

The Role of Emotion in the Personal Encountering of Truth in Religion and Science

Gheorghe Petraru

*Rev.Prof.PhD.
Faculty of Orthodox Theology,
Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iași, ROMANIA*

Abstract:

The experience of otherness always involves some emotion, especially in encountering the Divine in Its disclosure, expressed in sacred texts as Revelation and theologically interpreted, or experienced in a mystical state, be it ritual celebration. It is thoroughly human for mankind to experience joy in social relationships. It is of great emotional and spiritual satisfaction to make scientific discoveries, especially those useful to humanity at large.

Relationship with God of the human person and nature brings joy and induces deep spiritual emotions in us which create a catalyst for knowledge and action.

Emotion is linked with confidence in the act of changing the dynamic world in light of the transcendent vision grasped which offers itself in order to be observed and acted upon.

A non-static ontology, allowing for relational dynamics and the compassion of people who are in communion together in their complex psychological and neurological perspectives, allows one the possibility of discovering new truth and values.

Keywords: *cognition, discovery, emotion, experience, mystery, person, religion, relation, science, truth*

Emotion is part of the human being, along with intellect and will. If the modern world of recent past generations laid an emphasis on intellect, the present post-modern world stresses emotion as the driving force of a person's life, similar to reason during the Age of Reason. Coming out of the Middle Ages, the Enlightenment installed the supremacy of rationality, yet today, only 200 years later, we unilaterally and ideologically witness the primacy of emotion. An ontological, personalist vision obviously confirms the fact of the synthesis between emotion and intellect, man being a much more complex being than just the sum of his

parts, which creates fracturing and fragmentation but also exhibits the person's unity.

Obviously, emotions are part of our life.

For the religious man, for the Christian, any of the things that have happened or will happen in human history with its unpredictability or, from God's perspective, guided turns, there is nothing more important than the ontological and personal salvaging event in his or her communion and experiential encounter with Christ, the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

Irrespective of our elaborate conceptuality embedded in linguistic, mathematical, logical, technical or informational formulae, these will not reach the level required to experience Christ ontologically. It will not reach to the level and function required to carry out the cosmic phenomenon of life for man in his magnificent and overwhelming complexity. Our encounter with Christ is an ontological one; it takes place within the condition of human existence, in the cosmic creation of the Logos, *i.e.*, in God's creation through Logos (Jn. 1:1-3), when reading the Bible in prayer and meditation in the contemplation of nature in the Liturgy and the Sacraments.

For the man of science, to discover a scientific truth is an exceptional accomplishment, a peak of his professional success which involves a high degree of emotion as can be seen in visual mass media, for instance.

However, both in religion and science, what is being discovered has lain there since the beginning of time waiting to be discovered, the real and the objective. There comes a time, however, when the religious man and the scientist together have this subjective experience: the former from God, directly, as the Bible or Church Tradition speaks of the saints in whose communion the truth lies or whose communion with God is God's truth for the entire human community. The latter has the revelation of a truth of nature, of divine creation for what is generically called "fish scales" falling from Saul's eyes (Acts 9:18).

1. The person as intelligence, love, and action

Emotional intelligence which is theologically and religiously revisited and redefined at present is a rehashing of the primacy of feeling as theorized in Protestant Pietism by Schleiermacher. In this sense, D. Goleman says man's emotional sphere and feelings such as anger, happiness, love, surprise, disgust, sadness "were intelligently guided in world evolution" (Goleman 2007: 31-34). He confirms, however, the real fact that emotion as feeling is related to intelligence, not only the intelligence of the active and creative subject, but also absolute intelligent alterity, theme and order and harmonious development of the cosmic, human, and vital performance. This also involved other members of the community which imposed a rational structure by rules that coordinated action and social progress beyond the emotional side of the relationship. Moreover, the relationship with the *fascinans* and *mysterium tremendum* Divine is equally sacred fear and ecstatic love, mystical experience triggered in the human subject by the relational dimension of his being with a substantial and active Intelligence-Love that creates empathy with its effects on the brain, of the intelligence that changes man in a positive manner. This is achieved through an establishment of the sphere of the good, the beautiful and the truth with a real ontological status.

Religiously, theologically speaking, fear as emotional feeling towards Divine, communitarian, and ecclesial alterity is actually the feeling of appurtenance to the Divine and the community installed at His call and initiative which converges in love as the normal relation in the structuring of personality through empathy and real and symbolic communion. Thus, the temple as the sign of the holy relationship with the Absolute implies creative intelligence that obeys the Divine project and the being's participation in emotional commitment, in love with the real environment of sacredness that grants a genuine anthropological status.

This perspective is confirmed by G. Kaufman: that is the fact that within the tradition "and self-communication – not taken in some abstract or idealized sense, as something going up to heaven, but rather in the concrete empirical sense of God giving Himself in and through the actual historical events in which men and women live and move" (Kaufman 1995: 354). Actually this is the religious reality described in the Bible and Christian history, beyond theological and metaphysical systems that have

their contextual and cultural reason but remain abstract without the experience of real communion with God, rendered in a theological-religious language as a “cosmic person” (Kaufman 1995: 355). An hermeneutical reconstruction, however, that considers the text in the context of the rediscovery of its civilisation, the founding experience that is symbolically and religiously repeated in the future history of the celebrating and confessing community to this day and in the future; this renders consecrated metanarratives viable and credible so as to outline and structure society, permanently integrate the ones that come into the traditional sphere of life and even the dynamics of historic becoming.

The sacred text realistically renders Christ’s coming to man, down from the heavens and His polymorphic theophany which involves the personal dimension of the Divine rescue of man. This encounter includes the dimension of emotion that involves man who is totally surprised by this unexpected, unusual event. The New and Old Testaments are full of examples in this sense: Moses (Ex 3:6), Elijah (1 Kgs 19:13), St. Mary “deeply troubled” (Lk 1:29) and St. Paul (Acts 9:3). Moreover, God transmitted His divine message in the context of this encounter, be it explicitly or codified, a message that is then passed to the community that fulfils the divine will communicated to the person asked to give instruction. Hence the Exodus, the building of Solomon’s temple, the spreading of the Gospel to other nations. Obviously, these momentous events involve the relationship between two levels of existence that are able to communicate: a transmitter and a receiver that understand each other. This implies the informational, cognitive dimension of dialogue, and, lastly, especially on the human side, the sacred emotion. The experience of the encounter, that of love for the One that interpolates from the plane of transcendence is discovered as being a Person Who cares for man as a Parent, in His caring and loving nature.

These events include fundamentally deep emotional experiences and they are related to the True Being in the ontological sense of the term or to God Himself in His mystery, in theological terms. These experiences are both phenomenological and epistemological; this is because, in the realistic vision of the Being, no separation between religion, ontology, metaphysics and the inner and existential experience of the person occurs; the person is called to receive and mediate on the human level. This gap

came along with modernity, its extreme rational stream eliminating the complexity and mystery of human existence that is ontologically related to God and this gap is continued by our secularist and cultural postmodernity (Pouivet 2013: 197-198). Pouivet also asserts that there is a *connaissance révélée* with legitimate epistemology in a double sense; therefore: a) the one who believes in the revealed truth cannot be condemned because revelation would not be epistemologically justified and b) revealed truths are known for being acquired as any other process of knowledge pertaining to an epistemological field (Pouivet 2013: 99, 104). On the one hand, in this sense the moment of St. Paul's conversion to Christ and calling as an Apostle takes place, starting with his illumination on the road to Damascus when he instantly receives the truth of Christ's resurrection and universal redemption by His sacrifice on Golgotha. On the other hand, however, this is followed by a re-interpretation of his intellectually acquired understanding of Holy Scripture from a Christian perspective, Christological and Ecclesial. Therefore, there is the reception of the text of Scripture as truth through intellectual, epistemological acquisition doubled by the experience of the encounter with the Divine Person Who reveals Himself and confirms the biblical and ecclesial truth as knowledge which is "a guaranteed justified true belief" (Moreland and Craig 2003: 73). Furthermore, as Plantinga asserts, the revealed truth is a relational one, that is to God's Gospel, to the vision of Christ as expressed in Stephen's martyrdom, in the light of the Holy Spirit having His proper basic essence provided with internal and external rationality. It is a free, specific experience, a gift from God, unique and immediate (Plantinga 2000: 256-259).

This unique experience is a basis for perpetual memory and committed action in witnessing the truth received from God, developed afterwards in a coherent discourse based on the "hyper lucid consciousness of mystical visions" rooted in the "archetype of transcendental integration" (D'Aquili and Newberg 1999: 143). This calling and vision is the ground of faith and of confessing religious truth. As Swinburne underlines,

although normally more central beliefs come to be changed under the pressure of many experiences on the edge of the network, the central beliefs of some people may be so strong that they interpret all experience in the light of their existing

system of beliefs, so that the latter is virtually unalterable by experience (Swinburne 2007: 270).

These kind of experiences related in the Scripture are present in the history of the Church, especially in lives of the Saints. In this perspective classical theology with patristic roots perpetuated by Orthodox theology always witnessed a permanent balance between rationality, religious feeling, *i.e.*, sacred emotion and will, and creativity. Saint Maximus the Confessor is an illustrative example in this sense because for him the phenomenality of existence in the complexity of its manifestations – *logoi* – is articulated in the co-natural and co-eternal Logos to the Father and Holy Spirit that expresses being in Himself, and doctrine and love in the Divine Economy (Pelikan 1974: 9). In other words, reason and emotion in their distinctiveness band together and are the grounds of the subject in its voluntary, creative action. What is valid, reflected on and experienced is transferred, extrapolated at the transcendent, divine level to a larger extent as this is the ultimate, active background of human manifestations similar in nature that cannot exist without any reference to the superior level that they provoke or trigger.

The theologian D. Stăniloae claimed that, based on biblical Revelation, God is love (1 Jn. 4:8) and man discovering Him as Father, Word and Spirit, means that the core of the being is love, that the relation between Divine Persons is love which includes feelings and emotions. This divine love is extended to the world and the human community as the Church where the infinite and absolute love of God is experienced in Grace by humans. He asserts that the Trinity is the „structure of supreme love” (Stăniloae 1978: 282) and from the ontology of love based on these Three Persons, humankind experiences the communion of love with God in history and in the Church of Jesus Christ. This link between being and love is stressed today in a theological or philosophical reflection. It is called “inner and outer transcendence” by O. Davies which means the relationship between the self and otherness, thinking that these together form a

unity which is the transcendental analytic of the self as a self of compassion. Internal to that unity is the possibility of its own intensification. This shows itself as an expectation of hope, or an opening towards the possibility of an encounter with a Personal Other Who is both finite – as persons are finite – but also infinite (Davies 2001: 37).

At the same time, the personal dimension of this encounter is underlined more and more, this assertion fitting with the personalist theology of the Church Fathers, especially the Cappadocians. There is a circle, a spiral including being, love and person. The person opens in love to the other person and this loving opening is felt very intensively in the mystical experience. A famous case in the Orthodox Tradition is Saint Symeon the New Theologian who lived in the 11th century. His intense and deep spiritual experience allowed him to see the Uncreated Divine Energy as light, a cognitive and lived experience with the living God in Christ, the visible face of the Trinity in His Incarnation as Revelation, a concept *sine qua non* to Christianity (Alfeyev 2010: 264, 268). As W. Alston asserts, spiritual experiences like these “have to do with God’s purposes and intentions” (Alston 1991: 49) beyond our ability of grasping and understanding their reality. In such situations there is an experience with “cognitive significance” or a “trustworthiness of mystical perception” of God, the real basis for a paradigm of the emotion indicating and shaping the human being in relation with God (Wynn 2005: 11, 137).

2. The scientist’s emotion in his research and in the act of the contemplation of nature

Not only the religious man with his theology, but also every human person is structured in this sense, *i.e.*, to deal with the divine. The human being is related to the cosmos, to life, and there are people who have committed themselves to discover and interpret the physical world. As far as the scientist’s feeling standing before the micro and macrocosm is concerned, there are relevant instances in the history of science on the topic, with its entire ideological dimension in political totalitarian systems or democratic ones. God gave a shape to the world as He was the first Agent but also included men in this plan and process as co-creators.

Dumitru Stăniloae wrote that, beyond its spiritual, religious dimension which is intrinsic to man,

the world is also a reality capable of satisfy the needs of the human body, hence the incentive to the research of its resources to satisfy these needs, to search out other hidden resources able to satisfy new needs. But for this purpose, the world can become transparent in all that is wonderful in the eyes of God, its unseen

richness. It is He who showed His power and imagination for the purpose of finding new resources for increasing needs and their adjustment so that science and technology could be developed. All these emphasize God's great wisdom Who put in His creation so many energies and means for man's needs (Stăniloae 1987: 118-119).

Recalling the biblical background of various concerns for the sciences of man and the scientist's relation to his cultural and religious background, e.g., Einstein and Hebrew mysticism, Plank and Heisenberg and Plato's philosophy, Weizsäcker and Christian theology or Capra and Asian monism (Petraru 2002: 180-181), the faithful servant of scientific tradition lives within his sphere and context of thought and experience. This means that besides thought and experience, the scientist participates with all his being in the research of the laws of existence and, beyond the neutrality pretended by his field, he can get emotionally involved in his fascination with the universe, the system of rules and harmony, colours and the wide spectra of nature and life. Thus, he posits himself in the dimension of wonder and poetic contemplation as one faithful to the desire to know, he is conscious about "the correspondence of the mind with *what is*" (Haught 2007: 180, 181). Taking into account these considerations, F. Lenoir suggests a synthesis between the strict rigour of the sciences and the openness of man's consciousness of the sense of his existence in the world and before God by expressing the correspondence between the two sides of research: the experimental mechanical and the human. Bottom-up scientific research starts with the physical, biological world, the conscience analysed by today's neurosciences; and the top-down approach begins with the religious, theological, spiritual axiom of God's revelation, His presence with man since the beginning of time to eternity (Laurentin 2013: 73). Thus, as Godfrey-Smith claims, scientific theories refer to the pre-existing structure of the world, reflect its spirit, and may be ideologised. Scientific results are destined to serve the entire community of man in the spirit of humanism, public, communitarian good, beyond globalist, ultraliberal, utopian, populist tendencies (Godfrey-Smith 2012: 234). Moreover, as J. Hick asserts, that "critical realism" (Hick 2012: 220) is required in the sense of stating objective reality that imposes itself upon us beyond our human will and freedom: a world we discover at a certain moment, a world we seek to understand according to our subjective thinking. However, we should keep in mind

that we are not the first who came to this world, that those before us had similar concerns, that they reached valid conclusions in various fields of activity of the spirit, leaving the path open for the freedom of adjustment and interpretation, creativity with emotion and inherent and specific knowledge.

The complexity and beauty of the world invites people, as J. Eccles said, “to review the sense of wonder and mystery in our human existence” (Templeton and Herrman 1989: 191). This sense is a divine gift. God shapes the world being the first Agent, but also includes people in this plan and the human process of knowledge with the feelings and emotions that accompany multiple human adventures in the journey of life. Thus, we are given the wonderful chance and quality of being in the world God created and redeemed in Christ, the divine Logos, co-creators with God and in God with the freedom of assuming this unique and sublime condition.

In conclusion, the theologian shares his knowledge with the scientist and a double conversion is required to accept and bear the truth of the other who comes, in the first case, from God Who is revealed today in the biblical metanarrative or Christian hagiographic. This is accomplished by receiving information through signs and miracles, a theological constant in the sphere of human existence and entering into the Divine mind by rapacious reading of as much as one’s finite mind allows them, the Creator’s mind being enciphered in the cosmos, life and creation that bear the mark of the Divine.

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