

## THE CONFLUENCE BETWEEN CHRISTIANITY AND NEOPLATONISM: TRIADODOLOGY AND ANTHROPOLOGY

Assistant Lecturer PhD. Nicușor MORLOVA,  
Ovidius” University of Constanța  
ROMANIA  
Email: nicumorlova@gmail.com

### ABSTRACT

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

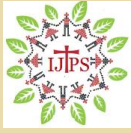
**Keywords:** *theology; Neoplatonism; triadology; terminology; anthropology;*

### INTRODUCTION

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

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

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



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

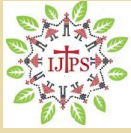
From early on, there were tendencies to reconcile philosophy and the Christian faith, especially from the Holy Fathers. Theology, without losing its autonomy, used the terminology and reasoning of the philosophical discourse to interpretatively approach theological problems, but also to counteract the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

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

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

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

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



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

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

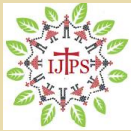
The Gnostics, too, made a similar effort to imbue Christianity with syncretistic ideas. But none of these movements prevailed. Only the symbiosis between Christianity and Greek philosophy remained, with the sole aim of formulating the dogmas and all the truths of faith as accurately as possible. This,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

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

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

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

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



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

If we are used to accepting the influence of Neoplatonism on some Christian authors and Christian thought, as it was understood after the 4th century, what must be recovered, in order to be able to look at the more complete picture of a dialectic philosophy-theology, is the influence that Christian living and teaching had on the thinking of the Neoplatonists. Neoplatonism can exert its attraction and influence on Christian authors concerned with philosophy or the expression and legitimization of mystical experience and Christian life because it first suffered the influence of these Christian contents. The idea of a unique God, who can be understood through contemplation and known through ecstasy, the effort to distance the spiritual life from the needs of the body, asceticism, charity, important characteristics of the Neoplatonism of Plotinus and Porphyry, bring the Christian doctrine much closer, in depth, to the Neoplatonic one. Neoplatonic thought taken to its purest sources shows itself as a mystical spiritualism much closer to the Christian faith than to pagan formalism, increasingly emptied of life<sup>1</sup>. Arguably, in defending paganism, Neoplatonism was trying to save its intellectual freedom by understanding that there was a new set of truths in Christianity that would shape any further attempts at free thought.

Philosophy was obliged to respond to a new challenge, to the spirit of the time, which was religious and, in part, Christian. What stands in the middle, the stake of the whole confrontation, is the interpretative exclusivity of a tradition, the legitimacy of approaching the problem of truth, the nature of reality and the consequences of the answers that will be given. The comments of both philosophers and theologians seem to be based, sometimes without proving, on the value supremacy of either Christianity or Neoplatonism. The isolation of specific elements is sought and the lack of influence and thus the autonomy of one of the systems is argued. These positions are the answer to another obvious, overlooked because it is implicit, namely the historical proximity, the mutual vital influence and the complete inseparability of the two systems in their concrete evolution. One asks what Christianity would have been without Neoplatonism when one can just as validly ask what Neoplatonism would have been without Christianity? And this even related to its appearance. We believe that the primary, deep influence is from Christianity to Neoplatonism, and the secondary, formal, theoretical influence comes from Neoplatonism to Christianity. Neoplatonism flirts with the suggestions of Christian teaching, but processes them in its own way, based on its own intellectual tradition with strict reference "*to the ancients*", as Plotinus does, precisely to be able to introduce elements with a high degree of novelty<sup>2</sup>.

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

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

<sup>2</sup> Marius-Dan Ionașcu, *Creștinism și Neoplatonism: Influențe și contradicții (Christianity and Neoplatonism: Influences and Contradictions)*, Work written as part of the study program of the Doctoral School within the Faculty of Philosophy of the University of Bucharest, from:

[/http://www.institutuldefilosofie.ro/e107\\_files/downloads/.pdf](http://www.institutuldefilosofie.ro/e107_files/downloads/.pdf), accessed on 23.03.2024 p.6.



The search for the intelligible model of all reality is thus directed towards an even higher search: that of the first and only principle. As the intelligible world narrows the world of becoming to the prior unity of pattern, of pure thought, so the plurality of this purely intelligible world needs the prior unity of a single principle. To think things through adequately, we need an intelligible model, but to think through such a model, we need to "conceive" a principle that is no longer properly conceivable. The intelligible world thus sends us to a super-intelligible principle. Such a principle prior to the intelligible world can no longer itself be approached by the means of thought—not even by the highest and purest thought—but is beyond thought and beyond all that can become the object of thought<sup>3</sup>.

John Wittaker considers the moment of St. Paul's Areopagus sermon, where the subtle shift from the neuter gender of the unknown god, to whom an altar was worshiped in the Areopagus, to the masculine gender of a personal God, is significant for a transition of meaning that occurs in Late Antiquity on a passage also from Plato's *Timaeus* (27D, 5ff), where we talk about what is without becoming and what becomes without ever being. Plato's impersonal distinction between two modes of reality turns into the personal distinction between what is and What Is, between a metaphysical principle and a personal God<sup>4</sup>.

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

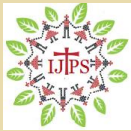
Plotinus identifies this One with the supreme god, with the Good itself, and, to his credit, affirms that through prayer we can know him. In Neoplatonism, the Monad, through irradiation, gives birth to the Dyad. The next ontological level is represented by "Nous" Intellect or Intelligence. At this level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

Plotinus, like those after him, Porphyry, Iamblichus, Proclus and Damascus will deepen this fundamental intuition of an insufficiency of Being in itself: Being cannot be fully understood and explained if we remain within its limits, within its data precise. On the contrary, in itself one can see the indications of a higher level, beyond being and thinking,

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

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

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



which the Neoplatonists will call the absolute One and the supreme Good — along the lines of Plato's suggestions. From the One, the absolute reality, the absolute good, is born the Mind (Nous - Reason - the Logos), which identifies itself with the intelligible world and the essence of things, and from this is born the Soul, the creator of all the beings of the sensible or natural world. Parallel to the path of descent and birth is the path of return or ascent: all substances or creations return to Mind, the prototype of the sensible or natural world. The objects of the Mind, the Ideas, are one with it.

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

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

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

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

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



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

The fundamental problem that confronts Plotinus, as it also confronts Christian writers, is the following: how can the unity of divinity be saved under the conditions of the existence of several hypostases. Plotinus offers a strictly logical, human solution, worthy of the reason of a great philosopher, without being entirely original, but dependent on his masters. He rejects the consubstantiality of the three divine Hypostases by introducing two great concepts: Procession and Emanation. Each of the two Hypostases, subordinate to the One, are indivisible and distinct, being derived from the same primordial creative Principle. They, therefore, do not destroy the factional unity of God, though they destroy his substantial unity, for each hypostasis has an existence different from and inferior to the One<sup>6</sup>.

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

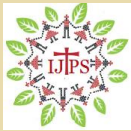
Not by chance, the Church called him "*the Great*". For its part, Christian triadology is fundamental in the correct understanding of the mystery of the creation of the world, the Church or the deification of man, thus opening huge perspectives on the mystery of man, the cosmos and God revealed to the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

The term was translated and understood as reflecting the same substance, identity of essence, and was adopted by the Synodal Fathers, not without a series of difficulties at the First Ecumenical Council in 325. Platonic philosophy also used another term for substance, namely, "*hypostasis*". In this difficult situation, salvation came through the contribution of the Cappadocian Fathers who fully fixed the meanings of each term<sup>7</sup>.

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

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

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



## 2. ANTHROPOLOGY

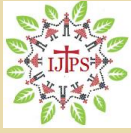
The Holy Fathers recognized and appreciated two fundamental characteristics of Greek philosophy related to man. On the one hand, the common vision regarding the spiritual value of man, and on the other, the value of the metaphysical and moral perspective on life. Therefore, human knowledge in Greek thought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

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

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

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





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

Any determination of non-being, that is, of the material world, is made in relation to the Being - God. The fundamental principle of the soul is communication, and its reporting to the sensible world becomes a formative and vital force. The self-realizing soul understands its formative value only when it turns to the universal Soul. The soul is the force that gives shape to the body and governs its movement. Its distinctive quality is that it maintains and governs the universe according to its own laws. The animate being is regarded by Plotinus as something divine, because the multiplicity of bodies is annulled and subsumed by the unity of the Mind towards which the soul is directed. Through this tendency, it manages to be present everywhere in the body, to coexist with it and to unite things that would otherwise be different from each other<sup>8</sup>.

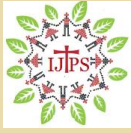
These conceptions are not too far from the Christian teaching about the creation of man and soul in the image and likeness of God. However, Plotinus' theory of the relationship between body and soul departs radically from Christianity, which sees the body as God's work and therefore good, provided one does not serve it and take care of him excessively to the detriment of the soul<sup>9</sup>. Also important is the conception according to which reason - the logos acts and harnesses all the powers of the soul. According to Aristotle, the activity of the logos is the noblest of our attributes. For Plato, the highest achievement of the mind is the knowledge of God and for Plotinus the unity of the primordial and supreme being is analysed in the duality of persons, the thinking man and God, thought by man. The mind operates without any limits, while reason operates within the principles and rules of logic. Human reason corresponds to the reason (rationality) of nature, which manifests itself through the rules of natural order and harmony. Reason is the principle of learning and familiarity with the truth of things, that is, the understanding of the natural order and the standard of the correct formulation of all the achievements of the mind.

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

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

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

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

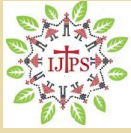


Christianity, and according to Plato, it means not only the self-examination of man, but the awareness of his tragedy, by being removed from the source of the light of knowledge and imprisoned in the darkness of matter. According to Greek thought, the knowledge of God exceeds the cognitive and intellectual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

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

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

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



Gregory of Nyssa, on the other hand, with his works demonstrated deep knowledge of Greek philosophy and logic. We find the wonderful coexistence of the Greek word and Trinitarian orthodoxy in his work: *"To the Hellenes, about common notions"*. He begins with what is common between Christians and Hellenic philosophers to formulate his theology of the Holy Trinity. The dialectical capacity is found in many of his works, such as *"Against Destiny"*, which appears as a discussion with a pagan philosopher, initiated by Gregory to convince his interlocutor. The *"Dialogue"* is reminiscent of the Platonic dialogues and was made to demonstrate that fate, as a divine entity, is non-existent<sup>10</sup>.

## CONCLUSION

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

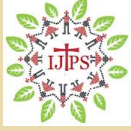
Christian teaching and dogma, in its process of emergence, is first expressed before more or less initiated and questioning followers, more or less trained in the philosophical culture of the time. The double conditioning of people of their time, formed in a certain culture and sympathy or adherence to the new Christian teaching, spontaneously gives birth to the encounter, dialogue, osmosis, sometimes, between philosophy and Christian teaching, which became a structured theology after the confrontation with the latter, through philosophically educated Christian followers. The meeting between philosophy and Christianity took place under the legitimacy of a general phenomenon, correctly captured by Bourceanu: *"When Greek philosophy and Christian theology noticed "common points", they gave rise either to a sympathy understood as recognition of the similar, or some antipathies as self-defense reactions towards a very serious competitor"*<sup>11</sup>. Under this attraction-repulsion dynamic, the two forms of knowledge influenced each other. Neoplatonism would have Plotinus as its main originator, but he had his Christian counterpart in Origen, whose influence would extend throughout later Greek theology<sup>12</sup>.

---

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

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

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



## BIBLIOGRAPHY:

- [1] Bourceanu, Adrian-Claudiu, *Neoplatonismul în scrierile areopagitice, (Neoplatonism in the Areopagite writings)*, PhD Thesis, University of Bucharest - Faculty of Philosophy, 2006.
- [2] Brun, Jean, *Neoplatonism*, Teora Publishing House, Bucharest, 2000.
- [3] Daniélou, Jean, *Biserica primară (de la origini până la sfârșitul secolului al treilea), Primary Church (from its origins to the end of the third century)*, Herald Publishing House, Bucharest, 2008.
- [4] Ionașcu, Marius-Dan, *Creștinism și Neoplatonism: Influențe și contradicții (Christianity and Neoplatonism: Influences and Contradictions)*, Work written as part of the study program of the Doctoral School within the Faculty of Philosophy of the University of Bucharest, from: [http://www.institutuldefilosofie.ro/e107\\_files/downloads/.pdf](http://www.institutuldefilosofie.ro/e107_files/downloads/.pdf), accessed on 23.03.2024.
- [4] Krakowski, Édouard, *Plotin et le paganisme religieux*, Denoël et Steele, Paris, 1933.
- [5] Kostara, Grigori, PhD. Thesis, "*Der Begriff des Lebens bei Plotinus*", Edit.: Felix Meiner Verlag, Hamburg, 1969.
- [6] Messari, I. Marina, *The effects of Plotinus on the Christian Fathers*, PhD. Thesis, at <https://freader.ekt.gr/eadd/index.php?doc=41107&lang=el>, accessed at 29.03.2024.
- [7] Pandele, Dorin-Gabriel, *De la "Trinitatea" lui Plotin la Sfânta Treime a Sfântului Atanasie cel Mare, (From the "Trinity" of Plotinus to the Holy Trinity of Saint Athanasius the Great)*, in the volume "Theology and Education at the Lower Danube", from: <https://www.gup.ugal.ro/ugaljournals/index.php/teologie/article/view/4557>, accessed at 23.03.2024.
- [8] Plotinus, *The Enneads*, 3,2,15, translated by Stephen MacKenna, Second Edition revised by B.S. Page, Oxford University Press, London, 3,2,15, from: <https://ia601605.us.archive.org/30/items/plotinustheennea033190mbp/plotinustheennea033190mbp.pdf>, accessed at 25.03.2024.
- [9] Theodorakopoulou, I.N., *The fundamental concepts of Plotinus' philosophy*, published by Korai Printing House, Athens, 1928.
- [10] Vlad, Marinela, *Dincolo de Ființă. Neoplatonismul și Aporiile Originii Inefabile, (Beyond Being. Neoplatonism and the Aporia of Ineffable Origins)*, Zeta Books Publishing House, Bucharest, 2011.