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Preface

The 18th issue year 2023 of Icon of Faith (Icoana Credinței), International Journal of Interdisciplinary Scientific Research (IFIJISR) encompasses a group of articles on various themes, dedicated to the areas of Theology and Christian life.

The commencing paper *THE PRACTICE OF PRAYER IN THE JERUSALEM CHURCH ACCORDING TO THE BOOK OF ACTS*, by Prof. Ph.D. Daniel AYUCH, present the different aspects of prayer in the Early Church that sojourned in Jerusalem as we read it mainly in the first eight chapters of Acts. *With prayer, the Church is omnipotent because it allows the power of God to reside among the brothers and sisters, for whom everything becomes possible (Lk 1,37)*. The subsequent paper, *THE MOTHER OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST IN THE ORTHODOX HYMNOGRAPHY* is signed by Prof. Ph.D. Petre Octavian TUCĂ & Nicușor TUCĂ. *The person of the Mother of the Lord is put in strict connection to her Son, the second Person of the Holy Trinity, highlighting her participation to His redeeming work. She is so glorified in the liturgical hymns of the Orthodox rite, that the stichera to her glorification adorn each page of our ritual books*. Fr. Phd. Ioan-Tănase CHIȘ signs the paper: *IS CHRISTIANITY STILL UP-TO-DATE? AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL ARGUMENT. In a world dominated by newness, the question we start with is inevitable: is Christianity still relevant today? For believers and religious affiliates, the question is superfluous; but it falls to them to deliver valid answers, even to such rhetoric. Man is the immediate reality, impossible to neglect, which is the concern of both believers (a being destined to fulfilment through deification, legitimised as a person by God) and non-believers (a being legitimised by itself)*. The next paper belonging to Fr. Ph.D. Cristian Florin BUTE, have the title *MOVEMENT AND ITS STABILITY AS AN ARGUMENT FOR CREATION, IN THE CAPPADOCIAN FATHERS. The Cappadocian Fathers consider that the orderly movement of creatures and, especially, the stability of heavenly bodies is an indication of the existence of the Creator and divine providence*. Vasile CĂPÎLNEAN signs the paper *CONFESSIONAL INTERFERENCES IN TRANSYLVANIA. AN OVERVIEW OF THE SCIENTIFIC LITERATURE ON THE PHENOMENON OF LITURGICAL INTERCHANGES IN THE 16TH AND 17TH CENTURIES. The Transylvanian Orthodox Church seems to have borrowed a lot of non-Orthodox practices from the confessions it lived with during the 16th-17th centuries, influences that can still be identified today*. Ph.D. Student Cosmin Iulian CÎRSTEA, signs the paper: *THE UNION OF MAN AND CREATION WITH GOD, REFLECTED IN THE "MEDITATIONS" OF SAINT MAXIM THE CONFESSOR. The union of man and creation with God, reflected in the "meditations" of St Maximus Confessor. God created all that exists out of love, wishing to share His eternally good existence with all creation*. Prof. Ph.D. George Daniel PETROV, signs the paper *THE HUMAN BEING – A BEING OF GRACE AND A DIALOGICAL STRUCTURE. Today the definition of the human being as a being of grace with a dialogical structure is imperative, because of contemporary challenges that threaten the person with desacralization, reducing him or her from the crown of creation to a simple egocentric individual heading towards nowhere*. Lastly, Ph.D. Ionuț MÎLCOMETE sign the paper: *ORTHODOX GNOSEOLOGY REFLECTED IN THE HOLY GOSPEL OF SAINT JOHN THE APOSTLE AND EVANGELIST*.

Therefore, the content of the current issue is a good and interesting opportunity to reading research on specific themes presented in the journal book, exhibited in a dynamic Christian tradition, Sciences, Religion & Education.

June 2023,

Fr. Ph.D. Marian BUGIULESCU

THE PRACTICE OF PRAYER IN THE JERUSALEM CHURCH ACCORDING TO THE BOOK OF ACTS

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ABSTRACT

One of the recurring elements in the Lucan Diptych is precisely the practice of prayer by all its characters. From Jesus to Mary and the disciples, and from the women to the first Christian community everyone is said to pray in the Gospel and the Book of Acts. The initial path of the Church is marked, above all, by the action of the Holy Spirit, who transforms the Apostles into witnesses of the Risen One who express themselves not only in the Word but also in the shedding of their own blood. Their testimony spread rapidly from Jerusalem and Antioch to the West until it reached the capital of the empire in Rome, as the Lord said in Acts 1:8: "you will receive the power of the Holy Spirit which will come on you, and then you will be my witnesses not only in Jerusalem but throughout Judaea and Samaria, and indeed to earth's remotest end." The entire book of Acts reveals a praying Church, a community of faithful deeply rooted in prayer. Both as a community and as individuals, they pray continually, thus fulfilling the prayer mandate given by Jesus in the Gospel: "Stay awake, praying at all times" (Lk 21:36). The First Church, that of Jerusalem in Acts 1-8, is not drafted as a self-sufficient community, sure of itself and its means, but rather as a Church that - in its weakness - is sustained by the power of God. A vision that comes in line with those words of Jesus Christ in Luke 12:32: "There is no need to be afraid, little flock, for it has pleased your Father to give you the kingdom." This study presents the different aspects of prayer in the Early Church that sojourned in Jerusalem as we read it mainly in the first eight chapters of Acts. In the first place, we will see prayer as an attitude of expectation and the role of praying in the company of the Mother of God. Next, we shall analyze some texts that deal with perseverance in prayer and sacramental prayer. Finally, the role of prayer at decisive moments in the community and facing persecution is analyzed. Prayer is the powerful weapon granted by God to his Church to win the battles in the middle of the world and achieve the conversion of men. With prayer, the Church is omnipotent because it allows the power of God to reside among the brothers and sisters, for whom everything becomes possible (Lk 1:37).

Keywords: Prayer; Lucan Diptych; Acts of the Apostles; Holy Spirit; Witness; Resurrection; Apostles; Mother of God; Perseverance; Sacramental Prayer; Persecution.

INTRODUCTION

Acts of the Apostles is the second book of the Lucan Diptych. While the Gospel deals with the revelation itself and with the foundation of the Christian faith according to the teachings and deeds of the Lord Jesus Christ, the second volume narrates the Apostles' and the people's witness to this faith.¹ In both books, one of the recurring elements is precisely the practice of prayer, from Jesus to Mary, the disciples, and the first Christian community.

¹ See LÖNING, Karl. *Geschichtswerk I*, 48.

The initial path of the Church is marked, above all, by the action of the Holy Spirit, who transforms the Apostles into witnesses of the Risen One who express themselves not only in the Word but also in the shedding of their own blood.² Their testimony spread rapidly from Jerusalem and Antioch to the West until it reached the capital of the empire in Rome. In this way, the program that Jesus gives to his disciples before the Ascension is fulfilled when he tells them: “you will receive the power of the Holy Spirit which will come on you, and then you will be my witnesses not only in Jerusalem but throughout Judaea and Samaria, and indeed to earth's remotest end” (Acts 1:8).

The entire book of Acts reveals a praying Church, a community of faithful deeply rooted in prayer around the Word of God. Both as a community and as individuals, they pray continually, thus fulfilling the prayer mandate given by Jesus in the Gospel: “Stay awake, praying at all times” (Lk 21:36) and “Get up and pray not to be put to the test” (Lk 22:46). In the Book of Acts, Saint Luke dwells on contemplating one of the key practices of the Early Church. A Church that prays is a Church that lives in dependence on the Lord, just as Jesus had lived in dependence on the Father. The First Church, that of Jerusalem in Acts 1-8, is not drafted as a self-sufficient community, sure of itself and its means, but rather as a Church that - in its weakness - is sustained by the power of God. A vision that comes in line with those words of Jesus Christ in Luke 12:32: “There is no need to be afraid, little flock, for it has pleased your Father to give you the kingdom.” Through prayer, the early community breathes and stays alive day by day. As we will see in this presentation, the Church of Jerusalem experienced the power of prayer, the effectiveness that Jesus promised to those who make a supplication by invoking his name with faith and humility (Lk 18:13-14; Lk 11:9; Mt 18:19-20; Mt 21:22). The Church of Acts experienced the joy of being miraculously sustained by a prayer that made them stronger amid weakness.

This study presents the different aspects of prayer in the Early Church that sojourned in Jerusalem as we read it mainly in the first eight chapters of Acts. In the first place, we will see prayer as an attitude of expectation and the role of praying in the company of the Mother of God. Next, we shall analyze some texts that deal with perseverance in prayer and sacramental prayer. Finally, the role of prayer at decisive moments in the community and facing persecution is analyzed. The Bible quotations in this paper have been chosen from the New Jerusalem Bible unless otherwise noted.

1. WITH MARY FROM THE RESURRECTION TO THE GIFT OF PENTECOST

It is significant that the first scene that Saint Luke depicts, after the Ascension of the Lord, is the group of the 120 disciples in prayer (Acts 1:14). It is the concrete response to the indication of the Lord to await “what the Father had promised” (1:4), that is, the sending of the Holy Spirit. Now is the time to open up to the gift from above, which will enable them to fulfill an extraordinary mission that overwhelms them in every sense. The reader cannot forget their origins as fishermen and simple men and women from the countryside of northern Galilee. Only by being clothed with the power from on high (Lk 24:49) will they be able to witness the Good News of Christ to the ends of the earth (1:8). The prayer of this initial group is born in simplicity and poverty. It is the invocation of those who, lacking everything, expect everything from above.

In this context of anticipation, between the Ascension and Pentecost, Saint Luke mentions Mary, the Mother of Jesus, and her relatives for the last time (cf. Acts 1:14). The

² See MARGUERAT, Daniel. *Acti 1*, 61.

auctor ad Theophilum dedicated to Mary the initial pages of his Gospel, from the announcement of the Archangel Gabriel to the birth and childhood of the Lord. With Mary begins the earthly life of Jesus and with Mary also begin the first steps of the Church; In both moments, the story unfolds in an atmosphere of recollection and listening to God. Mary followed in silence, but closely, all the path of her Son during his public life until the foot of his cross, and now she also follows, with a silent prayer, the path of the Church.

Mary is present in Jerusalem, in the upper room where Jesus' disciples used to meet (cf. Acts 1:13). She is there sharing this atmosphere of listening and prayer before the doors open up and they go out to announce the message of Christ the Lord to all peoples, teaching them to keep everything He commanded (cf. Mt 28:19-20). The presence of the Mother of God with the Eleven, after the Ascension, is not a simple historical annotation of something that happened in the past. It rather assumes a meaning of great value, because Mary shares with the Apostles and with the small community of Jerusalem the most precious thing she has: the living memory of Jesus that is expressed in prayer. By keeping the memory of Jesus alive, she preserves his presence among the brothers and sisters of the Church. Mary and the Church await as one entity the gift of the Holy Spirit because one cannot consider a Church without her presence together with the Apostles, as Saint Chromatius of Aquileia said in one of his sermons.³

2. THEY JOINED CONSTANTLY IN PRAYER (1:14; 2:42)

Perseverance in prayer is the attitude of the little church of the 120 disciples in Acts 1:14 but also that of the post-Pentecost church in 2:42. At 1:14 Luke says: "With one heart all these **joined constantly** in prayer." In both cases, Luke uses the Greek verb (gr. *proskartereo*) which indicates persistence, loyalty, and devotion to prayer.⁴ Prayer and praise permeate the entire life of the early Church. Communities pray and individuals pray. The reader notes that the Church of Acts is a Church in prayer, praising the Lord, literally hanging on the power of God.⁵

The end of St. Stephen's cycle, the church's first martyr, is played out in a prayerful setting.⁶ Faced with the fury of the members of the Sanhedrin for his speech (7:54), Saint Stephen gathers himself in prayer and manifests himself "filled with the Holy Spirit" which gives him the certainty that "the Son of man is standing at the right hand of God" (7:55-56). St Stephen suffers his martyrdom in prayer, trusting his life in the hands of the Lord Jesus (7:59) and begging "aloud" forgiveness for his murderers (7:60). An attitude that confirms him as a true disciple of Christ who asked forgiveness for those who crucified him and mocked him on the cross (see Lk 23:34). Immediately after the first persecution in Jerusalem, we see Saul in prayer when a certain Ananias lays his hands on him to restore his sight in Damascus (9:11-12). And although the story does not say so explicitly, Ananias himself must have been in prayer when he perceived the call of the Lord to go to Saul (9: 10-11) despite his objections and fears (9: 13-16).

Perseverance in prayer is also mentioned when the Apostles perform miracles. Certainly, all the signs of divine power are carried out "in the name of Jesus Christ" as we can read in Peter's healings of the crippled man in the Temple and the paralyzed man in

³ "Non potest ergo Ecclesia nuncupari nisi fuerit ibi Maria mater Domini cum fratribus eius. Illic enim Ecclesia Christi ex virgine praedicatur." CHROMACE D'AQUILEE. Sermo 30:1: Sources Chrétiennes 164, 135.

⁴ See HINSON, E. Glenn, 729.

⁵ See MARGUERAT, Daniel. *Atti 1*, 121, footnote 37.

⁶ For a detailed study of St Stephen's prayer see COLMEIRO VEGA, Alejandro. 26-31.

Lydda (3:6; 9:34). In this way, it is emphasized that it is the Lord who works the prodigies, in the apostolic era at the hands of the apostles (5:12), and later through his saints. In the case of the resurrection of Tabitha of Joppa, Peter precedes his miracle with intense prayer. When they take him to the disciple who was already dead, Peter “knelt down and prayed.” Only later did he tell her: “Tabitha, stand up” (9:40). The allusion to the resurrections carried out by the prophets Elijah and Elisha to the widow of Zarephath and the Shunammite woman are more than evident, and, in both cases, the prophets prayed fervently before performing their miracles (see 1Ki 17:20; 2Ki 4:33).⁷ In Mark 5:41 and Luke 7:14, Jesus acts with his divine authority and does not need any supplication to raise Jairus’ daughter and the Nain widow’s son. Peter is a disciple and needs God's help in everything he does. With prayer and faith, Peter returns Tabitha to life and presents her to the church gathered in that house moving many people to the faith in the Lord (9:42).

When Peter returns to Jerusalem, he is imprisoned due to Herod's persecution. Luke tells that “The church prayed to God for him unremittently” (12:5) and implies that the later prodigious liberation in Acts 12:6-11 was possible due to the insistent prayer of the Church. This time Luke affirms that prayer not only breaks the chains of sickness and suffering from the body but also breaks down the walls of injustice and rescues believers from the hands of the enemy. When Peter is free, the prayer does not stop, since he goes to the house of Mary, mother of John Mark, in search of the brothers and sisters and finds out that “they were gathered in prayer” (12:12). In short, perseverance in prayer sustains the life of the little Church of Jerusalem to such an extent that Christians could be defined as “those who call on the name of the Lord” (2:21; 3:16; 9:14-15.21).⁸

3. THE BREAKING OF BREAD

In the first summary of Acts 2:42-27, Luke mentions four essential pillars for the community life of the Church: the teaching of the apostles, communion, the breaking of bread, and prayers. The breaking of the bread was already introduced in Luke 24:30.35 to refer to the Eucharist in a more abstract way. Later we will read its verbal form as part of the practices of Christians everywhere (Acts 2:46; 20:7.11; 27:35). Since the more specific terms such as “the Lord's supper”, “eucharist”, or “sacrifice” do not appear in the book of Acts, the breaking of the bread becomes the formal term for referring to the Eucharist in this book. A tradition that has its roots in Paul's terminology, particularly in 1 Cor 10:16 and that at the same time, for Luke, underlines the aspect of sharing and behaving as a just community with everyone. This Eucharistic celebration was carried out “from house to house” (2:46 NAS), which helped to strengthen family ties in the Church around the sacrament of the Lord.⁹ For Luke, it is essential to leave in writing that the first communities met “on the first day of the week for the breaking of bread” (20:7). This first day would later be called the Lord's Day (ἐν τῇ κυριακῇ ἡμέρᾳ; see Rev 1:10) and from very early on it will be the day dedicated to the commemoration of the resurrection and the celebration of the Eucharist as a practice of Christian identity: “every Lord's Day gather yourselves together, and break bread, and give thanksgiving” (Didache 14:1). In this context, it is understood that Sunday is also a day to celebrate the beginning of a new life and the resurrection, as the story of the young man Eutychus in Acts 20:9-12 also shows.

⁷ About the intertextuality of this pericope in Acts and the narratives in 1-2 Kings see MARGUERAT, Daniel. *Atti I*, 403 and 407.

⁸ See also HINSON, E. Glenn, 729-732.

⁹ See Ampuero, Julio A. Poder.

4. THE APOSTLES DEDICATE THEMSELVES TO PRAYER

Since prayer is a natural activity for the entire church in Jerusalem, it is especially highlighted in the life of the Apostles. We have seen above that the Apostles assiduously resorted to prayer. Let us mention, for example, the healing of the cripple man that occurs when Peter and John “were going up to the Temple for the prayers at the ninth hour” (3:1).¹⁰

Beyond that, the Apostles are aware of the absolute priority of Scriptural prayer in their apostolic mission. This can be observed especially when the number of disciples increases and so do the leaders’ tasks. So, they choose to entrust others with the table service and dedicate themselves to the ministry of the Word and prayer (see 6:1-4). Being the service of the tables a task of charity, totally worthy and holy, they understand that their specific mission is mainly to preach the Word, an activity that finds one essential source in the recess for prayer.

It is not by chance that when the Apostles distribute the tasks, and they decide to devote themselves to prayer and the service of the Word (see 6:4) we are told immediately afterward that “The word of the Lord continued to spread: the number of disciples in Jerusalem was greatly increased” (6:7). The immediate consequence of this decision is the growth of the community. When the ministers of the Church pray and announce Christ, the Gospel spreads and the Church grows.

This prayer can particularly be accompanied by fasting when there is a special request or when the spiritual maturity of people is strengthened. In the Jerusalem cycle immediately after Pentecost, there is no mention of fasting. The first time it appears is before the imposition of hands on Paul and Barnabas in Antioch and before they establish presbyters in each community (see 13:2-3; 14:23).

5. FACING PERSECUTION (4:23-31)

After the ban to speak about Jesus and the threats received from the Sanhedrin (cf. Acts 4:18.21), the path of the Church meets a great challenge. With great resilience, the Apostles are determined to obey God before men. They are aware that they cannot remain silent about what they have seen and heard about Christ and his Resurrection. This is how Peter and John expressed it before the Sanhedrin in 4:19-20. The prohibition of the Jewish authorities from the Temple clashes against the mission received from Jesus in 1:8 and aims to prevent its accomplishment.

In the face of danger, the community reacts by lifting up a prayer with a revealing Biblical content. In light of this critical situation, the community does not react with discouragement or with regrets. On the contrary, they turn to the Lord as their only strength and support: “When they heard it, they lifted up their voice to God with one heart” (4:24). In their prayer, they look to God as the sovereign master of everything, as the creator of everything that exists (4:24). Reassured by the omnipotence of God, they can calmly confront the persecution they are going through.

With the help of the Word of God – specifically Psalm 2 as in the LXX – they seek light to understand their situation. And they find it, from the Word and above all from the experience of Jesus himself: Jesus also found opposition to carry out his mission by Herod and Pilate, and the persecution to which he was subjected now continues in the Church. In the same way that Herod and Pilate did not hinder God's plans, but rather –without knowing it– contributed to its achievement, persecution now does not prevent the Church from

¹⁰ About this practice see MARGUERAT, Daniel. *Acti 1*, 130 and FITZMYER, Joseph. *Acts*, 277.

fulfilling the mission received from Christ. On the contrary, persecution is integrated into God's plan (4:25-28).

Once they understand the meaning of what is happening, they do not ask for the difficulties to disappear, nor for the enemies to be annihilated, but simply for the courage to continue preaching the Word during persecution (4:29-30). Once they are convinced that the persecution will not hinder the spreading of the Gospel, they only ask to be clothed again with power from on high. They do not care if they are persecuted, but if the Gospel can be preached to everyone. The fruit of prayer is a new Pentecost that makes them preach the Word of God with courage. Prayer has broken down all fears. It has not only shed light to understand the meaning of what is happening: above all, it has given them the divine strength of the Spirit to transform that situation, as we can read in verse 31: "As they prayed, the house where they were assembled rocked. From this time, they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to proclaim the word of God fearlessly."

6. FACING IMPORTANT DECISIONS

To complete the number of the Twelve, discernment is not enough, even though it is indispensable and necessary. When it comes to choosing the substitute for Judas, Luke writes: "They prayed: Lord, you can read everyone's heart; show us therefore which of these two you have chosen" (1:24). Human illumination is not enough, even if it comes from every member of the community. They are aware that it is not theirs but God's choice, and that it is up to them to match the one that God has chosen.

They are aware that only God sees into all hearts and that external appearances can often be deceiving. For this reason, they pray: "Show us which of these two you have chosen." Thus, not only the human but mainly the divine initiative is demonstrated.

Also after the election of the seven, we are told that the apostles "laid their hands on them after prayer" (6:6). They have received a mission that must be clothed with prayer. No matter how material their tasks may seem, every mission in the Church is sacred, even the table service as it is meant in this case. The prayer emphasizes this while imploring the grace so that those who have received it carry it out in the spirit of Christ.

The first great mission to the Gentiles also springs from prayer: "One day while they were offering worship to the Lord and keeping a fast, the Holy Spirit said: I want Barnabas and Saul set apart for the work to which I have called them" (13:2). In this case, we are not told that there was a question subject to discernment. It seems like a complete and absolute initiative of the Spirit that was perceived precisely while they were in community prayer.¹¹ How the voice of the Spirit has been understood may have been through one of those who are listed in the previous verse as "prophets" (13:1). We see here the early Church listening to the Spirit through prayer. Only in prayer, God's will can be discerned with certainty and without error. And only in prayer can one grasp the movements of the Spirit who constantly surprises and opens new ways for the mission of the Church.

Another clear example is the entry into the Church of the first pagan family: the conversion of the centurion Cornelius and those of his household as it is recorded in Acts 10. In this case, prayer seems to be the engine of every development in the story. The first Christians of Jewish origin had great doubts about the evangelization of the immeasurable heathen world. However, prayer breaks down obstacles and prepares the way for both the evangelizer and the ones to be evangelized. Cornelius is a pious man, a man of prayer with a

¹¹ See FITZMYER, Joseph. Acts, 497.

certain sympathy for Judaism. Precisely while in prayer he understands that he has to make Peter come and immediately he obeys what God has inspired him (10:1-8).¹²

While Cornelius's envoys are on their way, Peter is also in prayer, and without him knowing anything about what is going to happen, God himself prepares the Apostle to welcome these pagans and to walk with them (10:9-16).

Peter will end up announcing Christ to Cornelius' household and they will receive the Holy Spirit and be baptized. Prayer has prepared both the preacher and his recipients to fulfill this step of great transcendence in the early Church, without them knowing it. Prayer has opened the way to evangelization in unexpected and surprising ways. From their logic and mindsets, the Apostles might never have taken that step.

Instead, by opening their ears to God through prayer, they have allowed God himself to prepare both their minds and hearts to make that qualitative leap, unthinkable from the Jewish mentality of that time.

CONCLUSIONS

The early Church of Acts reveals prayer around the Word of God as their secret source of strength and vitality. By prayer, they live from God. They have access to a superb, mystical, and divine life. The Church prolongs in history the prayer of Christ, the Incarnate Word. Thanks to the prayerful mediation of Scriptures, God's blessings constantly descend on the world, who is saved from itself, and the Biblical Kingdom of Heavens opens its doors for them. Between the Ascension and Pentecost, Virgin Mary meets in the Church in prayer (cf. Acts 1, 14). Mother of God and Mother of the Church, Mary exercises this maternity until the end of history. Mary teaches the need for prayer and tells us that only with a constant, intimate bond, full of love with her Son can we leave "our house", be free of our ego, and reach the ends of the world with the courage to announce the resurrection of the Lord.

Instead, a Church without prayer is a powerless church, like the Apostles in their boat facing the storm. When they ask for the intervention of the Lord, everything calms down and they can reach the land safely (Mt 8:23-28). With prayer, they can break all kinds of ties and chains like those of Peter in Jerusalem or those of Paul in Philippi (Acts 12:11-12 and 16:25-26). Without prayer, the Church is left without vigor and can be easily subdued by its enemies (Mt 17: 20-21; Mk 13:37).

Only prayer can work miracles because it connects us with the power of God. Prayer is the powerful weapon granted by God to his Church to win the battles in the middle of the world and achieve the conversion of men. Prayer and fasting are the secret weapons for spreading the Gospel. With prayer, the Church is omnipotent because it allows the power of God to reside among the brothers and sisters, for whom nothing is impossible (Lk 1:37). Prayer is capable of changing the course of events. Truly, the Church that prays «has its hands on the helm of history» as St. John Chrysostom said.

¹² Cf. MARGUERAT, Daniel. *Acti 1*, 428.

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THE MOTHER OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST IN THE ORTHODOX HYMNOGRAPHY

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ABSTRACT

The Mother of the Lord Jesus Christ is the most significant person of all the saints, because she was well-pleased for the Son of God to take body from her and be born of her. The person of the Mother of the Lord is put in strict connection to her Son, the second Person of the Holy Trinity, highlighting her participation to His redeeming work. She is so glorified in the liturgical hymns of the Orthodox rite, that the stichera to her glorification adorn each page of our ritual books.

Keywords: *hymn; Virgin Mary; Mother of God; Theotokos; glorification;*

INTRODUCTION

Mother of the Lord Jesus Christ (Gr. *Teotokos*) is an attribute of the Virgin Mary, expressing the faith, both of the Orthodox Church and of the Roman-Catholic Church, that the Holy Virgin Mary gave birth to the Son of God, the second Person of the Holy Trinity.

This doctrine or teaching was expressed in the time of the Third Ecumenical Council, held in Ephesus in 431 A.D. in response to the heresy of Nestorius, who was stating that two persons existed in Jesus Christ, the divine person of the Son of God, born from the Father, before all ages, and the human or historical person of Jesus Christ, born from the Virgin Mary. The heresy was called dioprosopism (two persons). The consequence of this heresy would be that the Virgin Mary did not give birth to the Son of God, but to Jesus Christ, the man, so that she is Mother of Jesus Christ and not Mother of the Lord (*Teotokos*) or Mother of God.

1. THE GLORIFICATION OF THE MOTHER OF THE LORD AS THE MOST GLORIOUS DURING THE FIRST CENTURIES

The Third Ecumenical Council denounced the heresy and affirmed that the Virgin Mary is Mother of the Lord (*Teotokos*) and affirmed, at the same time, her eternal virginity and her attribute of continually imploring God for us, namely of eternal mediator¹.

The quality of Theotokos (Mother of the Lord) was assimilated as well by the liturgical conscience of the Church, and all the hymns and prayers addressed to the Virgin Mary mention her with this attribute.

What gives us the most complete idea concerning the place held by the Most Holy Theotokos in the framework of the divine oikonomia and of the worship we ought to give her is her quality of Mother of God or God's Birth Giver², confessed by the Holy Scripture,

¹ Dumitru Stăniloae, “Maica Domnului ca mijlocitoare,” in *Ortodoxia* 1 (1952), pp. 79-129;

² Viorel Sava, “Învățătura despre Maica Domnului și reflectarea ei în cultul și imnografia ortodoxă”, „*În Biserica Slavei Tale*”. *Studii de Teologie și Spiritualitate Liturgică*, II, Iași: Editura Doxologia, 2012, pp.65-92.

defined as a dogma by the Church during the period of the ecumenical councils and versified in the hymns dedicated to her. During the first five centuries the teaching of the Church regarding the Mother of the Lord was comprised in the simple confession, based on the divine revelation, of the fact that Mary is the Mother of the embodied Logos and that she was a virgin. Based on these confessions she was glorified in an incipient cult³.

For example, the hymn “Virgin Mother of God rejoice...”, composed after an obviously biblical model (Lk.1: 28-42), is regarded as one of the oldest hymns, made of the angel's greeting to the Holy Virgin and Elisabeth's greeting to the Virgin Mary, after the Annunciation. The concluding formula is taken over from Saint James' Liturgy⁴. The introduction of this troparion in the liturgical service is attributed by the tradition to Saint Cyril of Alexandria, the hymn being, however, much older⁵. Here is the content of this hymn: “*O Virgin Mother of God, Hail Mary full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb; for thou gavest birth to the Saviour of our souls.*”⁶

In the texts of the books of worship we meet innumerable references that fight this heresy and show that Jesus Christ is not separated into two persons: “...being God by nature and becoming man by nature for our sake; *not that He was divided into two persons*, but that He is known in two unmingled natures...”⁷

The Third Ecumenical Council (Ephesus, 431) condemns Nestorius' heresy and formulates the *dogma of the hypostatic union*, namely of the union of the two natures, the divine one and the human one, in the one hypostasis of the Son of God: “Jesus Christ is perfectly God and perfectly man, from rational soul and body... The same, consubstantial with the Father according to the divinity and consubstantial with us according to the humanity”. The Holy Virgin Mary is Mother of God.

2. THE SUPRANATURAL BIRTH AND EVER-VIRGINITY OF THE MOTHER OF THE LORD

For the Eastern Church, the quality of Theotokos of the Mother of the Lord is so intimately united to Christology that our entire salvation stands or falls together with the teaching that the Most Holy Ever-Virgin Mother of God is God's Birth-Giver. Jesus Christ saves us but the work accomplished by Him has a real and universal value only because He is truly God and perfectly man at the same time.

The foundation of the quality of Theotokos of the Most Pure Mother, namely the merit of having given birth to the embodied God, consists in the union according to hypostasis of the two natures in the eternal person of the embodied Son of God. In her was

³ A. Maloney, “Mary and the Church as seen by the Early Fathers”, *Diakonia*, IX (1974), pp. 6-19.

⁴ Vasile Mitrofanovici, *Liturgica Bisericii Ortodoxe*, Cernăuți, 1929, p. 292.

⁵ Ene Braniște, *Liturgica generală*, București: Editura Basilica, vol. II, 2015, p. 457.

⁶ Troparion sung at the breaking of the bread (Great Vesper), *** *The Hieratikon*, digital edition available at https://old.tsu.ge/data/file_db/anthim/9.pdf, p. 22. See also the Greek version: „Mother of God, hail, blessed Mary, the Lord after you, blessed are you as a woman, and blessed is the fruit of your womb, that you are the Savior of our souls”, in *HIERATIKON - THE DIVINE LITURGIES* of John Chrysostom, King of the Great and Pre-Hiasmen, Edition of Apostolic Ministry of the Church of Greece, 'Edition E', 1995, p. 24.

⁷ Dogmatic Theotokion, plagal second mode, *** *Vespers as chanted on the Holy Mountain*, Florence, Arizona: St. Anthony's Greek Orthodox Monastery, 2006, (digital edition available at: <https://music.samonastery.org/Vespers.pdf>), p. 282.

accomplished the great miracle that “One of the Trinity”⁸ was made into what we are. She is “the door” and “the stairway” uniting heaven and earth, creating within the limits of our space and time a redeeming opening and bringing henceforth in another world “those which are above the world”: “*To the One in the Trinity, Born of the Father from before all ages, to Him you gave birth, most glorified Mother, by ineffable miracle, by the shadowing of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, with Gabriel’s voice, we call out to Thee: rejoice, Thou by whom joy rises, rejoice, Thou by whom the curse is erased, rejoice, the Lord is with Thee*”⁹.

The birth of the Savior was of a “seedless” conception¹⁰ and He was delivered from Virgin Mary’s womb “without corruption”¹¹, “without destroying the Lord’s Mother’s virginity”¹². To express this truth, again the Byzantine hymnography is our best testimony: “*Seedlessly and of the Divine Spirit, and by the will of the Father, didst thou conceive the Son of God, Who from the Father, existed before the ages without mother. And thou hast brought forth in the flesh Him Who, for our sakes, came forth from thee without father; and thou hast suckled Him as a babe. Wherefore, cease not to intercede that our souls be delivered from perils.*”¹³

Therefore, the sense of the Mariological dogma needs to be interpreted as follows: the Virgin Mary is God’s Birthgiver to the extent to which she gave birth not to the divine nature but to the Man-God, she gave birth to God according to His humanity, united to God the Logos. The Church then confesses that the attribute of God’s Birthgiver is also a consequence of the hypostatic union, in connection to which is the ever-virginity of the Mother of the Lord or the supernatural character of Christ’s birth, as the hymnographers reveal to us this miracle: “*How can we not marvel at thy theandric Offspring, O allrevered one? For without experience of wedlock, thou, O allblameless one, hast brought in the flesh a fatherless Son, Who was born motherless of the Father before the ages, and Who in no way suffered change or intermingling or division, but preserved in their entirety the properties of*

⁸ This formulation belongs to the Patriarch Proclus of Constantinople (5th century): “One of the Trinity became embodied” (Cf. Anton I. Adămuț, *Literatură și filosofie creștină*, vol. I, Iași: Editura Fides, 1997, p. 44).

⁹ „The Second Chapel to the Most Holy Theotokos” (included in Ceaslov of St. Jer. Grigorie Dascălul, Metropolitan of Wallachia), *Ceaslov*, București: Editura I.B.M.B.O.R., 1973, p. 585, Exapostilarion VIII, Theotokion, *** *The Octoechos: The Hymns of the Cycle of the Eight Tones for Sundays and Weekdays: Vol. IV: Tones VII & VIII*, translation by Reader Isaac E. Lambertsen, Liberty, Tennessee: The St. John of Kronstadt Press, 2nd 1999; Vezi și Theotokion: “We praise thee, we bless thee, we venerate thee, O Mother of God: for thou hast given birth to One of the undivided Trinity, thy Son and God (*that of the inseparable Trinity, you begotten the one Son and God*), and thou hast opened the heavenly places to us on earth.” (Theotokion, Cantic/Ode 7, Great Canon of St. Andrew of Crete, Tuesday in the First Week, Great Compline, *** *The Lenten Triodion*, translated from the original Greek by Mother Mary and Archimandrite Kallistos Ware, South Canaan, Pennsylvania: St. Tikhon’s Seminary Press, 2002, p. 226); Cf. *Triodion, Publication of the Apostolic Ministry of Greece, in Athens*, 1994, p. 653.

¹⁰ “Thou givest birth and art a virgin, and in both thou remainest by nature inviolate. He who is born makes new the laws of nature, and thy womb brings forth without travail. When God so wills, the natural order is overcome; for He does whatever He wishes.” (Theotokion, Cantic/Ode 4, Mattins, Thursday of the Great Canon, *** *The Lenten Triodion*..., p. 394); Cf. *Triodion*..., p. 641).

¹¹ Sf. Maxim Mărturisitorul, *Ambigua*, P.G. 91, 1341 C – 1349 A. See also the Romanian translation by Fr. Prof. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Ambigua. [Tâlcuiri ale unor locuri cu adânci înțelesuri din Sfinții Dionisie Areopagitul și Grigorie Teologul]*, translation, introduction and notes by Fr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru Stăniloae, în col. „Părinți și Scriitori Bisericești” (P.S.B.), vol. 80, București: Editura I.B.M.B.O.R., 1983.

¹² *Ibidem*, col. 1276 A.

¹³ Aposticha Theotokion, third mode, *** *Vespers as chanted on the Holy Mountain*..., pp. 152-153.

each essence. Wherefore, O Lady, Virgin Mother, do thou entreat Him that the souls of them that, in Orthodox manner, profess thee to be God's Birthgiver may be saved."¹⁴

Jesus Christ as a man comes into existence, like Adam, by an act of divine creation, so unblemished by the sin of voluptuousness. And on the other hand, Christ remains in continuity as well with Adam's successors arrived into existence by natural birth¹⁵: "Unto Him Who is God over all, the Son Who without seed willingly became incarnate of the Virgin, and by His divine power preserved her who gave Him birth as a pure virgin even after birthingiving..."¹⁶

The Mother of the Lord has been so honored in our liturgical hymns that the stichera unto her praise adorn each page of the ritual books.

Thus, we meet at first hymns containing Old Testament prophecies regarding the Virgin Mary. In essence, all the Old Testamentary pre-figurations of God's Birthgiver are related to Christology. The Church hymns relate them directly to Christ, either repeating them, or giving them another symbolical interpretation. So:

"The shadow of the Law is passed away with the coming of grace; for as the bush was not consumed when it was burning, thus as a virgin didst thou give birth, and a virgin didst thou remain. In the stead of a pillar of fire, there hath arisen the Sun of Righteousness, in the stead of Moses, Christ the Salvation of our souls."¹⁷

The entire Old Testament, preparing the oikonomia of salvation, also prepares the home, the temple¹⁸ in which God's Son was to be embodied, as "the Virgin, epitomiz[ed] all the saintliness of the Old Testament"¹⁹. The angel Gabriel himself is amazed at the all-wonderful purity of the Virgin: "Awed by the beauty of thy virginity and thine all-radiant purity, Gabriel, marvelling, cried out to thee, O Theotokos: «What praise can I bring which is worthy of thee? What shall I call thee? I am at a loss and filled with awe! Wherefore, as I have been commanded, I cry unto thee: 'Rejoice, O thou who art full of grace!'"²⁰

All those prophetic prefigurations: "Heaven of the Tree of life", "stairway of James", uniting heaven and earth, "the burning bush", which, though fully fire, is not consumed, "the bright Cloud", which shows the way, "the Tent of the testimony", "the Vessel of the heavenly manna", "the Arch of the Law", "the Virgin who gives birth" (Isaiah 7: 14), "The temple of the Lord's glory with the door closed, sealed" (Ezekiel 44: 1-4), "the House of God's wisdom" (Prov. 9: 1), all these, according to their spiritual meaning and according to the explanations of the Holy Fathers and of the hymnographers, refer to the All-pure Virgin, as chosen vessel full of grace of the divine embodiment. "About the Virgin Mary, God's Birthgiver, the conscience of the Church and even the angels in heaven confess

¹⁴ Dogmatic Theotokion, third mode, *** *Vespers as chanted on the Holy Mountain...*, pp. 146-147

¹⁵ Dumitru Stăniloae, *Iisus Hristos sau restaurarea omului*, Sibiu, 1943, pp. 120-121.

¹⁶ Theotokion, Canon of the Cross & Resurrection, Ode III, tone I, Sunday Matins, *** *The Octoechos: The Hymns of the Cycle of the Eight Tones for Sundays and Weekdays: Vol. I: Tones I & II*, translation by Reader Isaac E. Lambertsen, Liberty, Tennessee: The St. John of Kronstadt Press, ²1999, p. 14.

¹⁷ Dogmatic Theotokion, second mode, *** *Vespers as chanted on the Holy Mountain...*, pp. 70-71.

¹⁸ Condacul din ziua 21, *Mineiul pe noiembrie*, București: Editura I.B.M.B.O.R., ⁵1983, p. 330: „Prea Curat Templu al Mântuitorului...”.

¹⁹ Vladimir Lossky, *Orthodox Theology. An Introduction*, translated by Ian and Ihita Kesarcodi-Watson, Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1978, p. 89.

²⁰ Kathismata 1, Theotokion, tone 3, Sunday Matins, *** *The Octoechos: The Hymns of the Cycle of the Eight Tones for Sundays and Weekdays: Vol. II: Tones III & IV*, p. 11.

that she exceeds even the angelic hosts closest to God in purity and knowledge, as the one who carried in her innocent womb the Son of God made man.”²¹

The Holy Fathers and the creators of Church hymns illustrated and defended this dogma, because it is the basis of our salvation. If the Virgin Mary did not give birth to God but only to a simple man, then God would not have come to us and we would not have been lifted up to Him, would not have gotten deified.

3. THE DIVINE MATERNITY

The Orthodox hymns testify everywhere that Christ's coming in the world was supernatural. “The embodiment was achieved by a leap outside the natural development of man's life and yet within its framework”²², says a contemporary theologian, as if inspired by the hymns of Saint Andrew of Crete. “*Thou givest birth and art a virgin, and in both thou remainest by nature inviolate. He who is born makes new the laws of nature (ὁ τεχθεὶς καινίζει νόμους φύσεως), and thy womb brings forth without travail. When God so wills, the natural order is defeated; for He does whatever He wishes.*”²³

Because the Savior had a *coming to life* radically different from the familiar biological *coming to life* (gr. *genesis*) called *birth* (gr. *gennesis*) He was free from all the biological limitations subsequent to the falling into sin and, implicitly, free from death. These, He received them willingly by His real birth – free to a certain extent and outside the law of the coming to life posterior to the fall²⁴, namely free from “the conception by seed and the birth through corruption, which nature drew upon itself after having disobeyed the commandment”²⁵ – to crush them.

Virgin and Mother! It is one of the antinomies of the Revelation²⁶, along with others “hard to receive by the soul”, as the Christian conscience reflects: “*Virginity is alien to motherhood, and childbearing is a thing strange to virgins: yet in thee, O Theotokos, both are to be found. Therefore we and all the nations of the earth, without ceasing call thee blessed.*”²⁷

Divine maternity is a synonym of the virginity of Mary, in the sense that one is intertwined with the other, that we cannot have one without the other: Mary has the quality of mother of God because she gave birth to the Son of God, but this birth did not touch the virginity of the Birth-Giver, making her a mother in the human sense of the word. In this given situation the keeping of the virginity means that He Who was born was God, whereas the losing of the virginity would have meant that He Who was born was not God²⁸.

²¹ Ionuț Chircalan, *Creator și creație. Părintele Dumitru Stăniloae - valorificator al scrierilor areopagitice*, București: Editura Universitară, 2021, p. 179.

²² Ilie Moldovan, “Învățătura despre Sfântul Duh în Ortodoxie și preocupările ecumenice contemporane”, Teză de doctorat, *Mitropolia Ardealului*, 7-8 (1973), p. 758.

²³ Theotokion, Canticle/Ode 4, *Another Canon*, Great Canon of St. Andrew of Crete, Thursday in the Fifth Week, *** *The Lenten Triodion*..., p. 394, Cf. *Triod*, p. 461.

²⁴ See also the description and profound analysis of this law in St. Maximus the Confessor: Maxim Mărturisitorul, *Răspunsuri către Talasie*, 21, în „Filocalia românească”, vol. 3, translation, introduction and notes by Fr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru Stăniloae, Sibiu: Tipografia Arhidiecezană, 1947 (P.G. 90, 312 – 313 A).

²⁵ Sf. Maxim Mărturisitorul, *Ambigua*, P.G. 91, 1341 C.

²⁶ Ioan G. Coman, „Și Cuvântul Trup s-a făcut”. *Hristologie și mariologie patristică*, Timișoara, 1993, p. 395.

²⁷ Canticle/Ode Nine, Second Canon, *Irmos*, *** *The Festal Menaion*, translated from the original Greek by Mother Mary and Archmandrite Kallistos Ware, with an introduction by Archpriest Georges Florovsky, London: Faber and Faber, 1969, p. 124.

²⁸ Ioan G. Coman, „...Și Cuvântul Trup s-a făcut“..., pp. 394-395.

CONCLUSIONS

To conclude, the Orthodox Church, desiring to keep the balance of the theological values, always gave priority to the truths of faith from the Evangel. For this reason, the Orthodox Church abstained from imposing any dogmatic formulation concerning the Holy Virgin Mary (as for example the *immaculate conception* or the *ascension with the human body to heaven*)²⁹, except for the fact that the Orthodoxy strongly upheld that the Virgin Mary truly and really was God's Birthgiver (*Theotokos*) and "Mother of God". No doubt, this striking title, made necessary by the logic of Cyrillian Christology, justified her daily liturgical acclamation as³⁰: "*More honorable than the cherubim and more glorious beyond compare than the seraphim! Without corruption you gave birth to God the Word. True Theotokos, we magnify you!*"³¹

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²⁹ Nicolae D. Necula, "Adormirea Maicii Domnului în cultul Bisericii Ortodoxe", *Glasul Bisericii* 5-8 (1997), pp. 27-34; Gh. Tilea, "Maica Domnului după cărțile noastre de cult. Însemnări de mariologie ortodoxă", în *Glasul Bisericii*, 1-2 (1971), p. 82.

³⁰ John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology: Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes*, New York: Fordham University Press, 1979, p. 149; Henri Barri, "La Royauté de Marie pendant les neuf premiers siècles" *Recherches de science religieuse*, tom. XXIX, 2, 1939, p. 147; Pr. Dr. Gh. Tilea, „Maica Domnului după cărțile noastre de cult...”, pp. 81-82.

³¹ From the *Dismissal*, "Chapel," Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, *Daily Orthros (Matins)*, <https://www.goarch.org/-/daily-orthros> (Accessed April 2, 2023) *** *Theon Prosefharion*, Issued in alimony and under the supervision of Bishop Oinois, eleventh edition, Athens, 1992, p. 24. This second part of the Sunday axion is due to Cosmas the Melodist, while the hymn "De tine se bucură", namely the axion in the Liturgy of Saint Basil the Great is composed by Saint John of Damascus (Pr. Petre Vintilescu, *Despre poezia imnografică din cărțile de ritual și cântarea bisericească*, București: Editura Pace, 1937, pp. 113, 177-179).

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IS CHRISTIANITY STILL UP-TO-DATE? AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL ARGUMENT

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ABSTRACT

*In a world dominated by newness, the question we start with is inevitable: is Christianity still relevant today? For believers and religious affiliates, the question is superfluous; but it falls to them to deliver valid answers, even to such rhetoric. Where will they build their argument from? From a God whom the opposing camp has long since disqualified? We believe that one of the common, valid premises for effective dialogue and constructive criticism is the human being itself. Man is the immediate reality, impossible to neglect, which is the concern of both believers (a being destined to fulfilment through deification, legitimised as a person by God) and non-believers (a being legitimised by itself). The evolution of this being becomes the control lamp of ontological truth and implicitly contains the answer to our question. We have analysed, comparatively, two vectors, two potential directions relevant to human evolution. The first is described in two landmark works of literature, *The Abolition of Man* and *The Brave New World*, and the other through a summary of the orthodox Christian anthropological paradigm. In the case study I have developed, I have come to the conclusion that in the manner in which man undergoes a rationalistic immanent reductionism, becoming merely nature, he becomes himself a piece of nature and seals his demise through dehumanization, becoming himself an idol without consciousness. At the same time, if he empowers his inner, spiritual universe and tries to establish himself in the mystery of the personal God by relating correctly to nature, i.e. to the nature within him, he will find himself in the position of the saint who has risen above nature by the spiritual discipline of instincts. Here true reason and full freedom are revealed. So, despite hostile social pressure, Christianity is not only relevant today but, along the lines of this argument, necessary.*

Keywords: *Man, nature, idols, saints, conscience, reason, modernity, social pressure;*

INTRODUCTION

The questioning that marks the title of this study does not aim to delineate partisanship for or against Christianity nor to deepen fault lines but, rather, to facilitate the finding of valid answers at the round table of research and objective questioning, free from resentment and prejudice. What prompts us, however, to initiate this approach is an already entrenched social paradigm, visible as a hallmark of contemporary society or as a civic reflex, manifested in the form of a direct hostility to faith. This is felt, generalised, by what Brett C. Hoover recalled: „social pressures among young people have more recently turned against religious affiliation”¹. The above question is claimed both from within Christianity

¹ Brett C. Hoover, „Evaluating the Moral Framing of Disaffiliation: Sociological and Pastoral Perspectives of the Rise of the «Nones»”, in: *Religions* 2021, 12 (6), 386, pp. 1-2, <https://www.mdpi.com/2077-1444/12/6/386>.

and from without. If we place ourselves within, we will be tempted to talk about God, using reference to Him as the ultimate argument. In this situation, however, our interlocutors, positioned outside, will consider our argument irrelevant, because their logic, which starts from premises alien to divinity, does not allow itself to be penetrated by what they have already long since disqualified. Why have they done so? Because the supreme value for them is no longer God but man, and all valid arguments come from this register. The validity of this geography of debate is attested to by C.S. Lewis in his book *The Abolition of Man*, where its mechanism is clearly shown: „It is the difference between change from within and change from without, between organic and surgical. ... There is a difference between true moral progress and mere innovation”². It should be noted that objective criticism has a very good chance of being constructive, whereas hostility can only be barren and blind³. Based on these considerations, we have decided to use the reverse argument, in the sense that we reach God from the bottom up, from man. It is, if we may say so, a kenotic approach; aware that God assumed our condition through incarnation, becoming true man, we are convinced that, starting from man, we can reach God. So our argument is anthropological in nature because, by talking about man, we draw the same starting line in the debate and, on the other hand, by not being positioned on the outside, we have managed to calibrate a constructive dynamic that compels us to identify the final answers.

1. RETROSPECTIVE - THE DYNAMICS OF A MUTATION

„Instead of taking advantage of the new freedoms, ... [people] set out to lead virtuous lives. ... The threat of a healthy society seemed very plausible then”⁴. It is worth remembering that in the first millennium before Christ mankind passed through what Karl Jaspers called the „axial age”⁵ or the „axial period of history, ... [in which] personal consciousness pierces the sacralized collective, the philosophical question arises, the concept opposes the myth, and the prophecy of immanent sacredness”⁶. This is the context that promotes „the free individual and his capacity for rational thought, moral action and personal belief”⁷. It is the time of „Confucius in China, Buddha in India, Zarathustra in Iran, Socrates and Antigone in Greece, the great prophets of Israel in the Middle East”⁸. If man has been empowered, God has been projected „beyond the world, ... identifying him only with the good”⁹. We are talking about a period between 800 and 200 BC, which required a conceptual and even axiological settling. In the midst of this crystallisation process, biblical revelation is situated between two extremes, namely between „the Asian East, where man loses himself in the divine, and the ancient West, in which the restlessness of the individual is castrated. ... [The biblical revelation proposes] a personal God, who can no longer be confused with eros and the cosmos, and man, created in His image, called to become a unique, incomparable person. ... [called] to difference and communion”¹⁰. In the new spiritual geography created

² Clive Staples Lewis, *Desființarea omului*, Humanitas, București, 2023, p. 46.

³ C. S. Lewis, *Desființarea omului*, p. 47.

⁴ Clive Staples Lewis, *Sfaturile unui diavol bătrân către unul mai tânăr*, Humanitas, București, 2021, p. 180.

⁵ Diac. Ioan I. Ică Jr, *Canonul Ortodoxiei. Sinodul VII ecumenic. 2. Definitivând dogmatic orthodoxia*, Deisis, Sibiu, 2020, p. 1128.

⁶ Olivier Clement, „Creștinătate, secularizare și Europa”, in: Ioan I. Ică jr și Germano Marani, *Gândirea socială a Bisericii*, Deisis, Sibiu, 2002, p. 507.

⁷ Diac. Ioan I. Ică Jr, *Canonul Ortodoxiei*, p. 1128.

⁸ O. Clement, „Creștinătate, secularizare și Europa”, p. 507.

⁹ Diac. Ioan I. Ică Jr, *Canonul Ortodoxiei*, p. 1129.

¹⁰ O. Clement, „Creștinătate, secularizare și Europa”, pp. 507-508.

by the era to which we refer, Christianity and Europe stand in the middle, as an absolute axiological synthesis, both theologically and anthropologically, in what may be called „the mystery of the Other inscribed at the heart of Unity”¹¹. In the Asian hemisphere, „the universe is reborn in the divine, ... [in] the Semitic hemisphere [Judaism and Islam] the encounter between man and God [is achievable, almost exclusively and unilaterally, through] man's submission to the Law”¹². Out of this synthesis achieved by Christianity is born modernity, which „uses and makes use of the truths that remain of the ancient treasure of Christianity”¹³, by parasitizing the very premises that created it¹⁴. We are contemporaries of a social construct, modernity, for which political Christianity is „both vector and victim”¹⁵.

This parasitic dynamic of modernity in relation to the axiological system that generated it can be seen, with the naked eye, in the concept of the human self and legitimacy. Modernity has produced a kind of critique based on the „reconstruction of the genesis”¹⁶ about man and his ontological springs. It is the strategy denounced as „disguising the origin of borrowed things”¹⁷, such as the modification of certain virtues (love becomes benevolence, hope becomes optimism, the Decalogue is replaced by human rights), resulting in a set of counterfeit values, whereby the origin of these contents is no longer sought in God but is passed „under the yoke of «man»”¹⁸. Ernest Bernea identifies the principles of the new type of society: „the principles of the modern ... converge towards one result: the disfigurement of man. Culture has been transformed into propaganda and entertainment, good into material success, beauty into perverse refinement. Economics and politics ... have only subjected [man] to increasingly difficult conditions. Science and industrial morality ... have closed to man the paths to a life proper to his nature”¹⁹. If we refer to man, he is „forced to be «modern», ... he can no longer legitimize his humanity because he no longer has firm references which were the hierarchical cosmos or the personal God, against which he defined himself”²⁰, man being sufficient to himself, making „a criterion of himself”²¹. The scheme proposed by Remi Brague shows us a man of antiquity defined as soul with reference to nature, a man of Christianity defined as person with reference to God and a man of modernity, defined as self/ego, without a precise reference²², modernity ends up, in essence, „consuming meaning without creating meaning”²³.

The new human type reveals itself to us as an unhappy creature, a mutation, „a self isolated in its individual self-referential interiority”²⁴; is, if you like, an „implosion [of the human, in which] the place of the believer, who owes a debt of love to God and his fellow men, and that of the citizen, who owes a debt of patriotism and civic-mindedness to nation

¹¹ O. Clement, „Creștinătate, secularizare și Europa”, p. 508.

¹² O. Clement, „Creștinătate, secularizare și Europa”, p. 508.

¹³ Gilbert K. Chesterton, „Is Humanism a Religion”, in: Remi Brague, *Modern cu moderație. Timpurile moderne sau inventarea unei înșelăciuni*, Editura Spandugino, București, 2022, p. 21.

¹⁴ R. Brague, *Modern cu moderație*, p. 19.

¹⁵ Diacon. Ioan I. Ică Jr, *Canonul Ortodoxiei*, p. 1129.

¹⁶ Clive Staples Lewis, *Ferigi și elefanți și alte eseuri despre creștinism*, Humanitas, București, 2021, p. 133.

¹⁷ R. Brague, *Modern cu moderație*, p. 23.

¹⁸ R. Brague, *Modern cu moderație*, p. 23.

¹⁹ Ernest Bernea, *Criza lumii moderne*, Predania, București, 2011, p. 47.

²⁰ Diacon. Ioan I. Ică Jr, *Canonul Ortodoxiei*, p. 1126.

²¹ R. Brague, *Modern cu moderație*, p. 24.

²² R. Brague, *Modern cu moderație*, p. 25.

²³ R. Brague, *Modern cu moderație*, p. 22.

²⁴ Diacon. Ioan I. Ică Jr, *Canonul Ortodoxiei*, pp. 1129-1130.

and state, has been taken ... simply by the individual with his subjective desires, feelings and conceptions, which have become the supreme value and the sole criterion of thought and behaviour”²⁵. These mutations are felt as an existential drama, as a drift of the human being who has lost the reflex to seek his compass: „The great drama of the contemporary world is centered elsewhere than in the economic and political crises, ... in the intimate nature of man, in his horizon, in the spirit that governs him and makes him what he is. ... Who would have imagined ... that man would reach the state of denial of his own nature and that his world of values would be overturned ...?”²⁶.

The consequences include the collapse of fertility, the birth of ideologies and the abandonment of moral references²⁷. It must be said that Christianity promotes, par excellence, a culture of life²⁸, and this is proven sociologically and historically. To exemplify, we bring to mind the golden age of religious affiliation in the U.S., which is closely linked to the Baby Boomer generation (’46 – ’64): „Existing data do indicate that affiliation and participation in traditional religious institutions reached a provisional peak in the early postwar period, from the late 1940s into the early 1960s, especially among young people. This occurred alongside other markers of social stability (such as marriage rates and fertility) after decades of economic depression and war. Cold War opposition to atheistic communism played a role—traditional religion was patriotic—as did the postwar rise of the «new» Evangelicalism associated with figures like Billy Graham (Putnam and Campbell 2010, pp. 82–90)”²⁹.

An „anthropology of freedom understood as a process of realization of the person in an attitude of conflictual competition with God” has taken shape.”³⁰. This is why any moral reference anchored in providence is perceived by the new human type in a distorted manner, as a serious compromise and an injury to his dignity. Beyond constraining us, the One who intentionally created us free guides us. As an example, our understanding of the Pauline verse «All things are lawful for me, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful for me, but not all things I build up» (1 *Corinthians* 10: 23) has a much deeper meaning than a particular divine preference for a particular pattern of human conduct: „the boundary that separates good and evil [permissible and impermissible] ... is none other than that which separates life from death”³¹.

The horizon of a healthy society becomes a threat to a self-drunk world. The „solution” sought calls for the implementation of a two-way reductionism: either towards nature, as an emptying of the world of the spiritual through its immanentization and disembodiedness; or towards a pseudo-spiritualization of it: „As far as devils are concerned, the human race can make two equally significant but opposite mistakes. One is not to believe in their existence. The second is to believe in it, and to bicker with devils to too great and harmful an extent. They themselves rejoice in both errors and will greet the materialist, as well as the magician, with equal delight”³².

²⁵ Diac. Ioan I. Ică Jr, *Canonul Ortodoxiei*, pp. 1126-1127.

²⁶ E. Bernea, *Criza lumii moderne*, pp. 45-46.

²⁷ Diac. Ioan I. Ică Jr, *Canonul Ortodoxiei*, p. 1127.

²⁸ Diac. Ioan I. Ică Jr, *Canonul Ortodoxiei*, p. 1154.

²⁹ B. C. Hoover, *Evaluating the Moral Framing of Disaffiliation*, p. 2.

³⁰ Arhimandrit Teofil Tia, *Preoție misionară și pastorală contextuală*, Editura renașterea, Cluj-Napoca, 2014, p. 295.

³¹ R. Brague, *Modern cu moderație*, p. 220.

³² C.S. Lewis, *Sfaturile unui diavol bătrân către unul mai tânăr*, p. 9.

2. THE ABOLITION OF MAN AND HIS BRAVE NEW WORLD

The above subtitle is a literary borrowing and refers to two landmark books by two great authors, CS Lewis and Aldous Huxley. Obviously, it is no secret that we are referring to the books *The abolition of man* (1943) and *Brave New World* (1931/1932). Although, chronologically, *The Abolition of Man* is written after A. Huxley's *Brave New World*, the thread of events and the projections it makes anticipate what in Huxley is already happening, so they create the continuity of a plausible imaginary; it is exactly the ball at the net of our discussion. As the title suggests, *The Abolition of Man* unfolds a casuistry in which man, a tripartite composite of mind, chest and belly, amputates his depths to eliminate what would make him vulnerable in his ideal of mastering nature. The result is a new type of human who becomes a victim of his own ego; from master of nature he becomes a piece of it, from the one who was set on mastering it completely, a poor being assimilated to the point of disintegration by the game he had in his sights. If Lewis draws a jaundiced conclusion, of man collapsed under the burden of his own ambitions, Huxley opens up the prospect of a future mastered by the new human type, man already dismantled but continuing his life in the inertia of a world that no longer belongs to him at all. This is why his novel is part of the dystopian literary type, because the new society meets all the conditions of a world opposed to utopia. Specific to this world is the loss of intelligence and emotion, the cancellation of the individual/person, and much more.

The absolutization of rationality is used as a tool in the dissolution of the affective: „Anyone can «dissolve» the feelings by a flat rationalism, ... [and] a hardened heart does not provide infallible protection against a weak mind”³³. In Huxley the feeble mind is perpetuated by sophisticated genetic engineering, genetic determinism and propagandistic inoculation from the embryonic stages of conception, where children are „decanted” and not born, where the great laboratory is called the „Hall of Social Predestination”. The objective is a highly advanced technological one: „What man has bound, nature can no longer unbind”³⁴. Embryonic propaganda is meant to imitate not the work of water, which „can pierce even the hardest granite but, [rather] like wax droplets for seals, liquid droplets that stick, encrust, embed themselves in the matter on which they fall”³⁵. In the new world there is no longer a place for principles of life built on values, or on coordinates such as „right feelings” or „hierarchical affections”³⁶; here everything is done according to new principles: „the secret of happiness and virtue: to like what you are forced to do”³⁷. Conscience is no longer a landmark but, on the contrary, becomes a mark of the primitivism of the old man, because now it is desired to cut off „the parasitic growth of emotions, religious consecration and inherited taboos, in order to make room for «real» or «fundamental values»”³⁸, obtaining instead „all the advantages of Christianity and alcohol, without any of their disadvantages”³⁹. They „know how to manufacture consciousness and decide what kind of consciousness they will manufacture”⁴⁰, because, in their opinion, eliminating the affective part necessarily leads to guaranteed happiness, to: „permanently satisfied people”⁴¹, which is why it takes personal

³³ C. S. Lewis, *Desființarea omului*, pp. 19-20.

³⁴ Aldous Huxley, *Minunata lume nouă*, Ediția a III-a, Editura Polirom, Iași, 2011, p. 27.

³⁵ A.Huxley, *Minunata lume nouă*, p. 34.

³⁶ C. S. Lewis, *Desființarea omului*, pp. 19-20.

³⁷ A.Huxley, *Minunata lume nouă*, p. 21.

³⁸ C. S. Lewis, *Desființarea omului*, p. 33.

³⁹ A.Huxley, *Minunata lume nouă*, p. 59.

⁴⁰ C. S. Lewis, *Desființarea omului*, p. 58.

⁴¹ A.Huxley, *Minunata lume nouă*, p. 47.

pride in the fact that „no effort has been spared to ... lighten emotional life”⁴² and fully justifies the existence of a „College of Affective Engineering”⁴³. The success of this department will be that „values [become] simple phenomena of nature. Value judgments will be produced in the learner within the programming”⁴⁴.

Lewis masterfully expresses himself using a plastic comparison, in which we see birds teaching their chicks to fly, on the one hand, and a farmer treating the chicks as he pleases, without their being aware of the ends that are required to be achieved: „the old system consisted in a kind of propagation - people passing on humanity to other people; the new system consists only in propaganda”⁴⁵. The consequence Huxley draws: „we are all owned by everyone else”⁴⁶ and this would be, in the new axiological system, the definition of the good: „«the good» ... means what is useful for the community”⁴⁷. Lewis's remark is shockingly true: „With a creepy simplicity, we excise the organ and claim function. We create people without chests and expect them to be full of virtue and enterprise. We deride honour and are surprised to find traitors among us. We chastise and demand that the fucks be productive”⁴⁸. With apostolic courage, he defines man thus: „Chest - Charity - Feeling - these are the indispensable connecting factors between the cerebral man and the visceral man. One might even say that it is this intermediary element that defines man as man: for through his intellect he is but spirit, and through lust he is but animal”⁴⁹. An animal driven by instincts is a creature incapable of knowing inner fulfillment and balance. This is a logical deduction based on proven facts: „Our instincts are at war. ... every instinct, if you obey it, claims to be satisfied at the expense of all others”⁵⁰. Value judgments originate neither in instincts, because then we should recognize the value of feelings, nor in ideologies: „The human mind has no more power to invent a new value than it has to invent a new primary color”⁵¹. The only source of value lies in the springs of the inner man. In the absence of this, all attempts to reconstruct the genesis of values end up being denounced as attempts to arbitrarily tear fragments from their „participating context to the whole and amplified in their isolation”⁵².

Man's victories are ambivalent because „every new power gained by man is also a power over man. ... In every victory, man is both the triumphal general and the prisoner behind the triumphal chariot”⁵³. In line with Huxley, Lewis clearly affirms the ambivalence and failure of human success, by stripping the creature of dignity and the characteristic notes of the human person: „The last men, far from being the heirs of power, will, of all men, be most at the mercy of the great planners and programmers, and the power they themselves exercise over the future will be minimal. ... Man's power to transform himself into whatever he wishes means ... the power of certain men to transform others into what they first

⁴² A.Huxley, *Minunata lume nouă*, p. 49.

⁴³ A.Huxley, *Minunata lume nouă*, p. 71.

⁴⁴ C. S. Lewis, *Desființarea omului*, p. 57.

⁴⁵ C. S. Lewis, *Desființarea omului*, pp. 27-28.

⁴⁶ A.Huxley, *Minunata lume nouă*, p. 45.

⁴⁷ C. S. Lewis, *Desființarea omului*, p. 32.

⁴⁸ C. S. Lewis, *Desființarea omului*, p. 31.

⁴⁹ C. S. Lewis, *Desființarea omului*, p. 29.

⁵⁰ C. S. Lewis, *Desființarea omului*, p. 38.

⁵¹ C. S. Lewis, *Desființarea omului*, p. 45.

⁵² C. S. Lewis, *Desființarea omului*, p. 44.

⁵³ C. S. Lewis, *Desființarea omului*, p. 55.

desire”⁵⁴. Huxley marks the drama of such a scenario: „Men are happy; they get what they want and never ask for what they cannot get”⁵⁵. Lewis's observation is masterly: „Unrestrained by values, Nature masters the programmers and, through them, all humanity. At the moment of its fulfilment, the conquest of Nature by Man turns out to be the conquest of Man by Nature. ... Whenever Nature seemed to back down, it was really a tactical retreat. ... What we thought were hands raised in surrender were actually her arms opening to embrace us forever. ... Nature seems to be spatial and temporal, ... the universe of quantity, as opposed to the universe of quality; of objects, as opposed to consciousness; ... is that which admits of no value, as opposed to that which has and perceives value; the unity of efficient causes ... as opposed to final causes. ... We reduce things to Nature precisely so that we can "conquer" them. ... Once we have given up our souls, that is, ourselves, the power thus conferred will not belong to us. ... It lies in Man's power to treat himself as a 'natural object' and to treat his own value judgement as a raw material which scientific manipulation can alter to suit itself. ... If man chooses to treat himself as a raw material, that is what he will be: and not raw material manipulated by himself ... but by raw appetite”⁵⁶. Bernard, one of Huxley's characters, asks his interlocutor, Lena, „Wouldn't you like the freedom to be happy in another way? For instance, in your own way?”⁵⁷. It unmasks the soul, the chest of man that opens the coordinates of the inner man. Lewis denounces the reductionism operated by man by extirpating the depths and gives the final hint: „For the sages of old, the cardinal problem was how to make the soul conform to reality, and the solution was knowledge, self-mastery and virtue. The problem shared by magic and the applied sciences is how to make reality conform to man's desires: the solution is a technique ... ready to do things hitherto considered repugnant and unpious - such as digging up and mutilating the dead”⁵⁸. All these conquests become meaningless because they amount to nothing more than „a betrayal of man's nature and spiritual destiny”⁵⁹.

3. HUMAN NATURE, IDOLS AND SAINTS

„Freedom is the understanding, self-controlled movement of the soul. That is why unnatural animals are not free. For they are carried by nature and do not carry it. Therefore neither do they resist natural lust, but as soon as they are seized by a craving they rush towards its fulfilment. But man, being rational, is led by the flesh rather than carried by it. ... Man is the being who disposes of himself, freely taking account of laws, but not being wholly subject to a law, like the things and animals which constitute nature. Man is, in a certain sense, above nature, making it an instrument of his will and being able to fill it with the divine Spirit and his altogether superior freedom, which strengthens our freedom. Only when man makes himself the slave of the passions does he become a mere piece of nature or less than nature”⁶⁰

St. John the Ladder tells us that man's mission is to „subdue the flesh and the senses”⁶¹, which means that man was created by God „with a mixture of freedom and

⁵⁴ C. S. Lewis, *Desființarea omului*, pp. 55-56.

⁵⁵ A. Huxley, *Minunata lume nouă*, p. 233.

⁵⁶ C. S. Lewis, *Desființarea omului*, pp. 64-66.

⁵⁷ A. Huxley, *Minunata lume nouă*, p. 98.

⁵⁸ C. S. Lewis, *Desființarea omului*, p. 71.

⁵⁹ E. Bernea, *Criza lumii moderne*, p. 46.

⁶⁰ Pr. Prof. Dumitru Stăniloae, în: *Filocalia*, Vol. 9, Humanitas, București, 2011, pp. 49-50.

⁶¹ Sfântul Ioan Scărarul, „Scara Dumnezeiescului urcuș”, în: *Filocalia*, Vol. 9, Humanitas, București, 2011, p. 52.

necessity”⁶², from which we understand that „man can rise in spirit above the sinful nature, that he can overcome the evil habits that have become laws of nature, that he can become free from them. ... Man can develop either towards the full dominion of freedom or towards his full domination by necessity”⁶³. We do not seek to abolish man through a reductionism that takes away his dignity, but rather we propose „the perfection of the nature through the greatest possible participation in God”⁶⁴. „Any good that violates and forces consciences is converted into evil, and this is, according to Berdiaev, the «nightmare of enforced good» in which human freedom ... is neglected”⁶⁵. Freedom is manifested by will and not by instinct, because will is characteristic of the person, of self-consciousness, and instinct is characteristic of nature. St Maximus Confessor affirms the existence of a „gnomic” will, characteristic of the human person, different from the „natural” will. On these grounds the saint states that „sin originates in the personal and not in the natural dimension of human existence”⁶⁶. If man submits to the urges of nature, abdicates the genuine use of freedom and allows himself to be swept away by "the flood of the immediate experiences of the senses”⁶⁷, exploiting the weakness of nature.

For an understanding of the freedom with which man is endowed, we must bring to mind the natural affections, of which the Church Fathers speak to us. They represent the „passive aspect of our nature, [which is] entirely of the nature and not of the will. ... These are: craving for food, pleasure in food, fear, sorrow. ... They are necessary to our nature, helping to preserve it”⁶⁸. At the same time, they represent „the aspect of animality [of being and precisely because] from animal traits, they become diabolical traits, through the spiritual element that colours them”⁶⁹. It's a kind of „transfer of spiritual energy to the lower biological plane”⁷⁰. In order to counteract this tendency, we need to discipline the biological through the range of ascetic exercises combined with active participation in the Holy Mysteries that Orthodoxy puts at our disposal. The more the biological is prominent, the more our humanity fades. Conversely, the more we discipline the nature within us, the more we inscribe or establish ourselves on the vertical axis of our existence, „in the state of our heart, in our interior dispositions or in our interior work”⁷¹. Our huge asset is the Incarnation of the Son of God. By assuming human nature integral, apart from sin, Christ inaugurated the restoration of the flesh: „In the wilderness, resisting the temptations of the lure of pleasure, He gave us the power to overcome all that comes from that lure; in the time of Passion and on the cross, showing Himself steadfast in the face of the temptation to flee from pain, He gave us the power to escape the passions that come from that lure. But also in the miracles that Christ performed, His body played a particularly important role. ... The

⁶² Sf. I. Scărarul, *Scara Dumnezeiescului urcuș*, p. 52.

⁶³ Sf. I. Scărarul, *Scara Dumnezeiescului urcuș*, p. 52.

⁶⁴ Preot Profesor Doctor Dumitru Stăniloae, *Spiritualitatea Ortodoxă. Ascetica și Mistica*, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1992, p. 46.

⁶⁵ Paul Evdochimov, *Iubirea nebună a lui Dumnezeu*, Editura Anastasia, București, 1992, p. 21.

⁶⁶ Preot Profesor John Breck, *Darul sacral al vieții*, Patmos, Cluj-Napoca, 2001, p. 48.

⁶⁷ C.S. Lewis, *Sfaturile unui diavol bătrân către unul mai tânăr*, p. 15.

⁶⁸ Pr. Prof. Dr. D. Stăniloae, *Spiritualitatea Ortodoxă*, p. 61.

⁶⁹ Pr. Prof. Dr. D. Stăniloae, *Spiritualitatea Ortodoxă*, p. 62.

⁷⁰ Pr. Prof. Dr. D. Stăniloae, *Spiritualitatea Ortodoxă*, p. 64.

⁷¹ Sfântul Teofan Zăvorâtul, *Viața lăuntrică*, Sophia, București, 2011, p. 167.

miracle is accomplished not only by the command of Christ's divine will and by the almighty energy which is His own as God, but also by the voice and touch of His human body⁷².

The rationalism by which, as we have seen in Lewis, an attempt is made to filter and argue a natural, immanent reductionism of the human person, is a replication in historical multiplicity of what Arianism tried to do, namely to „drive God out of Christ⁷³”; this time, it is to drive God out of the fabric of every man's being and thereby abolish man. The equation has its logic: „Satan's whole struggle against Christ has but one aim: to destroy the God-man, to drive God out of the human body, out of matter, in order to master it completely⁷⁴. Satan fights for it, and his effort is recorded by the apostolic testimony telling us that he «walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour» (1 Peter 5: 8), aware that „nothing is naturally on [his] side⁷⁵”.

The most important dimension of the person is the inner dimension. The Apostle Paul would say: «I rejoice in the law of God after the inner man» (Romans 7: 22). That is why the stake of man's loss is the amputation of his inner universe. This is how, if we are to refer also to the abolition of man, a new human type can be born, characterised by „zero-dimensionality, ... an empty potentiality⁷⁶. This depthless man has diluted to the point of dissolution moral values and the possibility of fulfilling his ontological program of image and likeness. He, as we find him embodied by Ulrich, the character of Robert Musil's novel, „Is a man without self. ... Nowadays there are millions of such people What he thinks about anything will always depend on a certain possible context - nothing is, for him, what it is; everything is subject to change, in flux, part of a whole, of an infinite number of wholes presumptively adding to a super-whole of which he knows nothing anyway. So any answer he gives is only a partial answer, any feeling is only an opinion, and he never cares what anything is, only "how" it is. ... Ulrich felt himself capable of any virtue, as well as any crime. ... [is] neither bad, nor good, nor villain, nor honest man, nor hero, nor insect⁷⁷. Thus perishes the person, the man bearing the image of God, and we are born the aniconic man, or idol. He is a mutilated, counterfeit creature, according to the above, a being fallen into „his absolutism and [the false] divinities he has created for himself: property and capital, the god-state, pan-sexualism, etc.⁷⁸. Absorbed, seized by this new reality invested by man with the power to condition him, man has „destroyed his capacity for self-determination, [instituting no less than a] self-idolatry⁷⁹. Self-idolatry of the person subscribes, de facto, to a reversal of optics, from God to man: „The easiest thing is to turn their eyes from Him to themselves⁸⁰. The same Lewis states that the only source of legitimacy for humans is God, and when humans become disconnected from this, the inevitable result is precisely the idolization of their own being; a vicious circle of existential ignorance: „All is holy when the reins are in the Lord's hand. But they are ruined when people forget God and make a carved

⁷² Jean-Claude Larchet, *Semnificația trupului în Ortodoxie*, Editura Basilica a Patriarhiei Române, București, 2010, p. 57.

⁷³ Arhimandritul Iustin Popovici, *Omul și Dumnezeu-Om*, Editura Deisis, Sibiu, 1997, pp. 148-149.

⁷⁴ Arhim. I. Popovici, *Omul și Dumnezeu-Om*, p. 147.

⁷⁵ C.S. Lewis, *Sfaturile unui diavol bătrân către unul mai tânăr*, p. 114.

⁷⁶ Ovidiu Pecican, *România și Europa Mediană. Contribuții la tipologia culturală a Europei*, Polirom, Iași, 2021, pp. 84-85.

⁷⁷ O. Pecican, *România și Europa Mediană*, p. 84.

⁷⁸ E. Bernea, *Criza lumii moderne*, p. 47.

⁷⁹ Pr. Prof. J. Breck, *Darul sacral al vieții*, p. 47.

⁸⁰ C.S. Lewis, *Sfaturile unui diavol bătrân către unul mai tânăr*, p. 27.

image of themselves”⁸¹. Michel Henry notes the mutation that tends to confiscate the value of the person, a value that Christianity alone restores in integrum: „The decisive intuitions of Christianity, [because] ... in the midst of the generalized mental confusion, it alone can tell us today what man is. ... [Christianity unmasks the anthropological lie] of making us believe that man is reduced to something that feels nothing and does not feel itself, to what the Apocalypse calls «the idol» that «can neither see nor hear nor walk» (*Revelation* 9: 20), to waves of particles and chains of acids. ... People treated mathematically, computationally, statistically, ... reduced to «brains». ... Not any god can save us today, ... but the One who is alive”⁸².

Perhaps what I have said so far is arousing the outrage or, on the contrary, suspicion of readers. But to those who may feel disappointed, we say that all is not lost. Our great argument is twofold: on the one hand, the Incarnation of Christ and, on the other, the image of the Creator which we bear as a seal. The wax imprint of propaganda I mentioned in the previous chapter cannot leave marks so deep as to cancel out the imprint of the Cross. It is what we hold inwardly, as an „internal report of transcendence”⁸³. By virtue of this inner calling, we are in fact restoring the true centre and source of our legitimacy: „We depend only on souls. Not only on the instability of others' souls, but also on the unpredictability of our own soul. In spite of all the rules we invent, it is not on them that we depend, after all. For it is the unseen part that, in the first and last instance, decides everything”⁸⁴.

There is, however, a fear of those who would wish for the abolition of man, and this fear is precisely the manifestation without rest of the divine image in us; a new human being, a full one: the saint. This is, in fact, the ultimate stronghold that should be conquered in the effort to abolish man: „A corrupt saint ... [is] more to the liking of Hell than a mere tyrant or a debauched”⁸⁵. It depends only on us what vector, what dynamics and what spiritual metabolism we embrace, because: „Great and delicious sinners are made of the same material as the horrible phenomena that are called great saints”⁸⁶. A comprehensive definition of the saint can be found in Ernest Bernea's brilliant book *An Appeal to Simplicity*: „The saint is the greatest innovator of souls and times. ... The saint opens a path of ascent ... to this creature forgotten in its own wandering, lured by the hidden calls of an as yet untamed land. Holiness is a permanent rebuke to man's decadent inclinations. Holiness fixes a bright, highest point in the sky of our spirituality, by which the price of life here is raised. The saint is the man for whom meaning means the conscious and voluntary living of a permanent and perfect reality. ... The saint here lives permanence; he fights and overcomes the clay in man. ... The saint is defined by ... participation in divinity. ... where the saint appears, the new man appears, the true man”⁸⁷.

Is the saint necessary? Is it the version of human nature that has found its true and complete fulfilment? But is he also a social necessity? We will argue with two examples. I recently reread an article in *Dilema Veche* about a film: "A hidden life". The article is called

⁸¹ C.S. Lewis, *Marea despărțire*, Humanitas, București, 2021, p. 95.

⁸² Michel Henry, *Eu sunt Adevărul. Pentru o filozofie a creștinismului*, Deisis, Sibiu, 2007, pp. 351; 353; 361; 368-369.

⁸³ Horia-Roman Patapievic, *Partea nevăzută decide totul*, Humanitas, București, 2019, p. 43.

⁸⁴ H.R. Patapievic, *Partea nevăzută decide totul*, p. 295.

⁸⁵ C.S. Lewis, *Sfaturile unui diavol bătrân către unul mai tânăr*, p. 117.

⁸⁶ C.S. Lewis, *Sfaturile unui diavol bătrân către unul mai tânăr*, p. 177.

⁸⁷ Ernest Bernea, *Îndemn la simplitate*, Vremea, București, 2006, pp.102-104.

„*The need for saints*”⁸⁸. The film is based on the case of an Austrian farmer, Franz Jägerstätter, and shows the journey of a common man who refuses to join the Nazis because he sees Nazism as a pact with the Antichrist, with the devil. Franz soon comes to be despised by people and even condemned, including his family; the only person who will stand by him is his wife Franziska. He ends up in prison, where he has encounters with Dostoyevskian-inspired characters, such as an icon painter, who speaks of the power of seeing the divine behind the injustices and ugliness of the world. Franz's quest is thus projected onto the picture of a world in decay. The film says: „This is what happens when a world dies. People survive, but their lives die. Their reason for living disappears”; „Are we no longer able to see evil?” Franz wonders. One conclusion of the film is this: „We've had two thousand years of failure, we need a saint”. And the second reflection comes precisely from our midst, a native Christian people: „I note that the heart of this people has hardened; the people have become hard of hearing, for what they do not want to hear; they have closed their eyes, for what they do not want to see; they have closed their minds to everything that could either accuse them or bring them out of their lethargic complicity with evil and insensitivity. They are perfect: their conscience fully coincides with the number of justifications necessary to enable them to be effective in mischief; ... [we awaken] mutual hatred. ... Only a saint can save him”⁸⁹.

CONCLUSIONS

Subject to scientific reductionism today, man is only possible as a son of God, as a saint, and not as a son of a chemically determined biological life. It is not man reduced to his appearance but man conscious of his own self that the saint reveals to us. What did the saints understand that modern humanists do not? That God delivers Himself to us; He has His offensive moment and this presupposes our receptivity. In this way, the divine becomes the mobilizing limit. The saint captures the decisive insights of Christianity into such fundamental questions as man and his purpose. The "need for saints" is a social reality, a question that contains its own answer and is delivered to us as an alternative to the generalized mental confusion.

We have tried to reach God starting from man, and we believe we have succeeded precisely because we have forced the ultimate meanings of the human creature. We have instrumentalized man as the common starting point in our debate and the aisles we have marched down have revealed the reality of a paradox: the more he moves away from the God in him and closer to nature, as a mere piece of it, man alienates himself from himself and becomes the artificer of an anthropological mutation and lie in which his freedom is broken; the more he escalates his vocation as son and legitimate heir of eternity, as the human potentiality of the image of God in him, the more man fully asserts himself as a person destined to communion and endowed with unique, unrepeatable value, not subject to the perishability of nature.

Modern man legitimises himself through himself, becoming his own exclusive and absolute reference point. A drift that makes him guilty as the executioner of his own path. The Christian legitimises himself through God, who gives him powerful inner springs and establishes him in the perspective of interpersonal communion between man and his Creator.

The stake is marked by a break in level: we believe in the Man who, as God, inaugurated, in the beginning, the time of this world.

⁸⁸ Andreea Vlad, „*Nevoia de sfinți*”, in: *Dilema veche*, nr. 819, 31 octombrie – 6 noiembrie 2019, <https://www.dilemaveche.ro/sectiune/film/articol/nevoia-de-sfinti>.

⁸⁹ Horia-Roman Patapievic, *Politice*, Humanitas, București, 2006, p. 63.

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MOVEMENT AND ITS STABILITY AS AN ARGUMENT FOR CREATION, IN THE CAPPADOCIAN FATHERS

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ABSTRACT

The Cappadocian Fathers consider that the orderly movement of creatures and, especially, the stability of heavenly bodies is an indication of the existence of the Creator and divine providence. In St. Basil the Great we find a version of the argument of the First Mover from Aristotle, developed also by Thomas Aquinas. In St. Basil the Great and St. Gregory of Nazianz, as in Aristotle, the question of the existence of movement was posed not only in the sense of an original impulse towards movement, but also for the continuation of movement once begun. The sustaining in motion had to have a cause outside the one being moved. And St. Gregory of Nyssa shows that the stability of the movement of heavenly bodies is a witness of divine proneness, as a sign of the specificity of the uncreated, which is unchangeability, in contrast to the attribute of change that dominates the creature. The Cappadocian Fathers do not base faith on reason, but by rational arguments and facts of nature they strengthen the solidarity between faith and reason and clear the obstacles, coming from wrong philosophies, which obstruct the channels through which natural revelation inspires manry.

Keywords: *prime mover, orderly motion, gravity, created, uncreated, change, unchangeability;*

1. A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO THE CLASSICAL ARGUMENT OF THE FIRST MOVER AS AN ARGUMENT FOR THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

Throughout the history of thought, the “motion” argument has been inspired primarily by the classical axiom stated by Aristotle in the seventh book of his *Physics*: “Whatever is in motion must be moved by something.” That is to say, every movement has, *outside the* thing being moved, a producing and *sustaining* cause, a mover. It is worth noting that when we read Aristotle or Thomas Aquinas about the argument from motion, we make the mistake of thinking of the “motion” they speak of in the sense that Newtonian physics understands it. The latter states that if no outside forces act on a body, it retains its initial state of stationary or uniform rectilinear motion, i.e. for a body to acquire a certain motion, it needs only to receive an initial impulse in a certain direction and the motion will take place and continue without further intervention on it. In Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas, on the other hand, the meaning of motion is broader than the meaning we give it today (under the influence of Newtonian mechanics).

Namely, Aristotle and his disciples required explanations not only for the initiation of a movement or a change, but also for its further continuation, for its sustaining over time¹.

¹ Cf. “First Mover”, in Antony Flew, *A Dictionary of Philosophy*, London: Pan Books; ²1979, p. 114.

Thus, Thomas Aquinas, according to a fundamental principle of Aristotelian physics, “saw motion not as intrinsic to but as impressed upon the Universe, and sustained by an outside Force”². Therefore the example he chose to suggest motion is also indicative of the principle he used: a stick shaken (moved) by a man will stop moving when the man stops shaking it. But here is another example which does not give the same result, does not illustrate the same principle (of the continually sustaining cause for movement): an arrow sent from a bow continues its movement to its target even after the archer has completed his movement (the act of throwing). “*Aristotelians laboured to explain this second sort of phenomenon by appealing to putative continuing pressures in and from the surrounding air*”³.

Inspired by Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas was to state that since everything in motion is moved by something else and that mover is also moved by something else, resulting in a series of movers, it cannot go on forever, but there must be a Prime Mover (or Prime Motor) to set the world in motion and, it is understood, to sustain its movement. This Prime Mover is, of course, God.

2. THE FIRST MOVER'S ARGUMENT TO ST. BASIL THE GREAT AND ST. GREGORY THE THEOLOGIAN

In his turn, St. Basil the Great affirmed the impossibility of conceiving an infinite series of movers (supporters of movement), to show that “all is sustained by the Creator’s power”⁴. But he made this argument referring not to the cosmos as a whole or to the totality of its movements, but to the possible cause (or causes) that could sustain the earth (planet) and its foundations. However, he also states that if the earth is supported by one body, and this by another body, we would conceive of a range of movers (causing movement) that cannot be an endless series, which is specific to the First Mover's argument: “*Do you suppose that a heavier body prevents the earth from falling into the abyss? Then you must consider that this support needs itself a support to prevent it from failing. Can we imagine one? Our reason again demands yet another support, and thus we shall fall into the infinite, always imagining a base for the base which we have already found. And the further we advance in this reasoning the greater force we are obliged to give to this base, so that it may be able to support all the mass weighing upon it. Put then a limit to your thought.*”⁵

Today, thanks to scientific progress, St. Basil's argument is obsolete and seems irrelevant, since every schoolboy knows that the weight of the earth is kept in a revolutionary motion around the sun by gravitational attraction. And then it is no longer necessary to consider the series of bodies which, by supporting the smaller by the larger, have the overall purpose of supporting the foundations of the earth.

And yet, St. Basil's argument has a component that may still be interesting today. His point was that if we are to consider that there are a series of supporting bodies for the earth, then it cannot go on and on, but there must be a first immovable mover (hence God), but in any case, whatever explanation we give for the support of the earth, whether we “admit that the earth rests upon itself, or let us say that it rides the waters”, “*the surest answer we can give to our minds*” “*and to those who ask on what this great and awesome*

² *Ibidem*, p. 114.

³ *Ibidem*.

⁴ St. Basil the Great, *Hexaemeron*, I, 9, coll. “The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers Second Series”, vol. 8, edited by Philip Schaff, New York: The Christian Literature Company, 1893, p. 57.

⁵ *Ibidem*.

*weight of the earth rests*⁶ is that “In His (God *n.n.*) hands are the ends of the earth.” (Ps. 94:4), i.e., “all is sustained by the Creator’s power” Most interesting, apart from affirming the impossibility of an endless series of sustainers of the planet, is the idea that if we do not think from the beginning that God is the One Who directly sustains the earth, then another sustainer, if we think of it as of a created nature, must necessarily exert its action on the earth through direct contact, i.e., through the mediation of matter, ultimately through a material force (one thought possible being the weight of another large body that could sustain the earth). And interestingly, we replace all these ancient considerations with the force of gravity, which is true, but we forget or neglect that gravity is a natural law *only described* by science, but not *explained*. Because its real causes are unknown. How is it that any two bodies in the universe instantly communicate with each other this attractive force? The formula for the gravitational force (formerly called Newton's force) has been clearly established in terms of their relative masses and distances, but how does this force communicate faster than the speed of light and without any exchange of matter between the two bodies, even as a thread? Any two bodies in the universe, at any great distance, communicate a force between them instantaneously! A rigorously measurable force! How do they do this “wirelessly”⁷?

To this day, the cause of the gravitational force and the device that makes it work remains an enigma to science. The sustaining cause of gravity can be either material and belonging to this universe or spiritual and outside this universe. But in the first case scientists (Richard Feynman, Nobel laureate, for example) argue that the graviton cannot exist⁸. Even if it did exist it cannot be evidenced by observations, which makes it more of a mystical explanation than a naturalistic one. So that leaves as a plausible explanation a spiritual and sustaining cause of all the elements of the universe through the law of gravity, hence the whole universe. So not only can the data of this universe alone not explain the rationality of matter, but not even the law of gravity, which is from the beginning united with all the elements of the universe, can be explained by an autonomous universe alone, if the universe is considered a physical system closed to any transcendence.

That is why St. Basil's intuition that there must be a supporting body for the earth that has a contact through matter with it is correct (this contact should have been made at least by hypothetical particle such as the graviton), and the truth that this happens through a force as “simple” and physically and logically inexplicable as the force of gravity only enhances the mystery and leads us to think that, if there is no communication of matter between bodies, and the entire space of the universe automatically obeys the law of gravity, it can only be due to a Creator of all, a fact also recorded by Newton in the 18th century, when he discovered the law and formula that bears his name.

⁶ *Ibidem.*

⁷ Recalling how God created everything by movement and stationary, St. Gregory of Nyssa describes how the Creator fixed the heavenly vault on an axis, imparting to it a stable rotational movement “as if he had tightened with a string around the earth the matter which was whirling as a result of its circular rotation” (St. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Making of Man*, I, coll. “The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers Second Series”, vol. 5, edited by Philip Schaff, New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1917, p. 388. Indeed, the law of gravity is very much like a tension inserted in an invisible string that produces the cohesive force of matter!

⁸ “All we have done is to describe *how* the earth moves around the sun, but we have not said *what makes it go*. Newton made no hypotheses about this; he was satisfied to find *what* it did without getting into the machinery of it. *No one has since given any machinery.*” (Richard P. Feynman, *Six Easy Pieces: Essentials of Physics; Explained by Its Most Brilliant Teacher*. Addison-Wesley, 1995, p. 107)

But St. Basil also mentions to his listeners another hypothesis of physicists who explain the stability of the earth as being due to its place “in the middle of the universe and not being able to incline more to one side”⁹. What St. Basil meant is rendered in modern language by the fact that our planet is at the centre of gravity of the universe and as such, according to the laws of physics, stands still, however great and varied the velocities and motions of the rest of the universe. (The hypothesis is still valid for science: since motion is relative, i.e. either the earth moves relative to the universe or the universe moves relative to the earth, the possibility remains open that the earth is at the centre of gravity of the universe. Hence the question: how did it get there?)

In his turn, St Gregory of Nazianz, taking from Aristotle the identification of God with the “fifth element” of which the world is composed, along with the other four traditional “*stoicheia*” of the ancient world (i.e. earth, water, fire and air), asks rhetorically: “*what is the force that moves your Fifth Element, and what is it that moves all things, and what moves that, and-what is the force that moves that?*”¹⁰

Thus, since an infinite regress of movers (sustaining causes) was impossible to conceive of, then there must necessarily have been a motionless first mover. That is, God.

Also in St. Gregory of Nazianz we find an allusion to the impossibility of an infinite regression of movers (or supporters) causing the stability of the earth: “How is it that the earth stands solid and unswerving? On what is it supported? What is it that props it up, and on what does that rest? For indeed even reason has nothing to lean upon, but only the Will of God.”¹¹ But Saint Gregory also recalls the orderly movement of the sun, producing the regularity of the seasons, the alternation of days and nights, all in good order for our benefit and that of all creation. Therefore, the untiring and life-giving sun makes Saint Gregory wonder: “*But who gave him motion at first? And what is it which ever moves him in his circuit, though in his nature stable and immovable?*”¹²

That is to say, the sun, a material body, inert and, by its very nature, dead, is constantly in motion and the giver of enormous energy, indispensable to life. But to this day, the system of sun, earth and moon, essential to life, is a miracle that cannot be put into mathematical equations and which Newton himself believed could only be fully explained by divine intervention.

It is worth noting that, like Aristotle, for St. Gregory the Theologian the movement of a celestial body (the sun or the earth) requires, in order to be continuous, not only a first impulse, but also a permanent support from a mover (supporter). This seems bizarre to our thinking entrenched in the deistic prejudices to which modernity has accustomed us, but, for example, Newton's contemporaries were debating whether gravity is an intrinsic property of matter or a direct action of God¹³.

In fact, it cannot be logically proven that it is a property of matter, this is just a deistic (mechanistic) assumption that has been introduced as a postulate in science, but it is not provable.

⁹ St. Basil the Great, *Hexaemeron*, I, 10, p. 57.

¹⁰ Gregory Nazianzen, *Orationes*, 28 (Second Theological), 8, coll. “The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers Second Series”, vol. 7, edited by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, reprint of 1894 edition, Peabody: Hendrickson, 1995, p. 291.

¹¹ Gregory Nazianzen, *Orationes*, 28 (Second Theological), 26, p. 298.

¹² *Ibidem*, 30, p. 300.

¹³ Horia Roman-Patapievici, *Recent Man*, Humanitas Publishing House, ⁵2008, p. 80.

3. THE STABILITY OF MOVEMENT AS A SIGN OF THE EXISTENCE OF GOD, IN SAINT GREGORY OF NYSSA

St. Gregory of Nyssa also states that movement is more widely understood than its simple or mechanical meaning: “For as motion is not conceived merely as local shifting, but is also contemplated in change and alteration.”¹⁴ Likewise, the divine wisdom and power rule everything “with the reins of a double operation (for it was by rest /στάσις/ and motion /κίνησις/”¹⁵. In fact all that was created or brought to life by God “sprang both from motion (κίνησις) and from stationary (static: στάσις)”¹⁶.

But St. Gregory of Nyssa does not expound the argument from motion with detailed analysis and the assertion of the impossibility of an infinite series of second or intermediate movers, as found in Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas.

Saint Gregory of Nyssa takes the natural revelation indicated by the psalmist (“*The heavens declare the glory of God, and the work of his hands proclaims His strength*”, Ps. 18, 1-3) and illustrates it by the orderly and stable movement of the heavenly bodies.

*“The very heavens... all but shout aloud with a voice, and, though without voice, proclaim the wisdom of their Creator. For we can hear as it were words teaching us: «O men, when ye gaze upon us and behold our beauty and magnitude, and this ceaseless revolution, with its well-ordered and harmonious motion, working in the same direction and in the same manner, turn your thoughts to Him Who presides over our system, and, by aid of the beauty which you see, imagine to yourselves the beauty (kalon) of the invisible Archetype.»”*¹⁷

Even in the above quoted passage (“...and this unceasing movement of revolution, with its well-ordered and harmonious *movement*, working in the same direction and in the same way...”), the attention that St. Gregory of Nyssa gives to the movement stands out. His cosmological argument emphasizes movement, but not just any kind of movement, but that “well-ordered and harmonious” movement, that is, movement and stability at the same time, or “stable movement”, as St Maximus the Confessor would later insist.

St. Gregory of Nyssa also adds a subtlety to the argument of motion, affirming the distinction between the kinds of motion, in heaven and on earth, in contrast to each other, that on earth being characterized by changeableness, and the celestial (astronomical) by the permanence of order (or ordinance). “*The earthly country belongs among things changeable and variable. Nothing of the kind, such as not retaining the same form and condition, is known to us among those which appear and move in heaven, but all things in heaven proceed on their proper course in series and order and sequence (eirmōi kai taxei kai akoluthiai pros ton idion dromon).*”¹⁸

¹⁴ St. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Making of Man*, I, 4, p. 389.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 388.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*.

¹⁷ St. Gregory of Nyssa, *Answer to Eunomius second book*, VI (224), coll. “The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers Second Series”, vol. 5, edited by Philip Schaff, New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1917, pp. 272-273. See also in Jaroslav Pelikan, *Christianity and Classical Culture. The Metamorphosis of Natural Theology in the Christian Encounter with Hellenism*, Yale University Press, 1993, p. 66.

¹⁸ St. Gregory of Nyssa, *Homilies on the Beatitudes: An English Version with Commentary and Supporting Studies: Proceedings of the Eighth International Colloquium on Gregory of Nyssa Paderborn 14-18 September 1998*, Brill, 2000, pp. 84-85.

He had written it to affirm the “unchangeable and permanently consistent quality of the gift which hope holds out to us.”¹⁹ and that heavenly goodness is beyond any fear of change. Despite the contrast between the changing earth and the stable order of heaven, it is a fact that even in heaven there is “nothing that moves of its own proper motion”²⁰. And what is common and visible in both the movement of the heavens and the earth “all that appears, or that is conceivable in respect to us, depends on a Power Who is inscrutable and sublime”²¹. By the way, the regular movement of the seasons, as well as of day and night, all bear witness to that transcendent power beyond all movement or change²².

Thus, starting from his fundamental distinction between created and uncreated, more radical and systematic than in all his predecessors²³, Saint Gregory also adds the “decisive distinction”²⁴ between two defining attributes of created and uncreated, namely changeability and unchangeability respectively. While the uncreated being is characterized by unchangeability or immutability, for the created being the capacity for change is essential. However, in creation too, both change and constancy are manifested through the two simultaneous properties of movement and stability. Thus, St. Gregory points out, the unchangeability present in each created nature, especially in the movement of heavenly bodies, the laws of nature or species, is a clue, a sign that must lead us to think of their unchanging Cause Who created them, that is, of God, since invariability and unchangeability are attributes of the divine nature²⁵. And the fact that they are nevertheless subject to change (and implicitly to corruption) is left so that “property of nature which constitutes its immutability and immobility might not, when viewed in any created object, cause the creature to be accounted as God”²⁶, i.e. the unchangeability of the creature does not arouse idolatry towards it.

Despite the constant struggle between the opposites that make up the universe, there is a stable balance between what is stationary and what is in perpetual motion. And this balance is a sign and testimony of the Creator Who sustains both orderly movement and its stability between opposites.

CONCLUSIONS

We found in St. Basil the Great a version of the First Mover argument put forward by Aristotle, but with the difference that in St. Basil the impossibility of an infinite regressive series of intermediate movers does not refer to the whole universe, but only to the planet Earth. It is worth noting that the Cappadocian saint showed the impossibility of an endless series of intermediate movers of the Earth based on the necessity of physical contact between them. Which reminds us that the law of gravity, responsible for sustaining the

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 85.

²⁰ St. Gregory of Nyssa, *Answer to Eunomius second book*, VI (224), p. 273.

²¹ *Ibidem*.

²² St. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Orationes*, 6, 15, in coll. “*The Fathers of the Church. A New Translation*”, vol. 107, Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2003, p. 14: “And the seasons gently and gradually merging and succeeding one another and easing the harshness of their extremes by the interval between them does it not seem that it is peace that fitly gives them their direction with a view at the same time both to pleasure and to utility?”

²³ *The Brill Dictionary of Gregory of Nyssa*, edited by Lucas Francisco Mateo-Seco and Giulio Maspero, Brill, Leiden-Boston, 2010, p. 185.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 186.

²⁵ St. Gregory of Nyssa, “On the Making of Man”, I, 4, p. 389: “for as has been said, neither of these (neither that which is unstable, nor that which is mutable) can be considered to belong to the more Divine nature.”

²⁶ *Ibidem*.

planet in orbit around the sun, does not need physical contact to act. But that makes it all the more mysterious and inexplicable. And here St. Basil meets Newton who, unable to know the inner workings of the law of gravity, said “I do not imagine hypotheses”, leaving to God the mystery of its instantaneous and wireless efficiency.

Saint Gregory of Nyssa, affirming that the created being is characterized by change, and the uncreated by unchangeability, shows that the unchangeable aspect of some creatures, as well as the movement in stability of the heavenly bodies, are testimony to the existence of God who created them, sustains them in existence and cares for them. It is based on the premises of empirical observations, namely that anyone can see that, in concrete terms, opposites tend not to unite, but to break down each other, and that stable order is not produced by chaos or chance, but that order tends to turn into disorder (which is also a corollary of the second principle of thermodynamics).

It is important to note, that although the Cappadocian Fathers use reason for considerations and arguments in favour of creation *ex nihilo*, they do not base faith exclusively on the discursive use of analytical reason, but bring through reason testimonies that show faith in solidarity with reason and the laws of nature, thus strengthening believers in faith.

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CONFESSIONAL INTERFERENCES IN TRANSYLVANIA. AN OVERVIEW OF THE SCIENTIFIC LITERATURE ON THE PHENOMENON OF LITURGICAL INTERCHANGES IN THE 16TH AND 17TH CENTURIES

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ABSTRACT

The Transylvanian Orthodox Church seems to have borrowed a lot of non-Orthodox practices from the confessions it lived with during the 16th-17th centuries, influences that can still be identified today. It is enough to think about the specifics of the funeral sermons in Transylvania, which are composed in a special style, including the famous "forgiveness", a style that seems to be borrowed from the Protestant confessions existing in Transylvania. In this context, we propose a research to demonstrate that some local practices of the Orthodox Church have been influenced by liturgical interferences from other Churches, by inventorying and presenting the research directions embraced by renowned researchers in the field, in order to know the historical context in which the long contacts between Romanians and the neighbouring nations took place, the factors that determined them, the exponents of each camp and the periods in which these processes took place. We will group the views of the cited authors into three, according to their ethnic or confessional belonging, and identify the results of these interferences, accepted by most specialists.

Keywords: *Reformed Church; deacon Coresi; Protestant influences; funeral sermon; Romanian book;*

INTRODUCTION

The particularities of church life in Transylvanian Orthodoxy have always been noticed even by ordinary believers, who have no theological studies on the doctrine or worship of the Orthodox Church. Here, in the intra-Carpathian area, Orthodoxy seems to be "contaminated" with various teachings or practices foreign to the Byzantine tradition, aspects that have acculturated and become an integral part of the church life of the Transylvanian Romanians. The aim of our study is to demonstrate that some local practices of the Orthodox Church have been influenced by non-Orthodox liturgical interferences, with reference to the Transylvanian area. In this regard, we will inventory and introduce the research directions adopted by renowned researchers in the field, to know the historical context in which the long contacts between the Romanians and the neighbouring nations took place, the factors that determined it, the exponents of each group and the periods in which certain stages of influence took place. Knowing and understanding these realities helps us to build a clear picture about the situation of the Romanian Orthodox, related to living conditions (and, implicitly, their vulnerability to certain material benefits that might have made them give up their religious traditions), their ability to be aware of and understand the realities and

teachings of the faith in which they found themselves, but also the degree of obligation – presented by orthodox historians¹ as extremely large – from the politico-religious authorities to embrace the new confession (and, at the same time, the level of reception of reform programs among the people and the implementation of the provisions for Calvinization). Finally, we follow in our research how the liturgical and paraliturgical² rites and customs of the Orthodox were influenced by those of the other Churches or local confessions with which the Romanians shared the same area. In the analysis of documentary sources on Transylvania of the 16th-17th centuries, several research directions can be observed. At the present stage of our research, we have observed that there are three views that cover the historical realities, and these are most often influenced by the confessional or ethnic affiliation of the authors concerned with this subject. In what follows, we will present a synthesis of these trends, giving examples for each case, by analysing the literature.

1. THE ORTHODOX VIEW

The Orthodox view can be categorised as fundamentalist and not at all open to dialogue with other faiths. Most of the time we are dealing with an exaggerated (self)pity of Transylvanian Romanians. Often, the writings of historians consider that the Orthodox have always been subjected to discriminatory treatment by the followers of other local confessions. These (self)presentations leave the image of a martyred Church, which fought hard not to allow itself to be converted or "influenced" in doctrine by any other confessions that tried to extend its sphere of influence in these territories, and the political factor – always non-Romanian – supported and contributed to these pressures. The Romanian Orthodox are also presented as being extremely conscious of their own creed and faith, deeply rooted in Orthodoxy, fierce fighters against all ideas that are foreign to their faith. At the same time, we can observe that the Orthodox historiography presents the members of the other confessions as having an advantage in terms of legislation, so that most of the punitive laws were aimed only at the Orthodox Romanians³. As for the "degree of resistance" to the dangers of the Romanians' change of faith, the Orthodox authors point out that the efforts of the Protestants were unsuccessful, precisely because of the Romanians' indisputable attachment to Orthodoxy. However, recent Romanian Orthodox researchers have been trying to give an objective account of the facts that occurred in the 16th-17th centuries, leaning towards nuances that keep the discourse within natural limits, not going to the extreme of seeing in the Reformation only a persecution of the Romanians and their Church, nor exaggerating its merits. This contemporary view can be classified as objective or balanced⁴.

¹ See Mircea Păcurariu, *Istoria Bisericii Ortodoxe Române*, vol. I-III, Trinitas Publishing House, Iași, 2008; Mircea Păcurariu, *Istoria Bisericii românești din Transilvania, Banat, Crișana și Maramureș până în 1918*, Cluj-Napoca, 1992; Ioan Lupaș, *Istoria bisericească a românilor ardeleni*, introduction, editing, notes and comments by Doru Radosav, Dacia Publishing House, Cluj-Napoca, 1995.

² By "paraliturgical" we mean in this article all those rites which, although not organized and included in the official practices of the Church, are closely related to them. For example, funeral, baptismal or wedding customs; agricultural customs, etc.

³ See Mircea Păcurariu, *Istoria Bisericii românești din Transilvania, Banat, Crișana și Maramureș până în 1918*, Cluj-Napoca, 1992.

⁴ See Ana Dumitran, *Religie ortodoxă – religie reformată. Ipostaze ale identității profesionale a românilor din Transilvania în secolele XVI-XVII*, Nereamia Napocae Publishing House - Cristian Matos, Cluj-Napoca, 2004; Dumitru Vanca, *Paradigme liturgice în secolul 17. Ioan Zoba din Vinț și evoluția liturghiei românești*, Reîntregirea Publishing House, Alba Iulia, 2016; Ioan-Aurel Pop, "Națiuni și confesiuni în Principatul Transilvaniei – între acceptare și excludere", in Mihai Spăriosu, Vasile Boari (coord.), *Armonie și conflict intercultural în Banat și Transilvania. Perspective cultural-istorice 1650-1950*, Seria Studii culturale, Institutul

Nicolae Iorga was one of the first historians to deal systematically and scientifically with the religious realities of the Transylvanian Romanians. The study "The History of the Romanian Church and the Religious Life of the Romanians"⁵ brings to the reader's attention the activity of the Calvinist superintendents and the measures of the reform program initiated by them. The decisions taken by Pavel Tordásy are significant in terms of the intention to change the Romanian ritual: from the liturgy to keep only what is "by the word of God" and follows "the name, honour and praise of God"; prayers for the dead are abolished⁶. Evidently, Iorga presents the provisions found in the Reformed programs, but without specifying any detail related to their application and the degree of acceptance among the faithful. For this reason, we cannot draw a conclusion regarding Iorga's opinion about the influences suffered by the Orthodox rites, but we must be aware that the author exposes here only the external intention of modifying the ritual. On the other hand, in the work dedicated to Romanian writings – "History of Romanian religious literature up until 1688"⁷ – Iorga considers that Calvinist propaganda literature was not as successful as expected, even though most of the early printings bore the Protestant imprint – Catechism "Întrebare creștinească" (=Christian Question), "Molitifelnicul" (=Book of needs), "Tâlcuțelul Evangheliilor", Coresi's "Cazania" (=Homilies) (1564). Iorga believes that these writings did not receive much notoriety among Orthodox Romanians because they provided for an exaggerated simplification of liturgical practices and a virulent attack on the Orthodox clergy, which was far too obvious. Attempting to justify the pressure to simplify the cult and eliminate the liturgical and paraliturgical customs of the Easterners (while promoting the concepts of the Reformers), the prefaces of these books consider these customs as "superstitions and incantations", "devilish things" of no use to the soul⁸.

Ioan Lupaș is also another historian who systematically dealt with the religious realities of the Transylvanian Romanians – "The Church History of the Transylvanian Romanians"⁹. Lupaș combats the theory that Romanians stubbornly refused to accept some of the ideas professed by the Reformation, including the introduction of vernacular languages. According to the author, the introduction of the Romanian language in the cult was welcomed by many enlightened priests and prelates; for example, the "Catechism" (1544, Sibiu) enjoyed notoriety precisely because it was the first Romanian book, although it admitted only two sacraments; Lupaș, however, emphasizes the fact that the Romanian people did not deviate from religious ceremonies and dogmas of faith¹⁰. He observes that the initial intention of the Protestant authorities to simplify the ritual of the Orthodox Church and to abandon the cult of the dead (the Synod of 16 October 1569 in Aiud) was gradually abandoned¹¹. The reasons proposed by Lupaș for why the reforming provisions did not "catch on" among Orthodox Romanians concern, first, the rules imposed by Orthodox prelates for their shepherds – we recall in this regard Bishop Dosoftei (1622-1628) who tried

European, 2014, p. 273-284.

⁵ Nicolae Iorga, *Istoria Bisericii românești și a vieții religioase a românilor*, edited and prefaced by I. Opreșan, Saeculum I.O. Publishing House, Bucharest, 2016.

⁶ Nicolae Iorga, *Istoria Bisericii românești...*, p. 205-210.

⁷ Nicolae Iorga, *Istoria literaturii religioase a românilor până la 1688*, Graphic Workshops I. V. Socecu, Bucharest, 1904.

⁸ Nicolae Iorga, *Istoria Bisericii românești...*, p. 80.

⁹ Ioan Lupaș, *Istoria bisericească a românilor ardeleni*, introduction, editing, notes and comments by Doru Radosav, Dacia Publishing House, Cluj-Napoca, 1995.

¹⁰ Ioan Lupaș, *Istoria bisericească...*, p. 49-52.

¹¹ Ioan Lupaș, *Istoria bisericească...*, p. 53-54.

to discipline the Orthodox clergy and faithful, by drawing guidelines in the exercise of their faith, as a kind of counter-offensive to the ideas promoted by Protestants¹². Another reason for the failure of the Reformation among the Orthodox is the hierarchical links between the Romanian Church in Transylvania and the Romanian Church in the principalities, with the clergy of the three Romanian countries having close relations, especially since the priests from Transylvania were ordained at certain times in Wallachia or Moldova.

Another author who deserves our attention is the priest professor Mircea Păcurariu. His work "History of the Romanian Church in Transylvania, Banat, Crișana and Maramureș until 1918"¹³ traces all the stages through which Transylvanian Orthodoxy has passed over time, giving us the framework of these confessional interferences. Mircea Păcurariu explicitly points out that the "Calvinist proselytising action" had the same aim as the Catholic one, in other words, the "Hungarianization" of the Orthodox Romanians by attracting them to Calvinism. The reasons why this was not achieved are, in our author's opinion, the following: the anti-Ottoman treaty concluded by Michael the Brave with Prince Sigismund Báthory (20 May 1595) had some favourable stipulations for the Romanian Church in Transylvania – all Romanian priests and monks "to be left in the custom and tradition of old, with their rites, ceremonies and liberties"¹⁴, the politico-religious authorities thus taking a "step backwards" in supporting the spread of Calvinism. And secondly, the Orthodox bishops, despite the difficult context and the obligations they had towards the Calvinist religious authorities, managed to convene various Synods in which they drew the lines to guide the Orthodox clergy and faithful¹⁵. Therefore, according to Păcurariu's account, we can conclude that most of the conversion attempts initiated by the Calvinist authorities were counteracted by episcopal provisions that were intended to help discipline the clergy and the faithful, so that the Protestant influences felt in the Orthodox cult or in the customs of the Romanian Orthodox at that time were very few, if not non-existent¹⁶.

In the study signed by Ioan-Aurel Pop, entitled "Nations and Confessions in the Principality of Transylvania – between acceptance and exclusion"¹⁷, the author makes a detailed analysis of the system of states and confessions in Transylvania, focusing on the inferior status of the Romanians in the Transylvanian society of the time, and then explains the reasons why the Protestant Reformation did not "succeed" among the Transylvanian

¹² "The priest who will not keep two days in a week, 24 florins"; "The priest who will not know the psalter, 24 florins"; "The priest who will not have a deacon and will not serve, 24 florins"; "The priest who will not have long clothes up to the ankles, 12 florins"; "The priest who will not sing the liturgy with 7 prescuri, 12 florins, but the man who will not pay the priest, will not serve". . . At the same time, at the end of the "bargains", the bishop makes a list of the most important days of the year, in which he forbids the people to work and obliges the priest to "say the feast". See Ioan Lupaș, *Istoria bisericească...*, p. 65-66.

¹³ Mircea Păcurariu, *Istoria Bisericii românești din Transilvania, Banat, Crișana și Maramureș până în 1918*, Cluj-Napoca, 1992.

¹⁴ Mircea Păcurariu, *Istoria Bisericii românești...*, p. 132-133.

¹⁵ We recall here, for example, the synod convened by Metropolitan Sava Brancovici in Alba Iulia in 1675, where the obligations of Orthodox Christians were reiterated: the romanization of the services and their celebration on all Sundays and holidays, as well as on Wednesdays and Fridays, and during fasts on a daily basis; the discipline of priests and stricter control by the protopopes; the removal of superstitions, especially those related to the cult of the dead; the catechizing of the faithful and children by the priest in church; the obligation of the faithful to attend religious services and to receive Holy Communion four times a year. See Mircea Păcurariu, *Istoria Bisericii românești...*, p. 162-163.

¹⁶ Mircea Păcurariu, *Istoria Bisericii românești ...*, p. 128-140.

¹⁷ Ioan-Aurel Pop, "Națiuni și confesiuni în Principatul Transilvaniei – între acceptare și excludere", in Mihai Spăriosu, Vasile Boari (coord.), *Armonie și conflict intercultural în Banat și Transilvania. Perspective culturale-istorice 1650-1950*, Cultural Studies Series (European Institute, 2014), 273-284.

Romanians. These causes that Ioan-Aurel Pop identifies are important for our topic, as they also provide possible explanations for why – in Aurel Pop's opinion – the Orthodox ritual did not borrow too many foreign elements either.

First, the Reformation was designed for Catholics, so the Romanian Orthodox had no idea about the authority of the Pope, indulgences, exaggerated fasting or celibacy of priests. Then, the exaggerated simplification of the ceremonial meant the breaking of the foundations of the faith (a direct attack to tradition, saints, icons, the cult of the dead or the use of candles). An important role was also played by the "quasi-illiterate" state of the Romanians, for whom theological disputes were almost incomprehensible. Finally, another reason was represented by the calls for resistance coming from outside the Carpathians. However, in this context there was also a positive effect on the Romanians, which was that it hastened the transition to the use of the Romanian language in the Church and stimulated the printing of books of cult¹⁸.

A work of major importance for our research is Ana Dumitran's "Orthodox Religion – Reformed Religion. Instances of the confessional identity of Romanians from Transylvania in the 16th-17th centuries"¹⁹, in which the author makes an extensive analysis of the peculiarities of Transylvanian religious life from the 16th and 17th centuries. Ana Dumitran focuses at length on the pro-Calvinistic Synods convened by Superintendent Gheorghe from Sângeorz. The old fundamental principle of the Reformation – the vernacular language – is amplified with the theme of the uselessness of prayers for the dead. Ana Dumitran's conclusion about the implementation of these ideas is more than logical: The impact that someone's death had on the Romanian community, along with several pre-Christian practices associated with this moment, was deeply rooted in the popular consciousness, so Romanians did not feel the need to reform in this regard. Also, the politico-religious authorities did not manage to fully support this approach of the Calvinist superintendents, probably for the same reason of Romanian society's attachment to these practices²⁰. At the same time, Ana Dumitran is of the opinion that the changes on the ritual underwent an involution during the 17th century. If the "most complex" of the variants of the program for the attraction to Calvinism, which was imposed on Ilie Iorest in 1640, refers in particular to the way of administering the Mysteries²¹, the reform program of 1669 is summed up in new measures of control over Orthodoxy formulated in four points, which are in fact a repetition of previous requirements: the establishment of schools, the reopening of the printing press, the generalization of the use of the Romanian language in worship and the strict subordination of Romanian ecclesiastical institutions to the Hungarian Church²². For this reason, A. Dumitran believes that the only merit of the Calvinist episcopate resumes with the celebration of the Liturgy in Romanian; the use of Romanian translations of the scriptural texts in the service cannot be considered a doctrinal matter, but rather a spiritual revolution.

¹⁸ Ioan-Aurel Pop, "Națiuni și confesiuni...", p. 278.

¹⁹ Ana Dumitran, *Religie ortodoxă – religie reformată. Ipostaze ale identității confesionale a românilor din Transilvania în secolele XVI-XVII*, Nereamia Napocae Publishing House - Cristian Matos, Cluj-Napoca, 2004.

²⁰ Ana Dumitran, *Religie ortodoxă – religie reformată...*, p. 106-109.

²¹ The provisions of the reform program concerned the use of the Romanian language in worship, the introduction of the Calvinist ceremony for baptism, communion, marriage and burial, the granting of divorce according to the canonical prescriptions of the Hungarian Church, the renunciation of the cult of saints, icons and the cross, as well as some superstitions, the discipline of the faithful and the hierarchical organization according to the model of the Hungarian Church.

²² Ana Dumitran, *Religie ortodoxă – religie reformată...*, p. 146-149.

Finally – perhaps a little too dramatically – A. Dumitran sums up that, without the contribution of the Reformation, none of the 11 Romanian books would have seen the light of print, but it must be specified that the involvement of Calvinism in this process was quite small, compared to the desire of Transylvanian Orthodoxy to renew itself, to reform itself²³. In this regard, the author concludes that the transposition into Romanian of the Orthodox ritual was specific to the entire Transylvanian area, the coordination of translations and their uniformity being the work of the famous Protopope Ioan Zoba from Vinț, who also consecrated the Transylvanian funeral sermon as an integral part of the burial ceremony of the Transylvanian Romanians. Thus, according to A. Dumitran, this aspect seems to have remained among the few in terms of the influence of Calvinism on the ritual practiced by the Romanian Church²⁴. Dumitru Vanca, who, as a theologian, identifies in the sermons of Protopope Ioan Zoba of Vinț homiletic models perpetuated even until the last century in this area²⁵. Furthermore, Vanca identifies the origin of the elaborate funeral speech – which came into Romanian use in the second half of the 16th century – most probably in the Protestant neighbourhood and in the Reformed programs. The practice of "forgiveness", still used today, is specific only to the Transylvanian region, and the "Our Father" prayer as the conclusion of liturgical gatherings, introduced by the "Golden Coffin", is practiced only in Transylvania²⁶. The research of the two authors in this regard was even materialised in a joint study, "The funeral sermon in the Romanian Orthodox community in Transylvania"²⁷, who argues that the practice of elaborate funeral speech (unknown in Transylvania until the mid-16th century) was undoubtedly borrowed by the Romanian Church, probably because of attempts to draw the Orthodox Church in Transylvania into the Protestant Reformation²⁸.

The work signed by Dumitru Vanca, "Liturgical Paradigms in the 17th century. Ioan Zoba of Vinț and the evolution of Romanian liturgy"²⁹, is also useful for elucidating other confessional interferences in Transylvania. After an introduction in which the well-known justifications and pressures of the Reformation are rehearsed, Vanca categorically underlines the role of the Reformation in speeding up the process of translating books of cult: "we must admit that, without the pressure of the Reformation on the Transylvanian Romanians, the translation of the books of cult into Romanian would have been delayed by at least a century, and if among the elites of Transylvania in the 17th century we can count some Romanians, this is due, in good measure, to the Calvinist cultural policy favourable to the Romanians, led by some reformed principles"³⁰. At the same time, the author considers that, if the Reformation did not achieve its objectives, it helped the Orthodox Church to become "renewed, modern, Romanian and national at the same time", without the liturgical practice and Orthodox doctrine being contaminated by the Reformation. Thus, the pressure of the Reformation was fructified by the Romanians in an internal liturgical and administrative reform³¹.

²³ Ana Dumitran, *Religie ortodoxă – religie reformată...*, p. 120-121.

²⁴ Ana Dumitran, *Religie ortodoxă – religie reformată...*, p. 178.

²⁵ Dumitru Vanca, *Paradigme liturgice în secolul 17...*, p. 286.

²⁶ Dumitru Vanca, *Paradigme liturgice în secolul 17...*, p. 286.

²⁷ Dumitru Vanca, Ana Dumitran, "Predica funebră în mediul ortodox din Transilvania (mijlocul secolului XVI – sfârșitul secolului XVII)", in *Apulum: Series Historia & Patrimonium (Alba Iulia)*, 47 (2010), p. 139-157.

²⁸ Dumitru Vanca, Ana Dumitran, "Predica funebră în mediul ortodox din Transilvania...", p. 156.

²⁹ Dumitru Vanca, *Paradigme liturgice în secolul 17. Ioan Zoba din Vinț și evoluția liturghiei românești*, Reîntregirea Publishing House, Alba Iulia, 2016.

³⁰ Dumitru Vanca, *Paradigme liturgice în secolul 17...*, p. 35.

³¹ Dumitru Vanca, *Paradigme liturgice în secolul 17...*, p. 36.

Therefore, inventorying the foreign influences in the Orthodox ritual, Dumitru Vanca finds that the list is rather short; it is about the acceleration of the process of introducing the Romanian language in the ritual and the lachrymose and rhetorical homiletic style in the first person (the priest speaks in the place of the dead). It is possible that the custom of saying the prayer "Our Father" after all the services was also introduced by Protopope Ioan Zoba, but this practice cannot necessarily be considered of Protestant influence.

So, as far as the Romanian Orthodox view is concerned, we can make a few remarks. Most researchers are of the opinion that the only influence suffered by the Romanian Church in Transylvania because of contact with the Protestant Reformation is the acceleration of the introduction of the Romanian language in the cult and, possibly, the homiletic funeral style. All the other points set out in the reform programs seem to have been lost over time, so none bore fruit in the long term. Thus, the cited researchers claim that Transylvanian Orthodoxy undoubtedly remained intact, untouched by Reformed teachings or practices.

2. THE GREEK-CATHOLIC VIEW

On the opposite pole, one might say, is the Greek Catholic view. Although historians of the Uniates Church present the situation of the Romanian Orthodox in the same way – a martyred Church, their conclusion about the impact of the Reformation on the Romanian Church is different. In contradiction to Orthodox historiography, the uniates authors consider that the impact of Protestant proselytism on the Orthodox Church in Transylvania was immense, so that all aspects of church life were "contaminated" by foreign teachings, from dogmatic and institutional to ritual and behavioural. Greek Catholic authors argue that the Orthodox faith was influenced in all its aspects by Protestant interference, so that at the end of the 17th century the face of Transylvanian Orthodoxy was completely changed or even transformed. Of course, this approach is intended to highlight the saving role of the union between the Orthodox Church in Transylvania and the Church of Rome, an event that seems to have put Orthodoxy back on course³².

As far as this vision is concerned, we will first consider a publication by Alesandru Grama, edited in Blaj in the last years of the 19th century, which deals with the history of the Calvinist Church in Transylvania and the reform programs initiated in the Romanian Church. From this exposition, our attention is drawn to a chapter entitled "Calvinization of the Holy Mysteries", where the author presents, in turn, the Reformers' provisions concerning the transformation of each mystery³³. We are dealing with an interesting perspective; Alesandru Grama bases many of his theories only on his own suppositions, without providing any indisputable historical evidence to support his ideas.

Thus, Grama is of the opinion that the Calvinites tried to change, at first, the number of Sacraments, and then to modify the meaning and the way of administration of each of the sacraments; this approach was initiated by the printing of the Catechism of 1643 – about which G. Șincai says is "the most venomous and poisonous" book³⁴. If Baptism was

³² See Alesandru Grama, *Instituțiunile calvinesci în biserica românească din Ardelu, fazele lor în trecutu și valoarea în prezente*, Archdiocesan Seminary Typography, Blaj, 1895; Zenovie Pâclișanu, "Câteva date despre preoții româno-calvini", in *Cultura creștină*, 2 (1911), p. 44-49; Zenovie Pâclișanu, "Legăturile românilor ardeleni cu Reformațiunea în veacul al XVI-lea și al XVII-lea", in *Cultura creștină*, 17 (1911), p. 550-557.

³³ Alesandru Grama, *Instituțiunile calvinesci...*, p. 407.

³⁴ G. Șincai, *Cronica românilor, apud Alesandru Grama, Instituțiunile calvinesci...*, p. 408.

to be performed without holy water and without any symbolic action or prayers absent from Holy Scripture, the Eucharist adopted the name "Lord's Supper", according to canon 2 of the Synod held in 1675, and it was forbidden to administer it to children - according to canon 63 of the program signed by Geleji Katona. A consequence of this is, in Grama's opinion, that the practice of infant Communion in Transylvania remained rather poorly represented³⁵. Regarding the Holy Myron, Confession, Unction of the sick, or even the Holy Liturgy, the author finds an interesting explanation, but not very well argued: ignoring these services and not issuing any reforming provision concerning them would lead, in time, to their elimination. In supporting this theory, Grama brings the "custom" of some priests to give communion to the dying without any confession. On the other hand, the funeral was intended to be simplified by renouncing candles, frankincense, dispensations or other superstitions and ingrained traditions (usually "unorthodox") traditions, the service being reduced to a few hymns and sermons³⁶. The Calvinist influence on Marriage can be seen in the introduction of the vows between the bride and groom as part of the ceremony (see Coresi's Molitevnic), a custom unknown in the Eastern Church. At the same time, the "institution of the announcements" in the Transylvanian Church is also imposed by the Calvinists. According to Grama, this custom remained among the Calvinists in the Roman Catholic Church, and the Calvinist princess imposed it on the Romanian metropolitans, a custom that became widespread in the Romanian Church in Transylvania and has been perpetuated to this day. Under the same Calvinist influence, Grama also puts the calculation of kinship lines in the way known today, and the grounds for divorce would have been limited to two: adultery and leaving the home³⁷.

Concerned about other liturgical traditions endangered by Calvinist pressure, Grama believes that if they really wanted to eliminate the honouring of saints from the Orthodox cult, they would have to destroy all the service books, since the Orthodox mention the saints in every religious service, but such a radical measure would have scandalised the Romanian population. This is why the author believes that even in the case of the honouring of saints, the reformers appealed to ignorance so that "time would solve everything" in the sense of eliminating the cult of saints. Fortunately, the author's conclusion is that in this case we are not dealing with any significant influence. The same strong resistance was encountered by the Calvinist reformers regarding the cult of icons, but in this case the author considers himself "justified" in believing that it was some priests who removed icons from the churches³⁸.

Therefore, throughout the work one can see the author's intention to give exaggerated merits to the union of the Romanians with the Church of Rome – which would have "straightened out" all the influences imposed on the Romanians by the Calvinists and would have brought the order back to its original form. However, although the author makes some "arguments" in support of his theories, we are entitled to regard these as mere suppositions, which he puts down to provisions of the "union acceptance" synod of 1700. So, if that Synod had established in its canons some orthodox practices, Grama considered that those teachings or rites had previously been violated³⁹. We must recognise that the

³⁵ Alesandru Grama, *Instituțiunile calvinesci...*, p. 412-415.

³⁶ Alesandru Grama, *Instituțiunile calvinesci...*, p. 417-418.

³⁷ Alesandru Grama, *Instituțiunile calvinesci...*, p. 410-424.

³⁸ Alesandru Grama, *Instituțiunile calvinesci...*, p. 430-431.

³⁹ For example, canon 24 of the 1700 synod obliged priests, under penalty of a fine, to ensure the presence in churches of icons of the Saviour Christ, the Virgin Mary and Saint Nicholas. From this canon, Grama

establishment of a practice by an official provision does not necessarily mean a prior violation of it (although we cannot categorically exclude this possibility either), especially in the context of the union of Romanians with the Church of Rome. These provisions could simply be repetitions of Orthodox doctrine, demonstrating to the clergy and faithful of Transylvania that the union does not represent a renunciation of Orthodox doctrine.

The studies⁴⁰ signed by Zenovie Pâclișanu are also part of the Greek-Catholic vision, although he represents the balanced voice, so to speak, among the united historians. Thus, in an exaggerated way, Zenovie Pâclișanu sustains that the Transylvanian princess used "the most violent and inhuman means" to preach Calvinism among the Orthodox population. Among the consequences of these actions was, according to the author, the appearance of many Romanian books "full of heretical teachings". In this way, the author's conclusion is that, even though the Romanian people hold on to their customs and traditions, these attempts could not remain ineffective⁴¹, without supporting his theory with any solid argument. Pâclișanu relies rather on his own logic: however attached the Romanians were to their faith, the multitude of reforming provisions must have influenced them in some way.

So Greek-Catholic historians claim, as we have seen, that the Orthodox ritual was influenced, at least at the time, by some printed liturgical books and by the provisions of the Reformed programs, so that many priests deviated from the practice of the Eastern Church. They rely on some suppositions or logical syllogisms, without providing undeniable historical arguments to support their theories. We can, however, observe that they insist on "finding" Calvinist influences in Orthodox rituals to underline that, in fact, the union with the Church of Rome brought back Orthodox practice in Romanian communities. Yet, in the absence of historically substantiated facts, we are entitled to regard these theories as simple assumptions.

3. THE HUNGARIAN VIEW

The third view we noticed is the Hungarian one, although in studying it we were limited by the language barrier, so we could only consult studies translated or published in Romanian⁴². Nevertheless, I could observe a slightly biased presentation, like the Orthodox one – but directed to emphasize the merits of the Protestant Reformation in Transylvania, which sees in the actions of the Hungarians a disinterested missionary, eager to help the Romanian population, left behind because of poverty and low level of culture. It is clear that the Hungarians did not want to Hungarianize the Romanians, nor the Calvinization of the Romanian Church, any collaboration between the two confessions being incompatible. Once again, recent research seems to balance the scales in terms of the merits and criticisms of the

concluded that before 1700 (i.e., after the implementation of the reform programs in Transylvania), some priests removed icons from churches. Also, if another canon of the same synod, this time canon 17, provided for the punishment of catechesis for the priest who would not administer the Anointing of the newly baptized, the author considered that some priests certainly renounced the sacrament of the Anointing.

⁴⁰ Zenovie Pâclișanu, "Câteva date despre preoții...", p. 44-49; Zenovie Pâclișanu, "Legăturile românilor ardeleni", p. 550-557.

⁴¹ Zenovie Pâclișanu, "Câteva date despre preoții...", p. 44-49.

⁴² Some of the accessible and useful studies are: Levente Nagy, *Reforma la români. Un fenomen de transfer cultural în secolele XVI-XVII*, Editura Ratio et Revelatio, Oradea, 2021; Péter Bod, *Brevis Valachorum Transylvaniam incolentium Histoiria*, 1764, editată în *addenda* lucrării semnate de Ana Dumitran, Botond Gúdor și Nicolae Dănilă, *Relații interconfesionale româno-maghiare în Transilvania (mijlocul secolului XVI – primele decenii ale secolului XVIII)*, Alba Iulia, 2000; István Juhász, *A reformáció az erdélyi románok között*, Kolozsvár, 1940.

Reformation, so that the discourse seems to be much closer to that of contemporary Orthodox researchers.

Of major importance for our study is the work of Levente Nagy, "The Reformation in Romania. A Phenomenon of Cultural Transfer in the 16th-17th Centuries"⁴³. Here, the author presents the causes behind the failure of the Reformation among Romanians. First, the fact that the union of the Romanians with the Reformed Church meant only the acceptance of an administrative jurisdiction. Many questions remained regarding the fulfilment of the conditions connected with religious and liturgical life. Another reason for the failure of the Reformation is also linked to the fact that the change to Calvinism did not bring any advantage to the Romanians, as would happen in the case of union with the Church of Rome. The author also states that tithing was a condition of the believers of accepted religions, so that the Romanians were not at all motivated to enter "legality", and another cause of failure of the Reformation is also the takeover of the printing business by the Catholics. However, Nagy believes that the merit of the Protestant Reformation on the Romanian thought in Transylvania is to have played a catalytic role in its modernisation and westernisation. In addition, the development of the Romanian language and literature, as well as the introduction of the Romanian language in the cult, are products supported by the Reformation⁴⁴.

Another piece of work that provides information about the "meeting" of confessions in Transylvania is Botond Gúdor's "Transylvanian Orthodoxy between Tradition and Enlightenment in the Image of the Reformed Notary General (Episcopal Vicar) reformed Péter Bod (1712-1769) of Ighiu"⁴⁵. The author explains how Bod analysed the diversity of Romanian church services, focusing on the relationship between the believer and the celebration; in this context, Péter Bod details the ways in which Romanians experienced their cult – through fasting, mourning, Marriage or Baptism, also reaching the external aspects of the manifestation of the cult – semantron and bells. He also presented some of the Romanian burial customs to support the idea of superstitions. Next, Bod addresses the idea of celebration, emphasizing that fasting and celebration are essential elements of religiosity in Romanian life, even representing sacred duties. The fact that the Romanian customs seemed to him as primitive, ancestral, and linked to superstition, is attributed by Gúdor to the bitter taste left by the failure of the Reformation to change popular customs⁴⁶. Thus, the details related to the religious life of the Romanians in the first half of the 18th century lead us to believe that the customs of the Romanians seem not to have been influenced by the Protestant Reformation, so that the Orthodox Church preserved its confessional identity despite the vicissitudes of the time.

The work by Ana Dumitran, Botond Gúdor, Nicolae Dănilă⁴⁷ brings some further clarifications about the spread of the Reformation among Romanians. The chapter "Popular religion under the impact of the Reformation" draws attention to the fact that the Reformation – borne of a sincere and deep faith – tried to eliminate all religious manifestations under the sign of folklore or magic. According to the authors, it is important

⁴³ Levente Nagy, *Reforma la români. Un fenomen de transfer cultural în secolele XVI-XVII*, Editura Ratio et Revelatio, Oradea, 2021.

⁴⁴ Levente Nagy, *Reforma la români...*, p. 210.

⁴⁵ Botond Gúdor, "Ortodoxia transilvăneană între tradiție și iluminism în imaginea notarului general (vicar episcopal) reformat Péter Bod (1712-1769) din Ighiu", in Avram Cristea, Jan Nicolae, *Credința și credințele românilor*, Reîntregirea Publishing House, Alba Iulia, 2011, p. 110-123.

⁴⁶ Botond Gúdor, "Ortodoxia transilvăneană...", p. 114-115.

⁴⁷ Ana Dumitran, Botond Gúdor, Nicolae Dănilă, *Relații interconfesionale româno-maghiare...*

to mention the rather weak attachment of the Romanians to the church, with very low participation in religious services. Neither was participation in the Eucharist common among Romanians, as it was usually reserved for the dying⁴⁸. The lack of involvement in religious life and the lack of practicing believers is, according to the authors, the reason why Sava Brancovici urges priests to teach the faithful the "Our Father", the "Creed" and the "Decalogue".

In this sense, the authors consider that the Reformation acquires a sense of apostolate, of mission; the essential prayers of Orthodox cult were taught to the Romanians for the first time from Calvinist books. Hungarian historiography thus considers that the merits of the Reformation are embodied in the translation of Scripture, the structuring of the sermon, the generalisation of the sermon in Orthodox cult in Transylvania, and the introduction of the Romanian language in the cult⁴⁹, elements that could hardly be countered. The work therefore explains the important role of the Protestant Reformation in the Romanians' "religious emancipation" initiative, highlighting the victory of Orthodoxy with the weapons of the Reformation.

Therefore, we observe that the studies of the Hungarian authors emphasize the merits of the Protestant Reformation in the emancipation of the Romanians, attached to a much too primitive faith, loaded with a lot of superstitions and non-Christian customs. In their view, the Romanians' contacts with the Reformation, even if they did not imprint Protestant teachings on the Orthodox faith, succeeded in influencing Orthodox thinking, westernising it⁵⁰. As for the influences suffered by the Orthodox ritual, they are limited solely to the introduction of the Romanian language in the cult.

CONCLUSIONS

An analysis of the literature dealing with the confessional situation of Transylvania in the 16th-17th centuries brings forward some findings. We observe in the cited authors several tendencies to position themselves towards the phenomenon of the Protestant Reformation, some of them quite "extreme", if we can call them so.

For example, the priest professor Mircea Păcurariu betrays an exaggeratedly compassionate attitude towards the Romanians subjected to Calvinist proselytism, the actions of the reformers being catalogued as oppressive towards the Orthodox, pursuing in fact, the "Hungarianization" of the Romanians. A. Grama takes a different position, according to whom all Orthodox practices were "contaminated" by the Protestant spirit. Even where he has no arguments or historical evidence for some rites, Grama concludes that they "were to be transformed over time" unconsciously into Calvinist rites. Of course, this positioning is intended to highlight the merit of the religious union of Transylvanian Romanians with the Church of Rome. According to the author, it was this union under Metropolitan Athanasius Anghel that cancelled or annihilated the long-lasting consequences of Calvinist proselytism, bringing back the "Orthodox spirit" among the Romanians.

Even more differently, Levente Nagy argues that the Transylvanian Orthodox were not at all discriminated against by the political authorities of the state, as the rules applied to the clergy were the same – regardless of confession. The author dismantles many of the theories previously stated by various researchers and points out the merit of the Protestant

⁴⁸ Ana Dumitran, Botond Gúdor, Nicolae Dănilă, *Relații interconfesionale româno-maghiare...*, p. 107.

⁴⁹ Ana Dumitran, Botond Gúdor, Nicolae Dănilă, *Relații interconfesionale româno-maghiare...*, p. 110.

⁵⁰ Levente Nagy, *Reforma la români...*, p. 192.

Reformation, which was to modernise and "westernise" Romanian thought in Transylvania and, equally, to boost the development of the Romanian language and literature, and the introduction of the Romanian language in the cult.

On the other hand, we find the attitudes of the other authors cited to be balanced. They each underline the benefits that the Romanians shared following contact and living with the Protestant reformers; we can summarise this merit to the revolutionary success of introducing the Romanian language into the religious service, an endeavour in which the Transylvanians were at the forefront. In the absence of the impulse coming from the Protestant world, this step towards modernity would have been delayed by at least a century. The Reformation also deserves credit for the organisation and structuring of religious discourse in Transylvania (especially funerary discourse), by the work of the Protopope Ioan Zoba of Vinț.

From all the analysed data, we consider that, as far as the Protestant impact on the Transylvanian Orthodox Church ritual is concerned, its successes are quite limited. Although the reform programs provided for a fundamental change in the Romanians' religion, the context and the situation of the Romanians did not favour the assimilation of religious practices. However, it seems important to us to point out a success of the Reformation on the cult of the Transylvanian Romanians, although this cannot be catalogued as a Protestant influence on the ritual, but rather as a consequence of the Protestant neighbourhood. It is about a certain "purification" of the religious cult from the multitude of superstitions that reigned in the Romanians' consciousness, especially those related to death. Even now, the villages of Transylvania abound in funeral traditions and customs, "impossible" to omit from religious services, but, compared to the Orthodox in other areas, we see that Transylvania is balanced in this respect. According to all the provisions of the reform programs encountered in the literature reviewed, this was a main goal of the Protestants, and credit is due to them.

Consequently, after analysing the literature, we can clearly observe that the liturgical influences suffered by the Romanian Church in Transylvania because of the Protestant neighbourhood seem to be very few, although initially we are tempted to believe that they abound. Probably some non-orthodox customs were borrowed only in the religious behaviour of the Romanians, but this aspect remains an open topic for future research.

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THE UNION OF MAN AND CREATION WITH GOD, REFLECTED IN THE "MEDITATIONS" OF SAINT MAXIM THE CONFESSOR

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ABSTRACT

The union of man and creation with God, reflected in the "meditations" of St Maximus Confessor. God created all that exists out of love, wishing to share His eternally good existence with all creation. But the world cannot enter into a personal relationship with God, not being a person. That is why the Creator has placed in its midst man, who is the rational and personal representative of creation. He has been endowed with the vocation of uniting all that exists within himself and drawing the whole world into the most intimate communion with God. St Maximus Confessor describes this vocation of man through a series of five mediations that Adam had to carry out: mediation between man and woman, paradise and the inhabited world, heaven and earth, the intelligible and the sensible, the created and the uncreated.

Keywords: *deification; priesthood; mediations, man; creation;*

INTRODUCTION

God created everything out of love, wanting to share His eternally good existence with all creation. But the world cannot enter into a personal relationship with God, as it is not a person. That is why the Creator placed man in the midst of it, who is the rational and personal representative of creation. He has been endowed with the vocation of uniting in himself all that exists, and of drawing the whole world into the most intimate communion with God. St. Maximus Confessor describes this vocation of man through a series of five mediations that Adam had to carry out: mediation between man and woman, paradise and the inhabited world, heaven and earth, the intelligible and the sensible, the created and the uncreated.

1. MEDIATIONS OF SAINT MAXIM THE CONFESSOR

In man, there is a potential unity of all creatures, a unity which he is called upon to actualize. This potential unity exists between man's body and the material world, between his body and his soul, and between his soul, the spiritual world and God.¹ Specifically, Adam had the mission of being the priest of all creation, which he was to move like a train, together with himself, and bring into union with the Creator. St Maximus Confessor describes this mission through the five mediations.² He says that existence is divided into created and uncreated, intelligible and sensible, heavenly and earthly, paradise and the rest of the created

¹ PANAYOTIS NELLAS, *Omul, animal îndumnezeit*, trad. DIAC. IOAN I. ICĂ JR, Ed. Deisis, Sibiu, 2009, p. 85.

² SFÂNTUL MAXIM MĂRTURISITORUL, *Ambigua*, Io., 41, PG 91,1305B-1308C [trad. rom. SFÂNTUL MAXIM MĂRTURISITORUL, *Ambigua*, Io. 41, PSB 80, trad. PR. PROF. DR. DUMITRU STĂNILOAE, E.I.B.M.B.O.R., București, 1983, pp. 260-262].

world, male and female. Adam was called to overcome these divisions by a conscious work that would bring all creation together in him.³ First of all, the separation of man and woman was to be overcome by a chaste union, more complete than the bodily one typical of human nature after the fall into sin. Secondly, paradise was to be united with the rest of the earthly world; in this sense, man was to embrace nature, as if through love of God, uniting it with the paradise he carried within himself. By relating rightly to the surrounding nature, without dwelling on it as an end in itself which brings pleasure through consumption, man would have discovered the reasons put by God into the world and would have led it to the form desired by the Creator, bringing it to the likeness of paradise. In the third stage, through the spirit inserted in his body, he would overcome space, unifying the sensible world, the earth and the whole universe. In the next stage, Adam would have entered the heavenly world, living the life of the angels, and assimilating their intelligence; thus he would have united in himself the sensible world and the intelligible world.⁴

Finally, cosmic man, by giving himself fully to God, could give back to Him his entire creation, receiving from Him, in reciprocity of love, i.e. in grace, all that is God by nature. In this way, in overcoming the primordial separations between created and uncreated, the deification of man and, through man, of the whole universe would have been achieved.⁵

The latter mediation, between the created and the uncreated, might, at first glance, seem unattainable. How can the finite share the infinite and how can the created aspire to union with the uncreated?! This would have been impossible if God's plan had not yet included a stage of creation. The genesis of the world does not end with the seventh day, but creation continues after that, for Christ says: "My Father is working until now, and I am working." (John 5:17). Everything continues towards an eighth day, a day of creation perfected through the Incarnate Logos. He is the bridge between the created and the uncreated, and in union with Him alone, all can rest perfected. It was therefore necessary for the Logos to become man, in order for man's mission to be accomplished, and for the mediation between the created and the uncreated to take place.⁶ His resurrection is not determined by the accident of sin, sin only added to the mission of the Logos and redemption. Therefore, for the ultimate mediation to take place, the resurrection of the Son of God was necessary because He is the foundation and meaning of all that exists.⁷

Returning to the mediations of Saint Maxim the Confessor, they were not performed by Adam, because he committed the primordial sin by which the movement of his natural powers towards the purpose for which God had created him was interrupted.⁸ Man has missed his ontological vocation, ceasing to see in creation the reasons put into it by the

³ LARS THUNBERG, *Microcosm and Mediator. The Theological Anthropology of Maximus the Confessor*, Open Court Publishing Company, Illinois, 1995, pp. 51–60.

⁴ JEAN-CLAUDE LARCHET, *Îndumnezeirea omului la Sfântul Maxim Mărturisitorul*, trad. MARINELA BOJIN, Basilica, București, 2019, pp. 105–109.

⁵ PR. PROF. DR. DUMITRU STĂNILOAE, notă explicativă, în SFÂNTUL MAXIM MĂRTURISITORUL, *Ambigua*, Io. 41, pp. 263–264.

⁶ J.-C. LARCHET, *Îndumnezeirea omului...*, pp. 110–111.

⁷ PR. PROF. DR. DUMITRU STĂNILOAE, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, vol. I, Ed. IBM BOR, București, 2010, p. 337.

⁸ SFÂNTUL MAXIM MĂRTURISITORUL, *Quaestiones ad Thalassium*, prol., PG 90, 253C [trad. rom. SFÂNTUL MAXIM MĂRTURISITORUL, *Răspunsuri către Talasie*, coll. *Filocalia* 3, trad. PR. PROF. DR. DUMITRU STĂNILOAE, Ed. Apologeticum, București, 2005, p. 29].

Creator and has repositioned himself, stopping at its sensitive aspects⁹ and attaching to it through pleasure: "(...) by violating the divine commandment, which forbade him to contemplate creatures before he was established in godliness and unchangeableness, man allowed himself to be tempted by the image of what he saw and attracted by the promised pleasure of bodily delight in them; in this way he no longer regarded God as above them and, a fortiori, no longer saw His presence in them according to their reasons (logoi), which he was not sufficiently prepared to recognize. Thus man, without waiting until he was mature enough to devote himself to a spiritual contemplation of creatures, which would relate them to God, immediately gave himself over to an exclusively sensory knowledge of them - which therefore implies a lack of knowledge of God - accompanied by a bodily enjoyment, which takes the place of the spiritual enjoyment, giving rise, as was to be expected, to the passions."¹⁰

Thus, man has failed in his mission as "priest of creation", not understanding that this mission with which he has been endowed by creation cannot be fulfilled independently of God. In this way, Adam altered, along with his human nature, all that was ontologically linked to it, i.e. the whole of creation. Alone he could not now restore the world, so the incarnation of the Son of God was saving for him and creation.

Christ becomes man and assumes, in addition to the mediation between the created and the uncreated, the other four mediations and the redemption of man. By becoming man, Christ becomes the link between the created and the uncreated, and by his whole activity he brings to fulfilment the plan from which Adam had departed. In this way, he gives the possibility of man's deification and, through man, the whole world united with him.¹¹ The meaning God has planted in all that exists can now be actualized through the priest of creation, man. The latter can transfigure the whole cosmos by working with the God-man and can actualize its powers.¹²

2. THE INCARNATION OF THE WORD, THE FUNDAMENTAL ACT OF THE UNION OF MAN AND CREATION WITH GOD

God's eternal plan therefore included the incarnation of the Word, because only in this way could man, and through him all creation, overcome in grace the separation between the created and the uncreated¹³ and could unite with God¹⁴: "*The great counsel of God and the Father is the silent and unknown mystery of iconomy, which the only-begotten Son, having fulfilled in the incarnation, revealed by becoming an angel of the great and eternal counsel of God and the Father.*"¹⁵ Saint Maxim also says that for human nature, the Logos "*fulfilled the whole counsel of God and the Father, ennobling it by the power of His*

⁹ SFÂNTUL MAXIM MĂRTURISITORUL, *Epistolae*, 16, coll. PG 91, 580A [trad. rom. SFÂNTUL MAXIM MĂRTURISITORUL, *Scrieri și epistole hrisologice și duhovnicești*, Epistola 16, coll. PSB 81, E.I.B.M.B.O.R., București, 1990, p. 146].

¹⁰ JEAN-CLAUDE LARCHET, *Îndumnezeirea omului...*, pp. 203–204.

¹¹ M. TH DISDIER, „Les fondements dogmatiques de la spiritualité de saint Maxime le Confesseur”, *Revue des études byzantines* 29, 159 (1930), Persée-Portail des revues scientifiques en SHS, p. 312.

¹² Pr.Prof.Dr.D. STĂNILOAE, *Teologia Dogmatică...*, vol. I, p. 393.

¹³ PANAYOTIS NELLAS, *Omul, animal îndumnezeit*, pp. 72–73.

¹⁴ NORMAN RUSSELL, *The doctrine of deification in the Greek patristic tradition* (The Oxford early Christian studies), Oxford University Press, Oxford; New York, 2004, p. 262.

¹⁵ Sfântul Maxim Mărturisitorul, *Capita theologiae et aconomiae*, II, 23, PG 90, 1134A [trad. rom. Sfântul Maxim Mărturisitorul, *Capete teologice sau gnostice, Filocalia 2*, Ed. Apologeticum, București, 2005, p. 221].

incarnation."¹⁶ Taking this reasoning further, if the ultimate goal of creation is deification, and the incarnation is the fundamental act by which this goal can be achieved, we can safely say that the incarnation is the goal for which everything was brought into existence.¹⁷

In this key we can also better understand the beginning of the Gospel of John: *"In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. It was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him; and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not contain it."* (John. 1, 1-5)

"The concept of word or logos has possessed throughout history various semantic valences. In Heraclitus' conception, for example, logos defined 'the underlying principle of the organisation of the universe,'¹⁸ that gives harmony to the opposing elements that sustain and compose the dynamics of cosmic becoming. Looking to Plato, we see that the term is the epistemological essence of a thing, brought to light by the deepest knowledge of it.¹⁹ Therefore, logos is the true meaning of being-ousia. For Aristotle, the meaning of the term is that of rationality, the reasoning of things. As far as Stoic philosophy is concerned, logos is material in nature and is identical with nature, representing the active force in the universe; it is the basis of "cosmic sympathy and natural law, and the ethical imperative of life in conformity with nature".²⁰

The encounter of Judeo-Christian and Hellenistic thought brought a much clearer perspective to the term. The Logos is the essence of the above verses and represents the divine Reason of the world, which is seen in all of God's creation. Moreover, it is the fulfilment of the plan of the deification of all that exists. The Logos is no longer just an abstract principle, but the very Second Person of the Holy Trinity, the Word of God, which comprises the divine paradigms that will be actualized in time and space as God's creation.²¹

Returning to the incarnation of the Logos as God's plan from eternity, a few more issues need to be clarified. First, by linking the incarnation to the deification of man, it may be objected that we make it a necessary act, which would be contrary to God's absolute freedom. It could be objected that we are thus introducing a necessity into God, who is compelled to the act of incarnation in order to fulfil his original plan. It could also be argued that this conditioning of the incarnation on the incarnation would instrumentalize the latter. In the first case, we can answer very simply that it cannot be a compulsion. God decides from eternity to create man and to offer him the possibility of deification through the incarnation of the Logos. Incarnation is therefore an absolutely voluntary act of God.²² In the second case, the incarnation becomes not only an instrument, but the act of supreme love. God empties Himself of glory in order to give man through grace all that He is after being.²³

¹⁶ SFÂNTUL MAXIM MĂRTURISITORUL, *Quaestiones ad Thalassium*, 54, PG 90, 520D [trad. rom. SFÂNTUL MAXIM MĂRTURISITORUL, *Răspunsuri către Talasie*, 54, coll. *Filocalia* 3, trad. Pr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru Stăniloae, Apologeticum, p. 274].

¹⁷ Vladimir LOSSKY, *Teologia Mistică a Bisericii de Răsărit*, trad. Pr. Prof. Vasile Răducă, Ed. Bonifaceo, București, 1998, p. 166.

¹⁸ Francis E. PETERS, *Termenii filosofiei grecești*, trad. Drăgan Stoianovici, Humanitas, București, 1993, p. 161.

¹⁹ PLATON, *Republica*, vol. I, *Opere complete*, Ed. Humanitas, București, 2001, p. 297.

²⁰ F.E. PETERS, *Termenii filosofiei grecești*, p. 163.

²¹ PR. PROF. DR. ION BRIA, *Dicționar de Teologie Ortodoxă*, E.I.B.M.B.O.R., București, 1994, p. 242.

²² SFÂNTUL MAXIM MĂRTURISITORUL, *Epistolae*, 13, PG 91, 516D-517C [trad. rom. SFÂNTUL MAXIM MĂRTURISITORUL, *Scrieri și epistole hrisologice și duhovnicești*, Epistola 13, pp. 103-104].

²³ PANAYOTIS NELLAS, *Omul, animal îndumnezeit*, pp. 72-73.

The direct linking of incarnation to deification can also produce another confusion. We can consider that incarnation is inseparably linked to salvation and therefore to the fall into sin. Sin thus becomes a necessary instrument for the fulfilment of the plan of human deity. This cannot be accepted precisely for the reason explained earlier: the incarnation is not linked to the fall. The Son of God would have become man even if Adam had not fallen, precisely in order to fulfil the first mediation, that between created and uncreated. Sin only reconfigures this path and adds another aspect to the incarnation, salvation. Thus, in addition to the hypostatic union, the Saviour performs a series of redemptive acts, culminating in the crucifixion and resurrection.²⁴

As we have said before, the incarnation of the Word has been part of God's eternal plan for the deification of human beings.²⁵ This means that the Word's coming into being was the purpose for which the human nature was created, and the human nature was created with the purpose and capacity to receive the Son of God as hypostasis.²⁶ Man therefore has the ontological vocation to serve the union of the created and the uncreated: "(...) *the fact that God fashioned man 'in His own image' means in the last analysis that He created him so that he would tend by his very nature, by the very fact that he is human, towards that which is His Godly Image. It means that He has given him gifts, and has given them to him in a real way, so that these gifts constitute for man the very possibility and purpose of actively serving the incarnation of the Logos who is the perfect and unique Image or Icon of the Father. And so man, enipostatized in the Logos, may also be raised to the image, may also show himself to be the icon or image of God*".²⁷

Thus, man finds his ontological foundation in the Archetype. The Old Adam was created in the image of the New Adam, Christ, even though the latter did not exist as a man historically. Christ is in the timeless reality of God, and historical existence or non-existence is no impediment to the Creator.²⁸

In connection with the Logos' incarnation regardless of the appearance of sin in history, one more point needs to be clarified. This does not mean that it should have occurred under exactly the same conditions as it did after the fall. God could have found another way of uniting the divine and human natures, thus sharing the grace of deification with the creature.²⁹ If Adam had not fallen, he would have climbed step by step towards God, performing the mediations of which Saint Maximus speaks.³⁰ Reaching the last step, the Word would have enipostatized the human nature, overcoming the difference between created and uncreated. There would have been no need for all the saving activity or even the sacrifice on the cross and resurrection. The sharing in God's grace of man and of all creation would have been realized at that moment. But because Adam had fallen into sin and was thus diverted from his purpose, it was necessary for Christ to accomplish all five mediations in his place.

²⁴ JEAN-CLAUDE LARCHET, *Îndumnezeirea omului...*, p. 83.

²⁵ NORMAN RUSSELL, *The doctrine of deification...*, pp. 264–265.

²⁶ PR. PROF. DR. DUMITRU STĂNILOAE, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, vol. II, E.I.B.M., București, 2010, p. 38.

²⁷ PANAYOTIS NELLAS, *Omul, animal îndumnezeit*, p. 72.

²⁸ PANAYOTIS NELLAS, *Omul, animal îndumnezeit*, p. 71.

²⁹ J.-C. LARCHET, *Îndumnezeirea omului la Sfântul Maxim Mărturisitorul*, pp. 86–87.

³⁰ SFÂNTUL MAXIM MĂRTURISITORUL, *Quaestiones ad Thalassium*, 22, PG 90, 320A [trad. rom. SFÂNTUL MAXIM MĂRTURISITORUL, *Răspunsuri către Talasie*, 22, *Filocalia* 3, trad. Pr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Apologeticum*, p. 95].

3. THE FULFILMENT IN CHRIST OF THE FIVE "MEDIATIONS" DESCRIBED BY SAINT MAXIM THE CONFESSOR

In becoming man, the Son of God Himself accomplished all five mediations: Christ overcame the difference between man and woman by breaking the law of birth through sin.³¹ His conception which did not involve sexual pleasure, the preservation of the mother's virginity and the birth without the specific affections are acts through which the mediation between the sexes was accomplished. Therefore, in Christ "There is no longer Jew or Greek; there is neither slave nor free; there is no longer male and female" but we are all one. (Gal. 3:28). Expressing this mediation more abstractly, we can say that Christ overcame the separation between man and woman by freeing their common nature from the characteristics arising from the passions. He subsumed the characteristics of both sexes into their common reason (logos) by removing what was perverted by sin. Thus the specifics of each sex are not eliminated, but subdued by their common nature.³²

As for the mediation between heaven and the inhabited earth, Christ sanctified the world by His sinless life, thus introducing into its existence a reality specific to heaven. Moreover, after His death, He not only descended into hell, freeing the bound, but also entered heaven, returning to earth and showing that for the transfigured man there are no barriers between these realities³³: "In the grave with the body, in hell with the Soul, as one God, in heaven with the thief, and on the throne you were, O Christ, with the Father and the Spirit, filling them all, you who are uncorrupted."³⁴

The mediation between heaven and earth was accomplished by the Saviour ascending to heaven with His human body, co-substantial with ours. In this way, he eliminated the separating particularities and demonstrated the unity of the sensible nature.³⁵ Moreover, through virtuous living, Christ "overcame the fatness of the body"³⁶ ascending human nature into the "heaven of the perfection of angels".³⁷

As for the mediation between the intelligible and the sensible, it must be said that it has in common with the mediation between heaven and earth the act of the Saviour's ascension to heaven. This ascent of the human being through the various categories of created beings corresponds to a natural tendency of creation towards unity in the Logos. Both angels and men and all creation have their reasoning in the supreme Reason, Christ. The latter has raised up the knowing faculty of the human being through the categories of knowledge of the nine angelic groups, and thus man, who includes in himself the sentient nature, has the capacity to contemplate God together with the angels, beings par excellence intelligible.³⁸

The last mediation the man had to perform was different from all the others. It belongs to the last stage of spiritual evolution, involving mystical union. It is achieved when

³¹ SFÂNTUL MAXIM MĂRTURISITORUL, *Ambigua*, Io., 41, PG 91, 1309A [trad. rom. SFÂNTUL MAXIM MĂRTURISITORUL, *Ambigua*, Io.,41, p. 264.

³² LARS THUNBERG, *Microcosm and Mediator...*, pp. 379–380.

³³ LARS THUNBERG, *Microcosm and Mediator...*, pp. 381–382.

³⁴ *Liturghierul Pastoral*, Editura Mitropoliei Moldovei și Bucovinei, Iași, 2004, p. 137.

³⁵ SFÂNTUL MAXIM MĂRTURISITORUL, *Ambigua*, Io., 41, PG 91, 1309BC [trad. rom. SFÂNTUL MAXIM MĂRTURISITORUL, *Ambigua*, Io.,41, p. 265–266].

³⁶ SFÂNTUL MAXIM MĂRTURISITORUL, *Ambigua*, Io., 41, PG 91, 1305D [trad. rom. SFÂNTUL MAXIM MĂRTURISITORUL, *Ambigua*, Io.,41, p. 262].

³⁷ SFÂNTUL MAXIM MĂRTURISITORUL, *Ambigua*, Io., 41, PG 91, 1305D [trad. rom. SFÂNTUL MAXIM MĂRTURISITORUL, *Ambigua*, Io.,41, p. 263]L. THUNBERG, *Microcosm and Mediator...*, p. 391.

³⁸ LARS THUNBERG, *Microcosm and Mediator...*, pp. 398–399.

man overcomes the sphere of creation and the last type of separation that exists between man, nature and the Creator and unites in grace with God. It is an absolutely paradoxical mediation, since there is no unity of substance and no common logos between creation and Creator.³⁹ The only bridge between the created and the uncreated is the divine Logos who embodies human nature. Thus, the incarnation is the beginning of this mediation, and its completion is found in the placing of Christ with all human nature at the right hand of the Father, within the Holy Trinity.⁴⁰ From there, the Son of God made man can impart his divinizing grace to every human person, to the extent that he opens himself to this sharing.

As a conclusion to what has been said so far about the performance in Christ of the mediations to which Adam was called, we can say that the Son of God, by becoming man and performing the saving and deifying acts, virtually achieved the union of man with God. But this is not enough for the perfection of each individual human person. It would be a violation of man's freedom if both salvation and perfection in union with God were received by man without any action expressing his consent, or rather his adherence to the gift of Christ. The mediation between the created and the uncreated accomplished in and by Christ also implies a personal realization of the consequences of the enipostatization of the human being. In what follows, therefore, we will speak of the role of each human person in the act of full union with God.

4. THE ACTUALIZATION ON A PERSONAL LEVEL OF THE DEIFICATION OF THE HUMAN BEING ASSUMED BY THE SON OF GOD

The deification of man was part of God's plan even before he came into existence, or in other words, man was created to be deified⁴¹: *"For to this end he has also made us, 'that we might be made partakers of the divine nature' (II Pet. 1:4) and of his eternity, and that we might be made like him through the deification according to grace, for which is the whole existence and duration of those who are and the bringing into being and birth of those who are not."*⁴²

The fact that man is ontologically called to deification also implies his capacity to receive and cooperate with deifying grace. In this sense, man's logos comprises, as we have already shown, the impetus towards fulfilment in union with God. Thus, in order to be ennobled, the human person must put himself in accord with the logos of his nature⁴³ through everything he does: *"Every one of the creatures endowed with mind and reason, angels and men, is and is called part of God by the very reason (logos) after which he was created, which is in God and for God, which preexists in God as it was said. And if it moves according to it, it will certainly be in God, in whom the reason (logos) of its existence preexists, as its origin and cause. And if he does not wish to grasp with desire anything but his own origin, he does not fall away from God, but becomes, stretching himself more and more after him, a god, and is called a part of God, in that he partakes of God according to*

³⁹ Sfântul Maxim Mărturisitorul, *Ambigua*, Io., 41, coll. PG 91,1305A [trad. rom. Sfântul Maxim Mărturisitorul, *Ambigua*, Io. 41, p. 259]

⁴⁰ LARS THUNBERG, *Microcosm and Mediator...*, pp. 404–405.

⁴¹ NORMAN RUSSELL, *The doctrine of deification...*, p. 266.

⁴² SFÂNTUL MAXIM MĂRTURISITORUL, *Epistolae*, coll. PG 91, 609C [trad. rom. SFÂNTUL MAXIM MĂRTURISITORUL, *Scrieri și epistole hrisologice și duhovnicești*, 24, coll. PSB 81, E.I.B.M.B.O.R., Bucuresti, 1990, p. 163]

⁴³ JEAN-CLAUDE LARCHET, *Îndumnezeirea omului...*, p. 85.

his own will, as one who embraces according to nature, wisely and rationally, by a movement with a good face, his own origin and cause (...).⁴⁴

Man must therefore live and act according to the reason by which he was created, guarding against anything that would divert him from his purpose.⁴⁵ Only in this way did the saints "learn to let themselves be led without deviation, according to the right reason (logos) of nature, towards its Cause."⁴⁶ In this way, every human being is called to move by free choice from mere existence to good existence, which eventually is perfected in eternally good existence, which is deification. More precisely, by putting freedom into action, starting from the virtues imprinted in the image of God in man, man must cooperate with the grace given by God and become more and more like the Creator.⁴⁷

This conjoining is done in the most proper way through virtues, which are nothing more than the attunement of man's actions with the logos according to which he was created.⁴⁸ They are steps towards a conformity of life with God's eternally good existence, which is reached when man's will is no longer split by the choice between good and evil, but is steadfast in choosing the good.⁴⁹

If the incarnation of the Son of God virtually offers man deity, the practice of the virtues gives man the opportunity to actualize it. By doing good, an incarnation of the Word takes place in each person, since man acquires reflections of the divine attributes. The divine gifts to which human nature has access through incarnation become operative in the virtuous man.⁵⁰

However, virtues alone are not enough for the deification of the human person, but an effective sharing of the grace that Christ brought into human nature from the Virgin Mary is also necessary. This is done through the Mysteries of the Church.⁵¹ Saint Dionysius Pseudo-Areopagite lays strong emphasis on the fact that deification is accomplished only if, in addition to the virtues, man also partakes of the grace offered through the Holy Mysteries.⁵² For example, through Baptism, man is incorporated into Christ and thus receives the deifying grace that the Savior's humanity received through hypostatic union.⁵³ Through the sacrament of the Chrism, man partakes of the gifts of the Holy Spirit which enable him to put into action the powers offered by union with Christ through Baptism.⁵⁴ But the fullest manifestation of the deifying character of the sacraments is seen in the Holy

⁴⁴ SFÂNTUL MAXIM MĂRTURISITORUL, *Ambigua*, Io., 7, coll. PG 91,1080BC [trad. rom. SFÂNTUL MAXIM MĂRTURISITORUL, *Ambigua*, Io. 7d, p. 81]

⁴⁵ JEAN-CLAUDE LARCHET, *Îndumnezeirea omului...*, p. 186.

⁴⁶ SFÂNTUL MAXIM MĂRTURISITORUL, *Ambigua*, Io., 10, coll. PG 91,1116C [trad. rom. SFÂNTUL MAXIM MĂRTURISITORUL, *Ambigua*, Io. 10, p. 115]

⁴⁷ PANAYOTIS NELLAS, *Omul, animal îndumnezeit*, p. 73.

⁴⁸ POLYCARP SHERWOOD, *St. Maximus the confessor: The ascetic life. The four centuries on charity*, Longmans, Green and Co, Londra, 1955, p. 71.

⁴⁹ JEAN-CLAUDE LARCHET, *Îndumnezeirea omului...*, p. 188.

⁵⁰ LARS THUNBERG, *Microcosm and Mediator...*, pp. 430–431.

⁵¹ POLYCARP SHERWOOD, *The Earlier Ambigua of Saint Maximus the Confessor and his Refutation of Origenism*, Orbis Catholicus, Roma, 1955, pp. 72–81.

⁵² SFÂNTUL DIONISIE AREOPAGITUL, *De Ecclesiastica Hierarchia*, 1, 5, PG 3, 376BC [trad. rom. SFÂNTUL DIONISIE AREOPAGITUL, *Despre Ierarhia Bisericească*, 1, 5, *Opere complete*, trad. Pr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru Stăniloae, Ed. Paideia, București, 1996, p. 73.].

⁵³ JEAN-CLAUDE LARCHET, *Viața sacramentală*, trad. MARINELA BOJIN, Ed. Basilica, București, 2015, p. 29.

⁵⁴ SFÂNTUL ATANASIE CEL MARE, *Epistolae ad Serapionem*, I, 20, coll. PG 26, 580A [trad. rom. SFÂNTUL ATANASIE CEL MARE, „Epistole către Serapion”, I, 20, în: *Scrieri. Partea a II-a*, coll. PSB 16, E.I.B.M.B.O.R., Bucuresti, 1988, pp. 47–48].

Eucharist. Here man receives Christ Himself within himself, in whom "dwells bodily all the fullness of the Godhead" (Col. 2:9). Thus union with Christ is achieved, which radiates from within the interior the grace of deity.⁵⁵

So we see that man can be ennobled by the work of virtue, but only by sharing in the mysteries of the Church, which is the social extension of the body of Christ. It is the "power of the new mystery"⁵⁶, i.e. as the incarnation, which extends the effects of the hypostatic union and of the whole saving and deifying work to each individual human person. *"The Church is the synthesis of the three laws — the natural, the written and the laws of grace — which are the different ways of life of those who walk in the way of the Lord. It represents above all the third, which includes and perfects the first two, and which is founded on the mystery of the incarnation, which is the law of the Spirit, and correlatively related to the law of deification."*⁵⁷

Another aspect that we should address regarding the deification of man is its beginning and completion. We need to see when it begins, whether it is a steady state or an advance, and whether it can be fully realized here on earth.

St. Maxim speaks on several occasions about the fact that deification can be achieved even in this life and gives the example of the apostles Peter, James and John, who at the Transfiguration of Christ saw the uncreated light while still in the flesh.⁵⁸ Moreover, Christ Himself, being also true Man, was able to transfigure in part His human body and let divine light shine from it. We can therefore conclude that deification is not only the final step of our existence beyond physical death, nor is it only the last step of perfection, because it begins here on earth and is to a greater or lesser extent present from the lowest steps of spiritual evolution.⁵⁹

Thus we understand how the saints have had certain gifts since this life. They could overcome certain natural laws and physiological processes, showing a partial transfiguration of the body, they could perform miracles, resembling Christ, and they could contemplate uncreated light. Of course, all of this reached perfection after the separation of the soul from the body. It should be noted that this separation is only partial, the soul retaining a certain connection with the body, and the body showing evidence of the impregnation in it of the grace of deification. This is why saints leave holy relics which are the most visible proof of the sharing of the body with grace.⁶⁰

Thus, deification begins in earthly life, but is completed after death: *"(...)distinguishing past ages from future ones, he distinguished by these words in a mysterious and wise way the reason of activity from that of suffering. Thus the ages of life in the flesh, in which we now live (for Scripture also knows temporal ages, according to the word: And hath endured for ever and ever, and shall live to the end", are the ages of the active state, and the future ages, which follow after those here, are the ages of the spirit, of the prefiguration into the state of the suffering. Here, therefore, finding ourselves in the state*

⁵⁵ SFÂNTUL NICOLAE CABASILĂ, *Despre Viața în Hristos*, IV, 1-6, E.I.B.M.B.O.R., București, 1997, pp. 106–108.

⁵⁶ SFÂNTUL MAXIM MĂRTURISITORUL, *Quaestiones ad Thalassium*, 63, PG 90, 665B [trad. rom. SFÂNTUL MAXIM MĂRTURISITORUL, *Răspunsuri către Talasie*, 63, p. 396].

⁵⁷ JEAN-CLAUDE LARCHET, *Îndumnezeirea omului...*, pp. 440–441.

⁵⁸ SFÂNTUL MAXIM MĂRTURISITORUL, *Ambigua*, Io., 7, coll. PG 91,1076CD [trad. rom. SFÂNTUL MAXIM MĂRTURISITORUL, *Ambigua*, Io. 7, p. 75-77]

⁵⁹ JEAN-CLAUDE LARCHET, *Îndumnezeirea omului...*, p. 723.

⁶⁰ PR. PROF. DR. DUMITRU STĂNILOAE, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, vol. III, E.I.B.M.O., București, 2010, pp. 366–367.

of activity, we shall at once come to the end of the ages, our power and work by which we are active coming to an end, and in the ages to come, undergoing the preformation of deification by grace, we shall not be in activity, but in passivity, and therefore we shall never come to the end of our deification. For the "suffering" of that time will be beyond nature, and there will be no reason which will determine the endless deification of those who suffer it. So we work as long as we have in activity the working power of the virtues, which is rational by nature, and the thinking power, capable, without restraint, of all knowledge, being able to traverse the whole universe of what is and is known and to make retroactively its own all the ages that have been. And we shall perish after we have passed altogether beyond the reasoning of those created out of nothing, and have come in an unmeasured way to the Cause of things. Then we shall also let our powers rest, at once with what is bounded by nature, acquiring that which can by no means acquire the power after nature, because nature has no power to comprehend that which is beyond nature."⁶¹

We note that neither beyond death nor even at the end of the ages is deification static, but is a continuous evolution; here we are actively perfected through the work of the virtues and the reception of God's grace.⁶², and on the other side we receive from God the grace of deity that makes us continually grow in union with Him.⁶³

Likewise, the deification of men is not done equally for all, but each one as much as he is able to receive and as much as he cooperates with divine grace. There is therefore a hierarchy of deification according to each person's worthiness.⁶⁴ The human person advances in union with God according to the willingness of the will to work virtue and receive divine grace.⁶⁵

CONCLUSION

It must also be said that the deification of the human person is of particular importance for the rest of creation. By uniting himself in grace with God, man also brings into this union the world to which he is ontologically bound by his body. The world is thus deified through man, and the state he achieves is also reflected in it.

We can therefore conclude that God's plan from eternity includes the dehumanization of man and through him of all creation. In this sense, man has been endowed by God with the capacity and vocation to be a priest of creation. In this way he rises to the most intimate communion with God, and in this way he also brings the world into the closest proximity with the Creator, in accordance with his capacity to receive divine grace.

⁶¹ Sfântul Maxim Mărturisitorul, *Quaestiones ad Thalassium*, 22, coll. PG 90, 320CD [trad. rom. Sfântul Maxim Mărturisitorul, *Răspunsuri către Talasie*, 22, coll. *Filocalia* 3, trad. Pr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru Stăniloae, Apologeticum, București, 2005, p. 97-98].

⁶² POLYCARP SHERWOOD, *St. Maximus the confessor: The ascetic life...*, pp. 81–82.

⁶³ PR. PROF. DR. DUMITRU STĂNILOAE, *Teologia Dogmatică...*, vol. III, pp. 324–325.

⁶⁴ JEAN-CLAUDE LARCHET, *Îndumnezeirea omului...*, p. 730.

⁶⁵ SFÂNTUL DIONISIE AREOPAGITUL, *De Caelesti Hierarchia*, III, 2, PG 3 [trad. rom. SFÂNTUL DIONISIE AREOPAGITUL, *Despre Ierarhia Cerească*, III, 2, coll. *Opere complete*, trad. Pr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru Stăniloae, Paideia, București, 1996, p. 90]

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THE HUMAN BEING – A BEING OF GRACE AND A DIALOGICAL STRUCTURE

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ABSTRACT

Today, perhaps more than ever, the definition of the human being as a being of grace with a dialogical structure is imperative, because of contemporary challenges that threaten the person with desacralization, reducing him or her from the crown of creation to a simple egocentric individual heading towards nowhere. The removal of man from the sacred, through society's increasingly ephemeral offerings, threatens the dignity of the human being as a graceful being capable of dialogue and communion with the Persons of the Holy Trinity, instead offering him material elements that can in no way satisfy man's aspiration to the absolute. If, after creation, the human soul spiritualized the body, raising it to the state of dialogue with God, today the soul is threatened with "materialization", in the sense of reducing human nature to the sensory.

Keywords: *God; human being; grace; dialogical structure;*

INTRODUCTION

Today's society, out of a desire to align itself with factors of various kinds, attempts a definition of the person that distorts the value and authenticity of human nature. Man becomes from a person a mere individual, focused on his own desires and aspirations, immersed in an increasingly accentuated egocentrism. For this reason, it is imperative that the human being be properly defined in terms of his or her true relationship to God, the Source of grace and the supreme goal towards which the crown of creation is striving.

The analysis of the Biblical references highlights the dual constitution of the human being, made up of a material body and a spiritual soul. The dichotomy of the human being is presented in the creation expressed in the book of Genesis, but it is not limited to this reference. It is also presented in Ecclesiastes 12:7: "Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.", but also in James 2:26: "For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also." All these testimonies define the human being in his or her dichotomy received through creation.

In the Holy Scriptures, the soul is often called spirit. Like the Holy Scriptures, the Holy Tradition clearly affirms the dichotomous aspect of human nature. God is the creator of man's body and soul, but man does not consist solely of body or solely of soul. Instead, man consists of both body and soul¹. For man to be the living being described in the Biblical reference, it is imperative that the two elements that compose the nature of the human person exist simultaneously as a unitary whole, and what can be defined as death is precisely the temporary separation of the two elements.

¹ Saint Augustine, The Confessions, Book XI, <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/3296/3296-h/3296-h.htm>

1. DEFINING THE HUMAN INDIVIDUAL AS A BEING OF GRACE

a) Theological dichotomy versus philosophical trichotomy

Since ancient times the world of philosophy has tried to decipher the mystery of the human being, and prominent representatives such as Plato and Plotinus sought in their analysis to insert the idea that man consists of three parts, which resulted in what we define as philosophical trichotomy. According to these leaders in the philosophical world, the human being has a body, a soul, and a spirit. The philosophy of the two thus defines the subject as having both an animal soul and a rational soul divided into two distinct parts: soul and spirit².

This philosophy is still present today in the doctrine of some Protestant theologians, who argue for trichotomy in I Thessalonians 5:23: "And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." Of course, this theme does not divide the human soul into several sections but highlights different functions of the spiritual nature such as "the power of the organic life and the power of the spiritual life"³.

The two elements that might seem distinct, soul and spirit, define the one spiritual element present in the nature of the human being, namely the principle of spirit. The dichotomy of human nature is clearly underlined in the Epistle to the Corinthians, where the Apostle says: "An unmarried woman or virgin is concerned about the Lord's affairs: Her aim is to be devoted to the Lord in both body and spirit" (I Cor. 7:34). This epistle also highlights the relationship between the Creator and the creature, the latter having the duty to bring glory to God through the two elements of his nature, that is, through body and soul. This is why St. Paul says: "Therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's" (I Cor. 6:20).

Two aspects of this spiritual nature are reflected here; the lower aspect of vegetative, organic life, i.e., the soul, and the higher aspect of rational knowledge and will, i.e., the spirit. So, when he performs noetic functions (probing spiritual and rational heights), the human spiritual nature is called spirit, and when it relates to those of the body (to the maintenance of life) it is called soul.

The writings of the Holy Fathers often speak of the composition of human nature, but not in the trichotomy sense of philosophy. Even if they make a distinction between body, soul and spirit, their theology does not go beyond the meaning of Scripture, but only presents human nature as having a dichotomic composition, i.e., body and soul, while the other names actually define certain functions of the soul, or more precisely, two stages of perfection of the same spiritual principle, not two component elements of the spiritual nature in man. Although they make this distinction between the two subtle aspects or "wings" of the human soul, the Holy Scripture and the Fathers do not separate them into autonomous entities, but maintain the idea of unity, indivisibility, and indissolubility of the human soul, respecting the principle of the duality of man's nature: "Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matt. 10:28). Sometimes they define by spirit the principle of spiritual life in man (Gal. 5:16-17), that is, divine grace at work in the faithful man, for "The person without the Spirit

² Nikolai Berdiaev, *Sensul creației. Încercare de îndreptățire a omului*, translated by Anca Oroveanu, Humanitas, București, 1992, p. 87.

³ ***, *Anthology of Greek patristic literature of the first centuries*, compiled by Prof. Vasile Ionescu and Prof. Nicolae Ștefănescu, textbook for seminarians and students of Theological Institutes, E.I.B.M.B.O.R., București, 1960, p. 89.

does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit" (I Cor. 2:14). The unity of the two components of the human being is complete, as by definition they form a single nature. This nature is rational, superior to the surrounding nature. "The insertion of the soul into the body is very intimate and therefore the human spiritual factor cannot be conceived for an instant as pure spirit."⁴ Thus, the dichotomy of human nature is a mystery received as a gift from the Creator, and its greatness is clear from the fact that, in man, matter is united with the conscious and free spirit, man thus becoming a living being, the crown of all creation..

From the moment of his creation, the human spirit is a factor inserted into the world, while remaining distinct from nature, but being able to freely make use of nature. Man must therefore be understood "as incarnated spirit, as spirit with his ramifications in the body, or as body with its roots in the spirit"⁵. Patristic theology emphasizes the understanding function of the soul, therefore of the mind, through which the human being "intuitively knows God"⁶, and St. Simeon considers the knowledge of God as a "seeing", which is more than hearing⁷. The same idea is also supported by St Maximus the Confessor who emphasizes the mind as the spiritual power of the human person. Through purification, the mind can reach an advanced form of knowledge of God⁸.

Another Church Father, St. Gregory Palamas, debunks the heresies of his time, especially those of Varlaam, who claimed that only an abstract mind, totally detached from the human person, can know God. St. Gregory condemns the removal of the mind from human nature saying: "The greatest delusion and the source of all unbelief ... is to raise the mind not from carnal contemplation, but from the body itself, in order to make it meet up there with mental visions"⁹.

The encounter in spirit between the Uncreated and the creature does not imply, according to St. Gregory Palamas, the existence of a body emptied of sensations, but of a body purified of passions, which together with the soul can rise to the knowledge of God as far as is possible for the creature. But for this ascent of man to be possible, it is first imperative that the mind descends into the heart. Here the encounter with uncreated divine grace takes place. The human heart is the place where God writes His law by means of grace¹⁰.

For man to be alive, it is imperative not to alter his dichotomous structure. This structure is God's gift to the crown of His creation, and only through its constituent elements does man define himself as a dialogical being who can be in dialogue with his creator. The possibility of dialogue between God and man results precisely from the fact that He, the Creator, has inserted in the soul of man the necessary qualities of freedom, conscience, and reason. The purpose of the dialogue between the Divine and the human is to enable the

⁴ Nikolai Berdiaev, *Spirit și libertate*, translated by Stelian Lăcătuș, Paideia, București, 1996, p. 92.

⁵ Nikolai Berdiaev, *Spirit și libertate*, ..., p. 92.

⁶ Alexandros Kalomiros, *Sfinții Părinți despre originile și destinul omului și al cosmosului*, translated by Fr. Prof. Ioan Ică, Deisis, Sibiu, 1998, p. 88.

⁷ Saint Simeon Noul Teolog, *Discursuri teologice si etice. Scrieri I, S* translated by Fr. Ioan I. Ică jr., Deisis, Sibiu, 2005, p. 106.

⁸ Sfântul Maxim Mărturisitorul, *Ambigua*, in „P.S.B.” Colection, vol. 80, translated by Fr. Prof. Phd. D. Stăniloae, E.I.B.M.B.O.R., București, 1983, p. 78.

⁹ Sfântul Grigorie Palama, *Cuvânt despre isihăști*, în "Filocalia", vol. 7, translated by Dumitru Stăniloae, E.I.B.M.B.O.R., București, 1977, p. 397.

¹⁰ Sfântul Grigorie Palama, *Cuvânt despre isihăști...*, p. 396.

human being to be aware of and respond to the love given to him as a gift by God. Only by being aware of the love received can man experience love also horizontally, towards his fellow human beings.

b) The body - subjectivized matter, subject of the soul

The dichotomy of human nature requires that there be a perfect mutual intertwining between the two parts. Only through this intertwining do the two component elements of the human being reach their full potential. The difference between the two elements that make up human nature is that the body, being matter, is inferior to the soul. The theologian Nicolai Berdiaev states that "the spirit shapes the body endlessly for the perception of the world as well as the reaction to it. Through the body, the spirit expresses its infinitely complex connection on the one hand with the higher spiritual order, and on the other hand with the world order, linking them together."¹¹

Through the work that the soul performs in the body, its matter becomes subjectivized, actively participating in the work of the soul, becoming its subject. From this follows, among other things, the unique and unrepeatable character of the human being. This joint work of body and soul, a work in which the soul leads the body towards its ascent through virtue to the Creator, expresses the normality of the life ordained by God for man. In opposition to this is the situation in which the body threatens the soul with "materialization" in the sense that man, through misunderstood freedom, does not contemplate the spiritual, remaining limited to the sensory, to the materiality of the world. According to God's ordinance, because the essence of the soul is spiritual in nature, it must lead the body, "dictate to it and lead it towards the goals revealed by God"¹².

The soul cannot be severed from the body, nor vice versa, without mortally affecting the whole human being. The unity of body and soul can be likened to the relationship between the form and the material of a statue: "You cannot change the form without shattering the marble"¹³. The importance of the unity of body and soul also derives from the purpose of the human person. By imitating the unique kenotic gesture of the Son, who "reveals his true Father for the first time in an open way"¹⁴, and reveals God to the extent of how much can the human nature understand, every Christian embarks on a personal kenosis in which he seeks a spiritual encounter with God, the only One who can give a coherent answer to all the perplexities of earthly life. This voluntary humbleness in the body - because it must be voluntarily taken responsibility for - returns to us as the fruit of a wise understanding of suffering and illness, weaving the divine-human bond (of love and living) for which we were built, on the one hand restoring the unspoiled image before sin but above all fulfilling it in eternal unity with the Incarnated Son of God. "The soul is a born being, a living, thinking being, which gives to the living, sensitive body the power of life and external perception, so far as it appears as existence to this sensitive nature"¹⁵.

It is necessary to point out that the act of creation, which begins with "heaven and earth" and ends with man, as a rational intermediary between the material world and the spiritual world, contains within itself the rationality of the divine Logos which formulates the

¹¹ Nikolai Berdiaev, *Spirit și libertate...*, p. 92.

¹² Prof. Remus Rus, *Concepția despre om în marile religii*, Phd Thesis, în G.B., an XXXVII, 1978, nr. 7-8, p. 499.

¹³ Alexis Carrel, *Omul, ființa necunoscută*, translated by Lia Busuioceanu, Tedit F.Z.H., București, 1998, p. 30.

¹⁴ Sfântul Grigorie de Nazianz, *A treia cuvântare teologică*, 2, Anastasia, București, 1993, p. 52.

¹⁵ *Anthology of Greek patristic literature...*, p. 78.

structure of the rationality of creation. More than simply the source of this rationality, following man's fall into sin and his decadence, the Logos will manifest himself as the Saviour of the same Creation which he has verbalized. The divine Logos will be born in a material body and will offer man the path to deification as the only way accessible and in conformity with the rationality of creation: the actualization of the image through the likeness of God. According to the expression of the Holy Fathers, "nothing is new under the sun but the Incarnation of God". After the initial act of creation, as the time of the manifestation of the divine Logos in the outside world, there follows His work of restoring His original rationality to the world that had drifted away from it¹⁶.

c) **The fullness of the human being through divine uncreated grace**

A correct anthropological expression cannot define the human being in the absence of grace. The absence of divine grace in man can only mean reducing the person to definitions with not enough meaning, to notions such as the individual. The dynamic character of human nature is given by the work of grace, without which man cannot be fully defined, lacking the correct relation of the creature to the Creator. Moreover, the very definition of man's existence can only be achieved by reference to uncreated divine grace. "It is only theoretically possible to distinguish between the human being and his grace. In concrete terms, the very existence of the human being implies its grace to be and to do something always to be and to show itself otherwise and otherwise"¹⁷.

One could say that the living nature is also good, in the sense that it unwittingly does good to man. For this purpose, God made it good for people. And people continue to add something to this goodness, but not having the power to give Him their own fundamentally good existence, show that the work of God's goodness for them continues. Goodness, as a good consciously directed outwardly has no place except in a person, like evil. Goodness is of the person for the person, like evil. That is why the unconscious good or evil emanating from inanimate existences also has the person as its ultimate starting point and is directed towards the person¹⁸.

The good of the world has as its ultimate starting point the goodness of a creator Subject, and the limited evil in the world, which cannot abolish it, comes from evil subjects, limited in power. Goodness and evil are relationships between people, and good and evil are the ways in which some people make their goodness or evil felt by others. In any case, no kind of existence can escape the necessity of good, even the selfish one, who understands it as exclusively for himself. The animal unconsciously tends towards the good in order to serve man, nature is helped by man in order to serve him and his fellow men better¹⁹.

But all tend towards good, not having it fully. God Himself having the total good, does not have the movement from tending towards the total good, as a being does. But it cannot be said He is good without His own will. Yet He is not good merely because He wants to. His existence and grace are one, but not in the sense that He has Himself as His origin, the being, but vice-versa. Thus, the Father has in Himself the Son also, who was born

¹⁶ Pr. Prof. Ioan G. Coman, *Probleme de filosofie și literatură patristică*, IBMBOR, București, 1995, p. 67.

¹⁷ Pr. Prof. Dr. D. Stăniloae, *Studii de teologie dogmatică ortodoxă*, Ed. Mitropoliei Olteniei, Craiova, 1991, p. 248.

¹⁸ Pr. Ioan C. Teșu, *Omul Taina Teologică*, Christiana, București, 2002, p. 79.

¹⁹ Marius Telea, *Antropologia Sfinților Părinți Capadocieni*, Emia, Hunedoara, 2005, p. 137.

not by grace, but neither contrary to grace. He has him through being, but in a being that also has grace in herself²⁰.

We do not separate in the supreme existence the being from grace, and the being from goodness, in the sense that grace would simply produce the being, that is indifferent to goodness, for this would mean considering grace coming out of nothing, as Jacob Böhme thought. There must be an existence in order for it to be able to have will. In this sense we do not separate grace from being. But regarding the creatures, grace exists before their being. This grace belongs to someone else who exists and who has the power to bring something or someone else into being²¹. But along with the being, man has also received grace in this being, grace that moves in him to strengthen and lead his being towards spiritual growth from God. This is a growth out of goodness.

Inanimate creatures do not grow in goodness by their own grace. For they only grow biologically. And this happens because of the laws laid upon them without their will. Conscious flesh does not maintain its own being through grace, as it has neither given being to herself by herself, nor does it give it through her own grace. For grace itself involves the existence or being and can lead the latter to the source of its existence, according to the reason of its being. In this sense it can strengthen it and make it grow spiritually as what it is. Only in this sense can one speak of a definition of the being through the person. This means that the person can help fulfil the being as it is but can also deform it²².

Grace is the energy that sustains being. However, grace does not oblige the human person to give up the freedom given to him by God. Grace helps the human will to desire and fulfil what is necessary to bring the creature closer to the Creator. The free and fully conscious attraction of the human person towards God is man's response to the love he receives from God. This is how the human being is defined as fully free. She chooses to collaborate with uncreated divine grace and to move towards God in response to His love.

Kindness, love, like all values, have the person as their subject, in her relationship to other people. The person gives goodness and love a real existence. Human beings, in their relationship with each other, are the only ones who give support to goodness, love, joy, sadness. Their advancement towards goodness is equal to their advancement in unity. God wants them all united in Himself²³.

It is also through grace that man works the things outside of his being. All have been created for man, and he can use them passively. Through grace, man works all things for the benefit of everyone, and in the absence of grace he can use them selfishly, negatively. So, based upon the freedom to cooperate with divine grace, man can work the good things with a purpose of advancing in God's love, or he can work, by excluding grace, in a selfish way, seeking the satisfaction of his own desires.

From what has been pointed out it follows that grace is given to man to work for the benefit of all. The manifestation of grace must therefore be achieved through a correct relationship of the human being to God and to his relationship with the world. The human person must also harmoniously satisfy the needs of all the components of his being, so as not to weaken or narrow the latter.

²⁰ Marius Telea, *Antropologia Sfinților Părinți...*, p. 139.

²¹ Pr. Prof. Dr. D. Stăniloae, *Natură și har în teologia bizantină*, în „Ortodoxia”, nr. 3, 1974, p. 198.

²² Pr. Drd. Vasile Citirigă, *Transfigurarea creștinului prin lucrarea harului Sfântului Duh*, în S.T., an. XXXIV, 1982, nr. 5-6, p. 378.

²³ Pr. prof. Dr. Ilie Moldovan, *Iisus Hristos – principiul absolut al unității creștine*, în *Ortodoxia*, 1983, nr. 1, p. 98.

But it is also clear from this that the grace of the human being depends on the one hand on his specific being, and on the other hand it depends on him in the way he uses it. This fact was noted by St Gregory of Nazianz, who made a distinction between the subject who has a will and grace itself²⁴. It is what St Maximus the Confessor and, on the basis of the theology developed by him, the Sixth Ecumenical Council offered, namely the basis for seeing in Christ one Person, but two wills: the divine and the human one²⁵.

The belonging of grace to the human being, as a movement in the case of nature towards good or goodness, that is, towards God, and thus towards the growth of his being, is presented by St Maximus the Confessor in the following words, relying on other thinkers: 'Some of those have said that grace or the natural will is a power (faculty) desiring what is proper to nature. Naturally sustained by grace, the being desires to be and to move according to feeling and thinking, desiring after its natural and perfect existence. For nature was constituted as a self-willed entity, and all things pertain to its constitution, being bound as desire to the reason of existence, according to which it was made.'²⁶

The human being is the fulfilment of a divine reason, of a meaning, pre-existent in the Logos of God. This fulfilled meaning is a unity between body and soul and the many functions of both. All want to function harmoniously in order to maintain the unity of the being and fulfil its desire for growth. In the grace of the human nature is manifested this tendency of all the components of the latter to increase harmoniously, for the harmonious increase of the human nature. Without it one cannot think naturally. When the movement of grace satisfies the tendencies of all the components of nature to maintain and increase harmoniously, this movement is in accordance with the reason of human nature²⁷.

But just as human nature exists only in persons, so does grace exist only in them. For the life of the human nature unfolds towards growth in the changing relations between people, and in the need to respond to all kinds of ever-changing circumstances. But this variety of relationships between people and the circumstances in which they have to work makes it necessary to deliberate how to respond with grace to each circumstance and relationship imposed by it, by which the flesh is called to grow spiritually in goodness or towards God²⁸.

By grace, the human nature of a person never breaks away from the nature of others even in apparent cases of falling away from grace, for a person cannot help having some interest in those whom he does not love or those whom he wants to exploit or whose praise his pride needs. Just as kindness can only take place between a person and another person, so hatred or pride involves the need of the hater and of the one that is arrogant with others whom he hates and whom he is arrogant with. It is a fact which also shows that the man is not created to perish. He wants to last forever even in his selfishness, and he wants to last forever with those whom he hates, despises or whose praise he still needs²⁹.

²⁴ Sfântul Grigorie de Nazianz, Cuvântări teologice, translated by Fr. Ghe. Țălea și Nicolae Barbu, Herald, București, p. 76.

²⁵ Sfântul Maxim Mărturisitorul, Ambigua..., p. 128.

²⁶ Sfântul Maxim Mărturisitorul, Scrieri și epistole hristologice și duhovnicești, în „P.S.B.”, vol. 82, translated by Fr. Prof. Phd. D. Stăniloae, E.I.B.M.B.O.R., București, 1990, p. 93.

²⁷ Pr. Prof. Dr. D. Stăniloae, Natură și har..., p. 202.

²⁸ Sandu Frunză, Pentru o metafizică a persoanei implicată în teologia Părintelui Dumitru Stăniloae, în „Persoană și comuniune. Prinos de cinstire Părintelui Profesor Academician Dumitru Stăniloae la împlinirea vârstei de 90 de ani”, Ed. Arhiepiscopiei Sibiu, Sibiu, 1993, p. 201.

²⁹ Anton Dumitriu, Homo universalis. Încercare asupra naturii realității umane, Eminescu, 1990, p. 99

Thus, in the grace that has become the reckoning, man is involved in his relationship with other people, a relationship in which people communicate to each other not mere ideas, but joys, pains, pities, helps, sorrows. It is only in people or in the relationships between them that the human being lives his life, growing up straight or crooked³⁰.

d) Freedom, the power of the nature of the human being and her collaboration with divine grace

If the being can only exist in the human person, and if the person can freely use the powers of being by grace, this means that freedom itself relies upon the human being. Freedom is potentially given in the human being, as is speech. Both are actualized by the person. But the fact that they are actualized in persons also results in their variability. The human person is hypostatic word and hypostatic freedom through his being. The persons, who are nothing but the human being that is particular to each person, are all hypostases springing from words and acts of grace or deeds freely exchanged in the dialogue between them. By their very nature, people are thus shown to be subject to no uniform law³¹.

They remain within the framework of nature, but nature itself has in its unbreakable structure possibilities by which people can unite in themselves the created with the Creator and transfigure the created nature by the powers of the Creator, but they can also oppose it to Him and thereby weaken it. But what makes man capable of arbitrary choices and acts? Man shows that he does not explain himself by his very self, even by his arbitrary, unmotivated acts, ungrounded in the natural grace of existence. He decides on these acts out of opposition to a supreme force, which imposes a responsibility on him from a rational basis, from the basis of sustaining and increasing his human nature in existence³².

There is the possibility of an opposition that can be accentuated to the point of indifference to one's own existence. In such a choice, freedom is deeper than existence, or prior to it. However, man is driven in his decision for indeterminacy by opposition to the fact that he is and therefore to the Power that brought him into existence. On the other hand, since this abyss of absolute indeterminacy could not be chosen by man if he did not exist, namely as a human person, this freedom is nevertheless supported by existence, namely personal existence³³. And since a person cannot exist without a human being, the freedom which appears to be absolutely indeterminate, or abysmal, is a freedom which has its basis in a being which the person has not given to himself, but which is created by God, which wishes to oppose the very existence given by God, and therefore God himself, without being able by this to nullify his existence as a work of God and as the basis of grace³⁴.

God's freedom is absolute. But man's freedom, although it is God's supreme gift, can be misunderstood by the creature, man, by coming to the wrong conclusions from the premises of freedom. Thus, the human being, feeling free, and not having her freedom related to God, can choose the illusion that she is not determined by anything, not even by God. From this she can wrongly deduce that her existence does not originate from God, and life remains meaningless. There is also the danger that man, turning away from God for

³⁰ Pr. Prof. Dr. D. Staniloae, *Natură și har...*, p. 202.

³¹ Sandu Frunză, *Pentru o metafizică a persoanei...*, p. 202.

³² Pr. Drd. Vasile Cîțirigă, *Transfigurarea creștinului...* p. 379.

³³ Pr. Prof. Dr. D. Staniloae, *Natură și har...*, p. 203.

³⁴ Diac. Drd. V. Neacșu, *Constituția ființei umane și relația ei cu cosmosul din perspectiva îndumnezeirii acesteia - viziunea teologică a părintelui Stăniloae, în „Revista Teologică”, serie nouă, anul XVIII, anul 2008, p. 146.*

various transient satisfactions, may use his freedom to pursue his own desires. This is why it is imperative to relate the freedom of the human person correctly to the freedom of God. Without this relationship, man works practically against his own self.

Our will, however, is not one with God's will. They remain two separate wills. If there were a will identical to God's, it could not be wrong, it could not decide contrary to God's will; we could not feel dependent on God and accountable to Him. But it is good to fulfil God's will by our will, to appropriate his grace by our will. To want what God wants. For He wants what our wills normally want: to make ourselves happy in union with Him. It is another way in which our will for interpersonal unity and eternity meets interpersonal unity, God's eternity, another reflection of His abyss in us³⁵. "Even if the grace of God is by nature saving, and the will of men is by nature saved (partaking of salvation), the grace which by nature moves and the will which by nature is saved can never be identical qualities, even if the purpose of both is one: the salvation of all and of each one individually, which God works and invites to, and the saints choose."³⁶. And "in nothing else does evil consist except in the differentiation of our reckoning from the will of God"³⁷.

2. THE HUMAN PERSON - DIALOGICAL STRUCTURE

The tendency towards the likeness of God was inscribed in the human being like a divine seal. "This was imprinted in his constitution by his creation as image of the Image. It is impossible for man to know this mystery"³⁸. Being created in the Image of God, the human person possesses certain attributes which give her the necessary abilities to be in dialogical communion with the Creator. This freedom of communication is described "in the Holy Tradition as a spiritual endowment or rational power or spirit"³⁹.

The entirety of the Scripture bears witness to the dialogical relationship between creature and Creator. This is evident in the many instances in which the chosen people addressed God through their representatives, and in the New Testament, through the incarnation of the Logos, the dialogical relationship is raised to the highest level, with man addressing directly to the incarnate Son of God, our brother according to his human nature assumed in his hypostasis.

The whole redemptive event of Christ can thus be interpreted as a comprehensive dialogue between God and man. Through His Incarnation, the kenotic emptying of His deity, the Word placed Himself on a level with man as His interlocutor, He takes him seriously and respects his freedom. He gives up His divine powers to make Himself accessible to man. This dialogical presence of Jesus is thus an expression of his being and his mission, in which the Father finally reveals himself in His own inner being⁴⁰.

Thus, the dialogue becomes the hallmark of biblically grounded personal understanding of God: God is at His essence dialogical! The remaining question concerns how this dialogue is to be understood if it is to be an appropriate category for theologically

³⁵ Pr. Prof. Dr. D. Staniloae, *Natură și har...* p. 203.

³⁶ Sfântul Maxim Mărturisitorul, *Scrieri și epistole hristologice și duhovnicești*, în „P.S.B.”, vol. 82, translated by Fr. Prof. Phd. D. Stăniloae, E.I.B.M.B.O.R., București, 1990, p. 94.

³⁷ Sfântul Maxim Mărturisitorul, *Scrieri și epistole hristologice...* p. 95.

³⁸ Sfântul Maxim Mărturisitorul, *Scrieri și epistole hristologice...* p. 73.

³⁹ Panayotis Nellas, *Omul, animal îndumnezeit, Perspective pentru antropologia ortodoxă*, ediția a II-a, translated by Fr. Ioan Ică Jr., Ed. Deisis, Sibiu, 1999, p. 60.

⁴⁰ Klaus Krämer, *Mission in dialogue*, în *Mission and Dialogue. Approaches to a Communicative Understanding of Mission*, Klaus Krämer and Klaus Vellguth (Eds.), Verlag Herder GmbH, Freiburg im Breisgau, 2012, p. 9.

formulated religious truth. Dialogue between people is remarkable first of all for its discursiveness.

The continuous interaction between questions and answers, address and response, marks dialogue as a communication that takes place in the conditions of space and time at the horizon of historicity. Here we see the biggest difference between human communication and communication between Trinitarian Persons. Walter Kasper has pointed out that personalistic categories can only be applied by analogy to the Trinity. This means that every similarity has a greater difference corresponding to it: "In God not only unity, but also distinctiveness and thereby the counterpart is greater than in interpersonal relations between humans, the divine persons are not less dialogical, but infinitely more dialogical than the human persons. Divine persons not only take part in dialogue but are dialogue"⁴¹. While the parties to a human dialogue meet in a relationship based on mutuality and they constantly exchange roles during the dialogue, a relationship with the divine being cannot be considered a relationship between two separate persons standing opposite each other: the Persons who constitute a divine being are identical with the relationships. Thus, in the divine being, relationships are not something super-added to a person, as is the case with human beings. Rather, the relationship is the person herself.

"In its nature, the person exists only as a relationship. More precisely, the first person does not engender in the sense that the act of engendering a son is added to the complete person, but the person is the act of engendering, of giving, of transmitting. It is identical with this act of devotion. Thus, one could define the first person as self-giving in knowledge and fruitful love; not the giver, in whom the act of self-giving is found, but this self-giving, the pure reality of the act"⁴².

If divine persons are not primarily dialogical with one another (as human persons are), but in a much more fundamental and dialogical sense in themselves, this means addressing the basic relationships that make any authentic dialogue possible in the first place. The Father gives the son his whole being. His is thus the perfect devotion, the self-giving that shares the Other entirely without reserve and whose expression is perfect. By the fact that the Father communicates to the Son his whole being, the act of revelation is already rooted in the divine being herself. The Son receives the divine being from the Father. He is therefore the perfect reception.

Thus, the first basic movement of perfect devotion is matched by a second perfect and unreserved openness to the Other. From this relationship between Father and Son, the Holy Spirit emerges as embodied love: what happens between Father and Son is more than a give and take - it has an autonomous relational quality and in it lies a deep dynamism and creativity (the dynamic of love)⁴³. This dialogical interpretation of intra-trinitarian relations has far-reaching consequences. As the term God designates the ultimate ground of reality, statements about the specific nature of this reality have direct relevance to the question of how human existence can be accessed. If this basic foundation is formulated dialogically in the above presented manner, the absolute dialogue perfected in the Trinitarian essence of God can be described in a sense as the transcendent condition of any authentic, real dialogue⁴⁴.

⁴¹ W. Kasper, *Der Gott Jesu Christi*, Mainz, 1982, p. 352.

⁴² W. Kasper, *Der Gott Jesu Christi...*, p. 353

⁴³ W. Kasper, *Der Gott Jesu Christi...* p. 356.

⁴⁴ Klaus Krämer, *Mission in dialogue...*, p. 10.

Man is a dialogical being because he is an iconic being. With the creation of man, the Logos changes his way of acting, as he did with the material world. There is a shift from the creation of the material world by the Word to the direct creation of man, thus creating a human person. By making man as a person, man becomes capable of conversing with God, being a logical being, created in the image of the Logos. The fact that he is in the image of the Logos is proved to us by the very constitution and by the rational work of man. Father Stăniloae, basing himself on our rational structure, states that, "our thought about reasonings brings out our quality of being logical beings after the Logos. Man, having an objective and subjective rationality, recognizes himself as having his source in the divine Logos, but he also permeates creation with his rationality."⁴⁵.

CONCLUSIONS

From the above it follows that the human person cannot be limited to a graceless existence outside the relationship of communion and dialogue with God. Being of paramount importance, the analysis of the human person aroused the interest of the most erudite men such as Plato, who, however, relying solely on rational deduction, could not penetrate the mystery of man. This is why philosophical theories such as trichotomy were dismantled by the truth of faith expressed by the Holy Fathers. The threat that today's society poses to the human person, whom the first wishes to remove from the sacred and anchor her only in materiality, is as real as it gets. For this reason, the dichotomous presentation of man is necessary, together with a correct understanding of his dichotomy, in the sense that the body is the subject of the soul and not vice versa. Only by correctly understanding this subjectification can one penetrate the mystery of the person, namely that of being 'in the Image of God'.

The fullness of the human being can only be defined from a theological perspective because of all the disciplines that analyse man, only the theological perspective presents him in his fullness as the crown of creation in full collaboration with uncreated divine grace. This collaboration, free and fully conscious, aims to present man in the most intimate relationship that can exist between God and creation, the human person being defined par excellence as a rational being, capable of communion and dialogue with the Creator. Without this particularly important valence of man, he would remain limited in his own rationality, which would never understand the supreme goal towards which he is striving, namely participation through grace in the love of the Holy Trinity.

⁴⁵ Pr. Dr. Marin D. Ciulei, *Antropologie Patristică*, Sirona, Alexandria, 1999, p. 209.

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ORTHODOX GNOSEOLOGY REFLECTED IN THE HOLY GOSPEL OF SAINT JOHN THE APOSTLE AND EVANGELIST

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ABSTRACT

In order to get to the knowledge of God, we must first know ourselves and the purpose that God has for each individual human person. Those who had the sense of spiritual knowledge knew God, but pretended not to know Him, perverting their consciences and freely preferring lies instead of Truth. Knowing God is done through prayer, through knowing the reasons planted by Him in creatures, and after that, according to the fulfillment of His commandments. Love is the perfect way to get to the knowledge of God.

Keywords: *Knowledge of God; gnoseology; orthodox; contemplation; Logos;*

INTRODUCTION

Regarding the knowledge of the divine relationships between the Persons of the Most Holy Trinity, and especially about the knowledge of the Person of the Son, of the incarnate Logos, the prologue of the Gospel of the Holy Apostle and Evangelist John is of great significance. The first verse, "*In the beginning was The Word and The Word was with God and The Word was God*"¹ (John 1: 1), has a deep dogmatic character (meaning/significance).

Saint Basil the Great would ask why Christ is called *Word, Logos*? The answer is also presented by him in an admirable way, thus: "*For what is called Word? To show you He came out from the mind! Why is it called Word? Because He was born without suffering! Why is it called Word? Because He is the image of The One who had begotten Him, showing in Himself, entirely, The One who had begotten Him; and without being separated in any way from The One who had begotten Him, He nevertheless has a perfect existence in Himself, just as our word fully expresses our thought; those that we have thought in our hearts, those we speak with our words; thus, our speech is the expression of the thought of our heart, because from the abundance of the heart the word is spoken (...)* Saint John called Him *Word to show you the birth without suffering from the Father, to theologize to you the perfect existence of the Son, and thereby show the connection outside of time, of the Son with the Father. That even our word, born of the mind, is born without suffering; it neither cuts, nor divides, nor flows; but the mind, remaining whole in its own being, gives birth to a whole and perfect word; and the word, going forth, has in it all the power of the mind that gave birth to it.*"²

¹ *Sfânta Evanghelie*, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune Ortodoxă, București, 2013, p. 13.

² Sfântul Vasile cel Mare, *Omilii și cuvântări*, colecția "Părinți și scriitori bisericești", Serie nouă, vol. 1, Editura Basilica a Patriarhiei Române, București, 2009, pp. 262-263.

1. SPIRITUAL KNOWLEDGE AND RATIONAL KNOWLEDGE

So we see that Saint Basil the Great makes an analogy, likening God - The Word (The Logos of the Father) to the human word. The Son - The Word is born without suffering from the Father, as the word *is born*, from the mind. Here it must be understood both as *nous*, meaning, the most profound part of the human being, but also as mind in the sense of reason or logic, from which the human word, thought or spoken, is born. Just as the human word expresses the spiritual background of the one who utters it, so God - The Word that is born from the Father, expresses something from the Father.

In this sense, the affirmation of The Lord Christ at the Last Supper must be understood, according to which "*He who has seen Me has seen the Father*" (John 14: 9). Christ is also called *Word* in order to show the manner of His Birth, that is, *without pain*, both from the Father, before all ages, as God according to divine nature, and from the Virgin Mary, in time, according to human nature. Just as the word of our speech is born without pain from our mind or logic, so Christ - The Word was born without pain from the Father, and then also without pain from the Virgin Mary.

In order to eliminate any doubt regarding the Person of the Son and especially not to give the Arians the opportunity to learn wrongly about Christ, Saint Basil continues the idea of the Son's birth without suffering, confessing: "*In the beginning was The Word. If the evangelist John had said: In the beginning was The Son, he would have introduced the idea of suffering along with the designation of Son, because with us humans, everything that is born is born in time and is born as a result of suffering; therefore John, anticipating this, said Word, correcting in advance the improper opinions, so that you may keep your soul unwounded.*"³

If in human births the joy of birth is doubled by physical pain, in the case of the Son of God things did not happen in that manner. His birth before time from the Father was without any suffering, and His birth in time from the Virgin Mary was also without suffering, without the pains of creation. This was possible, since it was fitting that She who gave birth to Christ should not suffer the pains of birth since She did not even taste the sweetness of human marriage, being ever Virgin and unmarried.

Interpreting the verse "*And The Word was with God*", *Saint Basil testifies that the Son was not in any place, because Christ who is boundless and whom the Heavens cannot contain, how can He be circumscribed by a defined space? The Word was with God, because "neither the Father is in a certain place nor the Son; nor can it be understood as contained by place (space): the Father is boundless, the Son is also boundless. Whatever you may think and wherever you may go with the spirit, you will find that everything is filled with God; and everywhere you will also find the Hypostasis of the Son.*"⁴ From here emerges the teaching about God being everywhere, or omnipresence of God. The Son, although He was with The Father, and is with The Father before all eternity, this does not refer to the presence of the Son in a circumscribed place, and which can therefore be measured, but refers to *the way of being* of Persons of the Most Holy Trinity. The dogma of the Most Holy Trinity cannot be fully understood by our mind, no matter how spiritual it may be, only to the extent that we widen our *vessel* of spiritual understanding, by shunning of passions.

John's Prologue is very important because it reveals to us the main directions in the knowledge of the Son of God, as a hypostasis different from that of The Father, but also in terms of the relationship with The Father. By following the path of knowledge about Christ,

3 Sfântul Vasile cel Mare, *Omilii și cuvântări*, p. 263

4 Sfântul Vasile cel Mare, *Omilii și cuvântări*, p. 263

we learn that His Birth, as God, from The Father was passion-free (without pain), just as the Birth from the Virgin Mary, according to human nature, was also passion-free, the Virgin suffering no corruption. Saint John Chrysostom therefore states the following: *"That's why he called Him Word, because he wanted to show that This Word is the Son of God, The Only-Begotten. Lest any should think that this birth was with passion, he prevented it and removed all evil suspicion by calling Him Word and clearly showing that The Son is from The Father and that His Birth is without passion."*⁵ Here we see the consensus of the Holy Fathers regarding the spiritual understanding of the first verse from the Saint John's Gospel. Both Saint John Chrysostom and Saint Basil the Great emphasize the fact that Christ was called *Word - Logos*, so that, among other things, can also be shown the Birth without pain or without any corruption of The Son from The Father.

Saint John the Evangelist nowhere in the Gospel uses the term "essence", *ousia*, speaking about God, thus wanting to make Him known to us through His works. The Savior is called *Light, The Light of the World* (John ch. 8). Saint John Chrysostom explains this appointment of Christ our Lord, emphasizing the fact that light clears the horizon of knowledge, removes the veil of darkness for the purpose of contemplative vision of God. Christ reveals to us The Father as He is, and as only He alone knows Him. Interpreting the word of the Savior who says: *"All that I have heard from the Father, I have made known to you"* (John 15: 15), the great hierarch affirms that the Apostle calls Christ *Life and Light* because *"through knowledge, He gave us given light, and through this life. A single name, or two or three or more, is by no means sufficient to teach us about God. But it is enough if even so, that through many names, we can come to know Him, even if not in a fully intelligible (distinguishable) manner."*⁶ According to apophatic theology, God is the One called by many names, but at the same time the One who cannot be named. All the names by which we call God, such as: *Love, Light, Wisdom*, are good, but they do not exhaust the depth of meanings and cannot fully define God and His being, which can only be partially comprehended by the human mind.

2. KNOWING CHRIST AS THE SON OF THE FATHER

Regarding the relationship between Christ and The Father, chapters 5 and 14 of Saint John's Gospel are of great significance. We know The Savior as of the same essence with The Father and co-worker with Him in the great plan of providence. Thus, the Savior affirms: *"I am in The Father and The Father in Me"* (John 14: 11); and *"I have been with you for so long and you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen The Father"* (John 14: 9); *Here is presented the mutual essence of The Father and The Son; and "That all may honor The Son as they honor The Father"* (John 5: 23); From this we learn that the honor due to The Father must not be greater than that due to The Son, but all three Trinitarian Persons must be honored and loved equally. *"As The Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also The Son gives life to whom He wills"* (John 5: 21); *"My Father works until now, and I work"* (John 5, 17); *"As The Father knows Me, I also know The Father. And I lay down my soul for the sheep"* (John 10, 15); *"I and The Father are One"* (John 10: 30)." From all these verses we understand the intrinsic connection between The Persons of The Holy Trinity, by virtue of perichoresis (mutual interpenetration or conpenetration) which defines Their way of being.

5 Sfântul Ioan Gură de Aur, *Omilii la Evanghelia după Ioan*, vol. 1, Colecția "Părinți și Scriitori bisericești", Serie nouă, tom. 15, Editura Basilica, București, 2016, pp. 43-44.

6 Sfântul Ioan Gură de Aur, *Omilii la Evanghelia după Ioan*, p. 44

The pure in heart will see God (Matthew 5: 8), that is, they will know Him as He is. Saint John Chrysostom, in his exposition of the Gospel of the Apostle John, inculcates a passion that stops man on the way to knowing God, this passion being *vain glory*. He affirms that the Jews did not crucify The Lord of glory out of ignorance, but out of arrogance, out of pride, because they preferred the glory of men to the imperishable glory that comes from God. Vain glory was the original sin into which our forefathers, Adam and Eve, fell, and with them all the human race, respectively all Adam.

From the passion of vain glory are born all the passions such as lustful love of the flesh (*filautia*), pride, gluttony, fornication, sloth, envy, murder and others. "*Vain glory is a dreadful thing, for those who fall into its nets, it enslaves their minds even in regard to things that are as clear as possible and convinces them to oppose the confessed truth.*"⁷

Interpreting verse 10 of chapter 1: "*He was in the world and through Him the world was made, but the world did not know Him*", the great Chrysostom states, "*Here he calls the world, the corrupt crowd, enslaved by worldly things, the lowly people, disturbed and out of their mind. But the wonderful friends of God, they all knew Him even before His appearance in the flesh. Christ Himself, calling him by name, speaks of the patriarch: «Abraham, our father, was glad to see My day; and he saw it and rejoiced» (John 8: 56)*"⁸. Those who had the sense of spiritual knowledge knew God, but pretended not to know Him, perverting their consciences and freely preferring lies instead of the Truth. Moreover, Christ, even before the Birth of the Virgin Mary, was known in the Spirit, through the visions of the Prophets of the Old Testament.

It is interesting that even in the Old Testament the One who spoke to mankind and the Prophets was not The Father, but also Christ - The Word, but at that time as The Word not yet incarnate. Christ revealed to the Prophets details about Himself such as His Birth, the place of His Birth, the manner of His Birth (in a miraculous way and without harming the virginity of His Mother), or details related to His life and Holy Passions (Isaiah, ch. 53), making these things known to mankind, hundreds of years before He was born of the Virgin.

Next, we learn that God The Son makes God The Father known to the world. Explaining the words, "*No one has ever seen God.*" *The Only-Begotten Son, Who is in the bosom of The Father, He made Him known*" (John 1: 18), Saint John Chrysostom emphasizes the universality of the Gospel message, as well as the necessity of spreading it to everyone. Therefore, the Saint states: "*The words made known show the teaching clearer and limpid, that He gave and directed not only to the Jews but also to the whole world. Not even the Jews took the Prophets into account, but to the Only-Begotten of God, the whole world bowed down and obeyed Him. So to make known shows in this case, the greater clarity of His teaching. This is why He is called Word (John 1: 1) and Angel of great counsel (Isaiah 9, 5).*"⁹

Christ did not do any extra deed, but only what the Father entrusted Him to do or say. In this sense, The Lord Christ never did his own will, because His human will, as a man, always submitted to His divine will (which, by the way, was the same as the will of The Father and The Holy Spirit). This happened as a result of the hypostatic union.

7 Sfântul Ioan Gură de Aur, *Omilia la Evanghelia după Ioan*, p. 59.

8 Sfântul Ioan Gură de Aur, *Omilia la Evanghelia după Ioan*, pp. 98-99.

9 Sfântul Ioan Gură de Aur, *Omilia la Evanghelia după Ioan*, p. 100

3. KNOWING CHRIST THROUGH HIS MIRACLES

About the knowledge of God from His miracles, the Savior's presence at the Wedding in Cana (John ch. 2) is very suggestive. An interpretation of Saint Maximus the Confessor shows us that *the good wine* is the good knowledge of God. Man must partake of the good wine first, that is, to know the Creator first of all, and only then to taste the least good wine, which means nothing but the knowledge of God, through His creatures, not directly. *"The best wine, which the Word brought later through His coming, i.e. the highest reason about God, the human nature must drink it at the beginning, as the first, and get drunk with it, and only then to know other wines, i.e. the reasons of things, as wines inferior to the first. For it is as just and proper as it is possible for nature to first know the Reason (God) for which it was made and only afterward to investigate the reasons of the things built for it."*¹⁰ In other words, man has a duty that in the matter of knowing God to focus on the personal knowledge of God in a direct way through prayer, and only then to try to know the Creator by means of the reasons planted by Him in the creatures. God is a tripersonal being and He lets Himself be known only as a Person, by another person. Man starts on the path of knowing God as a Person, from what he has in common with God, that is, from *the image of God* seeded in man. As man sanctifies himself, deifies himself, finds that he resembles God more and more (according to grace, not according to nature), he therefore finds that God is mirrored in him. This is possible because the image of The Father (by nature) is The Son, and the image of The Son (by grace) must be made, man.

The knowledge of The Father cannot be attained unless we first know The Son. In this sense, The Savior says: *"I am the Way, the Truth and the Life. No one comes to my Father except through Me"* (John 14: 6). Father Dumitru Stăniloae, interpreting this verse, states: *"Whoever knows Jesus as The Son of God also knows His Father as God, or God as His Father. God as Father cannot be known otherwise than through The Son; and the one who knows Christ as God knows God with certainty and at the same time as His Son."*¹¹ However, although they knew The Savior and were with Him day by day during the three and a half years of messianic activity, The Holy Apostles were afraid at the time of the Holy Passion of Christ (because The Holy Spirit had not yet descended and the Holy Apostles had not yet been filled with grace), except for the Holy Apostle and Evangelist John, the disciple who loved Christ the most and the only Apostle who followed Him to the Cross and even after that (being one of those who buried The Lord), together with the Mother of God and the holy women bearer of myrrh. Saint John the Evangelist had the strength to follow Christ to the place of the Crucifixion *not* because he was known to the Hierarch, but because *love casts out fear*.

Why was there this unjustified fear of the Holy Apostles? Because they were not yet full of grace, but also because they did not know The Lord of Glory well enough. They realized that Christ was superior to any man who existed until then, but they could not understand and could not receive His equality, consubstantiality (having the same nature) with The Father, this being something new to the human mind. This fact is confirmed by the Savior saying: *"If you had known Me, you would also have known My Father; but from now on you know Him and have seen Him"* (John 14: 7). What proves the doubt of the Holy

10 Sfântul Maxim Mărturisitorul, *Răspunsuri către Talasie, Răspuns la întrebarea 40*, în *Filocalia*, vol. 3, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune Ortodoxă, București, 2009, p. 175.

11 Pr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Chipul evanghelic al lui Iisus Hristos*, Editura Basilica, București, 2016, p. 319.

Apostles regarding the divinity of the Savior, is shown by the request of the Holy Apostle Philip: "*Lord, show us The Father and it is enough*" (John 14: 8).

In chapter 14, The Savior presents the teaching about equality with The Father, as we also find it in chapter 10: "*I and The Father are one*" (John 10: 30). The Savior rebukes Philip for his doubt, saying: "*I have been with you so long and you have not known Me, Philip?*" *He who has seen Me has seen The Father. How do you say: Show us The Father?*" (John 14: 9). But knowing God is not enough just knowing The Father and The Son. This is complete when we also know The Holy Spirit, The Comforter. He who knows The Holy Spirit has the gift of always having divine grace within him. Thus, The Savior says: "*I will ask The Father and He will give you another Comforter, to be with you forever: The Spirit of Truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him, nor knows Him; you know Him, that He remains with you and will be in you*" (John 14: 16-17).

"*All that I have heard from my Father, I have made known to you*" (John 15: 15). With this word, Christ shows us that we are no longer servants but have the status of His friends, because all that is necessary for the salvation of people and what The Son has seen from eternity with The Father, He shared with us. The consequence of not knowing God also consists in the persecution of His chosen ones, obviously by those who do not want to know God. The sons of this age, the sons of the flesh, being carnal themselves cannot understand the beauty of the Spirit. That is why Christ would warn the Holy Apostles about the persecutions coming from those who do not want to know God, testifying: "*If you were of the world, the world would love what is it's own;... If they persecuted Me they will persecute you... and all these things they will do to you because of My name, because they do not know the One who sent Me*" (John 15: 19-21).

The priestly prayer spoken by The Savior before His Holy Passion, spoken for Himself, for the Apostles and for all the faithful, has a significant gnoseological character, presenting the knowledge of God (*gnosis*) as eternal life itself: "*And this is eternal life: To know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom You have sent*" (John 17: 3), and again: "*I have shown Your Name to the people whom You have given Me from the world. They were Yours and You gave them to Me and they kept Your word. Now they know that all that You gave Me was from You... and they truly knew that I came from You, and they believed that You sent Me*" (John 17: 6-8).

Another way of knowing is the palpable, sensory, or measurable one, this being attributed to Saint Thomas the Apostle, unfairly called "*The Unbeliever*". The Savior, eight days after the Resurrection, entering through the locked doors in the pavilion of the Last Supper, in order to entrust also Saint Thomas of the Resurrection, said: "*Put your finger here and see My hands and bring your hand and put it in the My side, and be not faithless, but faithful. Thomas answered and said to Him: My Lord and my God! Jesus said to him: Because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed*" (John 20: 27-28). Father Dumitru Stăniloae, interpreting this evangelical passage, affirms the fact that: "*Jesus appeared to the Apostles on the eighth day after the first apparition, also through locked doors, doing this to strengthen the Apostles even more, but more so the future men, in the conviction about His Resurrection.*"¹²

The Savior was sent by The Father with the mission to save the world, that is, all the people who will believe in Christ and embody His commandments in concrete deeds. Saint John the Evangelist presents the virtue of love as one of the main themes of his Gospel.

12 Pr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Chipul evanghelic al lui Iisus Hristos*, p. 319.

This fact is not surprising, since he himself is "*the disciple whom Jesus loved*" (cf. John 19: 26), the one who, at The Last Supper, with an innocent and loving voice, asked Christ if he was not the one who will sell Him. Saint John the Evangelist was "*a slave of divine grace*"¹³.

4. KNOWLEDGE THROUGH LOVE OF GOD AND FELLOW MEN

Likeness to God has as its finality, perfect love. This is shown by Saint John of the Ladder in whose work *The Ladder*, the last step in man's ascent from the image to the likeness of God is love. In this sense, we must resemble God in grace, this can be understood from the Lord's words: "*That they may all be one, as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, so also these in Us may be one ... I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, and that the world may know that You sent Me and that You loved them as You loved Me*" (John 17: 21-23). The only one who knows the Father perfectly is Christ, and we acquire divine love to the extent that we strive to know God's plan for ourselves, and work with Him, to multiply the talents entrusted to us. In this sense, living in love with God and with our fellow men is the message of the Gospel: "*Righteous Father, the world has not known You, but I have known You, and they have known that You sent Me. And I made Your Name known to them, and I will make it known, so that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them*" (John 17: 25-26).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, we note that in order to get to know God, we must first know ourselves and the purpose that God has for each individual person. Knowing God is done through prayer, through knowing the reasons planted by Him in creatures, and then, according to the fulfillment of His commands. Love is the perfect way to know God. This reality is reinforced by the Apostle of Love in his first catholic (universal) Epistle, confessing: "*He who does not love has not known God, because God is love*" (1 John 4: 8).

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¹³ Pr. Daniil Sandu Tudor, *Acatiste*, Editura Christiana, București, 2009, p. 73.

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