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THE CONCEPT OF ESTRANGEMENT IN ST. GREGORY OF NYSSA THEOLOGY AS A RESPONSE TO THE MODERN PARADIGM OF THE ORTHODOX ROMANIAN DIASPORA

Ph.D. Ionuț VLĂDESCU,

Catholic Faculty of Theology, University of Bucharest

22 Decembre Street no. 244, Suceava, ROMANIA

E-mail: ionut772002@yahoo.com

Abstract

Knowledge has been a trait of man since the creation. The need to learn, to discover, to invent lead man to search and this search placed him between two planes:

- Physical (seen)
- Metaphysical (unseen).
- The paradigm by which man will decipher his existence will place him on two paths of knowledge:
- Knowledge from the outside that leads to the contemplation of an idea, a simulacrum,
- Inner knowledge (apophasis) that leads him to discover himself as a person created after The Image of God.

In the present study I will aim to analyze the concept of Estrangement, accentuated today by the excessive phenomenon of migration. By the hermeneutic key offered by Saint Gregory of Nyssa thinking, we discover the factors that are generating estrangement. When reporting to them we can find ways to know our identity, that is, God. Understanding the Gregorian vision as a straightener to God's commandments to be perceived not only in their letter but in the spirit. In this matter, we also pursued a practical direction by applying the riches of Gregorian thinking to the paradigm of the Orthodox diaspora. The motivation of the theme is a subjective one because the concept of Estrangement as a study in the postmodernist society is diluted to the geographical, cultural, religious space, leading to the Identity being that of leaving the continuous path towards completion in Christ the Son of God.

Keywords: Estrangement, Identity, Diaspora, Secularization, Desacralization, Postmodernity;

1. INTRODUCTION

Saint Gregory, bishop of Nyssa, is a well-known Church Father, and belongs to the Cappadocian triad. Coming from a select Christian family, he was born around 335-336 in Caesarea. Caesarea had a cosmopolitan character and was spoken Cappadocian and mostly Greek. There were many



renowned teachers and public schools, wealth and high officials, and Christianity, which had begun to spread here since the first century and which had now flourished, was seconded by idolatrous religions, thus creating a syncretism of religion and traditions.¹ These are the environmental conditions in which young Gregory will form. Initiation into religious training would begin in the family, especially from the elder brother St. Basil, but also from Sister Mercina², to whom he would later give the appellation of *didaskalos*. We do not have information about St. Gregory's studies; As a teacher, he was noted by his elder brother for the excellence of rhetoric and philosophy of the time, as well as his predecessor Christian writers.³ He was enthusiastic about medicine and science⁴. It is assumed that in the secular profession Gregory worked between 364-371. Meanwhile, at about the end of 365, his brother Basil left the hermitage and became the trusted assistant of the bishop of Caesarea, beginning the organization of ascetic communities, massively helping the poor and balancing the struggle with the Arians. In 370, after Eusebius⁴ death, he succeeded him in the episcopal see and was the leader of the Nicene Christians against whom the Arian emperor Valens would start a real war. When in 372 the decision was made to divide Cappadocia in two, the aim was to decrease St. Basil's influence, and thus hinder his actions. In need of support in this struggle, St. Basil wants the two Saints Gregory by his side, and Letter 58 is proof of this.⁵ Two episcopal sees are now strategically created on the dividing line: that of Sashimi and that of Nyssa. Although he did not want this position, being constrained⁶ by the call of his brother and mentor and brother Basil, Saint Gregory accepted the episcopate and became a speculative and argumentative theologian, offering support both through his rhetorical abilities and through the assimilated Greek culture, which gave him authority in the society of that time.⁷ In 379 he was present in Caesarea at the funeral of his brother Basil, who earlier, on his deathbed, asked Gregory to continue his work in Church.⁸ As he himself says in three of his writings of that year – *the Second Homily on the 40 Martyrs*, *The Homily Against the Usurers*, and *On the Making of Man* – he is Basil's successor in the problems that remained to be solved and the themes developed by him.

The new emperor of the East, Theodosius, entered Constantinople in 380 and, being devoted to the Nicene cause, wanted to settle the affairs of the Church by meeting the council of 381 to put an end to both the Arian controversy and two other heresies. Gregory is among the most remarkable speakers and defenders of the Nicene formula, so that starting with this council it will be necessary to express the Cappadocian Fathers regarding the Trinity, namely: „One and the same divine nature in three persons.”⁹ At the same time, Emperor Theodosius confirmed the decision of the council and appointed Gregory, Helladius of Caesarea, and Ortelius of Maltene as guarantors of Orthodoxy and responsible for the affairs

¹ Stelianos Papadopoulos, *Life of St. Basil the Great*, trans. Cornel Coman, Byzantine Publishing House, Bucharest, 2003, pp. 8-14

² Saint Gregory of Nyssa, *The letters, Introduction, Translation and Commentary* by Anna M. Silvas, Brill Ed., Boston, 2007, Ep. 19.6, p. 176

³ Saint Basil the Great, in *P.S.B.3, Epistles*, trans. and notes Fr. T. Bodogae, Ed. Basilica, Bucharest, 2010, p. 354

⁴ Saint Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity*, in Philip Schaff ed., *Christian Classics Ethereal Library, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Series II, Vol. 5: Gregory of Nyssa, Dogmatic Treaties*, WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company Grand Rapids, Michigan, Ch. 3, pp. 638-643

⁵ St. Basil the Great, *Epistles*, p. 135 "We have entered into a battle that grinds our body and torments our soul to such an extent that it surpasses our powers. And because you have entered into the same kind of struggle, you will have to help me with matters related to the Church."

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 360, "Gregory, at our insistence, forcibly received episcopal dignity."

⁷ Saint Gregory of Nyssa, *The letters...*, p. 29

⁸ Saint Gregory of Nyssa, *The letters...*, Ep. 3.26 to Eustathia and Ambrosia and Basilissa, p. 131 and Ep. 29.4 to his brother Peter, bishop of Severta, p. 207; in both letters the expression referring to brother Basil is ultra respectful, as he is called a saint and spiritual father of the community and family (probably with the exception of Macrina): "remember the holy Father whom I was deemed worthy to follow" and "When St. Basil fell asleep and I inherited the controversy with Eunomia's ... he was insulting to our father."

⁹ Fr. Prof. Dr. Ion Bria, *Dictionary of Orthodox Theology*, EIBMBOR, Bucharest, 1994, p. 356

of the Church in Pontus. Due to political considerations, the Third Canon recognizes the honorary primacy of the See of Constantinople in the East, giving it the title of New Rome¹⁰

Looking at Gregory's life, we notice in him a paradoxical combination: on the one hand there is a naïve and childish kindness manifested by the attitude he had towards certain events within the Church, on the other hand one feels a generous spirit devoted to the cause of Orthodoxy, doubled by a refined culture; As for freedom, he used it both when he wanted to be rebellious, and when he decided to obey. And if in his mysticism Gregory sees the ascent of the soul to perfection, passing from strength to strength, so the path of his life can be regarded in a way „as a gradual transcendence of reality”.¹¹

2. MODERN DESACRALIZATION VERSUS CAPPADOCIAN ATTITUDE

Modernity implicitly implies secularization. *Secularization* is a concept that unfolds semantically across areas of scientific ability, especially sociology and theology.¹² According to the paradigms of sociological discourse on *secularization*, it must be viewed primarily from a historical perspective.¹³ The forms of secularization in the preindustrial, industrial, and postindustrial eras, as well as the social meanings of *secularization*, are analyzed in detail by Joze Bajzek and Giancarlo Milanezi in *Sociology Della Religione*.¹⁴ But the analysis must begin with the semantics of the term *secularization*, as Jean Bauberot points out: „the term 'secularization' is polysemantic.”¹⁵

Etymologically, *secularization* comes from the Latin term *Saeculum*. Originally, it meant „forever and ever” or the whole of a time (duration). Not coincidentally, *plenary time* was measured as a century (one hundred years). Jean Delumeau captured very well the theological meaning of secularization when he referred to sixteenth-century Protestant Europe and to „the theological refusal, beginning with Luther, to establish a sacramental difference between pastors and laity.”¹⁶ The purely social meaning of *secularization* is that of „appropriation of ecclesiastical goods by civil power,” whether they are transfers related to the Protestant Reformation (in the sixteenth century and in the sixth century XVII), or property of the Catholic Church, renationalized and sold as national property during the French Revolution.¹⁷ At stake is a strong sense of *secularization*, one with profound negative connotations. He focuses on secularization as an ideological and political instrument of struggle against religion and the Church. This is why the English sociologist David Martin proposed replacing the term „secularization” with another „as long as any use of secularization reverberates through unpleasant echoes of its broader connotations.”¹⁸ Anthony Giddens points out that „religious organizations have progressively lost much of their former political and social influence, and this trend is noticeable throughout the world, although there are some exceptions.”¹⁹ Today, these exceptions are becoming more numerous, and this fact confirms again the return of much of the Western world to religious beliefs and practices, even in new ways. Unpublished. Another aspect of secularization refers to „the inability of the great religious systems

¹⁰ Nicolae Bănescu, *History of the Byzantine Empire I*, Anastasia Publishing House, Bucharest, 2000, p. 208

¹¹ Saint Basil the Great, *From Glory to Glory, texts from Gregory of Nyssa's mystical writings*, selected and introduced by J. Daniélou, translated, and edited; H. Murillo (Crestwood N.Y.: St Vladimir's Press, 1995), pp. 270–271

¹² For exhaustive remarks on the concept of *secularization*, see Fr. Dr. Ștefan Buchiu, *Orthodoxy and secularization*, Libra Publishing House, Bucharest, 1999, pp. 9-37.

¹³ Nicu Gavriluță, *Sociology of religions. Beliefs, rituals, ideologies*, Polirom, 2013, p. 233

¹⁴ Joze Bajzek, Giancarlo Milanesi, *Sociologia della Religione*, Editrice Elledici, Turin, 2006, pp. 165-179.

¹⁵ Jean Bauberot, "Secularization," in Jacques Bersani, *Encyclopedia of Religions*, Pro Editura Publishing House, Bucharest, 2008, p. 219.

¹⁶ Jean Delumeau, *waiting for dawn. A Christianity for Tomorrow*, translated by Giuliano Sfichi, Polirom Publishing House, Iasi, 2006, p. 205

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ David Martin, *The Religious and the Secular*, Schocket Books, New York, 1969, p. 16.

¹⁹ Anthony Giddens, *Sociology*, All Publishing House, Bucharest, 2010, p. 501.

to keep the different things together” dimensions of religious experience, individual and collective.”²⁰ The lack of control and adequate spiritual offer to the waiting structure of the younger generations has led to alienation from authentic Christian values. The Romanian Orthodox Diaspora does not make a discordant note in this respect. The wide European palette of influence and exposure to the two progressive postmodern currents defined: either through religious ignorance or through charismatic sentimentality made young Romanian Orthodox people pushed either to alienation or to religious fundamentalism.

The concept of secularization as a modern phenomenon of desacralization is nothing more than the redemption of the ancient Greek system of thought in which St. Gregory strove to awaken the soul entrenched by God through diligent enlightenment. Because the Greek archaic were alien to the thought that man could ever aspire to the gifts that the gods had, the *idea of immortality would have seemed unimaginable to them*, therefore the only thing they could expect was at best the lamenting shadow state in the kingdom of horror at Hades, and if they did not live their lives correctly, He would also have received the torments brought by the goddesses of remorse. If ordinary people became by death those without names, without distinct features, attached to an undifferentiated mass, without memory, *the funeral cult* they received *did not ensure after death the permanence of human individuality in its singularity*, but through it the continuity of the family or city was maintained.²¹ *Plato's idea of individual responsibility* is exemplified by choosing the daimon for the next life; therefore, a good daimon won for the life in progress assumes that man has lived the previous predominantly virtuous, (and the daimon is one class higher on the scale of that virtue), and a bad one means a past vicious life; therefore man can evolve through a contemplative life, so that instead of daimon he has a guide a god.²²

The response of the Great Cappadocian Fathers, especially St. Gregory, to this system was masterfully given by defining the concept of the person as a solution to industrious estrangement (as Father Ioannis Papadopoulos pointed out). If we were to create a hermeneutical bridge in the time of the Great Cappadocian Fathers, we would benefit from the just key to understanding that God is a Person, and we have been given the privilege of being personal through Jesus Christ, a situation that justifies the value of every man: man, woman, child, embryo, poor, rich, free or not.²³ And *accepting*

„*The apophatic distinction between the divine being and the Persons of the Trinity and emphasizing common energies*”, they managed to express the ineffable without introducing an ontological necessity into the deity, and the person is not regarded in the sense of absolute otherness.²⁴

3. THE CONCEPT OF ALIENATION

St. Gregory uses the following phrase to pave the way for return from estrangement: „Invisible in His nature, God becomes visible through His activities insofar as He can be contemplated through certain properties *connected* with Him.”²⁵ Here, as with other theological and spiritual writings, Cappadocian uses a specific expression, linking the theme of *ἐνέργεια* to the use of the accusative and with the meaning of *περί* - all around to express that all that is considered in relation to the divine, which is eternal and infinite, always remains unchanged, that is, *ἐνεργείας* are *immutable and inseparable from*

²⁰ Mircea Mandache, "The process of secularization and modernization of European society", in *Romanian Journal of Sociology*, year X, new series, no. 1-2, 1999, p. 27

²¹ Jean-Pierre Vernant, *Mortals and Immortals*, Collected Essays, Ed. Froma I. Zeitlin, Pub. Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1991, p. 123, Jean-Pierre Vernant, *Myth and Thought among the Greeks*, Zone Books, New York, 2006, p.326.

²² Plotinus, *Opere III*, 15, 4.3(1-24), trans., Andrei Cornea, Humanitas Publishing House, Bucharest, 2009, p. 395

²³ Ioannis Panagopoulos, *Sýnaxi*, no. 13 and 14, 1985, assoc. prof. Ioan Ică jun., *Person and/or ontology in contemporary Orthodox thought*, in *Person and communion*, Ed. Orthodox Archdiocese Sibiu, 1993, pp. 369-370

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p.271

²⁵ Gregory of Nyssa, *About the Beatitudes* Bilingual Ed., trans. O. Terminalia, Ed. Polirom, Iași, 2010, p.381

the divine nature.”²⁶ and become the point at which the divine immanent meets economically with the soul of man as described in the mystical interpretation of Song of Solomon.²⁷

The difficulty in understanding the concept of alienation stems from understanding the etymological meaning of the word in Greek. The verb *ἀπαλλοτριόω* translates as: to alienate, to be removed from one's intimacy and friendship, to be made a stranger, not to participate²⁸ and is composed of the preposition *ἀπό* - which means *from, far from* and the verb *ἀλλοτριόω*. A distinctive feature of the terminology is Psalm 57, which presents the concept hyperbolized when estrangement has as its connotation the relationship between God and man.

„Alienated (*ἀπηλλοτριώθησαν*) sinners from birth, lost from the womb.”²⁹ St. Paul, in the *Epistle to the Colossians*, when emphasizing man's state of *inauthenticity*, enmity toward God and himself through sin, uses the term *alienated*: „But you, who were once *estranged* (*καὶ ὑμεῖς ποτε ὄντας ἀπηλλοτριωμένους*) and enemies with your minds to evil things, has now reconciled you.”³⁰ Alienation is regarded as a loss of intimacy with God, of a ceded right.

Knowingly. In the language of St. Gregory and the great Cappadocian fathers in general, the meaning of alienation takes on a special connotation in the sense that it refers to the breaking of existing communion between persons, and the ensuing consequences.³¹

In addition to the philosophical meaning of the concept of alienation, Plato introduces the medical meaning of alienation. Thus, the adjective „stranger” refers to something *abnormal* Which hinders some people in defending or attacking in battle: „A poor weakling, sunburned, seated in battle with a rich man, brought up in the shade, *with many meats* (*ἔχοντι σάρκας ἀλλοτρίας*) sees the rich man panting and in trouble.”³² Also in *Republic*, *Aliens* are also associated with the idea of *enemy*, as opposed to those close to them (*οἰκεῖον*), related (*συγγενές*) „I affirm that the Greek race is related to itself and belongs to the same family (*Ἑλληνικὸν γένος αὐτὸ αὐτῷ οἰκεῖον εἶναι καὶ συγγενές*), but that he is alien and barbarous to another nation (*τῷ δὲ βαρβαρικῷ ὀθνεῖόν τε καὶ ἀλλότριον*)”.³³ The intersection between the two systems of thought: religious – philosophical in Cappadocia determined the need to define the concept of alienation in the paradigm of that time, which is strikingly like the paradigm of contemporaneity, namely, alienation as rupture, as total separation between man and God. If the philosophical system defines alienation as ignorance, deception, abnormality, alienation in the Christian sense means leaving by disobedience from Divine commandments.

Defining alienation in terms of experiences – experimentation, the gnostic concept, especially the Marcionism one, introduces the ontological aspect of alienation. Life, the world, nature, deity, all have the attribute of *stranger* in Gnostic literature, and Marcion's expressions are those of *alien god, stranger, or unknown*.³⁴ The gnostic man, like modern man, is a being thrown from his luminous dwelling into an alien world of darkness, forced to submit to an alien destiny that accustomed him to this state of alienation, a situation that generates another alienation from his transcendent origin and no longer knows that there is a stranger here, So the anguish of the gnostic is to be caught between two kinds of estrangement.³⁵ The only chance of individual and universal salvation present in Gnostic eschatology

²⁶ Giulio Maspero, *Energy*, in *The Brill Dictionary of Gregory of Nyssa*, p. 259

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 261

²⁸ *Septuagint*, Jerem. 17,16-17 <http://www.elopos.net/elpenor/greek-texts/Septuagint/chapter.asp?book=44&page=17>

²⁹ *Thayer's Greek Lexicon*, Electronic Db, 2011 by Biblesoft, Inc., in <http://bibleapps.com/greek/526.htm>

³⁰ *The N.T.*, To the Colossians, 1.21, <http://www.elopos.net/elpenor/greek-texts/new-testament/Colossians/1.asp>

³¹ Fr. Prof. Dr. Vasile Răducuă, *The Anthropology of Saint Gregory of Nyssa – The Fall into Sin and the Restoration of Man*, EIBMBOR, Bucharest, 1996, p. 167

³² Plato, *Gorgias*, trans., notes Alex. Cizek, Ed. Paideia, Bucharest, 2003, 482c, p. 71

³³ Idem, *Euthyphro*, in *Vol. 1* trans. by Harold North Fowler, introduction by W.R.M. Lamb. Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press; London, William Heinemann Ltd. 1966, 4b, in <http://data.perseus.org/citations/urn:cts:greekLit:tlg0059.tlg001.perseus-eng1:4b>

³⁴ Hans Jonas, *The gnostic religion: the message of the alien God and the beginnings of Christianity* Beacon Press, Boston, 2001, p. 49

³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 49-50

reported to alienation is gnosis. Defined as the only type of knowledge that offers the practical possibility of alienation and escape from the mundane through various techniques and bodily death (because the body is considered not only a dungeon, but also something evil). If the first two estrangements are negative, the one obtained by gnosis is positive.³⁶ Although Gnosticism is a slippage and a heresy, yet the drama of the one caught in this system is real, and the alienation felt is also genuine, although the imaginative scaffolding of created mythologies is false and aberrant, especially those grafted into Christian spirituality.

The response and solution offered by the Great Cappadocian Brethren to the Gnostic deviations can be considered the paradigm response of the Orthodox Christian alienated from the nation and the Church, overwhelmed by the dual neo gnostic system with reference: either towards excessive transcendence restricting the divine, deity to a mere inaccessible idea, or towards exacerbated immanence restricting the Divine to simplicity of a sensory perception. For neo-Gnostics, alienation is the remoteness of being, free, volitional from God.³⁷

Emphasizing that it is free will that is responsible for the fall of both the devil and man, St. Basil refers to other angels, such as Michael, who responsibly did not turn away from God, and defines evil as lack of personal communion with Him, *rupture - estrangement*: „This is evil: *alienation* from God.³⁸ - ἡ τοῦ Θεοῦ ἀλλοτριωσις.³⁹ Once this separation has occurred, evil makes its way into all creation, and man adds passion after passion, weakening his will. In need of a universal restoration, Jesus Christ God performs this act in Himself for all mankind, suffering all but sin and offering man the model to follow, because: „The economy of God and our Savior for the salvation of the human race consists in rising from the fall, and bringing it back from *the alienation - ἀλλοτριώσεως - brought about by disobedience*, into intimacy with God.”⁴⁰ St. Basil did not provide much detail about the initial estrangement of the proto-fathers in his works, leaving this to his brother, Gregory of Nyssa, who promptly and acrimoniously acquitted himself of this task. By „fasting true, which is *estrangement from sin*” - κακοῦ ἀλλοτριώσις⁴¹ - man appropriates salvation subjectively, the basis of knowledge of this being laid in man from the beginning of creation, namely through the natural tendency to strive for what is authentic and *remoteness - alienation* from what is not specific to him (it is about the same couple of notions ἀλλοτριώσις - οἰκειώσις „A natural law is built into us which instructs us to approach the good and to *alienate ourselves* (λόγος οἰκειώσιν ἡμῖν τοῦ καλοῦ, καὶ ἀλλοτριώσιν)—from those that harm us.”⁴²

St. Gregory of Nyssa, like the other two Great Cappadocian Brethren, uses this notion, noting in his writings the existence of over fifty occurrences of ἀλλοτριώσις or its derivatives. What is the specific note of the Gregorian teaching on alienation, however, is a couple of metaphysical movements opposed to each other: *estrangement from evil as the beginning of happiness*,⁴³ and *estrangement from true life*, that is, sin, as refusal and loss of participation in God.⁴⁴ These directions are evidenced by the conditions in which the drama of man occurred, that is, original sin, by its significance for all creation, by the path taken by humanity and by each of us, and most importantly: marking the way by which we can return to the Good in heaven through the Redeemer Jesus Christ and through the work of subjective salvation.

³⁶ Ioan Petru Culianu, *Gnosticism and Modern Thought: Hans Jonas*, trans. Maria-M. Angheliescu and Șerban Angheliescu, Polirom Publishing House, Iași, 2006, p. 228

³⁷ Endre von Ivánka, *Hellenic and Christian in the Spiritual Life of Early Byzantium*, trans. and notes Vasile Carabe, Nemira Publishing House, Bucharest, 2013

³⁸ St. Basil the Great, *Homily IX, That God is not the author of evils*, in *P.S.B. 17*, VIII, p. 444

³⁹ Idem, *On the Holy Spirit*, in *P.S.B. 12, Writings III*, trans., Fr. C. Cornițescu and T. Bodogae, EIBMBOR, Bucharest, 1988, XV, p. 49

⁴⁰ Saint Basil the Great on the *Holy Spirit*, in *P.S.B. 12, Writings III*, trans, C. Cornițescu and Fr. T. Bodogae, EIBMBOR, Bucharest, 1988, XV, p. 49

⁴¹ Idem, *Homily II, On Fasting*, in *P.S.B. 17*, VII, p. 363

⁴² Idem, *Homily VII to the Hexaemeron*, in *P.S.B. 17*, V, p. 153

⁴³ St. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Titles of the Psalms*, in *PSB 30, Writings II*, I, p. 137

⁴⁴ Saint Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Life of Moses*, trans. and notes Fr. Ioan Buga, Ed. Sfântul Gheorghe-Vechi, Bucharest, 1995, pp. 148-162

(ἐπέκτασις) The ascent of the soul to God – solution for the redemption of Orthodox identity.

From all the Gregorian works appears the idea of alteration and the undiminishing of the divine image in fallen man, that is, man is not deprived of personhood, only that man *no longer shines* because he has become like an iron *blackened by the rust of sin*, or is hidden by a stain that defiles the heart, or in other words: „*He has put on the corrupt and clayey image of sin.*”⁴⁵ Man can only be washed by the water of virtue, because the beauty of the image *shines all the more the closer man is to God*. Alienation from Him *brings the opposite effect* and shame (*αἰσχύνη*) of the inclination to animality that can be remedied by freeing oneself from sins and recovering trust instead of hiding and ashamed from God. Although there was no destruction of the divine image in man through the sin of the proto-parents, the consequences of his blackening are felt *by the weakening of traits* such as freedom of will that now inclines to pleasure, knowledge diluted *by the loss of certain elements* such as true life, happiness, winging by the Holy Spirit.⁴⁶ Through economy, the Son of God also becomes the Son of Man, but not an ordinary one, but the first fruits (first fruits of) the new humanity, which is why He is also called the First of many brethren, or the Firstborn of the dead, or the Good Shepherd, and because Paul said that Christ is *the head of the Church* and Christians are *members of her body*.

St. Gregory develops the idea of collaterality, *that is, the unity of threads between the head and each part of the body*.⁴⁷ So here are the prerequisites for humanity's return from the state of alienation: God puts on our flesh, becomes man, and for all of us He wins.

For in Christ there is something uncreated, that is, the eternal and creative deity of all, and something created, that is, the body taken from our flesh, for „having appropriated as His first fruits (*ἀπαρχή*) the perishable disposition of the flesh, which He took upon Himself through incorruptible virginity, He sanctifies with it, in incorruption, the common nature, that is, the Church, His body.”⁴⁸ The fact that God bends down to us, stretching out His hands to lift us from the fall, is not forced salvation or automatism, but is a synergistic act; therefore, a personal, committed, and free yes is needed on our part as long as we live in the flesh in response to this saving love.

St. Gregory presents life as the picture that man must paint with various colors (virtues), the first of which is humility and the others according to the model of Christ.⁴⁹ Freedom of choice is not the only factor that was responsible for man's fall, but also the lack of love of the proto-fathers for God who chose the side of the enemy.⁵⁰ We see that the choice between obedience and the desire induced by the serpent becomes a fiery test that man must pass, and the response to disobedience to God's command is the first form of selfishness, self-esteem, and at the same time alienation from the Creator. The breaking of communion with God created a first form of anatomy of going outside the divine law. And the entrance into the life of sin that is made in the image of the face of the enemy.⁵¹

Unfortunately, *by alienating from God*, man deviates from what was prepared for him, namely deification, to move in another direction than the right one, and thus *alienates himself, even by himself*, not knowing that he is running in the wrong direction and *gaining shame*, instead of the filial trust (*παρησία*) he has lost, curse, suffering, sickness, death, instead of benefits and eternal life.⁵² Calling sin or passion not only those which are visible by works (theft, rapture, adultery, covetousness, fornication and disease of the tongue, and all visible race of sins), but also those which destroy souls invisibly (envy, unbelief, evil evils, cunning, lust of the unjust, hatred, haughtiness, vainglory, and the like). Gregory

⁴⁵ St. Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity*, XII, in Philip Schaff ed., *Christian Classics Ethereal Library, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Series II, Vol. 5: Gregory of Nyssa, Dogmatic Treaties*, WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company Grand Rapids, Michigan, Ch. 3, p. 664

⁴⁶ Lucas Francisco Mateo-Seco, *Ashine*, in *Brill Dictionary of Gregory of Nyssa*, p. 13

⁴⁷ St. Gregory of Nyssa, *On Perfection*, in *P.S.B. 30, Writings II*, p.469

⁴⁸ *Idem*, Song ... XVI, p. 312

⁴⁹ St. Gregory of Nyssa *Correct explanation to the book of Ecclesiastes*, in *PSB 30, Writings II*, p.225

⁵⁰ *Idem*, *Contre Eunomie II*, in *PG 45, 545 AB*, or *Contre Eunomie I*, in Philip Schaff ed., *Op. Cit.*, book II,13, p. 243

⁵¹ *Idem*, *Beatitudes*, IV, p. 386

⁵² *Idem*, *the Great ...*, VI, p. 299

likens them all to Pharaoh's army, which was drowned by God in the Red Sea. Therefore, the man who is baptized must drown all Egyptians, and if he has not done so completely, that is, mysteriously, he must strive to pluck the thorns of these sins from the soul, because wheat and tares cannot be cultivated on the same ground of the heart.⁵³ According to Gregory, the whole sacramental life, together with one's own effort to increase virtues and kill passions, constitutes *a single path on which man must walk* in order to ascend spiritually and unite with God, for without the Mysteries placed by Christ at man's disposal, *he cannot attain his true nature*, that is, his vocation, which is deification.⁵⁴

Epistasis (ἐπέκτασις) and mysticism. According to the Gregorian view of virtue as an endless increase in good (perfection cannot be reached, for it „has only indeterminacy as its boundaries”), the soul's ascent to God is also seen as *a crescendo that continues into eternity*. This process, ἐπέκτασις, is the keystone of St. Gregory's anthropology and supports the argument of *God's infinity* and the fact that *the human person is regarded as specially created so that he can grow indefinitely*, a vision that presupposes a deep respect for every human being. Epistasis is a chain of *spiritual acquisitions* and *love* that materializes in *debuts for a new stage*, the one in which man wants more and more, and when he receives more intensely what he wanted, the series continues by reiteration - without ever reaching satiety, because the desire grows as it is fulfilled.⁵⁵

Daily alienation. Moving from the Gregorian paradigm to the alienation characteristic of everyday life, we see the gravitation of modern humans towards himself, overwhelmed by egoism and regimented in the spiral of satisfying the needs imposed increasingly by artificially created models intensely circulated by the media. Alienation thus becomes a seal placed in our time that we will approach from the edifying perspective of the Church's mission and the assiduous struggle to redeem the Romanian Orthodox identity:

- **The relationship between man and God** Tacitly or explicitly, most Europeans declare themselves Christians, which should channel their lives on a path of spiritual growth and salvation. Unfortunately, modern humans are quite indifferent to the demands of religious life, therefore, although *Christianity is incompatible with alienation and mercantile morality*, because it does not really live God, modern humans build a simulacrum of syncretic faith. Orthodoxy, Catholicism and Protestantism receive elements from various esoteric influences: magic, bioenergy, spiritualism, radiesthesia, esotericism, new age. There are features of pagan celebrations that they raise. At the level of celebration in school or outside it (Halloween, Valentine Day), which allows a rapid improvement of life here, as well as the transition to polytheism, *the new gods being the machine and the efficiency* to which the self is added, by proclaiming *human rights*.⁵⁶
- **Man to himself.** Not being oriented towards God, man turns to self-narcissism and selfishness, perceiving himself as an organized system of desires that need to be satisfied as quickly as possible, and at the same time visualizing himself as a commodity to be valued as well as possible on the market. Caught up in work or entertainment, he finds no point in being alone with himself, in asking genuine questions about what gifts he has and what he wants, or why he came into the world. Nicole Aubert (psychologist, psychiatrist, and professor at the University of Paris), calling today's man hypermodern, characterizes him as an excess of consumption and pleasure, but also subject to an excess of pressure, demand and stress, which is why *his related pathologies are also marked by excess: anorexia, bulimia, physical and mental exhaustion*.⁵⁷ Wanting to live everything to the fullest, modern man has a contradictory behavior, including the desire to attain an absolute manifested by *overcoming himself, an example being extreme sports*. And what he initially thought

⁵³ *Idem, On the Godly Order of Life and the True Need*, in *PSB* 29, p. 461

⁵⁴ *Idem, On Perfection*, in *P.S.B. 30, Writings II*, p. 466

⁵⁵ St. Gregory of Nyssa, *Interpretation of the Song of Solomon*, in *P.S.B. 29, Man. XI* p. 259

⁵⁶ Erich Fromm, *Man in capitalist society*, in *Selected Texts I*, trans. I. Răceanu and N. Frigorie, Ed. Politic, Bucharest, 1983, p. 175

⁵⁷ Nicole Aubert, *L'individu hypermoderne: vers une mutation anthropologique?* colloque organize par l'ESCP-EAP et le laboratories de Changement Social de university Paris 9 Dauphine, 8 au 11 September 2003, p. 5

would be a benefit (the establishment of rights guaranteed by society) gradually turned into „*the tyranny of individual rights over citizenship rights*.”⁵⁸ Also professing a *cult of urgency*.

Modern thinks he can violence and overcome time with the help of the Internet, mail, telephone, etc., but his pace is no longer natural, but accelerated and restless.⁵⁹ Living deep estrangement, some people come to feel so vulnerable that they are ready to give up their freedom and initiative in exchange for help, and society already has *trained technicians* who, as professionals and under the name of *life instructors or life coaches*, direct them from several points of view: as a therapist, mentor, business advisor, friend, mother, etc.⁶⁰

- **Man's relationship with his fellowmen** Man was created as a dialogical and flourishing being through communion; therefore, if he lacks authentic relationships, based from the start on mutual respect and appreciation, whether it is family or not, shockwaves are generated that hit him in the depths of his being. The first to experience the drama of alienation *are children*, whether they belong to single-parent families or not, rich, or poor, and the reason is that *parents have to work hard* at home or abroad to survive, or because, having prosperous businesses, they want to expand them. Due to the long time, they spend away from each other, children receive education in kindergartens with extended hours, go to afterschool, are supervised by nannies, and when after 6 pm they meet their parents at home, the fatigue accumulated by everyone takes its toll. Also due to alienation and household activities that must be done, children are left to watch unnatural programs on TV or computer for their age, or they watch too much, tiring their eyes and nervous system, becoming electronically dependent. Added to this is the fact that a short search on the Internet can lead to *inappropriate advertisements*, who mutilate the soul of children. *Exposed to a media attack* – just a pass in front of a newspaper and magazine stand, or the neighbor on the subway or bus with the newspaper open, forces the eyes to receive unwanted images – children and young people are not protected by the alienated society in which they live, due to the fact that everyone *has the right* to exhibit or sell, without the competent bodies taking any action. After the first stage of human life has been subjected to the above animal stimuli, adolescence also comes with all the hormonal transformations that are waiting only for a small impulse to get out of the queen. Thus, emotionally bombarded with commercials, movies, and erotic literature, plus frustrations experienced in the family, lack of supervision, and the fact that people have increasingly begun to bare their bodies, young people begin to slip: they seek occasional sexual fulfillment, they take drugs in search of new sensations, or they commit suicide because they no longer find meaning in life. The elevated level of technology and the multiplying unfulfillments make people no longer look for solutions in real life by sharing worries with loved ones or offering and receiving emotional support from them, but *to move into the realm of virtuality*, as an escape from loneliness and existential crisis. And in married couples, estrangement creeps in for multiple reasons such as: Little time spent together, the gradual transformation that the life partner undergoes from a loved one to a useful person, the appearance of children and the dispute over who should take better care of them, the different level of education and the pursuit of offers that can propel them into social life, etc. It is a type of phobia called anthropomorphism, and it develops due to selfishness, but also alienation, fear of loneliness, including the one lived in two.

Fr. Philotheos Pharos stated that people are in desperate need of the Church: „Unfortunately, no one is willing to make it up for those who seek it, because sacrifice is needed, and we all wait. Deed from others, while we limit ourselves to words.”⁶¹ The liturgy is not for individualistic salvation, yet we seem not to care about those around us, we do not try to know them, and years can pass without greeting each other, not realizing that lack of communion is hell. In Western society, but also in our country after

⁵⁸ Marcel Gauchet, *The Exit from Religion – The Path of Secularism*, trans. Mona Antohi, Humanitas Publishing House, Bucharest, 1998, pp. 92-93, p. 157.

⁵⁹ David Le Breton, *Anthropology of the Body and Modernity*, trans. D. Lică, Ed. Amarcord, Timișoara, 2002, p. 131

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 227

⁶¹ Fr. Philotheos Pharos, *The Alienation of the Christian Ethos*, trans. G. Mândrlă, Platytera Publishing House, Bucharest, 2004, p.98

1989, man is considered as accomplished if he owns material goods, power and achievements; Unfortunately, the translation of this ethos has also made its presence felt „in church publications through the praise that is given to the administration, otherwise implying that things seem to be in order, and that sin does not trouble us.”⁶²

4. CONCLUSIONS

The contemporary paradigm of the person is defined by superficiality, in which alienation becomes haunting, and the notion of identity is given by a context of superficiality, saturated with contradictory opinions, with truth claims, in which the only accessible framework for defining identity is „diversity.” No wonder man's main trait is alienation. If man does not know who he is, what he must do, where he comes from and where he is going, the answers he will give to life will have undesirable consequences, he can no longer find meaning in life and thus he will become an „alienated”. The answer to this current paradigm is found in the work of St. Gregory of Nyssa, who aligns himself with the teaching of the Holy Fathers and discovers a path of complete freedom and definition of identity that is contrary to modern logic and which apparently seems lost, but which is the only way to find identity. Thus Alienation is not given by geographical, political or cultural space, but it is sin that reveals aspects that are sometimes imperceptible through which man becomes alienated from God, who offers him in the ecclesial space the rediscovery of identity given in Christ (Ephesians 1) and eternity by embarking on the path of striving towards deification. With this offer there is also the reverse, namely sin, which means alienation, fall, death. Thus, alienation is a theme that pertains to the whole spectrum of life. That is why solutions like those offered by St. Gregory are timelier than ever. The hermeneutical patristic keys it offers are the armor and solution for any soul thirsting for the absolute but bound by the natural drive through which it looks to fulfill it through chimeras and surrogates. St. Gregory's solution, which offers the anthropological paradigm of man's identity as a person created in the image and likeness of the Holy Trinity, is antithetical to the cymbal of sin which, once committed, leads to loss of intimacy with God and alienation. Only Christ can be the only remedy for solving the diagnosis of estrangement.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 134

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