are to accompany the righteous sons of men in the halls of Paradise or Heaven, if you will. Martin Luther himself believed this was the case based on his interpretations of Acts 3: 21 and Romans 8: 18-22. The illustrious C.S. Lewis interpreted Isaiah 11: 6-8; 65: 17 and Revelation 21: 1 with much the same effect (Conger, 2018; Evensen, 2013; Lacey, 2020; Mathias, 2012). Although many Christian leaders and thinkers over time have assumed the possibility or existence of an animal afterlife, technically speaking, there seem to be no explicit verses in the Bible that claim animals go to Heaven at death or that they have eternal life. Evidently, this ambiguity has left the door open for varied scholarly and religious opinions on the matter. Jews, Protestants, and Catholics disagree both among and between themselves in a great variety of opinions simply too numerous to recount here. However, it’s a different issue as to whether Scripture claims animals have souls, which surely implies a great deal about the presence of animals in eternal Paradise.

The Hebrew Bible teaches that animals have souls in Genesis 1:30 and 9: 10, although it is unclear if the ‘breath of life’ mentioned there is identical to human souls. From the Wisdom literature, Job 12: 10 adopts the position that the ‘spirits’ of animals appears only to be a life-energizing force rather than a timeless spiritual soul, as it is assumed to be for humanity. For human beings, it is claimed there, the soul is the seat of all reason, feelings, conscience, and everything else that is the virtual essence of the person, and hence, fundamentally different from animals, or so it is presumed to be. Once again, notice that the emphasis always seems to be placed upon the differences rather than the similarities between human beings and animals.

not so much concerned with them other than indirectly if they touch upon our central focus on animal afterlife (Weeks, 2010, pp. 70-84; Wright, 2005, pp. xxii-xxiv).

² The term for soul in Hebrew is ‘nephesh’, which literally means “breath”. This life-breath was a gift from God to both animals and humanity as in Genesis 2:7; 7:22, and 6:17. This Hebrew term is also tied to the notion of life-blood in both Leviticus 17:11 and Genesis 9:4. When the breath leaves the body or the blood stops circulating in the body, then death of the soul occurs (Lev 19:28 and Num 6:6). The ancient Hebrews did not believe in the presence of an immortal soul within a physical human body, as did Plato. Simply put, there was no soul without the physical body. Therefore, the afterlife was a non-life place consisting of shadows where everyone goes at death completely alienated from God. Consequently, this life is the only life that really matters, not a gloomy or shadowy afterlife as a shadow in Sheol (Ahbel-Rappe, 2023; Klein, 2012; Kohler, 2016; Swinburne, 1997).



Regardless, the ancient Hebrew Bible claims categorically that animals have souls (nephesh) and spirits (ruach) even though it is true they were not created in the image of God (Genesis 9: 6) and neither were they given the same calling by the Creator God as was bestowed upon humankind. In the rank order of physical creation by God, Genesis 1: 26-28 confirms man's dominion (not domination) or strict responsibility to care for and not abuse the animal kingdom.

Other texts in the Bible go much further beyond these claims about the status and relationship of animals to humanity. For example, Proverbs 12: 10 as well as several verses in Psalm 104 make clear that loving and caring for animals is a prime indication of righteousness. It is expressly asserted there that a person who loves and cares for animals in practice rather than merely in words is a righteous person. Therefore, we should love and care for God's animal creation as He Himself loves and cares for it since we are made in His image. Generally, this is the view from the Hebrew Bible and the Old Testament.

Nevertheless, again technically speaking, supposedly they are not guaranteed eternal life and glorified bodies a la New Testament claims in Corinthians and Thessalonians. As far as we know, animals don't appear capable of repenting for their sinful behaviors, professing belief in Christ as a portal to animal resurrection, and subject to God's final judgment. On the other hand, do they really have to be capable of doing such things as a condition of entrance into the afterlife or even to be part of God's plan for salvation? Are animals even capable of knowing when they have sinned against themselves or human beings, intentionally or not? From a biblical point of view, can we say that animals do not have an 'understanding' of God? From God's point of view, is this even applicable to animals as a condition of enjoying a privileged presence in Paradise? Lots of questions abound, but arguably there appear to be no clear and facile biblical answers. The intention here is not to be sarcastic, of course, but simply to point out the obvious and typical claims.

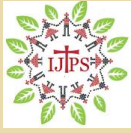
In the final analysis, the relative silence of the Bible on such topics should not be construed by humanity as God's silent verdict on the matter by any stretch of the theological imagination. At the very least, and from within a Christological paradigm, it seems impossible to conclude that injustices committed against them do not have serious spiritual repercussions. And it certainly does not mean that God did not provide a place for them in His kingdom after expiration. Anyone who has ever had a beloved dog or cat or parrot or rabbit as a pet for any amount of time would certainly beg to differ with the typical evolutionary claim (Horvat, 2018) that animals don't have souls or don't have emotions or don't feel pain and joy or don't'....

All this having been said by way of preliminary commentary in order to highlight some of the important issues to be considered as a backcloth in any discussion about animal afterlife, let us now briefly review what a few eminent early Christian thinkers thought about some of these issues through a careful examination of their commentaries on the man-beast references in the Book of Ecclesiastes.

1. GREGORY THAUMATURGUS (213 – 270 AD)

Thaumaturgus was one of the earliest Church Fathers³ to address the man-beast references in Ecclesiastes largely from the vantage point of literal hermeneutics. Essentially,

³ Various known by contemporary biblical scholars as the Church Fathers, the Apostolic Fathers, the Christian Fathers, Fathers of the Church, and here the early Church Fathers, they were a select group of ancient Christian theologians and writers viewed as most influential in establishing the intellectual and doctrinal groundwork of



he agrees with Qoheleth that both man and beast die and return to the dust of the earth as stated in Genesis 3. However, whereas Qoheleth is busy establishing similarities in the life situation of men and animals, at least in broad terms, Thaumaturgus is just as busy underscoring what he feels to be essential differences, and then underlining those perceived differences to make certain comments about animal afterlife.

One key difference he stresses is in regards to language and speaking. On the one hand, it is agreed that men and beasts share the same breath of life, an energizing life-force as mentioned above. So, therefore, they share the same fate when that breath expires, namely, death. However, unlike Qoheleth's genuinely sarcastic 'who-knows-where-the-breaths-of-men-and-animals-go-after-death' approach in Eccl 3: 21, Thaumaturgus adopts a more decisive interpretation.

He opts for arguing that human beings have souls, not just a life-force breath, implying, of course, that animals don't. What's more, this energizing life-force cannot be conceived of as being a 'soul' per se. The energizing life-force and the soul are qualitatively different species, so to speak, and one is eternal while the other is not. It is never demonstrated how this conclusion is arrived at nor is there a thorough exploration of other biblical texts that might suggest otherwise such as Genesis and the prophetic texts.

In his way of thinking, animals don't have souls whereas humans do, although he still remains a bit uncertain as to whether human souls ascend to heaven while the life-force or breath of animals descends to the earth. Along with the facility of speaking in language, he views this as a distinct advantage which human beings have over animals. Dissent with some part of Qoheleth's verse compels him to paraphrase a meaning not specified in the text itself. Interestingly, from the standpoint of creation doctrine, he also never questions why it is necessary for one to have advantage over the other and what other biblical texts may have to say about this claim, since both were created by God (Baynes and Smith, 2006; Herbermann, 2015; Jarrick, 1990; Orthodox Church of America, 2024; Schaff, 2019; Slusser, 1998; Van Dam, 1982; Vatican News, 2017; Wright, 2018).

2. DIDYMUS (THE BLIND) (313 – 398 AD)

Fortunately for the purposes of this study, the fragments of Ecclesiastes commentaries found in the Tura codices in Egypt in 1941 begin with interpretations of Qoheleth's man-beast analogies in 3: 18-21. Indeed, comparatively speaking, there are very few commentaries by early Christian thinkers on these specific Qoheleth verses. In those verses, as we know, Qoheleth compares the 'sons of men' with 'beasts' in those verses, arguing that a similar fate befalls them both in terms of death and returning to dust. According to conventional interpretation it is important to note that he is not equating beasts with the sons of men but differentiating between two different species, of course.

Very much like Thaumaturgus, Didymus begs to differ with Qoheleth, insisting that language and the faculty of speech differentiates human beings from animals. In other words, in his mind Didymus presumes from the start that animals cannot articulate their thoughts and feelings as can human beings, and this inability has practical implications for the application of concepts such as 'soul' and 'heaven' to animals. Interestingly, also like Thaumaturgus, there is no philosophical nor biblical confirmation nor exploration of the underlying assumptions characterizing this position.

the Christian faith as we know it today. They lived and worked mostly from the late first to the mid-8th centuries AD, a historical period known as the Patristic Era (Peterson, 2016; Rasmussen, 2011).



Therefore, Didymus suggests, animals are not rational or reasonable beings, whereas human beings are. From a kind of spiritual tunnel vision, as it were, the possibility that animals may possess a different sort of soul, employ a different kind of reasoning, and speak a different kind of language or even have a different divine calling is not entertained at all. Consequently, human beings are similar to angels in the Christian pecking order, perhaps slightly slower, whereas animals don't rank at all, at least not in the same ranking system.

According to Didymus, this means that human souls can advance and even perfect understanding of God, implying that animals do not possess this unique capacity or don't understand God in another way. He insists that when Qoheleth compares the fate of man and beast, he is not referring to the death of reason but, rather, to the literal death of the body. This position on the fate of human reason at death allows him to differentiate himself from the conventional understanding of Qoheleth's man-beast statements which underscores merely similarities.

It is clear that Didymus is applying an allegorical interpretation of Qoheleth's verses rather than a literal translation to arrive at this conclusion, as Thaumaturgus did. Since they are near to angels in nature, it is assumed that animals are definitely not. The result of this sort of thinking for conceptions of animal afterlife are obvious. After death human beings can either go to heaven or be condemned, whereas access for animals is blocked because they supposedly cannot be held accountable for earthly behaviors. The implication is that human beings are subject to divine judgment, whereas animals are not included.

Admittedly, even though they may also have souls, the death of animals means that both animal flesh and soul are terminated, unlike for human beings. Again, the assumption here is that there is no divine accountability or judgment of animal behavior nor abusive treatment of animals by human beings after death. Didymus claims this is emphatically not the case for the soul of human beings. Why? Didymus asserts that it jettisons its human host at death and continues to exist somewhere in the spiritual realm, undoubtedly awaiting final judgment. Qoheleth may entertain doubts about the existence of an afterlife altogether, both human and beast, but Didymus argues otherwise.

Furthermore, Didymus also insists that Qoheleth never talks about the human soul per se, choosing instead to refer to the biological life-force energy of 'breath'. It is precisely this life-force of breath analogy that Qoheleth wishes to stress in his comparison with beasts, Didymus asserts, not the spirit or the 'soul' as conceived within a Christological paradigm. From Didymus' point of view, that is why Qoheleth continually stresses the physical bodily or flesh features of both man and beast to claim that they share this particular common fate.

It is in this specific sense that human beings possess no advantage over animals, not in terms of the broader meaning of fate or eternal destiny. The sensory functions of humans may be similar to animals, but they are not identical. That's what Qoheleth really means to point out, Didymus claims. Therefore, he concludes, man is not converted to nothing or completely destroyed at death, like what happens to animals. Whereas Qoheleth would admit that no one knows what happens to the spirit of animals after breath expires, Didymus believes that human beings are typically misled into thinking this way mostly due to the ever-changing nature of temporal existence on earth.

Consequently, following this mistaken belief, they start to think everything is futile or vain or vapor (hevel), like what Qoheleth repeats over and over again. Didymus' strongest position against Qoheleth is precisely at this point of intimating that everything, including 'heaven' and 'soul', are vain or futile or vapor, as it were. That is, Didymus reacted strongly to Qoheleth implying that the similar fate of man and beast confirms that heaven, earth and



God's creation in general are the vain illusions of the sons of men. However, it is another question altogether whether the ancient Hebraic author of Ecclesiastes is really making or implying this claim at all.

Meek (2016) points this out when he is comparing Didymus' and Chrysostom's view on Qoheleth's hevel. He shows that Didymus agreed with Qoheleth's suggestion that temporal reality must be avoided to the extent possible since it tends to distract central human attention away from God. But that doesn't mean that Didymus agrees that everything is vanity, as Qoheleth seems to suggest. It only means everything is futile apart from or in comparison to the spiritual meaning of human existence.

What makes human existence meaningful is faith in God (Ayres, 2012; Bayliss, 2016; Chapman, 2018; Chrisholm, 1993; Cross and Livingstone, 2009; Ehrman, 1986, 1983; Florovsky, 1987; Gauche, 1934; Hicks, 2015; Lascartos and Marketos, 1994, Layton, 2004; Schaff and Wace, 2009; Young and Teal, 2010).

3. ST. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM (347 – 407 AD)

Among the few verses that Chrysostom comments upon in Ecclesiastes are Qoheleth's man-beast references. He claims that Qoheleth is not literally comparing man with animals but, rather, men of faith with men of no faith. In other words, Chrysostom argues that Qoheleth is comparing different types of people, not different species. Furthermore, he asserts that Qoheleth is actually comparing faithful human beings with faithless people referred to as 'beasts'.

People who don't believe in God constantly harangue that He is blameworthy for all manner of injustices on earth and, therefore, cannot possibly exercise enough divine foresight to provide proper guidance or care for human destiny. Instead of glorifying and worshipping God, these people are too busy finding enough fault in Him to deny Him providence. Chrysostom claims that it is these kinds of people holding these types of beliefs which Qoheleth refers to as beasts, not animals per se.

By contrast with this allegorical interpretation, Chrysostom then proceeds to interpret Qoheleth's reference to the shared fate of man and animals in a literal manner, that is, as a physical, bodily death only. He agrees that man and beast share one physical body existence with one life-energizing breath which expires at death. But he has something else to say about Qoheleth's apparent doubt as to what happens afterwards, that is, after death, in the afterlife.

Here Chrysostom applies the resurrection doctrine dominant at his time to interpret Qoheleth's apparent doubt about the afterlife, the 'who-knows' concluding statement of Chapter 3. People who reject the resurrection of Christ are like Qoheleth in this regard, Chrysostom asserts, and by implication they are the 'beasts' Qoheleth speaks about. But this was not actually the author's view, he claims. The man-beast reference is not a comparison of species but, in fact, an intra-species analogy.

So, then, Chrysostom distinguishes between Qoheleth's unbeliever views as a character with the author's personal believer views as a writer. The implication, of course, is that Chrysostom thinks the author created Ecclesiastes in order to compare and contrast the views of resurrection believers and resurrection deniers, which can hardly be the case since the writer of Ecclesiastes is an Old Testament author (Allen and Mayer, 2000; Attwater, 1960; Carter, 1962; Hill, 2007; Kelly, 1998).



4. ST. JEROME (347 – 420 AD)

Jerome rattles off a solid two pages of exegeses on the man-beast references in Ecclesiastes, nearly the longest response to any of Qoheleth's verses contained in his entire Commentary on Ecclesiastes. Before we explore what he has to say about these verses, we need to briefly review what the ancient Hebraic and modern Jewish religious traditions have to say about the relationship between humanity and animals since the issues that arise there are highly pertinent to both Jerome and Augustine. The parameters of this relationship are divinely ordained and presented in the Bible in several places especially Genesis and Psalms. It bears recalling the biblical man-beast relationship as it pertains to the dominant Christological paradigm⁴ of the early Church Fathers.

In Genesis, God openly recognizes animals as good and blesses them, commanding them to reproduce and multiply, but apparently, they are not made in the image of God (Gen 1: 27). It is presumed that only human beings received the breath of God that is his spirit, and that allows him to transcend the world of animals (1 Thes 5: 23). God used his hands like a skillful potter to literally form human beings from the dust of the ground (Gen 2: 7), whereas animals were not created in exactly this way. The assumption is that these differences in the way they were created have important ramifications for access to the afterlife. Supposedly, there are important consequences that result from this creational difference. Only human beings were given a faculty of creative thought to communicate with God, ranking them just below the status of angels (Psalm 8: 5), a narrative we have already heard above. Further, human beings were created by God for God, that is, for the purpose of worshipping God as children of God, whereas supposedly animals did not receive this particular calling even in a different form (Col 1: 16). It is not even considered here that animals may have their own languages and their own calling from God Himself. So, then, the Bible clearly distinguishes between human beings and animals at least in these ways, whereas Qoheleth and the modern evolutionary view appear not to do so.

It is interesting to note how St. Jerome deals with these issues in his view of the man-beast relationship propounded by Qoheleth in Ecclesiastes. Well, Jerome shrugs his shoulders and begins matter-of-factly by paraphrasing at length Qoheleth's words, purportedly to demonstrate understanding of the verses. In the process, however, it will be noted that he substitutes and adds many key terms of his own which, in turn, have the effect of changing its initial meaning:

“It is not surprising that there is no distinction in this life between righteous and wicked, nor that none values virtues, but all things occur with uncertain outcome, where nothing seems to differ according to the worthlessness of the body between sheep and men: there is the same birth, common end in death; we proceed similarly towards the light and are equally dissolved into dust. But there seems to be this difference, that the spirit of man ascends to the heavens, and the spirit of animals goes down into the earth, but from where do we know this for certain? Who can know whether

⁴ In simple terms, a Christological paradigm or perspective refers to the doctrine of Christ and its related concepts and beliefs, usually concerning the reflections, teachings, and doctrine pertaining to Jesus of Nazareth. More broadly, it encompasses the system of beliefs, values, and principles about the nature and work of Jesus Christ and related concepts such as Incarnation, Resurrection, and the relationship between the human and divine nature of Christ (Hillebrand and Stefon, 2024).



what is hoped is true or false?” (Jerome Commentary on Eccl 3: 18-21 in McGregor, 2019)

From the start, Jerome flatly neglects Qoheleth’s core ancient Hebraic idea about God ‘testing’ humankind to make them aware they exist as animals without Him in their lives, stated quite clearly at the start of Chapter 3. Since Jerome does not address this idea, it is doubtful that he understands Qoheleth’s intended message here. Nowhere in these man-beast verses do we find Qoheleth talking about ‘the righteous and the wicked’, as Jerome states, much less so the righteous ascending and the wicked descending. Qoheleth does not even suggest factually that ‘there seems to be this difference’ between man and beast, as Jerome does.

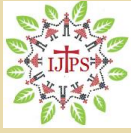
Neither did Qoheleth propose or suggest in any way whatsoever a distinct difference between man and beast. At the end, Qoheleth simply asks the reader a ‘Who-knows?’ question, not two questions as Jerome does with ‘from where do we know’ (location or source) and ‘who can know’ (person). Therefore, what appears at first glance to be a lengthy accurate re-interpretation of Qoheleth’s intended meaning ends up becoming a cleverly-worded substitution of meaning.

Well, then, exactly what does Jerome think Qoheleth is saying about the man-beast relationship? Does Jerome think that Qoheleth believes the ‘spirit’ of both men and beast die when their body dies, or does he believe that man and beast are destined for separate places after death? Not quite. Jerome draws on ancient biblical texts (Genesis, Job, Luke) to claim that:

“...before the arrival of Christ all were led equally to the nether regions...And in fact before Christ accompanied by a robber opened the wheel of flames..., and the gates of paradise, the heavens were closed and the equal unworthiness of the spirits of sheep and of men was abridged” (Jerome Commentary in Eccl 3: 18-21 in McGregor, 2019).

As we can see here, Jerome is reinterpreting Qoheleth through the dominant Christological perspective of his time in a very specific way even though he well knows it was written from within an ancient Hebraic theological and cosmological perspective. In doing so, Jerome is bending the intended ancient Hebrew meanings contained within Ecclesiastes in an attempt to make them exegetically applicable to his day and times, not necessarily to render an accurate interpretation from Qoheleth’s ancient Hebraic viewpoint. It is another question altogether as to whether this hermeneutical strategy does justice to the underlying religious Hebrew messages that are, in fact, directly applicable to a proper understanding of New Testament Christianity.

Again, there are a number of concepts contained within Jerome’s commentary up to this point that are not found in Qoheleth’s verses beyond the Christ reference. Qoheleth does not mention anything about the netherworld or underworld, although we can assume Qoheleth’s familiarity with it. Qoheleth does not mention anything about the ‘spirit’ (imputing an eternal soul) of men and beast as Jerome does but, rather, their ‘breath’ (imputing a biological life-force). Further, Qoheleth says nothing about comparing ‘sheep’ with ‘sons of men’ as Jerome does with his Christological approach (presumably to convey the idea of ‘the Lord is my shepherd’ in Psalm 23: 1 and possibly other biblical texts employing sheep terminology), especially with all the ancient connotations attached to that animal after the life and death of Christ.



In subsequent commentary on these verses, Jerome suggests that Qoheleth argues humans are like beasts in that they are ‘weak in body’ but they ‘differ from beasts in language’, ideas not contained in these verses whatsoever. After all, how does Jerome know that beasts don’t have their own languages? Answer: He doesn’t. Then he states that Qoheleth is not referring to the existence of a soul but, rather, a life-breath (of air) that is the same for both man and beast, and supposedly, Jerome repeats Qoheleth’s “...and there is nothing more for man than for beast”. However, Qoheleth’s original verse is: “they all have the same breath and there is no advantage for man over beast” (Eccl 3: 19). In terms of the biological life-force of ‘breath’, Qoheleth does not see much advantage for one nor the other.

When it comes to Qoheleth’s ‘Who-knows?’ question regarding breath ascending upwards or descending downwards, Jerome begins his inquiry with, “But this seems to be blasphemy” when, actually, it’s not. Why? Jerome takes the position that Qoheleth is not stating a difference between man and beast in relation to the “dignity of the soul”. Rather, Qoheleth simply wants to illustrate the “difficulty of the matter” by adding the subjective pronoun ‘who’.

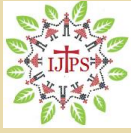
Then once again, Jerome calls up a slew of biblical texts to support his judgment on Qoheleth’s claim, implying that Qoheleth’s way of posing the question is not new to biblical narratives (Isaiah 53: 8; Jer 17: 9; Ps 14: 1/35: 17/72: 23). What’s more, the prophetic texts in the Bible make clear that both man and beast are included in God’s plan of salvation, although how this idea squares with statements about the ‘breath’ or ‘spirit’ of animals descending downwards into the earth is never considered or explored.

In these extra biblical verses, Jerome shows that Qoheleth is not actually adopting a new narrative technique of explicating biblical principles. Will the saintly man ascend to heaven or the sinner or beast go down into the earth? Why should the sinner be considered a ‘beast’ if, in fact, all people are sinners by nature? Is it possible for the righteous man to fall and the sinner to rise? Can the learned man of reason be led down to the underworld while the simpler and unlearned man be crowned in martyrdom in paradise?

These are all questions posed in a great variety of biblical texts, and so Qoheleth’s question is not blasphemous, Jerome asserts. Even the sinner-beast analogy can be found there in these texts. That may or may not be these cases, of course, but in the verses in question, Qoheleth only refers to beasts, not sinners. And Qoheleth makes absolutely no explicit equivalencies between animals or ‘beasts and men, that is, he does not say that sinners or wicked people are beasts.

In most of his commentaries on Ecclesiastes, we can see that Jerome’s manner of interpretation is quite similar to that of other early Church Fathers, that is, draw upon biblical texts to support and legitimize reinterpreting the versal text under examination and often attaching another meaning altogether in the process. As for the other early Church Fathers examined here, the biblical hermeneutic that is adopted does not appear to be aimed at deciphering Qoheleth’s intended meaning in its own terms or within an ancient Hebraic theological and cosmological perspective. In other words, it is largely an exercise in eisegesis rather than exegesis⁵. The result is the transformation of the original similar man-beast fate into a man-beast distinction based mostly on the ‘nature of the soul’, but also language.

⁵ Generally, eisegesis is reading into a text one’s own ideas, whereas exegesis is letting the meaning emerge from the text itself in its original historical context only after careful study (Fahlbusch and Bromiley, 1999).



Among other problems already mentioned, the problem here with Jerome's thinking about the biblical view of the 'soul' in the man-beast relationship appears to be that biblical texts tend to disagree with the position that animals have no souls. In both the Old Testament and the New Testament, several biblical passages explicitly state that animals have souls including the implicit meanings Jerome does not consider in Ecclesiastes 3: 18-21. The ancient Hebrew Bible also makes clear that God made a covenant with all of Creation, not only humankind (Gen 9: 12-17; Psalm 50: 10-11; Hosea 2: 18).

Other ancient Hebraic biblical texts posit that every earthly animal praise God (Psalm 69: 34/150: 6; Job 12: 7-10; Isaiah 42: 10). Still other ancient biblical verses tell us that animals will be saved and they will accompany humans in heaven (Psalm 36: 6; Luke 3: 6; Romans 8: 19-21; John 3: 16). There are so many ancient biblical verses directly relevant to interpretation of Qoheleth's man-beast verses that it's difficult to believe a prolific scholar like Jerome was not aware of them at the time that he wrote Commentary on Ecclesiastes (Cain and Lossi, 2009; Grillo, 2015; Jarrick, 2015; Jerome, 2015; Kelly, 2012; Kelly, 1975; McGregor, 2015; Montiero, 2013; Schaff and Wace, 2022; Wright, 2018).

5. AUGUSTINE (354 – 430 AD)

Only the last verse of Eccl 3: 18-21 which is mentioned by Augustine in his magnum opus, *The City of God*. Despite the fact that Augustine rambles on for three pages till the end of Book 13 on the broad related topics of this verse comparing and contrasting Hebrew, Latin, and Greek meanings in the process (breath, spirit, bodily life, spiritual life, afterlife, and so forth), we can still deduce a reliable Augustinian viewpoint.

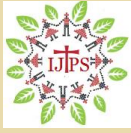
We will no doubt recall the full conventional import of meanings Qoheleth conveys in those verses. God is testing human beings by creating them as animals that they may understand the meaninglessness of earthly life without Him front and center. This is why the fate of the sons of men and literal beasts is alike: they both have the same 'breath', they both 'die', and their physical bodies return afterwards to the place from which they were made, the earth.

Where does the breath of each go after it expires? Who knows? Qoheleth quips, implying that only God knows where the breath of human beings and animals go at death. After death, we cannot observe that the breath of animals goes here and that of humans goes there, so to speak, implying that absolutely no one save God Himself is entitled to speak decisively on this issue.

The ancient Midrashic rabbis interpret these verses as metaphorically comparing righteous 'men' with wicked or beastly 'men'. Men who are not righteous believers live as beasts do in the wild but among other men. It's interesting that who exactly determines the criteria for making one 'righteous', or 'wicked', for that matter, and what these criteria consist of, is never clearly elaborated. However, this metaphorical interpretation is hardly applicable to Qoheleth given the initial 'test' verse which begins the versal sequence in Chapter 3.

Therefore, it is likely that Qoheleth was indeed referring to the breath or spirit of animals in the wild, not human beings viewed as sinful or wicked. We cannot observe whether an animal or a human has a soul or a spirit, so we cannot know for certain where they go after death if they do have one. The best that we can do is to have steadfast faith, fear God adoringly and trustfully, and obey His commandments.

Augustine labors on for nearly three pages to settle some of these questions basing his argument principally on Genesis, but referencing other biblical texts as well, in a much



more clear and decisive way than does St. Jerome who waffles quite a bit on the central issues. As for whether or not human beings have souls, Augustine warns the reader not to “carelessly neglect the teaching of Scripture” where it states: “‘Let the earth bring forth the living soul’ (Gen 1: 24), where all the terrestrial animals were created.” (Augustine, *ibid.*, p. 395). And just a few verses down from the same verse in Genesis where it speaks about all life on dry land had died due to the great flood, Augustine asserts wryly why readers haven’t noticed: “All in whose nostrils was the breath of life, of all that was in the dry land, died.”

Essentially, Augustine’s argument here is that if Scripture can talk about living souls and spirits of life “even in reference to beasts,” then why should we doubt that animals have souls? Indeed, it was the “ordinary style of Scripture to speak of animals “in which the soul serves as the residence of sensation”. Granted, the rational soul of man was not created in the same way as the soul of other animals out of the waters and the earth, Augustine says, but still God “ordered that it should live in an animal body like those other animals.”

Scripture talks about the creation of souls when it says, “Let the earth produce every living soul”. It is safe to say, therefore, that Augustine here is answering Qoheleth’s ‘Who knows’ question in Eccl 3: 21, namely, animals have souls although not the same type and not made in the same way as that of human souls. If there was any doubt intended or suggested by Qoheleth about the existence of souls in humans and animals, there was no such doubt within Augustine. The physical bodies of animals may perish, but their souls do not (Augustine, 2018; Bonner, 2002; Brown, 2000; Chadwick, 2009; Hollingworth, 2013; Kirwan, 2008; Knowles and Pinkett, 2004; MacCulloch, 2009; O’Donnell, 1999; Rist, 2008; Schaff, 2015; Shaw, 2011).

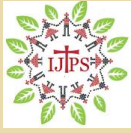
CONCLUSIONS

As we can see from our brief initial review of early patristic statements on the man-beast references contained in Ecclesiastes 3: 18-21, some salient patterns of interpretation emerged regarding notions about animal afterlife and conceptions about animals and human beings in general as well as the relationship between humanity and animals.

Overall, however, the general finding here is that most of these early Christian thinkers (save Augustine) were heavily inclined not to interpret these verses contextually nor in Qoheleth’s own terms nor even within the range of ancient Hebraic theology and cosmology, despite the fact that the author of Ecclesiastes was clearly an ancient Hebrew. Instead, the strong tendency was to substitute Qoheleth’s terms and rewrite verses to arrive at entirely different meanings.

The first salient pattern of interpretation is without doubt. In contrast to Qoheleth, but with the possible exception of Augustine, the patristic consensus seemed to be that animals have neither souls nor rational faculties nor language nor speech nor other features that might elevate their status in the Christian ranking order of creation. Therefore, the life of animals terminates on earth with access to the afterlife effectively denied.

A second salient pattern of interpretation which emerged from these findings is the claim that Qoheleth was really contrasting righteous human beings with depraved, wicked, sinful, or faithless people, not animals per se. In other words, the assertion was that different types of human beings were compared, not two different species. Therefore, it was believed that Qoheleth definitely was not making any kind of statement about the present or future status of animals in Paradise. These patristic Christian thinkers seemed to approach the ideas contained or implied in these verses with extreme caution. Perhaps comparing the fate of human beings with animals in any way appeared to wander perilously close to the borders of



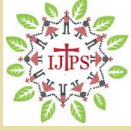
sacrilegious talk about God or sacred things. Nevertheless, the question of why sinful human beings should be viewed in such an ugly manner as ‘beasts’ in the wild when all of humanity from within a Christological paradigm is unavoidably sinful by nature a la Genesis apparently never crossed the minds of these early Christian thinkers, again save for Augustine.

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THE CONFLUENCE BETWEEN CHRISTIANITY AND NEOPLATONISM: TRIADODOLOGY AND ANTHROPOLOGY

Assistant Lecturer PhD. Nicușor MORLOVA,

Ovidius” University of Constanța

ROMANIA

Email: nicumorlova@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Was Christianity Hellenized or was philosophy Christianized? It is a dilemma that has sparked numerous discussions and conflicting opinions to this day. This debate revolves mainly around the metaphysics of Greek philosophy, which left Christianity with its entire conceptual arsenal. The close relationship between philosophy and religion in Plotinus' time explains why many philosophers engaged in religion and ethics, but also why many Christian theologians perceived theology as the highest form of philosophy. Viewed contextually, the philosophy of Plotinus, having rich elements of mysticism and definition of divinity, can be considered a true religion. The Church Fathers, having a deep understanding of the limits within which they could operate using the Greek language, the philosophical terminology, as well as the morphological structures and linguistic expressions of their time, highlighted the semantic differences and the conventional nature of these expressions. As deep thinkers and scholars of Greek culture, who admired the beauty of Greek speech, they enriched the traditional terminology with new meanings and used it effectively to introduce new religious concepts and to describe the experience or theory of truth with the greatest possible precision.

Keywords: *theology; Neoplatonism; triadology; terminology; anthropology;*

INTRODUCTION

The Christian teaching preached by the Holy Apostles to all nations spread over a land that was dominated by polytheistic religions, by numerous philosophical schools, by magical practices, commonly defined by the concept of Hellenism. Although many criticisms were made of Hellenism, because it was tributary to polytheism, it performed an important function for the dissemination of Christianity, by preparing the cultural climate, contributing significantly, on a semantic level, to the composition of Christian dogmas.

Christianity is not the result of philosophical thought, a system of theories developed on the basis of logic, but a way of life, an inner experience of the divine that springs from Revelation. It is adherence to a divine message concerning the mysteries of God's nature and the salvation of man. This adherence appeals to logic, but is based on faith and intuition in the divine call, to accept what the mind cannot explain or demonstrate. Thus, Christianity contains a revealed teaching that constitutes the foundation of the religious life.

Although theology and philosophy address common themes, such as the existence of God, anthropology, cosmology, soteriology, and others, their method of approach and interpretative attitude toward them differ. Theology does not deal with the objects of study in a critical and dialectical manner and does not seek to discover the truth through debate,



reflection and research, but focuses on the truth revealed by God, aiming to explain and facilitate its understanding by man. It is based on the truths contained and written in Scripture and, according to them, evaluates positively or negatively any other epistemological propositions and theories. Faith, understood as a way of life, is the starting point of theology. The stable point of reference of faith is God, and therefore it does not allow itself to submit the absolute certainty of truth only to a rational examination or purely speculative objective criteria, because God transcends any purely rational interpretation. Philosophy, on the other hand, proceeds intuitively, based on an evolutionary rational construct, seeking truth and being motivated by a cognitive, meditative inclination, not faith.

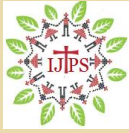
From early on, there were tendencies to reconcile philosophy and the Christian faith, especially from the Holy Fathers. Theology, without losing its autonomy, used the terminology and reasoning of the philosophical discourse to interpretatively approach theological problems, but also to counteract the heresies that appeared during the turbulent history of the Church.

The purpose of this article is to highlight those aspects of Plotinus' philosophy which have many similarities with Christian teaching and which captured the interest of the Holy Fathers, starting from the middle of the 3rd century and throughout the 4th century, a period in which the first dogmas of Christianity were established, after disputes with heretics such as Arius, Eunomius, Apollinaris and others. The latter misinterpreted some evangelical truths, using arguments, definitions, concepts and terminology from the arsenal of Greek philosophy and especially from Plotinus' Neoplatonism. The Holy Fathers, in turn prominent connoisseurs of Greek philosophy, drew their arguments from the same arsenal, in order to correctly present Christian thought and to establish the benchmarks of faith within the Ecumenical Councils, so that they acquire a permanent and official character.

Plotinus develops his philosophical system starting from a personal mystical experience, apparently original, which elevates him to the status of a great thinker of late Greek antiquity and the founder of a philosophical religion, which stands with dignity alongside the philosophy of Plato and Aristotle. His philosophy, in terms of dogmatic positions, constitutes a critical revision of the earlier philosophical tradition, with a special emphasis on Plato, and is distinguished by a structured and coherent thought.

However, we know that his teacher, Ammonios Sakkas, baptized and educated in a Christian family, played an important role in formulating those concepts by which he approached Christianity. We reach this conclusion also from the fact that Ammonios was also a teacher of Origen the Christian. As two branches of the same tree, Origen and Plotinus became two exceptional personalities, representing iconic the religious and cultural symbiosis of the age. We believe that Neoplatonism was substantially inspired by Christianity, which already had an important historical presence for almost three centuries, if we analyse all aspects related to triadology, anthropology, mysticism and spiritual way of life. Even if certain concepts seem only a reinterpretation of Platonism and strive to preserve the landmarks of an autonomous philosophical system, their theological character and destiny to become a way of life that aimed at spiritual perfection and even personal salvation through ecstatic union with the supreme One and the Good, it bears a striking resemblance to Christian teaching.

Christianity became dominant because it possessed the power of revealed truth, enlightened by grace, it managed to offer a higher perception of God, a faith that defeated death, and a new conception of the salvation of humanity. In his confrontation with ancient Greek philosophy, he used its conceptual endowment, which was known in the educated



circles of the age and in the vast Roman empire, adapting it to his dogmatic content. Neoplatonic philosophy turned to a religious metaphysics, with a theory of the world based on the distinction between the transcendent and the terrestrial-sensory, which had originally been expressed in Platonic metaphysics. In essence, the effort of Neoplatonic philosophical reflection became a reformulation of Platonism with a religious aspect. The core of this philosophical reconstruction was not Athens, but cosmopolitan Alexandria, where a multitude of faiths and cultures met and intersected.

The Holy Fathers understood that when human speech is put at the service of the divine Word, there is no risk that the latter will be altered. They felt this was necessary. Using traditional Greek education and philosophy was the only viable way to make Christianity accessible to all. During the same period, there were similar attempts from outside to clothe and include Christian teachings in the Jewish tradition, resulting in Judeo-Christianity.

The Gnostics, too, made a similar effort to imbue Christianity with syncretistic ideas. But none of these movements prevailed. Only the symbiosis between Christianity and Greek philosophy remained, with the sole aim of formulating the dogmas and all the truths of faith as accurately as possible. This, of course, was not accidental, but absolutely natural, given that Greek philosophy, since the time of Alexander the Great, dominated all the cultural hubs of the era, in the entire Mediterranean basin.

Of course, the use of concepts, vocabulary or other tools made available by philosophy, did not mean an appropriation of philosophical ideas or thinking. On the contrary, many of the works of the Holy Fathers are written precisely against Hellenism, Gnosticism and other systems of rational thought, which led to the emergence of heresies. And this happens right from the dawn of Christianity in the Epistles of the Holy Apostle Paul, in the works of Christian apologists and patristic authors.

It is remarkable that the philosophy of Plotinus, although it has influences and a Platonic substratum, transforms and develops philosophical thinking in an innovative way for its time, in which man lived moral decadence, existential anxiety and insecurity, looking for an escape route for his salvation spiritual.

In an age when the polytheism of the Greeks no longer satisfied the metaphysical needs of man, who felt fragmented, powerless and isolated in the vastness of the Roman empire, Plotinus proves sensitive to human anxieties and despair and offers a new perspective in his philosophy, proposing a new type of man and a new cosmic pattern, bridging the gap between the world of ideas and the world of sense, and offering the promise that man can experience, through ecstasy, union with the One and the Good. Sound familiar? Of course, because through the Christian teaching of the Fathers and through their lives, the spiritual perfection of the human person was promoted.

The whole problem of the affinity between Hellenism and Christianity can also be defined by the attitude that the two Theological Schools, from Alexandria and Antioch, had towards Greek philosophy. If the one in Alexandria developed an educational segment in which philosophy played a very important role, the one in Antioch tried to remain, as much as possible, a strictly theological school.



1. TRIADODOLOGY - THE THREE HYPOSTASES OF THE DIVINE BEING: ONE, MIND (NOUS) AND SOUL

If we are used to accepting the influence of Neoplatonism on some Christian authors and Christian thought, as it was understood after the 4th century, what must be recovered, in order to be able to look at the more complete picture of a dialectic philosophy-theology, is the influence that Christian living and teaching had on the thinking of the Neoplatonists. Neoplatonism can exert its attraction and influence on Christian authors concerned with philosophy or the expression and legitimization of mystical experience and Christian life because it first suffered the influence of these Christian contents. The idea of a unique God, who can be understood through contemplation and known through ecstasy, the effort to distance the spiritual life from the needs of the body, asceticism, charity, important characteristics of the Neoplatonism of Plotinus and Porphyry, bring the Christian doctrine much closer, in depth, to the Neoplatonic one. Neoplatonic thought taken to its purest sources shows itself as a mystical spiritualism much closer to the Christian faith than to pagan formalism, increasingly emptied of life¹. Arguably, in defending paganism, Neoplatonism was trying to save its intellectual freedom by understanding that there was a new set of truths in Christianity that would shape any further attempts at free thought.

Philosophy was obliged to respond to a new challenge, to the spirit of the time, which was religious and, in part, Christian. What stands in the middle, the stake of the whole confrontation, is the interpretative exclusivity of a tradition, the legitimacy of approaching the problem of truth, the nature of reality and the consequences of the answers that will be given. The comments of both philosophers and theologians seem to be based, sometimes without proving, on the value supremacy of either Christianity or Neoplatonism. The isolation of specific elements is sought and the lack of influence and thus the autonomy of one of the systems is argued. These positions are the answer to another obvious, overlooked because it is implicit, namely the historical proximity, the mutual vital influence and the complete inseparability of the two systems in their concrete evolution. One asks what Christianity would have been without Neoplatonism when one can just as validly ask what Neoplatonism would have been without Christianity? And this even related to its appearance. We believe that the primary, deep influence is from Christianity to Neoplatonism, and the secondary, formal, theoretical influence comes from Neoplatonism to Christianity. Neoplatonism flirts with the suggestions of Christian teaching, but processes them in its own way, based on its own intellectual tradition with strict reference "*to the ancients*", as Plotinus does, precisely to be able to introduce elements with a high degree of novelty².

The capital problem of Neoplatonic thought does not concern the intelligible world, but its principle. The question arises: where does this world come from, what is the source from which it proceeds and what is its finality? The intelligible level itself needs the integral perspective of a single, simple and prior principle. It is about a principle that can explain the multiple nature of the intelligible, but, for this, the principle itself can no longer be an intelligible being, but it will be the single and unitary source, starting from which the

¹ Édouard Krakowski, *Plotin et le paganisme religieux*, Denoël et Steele, Paris, 1933, p. 221.

² Marius-Dan Ionașcu, *Creștinism și Neoplatonism: Influențe și contradicții (Christianity and Neoplatonism: Influences and Contradictions)*, Work written as part of the study program of the Doctoral School within the Faculty of Philosophy of the University of Bucharest, from: [/http://www.institutuldefilosofie.ro/e107_files/downloads/.pdf](http://www.institutuldefilosofie.ro/e107_files/downloads/.pdf), accessed on 23.03.2024 p.6.



intelligible reality can be constituted. It thus becomes the absolute principle of all reality—both intelligible and sensible, which we explain by reference to the intelligible.

The search for the intelligible model of all reality is thus directed towards an even higher search: that of the first and only principle. As the intelligible world narrows the world of becoming to the prior unity of pattern, of pure thought, so the plurality of this purely intelligible world needs the prior unity of a single principle. To think things through adequately, we need an intelligible model, but to think through such a model, we need to "conceive" a principle that is no longer properly conceivable. The intelligible world thus sends us to a super-intelligible principle. Such a principle prior to the intelligible world can no longer itself be approached by the means of thought—not even by the highest and purest thought—but is beyond thought and beyond all that can become the object of thought³.

John Wittaker considers the moment of St. Paul's Areopagus sermon, where the subtle shift from the neuter gender of the unknown god, to whom an altar was worshiped in the Areopagus, to the masculine gender of a personal God, is significant for a transition of meaning that occurs in Late Antiquity on a passage also from Plato's *Timaeus* (27D, 5ff), where we talk about what is without becoming and what becomes without ever being. Plato's impersonal distinction between two modes of reality turns into the personal distinction between what is and What Is, between a metaphysical principle and a personal God⁴.

First, we should answer the question: why does Plotinus need a triad, and why does it configure itself so similarly to the Christian one? Although the sources are different, the form seems to tend toward similarity. It is clear that it is not the same Trinity, but still, why a "Trinity" in both Neoplatonism and Christianity at almost the same time? Plotinus' sources for his triadic system are acknowledged by himself to be Plato's dialogue *Parmenides* and less the *Timaeus*. But it is quite possible that Plotinus looked for a "triad" in Platonic philosophy because another "third", from another system of discourse, was engendering controversy in the age and risked confiscating the exploratory power of philosophy. If Plotinus's triadology so strongly marks the trinitarian theology of the Church Fathers, in the eyes of some commentators, can we not recognize, in the substratum, an advance influence of the Christian Trinity as a notion in the age in Plotinus' interpretive presumptions?

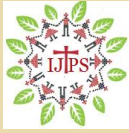
Plotinus identifies this One with the supreme god, with the Good itself, and, to his credit, affirms that through prayer we can know him. In Neoplatonism, the Monad, through irradiation, gives birth to the Dyad. The next ontological level is represented by "Nous" Intellect or Intelligence. At this level of separation of the One from its absolute singularity we see a first possibility to be named, to receive attributes. Plotinus states, somewhat similar to the Evangelist John, that "*The Divine Reason is the beginning and the end; all that comes into being must be rational and fall at its coming into an ordered scheme reasonable at every point*"⁵.

Plotinus, like those after him, Porphyry, Iamblichus, Proclus and Damascus will deepen this fundamental intuition of an insufficiency of Being in itself: Being cannot be fully

³ Marinela Vlad, *Dincolo de Ființă. Neoplatonismul și Aporiile Originii Inefabile, (Beyond Being. Neoplatonism and the Aporia of Ineffable Origins)*, Zeta Books Publishing House, Bucharest, 2011, pp.6-7.

⁴ John Wittaker, *Plutarch, Platonism and Christianity*, in "Neoplatonism and early Christian thought", Essays in honour of A.H. Armstrong, edited by H.J. Blumenthal and R.A. Markus, Variorum Publications Ltd., London, 1981, p. 54.

⁵ Plotinus, *The Enneads*, 3,2,15, translated by Stephen MacKenna, Second Edition revised by B.S. Page, Oxford University Press, London, 3,2,15, from: <https://ia601605.us.archive.org/30/items/plotinustheennea033190mbp/plotinustheennea033190mbp.pdf>, accessed at 25.03.2024, p.142.



understood and explained if we remain within its limits, within its data precise. On the contrary, in itself one can see the indications of a higher level, beyond being and thinking, which the Neoplatonists will call the absolute One and the supreme Good — along the lines of Plato's suggestions. From the One, the absolute reality, the absolute good, is born the Mind (Nous - Reason - the Logos), which identifies itself with the intelligible world and the essence of things, and from this is born the Soul, the creator of all the beings of the sensible or natural world. Parallel to the path of descent and birth is the path of return or ascent: all substances or creations return to Mind, the prototype of the sensible or natural world. The objects of the Mind, the Ideas, are one with it.

Thus, it is subject and object of intellectual function, it is self-contemplation and self-reflection. Plotinus was led to the identification of Mind and the essence of the world, especially with the help of Parmenides and Heraclitus. In *"On Mind"* he mentions that real beings are Mind and when Mind understands beings it is not as if it understands something foreign because it is itself the law of Being. So, he accepts the Parmenidean notion that thinking equals being.

For Plotinus, the Ideas, on the one hand, are ontologically placed in the divine Mind. Though numerous, immaterial, and eternal, the Ideas are animated by the very life of divine Understanding, each unique, self-understanding with a spiritual insight into absolute reality. Is Mind first in nature, not necessarily chronologically, in relation to Ideas?

Or is there simultaneous mutual dependence, coexistence, or even identity without one of the two prevailing? It is necessary for a correct visualization of the problem to see from within the perspective of dynamics centred on the downward effusion from the emanation of the One, to confirm that obviously Mind or the intellectual principle has primacy over the kingdom of Ideas as a creative source. As Mind emanates from the One, in its first ontological moment, as a void and undefined for potentiality, it is fertilized by its contemplation by the radiance of the One and bursts forth to create the multiplicity of the world of Ideas. The mind and its objects constitute an interdependent unity in their relationship and coexist as a unified life simultaneously with the outpouring of the One.

The intellectual principle as the energy of true existence comes second in order. Whichever Plotinus gives the upper hand, the powerful Platonic realism of the Ideas remains. But while the Ideas introduce plurality, they cannot overcome the simple unity of the One, and the One, in turn, cannot bear to be in the shadow of the plurality, between the notion and the idea. The introduction of the world of Ideas or real being must be sent to a lower level than divinity, to the second substance, that of Mind. The soul is a divine substance, it has life in itself, it is immortal, simple, indivisible and all-pervading, it is the organizing principle of the living organism, it gives life and motion to bodies, it is the cause of the unity and body of the sensible world.

The soul expands throughout the body and takes the appropriate form. The universe has as much extension as the Soul, to be supported by it. In *"About Destiny"* he says: *"an all-pervading soul sustains and completes all"*. Influenced by the substance theory of Plato, Aristotle, the Stoics, and the Neo-Pythagoreans, and especially by the triadological division of Numenius, it contributes to the effort to overcome the opposition between monotheistic and polytheistic dogmas. He elaborates his philosophical system in parallel with the formulation of the dogma of the Holy Trinity and to a degree helps by terminology to define it. What he is chiefly concerned with is the primacy of beings, and he concludes that the One is prior to the plurality, which needs its unity, from which they derive their essence. One is not defined or categorized, it is simple and unique, beyond essence and being. Mind, the first



being, thinking and thought, the result of the effusion of the One as its effusion: "*and all that is already perfectly generated...and the second.*" The soul, the result of Mind by emanation and because of its tendency for completion and perfection, has two main characteristics: 1. it looks to its primordial source, Mind, and 2. it observes the world and forms it. It is the cosmic soul that gives life to material things, which is called the celestial Aphrodite when it goes up and the earthly Aphrodite when it goes down, while the individual souls of men are imprisoned in the chains of the body as a ransom for their forgetfulness and detachment their Mind and Oneness and their tendency for autonomy and self-existence. One, Mind and Soul constitute the three original substances. Matter, non-being and "*devoid of all,*" represents the ultimate limit of the descent of being from the One and the potential for the formation of sentient beings by the Cosmic Soul. Action, matter and form together were realized in the intelligible world. The function of Ideas in Plotinus is mediatic between the intelligible and the sensible world.

The fundamental problem that confronts Plotinus, as it also confronts Christian writers, is the following: how can the unity of divinity be saved under the conditions of the existence of several hypostases. Plotinus offers a strictly logical, human solution, worthy of the reason of a great philosopher, without being entirely original, but dependent on his masters. He rejects the consubstantiality of the three divine Hypostases by introducing two great concepts: Procession and Emanation. Each of the two Hypostases, subordinate to the One, are indivisible and distinct, being derived from the same primordial creative Principle. They, therefore, do not destroy the factional unity of God, though they destroy his substantial unity, for each hypostasis has an existence different from and inferior to the One⁶.

If Origen and Clement of Alexandria were hesitant to make a clear distinction between philosophy and theology, Saint Athanasius did not. He is the first and the greatest of the Fathers of the Church who, using the tools of Greek philosophy, theologically justified the mystery of the Holy Trinity, marking the definitive detachment of Christian theology from Hellenistic captivity. Overcoming all the concepts of ancient Greek philosophy, especially its cosmology and anthropology, was a heroic act, which required a huge effort dictated by a sublime height of the great Father's thought.

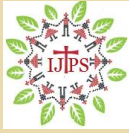
Not by chance, the Church called him "*the Great*". For its part, Christian triadology is fundamental in the correct understanding of the mystery of the creation of the world, the Church or the deification of man, thus opening huge perspectives on the mystery of man, the cosmos and God revealed to the world as a Trinity of loving Persons. From the system of Platonic philosophy, Saint Athanasius took the term „ousia“, which in principle can be translated with the Latin "*substance*" or with the Romanian "*essence*", "*substance*" and gave it a new content. By adding the prefix "*omo*" St. Athanasius gave Christian theology in great turmoil about the mystery of the Holy Trinity a real key to understanding the Trinity.

The term was translated and understood as reflecting the same substance, identity of essence, and was adopted by the Synodal Fathers, not without a series of difficulties at the First Ecumenical Council in 325. Platonic philosophy also used another term for substance, namely, "*hypostasis*". In this difficult situation, salvation came through the contribution of the Cappadocian Fathers who fully fixed the meanings of each term⁷.

⁶ Jean Brun, *Neoplatonism*, Teora Publishing House, Bucharest, 2000, pp. 118-119.

⁷ Dorin-Gabriel Pandele, *De la "Trinitatea" lui Plotin la Sfânta Treime a Sfântului Atanasie cel Mare*, (From the "Trinity" of Plotinus to the Holy Trinity of Saint Athanasius the Great), in the volume "Theology and Education at the Lower Danube" p. 308, from:

<https://www.gup.ugal.ro/ugaljournals/index.php/teologie/article/view/4557>, accessed at 23.03.2024.



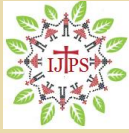
2. ANTHROPOLOGY

The Holy Fathers recognized and appreciated two fundamental characteristics of Greek philosophy related to man. On the one hand, the common vision regarding the spiritual value of man, and on the other, the value of the metaphysical and moral perspective on life. Therefore, human knowledge in Greek thought generally has a religious and moral undertone. In Greek philosophy, the essential factors of human thought are mind (nous), reason (logos), and spirit (pneuma), which are generally presented as epistemological terms because they are used for the expression of thoughts. Hierarchically, Mind is superior to Reason and Spirit. It is about the anthropological triad, which can find a counterpart in the Trinitarian divinity. The mind is considered by ancient Greek philosophy to be of divine origin; therefore, it is characterized as divine and immortal. According to Plato, man has a mind defined as a "*microcosm*", but which participates in the "universal" mind, which for us is the "king of heaven and earth".

Plotinus calls the mind a "*thinking essence*," which receives its substance from the One, the highest of all spiritual essences. In his book "*On the descent of the soul into bodies*", he explains that the soul descends from the intelligible world to the sensible world in order to participate with matter in the One-Good, so as to close the gap between the two worlds. The soul therefore belongs to both worlds, that is why it is characterized as "*amphibious*". The soul in the intelligible world was unitary and indivisible, but with its descent into the sensible world it divides into several individual souls which differ from each other according to the body with which they unite. Thus, one separates the soul of the universe from that of man because of their unequal difference from the intelligible world, as explained in "*On questions concerning the soul*". Man is made up of a corrupt body, impure and evil because it is matter, and of the soul, which constitutes his immortal and divine part. The body is not a receptacle for the soul, but, as air is for light, it acts in different parts of the body without having its seat in them. Only the soul is the true identity of man. Accepts the Orphic, Platonic and Neo-Pythagorean view of reincarnation. He does not accept the Stoic perspective on suicide because then the soul takes something from the body, as it is violently torn from it.

Perception belongs to the soul, because of the simplicity that distinguishes it. However, it is not related to the passions, but to the functional relationship with the body, because it does not get confused with it, but only illuminates it. In "*On the Soul*", he aims to emphasize that our bodily needs are not all material in nature, coming from our perception, but are the result of the coexistence of body and soul. A soulless body cannot perceive the world or experience any bodily state. Likewise, the soul, even in its lowest nature, cannot be subject to the body. There is, therefore, no essential interaction between the two. The only satisfactory interpretation of the soul, taken from Plato, is that it constitutes "*a moving icon of eternity*".

The principle on which Plotinus' philosophy is based is the relationship between the soul and the One-Good. All actions of the soul are evaluated according to this relationship. His relationship with the mind acquires value from the moment it contributes to his ascent to the divine. The orientation of the soul towards matter is considered as a separation from its essence, and this transformation is due to the Platonic forgetting of the divine, but also to the fact that the soul seeks the primordial principles of knowledge. In reality, as long as the soul remains attached to sensible things, it is impossible for it to have access to the sources of knowledge, which leads to ignorance of its own origin. Thus, he does not possess real knowledge.



The soul is something divine or something with divine affinity, argues Plotinus, following Plato. This nature of his is ignored when he places great value on sensible things. The value of the soul is determined by its actions in accordance with law and reason. When he does not live according to them, he does not recognize his own worth and submits to sensible things.

Any determination of non-being, that is, of the material world, is made in relation to the Being - God. The fundamental principle of the soul is communication, and its reporting to the sensible world becomes a formative and vital force. The self-realizing soul understands its formative value only when it turns to the universal Soul. The soul is the force that gives shape to the body and governs its movement. Its distinctive quality is that it maintains and governs the universe according to its own laws. The animate being is regarded by Plotinus as something divine, because the multiplicity of bodies is annulled and subsumed by the unity of the Mind towards which the soul is directed. Through this tendency, it manages to be present everywhere in the body, to coexist with it and to unite things that would otherwise be different from each other⁸.

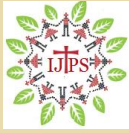
These conceptions are not too far from the Christian teaching about the creation of man and soul in the image and likeness of God. However, Plotinus' theory of the relationship between body and soul departs radically from Christianity, which sees the body as God's work and therefore good, provided one does not serve it and take care of him excessively to the detriment of the soul⁹. Also important is the conception according to which reason - the logos acts and harnesses all the powers of the soul. According to Aristotle, the activity of the logos is the noblest of our attributes. For Plato, the highest achievement of the mind is the knowledge of God and for Plotinus the unity of the primordial and supreme being is analysed in the duality of persons, the thinking man and God, thought by man. The mind operates without any limits, while reason operates within the principles and rules of logic. Human reason corresponds to the reason (rationality) of nature, which manifests itself through the rules of natural order and harmony. Reason is the principle of learning and familiarity with the truth of things, that is, the understanding of the natural order and the standard of the correct formulation of all the achievements of the mind.

In the concept of "*spermatic logos*" of the Stoics and the first Apologists of Christianity, there is the interpretation of the human logos that is ontologically related to the divine logos. The concept of spirit, as the third factor of human thought, expresses the power through which the spiritual structure of man is realized, manifested by vitality, activity, tone and energy. Man, through the spirit, appreciates all that the Spirit of God commands and perceives the manifestations of the divine will. Spirit, as distinct from soul and body, is the most essential link between soul and body and is a vehicle of the soul to all spiritual beings. Through the light offered by the spirit to the human soul, the self-knowledge and spiritual elevation of man is activated. Also, according to Plato, the communion of the soul with the essence and truth of beings and the likeness of all that is spiritual is achieved.

The most essential expression of the presence and action of the spirit in man is the virtuous life, which makes man spiritual. The composition of all the spiritual powers and actions of man represents pure consciousness, it is the manifestation of the autonomy and innate religiosity of man. The call to self-knowledge is a common point of Greek thought

⁸ I.N. Theodorakopoulou, *The fundamental concepts of Plotinus' philosophy*, published by Korai Printing House, Athens, , 1928, p.11.

⁹ Grigori Kostara, PhD. Thesis, "*Der Begriff des Lebens bei Plotinus*", Edit.: Felix Meiner Verlag, Hamburg, 1969, p.35.



and Christianity, and according to Plato, it means not only the self-examination of man, but the awareness of his tragedy, by being removed from the source of the light of knowledge and imprisoned in the darkness of matter. According to Greek thought, the knowledge of God exceeds the cognitive and intellectual capacities of man, therefore the knowledge of the "path" that leads to God acquires value. And at this point, the great similarities between Greek thought and Christian faith must be emphasized.

According to Plotinus, he who knows the way contemplates God and is considered to be the mystical seer of God, who is unseen and remains unknown. This conception of knowing the "way" to God acquires maximum importance in Orthodox theology for defining the concept of tradition and through the value of history for salvation. Greek philosophy provided the Christian faith with the model by which man's interest moved from the worldly to the supermundane and heavenly, to the ultimate truth, that difference between cataphatic and apophatic knowledge. A life lived philosophizing is considered a virtuous life. Classical education aimed at training and orientation towards high ideals with which man could be spiritually uplifted. This exercise aimed at the contemplative life (theoria) whose main characteristics are virtue, dispassion (apatheia), purification (catharsis) and union with the divine.

The union of Hellenism with Christianity by the Church Fathers represented a turning point in the history of culture. The realization of the meeting between Hellenism and Christianity was done especially by the Eastern Fathers of the Church, regardless of whether they were of Greek origin or whether they had simply received Hellenistic education. For example, Origen, although he came from Alexandria in Egypt, which was a hub of Greek studies and a Greek colony by population, preached in Greek because he was familiar with the Greek language and philosophy. Likewise, Saint Athanasius the Great, Didymus the Blind and others.

The problem of relations between Christianity and Hellenism was definitively solved by the contribution of the great Cappadocians: Basil the Great, Gregory the Theologian and Gregory of Nyssa. Basil the Great and Gregory the Theologian also studied in Athens, where they studied Greek philosophy and later, when they retired to become monks in Neo Caesarea in Pontus, they wrote the *Philocalies*, which is nothing more than a diorite anthology of the works of Origen. Through Basil the Great's work *"To young people, about how they can use Greek writings"*, the bridge between Hellenism and Christianity was definitively built, and Christians could study Greek literature without reservations or contraindications. Gregory the Theologian, for his part, expresses his admiration and appreciation for ancient Greek education. His thinking is permeated by Greek philosophy, poetry and the art of rhetoric. In formulating his theological discourses, he uses philosophical terminology such as: hypostasis, person, essence, nature, property, consubstantiality, principle, birth, etc. Thus, the content of Christian dogmas is defined philosophically and formulated with precision and clarity. Gregory's poetic collection, although Christian and Orthodox in content, is Greek in form and language, written in prosodic meters. 408 poems totalling 18,000 lines are preserved and demonstrate his excellent knowledge of the Greek language and rank him among the greatest poets of antiquity. Through his poems he wanted to show that Christians can use the Greek language and its means of expression in the most majestic way. *"Hymn to God"* is one of the best and representative of his grandiose poetry. It refers to the majesty of God, before whom all beings bow down, all need Him, in Him they rest, and no one can fully understand Him or



praise Him enough. Also, anyone can recite this hymn regardless of whether they are a Christian as long as they worship God.

Gregory of Nyssa, on the other hand, with his works demonstrated deep knowledge of Greek philosophy and logic. We find the wonderful coexistence of the Greek word and Trinitarian orthodoxy in his work: *"To the Hellenes, about common notions"*. He begins with what is common between Christians and Hellenic philosophers to formulate his theology of the Holy Trinity. The dialectical capacity is found in many of his works, such as *"Against Destiny"*, which appears as a discussion with a pagan philosopher, initiated by Gregory to convince his interlocutor. The *"Dialogue"* is reminiscent of the Platonic dialogues and was made to demonstrate that fate, as a divine entity, is non-existent¹⁰.

CONCLUSION

Any approach to a subject that joins philosophy and Christianity or Christian theology presupposes an apologetic or vindictive positioning towards one or the other of the discourse systems. Although the history of philosophy and theology have proven the possibility, the necessity or even the obligation of dialogue, the road travelled together has often been difficult. Just as Christianity could not abstract from philosophy, currently called ancient, but whose functional status in the era was completely different, we consider, and not just for the sake of pencilling in a symmetry, somewhere obvious, that the philosophers of the era could not abstract either of Christian teaching, its key concepts, its influences and implications for society.

Christian teaching and dogma, in its process of emergence, is first expressed before more or less initiated and questioning followers, more or less trained in the philosophical culture of the time. The double conditioning of people of their time, formed in a certain culture and sympathy or adherence to the new Christian teaching, spontaneously gives birth to the encounter, dialogue, osmosis, sometimes, between philosophy and Christian teaching, which became a structured theology after the confrontation with the latter, through philosophically educated Christian followers. The meeting between philosophy and Christianity took place under the legitimacy of a general phenomenon, correctly captured by Bourceanu: *"When Greek philosophy and Christian theology noticed "common points", they gave rise either to a sympathy understood as recognition of the similar, or some antipathies as self-defense reactions towards a very serious competitor"*¹¹. Under this attraction-repulsion dynamic, the two forms of knowledge influenced each other. Neoplatonism would have Plotinus as its main originator, but he had his Christian counterpart in Origen, whose influence would extend throughout later Greek theology¹².

¹⁰ Marina I. Messari, *The effects of Plotinus on the Christian Fathers*, PhD. Thesis, at <https://freader.ekt.gr/eadd/index.php?doc=41107&lang=el>, accessed at 29.03.2024, pp. 15-16.

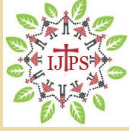
¹¹ Adrian-Claudiu Bourceanu, *Neoplatonismul în scrierile areopagitice, (Neoplatonism in the Areopagite writings)*, PhD Thesis, University of Bucharest - Faculty of Philosophy, 2006, p. 146.

¹² Jean Danielou, *Biserica primară (de la origini până la sfârșitul secolului al treilea), Primary Church (from its origins to the end of the third century)*, Herald Publishing House, Bucharest, 2008, p. 223.



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ARGUMENTS REGARDING THE EXISTENCE OF GOD IN THE WORK MONOLOGION

Georgiana-Cerasela NIȚU,

PhD student at Faculty of Philosophy, University of Bucharest,
ROMANIA

Email: adela_cerasela2001@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

Throughout the history of philosophical thought, both theologians and philosophers have tried to bring arguments in favor of the existence but also of the essence of God. Anselm of Canterbury uses the rational approach to prove God's existence in both the Monologion¹ and the Proslogion². The work Monologion or on the divine essence represents a landmark for the rational demonstration of the existence and essence of God, through the degrees of perfection of the divine being. Instead, in the work Proslogion his approach is a rational one (a priori) and logically argues the existence of God. In the work Proslogion, Anselm recalls that his first work is an unsuccessful attempt, by weaving several arguments, concatenatione multorum argumentorum to demonstrate the reason of faith³, and what can be observed is the similar way (almost synoptic), in which he begins his and the following works, both in the Proslogion and in Why God became man. Thus, Anselm begins his preface by saying that: "some brothers have often and eagerly asked me to set down in writing, in the form of a meditation, my words regarding the divine being, delivered in regular sermons to them and which they collected at a place this meditation."⁴ Anselm believes that he used some necessary and rational arguments concerning the existence of God and did not rely, as his disciple Lanfranco proposed, on the authority of Scripture.

Keywords: *degrees of perfection; supreme good; God, cataphatic approach; Monologion;*

INTRODUCTION

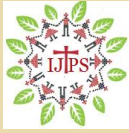
The purpose of this research is to understand Anselmian concepts and how Anselm related to his predecessors, but also a hermeneutic approach to the main concepts in the work Monologion. The hermeneutic analysis will consider the main concepts and critical analysis of the work Monologion, presented by Sofia Vanni. Thus, Anselm of Canterbury (of Aosta) considers cataphatic knowledge (with reference to God's works), starting from the premises of divine attributes (goodness, justice and truth), to then arrive at apophatic knowledge (with reference to the being of God) from the work Proslogion, and which contains arguments in

¹ Anselm of Canterbury, *Monologion or on the essence of divinity*, translation from the Latin language of the notes and the afterword by Alexander Baumgarten, Publisher Biblioteca Apostrof, Cluj, 1998.

² Anselm of Canterbury, *Proslogion*, Bilingual Edition, Latin translation, Afterword and notes by Gheorghe Vlăduțescu, Scientific Publishing House, Bucharest, 1997.

³ Paul Vinginaux, *Le metode de Saint Anselm dans la Monologion et le Proslogion*, în *De Saint Anselme a Luther*, pp.111-130.

⁴ Anselm, *Monologion* op. cit. , p. 7.



favor of the existence of God. In cataphatism, as well as in apophatism, the being of God (ουσία - ousia) cannot be known to the human mind or reason, God remaining to be known only cataphatically, through his divine works, as well as through his divine energies. About the being of God there can only be an apophatic discourse, for this Being is above His cataphatic attributes, in a complex totally unknown to the human mind. Anselm did not rely on Scripture because reason alone can make us understand what exists and what does not exist. Anselm uses the power of reason in this endeavor although at that time reason was not a reliable way to rationally demonstrate divine revelation.

Through this style, Anselm suggests the use of the rational approach in supporting certain arguments regarding the divine nature. So, in the work *Monologion*, Anselm deals with the essence of God, and in the *Proslogion* with his existence, the similarity between the two works stems from the fact that he uses a logical and syllogistic approach, which leads to the same concept, to "esse-le"⁵ God's. In the work *Monologion*, Anselm contemplates rational discourse, in the form of meditation on degrees of reality (degrees of perfection of the divine being; or divine attributes, theologically speaking).

The concepts that Anselm used in his work are of Aristotelian and Augustinian inspiration. These concepts are nature, substance, essence, and the relation between existence and essence), present both in the philosophy of Boethius and in the writings of Blessed Augustine. However, the main concepts that will be followed during the present research (and otherwise present in most of Anselm's works), are: the ultimate truth, the ultimate good, the essence and existence of God. I will consider the way in which Jean Luc Marion proposes a quintessence regarding the divine being, in order to expose the apophatic approach, but also the cataphatic one.

Anselm knew the dogmatic statement of the fact that, in the Holy Trinity (or in the case of the Christian God), the incarnate Son (or the divine Logos), contained two wills and two energies⁶, one created and the other uncreated, which are however united⁷, undivided and inseparable, in polemic with Nestorianism⁸ but also unmixed and unchanged in polemic with Monophysitism.⁹ The divine will and energy are those which can be known to human minds and judgments, as far as possible, only in a cataphatic way. However, in the divine being the expressions about God remain only pure apophaticism.

For example, regarding the divine Being, it can be said that God is not good because he is above this goodness, the apophatism thus designating him as not being good, only in the sense that he is above all goodness, and the cataphatism designating him simply God as good, and reducing the incomprehensibility of his Being by fitting him into a definition of his attributes. But a mediation between cataphatism and apophatism, can name God as an "unapproachable light", as defined by the Holy Apostle Paul in his epistles.

For Anselm, the philosophical-theological question arises, how can one move from affirming the existence in the intellect of the concept of God, as a perfect being, to affirming

⁵ See Parmenides in *On Nature* (II), the use of the verb *esse* in the impersonal present indicative and represents his condition is on the coordinate of eternity (the way that says is or the true way).

⁶ Christian dogmatic synthesis of the VI Ecumenical Synod (council) in Constantinople (680—681).

⁷ Christian dogmatic synthesis of the Third Ecumenical Synod (council) of Ephesus (431).

⁸ The incarnation of the divine Logos, in the human being of the historical person of Jesus Christ, meets the error of theological thinking of Nestorianism which proposed that the two essences, the divine and the human, are separated into two personae, one of the human Jesus Christ and the other of the divine Logos, resident in the man Jesus Christ

⁹ According to the Monophysite theological thinking error, the historical person of Jesus Christ has as his only nature or nature, the divine nature, the human nature or nature is absorbed by the divine nature or nature.



the existence of God among real things? How can one move from a logical-rational truth to an ontological truth? Anselm believes that if a being exists only in the intellect (*esse in intellectu*) and does not exist in reality (*esse in re*), then it follows that it can be conceived as something supreme, and this being can also be conceived as a perfect thing. What are the degrees of perfection to which Anselm refers? Why does Anselm conceive of the existence of an absolute Good represented by a perfect Being called God and of an inferior good belonging to things? Therefore, during the present research, the above questions will be answered.

1. THE INFLUENCE OF AUGUSTINIAN/ARISTOTELIAN PHILOSOPHY IN ANSELMIAN PHILOSOPHY

Anselm is a remarkable personality of the 11th century philosophically as well as theologically. Anselm is generically named, following John Scottus Eriugena (815 - 877 AD), as the true father of scholasticism, but he is also a historian of medieval philosophy. Anselm wrote monographs, in which he addressed important issues of medieval philosophy (the existence and essence of God, the Holy Trinity and original sin), with admirable depth. Anselm's philosophy falls within the Augustinian tradition, and he is influenced in his writings by the church writer Boethius, beginning with his *Monologion*. Through his Aristotelian ideas, but also in the work *Why God became man*¹⁰ Anselm makes a reference to the famous Aristotelian argument of the naval battle¹¹, which he (who did not know the Greek language) knew from the church writer Boethius. Anselm (1033 - 1109) is concerned, like his predecessors (for example John Scottus Eriugena), with the problem of the relationship between reason and faith. Anselm was a great Christian thinker who followed John Scottus Eriugena. Anselm of Canterbury, like Blessed Augustine, tries to prove the existence of God, in a rational way, and thus elaborates an ontological argument¹² (*a priori*) in the work *Proslogion*, but also an *a posteriori* argument in the work *Monologion*. The ontological argument, being criticized later by the philosopher Immanuel Kant. Although, Gheorghe Vlăduțescu believes that in the first work written by Anselm, the ontological argument is presented, in order to prove the existence of God in a rational way.

Anselm was educated on the Platonic and Augustinian lines, recognizing the existence of dialectics in the field of theological thought. It rationally analyzes what creation is (*ex nihilo* - from nothing), investigates the position of the Logos¹³ in the world, the relation of the hierarchy of being, free will and the distinction of logical, moral and ontological truth. Anselm's training took place in the monastic environment, of the Augustinian tradition. Thus, this biographical mention of Anselm above was intended to highlight the fact that in the text of the *Monologion*, Anselm took over and improved the concepts of his predecessors.

The work *Monologion* is written in the third person singular¹⁴ (since the whole argument is a meditation on the divine being), and the main word is (Supreme Good) the

¹⁰ Anselm de Canterbury, *Why God became man*, Polirom Publishing House, Iasi, 1997.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p.11, (being is called absolutely and first starting from substances, and then starting from accidents, it turns out that the essence is properly and truly in substances, and in accidents in a specific way and according to "what" by universal reason.)

¹² The name is proposed by Immanuel Kant.

¹³ The Logos (λόγος) is seen with all three views of him: *logos prophorikos*, *logos endiathetos* and *logos spermaticos*.

¹⁴ Anselm, *Monologion*, op.cit, p.143



supreme essence, which is subject to discourse and consequently to preaching. Anselm takes up a distinction from Aristotelian logic, namely, being by essence and being by accident. This uses the concept of good, according to utility (which is the function of essence), but also considers the lower nature which refers to an attribution in accident.¹⁵ However, Jean-Luc Marion in his work *Certainty Negative*¹⁶ considers this phrase of Aristotle's and considers that it did not have the objective meaning of substance and accident. He says that the substance will remain eternal while the accident will lose its revelatory function.

To understand the problem presented by Anselm, I think it is necessary to present an example: "a horse is called good by the accident of utility, while God cannot be called good by any accident, but in himself, since otherwise this attribution would depend on another and not of God."¹⁷ Therefore, when we speak of God we mean the divine substance which is eternal. These concepts, which Anselm proposes, are of Aristotelian inspiration (such as nature, substance, essence - i.e. the three causes in Aristotle, the essence-accident relationship, or the attribution of the supreme good, which came from the church writer Boethius). Another philosophical-theological term, taken over by Anselmian philosophy, is that of person (*persona*). Anselm takes the concept of *persona* from the work of Boethius, namely from the work *On the person and the two natures of Christ*, i.e. human nature or nature, and the person is defined as a "rationalis natural individual substantia"¹⁸ - the individual substance of a rational nature. This concept of the person is also taken up in the work *Proslogion* and designates the unaccountable or foolish one who gives more importance to the creation than to the Creator.

The concept of person, by the definition of the Ecumenical Synods (Councils), included the two natures or threads of the divine person, of the Logos or Word of God (of the Holy Trinity), Logos incarnated in the immanent time of the Universe, that is, in the history of humanity, through the person divine-human of Jesus Christ. In his work, Anselm uses the term *de universalis*¹⁹, which denotes the quality of the creature, in relation to the Creator, but in Anselm's text, the term loses its consistency/connotation and no longer refers to the whole. To try to find out God's determinations, Anselm hypothesizes in the work a problem of creation from *ex nihilo*, through the following quote "as it should be understood that he made all from nothing."²⁰ In this part of the work, the problem of nothingness arises.

Although Anselm tries to get around the problem of nothingness, which does not lead to the idea of something existent and predicable, either it refers to a negative approach to something that is, or it refers to the hypostatization of nothingness. Anselm refers to a third hypostasis, namely that of a simple form of expression, which leads to the absence of a cause or a phenomenon. Like the philosopher Martin Heidegger, Anselm believes that it is not nothingness that grounds negation, but negation is prior to nothingness. This textual passage, in which Anselm exposes the problem of nothingness, is also taken up by Thomas Aquinas, in his work, *De mundi aeternity*, where he refers to the cosmogonic problem of the creation of the world (*κόσμος*) from nothing, but also of the temporality of existence, in as

¹⁵ Ibidem, p.11, (being is called absolutely and first starting from substances, and then starting from accidents, it turns out that the essence is properly and truly in substances, and in accidents in a specific way and according to "what" by universal reason.)

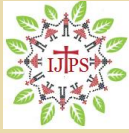
¹⁶ Jean-Luc Marion, *Negative Certainties*, Deisis Sibiu, 2013

¹⁷ Anselm, *Op.cit*, p. 11.

¹⁸ Boethius, *Liber de Persona et Duabus Naturis*, Ch. 3, a person is an individual substance with a rational nature.

¹⁹ Anselm, *Monologion or about the essence of divinity*, Biblioteca Apostrof Cluj, p. 24.

²⁰ Ibidem, pp.28, -29.



for the creature. So, the problem of nothingness is reflected in relation to the divine reason and in relation to that of the temporality of being: "that those which are made from nothing, before it appears that they once existed in relation to the reason of the one who made them."²¹ What we can infer is that there is a cause for the creation of the world, and the world has as its ultimate cause, the divine nature.

The term Monologion in the title of Anselm's work, denotes the soliloquy, in which both the attributes of the divinity and God are the object of thought or meditation. This speech or meditation is similar to the hesychasm of Eastern Christianity, when it relates to God, a hesychasm experienced since before Anselm, in which the Christian contemplates God affectively but personally and not necessarily rationally, in an apophatic way and in silence (ησυχία) or in silence, because God being a being and triune in persons, like man who is also a personal being, God can thus manage the dialogue of restoring the divine-human link in a circular and continuous sense. Thus, in this work eloquently called the Monologion, Anselm makes a cosmological argument for the existence of God, starting from the degrees of perfection between things.

Anselm conceives the existence of an absolute Good, which is represented by the perfect Being, called God, and by an inferior good belonging to things. Anselm considers that if a being exists only in the intellect, it does not exist in reality, that is, to be in reality (esse in re), means more than in the mind (esse in intellectu), and then it follows that it can be the concept of something, higher than this something, or we can even think of something higher, which can no longer be the concept. Therefore, God must also exist in reality. Anselm considers a distinction of Aristotelian logic: being essence and being accident, and the distribution of good according to the use of the reference from attribution to accident. The degrees of inequality are of Neoplatonic inspiration. The scale of these perfections begins with God as the first perfection, in which essence and existence coincide. This time hierarchy is developed by Thomas Aquinas, in the famous *De ente et essentia*, where the difference imposed by Boethius in what a thing is (essence) and the fact that it is (being), increases according to the materiality of each reality.

Thus, God's attributes of being and essence are identical. "For if the difference of degrees is infinite, then there would still be no higher degree, from this argument we deduce the fact that the multitude of these natures would not end with any limit."²² The Monologion has seventy-nine chapters, and the first chapters consider the existence of a supreme Good (which is perfect) and the unity of the divine being. This work attempts to demonstrate the existence/essence of the divine being, through the concept of supreme good, creature, majesty, perfection, thus treating each attribute of divinity.

Throughout the work Monologion, the conceptual problem of the trinity is also treated, which he develops in the work *About the Trinity Faith*. Thus, Anselm investigates the three persons of the trinity and gives them the following attributes: the Son is the Creator Logos of the Father, and the Holy Spirit is the love between the Father and the Son. Anselm analyzes the divine Trinity, in relation to what is rational, by faith and knowledge, and the last chapter concerns the knowledge and contemplation of God.

²¹ Ibidem.

²² Ibidem



Anselm tries to use theistic²³ evidence to demonstrate the existence of God. It considers the need for rational demonstration (with the help of argumentation) of the existence of the divine being (God). To demonstrate the existence and essence of God, he uses reason as the first and revealing element, because it is the only one able to prove what exists and what does not exist. An example we find it in the Parmenidean work *On Nature* by using the phrase to think is the same as being, therefore, being can be thought of as being (being as being), later being taken up and thought of in Aristotelian metaphysics as being as being. Thus, Anselm takes the Parmenidean approach to being which is the way of truth and knowledge and aims at the divine being and its attributes. The Hegelian interpretation of this phrase leads to the determination of being in itself, the divine being not being the same as the idea of God. Another element that highlights the existence of God is that of Supreme Nature and Sovereign Good.

He uses a definition of the divine nature: "therefore, that which is good in itself is sovereignly good and superior to that which exists, since that which is supremely good is the greatest, that is, superior to that which exists."²⁴ Anselm asks whether the primordial cause of things is a rational one. Reason is the only one that has a cause in mind. This cause is related to a higher good that co-participates in the good of things. Anselm provides a syllogism in that both nature and the universal have a cause, and this cause is related to the degrees of perfection between things. It demonstrates that there can be degrees of perfection both between things and between beings and these belong to the ultimate nature which is God.

Therefore there is either one thing, by which all existing things exist, or there is more than one such thing. If there are more than one, either they all exist through one thing, or each of them exists through itself, or they exist through each other. If true, then "there is certainly some power or nature of self-existence, which they have to exist by themselves," and in that case, "all things exist more truly, by that than by the few things that cannot exist without that thing". This, of course, exists by itself, so it is greater than all other things. Therefore, it is "the best and greatest and supreme of all existing things."²⁵

Anselm begins with the premise that things "are not all equal to dignity; rather, some of them are on different and unequal levels' (eg, a horse is better than wood and a human being is better than a horse).²⁶ Now it is absurd to think that there is no limit to how high these levels can be, so that there is no level so high that no higher level can be found. The only question is how many beings occupy the highest level of all. Is there just one or more? Suppose there are more. By assumptions, we must all be equal. If they are equal, they are equal by the same thing.

This is either identical with them or different from them. If it is identical with them, then they are not many but one, since they are all identical with one thing. On the other hand, if that thing is different from them, then it does not occupy the highest level. Instead, that thing is greater than the others. Therefore there is a certain nature or substance or essence, which by Him is good and great, and by Himself is what it is; by which there is that which is truly good, or great, or whatever; and this is the supreme good, or supreme work, supreme

²³ Conception of God as an absolute, unique and living personal being, of a different essence, compared to the created world but external to the world, with a will of his own, external to nature, but a God present in the world through his creative action.

²⁴ Anselm, *Proslogion*, Before and After Anselm, p. 134

²⁵ Anselm de Canterbury (de Aosta), *Monologion*, Op. Cit, p. 65.

²⁶ *dem*, p.32.



being, or subsistence, that is, the supreme of all existing things. The problem of truth that he proposes in the Monologion is also taken up in the work *About truth*, where he realizes based on the truth of the statement that the ultimate truth has neither beginning nor end, because it is limited by the two concepts. Anselm begins his work by referring to goodness and tries to make a whole apologia on goods and the good itself and tries, using the Aristotelian approach to attribute the good according to utility. Anselm emphasizes that there is a cause for which all things are good, and this ultimate cause is a rational one. In the second chapter he has in mind a characterization of greatness, but he uses it to denote something qualitative, not quantitative, because it refers to wisdom.

2. SOFIA VANNI'S COMMENTARY ON THE WORK MONOLOGION

The researcher Sofia Vanni offers her own commentary on the Anselmian work. Logic and thought in Anselmian work are both expounded in the Monologion, although some commentators have felt that this work is neglected by medieval philosophy. Anselm, in his works, but especially in the work Monologion, presents that assumed truths are revealed truths, that is, truths of faith, but always, according to the Anselmian method, the proposed solutions are presented as conclusions, necessarily related to certain truths, already admitted. Anselm uses meditation in his search for the reason of faith, and in this he goes far beyond the concessions that Lanfranco made to dialectics. It is much more true that, after Anselm had been to his tutor Lanfranco, and afterwards became Archbishop of Canterbury, he submitted his Monologion to his own judgment. Sofia Vanni believes that "Anselm would have felt ruined if Lanfranco had judged this work of his negatively. But probably Lanfranco replied by congratulating him, rather a little coldly and bewildered by the originality of the writing, than by his dialectical rigor."²⁷

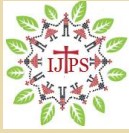
In short, Lanfranco must have expressed some reservations, being deeply²⁸ concerned lest Anselm, hurt by his remarks, should have lessened his affection for him, even though the remarks had been made with a good purpose. However, Lanfranco had advised Anselm to reflect well on what he had written and to compare what he wrote with the Holy Scriptures and with the texts of the Fathers, relying on their authority, where reason can no longer reach. Sofia Vanni considered that although Anselm's discourses were based on Holy Scripture or the works of Blessed Augustine, observing that his writings were not sources of Holy Scripture or Holy Tradition. The Holy Tradition is considered to be that which includes the confessions of the martyrs, the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, the patristic writings of the Latin (Western) and Greek (Eastern) patrology, but even the Holy Scriptures, as a primary quintessence of the Holy Tradition.

But on the contrary, Anselm presented his work as a recapitulation of the broad arguments of Blessed Augustine in *De Trinitate*. After Lanfranco's judgment, in the letter of presentation of the Monologion, (it should be noted that Anselm had sent him the opusculum without a title), Anselm had asked Lanfranco to give the work a title; but still it does not appear that Lanfranco proposed a title. The title is that which Anselm had found for himself, and which was as an example of a meditation on the reason of faith.

Anselm prefers to see the rationale of the work in the Monologion, before he speaks of the dialogue purporting to be devoted to logic in his work *De grammatico*. Anselm believes that applied logic in research provides a better understanding of how Anselmian

²⁷ Ibidem, p.56.

²⁸ Sofia Vanni, *Introductione a Anselmo D'Aosta*, Bari, p.21



thought proceeds. The subject of the Monologion is the being of God (*divinitatis essentia*)²⁹ and other truths related to it. The method by which Anselm writes his discourses, and that nothing was asserted without the authority of Holy Scripture, that every assertion was justified by the evidence of truth and the persuasive power of reason (*quidquid per singulas investigationes finis asserteret, id ita esse [...] et rationis necessitas breviter cogeret et veritatis claritas patenter ostenderet*). *Rationis necessitas*,³⁰ resides from the necessity of the connection between one statement and the other, *veritatis claritas*, which is the immediate proof and spectacle of truth. *Ratio*, includes both moments, namely the necessary and the sufficient connection, between one sentence and the other, in order to arrive at a statement that is self-evident. Rationally, it is the same methodological procedure in the Monologion, which starts not from a concept of God, but from what gives an experience, and deduces that this cannot be, or could be contradictory, without the existence of a supreme good, of a supreme essence, on which all things depend. Anselm deduces from these early realized concepts other attributes of the Supreme Being, and only after deduction of these (including reason and will), Anselm concludes in the last chapter, that this essence is God himself.

God's name is mentioned in the Monologion only at the end. The style of the Monologion responds to the need expressed by Immanuel Kant, in *The Only Possible Argument for a Demonstration of God's Existence*: "When I say: that God is an existing thing, I seem to express the relation of a predicate to the subject. But, indeed, there is an inaccuracy in this expression. To speak exactly we should say: something that exists is God"³¹. Being extremely logical, Anselm realized that, in philosophy, namely through reason alone (*sola ratione*), one cannot start from the concept of God, but can only arrive there (namely to the concept of God, through faith you drive at the experience of God).

Anselm's disciples asked him to rationally justify the doctrine of faith, without appealing to the authority of Holy Scripture, and thus Anselm puts himself in the shoes of one who is free from Christian revelation, as if Christian preaching had not reached to him, or as if he does not give credence to such a sermon (*aut non audiendo aut non credendo ignorat*). Thus, following the guidance of reason, Anselm continues to demonstrate the existence of a supreme good, a supreme truth, and a supreme entity. Anselmian's first argument starts from an unparalleled observation: we all want to enjoy the things we consider good, and we encounter many good things, but what makes the things we judge good? It is in the very nature of things that they should be different, for what constitutes the nature of a thing cannot belong to it more or less, and yet there are things more or less good. Therefore, these more or less good things must be of such a nature that they are by virtue of one goodness. For the objection that goodness is different in different things (for example the goodness of a horse consists in its strength and speed, strength in time and speed are not good in other cases as it is, for example, for a thief). So there is a goodness, which comes from the concept of utility, but it is not the original goodness, because the concept of profit is a relative concept.

²⁹ Written in 1076. It is Anselm's first philosophical work. First he wrote some Prayers (*Orazioni*).

³⁰ *Essentia* does not have in St. Anselm the meaning (which it had according to the Latin translation of Avicenna's *Metaphysics*) of *essenza* as distinct from existence or instead of action, but the meaning of *che fa essere* as and how light appears as something shining. *Essentia*, *esse* et *ens* these are like *luxury*, *lucere* e *lucens* (*Monolog.*, chapter 6).

³¹ «... in persona alicuius tacite secum rationando quae nesciat investigantis...» *Prosl. Prooemium*; *Opera* I, p. 93.

³¹ *Monol.*, cap. 1; *Opera* I, p. 13.



Concept is useful for whom? Useful for what? Therefore, the divine being refers to what is good in itself (*honestum*), and it is only in relation to this that one can speak of the goodness of various good things. "Now who could deny that, in virtue of which all things are good, there must also be a greater good?" And not only is it a great good, but it is the highest good, for what is good for itself is good in measure in which it is possible to be good and does not borrow its goodness from elsewhere, because that good does not need anything else in return. The Anselmian argument is typically Platonic and Augustinian. Anselm takes up Augustine's speech in the eighth book *De Trinitate*, which moves from good or goods to good, "Good is the country with the height of the mountains, with the alternation of hills and plains; good is a pleasant and fertile farm..."³² and so on, from most earthly things to their good. The good has an ethical connotation, while the good can only have an aesthetic, useful or simply pecuniary connotation. A man can own a work of art, which undeniably has an aesthetic but also a pecuniary value, that is, it is a valuable asset, but which, from an ethical point of view, may not contain any connotation, because it does not convey any ethical or metaphysical message.

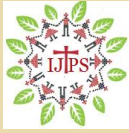
CONCLUSION

Gheorghe Vladuțescu believes that there is a distinction but also a clear delimitation between the writing of the *Monologion* and the *Proslogion*. In the *Monologion*, Anselm develops the ontological argument, and in the *Proslogion* he argues for the existence of God. Therefore, in writing the *Proslogion*, Anselm moves from the concept of divine perfection to that of divine being.

In arguments, both in speech and in conceptions about God, the scholastic theology of Western Christianity has always been based on the power of reason, in its expositions about God and then about pistis. Eastern Christianity has always emphasized the affective understanding of man's relationship with God, an apophatic, personal and mystical-ascetic understanding. But both tendencies, conclude to the common set of the treasury of understanding of the Christian faith, when talking about a divine one, the soteriological³³ union of man with God and these through the immanent and then transcendent realization of the union between people. So unity, union and union. Anselm starts from reason to reach faith (an intuitive way, which will influence scholasticism and then the method of scientific empiricism), and in the east it starts from dogmatic paradigms, in order to be able to create a rational relationship between them (a deductive way and speculative of systematic dogmatic theology), in order to achieve a higher form of understanding. One can observe all of the above, especially when rationally or scholastically, the three Persons of the divine being, are an antinomian possibility of divine perfection and omnipotence. And, from an affective or Eastern Christian point of view, the union between the Triune Persons, but also their distinction as antinomy, is achieved only through the pure and perfect love of these Persons in the divine being. I mean the ones Three Persons are united by the convergence of their perfect love, in one divine being of God, but these three Persons nevertheless remain distinct, because through love it is impossible to make one person the continuation of the other in itself, avoiding the subjugation of the other and the dilution of one's identity and dignity in one another, because a pure love would not accept this.

³²Sofia Vanni, *Introductione a Anselmo D'Aosta*, p. 25.

³³Anselm of Canterbury is also considered the father of soteriology (doctrine of theology, which is based on salvation/rescue from suffering attributed to sin, salvation achieved through the freely consented sacrificial act of a Person of the Holy Trinity or God; the term comes from the Greek *ὁ σωτήρ* = savior, liberator).

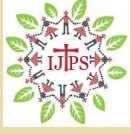


Anselm of Canterbury lays the foundation for scholastic logic, when he exposes perichoresis (the unity of the persons of the divine Trinity), expressing that the Father became incarnate at the same time as the Son. This is understood correctly, in that together with one person, there are always the other two, because it is about one God, omnipresent (as a cataphatic attribute). The rational reconstruction of faith (die rationale Rekonstruktion des Glaubens) or Sola Ratione, as defined by Stephan Ernst and Thomas Frans, is the achievement made by Anselm of Canterbury, by prioritizing reason before faith, in the course of theological research. Anselm cannot be blamed for not starting from Holy Scripture to arrive at pistis (faith), as his mentor Lanfranco had asked him to do, because by using sola ratione to arrive at faith (pistis), Anselm could address to all people (even those for whom the Holy Scripture is not a reference point), thus bringing all to faith.

As for the work Monologion is written at the request of some monarchs. This work is a theological treatise, being an apologetic and religious work. Anselm tried to prove by appeal to reason the existence and attributes of God. It analyzes the inequities of various aspects of perfection through justice, understanding and wisdom. He claimed an absolute norm that can be understood by the human mind, that this norm is the cause of all things. This norm is God (the absolute and ultimate standard and ultimate perfection.).

Anselm's speculative research on the Son - the Creator (Logos) and eternal Word of the Father and the Holy Spirit, which proceeds from the Love of the Father and the Son, of the three divine platforms viewed from the perspective of divine unity. Jean Luc Marion proposes a quintessence of the understanding of God, in that God is incomprehensible in His being, and His incomprehensible is indefinable, and because man is like God, man is indefinable. Thus it seems that from the apophatic point of view, almost nothing could be said about God. But Anselm, as the forerunner of scholasticism, speaks about God in a cataphatic way, arguing logically and rationally for the existence of divine attributes, which in apophatic way might seem a reduction of divine incomprehensibility, only that Anselm, in the first instance, mentions the attributes of the divine being, to then reach the concept of God. That's why Anselm in the work Monologion and in his philosophical-theological approach, starts from reason (ratio) to reach faith (credo).

The historical context in Anselm's case really meant a show of courage, using reason instead of Holy Scripture in proving the Christian creed. Therefore, it can be concluded that the Anselmian argument from the Monologion is an a posteriori argument, while the ontological argument from the Proslogion is an a priori one.



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THE TRANSHUMANISM – PARADIGM OF SECULARIZATION AN ORTHODOX PERSPECTIVE

Cătălin-Dumitru VOȘLOBAN,

PhD Student, Doctoral School of Theology, „Ovidius” University of Constanța,
ROMANIA

Email: Cata.Voslo@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The phenomenology of secularization is in a continuous change, generated by the alterability of all main aspects of life: the socio-political, cultural, and human psycho-physiological environment, all these being affected by the technology and lifestyle specific to the 21st century. In the field of modern technology, the scientific discoveries and the fast technological progress have led most notably to an „inhuman technicalization of life”, with a strong echo in the spiritual plan of human existence. The acceleration of these changes in the last decades, have clothed the process of secularization in a new, modern garment, semantically altering the term „progress”, in an ideological way. Sciences, culture, health, medicine, life, man, and even his nature, are targeted by a radical change, through technology, with the declared purpose of an eternal state of well-being, of infinitely improved capabilities of the human intellect and physique. This philosophy, which leads to augmentations and modifications of the human body, brain and even the genome, for purposes clearly demarcated from Christian eschatology, shapes this new current of thought - transhumanism, which promises to lead humanity towards a finality and state that are fundamentally different from the current ones, namely post-humanity.

Keywords: *secularization; transhumanism; technology; post-humanism, progress;*

INTRODUCTION

To comprehensively address the issue of secularization in the 21st century, necessarily involves the analysis of the contemporary ideological landscape, dominated among others by transhumanism, as an emerging ideology. In this sense, it can be observed that transhumanism, as a current of thought, identifies itself almost entirely with the secularist way of thinking, from which he seems to emanate.

The attempt is to prove the paternity of secularization, in the genesis process of transhumanism, by bringing into discussion the transformation of all important aspects of life: family, school, society, medicine, etc., since, in the same way in which secularization gradually and progressively is soaking up all these areas, the transhumanism aims to transform all of them. If secularization presents itself as a simple process, without claiming a specific goal, but only the desired direction, transhumanism shows both the direction to follow and the goal pursued. Beyond the modern means used by it, the point of interest is the philosophy that fuels its actions, which can easily lead us to the core ideas of secularization.

This article attempts to indicate, through the analysis of recent literature in the field, of the current discourse on transhumanism, and by a conceptual, semantic analysis of specific terms (i.e. secularization, post-humanism, progress), the direct link between the secularist phenomenon and the transhumanist current of thought. First of all, the methods



used by the transhumanist movement will be analyzed. Subsequently, by comparison with Christian eschatology, the finality proposed by this current of thought will be analyzed and summarized.

1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Secularization represents a change, first of all, in the unseen plane of man, in his way of feeling and living, and subsequently of the society of which he is a part, and which he transforms according to his own convictions. On a human level, secularization is given by the evolution of man's personal relationship with God, a relationship that falls under the influence of the external environment: cultural, social, and last but not least, ideological. Citing Steve Bruce, Jaco Beyers shows that secularization is the process resulting from social and economic influences¹. In relation to both fields, among the factors that influence the process of secularization, scientific progress appears as a new element. It leads to the re-evaluation and change of all aspects of life, through the ever deeper interpenetration of life with technology. The ideological capture of scientific progress produces an autonomization of the human mind, which gives rise to the transhumanist current of thought. It can be translated into man's personal conviction that with the help of cutting-edge technology, he acquires unlimited powers in terms of expanding his physical and intellectual capabilities, but also over life, disease, and even death. The question that arises is whether and to what extent, scientific progress potentiates the phenomenon of secularization, thus shaping a new paradigm of it.

2. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SECULARIZATION AND THE EMERGING TRANSHUMANISM

From an epistemological point of view, secularization represents the resubordination of all aspects of life and society to principles and values other than those contained in the teachings of the Church. The element of novelty in the phenomenology of secularization is the contribution of ultramodern technology, which, once seized in an ideological sense by it, emanates from itself the main transhumanist ideas. Thus, the technological advance and the emergence of new means, bring to the fore transhumanism as a solution to the ontological expectation of human well-being, fulfillment and happiness. Just as secularization touches all aspects of life, culturally, socially, biologically, in the same way transhumanism, in the process of its unfolding, touches, transforms and changes all key aspects of man's earthly life.

The purpose is to show that the authorship of transhumanism as an ideology and current of thought can be claimed, among others, by secularization as a total phenomenon in the transformation of human life and society. But, although the germ of transhumanism remains secularization, nevertheless, it is the technological momentum that potentiates and metamorphoses it into what we call transhumanism today.

Advanced technology remains beneficial to man only until it is ideologically captured, at which point it begins to serve purposes that turn out to be completely alien to genuine Christian love. If the secularist spirit represents the germ of the transhumanist current, yet the key element, which gives life and flavor to the current, is cutting-edge technology, and progress, without which the transhumanist promise and dream could not

¹ Jaco Beyers, „The church and the secular: The effect of the post-secular on Christianity”, in *HTS: Theological Studies*, Vol. 70, no. 1 (2014), p. 4



have taken shape. Thus, from this symbiosis, between the extraordinary technological progress and the process of secularization of life, a new ideology takes shape:

„Transhumanism is a high-tech dream of computer scientists, philosophers, neuroscientists and many others. It seeks to use major advances in technology to augment the human body and mind, and ultimately the entire human experience. It is the philosophy that holds that mankind should actively self-improve and direct the course of its own evolution. Transhumanists want to become what they call "post-humans". Post-humans are people who have been altered by body and brain augmentations to the point where they can no longer be called human. They underwent mutations that turned them into completely new beings”².

From this presentation, one can see the interrelationship of secularist ideas and cutting edge technology. Transhumanism makes use not only of the most advanced technologies available, but also of the highest intellectual achievements available, which points to the human element. Daniel Estulin's definition is rather an x-ray of the ideological movement, which clearly exposes not only the goal and the means, but also its philosophy. The secularist spirit is present, through humanity's desire for self-improvement, a desire that sets in motion and appeals to all the ultra-modern means available. An important aspect that emerges from the cited definition is the perpetual character of the transhumanist dream, through which it fascinates and captivates. This aspect translates into the fact that the ideology presents itself in the form of a beautiful dream, but it does not offer any real basis, nor guarantees, or an approximate time frame for the achievement of the respective goals.

The process of secularization, whose triggering moment, in the broadest sense, is considered to be the French revolution, has progressed gradually, influenced by the particularities of each epoch that humanity has passed through, either social or technological, or by currents of thought that appeared in the last three centuries. What secularization now takes over from the 21st century, for the first time in its existence as an ongoing process, is the extraordinary leap and advance of science, reaching a level that can sometimes give man the illusory feeling of omnipotence. Once the search for God by the human soul seems to disappear, through gradual elimination, man redirects all its energies, constructively intended and associated with this ontological search, in a completely different direction, which can seduce him.

3. SECULARIZATION AND METHODS OF TRANSHUMANISM

3.1. Transhumanism In The Vision of Its Promoters

There are several definitions for the current of thought that has acquired the name of transhumanism, which is why we will use one of the most suggestive definitions, in order to highlight its roots. In this regard, father Jean Boboc quotes a definition provided by Nicolas Le Dévédec: „As an ideological background of the amelioration society, it (transhumanist ideology) sheds light on the post-humanist model of perfectibility that tends to prevail in our contemporary Western societies. [...]It is a question, no more, no less, of uprooting man from any biological anchorage, in order to access a new stage of evolution”³.

² Daniel Estulin, *Transevoluția, Apropiați epocă a deconstrucției umane*, romanian translation by Mihai-Dan Pavelescu, Meteor Publishing, 2018, pp. 183-184

³ Nicolas Le Dévédec, *La société de l'amélioration. La perfectibilité humaine des Lumières au transhumanisme*, éditeur Liber, Montreal, 2015, apud Pr. Jean Boboc, „Transumanismul decriptat. Metamorfoza navei lui Tezeu”, romanian translation from french by Manuel Valeriu, edition edited by Prof. Dr. Sebastian Moldovan, Doxologia publishing, Iași, 2020, p. 64



The definition puts before everything the very essence of the transhumanist current: the improvement of man, of society, which coincides with the declared goal of the movement. The ideal, or the model towards which it strives, is the post-humanist one of perfectibility. It follows from here that transhumanism is only a stage of evolution, towards the final stage, post-humanity. In the analysis of this term, one finds all the paradigmatic aspects of the transformation of man and society according to the transhumanist ideal. The desirability of the improvement of society, of man, without the appeal to God, to His pronia and to His work, can only have an ideological substrate, as N. Le Dévédec shows above. God himself, as the author of life, wants the same thing for man: his improvement to perfection, and the transformation of his transitory life into eternal life, with the difference that, in Christianity, immortality is regained, and in transhumanism, it would be reached for the first time in human history.

In Christian eschatology, perfection is achieved, not through augmentations of the physical body, but through the inner transformation of man following the exercise of his will for good, permanently assisted by the sanctifying grace. Transhumanism also claims basically the same goals, but their semantic nuance is completely different. Both God and transhumanist philosophers promise and call man to the same finality, although the last ones are more reserved in offering guarantees for: well-being, eternal life, knowledge and perfected intellectual abilities. Nick Bostrom adds all of this to the stated goals of transhumanism: „Options for improvement discussed include the radical expansion of health, the eradication of disease, the elimination of unnecessary suffering, and the augmentation of intellectual, physical, and emotional possibilities. Other transhumanist themes include the colonization of space and the possibility of creating superintelligent machines, along with other potential developments that could profoundly alter the human condition”⁴.

The fundamental differences between the Christian and the transhumanist vision appear, however, in the definition of the means by which this perfection is reached. It should be noted what father Jean Boboc stated, speaking about man, namely that „all his possibilities are already set by his nature from which he cannot escape”⁵.

This means that all his biological, cognitive, physical limits are already circumscribed to carefully established thresholds, which leads us to the words of our Savior Christ: „without Me you can do nothing” (John 15, 5). In what follows, an analysis of the two paths to perfection will be conducted, first of all trying to show what this means in the transhumanist sense, and than in the Orthodox one, for finally stating the methods that the two paths assume for reaching the stated goals.

3.2. The Transhumanist Desires

As it appears from its definitions, and from the praises brought by its promoters, transhumanism does not demand any internal or moral change of man, but proposes the achievement of perfection, through complex physical, invasive interventions, in the body, and even in the very human nature. He considers man „upgradable” by augmentation, or by intervention in his genetic material, or in his brain, the two key elements in man's bio-psycho-physical existence. Thus fascinated by his own creation, the computer, man began to wish he could become like it: to be able to instantly appropriate endless amounts of information, to have instant access to all existing information, to be able to transfer his

⁴ Nick Bostrom, *Ethical Issues for the Twenty-First Century – Transhumanist Values*, Oxford Philosophy Documentation Center, 2005, p. 3. Available at <https://nickbostrom.com/ethics/values.pdf>

⁵ Pr. Jean Boboc, *Transumanismul decriptat – Metemorfoza navei lui Tezeu*, romanian translation from french by Manuel Valeriu, edition edited by prof.dr. Sebastian Moldovan, Doxologia publishing, Iași, 2020, p. 15



memory, to be able to slow down and stop aging, to be able to eliminate suffering from his existence, suffering which he considers worthless and unnecessary. This idolatry of one's own creation, and the investment of all his resources towards the desideratum of this resemblance, may present, in a broad sense, all the characteristics of a new religion, whose engine is found to be the progress, a term semantically altered in the 21st century.

By changing the human essence through augmentation, has its own risks. However, these invasive procedures in the genetic or molecular structure of man can give birth to hybrid creatures, whose belonging to human nature is called into question. Damien Broderick shows that „trans-human” refers to „someone who is actively preparing to become posthuman. Someone knowledgeable enough to know future possibilities and prepare for them, and who takes every available resolution to self-improve. And posthuman refers to a person with unprecedented physical, intellectual and psychological capabilities, self-programming, self-forming, individually limitless, potentially immortal”⁶. Even if the vision of Damien Broderick does not entirely correspond to that of Daniel Estulin, as the last one sees in the posthuman state, something that no longer belongs to human nature due to the structural changes and augmentations it has undergone, the opinion of the second one seems more grounded, since the intervention in the biological and genetic structure of man brings with it unquantifiable changes in the functioning of the human affective, rational and spiritual universe as a whole.

In the transhumanist discourse, no clear reference can be found to any change in the moral inner order, or in the way of thinking, or regarding the affective universe of man. The transhumanist dream proposes the resemblance of man to the machine, whose characteristics he wants implemented in himself: instant learning, unlimited memory, the possibility to transfer his memory, or even the transfer of consciousness, abilities that are referred to in a report of the European Union, also cited by father Jean Boboc: „Technological devices already available and ongoing research anticipate breakthroughs and technoscientific applications worthy of true science fiction [...]: gene doping, aging slowing, brain digitization and knowledge transfer, AI (Artificial Intelligence), genetic enhancement and other cognitive capabilities, mood modulations, etc”⁷.

4. CHRISTIAN ESCHATOLOGY AND TRANSHUMANISM AS RELIGION OF THE FUTURE

4.1. The Transhumanist Dream, and the Perfection in Christian Sense

Considering the stated ideals, which are clearly demarcated from Christian eschatology, it is easy to intuit father Jean Boboc's remark that „the ideologues of transhumanism do not start from Christian anthropology”, but from the premise of a Darwinian type of evolution, which they undertake the duty of speeding it up. In this sense, one can evoke a definition of transhumanism, provided by Nick Bostrom, one of the pillars of this current of thought: „a philosophy of life (like the extropian perspective) that seeks to continue and accelerate the evolution of intelligent life beyond its current human form, with

⁶ Damien Broderick, „Trans and Post”, in Max More, Natasha-Vita More (eds.), *The Transhumanist Reader: Classical and contemporary Essays of Science, Technology and Philosophy of the Human Future*, Wiley-Blackwell, 2013, p. 430, apud Ana-Veronica Ion, „Transumanismul – Un comentariu creștin”, Eikon publishing, Bucharest, 2021, p. 20

⁷ Science and Technology Options Assesement, *Human Enhancement Study*. Available at: [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/etudes/join/2009/417483/IPOL-JOIN_ET\(2009\)417483_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/etudes/join/2009/417483/IPOL-JOIN_ET(2009)417483_EN.pdf), apud Pr. Jean Boboc, *Transumanismul decriptat...*, p. 84



the help of science and technology, under the guidance of the principles and values related to defending of life”⁸. This assumption of the change in human nature and condition can be considered a direct result of secularization, through the divinization of human reason, and simultaneously, of the science it has reached.

God, however, proposes to mankind the achievement of perfection and immortality through Him, through the redemption of each person, obtained through the Son of God’s sacrifice on the cross. He proposes the achievement of absolute knowledge, and eternal happiness through repentance, prayer and good deeds, through which communion with God is reached, communion which involves the simultaneous possession of eternal life and happiness. The key element to which perfection appeals, in the Orthodox sense, is the will of man, which, intertwined with the grace and power of God, transfigures the inner man, without operating any kind of physical, biological or genetic changes to his structure.

If in transhumanism, man himself is the one who selfimproves through augmentation, trying to rise beyond the limits imposed by his nature, in Orthodoxy, God is the one who, called by man through the manifestation of his free will, changes the inner man, lifting him from the fallen condition imposed by his nature, to the divine condition of immortality and to eternal happiness. This overcoming of his fallen condition is impossible for man to achieve, but is exclusively God's prerogative. If from an orthodox, spiritual point of view, perfection comes through repentance and knowledge of God, transhumanism promises everything through the means of modern technology: operations, interventions and augmentations in the human genome, brain implants, etc. The fundamental difference between the two ways, comes from the total lack of spiritual struggle of man, in the process of reaching perfection, in the transhumanist vision.

4.2. Secularization of Man's Ontological Attraction Towards God

Speaking about the relationship between secularization and religion, Aistė Bukevičiūtė believes that a broader definition of secularization can give rise to situations where ideologies are treated as religions⁹.

This observation resonates with Julian Huxley's conclusion, drawn nearly a century ago: „I believe in transhumanism»: when enough people will come to truly say so, the human species will be on the brink of a new kind of existence, in the same way distinct from ours, as ours is from that of the man of Pekin”¹⁰. Man is no longer urged to say „I believe in One God”, according to the orthodox symbol of faith, but his faith is diverted to a closed path, stuck in the characteristic immanence of the science, which belongs to the physical world. The ontological need of man to seek God, and to worship Him, is diverted by the ideological and secularist current. As God has planted into mankind the struggle to reach infinity, man cannot exist in the absence of a goal, of a dream to dedicate his existence to. This peculiarity of the human being belongs to the image of God placed inside man at his creation, through which man is meant to advance eternally in the only true knowledge, that of God, which is infinite. All other knowledge is closed in the immanent, and cannot bring the human soul the fulfillment it seeks. Precisely this ontological need for perpetual

⁸ Nick Bostrom, „Human Genetic Enhancements: A transhumanist perspective”, in *Journal of Value Inquiry*, vol. 37, no. 4 (2003), pp 493-506, apud Ana-Veronica Ion, „Transumanismul – Un comentariu creștin”, Eikon publishing, Bucharest, 2021, p. 18

⁹ Aistė Bukevičiūtė, „Secularization and the future of religion”, in *Scholarly Journal Problemos*, vol. 103/2023, Vilnius University press, Vilnius, 2023, p. 74

¹⁰ Julian Huxley, „Transhumanism”, in *New Bottles for New Wine*, London: Chatto and Windus, 1957, pp.13-17



knowledge, for perfection, is ideologically taken over inside man, by the transhumanist current, and exploited in the direction proposed by its goals. Any other path of knowledge, apart from that of knowing God, is a path closed in the immanent. Diverting man on such a path is equivalent to a gradual elimination of authentic faith from man, a phenomenon predicted by Max Weber, who stated that, in the end, religion will no longer have a place in society and will become completely obsolete¹¹.

4.3. Risks in the Transhumanist Approach

Although it is argued that the principle underlying the transhumanist approach is the defending of life¹², the major risk involved in the technological intervention in human biology and genetics, is aimed at life itself. The reference to „the evolution of intelligent life beyond its present human form” shows the participation of the theory of evolution in the genesis process of transhumanism.

According to its philosophy, mankind is in a continuous evolution, a process that must be accelerated using the most advanced means of science. The theory of evolution, closely related to the epistemology of secularization, does not see in human nature an unchangeable given fact, but an alterable element, which is in a perpetual evolution.

In the sense of secularization, it can be said that transhumanism takes from what belongs to God, and puts it under the authority and control of man. In transhumanism, man transforms natural biological life, with the desire to take it „beyond its present human form.”, as cited above At Nick Bostrom we can also find details about the methods used by the transhumanist approach: „The emphasis is placed on both present technologies, such as genetic engineering and information technology, as well as some that are anticipated to develop, such as molecular nanotechnology and artificial intelligence”¹³.

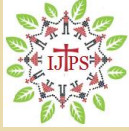
Penetrating more and more into the core of the human biological being, man sets foot on a ground that does not belong to him, that of life and of its Author, implementing changes in the very epistemology of biological life. The intervention in the biology of life cannot remain without an echo in the spiritual plane of the person, given the fact that man is a dichotomous being. In this way is affected, in an unquantifiable way, the very ability of man to believe, and to manifest his faith. Affecting this mechanism can lead to impossibility of man to pursue and achieve the goal proposed by the Savior Christ, the regaining of eternal life and eternal happiness. Transhumanism proposes an attempt to acquire immortality, while the phrase „eternal life” belongs to Christian eschatology. Not daring to promise immortality, transhumanism proposes only an attempt to acquire it, through the paradoxical mortal man's own intervention. Christian eschatology not only promises eternal life, but with it, also promises eternal happiness, since eternity loses its meaning without happiness.

The fundamental difference from the transhumanist ideology is that in Orthodoxy, life and eternal happiness are not self-acquired, through man's efforts and achievements, but are received as a gift from the God-Man, who redeems mankind from death through His own sacrifice. Thus, the two proposed paths to perfection present fundamental differences that cannot be reconciled.

¹¹ Jaco Beyers, „The church and the secular:..., p. 6

¹² Nick Bostrom, „Human Genetic Enhancements: A transhumanist perspective”, in *Journal of Value Inquiry*, vol. 37, no. 4 (2003), pp 493-506, apud Ana-Veronica Ion, „Transumanismul – Un comentariu creștin...”, p. 18

¹³ Nick Bostrom, „Human Genetic Enhancements: A transhumanist perspective”, in *Journal of Value Inquiry*, vol. 37, no. 4 (2003), pp 493-506, apud Ana-Veronica Ion, „Transumanismul – Un comentariu creștin...”, p. 18



CONCLUSION

The liaison between secularization and transhumanism is one of mutual determination: secularization generates transhumanism, as a desire and hope for perfection, but in a technical way, by using the highest advances of human science. Meanwhile transhumanism confirms and strengthens secularization as a process, by the goals it proposes, and by the methods through which it wishes to reach those goals.

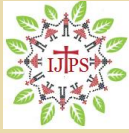
Transhumanism results from secularization which has been given the power provided by cutting-edge technology, and which gives it new ways of acting, and new means, as well as a new public presentation and new horizons to dream of. Thus, the whole movement is built on the fertile ideological soil of secularization, this approach gradually encompassing all aspects and sectors of life, which have previously been impregnated by the secularist spirit. If until now the secularist movement has not been able to influence human nature in any way, in the 21st century, secularization, enhanced by cutting-edge technology and by scientific discoveries that have reached their peak, brings to light this element of absolute novelty, namely the possibility and the secularist ambition to completely transform human nature, an ambition that identifies itself with the transhumanist dream.

This paradigmatic transformation of man and society is set in motion by promising infinitely enhanced physical and intellectual capabilities, and finally a state of eternal well-being, but at the cost of transformations aimed at man, that are often impossible to quantify, and most often irreversible.



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THE THOUGHT OF THOMAS AQUINAS. A SWORD OF DAMOCLES ON THE RADIATIVE PROCESS

¹Francesca RIOTTO, ¹Marcello LEONELLO, ²Giovanni FAZIO,

¹Diocesi di Oppido Mamertina-Palmi, I-89015 Palmi (RC),

²Università di Messina, Dipartimento MIFT, I-98166 Messina,

ITALY

Email: francescariotto@yahoo.com; giovanni.fazio@unime.it

ABSTRACT

In this article, we want to further investigate the radiative hypothesis using the thought of a Doctor of the Catholic Church: Saint Thomas Aquinas. Here, we speak about a radiative process (which, in this case, appears to us as if it was a miraculous event) that should lead to the formation of the Shroud Body Image. We do not believe that this hypothesis is able to obtain the above Image with all the complex characteristics already deduced experimentally. Thus, we decided to investigate with the help of Saint Thomas Aquinas, an authoritative scholar in the world of Theology and Philosophy. The above investigation that seems impossible, on the contrary, can become realistic using the thought of Thomas that exudes from all his writings. Saint Thomas affirms that God is Immutable and Eternal, that is, outside of time and space. Consequently, His actions, for example a Miracle, occurs instantly, with the impossibility that this extraordinary event could be described step by step. In such a case the Natural Sciences can only say that a supernatural event is happened. Nothing else.

Keywords: *Shroud of Turin; Body Image formation; Radiative Hypothesis; Natural processes; Saint Thomas Aquinas;*

INTRODUCTION

The Shroud of Turin is the most intriguing and investigated (experimentally and theoretically) archaeological object that exists in nature. Despite the interest there is in the world for this funerary linen and the many decades of studies, a solution accepted by all has not been reached. On the contrary, each researcher has his own solution; obviously, they are all different from each other. The first “random” experiment on the Shroud was performed, in May 1898, by Secondo Pia, an amateur photographer.

The first result of the above experiment highlighted the 2 D characteristic possessed by the above Body Image that appears on the burial linen: an Image that has the properties of a photographic negative; reversed colour, like right with left (see Fig.1).

For the scientists, the above date marks the beginning of research, as understood in the modern sense. So, there are about twelve decades of effort supported by scholars from all over the world, without success. The underlying problem is the conflict of interest which, unfortunately, affects the minds of all of us.

Here, all the differences among Agnostics, Atheists, Roman Catholics and belonging to other religions appear. Maybe, the above effects could be different for each researcher, however, they are present.

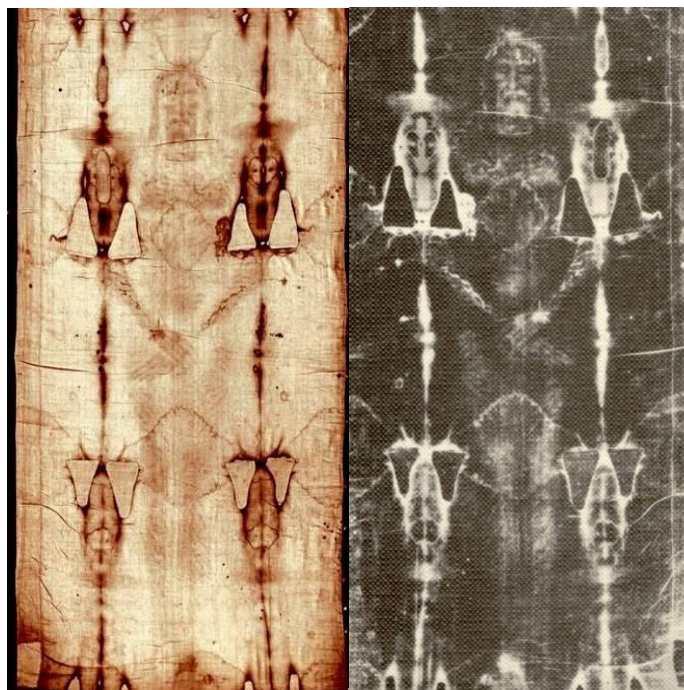


Fig. 1 The Shroud of Turin: (left) Frontal Image, (right) Reversed Colour of the same. The Image, beyond the Water marks, Burned and Scorches areas, shows a male flagellated and crucified with injuries to his hands and feet, forehead and side. The serene face, in the Reversed Colour Image, of a man who has undergone so much suffering is striking.

1. THE THOUGHT OF THOMAS AQUINAS

After an article of the scientist Lukasik (1985), a lot of Scientists and Researchers who believed in the radiative hypothesis, that appear miraculous, have worked and continue to work, theoretically and experimentally, with great commitment for more than three decades in the attempt to obtain an acceptable result, which isn't there yet.

Physics contrasts these hypotheses: it would be the first time, in the history of humanity, that a body emits protons or ultraviolet radiations to form an image. A human body can only emit thermal radiations, like his corpse. Therefore, with this beginning, everything that is successively deduced, should be discarded.

One of us has demonstrated several times and with different approaches that the above mechanism (the radiative one) is not practicable and unacceptable for the Natural Sciences. In fact, with our articles, it has been demonstrated the futility of continuing with this line of research (Fazio, 2020, 2022 and 2020a). Unfortunately, from our point of view, it has been unsuccessful.

Rogers and Arnoldi believed in a chemical process as a Maillard Reaction that happened among ammonia and amines emitted by the decomposing corpse and the reducing sugar contained in crude stark left on the funerary cloth by the manufacturing procedure (Rogers and Arnoldi, 2003). Here, it is important the energy source.

The only present is the thermal of the corpse. The Dr. R. Irvine of the Pathology Section, Office of the Medical Investigator, University of New Mexico, affirms that a corpse



in the funerary cloth can also reach 41 Celsius degrees. This is a positive result for those who are certain of the Shroud Image formation by Maillard Reaction.

We are also convinced that the mechanism responsible for the formation of the Shroud Image is a natural process. Therefore, we are against the radiative hypothesis. We believe in a natural process of stochastic type (Fazio et al., 2019). A small amount of thermal energy is distributed over all the fibrils of the flax. Apparently, nothing happens. After years or decades, we see fibrils that have undergone chemical modifications and others that have not. In the same way, the stochastic process happens in the world of the weak ionizing radiations (Little et al., 2003).

However, there is no competition between the two above natural processes: both depend on the ordinary chemistry. In other words, everything is conditioned by the presence (or not) of ammonia and amines. If the nitrogen compounds are present, it is possible the chemical process announced by Rogers and Arnoldi. Otherwise, it is possible a stochastic interaction.

Recently, it has been announced, in the case of radiative hypothesis, the incompatibility existing between the penetration depth of the linen and the value of the discoloration range (Fazio, 2023). A proton, that penetrates the linen for 200 nm, in air cannot satisfy the Discoloration Range and viceversa (Fanti et al., 2010). Furthermore, the correlation between the density of the yellowed fibrils and the Body Image-Burial Linen distance it is not linear. Therefore, it is different from the one extracted from the area of the Body Image on the Shroud.

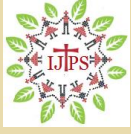
Humanity has always asked itself the question: who is God? or: is there a God? Here, it is extremely complex for anyone to provide an answer. Augustine of Hippo, Saint and Doctor of the Catholic Church, had expressed the Plato's philosophy in Christian key. Thomas Aquinas, centuries later, founded his philosophical system, reworking Aristotle's philosophy from a Christian perspective, on the assumption that faith and reason are reconcilable and not in contradiction. Thus, in an attempt to combine them, he identified five paths to demonstrate the existence of God, all on rational foundations. Not empirical evidence, but rationally demonstrable reasoning.

He deduced that God is Eternal, that is, outside of time and space. God has always been there, is there today and will always be there. Man, using reason, can identify other aspects of God. However, a deeper knowledge of God cannot be obtained with reason alone; it is necessary to resort to the revealed doctrine which, through faith, allows us to grasp what we otherwise could not understand on rational foundations.

Thomas, according to reason, deduced that the actions of God, Immutable and Eternal, are instantaneous as, for example, in the case of a Miracle. The above Theologian defined the exact nature of this supernatural event: it is a sensitive effect produced by God that transcends all the forces of nature. His power over nature is absolute. From eternity and for eternity, God foresaw and willed what He should do in the course of time. He, therefore, established the course of things, but at the same time he preordained in His eternal decree what he will have to do outside the regular course of nature (Saint Aquinas, 1932).

Now that we have described the thoughts of Saint Thomas relating to Miracles, it is the time to review the trend of the radiative hypothesis with the aim of comparing it with what we have deduced. For the supporters of the above hypothesis, at first, there is the emission of vacuum ultraviolet radiations or of protons.

Then follows a series of experiments, in line with the Laws of the Natural Sciences, which can be described step by step. In the end, there is the formation of the Image.



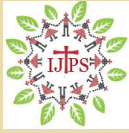
CONCLUSIONS

Putting the Saint Thomas' thought into action, we see that two errors were made using the radiative hypothesis. The first, it is evident coming back to the initial phase of their experiments, which occurs with the emission, by a human being, of electromagnetic radiations or, alternatively, of particles such as protons. The second one happens while they operate respecting the laws of Natural Sciences. In fact, in this second phase what happens during the experiment can be described step by step. All this is not reconcilable with the claim to demonstrate that the Body Image is the result of a Miracle through the radiative hypothesis. We can say: their vision begins in the Transcendent, continues through the Immanent to flow into the Transcendent.

It is not possible to present a model of mechanism for the Shroud Body Image formation which is based in part on Theology and in part on Natural Sciences. We must think that there is an area of investigation where the rational phenomena occur and where the Natural Sciences can explain them. This area is that of the Immanent which has insurmountable boundaries. Outside, there is the area of the eternal Transcendent where the supernatural phenomena occur and the laws of Physics are not valid to study such events. These laws can only tell us that there has been an extraordinary event. Nothing else.

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JURISPRUDENCE OF CONFESSION SECRET AS LEGISLATIVE BIAS

PhD. Ionuț VLĂDESCU,
Faculty of Theology - Bucharest,
ROMANIA.
E-mail: ionut772002@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

*Starting the scientific approach from the term jurisprudence applied to the secret of confession in the mystery of confession, we find ourselves faced with a major problem, namely: that of the dichotomy of defining the canon by the institution of the Church. This dichotomy is accentuated within the Church by the vagueness of defining what is divine instruction versus human instruction. Solving required the implementation of a *jus divinum* and a *jus humanum*." Thus, the issue of jurisprudence in the mystery of confession is decided by the institution that will rule the case. Philosophers and theologians have dealt with the issue of law itself, only they ask themselves with all seriousness the question: What is law? Lawyers, we could say they only ask: what can bring you the right? How cost-effective is it? That's why it's bizarre to find that it is precisely legal professionals who have the least clear idea of law.*

Keywords: *Jurisprudence; Confession; Canon; Law; Synodal;*

INTRODUCTION

Prof. Liviu Stan is the first Romanian theologian to define canon law from the perspective of Church teaching, showing that the essence of canon philosophy cannot be divorced from theology, and the Church also cannot ignore civil law. The author points out that „Right derives from the will of God, or from Good or Truth, namely as an idea, as from the beginning in God, as *jus actus* but also as *jus militants*, it began to exist for men and fulfill a purpose in their lives, only at the same time as good and truth.” [1]

This, two types of presumption are imposed in canon law:

1. Simple presumption *juris tantum* admitting proof to the contrary
2. Absolute exceptional presumption *juris et de jure* which does not admit proof to the contrary.

Applying these presumptions to our approach, we must define whether the mystery of confession is a *juris tantum* or a *juris et de jure*. Theology focuses the dichotomous life: between time and eternity, sin and holiness, between now and forever, at the same time it also places the dichotomous law between the Law of Christ and the social law, and this logic leads us to the dichotomy of the Gospel-Penal Code. The antinomy between the Gospel and the civil code led the Church to introduce an intermediate law to bring the two fundamental laws closer together, to mediate the relationship between the justice of fallen humanity and the Divine Law. This need gave rise to canon laws, thus the canon is an instrument of correction, a social law that pursues in its essence the extension of the Law of Christ in history, so we can conclude that the canon is an intermediate law that is based on *juris tantum* suffers the simple presumption that accepts evidence to the contrary, the canon is evolutionary, so its letter can de facto change, so the canon cannot claim to be an immutable law such as Divine Law.



1. JURISPRUDENCE OF CONFESSION

Viewed from the perspective of divine law, the canon holds jurisprudence applied to any article. The Canon finds biblical support The Savior is the first to introduce jurisprudence through the promise of the Holy Spirit's proceeding from the Father, having as its primary role „*learning in everything and it will remind you of everything I have told you*” [2] The Canon is based on the Rema principle, the actualization of the law of Christ. The Holy Spirit makes Revelation actual, [3] and the second principle is the *Synodal one*. [4] human work done by priest, confessor according to spiritual life, cumulative studies, experience. Canon I of the Seventh Ecumenical Council states that „the holy canons are set by the trumpets of the Holy Spirit.” [5]

We can define canon law as God's will, or good, or truth, in the sense that it exists from the beginning in God as „*jus aeternum* but as *jus militanus*, it began to exist for men and fulfill a purpose in their lives only at the same time as good and truth.” [6] Canon law is thus seen as a guiding norm, not as dogma, so the canon becomes a guide to truth, the fixing of truth belongs to both clergy and laity, because the Church cannot be seen as a hierarchy, but as the body of Christ, therefore the synodal principle of fixing canons defines the boundaries of the church and not the mission of the church or Christianity in general. For if the canon is merely a declaration of even priesthood or mere recommendations, then they cannot be active principles in the church, for the Church is the Theandric Body of Christ in which all believers are understood. Thus, the canon has a dynamic character, accepting jurisprudence as the norm in case of alteration of the authorized established principle. In the case of refusal of established obedience, the principle of jurisprudence is in the sense of „obedience more to the voice of God than to that of men, thus even the synod is obliged to follow the will of the indications of the laity, against which bishops cannot impose anyone. As an object of the eventual arbitrariness of the episcopal college, the people have the right to refuse to accept a Vladik unloved by them.” [7]

The introductory plea shows that jurisprudence is present and possible in most canonical articles because, from a theological perspective, it should not be confused with dogma, we also note the evolutionary character of the canon, by adding or repealing laws, as well as the relativity of canonical interpretation, but it is not excluded from the Church, because the Church cannot be divided as „in Christ the two natures meet, so in the Church the dimension meets; sacramental- eschatological and what institutional” [8] The unity of the church is not only spiritual, but it also manifests itself at the institutional-structural level. [9] Thus, „the presence and work of the Church in the world is the extension of Christ into humanity expressed through persons (living members), communities and all that expresses an institutional and institutional dimension.” [10]

2. THE ACT OF CONFESSION. DIVINE LAW OR CANON LAW?

From a scriptural perspective the act of confession is inciting to God, since the Old Testament we see that God's law was aimed at the atonement. The code of the Mosaic law provided for a ritual act by sacrificing an animal, confessing sin or wrongdoing, and acquitting the culprit by paying damages. [11] There was also an annual national public collective confession with specific, ritual regulations called atoning sacrifices (Leviticus. 5:6,7,8). Rescue fortresses are introduced as measures of jurisprudence. [12]

An example of the act of confession as God's initiative towards man is the example of King David (2 Samuel: 12:13), God sends the prophet Nathan who rebukes King David using the canon of the law, and the King, not knowing that he is the accused, declares the



death sentence as the decision-making body. And when the prophet (counsel for the prosecution) reveals the identity of the accused, we see the act of divine jurisprudence at work through the mystery of the emperor's public confession. Psalms 32:5 and 51:1-4 „I have confessed my iniquities, and you have forgiven the iniquity of my sin.” In the New Testament confession is like an act of public confession, it is St. James who encourages public confession: „Confess your sins to one another” (James 5:16). The above examples show that the act of Confession is a Divine initiative with the role of bringing the penitent to the restoration of communion with Christ.

Or that is why the mystery of confession can be regarded as divine jurisprudence. If the law states that the wage of sin is death, confession absolves the penitent by confession (jurisprudence), or that is why the divine initiative urges public confession, because confession of sin means acquittal of guilt and release of the guilty. Thus, the secret of confession is an authorized established addition to Canon precisely because of the misunderstanding of the sacrament of confession, which is the soteriological principle of the penitent.

The sacrament of confession does not evade the institutional, but defines it, but in the essence of confession, the Church articulates the means of saving mission in an institutionally organized world, precisely in order to transmit *to it the phenomenon of the Kingdom of heaven*. [13] The functional unity of the Church is given by the institutional dimension, but it is given, it must „spring from the manifestation and mystery of God's saving love, which is expressed both in the plane of conscience and in the plane of life, through relations of communion.” [14]

The theology of Law emphasizes this aspect of divine law shared by the Church as an organic body made up of members who are in a relationship of interdependence. The Apostle Paul shows this organic connection in 1 Corinthians 12: „If one member suffers, the whole body suffers,” it was precisely in this spirit that the act of confession was public, in the sense of empathy with the penitent for repentance. We see the Church „not as a multitude of persons, but as a community of those clothed in Christ who partake of the Mysteries of the Kingdom, participating in the life of the whole Church, including through the canonical church system and structure.”[15]

The mystery of Confession is not a mystery because of the secret of confession, but because of the soteriological principle of absolving the penitent and bringing him back into communion with Christ but also with the Holy Church. The freedom to confess sins was evidence of the bond of brotherly love in Christ. Therefore, the Mystery of Confession is a Divine Law that has the role of applying jurisprudence through the Law of Life Grace.

3. CONFESSION SECRET AS LEGISLATIVE BIAS

The secret of confession was introduced in the fourth century as an act of prevention and mitigation of the consequences of public confession, especially relations between believers and non-believers. The expansion of the Church into new environments, the interaction with different systems of laws determined the Church to introduce into the act of confession regulations that in time became authorized canonical norms. The normative acts regulating the introduction of the secrecy of confession are:

Canon 6 Carthage states that only the bishop absolves at public confession. In 390 Patriarch Nektarios generalized the private confession, which then became secret.

Canon 34 Basil the Great and 28 Nicephorus the Confessor impose the secret of confession, because the purpose of the mystery is to cleanse the sins of the believer, not to



divulge them, to cause scandal or to give them to the judgment of men. In confession, man's confession meets God's judgment, and God's judgment must prevail.

Canon 43 Carthage of 419 indirectly mentions that public confession was still practiced at that time. The fact is that today's confession can be both public and private, and when it is private, it must necessarily be secret. The secret of confession is only for the priest, not for the penitent. Therefore, if something said at confession is discovered, we cannot accuse the priest of divulging, perhaps the penitent made it public and then it spread. The spiritual priest may tell the cases of confession in a spiritual sense, but any direct reference to persons, even any allusion and suspicion, must be excluded. Violation of the secrecy of confession is punishable by defrocking. In Byzantium, those who told the secret of confession had their tongues cut off and imprisoned for life. In this situation it has been preserved to this day, but in different forms.

Article 23 of the Law on Religious Affairs of 2007 provides that legal staff cannot be compelled to reveal the secrets of penitentiary.

Art. 214 of the criminal code provides imprisonment from 3 months to 1 year or fine days for those who show professional secrecy.

Art. 79 para. Article 1 of the Code of Criminal Procedure prohibits those in a position to show professional secrecy from witnesses.

Canon 133 Carthage forbids a confessor to be a witness.

Article 28 of the Rules of Procedure of the Disciplinary Courts of the Orthodox Church Romanian provides for the defrocking of the priest who loses the secret of confession. This is also true in the Catholic Church.

Articles 983-985 of the Codex Juri Canonical prohibit disclosure of the secret of confession, and the priest is punished with defrocking. The scriptural basis for the secret of confession is Jesus Sirach 19:10 - Have you heard a word? May he die with you! [16]

Prof. Ioan Ică Jr. shows that since Byzantium a culture of integration of the Church into the empire and integration of the empire into the Church has appeared. Thus, it is St. Cyprian of Cartagena who emphasizes the legal dimension of ecclesiology, borrowing the imperial perspective, the episcopate of Ignatian is no longer sacramental-cultural but is pushed towards a jurisdictional-territorial episcopate. [17]

This new organization at the level of the Church is confirmed by the Turland Council, especially by canons 17 and 38, which state that church organization must follow political organization. The question for canonists is whether the churching of the norms of jurisdictional and political structure can be placed on the same value and authority as the norms of Divine Law. The answer is not conclusive, an agreement cannot be reached to this day. [18] The act of confession is a canon law only in method, not. Keeping confession secret is an established regulation, by aligning procedures to social authority and has the role of prevention and protection. The secret of confession is nullified by the tripartite procedure itself, the penitent confesses to the confessor, who in turn confesses to Christ.

CONCLUSIONS

The act of confession is an act of jurisprudence in its essence as a mystery. God is the initiator of the mystery of confession as the act of pronouncing the sentence of release of the penitent from the law of sin and death. Jurisprudence in this case is identified with divine grace. Diacritical rational thinking only in the spirit of the law is incompatible with the act of Confession, therefore the Confessor is not guided by rational critical thinking but by the charism of spiritual discernment, because only God can be the guarantor of pronouncing an



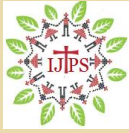
exceptional absolute presumption *juris et de jure* that does not admit proof to the contrary. Therefore, the confessor in the sacrament of confession does not think *about* God but *with* God, combining theory with life, thinking with prayer, concept with contemplation. If the mystery of confession is viewed only from the social perspective of man deprived of the spiritual virtue of discernment, allowing himself to be nourished only by *the telos of the* legal text, then the act of confession is null and void because the *organic law* extracts the very essence of confession, namely the principle of *Agape* (sacrificial love).

Regarding the permissiveness of confessing, the secret of confession by the confessor, I answered by pointing out that the act of confession is the soteriological manifestation of Christ's saving love, so that all those who by faith reach Jesus and confess to be forgiven, receive this forgiveness not by law (justice), but undeservedly by justification by grace (Romans 3:21-24), and the Prophet Micah shows us that God throws all sins to the bottom of the sea. Thus, the confessor, through whom God pronounces the act of absolution, must also have the thought of throwing sins into the sea of oblivion, which can no longer be remembered.

The introduction of the secret of confession was not God's initiative but the adaptation of the Church to the social and jurisdictional needs of law varied from country to country, but in the *agape community* of the Church where confession of sin is seen economically as evidence of repentance, it is not a reason for fear but for joy and celebration. This dichotomous belief of the sacrament of confession is not antinomian within the Church but is merely an adaptation for the prevention of those who have not understood the truth. The Church in love also embraces them through this protection in the economic principle of salvation.

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- [6] Liviu Stan, *Homage Juris*, pp.140-167
- [7] Liviu Stan, *Mereni in the Church*, Sibiu, 1943, pp. 608-609. See the example of the 2005 conflict: the election of a metropolitan without a majority in episcopal suffrage.
- [8] Alan Nisus. *Leglise comme communion et comme institution*, Ed. Du Cerf, Paris, 2012, p.58 2008, p.58
- [9] This motivation is underlined by the 34th Apostolic Canon. For apostolic canons, see: Ioan Ică Jr., *Canon of Orthodoxy*, vol.1, Ed. Diesis, Sibiu, 2007, pp.770-784; John Floca, *Canons of the Orthodox Church. Notes and comments*, Sibiu, 1992, pp.7-48; Constantine Dron, *The Canons. Text and interpretation*, Typography Books of Churches Bucharest, 1933, pp.21-272; Nicodemus Malas, *Canons of the Orthodox Church accompanied by commentaries*, trans. U. Jovicic And N. Popovici, vol. I, part I, Diocesan Printing House, Arad, 1930, pp.179- 316
- [10] Nicholas Afanasiev, *The Church of the Holy Spirit*, trans. Elena Derevici, Patmos Publishing House, Cluj Napoca, 2008, p.23
- [11] See the Pentateuch, which is also called the book of the law, especially Deuterion and Leviticus.
- [12] The Lord spoke to Joshua and said, "Speak to the children of Israel, and say unto them, Resolve, as I commanded you through Moses, cities of refuge, 3 where the murderer may flee, who shall kill any



man unwillingly, without having any thought of killing him; May they be a place of refuge for you against the avenger of blood. Let the murderer flee to one of these cities, stop at the entrance of the gate of the city, and tell his story to the elders of that city; let them receive him into their city and give him a dwelling place to live with them. 5 If the avenger of blood pursues him, let them not deliver the murderer into his hands, for he unwittingly slew his neighbor and without having been his enemy before. 6 Let him remain in this city until he appears before the assembly to be judged, until the death of the high priest who shall then be in office. Then let the murderer return and enter again into his city and house, into the city from which he had fled." 7 They set aside Chadash in Galilee, in the mountain of Naphtali; Shechem in the mountain of Ephraim and Kirit-Arba, or Hebron in the mountain of Judah. 8 And on the other side of the Jordan, east of Jericho, he chose the Stick, in the wilderness, in the plain, in the tribe of Reuben, Ramoth in Gilead in the tribe of Gad and Golan in Basan in the tribe of Manasseh. 9 These were the cities appointed for all the children of Israel and for the stranger who dwells in their midst, so that he who kills someone unwillingly may flee into them and not die slain at the hand of the avenger of blood before he appears before the assembly. Joshua chapter 20, Deuteronomy 19.

[13] Christos Yannaras, *Abecedary of Faith*, trans. Constantin Coman, Byzantine Publishing House, Bucharest, 2007, pp.70-71

[14] Boris Bubriski, *Le mystery de l'Eglise, course de Theologies domestique*, ITO Paris, 2000, p.14. This perspective is also deepened in: Boris Bubriski, *Le mystery de l'Eglise*, Ed. du Cerf, Paris, 2003, pp.36-37.

[15] For complete information see: Patriciu Voicu, *Canon and Libertate. Continuous sharing from the Church's experience*, Cluj University Press Publishing House, Cluj-Napoca, 2013, pp.10-15

[16] Ioan N. Floca, *Canons of the Orthodox Church - Notes and comments*, Sophia Publishing House 2005

[17] Ioan Ică JR, *Canon of Orthodoxy*, vol. I: *The Apostolic Canon of the First Centuries*, Diesis Publishing House, Sibiu, 2008, p.275

[18] Disappointed with the attitude of the emperors towards the order of the Church, Zonaras did not concern himself with the agreement between imperial legislation and the Holy Canons and did not consider the sources of Byzantine law, considering that imperial power negatively influenced church leaders. Theodore Balsamon considered the most knowledgeable of the great Byzantine canonists, a great follower of the Byzantine symphony, contradicts Zonaras and emphasizes the role of imperial legislation and privileges granted by political authority to the patriarchs and especially to the ecumenical patriarch. This position was well received by the Patriarchs of Constantinople, but did not remain without criticism, the most coherent being even a contemporary of his, Demetrius Chomatianos, archbishop of Horrid, who accused Balsamon of incoherence and lack of logic, pointing out that Balsamon sometimes contradicted himself, depending on what he set out to argue. See Michael Angold, *Church, and society in Byzantium under The Comneni, 1081-1261*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2000, pp. 454-457.



OLD AGE AND YOUTH IN THE MYSTERY OF MAN'S PERSONAL RECONCILIATION WITH GOD

Nicolae GAVRILĂ,

Ph.D. Student at "Ovidius" University of Constanta,
ROMANIA

Email: gavrila_nicolae64@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

The view of Eastern spirituality on aging and death is different to the secular one. The believe in and the following of Jesus Christ as Lord – fully God and fully human in essence – opens the door to everyone to the everlasting life, a state of incorruptibility of the body and absence of any sorrow for the soul. Forgiveness and reconciliation, promoted in the Church as remedies to the effects of the sinfull life and as ways of accessing a fruitfull communion with the Triune God, become effective if totally assumed by the believer, and do not work as automatic, mechanical acts. This simple, yet also intense, process of rejuvenating, regenerating the human person starts from the earthly life as an affirmative answer to God' calling and as first steps of openness towards the authentic dialogue with God, which will rich its peak in the life to come.

Keywords: *communion; confession; elderliness; holiness; reconciliation; sin; spiritual guidance;*

INTRODUCTION

If biological life means a decay of youth into old age, spiritual life means a continuous rejuvenation of the human being at the dawn of eternal life. Salvation, with its various meanings, presupposes first of all a human being who is no longer subject to degradation, disintegration. Holiness and deification presuppose a profound physical transformation, by no means just a legal acquittal. And this process of regeneration of the human being can only be achieved through a continuous dialogue of confessing the desire to share the inexhaustible mystery of divine love. The mystery of man's personal reconciliation with God becomes a continuum of reversing the effects of sin. Old age, from the perspective of spiritual growth, reveals itself to us as a stage of wisdom, of the ability to see much more clearly beyond the physical limits of this world. Eventually, this spiritual maturity becomes a return to the true youth of human nature, to that point where we are reconciled not only with God and fellow humans, but also with the passage of time.

The state of sin is revealed as unnatural to authentic human existence. The fall becomes painful, and not only for oneself but for one's whole reality. To break out of this seclusion, man needs a long journey of transformation, in which he cannot take himself apart from others. If sin is individual, salvation is communal, ecclesial. Returning from sin means first and foremost regaining the availability of authentic dialogue with other persons, just as sin was a closing in on oneself, a disintegration of the wholeness of existence. "Man has been able, by his will and by his connection with all things, to bring about disunity between all things, as between them and God, their ultimate unifying principle. For in separating himself from one man, he separated himself from that man's way of seeing the whole of



reality and its fraternal use, and thus each set up all reality against another, or divided it among themselves by enmity and strife, always seeking to keep it disunited by the same means. They have thereby divided themselves, and none of them is in accord with the whole reality as it is."¹ Sin thus appears to us as man's flight from himself. When he affirms himself autonomously, man is in fact affirming his nothingness. And until he is aware of his nothingness, it is impossible for him to actually find himself.

1. OLD AGE AND YOUTH IN THE MYSTERY OF MAN'S

Moving to the level of the Church, Repentance and Confession means the reactualization of a deep personal relationship, and not simply reconciliation as the cancellation of a debt. It begins with the realization of personal worth in contrast to the dissolution of sin. It is therefore thirst after personal communion, or the soul's state of being thirsty after so much desolation. "If repentance signifies, on the one hand, a realization of the believer's estrangement from God and neighbor because of sins committed, on the other hand it signifies the restoration of the believer's bond with God and neighbor through confession of sins, atonement and forgiveness."²

Therefore, forgiveness does not come only from God as impassive Judge, but constitutes a mysterious encounter in the depths of the human being, an unveiling of the "face" overshadowed by sin, a revelation of the true identity of being a son of the heavenly Father. And this return leads to a true renewal of existence. "There is something existential going on in forgiveness. It is not just a legal act. It is the bringing to light of the divine image. Deeper than the sin is the divine within us, the support of our being."³

The time limited by death is a consequence of separation from God. The fall is a continual self-absorption through it. And to be alone, as a tormented existential state of being, is tantamount to a diminishing of existence to the point of no longer knowing that we exist. "Through sin, or the withdrawal of the divine Spirit, creation weakens in its vital resources. Our being itself, in the state of sin, can advance to the point of the egoism of singularization, so that it hardly knows whether it really exists."⁴

From this point of view, of an existence alienated from God, the world goes so far that it becomes a place where you can no longer meet people. From history man becomes more absent than God. In this context, God means the absence of people, and the *love of neighbor* leads to Sartre's observation: "hell is other people". An existence and a world that longer prolonged in the presence of God seclude the man so that he sees only himself, or what limits him.

Father Stăniloae observes a total existential anxiety generated by this limitation of existence. "Man is a mystery because he is an abyss submerged in the luminous abyss of God's existence. Sin has brought an impoverishment of personal mystery, because he no longer has the consciousness of living fully in the abyss of God's existence, and has weakened this very living. And death weakens to the utmost the rootedness of the one whose being has been weakened by the sin of selfishness and pride in the abyss of the senses of the divine being and their communication by God to the one... Finding in himself nothing but self-loathing and being in a solitude which he has prepared for himself, he gives

¹ Pr. Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *Teologia dogmatică ortodoxă*, vol. 3, Ed. IBMBOR, București, 1997, p. 10.

² Pr. Dumitru POPESCU, „Pocăința ca refacere a legăturii credincioșilor cu Dumnezeu și cu semenii”, în *Biserica Ortodoxă Română*, 1971, nr. 9-10, p. 1027.

³ Pr. Constantin GALERIU, „Sensul creștin al pocăinței”, în *Studii Teologice*, 1967, nr. 9-10, p. 487.

⁴ Pr. D. STĂNILOAE, *Teologia dogmatică ortodoxă*, vol. 1, p. 328.



hallucinatory proportions to his loneliness and to the impossibility of real communication to which he has become accustomed in the course of earthly life. This keeps him in a kind of unremitting schizophrenic state."⁵

Reconciliation with God is indissolubly linked to the awareness of inseparability from our fellow human beings. Interpersonal relationships are deformed by sin precisely in the fact of the interruption or inconsistency of the relationship with the other. The words we can say to one another are finite, and love, however strong, is doomed to death. We are therefore faced with a certain perceptible contradiction in the human being, that between the "infinity" of his person and the finite time that is directed towards death. Hence the whole human tragedy. He can never reconcile himself with the thought of death; as a person, he is opposed to death and to the time that kills him.

But openness through the word also implies the inexhaustibility of the word. The word is not only a hardened expression of being, but it is being itself personally existing. For Dumitru Stăniloae, the word-reason constitutes the very foundation of man's being, which ultimately leads to the relationship with God through Jesus Christ, the incarnate Word. The ontological basis of the human being is precisely the call to existence through the Word on the part of God-Trinity. "The identification of the rational with immortality will be better understood if we consider man's existence unto death as non-rational or meaningless, but also if we regard the rational as a speaker. *Man speaks because he is moved by God, because he is placed by speech in relationship with God; and because he speaks, or rather because he responds, man will never finish responding, because God will never conclude telling him what he is and showing him his love, and man will never finish understanding and wanting to understand even more and to express his joy, gratitude and doxology for what God shows him.*"⁶ The loss of the dimension of communitarian-personal existence has meant for man the loss of himself, wandering among the countless objects of this world. The fall is first of all the breaking of the dialogue with God, in the absence of which man loses the meaning of his own existence, is diminished as a person. From now on, every love is doomed to death, and every word carries the grim threat of the end.

Coming out of the living relationship with the Word as a person, "man found himself alone before a world of objects, shut up for him in a meaningless rationality, or with a meaning limited exclusively to earthly life alone, without an extension into eternity; he found himself outside the relationship with the supreme Person who gives meaning to the reasons of things, and meaning and life to the human persons created by Him, and a continual newness; he found himself before a world subject to processes of uniform repetition of the continual making and unmaking of its unities, which for individual human persons means death."⁷

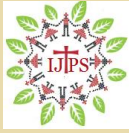
If "man's thirst for perfect dialogue with others can only be satisfied with and through the divine Persons", this becomes almost impossible after the fall into sin. In the new historical condition, salvation will be tantamount to reopening access to communion. "To this end one of these Persons became man, while remaining also God, in order that we too might reach the perfect dialogue both among ourselves as men and with the Holy Trinity."⁸

⁵ Pr. D. STĂNILOAE, *Chipul nemuritor al lui Dumnezeu*, vol. 1, Ed. Cristal, București, 1995, p. 72-73.

⁶ Pr. D. STĂNILOAE, *Teologia dogmatică ortodoxă*, vol. 1, p. 268.

⁷ Pr. D. STĂNILOAE, *Teologia dogmatică ortodoxă*, vol. 2, p. 10.

⁸ Pr. D. STĂNILOAE, *Studii de teologie dogmatică ortodoxă. Omul și Dumnezeu*, Ed. Mitropoliei Olteniei, Craiova, 1990, p. 201.



2. LOGOS, WORD AND REASON - EXPRESSED IN THE ASPECT OF INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION

Without Christ as the divine-human Person, death and solitude remain the reverse of being. Being itself is either divine-humanity or nothingness. Man's existence would be a terribly lonely existence without the love of an eternal Person who goes to death in his love for man. God himself dies. This is the meaning that Western Christianity has often lost in the legalization of the act of mercy. Salvation means a reconversion of everything we know about the evolution of life: "But what shall I say, what shall I say? The wonder frightens me. The Ancient of Days became a child. He that sitteth upon a throne, high and lifted up is laid in the manger. He who is undefiled, He who is pure, He who is unblemished, He who is uncorrupted, He who is without a body is held by human hands; He who has broken the bonds of sin is presented in diapers, because He wills it. He will transform dishonor into honor, he will clothe with glory the one who is dishonored, and He will make the one who is subject to reproach to be a figure of virtue. Therefore he takes my body, that I may make room in me for His Word. He takes my body, that he may give his Spirit. He giveth to me, and taketh from me, that He may give me the treasure of life. He takes my body to sanctify me. He gives me His Spirit to save me."⁹

God died out of love for man, to save him from death. It is the love of the person who dies so that the beloved may die no more. It is what the human person also feels in all the tragedy of his mortal existence. If there is a truly pressing reality that pervades existence, it is not so much death as it is love that desires that the loved one may die no more.

The inability of a simple man to fulfill this tendency of being is expressed by analogy with the encounter with a saint. "What one experiences in the presence of a saint is a pale analogy to the experience which the person of Jesus Christ brought to the apostles and ever since to those who believe."¹⁰ The insufficiency of the personal relationship in which death intervenes is ultimately seen as fulfilled in the existence of an eternal person, as a "supreme Thou." As Martin Buber observes, "through everything that becomes present to us, we glimpse the edge of the eternal Thou, from each we feel its breeze, in each Thou we utter the eternal."¹¹

Logos means both *Word* and *reason* - expressed in the aspect of interpersonal communication. The meaning of the word is to open the being to another. The word has a meaning and stands in connection with understanding - a point also insistently made by existentialists.¹² It is not a lifeless concept, but through words communion is expressed. Christ is called the *Word*. His character as divine Person is thereby felt in the utmost relation and closeness to us. If we fragment language by losing the meaning of words, the Word is an address which calls for the whole being. It is an entry into a personal relationship with the divine Thou who also became man. This relationship ultimately enables man to emerge from the limitation and relativity of an existence in death. Reconciliation involves not just going through a legal procedure but confessing the truth of our being to Christ.

Until then, however, we may be deficient in dialogue with our neighbors. The fact that we desire more and tend towards the other can never reach fulfillment without Christ. Unless we encounter Christ as You, our relationship with every person we meet is doomed to

⁹ Sf. IOAN GURĂ DE AUR, *Cuvânt la Nașterea Mântuitorului nostru Iisus Hristos*, în vol. *Predici la sărbători împărătești...*, p. 26-27.

¹⁰ Pr. Prof. Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *Iisus Hristos sau restaurarea omului*, Ed. Arhidiecezană, Sibiu, 1943, p. 58.

¹¹ Martin BUBER, *Eu și Tu*, trad. Șt.A. Doinaș, Ed. Humanitas, București, 1992, p. 33.

¹² Martin HEIDEGGER, *Ființă și timp*, trad. G. Liiceanu și C. Cioabă, Ed. Humanitas, București, 2003, p. 222.



death. Without Christ, we cannot fully live existence as persons. Being has as its meaning the supreme personal reality, it has Christ as its meaning. Man appears as an incomplete being without Christ, without the relationship with Him. In the absence of Christ, all that remains is the desolation of a continuous absence.

The restoration of the human being starts from its dialogical essence. The Savior Christ opens the framework of dialogue, and we are capable of responding to the call. The regeneration or re-rejuvenation of human nature as a reversal of the effects of sin presupposes a continual growth in dialogue with God and others. In the Church-communion we are not merely passive objects influenced by divine grace, but persons responding to divine love, freely opening ourselves to divine grace. And this is most evident in the sacrament of reconciliation and healing for sins committed.

The Church is a place of permanent spiritual rejuvenation. As St. John Chrysostom admirably expressed it: "At weddings, after the seven days, the wedding pantries are closed; but here, in this holy pantry, if you wish, you can stay forever. Moreover, at weddings, after the first or even the second month, the bride is no longer so dear to the bridegroom; here it is not so, but the more time passes, the more the Bridegroom's love is fervent, the more the embraces are unending, the more living together is spiritual, only if we lead a pure life, if we are awake. Again, the bride and bridegroom's bodies are also transformed. After youth comes old age. But here in these holy chambers, after old age comes youth. And if we will, this youth never ends. The grace is great, but it will be even greater if we will."¹³

Of course, often in patristic works, youth is synonymous with predisposition to sin. It is the most vulnerable stage of biological development, when the impulse to disobedience is hard to control. At the height of its physical growth, the human body is tempted to savor the world here and there, forgetting eternal values. Old age comes as a consequence of this indulgence in the pleasures of the world, as a way of reflecting on the ephemerality of life in the face of approaching death. But this physical slope does not automatically bring us closer to God, even if He can be seen as the only way to face death. Youth claims an endlessness of life, but paradoxically only the image of death can reveal the way to it: "Let us go to the graves, please, and see the mysteries there. Let us see the decomposed man, the broken bones, and the rotting bodies. If you are wise, look! If you are wise, tell me: Who is the king, who is the soldier? Who is the master, who is the servant? Who is wise, who is unwise? Where is the beauty of youth? Where is the beautiful face? Where are the bright eyes? Where is the well-formed nose? Where are the burning lips? Where is the beauty of the cheeks? Are they not all dust? Are they not all ashes? Is not all decay? Thinking on these things, brethren, and remembering our last day, let us turn, while we still have time, from our erring way."¹⁴ Forgiveness and reconciliation are not automatic, mechanical acts, but presuppose a rejuvenating, regenerating openness to authentic dialogue with God. The liturgical act of forgiveness is closely linked to man's longing for God. Acceptance of ageing and of inevitable death is indeed the possibility of turning to God, but it is not only the fear of death that makes us heal, but the love that rejuvenates the soul of the one who sets out on the path of repentance.¹⁵ The positive dimension of confession, that of loving dialogical openness, predominates in Eastern spirituality.

¹³ Sf. IOAN GURĂ DE AUR, *Cuvânt la Înviere*, V, în vol. *Predici la sărbători împărătești...*, p. 147.

¹⁴ Sf. IOAN GURĂ DE AUR, *Omiliile despre pocăință*, trad. D. Fecioru, Ed. IBM., București, 1998, p. 180-181

¹⁵ Sf. IOAN GURĂ DE AUR, *Cuvânt la Fericitul Avraam*, I, în vol. *Predici la sărbători împărătești și cuvântări de laudă la sfinți*, trad. Pr. Dumitru Fecioru, Ed. IBMBOR, București, 2002, p. 559



The decisive step for the penitent in the sacrament of Confession is the actual confession of sins. It is emphasized that it is not enough simply to repent inwardly, but also to eliminate them from within the being, to exteriorize their reality. "The one who confesses his sins is protected, on the one hand, from the danger of relativizing them, that is, of weakening his repentance and continuing to repeat them; on the other hand, from the danger of the contrary disposition of despair, that is, of a state of torment which goes hand in hand with the tendency to mask it, but without complete success."¹⁶

If the confession of sins is a need felt quite acutely, the possibility of confessing them is given to us in the person of the priest, as the only one to whom we can really and effectively open ourselves. To an ordinary man it is difficult to confess one's sins, the dark secret of one's being. "My distrust of the other, a distrust which prevents me from confessing my sins to him, is justified by the fact that I can hardly find anyone who does not take advantage of the sins I confess to him to despise me, to hinder me on the basis of them at important moments in life from satisfying legitimate needs; I can hardly find anyone who does not communicate to others the weaknesses and sins I have confessed to him, who does not cause me all sorts of disadvantages by confessing what I have done."¹⁷

The presence of the priest is salvific, however, because the dialogue with the priest is somehow assured by the silent presence of Christ. This constitutes both a possibility of literally telling one's sins to someone else, in order to free oneself from them, and also the environment that allows the sincere opening of the soul in recognizing them. "The presence of Christ between the two of them is suggested by the fact that the priest listens to the penitent's confession before the icon of Christ, or says to the penitent after the introductory prayers: 'Behold, my son, Christ stands unseen, receiving your confession with humility. Therefore, do not be ashamed, nor be afraid, nor hide from me anything of what you have done, but tell me all things without doubting and without fear, so that you may receive pardon from our Lord Jesus Christ'. The priest demands complete sincerity from him, for his confession is not made only before man, who may be lied to, or before whom confession may be counted as a humiliation unworthy of human pride, but especially before Christ."¹⁸

In the act of confession, in the dialogical form, the barriers created by sin to communion with others are literally removed. Sin has created a separation from which the penitent now frees himself, overcomes it, and overcomes his own sin. Confession restores communion. The sacrament of Confession is thus "the sacrament of the restoration of full communion between a believer and the priest as the seen agent of Christ and as the representative of the Church. It is therefore the Mystery of restoring the penitent to communion with Christ and the Church, preparing him for his communion with the Body of Christ."¹⁹ It is only in this setting that the sinner returns to the truth, the authenticity of his being, rediscovers himself. For Paul Florensky, "man actualizes his being, his deepest reality, opening himself only in relationship with another, in the dual unity of love", and "in this unity the Holy Spirit himself is present as the wellspring of love".²⁰

¹⁶ Pr. D. STĂNILOAE, „Înnoirea și sfințirea credincioșilor în Taina Mărturisirii, după învățătura Bisericii Ortodoxe”, în *Ortodoxia*, 1986, nr. 3, p. 11.

¹⁷ Pr. D. STĂNILOAE, „Înnoirea și sfințirea credincioșilor în Taina Mărturisirii”, p. 12.

¹⁸ Pr. D. STĂNILOAE, *Teologia dogmatică ortodoxă*, vol. 3, p. 89.

¹⁹ Pr. D. STĂNILOAE, *Teologia dogmatică ortodoxă*, vol. 3, p. 89.

²⁰ Pr. Dumitru Gh. RADU, „Caracterul ecleziologic al Sfintelor Taine și problema intercomuniunii”, teză de doctorat, în *Ortodoxia*, 1978, nr. 1-2, p. 26.



Confession engages the believer in the most vivid and personal way possible. Dialogical confession brings out the person, erased by sins, cast into individualism. Confession of sins is thus more than a mere enumeration of sins with a view to erasing them. "More than a cleansing from sins, it is a saving and edifying sacrament. It builds us up, forms us spiritually, according to the revealing image of life in the Holy Spirit of Christ."²¹

This personal dialogue constitutes a uniqueness of the Sacrament of Confession in relation to the other Sacraments of the Church. Grace has as its object human freedom itself, the soul of the recipient, with which it cooperates or which it restores through dialogue. In Confession "the priest enters into the soul of the penitent, which opens itself to him willingly; it does not remain a fleeting and superficial contact. Both the penitent and the priest make a much greater contribution in this sacrament. In the other sacraments, grace works on the objective, ontic level, at the root of the being, often in an often-insubstantial way. Here it works through the more detailed and vibrant involvement of the penitent, through confession and repentance, then of the priest in the appreciation of the means recommended to the penitent for the spiritual healing of the one who is sickened by heavy sins, and then again through the penitent's contribution to their fulfillment."²²

In the end, confession of sins is revealed as liberating. This is reflected in the spiritual state of the penitent, who, through the priest, has rediscovered his identity as a person in a saving relationship with Christ.²³

Practice of confession involves a spiritual pedagogy that has been amply developed in the tradition of the Church. The confessor is our "father" because he has received the grace to give birth to others for a new spiritual life in Christ: "O my children, over whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you" (Galatians IV, 19).

In the course of history, alongside these confessors, parallel to the monastic life, there appeared those "starets", "elders". They were often ordained, counselors and guides of conscience. Although this guidance did not have sacramental power, "this exemption is explained by the monastic state, a state of absolute repentance: masters of this art, the starets can help others."²⁴

John Meyendorff and Paul Evdokimov speak of those spiritual fathers who can be simple monks, before whom it was possible to confess sins in monasteries: "that institution of starets, "spiritual fathers" more than that of "guides (directors) of conscience" indicates the Orthodox people always in search not so much of a hierarchical instance formed, but of a living manifestation of graces, of the authority that comes not from a function, but directly from God and in which the Holy Spirit manifests himself"²⁵.

The starets were often "spiritual fathers" of bishops. It is not specified, however, whether these starets officiated the Mystery of Confession. In the twelfth century, the canonist Balsamon makes a clear distinction between the ministry of counselor and the power to forgive sins and reaffirms the classical tradition of bishop and priests entrusted with the ministry of forgiveness.

²¹ Pr. Constantin GALERIU, „Taina Mărturisirii”, în *Ortodoxia*, 1979, nr. 3-4, p. 485.

²² Pr. D. STĂNILOAE, *Teologia dogmatică ortodoxă*, vol. 3, p. 87.

²³ Pr. D. STĂNILOAE, *Teologia dogmatică ortodoxă*, vol. 3, p. 88.

²⁴ Paul EVDOKIMOV, *Vârstele vieții spirituale*, trad. I. Buga și A. Manolescu, Ed. Humanitas, București, 2006, p. 314.

²⁵ Pr. Dumitru RADU, „Preotul ca săvârșitor al Tainei Spovedaniei și puterea lui de a dezlega păcatele, după învățătura ortodoxă”, în *Biserica Ortodoxă Română*, 1982, nr. 9-10, p. 828.



The Confession made to these non-ordained "confessors" was not related to the Mystery of Confession, Alexander Schmemmann states, but was an integral part of monastic life and discipline based on total obedience. This confession is of a "non-sacramental type, compared, *mutatis mutandis*, with what we today call 'counseling' or 'spiritual guidance'".²⁶

The functions of the two modes of exercising spiritual paternity that have coexisted in the life of the Church have never been confused. Thus, the notion of practice of confession appears as a complex concept with two aspects: liturgical sacramental, linked to the administration of the Sacrament, and pedagogical-pastoral. From the sacramental perspective, the practice of confession is an ordination, a special blessing by which the bishop gives the priest the right to hear confessions and to bind or loosen people's sins.

The priest is more than a simply agent carrying out a divine ministry; he is the dialogue partner, the one in whose reciprocity the penitent regains forgiveness and communion. But he does this not by his own power, but by Christ's. "Repentance is a very profound encounter of the penitent with Christ, for it must bring not only the forgiveness of sins, but also the actualization, or more precisely the reactivation of communion with Christ."²⁷ Forgiveness takes place in one voice of the priest and the penitent before Christ, before God. They reproduce the very mystery of the Church. Confession thus supports the Church's condition of unity of the members in Christ. It allows these members to be reinvigorated, highlighting the ecclesial character of salvation in the dialogue between the confessor and the penitent. It is never considered as an individual act. We cannot always obtain forgiveness by isolating ourselves from others, but forgiveness always comes through the openness to the other.²⁸

Everything takes place in the ecclesial space, even if the "elders" mentioned in the patristic tradition and in monastic histories often live in isolated places. However, they keep in a silent way the link with the Church, their asceticism not being a separation from the others: "Do not be separated from the Church, for no one is stronger than the Church. Your hope, salvation and redemption is the Church. It is higher than the heavens and wider than the earth. It never grows old, but is always in full glory."²⁹

Old age is synonymous with wisdom and with a state of strength in the spiritual struggle. "This youth knows no old age, it is not subject to infirmity, it is not lost through lack of vigor, it does not weaken with time, it cannot be conquered by anything, it is not impoverished by anything, except sin. For its old age comes through the weariness of sin."³⁰

Such an elder can pass on his experience to his disciples, his advice can strengthen them in the fight against passions.

CONCLUSION

Old age is, of course, also the result of ascetic effort. The latter, apart from being a process of mortification of the body, aims at healing the bodily impulses to consume to the point of destruction this physical world, the inclinations of all kinds to the gluttony of material pleasures. Ultimately, life here, instead of being a journey to death, becomes a continual regeneration and rejuvenation in God.

²⁶ Alexander Schmemmann, *Postul cel Mare*, trad. A. și L. Constantin, Ed. Doris, București., 1998, p. 168-169.

²⁷ Pr. D. RADU, „Caracterul ecleziologic...”, p. 303.

²⁸ Pr. D. STĂNILOAE, *Teologia dogmatică ortodoxă*, vol. 3, p. 96.

²⁹ Sf. IOAN GURĂ DE AUR, *Despre Rai și Scriptură. Despre iubirea lui Dumnezeu pentru noi. Despre «Șezut-a Împărăteasa de-a dreapta Ta»*, trad. V. Manolache, Ed. Bizantină, București, 2009, p. 35.

³⁰ Sf. IOAN GURĂ DE AUR, *Cateheze baptismale*, trad. M. Hancheș, Ed. Oastea Domnului, Sibiu, 2003, p. 102.



Man, reborn in Baptism and constantly renewed by the mystery of Confession, lives in the light of Christ's resurrection. Rebirth comes through Baptism, and through Confession and Repentance we continually cleanse our souls. "Our soul, being aged and obsolete in sins, through Baptism has been renewed, as being created anew, for which also we desire heavenly life."³¹ Spiritual nourishment enlightens human nature, gradually growing the one reborn through Baptism. "The beauty of the soul never fades, and even in old age it has many lovers and continually flourishes. So that we too may gain this beauty, let us covet those who have it and make ourselves enamored of them. For only in this way will we be able to take this beauty and enjoy eternal goodness."³²

In the Orthodox tradition, Confession is not just for the formal purpose of being absolved of sins. It is an ascent of the opening of our person freed from sins to God's communication of the very life unending. The light that those "elders" share with us is a light of the eternal living Word. Old age becomes a source of spiritual life, continually rejuvenating our soul. The revelation of our depths through the confession of sins becomes an open door to gradually fill ourselves with the unspoken divine - to move towards that inexhaustible dialogue open to the being created by the eternal communion of divine persons.

³¹ Sf. Ioan Gură de Aur, *Comentariile sau Explicarea Epistolei către Galateni*, trad. T. Athanasiu, Tipografia Editoare „Dacia”, Iași, 1901, p. 126.

³² Sf. IOAN GURĂ DE AUR, *Tâlcuiri la Epistola a doua către Corinteni*, trad. T. Athanasiu, Ed. Sophia, București, 2007, p. 85.



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REFLECTIONS ON CREATION: THE “NORMATIVE MAN” THROUGH THE LENS OF SAINT GREGORY OF NYSSA'S ANTHROPOLOGY

Bogdan-Georgian TUDOR,

Ph.D. Student at “1 Decembrie 1918” University of Alba Iulia,

ROMANIA

Email: gb.tudor@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

Our study explores the concept of the "normative man" from the perspective of Saint Gregory of Nyssa's anthropology. The starting point is the analysis of the biblical passage that describes the creation of man, a fundamental passage for understanding the place and purpose of humanity in the Christian vision. The emphasis will be on human dignity conferred by being created "in the image and likeness of God." We will explore how the image of God is reflected in various aspects of human existence: reason, free will, and relationships. We aim to offer a nuanced perspective on the complexity of the human condition, highlighting the extraordinary potential of man created in the image of God.

Keywords: *Christian anthropology; image and likeness; creation of man; normative man; Saint Gregory of Nyssa;*

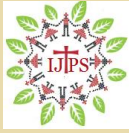
INTRODUCTION

If society were to return to the teachings of Christianity, which draw their essence from the writings of the Holy Scripture, man would be restored to his primordial dignity, granted by the Holy Trinity when it decided: "Let Us make man in Our image, after Our likeness, and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, over the cattle, over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." (Genesis 1:26). This is one of the three biblical texts of the first book attributed to Moses, which the French theologian Jean-Claude Larchet considers fundamental for Christian anthropology: "Christian anthropology and its conception of gender are primarily based on the Scriptures, and first of all on three passages from the book of Genesis: 1:26-27; 2:18-25; 5:1-2."¹

The passage from the book of Genesis in the Holy Scripture describes the creation of man by God. The statement that man was created "in God's image and likeness" has generated multiple interpretations throughout history.

This concept suggests that humans possess certain divine qualities or enjoy a special connection with God, distinct from the rest of creation. Jean-Claude Larchet argues, based on the writings of some Church Fathers, that the distinction of sex is secondary to the fundamental human nature. The creation of man "in the image of God" represents a fundamental concept that precedes the differences between man and woman in contemporary discussions.

¹ Jean-Claude LARCHET, *Transfigurer le genre*, Éditions des Syrtes, Genève, Suisse, 2023, p. 23.



1. ANTHROPOLOGY OF SAINT GREGORY OF NYSSA

This interpretation emphasises the inherent value of each human being, regardless of gender, as the image of Divinity: "For many Fathers, in this text, the two parts of the sentence – 'in the image of God He created him' and 'male and female He created them' – must be disassociated, the second part not being an explanation of the first, but a second phase in relation to it. What is fundamental, primordial, is the human being, whose value lies in being created in the image of God, a consideration that precedes the distinction between the two sexes and applies equally to both."²

The concept of "image and likeness" of God suggests that humans have a moral, spiritual, intellectual, and relational capacity that reflects divine attributes. In Christian doctrine, this gives every human being intrinsic value and unique responsibilities, such as caring for and protecting creation, as indicated in the verse: "let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, over the cattle, over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."

The expression "image and likeness" has been extensively debated in theology to elucidate the special relationship between man and God and the purpose of humans in the world. Although there are various theological interpretations, the fundamental concept of man being created in the image and likeness of God is essential in Judeo-Christian thought. It has significantly influenced Western culture and ethics.

A profound understanding of human dignity, as revealed by God, could provide contemporary society with a moral compass to navigate the waves of the current value crisis. The Church has a crucial responsibility in guiding communities toward an authentic understanding of Christian values, beginning with recognising the inherent value of every person as God bestows.

Although the book of Genesis presents the creation of man on the sixth day (1:24-31), and other biblical texts (such as 2 Maccabees 7:28) affirm the creation of man alongside the rest of creation, this does not diminish the importance and uniqueness of the human being. Man is not merely reduced to a simple part of creation but holds a special status.

In Christian theology, man is considered the crown of creation, the only being created "in God's image and likeness". This characteristic gives him a privileged place within creation. The symbolic interpretation of man's creation on the sixth day underscores his importance in the plan of the Holy Trinity, being designated as the steward of creation and called to actively participate in maintaining and developing the harmony created by God.

The biblical account of creation differentiates man from other creatures. Although man belongs to the material world and shares biological characteristics with other life forms, he is distinguished by cognitive, spiritual, and moral capacities that bring him closer to God. This dual nature gives man a unique mission and role in the world, setting him apart from the rest of creation.

Jean-Claude Larchet highlights Saint Basil the Great's interpretation of the biblical text from the book of Genesis. He argues that the term "man" does not refer exclusively to the male sex but to the human being in its entirety. Thus, both man and woman are equal in dignity, bearing the divine image.

² Jean-Claude LARCHET, *Transfigurer le genre*, Éditions des Syrtes, Genève, Suisse, 2023, p. 24.



"For Saint Basil of Caesarea, the precision is given so that 'no one, out of ignorance, takes the word man to mean only the male sex,' and indicates that 'the woman also has, like her husband, the privilege of having been created in the image of God'."³

According to the traditional Christian view, as in Saint Basil the Great, man is a unique creation of God with a different origin and dignity than other beings. This perspective underscores God's distinct creative act in the case of man, reflected in the human body and soul.⁴

Saint Gregory of Nyssa argues that sexual differentiation is after the creation of man in the image and likeness of God and is not a defining trait of fundamental human nature. The essence of man lies in communion with God, which transcends gender divisions: "'God made man,' says Scripture. 'He made him in the image of God.' The creation of the one who is according to the image thus reached its perfection. Then Scripture continues the story of creation and says: 'God made them male and female.' Everyone knows, I believe, that this aspect is excluded from the prototype: 'In Christ Jesus, as the Apostle says, there is neither male nor female.' And yet Scripture states that man was divided according to sex. Therefore, the creation of our nature is in a way dual: what makes us similar to Divinity and what establishes the division of sexes. Indeed, such an interpretation is suggested by the very order of the narrative: Scripture first says, 'God made man; He made him in the image of God.' Only later does it add, 'He made them male and female,' a division foreign to divine attributes."⁵

This passage emphasises that sexual differentiation, although part of the order of creation, does not reflect the image of God to the same extent as the spiritual nature of man. Drawing on the writings of Saint Apostle Paul, Saint Gregory of Nyssa accentuates the transcendence of the divine nature, which surpasses gender categories.

2. HUMAN NATURE IN THE VISION OF SAINT GREGORY OF NYSSA

Saint Gregory of Nyssa considers gender differences to be a secondary aspect of human nature, added later to the creation of man in God's image and likeness. He emphasises the primordial importance of spiritual communion with the Divinity as the fundamental purpose of human existence, surpassing gender differences.

Jean-Claude Larchet, analysing Gregory of Nyssa's perspective on creation, underscores his belief that the essence of human existence lies in the creation of man in the image of God, reflecting Christ. The subsequent differentiation into "male and female" represents, in Gregory of Nyssa's view, a secondary level of existence, a deviation from the primordial perfection and unity of the divine image: "Gregory further explains that the formula 'male and female He created them' refers to a second level in the human being, the first being what makes him a being in the image of God and 'after the prototype' which is Christ; 'male and female' is indeed a 'division foreign to divine attributes.'"⁶

Father Ștefan Florea, examining the writings of Saint Gregory of Nyssa, highlights his view that man's uniqueness within creation lies in the fact that, being created in the image of God, he reflects the "Heavenly Man," another way of referring to Christ: "The image of

³ Jean-Claude LARCHET, *Transfigurer le genre*, Éditions des Syrtes, Genève, Suisse, 2023, p. 24.

⁴ Cf. Gheorghe ISTODOR, „Omul – realitate dihotomică. O mărturie misionară împotriva concepțiilor eterodoxe antropologice”, in *Altarul Reîntregirii*, Nr. 2/2009, pp. 203-222

⁵ Saint Gregory of Nyssa, *The Creation of Man*, XVI, PG XLIV, 181A-B.

⁶ Jean-Claude LARCHET, *Transfigurer le genre*, p. 25.



God in man is considered by Saint Gregory as the source of humanity, but that humanity born from above, capable of reflecting the Heavenly Man."⁷

Interpreting Saint Gregory of Nyssa's vision, Father Ștefan Florea highlights a distinction between two perspectives on human nature: the "normative man" (man as he was created) and the "real man" (man marked by the Fall). The normative man is defined through the lens of the divine image, visible in his material and spiritual structure. Although affected by the Fall, the real man retains the divine image. However, it is obscured by the consequences of sin on human nature: "Saint Gregory, when speaking about man, uses two registers of humanity, analysing the normative man, the pre-Fall man or Christ-Man, in contrast with man as such. The normative man is considered from the divine image's perspective about the materiality structure. In contrast, the real man is analysed from the perspective of the divine image obscured in the same relationship with materiality. Hence the need to distinguish between what is and what should be. Moreover, we must affirm that both the pre-Fall man and the post-Fall man, by their very created human nature, are simultaneously material and spiritual..."⁸.

The "normative man" represents the archetype of the ideal human, as conceived by God—in His image—existing in perfect harmony between the spiritual and the material. This is the state of man before the Fall. On the other hand, the "real man," is the man marked by the Fall, in whom the divine image, though present, is overshadowed by the effects of sin. Both human states, pre-fall and post-fall, are characterised by material-spiritual duality.

The difference lies in how these two dimensions relate to the divine image: harmoniously in the case of the "normative man" and discordantly in the case of the "real man." Father Ștefan Florea, following the teachings of Saint Gregory of Nyssa, urges us to reflect on the tension between our calling to be "normative humans," that is, the complete reflection of the divine image. The reality of the post-Fall human condition, in which we have become "real humans," marked by imperfection and sin. Jean-Claude Larchet clarifies the interpretation of the "double creation" concept in Gregory of Nyssa, emphasising that it does not refer to two distinct chronological moments but rather to two planes or levels of creation. The differentiation of sexes, added later to the divine image, is not a divine attribute in itself but rather an anticipation of sexuality as a means of perpetuating the human species after the Fall. He states that: "It has often been said that Gregory of Nyssa conceived a double creation. This second text shows that the two creations are not chronological but refer to two planes; the term 'creation' is actually not very appropriate. There is indeed a duality, but it is more 'logical' than chronological. The sexes are certainly 'superadded' to the image, not being divine attributes. By creating the sexes, God anticipates sexuality which will be implemented after sin to allow for the reproduction of the species"⁹.

Jean-Claude Larchet, interpreting Gregory of Nyssa's vision, emphasises that the differentiation of sexes, added later to the divine image, does not represent an inherent attribute of Divinity. By creating the sexes, God anticipates and prepares humanity for the reality of sexuality post-fall as a means of perpetuating the human species. The French theologian begins his analysis with the text of Saint Gregory of Nyssa on the Creation of Man: "As is easily seen, the human composite participates in two orders: that of Divinity,

⁷ Florea Ștefan, *Spiritualitate și desăvârșire la Scântul Grigorie de Nyssa*, Bibliotheca Publishing House, Târgoviște, 2015, p. 174.

⁸ Florea Ștefan, *Spiritualitate și desăvârșire la Scântul Grigorie de Nyssa*, Bibliotheca Publishing House, Târgoviște, 2015, p. 175.

⁹ Jean-Claude LARCHET, *Transfigurer le genre*, p. 26.



possessing reason and intelligence which do not admit division into male and female; from the irrational, it derives its bodily constitution and the division of sex. Every being that participates in human life possesses both characteristics."¹⁰

The fragment presents a profound perspective on human nature, emphasising its fundamental duality. Gregory of Nyssa describes man as a unique synthesis of two distinct realities: the "order of Divinity" and the "order of the irrational." The "order of Divinity" defines the spiritual essence of man—reason and intelligence—which reflects the image of God and transcends gender differences, being universally present in every human being.

On the other hand, Gregory of Nyssa's "order of the irrational" encompasses the bodily aspects of human existence, including the differentiation of sexes. This dimension of our being is associated with materiality and primal instincts, representing a distinct component of the spiritual essence.

CONCLUSION

Therefore, Gregory of Nyssa emphasises cultivating spiritual and rational aspects to draw closer to the divine model without denying or neglecting our bodily dimension.

The biblical account of creation in the Holy Scripture highlights the distinct manner in which God created man compared to the rest of creation. God, through His direct involvement—forming man from the dust and breathing life into him—underscores the importance and exceptional value granted to humanity, in contrast to other beings, which were created merely by His word. Thus, man stands out about the created universe because, for the human being, God manifests special attention. While for the rest of creation, He simply commands it into existence from "nothing," for the "crown of creation"—man—God Himself acts.

In the biblical account of man's creation, we discover that God adds to the divine will the acts of "forming" and "breathing life into" as divine acts that elevate the one destined to rule the earth and all that was created upon it to the status of the "image" of the Holy Trinity. This dignity bestowed upon Adam is assumed by modern man today, yet it is not valued at its true worth.

¹⁰ Saint Gregory of Nyssa, *The Creation of Man*, XVI, PG XLIV, 181B.



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