

Hedonism: Catechesis Face to Face with Consumer Society

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Abstract:

The challenges related to the contemporary catechesis are the most diverse. Hedonism, which is manifested as a constant of modern society, cannot be avoided in the construction of a coherent catechetical discourse, connected to the realities of the world. Acquiring pleasures at any cost, ignoring the pain as an inevitable source of spiritual ascent, man's more or less justified quests, the excessive psychologisation of the catechetical discourse are some of the themes that this study approaches, attempting the composition of a catechetical patristically rooted philosophy. Archimandrite Sophrony or Saint Gregory Palamas are considered important landmarks in the construction of this catechetical philosophy, their teaching constituting a basis for any attempt to conform the contemporary catechetical discourse with the patristic theology. For that matter, any attempt to break from the patristic philon represents an incapacity to offer healing answers to the modern man who centers most of his life on a more or less well-defined pleasure.

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1. Pleasure: an existential given or subsequent perversion?

Pleasure, as an existential given of man, is most often perverted in the pursuit for the undefined, degrading and subjugating pleasure. Man is ordained to enjoy and sweeten from the beauty of His Creator, as well as from the beauty of creation, in an imptus of going beyond one's limits, an ecstatic one, which aims at tasting from the otherness of Beauty. God, the One beyond thought and word, attracts man to Himself, in an ecstatic union, full of the tasting of the joy of reunion. In a hymn of great beauty, in which the joy of tasting the love of God is expressed, Saint John Chrysostom says:

That even when the son that was not saved had returned, there were flutes and guitars and dances and celebrations. And the one that was supposed to call his son

to book for wasting the fortune in vain and for his elopement (into a place) so remote, has done nothing of sort, but looked at him as someone full of honour. And he did not even reproach him with words, and he did not even simply remind him of those things, but embraced him, kissed him, killed the calf, dressed him in robes and gave him gifts. We have all these examples and we should dare and not discourage ourselves. Because He does not enjoy that he is named Lord, but enjoys that He is named Father and does not enjoy to have a servant, but a son. Because He wants more (to be sons) than (to be servants). That is why He had done everything and did not spare the only Begotten Son, so that we take the adoption and to love Him not only as Lord, but also as Father. And if He obtains this from us, He takes pride in this as someone who is honoured and makes it aware to everyone, He who does not need anything of ours (Sfântul Ioan Gură de Aur 2017: 11).

God, says Saint John Chrysostom, enjoys the fact that man takes the filiation and admits the paternity of the Father. The pleasure that man feels when tasting the infinite of God's knowledge is actually the God's joy that manifests itself in the case of overcoming the state of servant. Christianity does not propose servitude as a lifestyle, but proposes delectation as a means of happy and endless existence. Troubles, trials, incapacity to immediately feel joy are only stages that harden man in order to choose the incorrupt joy and the pleasure that lasts for eternity. The same Saint John Chrysostom tells us:

To run into dangers for Him, as if we are running after the greatest crowns and to not consider as hard and unbearable even poverty, illness, insult, calumny, death itself when we suffer for Him. Because if we are awake and right-minded, we shall win the greatest advantages from all these. Similar to the situation in which, if we are not awake and wise, we shall not harvest something useful not even from the opposite ones. Think! Someone mocks and struggles with you? Actually, he/she prepares you to be awake and gives you the reason to be similar to God. Because if you love the one that plots against you, you shall be similar to the One that makes the son rise and over the righteous and the sinful ones (Sfântul Ioan Gură de Aur 2017: 11).

The journey of this life, filled with both good and pleasant, but also with less good and less pleasant things, actually represents a stage, of gestation, that prepares man for the "truth of things." Everything that is apparent, may be an ultimatum for the earthly life of man, may acquire, in the light of eternal sweetening, an ephemeral state. "The here" which becomes absolute, unfortunately, for most contemporary people, is only the bridge to the true reality, the one of endless joy for the glory of God:

In the first stage, the mobile of moral manifestation is the fear of punishment, in the second stage, the hope for a gratification, while in the third stage, the mobile is freedom or love. In the first stage, man acts as a servant, in the second one, as a person that is about to be repaid and in the third one, he/she moves in the spirit of freedom and without any gainful interest (Mantzaridis 2014: 192).

2. Hedonism: an escapeless quandry?

Man aims, or should aim at the state of son and this longing happily satisfies all the unallayed needs for the pleasures and joys of the world. All man's search has, in essence, a basis in the search for this eternal happiness and sweetening. The three degrees of moral life that Mantzaridis reminded of are exactly the states of closeness or remoteness from the tasting of the happiness of being a son. Saint John Chrysostom highlights, in the passage written above, the importance of the awareness of the state of son, of the desire to overcome the state of a simple servant or even of hireling and aims at the wholeness of the state of son. "The nostalgia of the paradise" is not only a projection to the state prior to the fall, but an activation of the vital instinct that aims at the projection into eternity of this "nostalgia". Man feels his calling to be a son and this calling is deeply rooted in our nature. There is no representative of the human nature who does not relate, existentially, to this latency:

As a matter of fact, is this not life itself? Never is a man bad for everyone, he always makes someone happy, so that as, if you are not content with looking only at one point of view, you shall eventually realise the utility of each being. The ones that believe in one God tell themselves that, if their God does not strike the bad people, it means that He takes care of the course of His creation as a whole and that is why He cannot descent for specific cases (Zola 1975: 122).

The latency of the state of son is the ontological given of nature. Man is free to activate this latency or not and that is why any definitive judgment on the nature and finality of the course of each man is improper and even more, improbable. The utility of each being, about whom Zola is talking, is also the key to understanding hedonism as a non-constituent state of this course towards the potency of filiation:

Life continues its creation, disperses after its own laws, disinterested in hypotheses, always going forward in the accomplishing of its infinite toil. With the risk of creating monsters, life must still create, because, contrary to the sick and the mad that it can create, it does not labour to create, certainly with the hope

that some day the healthy and wise shall come. Life, the life that runs into a permanent flow, which continues and starts afresh, towards the unknown perfection! The life in which we swim, the life with its infinite and opposite streams, always moving and great, as an endless sea (Zola 1975: 319).

This flow of repetitive development of life bears in itself the seal of the longing for perfection. The nostalgia for paradise bears in itself the continuous reporting to this given of filiation. However, “nostalgia” is not only a simple memory or projection, but becomes a state of impartion, even in this life, of the ineffable relish. What does consumer society do when facing these facts? It proposes surrogate solutions for the satisfaction of this longing for adoption. It proposes solutions inadequate for the size of man’s search, a search that repeats itself with each individual materialization of the endless flow of life. Each man bears in himself this longing, which cannot be fooled with finite solutions, which shall most often be dissatisfactory. Not being satiated by this surrogate food, man feels the unfulfillment in front of his own existence:

The love of money is and is called the root of all sins. Because it has caused hate, thefts, envies, falling out, enmities, strifes, keeping in mind of the evil, unmercifulness and murders (Sfântul Ioan Scărarul 2002: 245).

Taking attention away from the “truth of things” and the focus on the surrogate offered by the consumer society places the man searching for satisfactory realities on the orbit of momentary solutions. The excessive concern for the financial stability, described at length by Saint John Climacus in a chapter in *Philokalia* out of which we have taken the fragment above, is exactly the sign for this waste of solutions unsustainable from an existential point of view. The gathering of more or less necessary goods, the dedication of life and of the carrier to a hedonistic-consumerist living direction, the incapacity to feel that “the truth of things” does not stop to the material, are only a few aspects in the drama which the annexation to the paradigms of consumer society may stir in the “searching” process of man.

3. Rediscovering the taste

Fleeing away from the world does not mean only isolation in spaces lacking material challenge, but it represents the emotional separation from the world’s desire, seen as an inner space of the sinful attachment to the

material universe. We live in the world, we obey the world's coordinates, we cannot ignore the materiality that develops around us, but at the same time we unite our mind and heart to the universe above matter, to the world in which we manifest the work of grace. The rightful understanding of this positioning may safeguard contemporary man against many dilemmas of choosing. Tasting and seeing this reality above understanding represents the stale of our living. "Taste and see that the Lord is good", one of the chironics ordained for the Godlike Liturgi urges us. On the other hand, we cannot exclusively speak about an emotional detachment:

It is sometimes said that the New Testament indicates only the necessity of an emotional detachment from the world (cf. 1 Corinthians 7, 29-31). Capitulation means above all an inner attitude: disinterest for worldly things. But Saint Apostle Paul recognizes that the emotional contact itself with the worldly realities may endanger the inner options: the married person is «divided» (1 Corinthians 7, 33-34); the rich ones oppose the temptation of gathering goods (Špidlik 2000: 129).

Emotional alienation, as well as physical alienation and the avoidance of occasions that can give birth to occasions of annexation to the matter are preferred themes for the majority of the Fathers. The obstacles that can restrain the development and becoming of hedonism as a "natural" lifestyle represent all that the life of asceticism proposes the man in search of "the absolute".

In his motherland/The snow of being stands for the word./ His soul is in a search/in a silent, secular search for all eternity./And until the last of the borders./ He searches for the water out of which the rainbow is drunk. He searches for the water, out of which the rainbow drinks beauty and nothingness (Blaga 1997: 144).

The man's soul is in an eternal search for this absolute. This search is impacted by the temptation of materiality and mostly, by the temptation of putting materiality on the list of living priorities. Thus, man impacts the paradox of tasting from the "nothingness". Although it seems that it lacks theological consistency, the concept of "nothingness" has deep roots in Orthodox theology. Any existence that does not feed and drink from the deep fountain of godlike existence, misses its own development. Any surrogate that does not aim for the true existence trifles with "the nothingness", with the lack of concrete existence. The mask that the

modern man often put on is an eloquent and sufficient example for this tasting from the “nothingness”. The weak existence, unconnected to the fountain of life, proposes lifestyle alternatives that are not in the space of real existence and implicitly, of existence:

Depravity that renders fruit, deep inside, the prime grandeur, gives me, as well as you, the stigma of its barrenness... (Mallarmé 1988: 51).

The angst of the dependency on the nothingness destroyer of meaning should be the mobile that determines the one chained by this nothingness to detach from it and to search for the true existential completion that cannot be associated with sin. Man effectively tastes out of nothingness when he bears away from the fountain of true existence:

Fluent is the nature of wealth. It runs near the ones that have faster than the torrent. It runs from one to the other [...] Today, this estate belongs to one, tomorrow to another and shortly after, to another. Searching for houses in the city. How many times they have not changed their owners since they were built! They have worn the name of one owner, then the name of another. And gold always runs into the hands of the one that has it, moves to another and from that one to another. You can rather hold water in your hands than to keep fortune time and again (Sfântul Vasile cel Mare 2000: 240).

The incapacity to ascend to existential completion pushes man to the flow lacking the consistency of the immanence. And although time worn experience certifies that this flow is permanent and does not truly feed the need for completion, contemporary man does not accept to give up this waste of energy. The greatness of the glory of God cannot be contained even by the man that bears a living in line with this greatness. All the more, the drifting into nothingness throws man further way from the understanding of this greatness:

Our path to knowing God goes not through books, but through the faith in Christ's word; this faith descends our mind into a heart covered by the flame of the love for Christ. We descend into this fathomless ocean that is the heart of man. Know the diligence of this descent: it is conditioned by the burden of misery. There, deep inside, the hand of God gently embraces us and rises us to the heavens. For that matter, the ascension into heaven is also possible only if it finds the energy of the pain of love (Arhimandritul Sofronie 2015: 85).

Hedonism blurs this descent to the heart of finding oneself. The mind enslaved by the sweetness of sin does not find the path to the union with oneself and the discovery of the hidden place of the inner man. The

continuous projection to the object producing pleasure occupies the mind's entire activity and thus, the hesychast solution of the descent of the mind into the heart does not appear as a solution worthy to be taken into consideration. What matters is the discovery of the easiest path to reaching pleasure. The renewal of the mind in the process of finding the heart and, implicitly, of this "deep" about which Archimandrite Sophrony speaks about, is not possible when the "blurring of pleasure" reaches the mind in its entirety. The heart of man is "a fathomless ocean", to which one reaches through much diligence and through a tension of the being that does not leave room for useless waste. The reality of things, on which the reality of ontology is based on, is darkened by Hedonism is not compatible with the bearing of pain redeeming from the shadow of sins. The process of the freeing from the race for pleasure is somewhat similar to the one of freeing, through culture, from the anchorage into the dull mundane:

Culture was an asset because it was an activity that pulled one away from the mediocrity of life and from the empire of trash. In the ignorant environment of our society, to handle culture is the equivalent of a religious conversation, possibly spreading the same resorts. To want to cultivate oneself seemed to the apterous as aberrant as the healthy thought of retrieving to the monastery (Patapievic 2006: 53).

The race for the fulfilment of the pleasure tends to become a constant in the current society's attitude, a constant that is brought to the rank of normality. The mediocrity of life, the almighty trash are constants that cannot be denied. The percentage of culture enthusiasts is well below the ones that are satisfied with a consumption of creations that are so-called cultural, but which are ultimately nothing else but pale shadows of a deep culture. As the bearing of culture is not an easy undertaking, but entails a certain effort, similarly, bearing the renewal of the mind entails a rejection of what can be called "trash", "surrogate", "mediocrity".

4. Activist religiosity vs. the secret discovery of unsaid realities

He flame of Christ's love, that Archimandrite Sophrony reminds of, does not stand to be fed with the humid twigs of a religiosity detached from ontology, with ritualistic manifestations that do not restrict the race for pleasure, but are satisfied with a certain fulfilment of "the ritualistic religiosity". To be ignorant, to not be interested in the cultivation of the

cultural sense, to abandon the profound search and to embrace the chaotic pursuit of pleasure are the symptoms of existence in superficiality. The Neovarlaamism present in the new paradigms of existence does nothing else but to justify pleasure, using forms deviated from ecclesiology. The concept of “personal development”, ever more present in the ecclesiastic space and that is obviously a form of neovarlaamism, proposes “the pleasure of the discovery” of certain limits of existence that are more and more suitable for the “created area” of existence. He offers a certain pleasure, that of the immediate confrontation of progress items. The centrality of the “I” in all actions, which often acquires missionary valencies, causes a state of satisfaction, quantifiable following the fulfilment of specific items. The path of neptical commitment to the life of Church is not one that offers immediate satisfactions. The long process of release from passions and the embrace of virtue cannot be quantified and presented as a visible progress, and thus, in line with the items of personal development, it may not bring immediate pleasure. The Neovarlaamism of the theories of personal development, bringer of immediate pleasure and unfortunately, promoted by some contemporary monks, is strictly amended, from a prophetic point of view, by the Fathers:

Satan starts to mix its venom in the monk’s drink, starting from a spiritual compassion and love and from a well-founded intimacy; it does so that this often ends in celebrations and lewdness hurtful for the soul, in guilty improper things (Filotei Sinaitul 2009: 95).

The pleasure of activism, about which we shall speak in another study, is extremely deceiving, and does not leave room o harsh criticism, taking into consideration the missionary aspect and appearance. When it is also present in the life of the monks, the risks to not understand the danger of its instillation is even more undistinguishable. The change of paradigms and the favouring of various paths of personal development at the expense of the path trodden by the neptical theology represents a risk that, once become reality, it can be stopped with difficulty. He worldly methods for personal development, affiliated in the monastery space as an alternative or completion in the neptical theology, does nothing else but to repeat the history of the dispute between Saint Gregory Palamas and the

adversaries of hesychasm, adversaries that cannot fully trust the path of hesychia, patristically confirmed.

The natural consequence of the guarding of the God's commandments is our extreme lessening, meaning depletion; without the sincere recognition that we are truly the creation of hell in our fall, we can never reach absolute repentance; through an absolute repentance we pull us out of the embrace of the death of the selfish «individuum» and we are led to the contemplation of the Godlike universalism of Christ Who «has loved us until the end of times». When we hate ourselves for the evil that lies into us, then limitless dimensions of love that was commanded open to us; outside Christ, we shall never embrace the entire world into the flame of life creator of the grace that descends from above (Arhimandritul Sofronie 2015: 143).

The search for pleasure in the “otherness” of the true existence, that can be assimilated with the neovarlaamism of personal development forms, does nothing else but to block man in the tight space of quantifiable evidences and shall take away the freedom granted by the taste of the uncreated grace. The illusion of solving the problems and of progressing into the hedonist taste of the result is supported by faithlessness and rejection, more or less aware, of the reality that only the vivid and unmediated encounter can produce in the soul the true joy. The words of Saint Gregory Palamas are profoundly eloquent in this regard:

Thus, we shall make our farewells to all of this and to watch in songs, in prayers and requests to the Doer, our God and Lord, to persevere in these, to give all our time to these, to ascend, through these, the heart and mind to the fathomless eminence of the godlike greatness, to fix our eyes to the beauty of the son of glory, to let our inner person be enlightened and the outside person through participations and the impartations that come from there, to surrender to this ineffable glory, through contemplations and visions, as much as possible, and to fill with the godlike and great joy, so that we do not be condemned in together with the vain school by occupying ourselves with the harmful and useless (Γρηγορίου τοῦ Παλαμάς 1988: 1.23).

No worldly pleasure can replace the joy of tasting the godlike glory, uncreated, that brings and accomplishes the vivid and unmediated encounter that we mentioned above. The distance from “all worldly concern”, that is often perceived as “worldly pleasure”, although, fundamentally, worldly pleasure is nothing else but the fountain of sometimes unpredictable worries, is the only path that frees man from the mask of pseudo-reality. The only reality, often replaced by various

pseudo-realities, is nothing else than the joy arisen from the assignment of existence into the “hands” of the Providence who sweetens us with ineffable visions and contemplations. The simulacrum of human, momentary joys, unfortunately displays this only reality, marked by the joy of the impartation of the true existence. Saint Gregory Palamas, addressing to the monks, is very definite regarding the surrender of illusion. Thus, he is very definite with the illusion of knowledge in the meshes off which Varlaam had fallen:

Could someone ask himself: how did he fall into such an abyss? He has fallen because he has meticulously searched with the reason and the natural philosophy above reason and nature, refusing to listen to the things said by the Fathers, namely, that is impossible to be interpreted with the reason the type of prophetic vision, only him who has learned it by experience knows it defined; if often no reason can describe the things or the ones that arise on the nature, even more it shall not be able to do so for the works of the Spirit. And it is visible that this thing is often confessed by the saints following Christ (Γρηγορίου τοῦ Παλαμάς 1988: 3.3).

What else is deceit, if nothing else than a feeding with the illusion of a joy lacking ontology? Even the knowledge lacking the experience of a concrete reality is still a joy lacking ontology. The empty knowledge, for the sake of knowledge, implies a massive waste of energy, waste that is not connected to the configuration of the true needs of the concrete man. Saint Symeon the New Theologian focuses on the importance of the non-display of this reality and the tasting from the excess of experience, as in an absolute undertaking to taste from the true life:

Therefore, reaching this stage, God instils in him and everything that he desires is done, or rather, even more than what he desires. Because God is all that is good, He makes the soul in which He dwells full of all the good related to the comprehension of our nature, because God is abyssal and beyond all bearing from all the created nature. [...] Therefore, the God that dwells in him, teaches such a person about the future and the present, not through words, but through the things itself, through experience and reality (Sfântul Simeon Noul Teolog 1999: 181).

Experience, as important in the patristical discourse, is the key that opens the gate of the understanding of philokalic and hesychast living. Not the activism exclusively oriented towards the realities of the current world is the one that open to man the mystery, but the action of the spiritual work.

God reveals Himself to man as a final limit of his existence, but as a limit that does nothing else but introduce into the true existence. God is the last frontier, in the sense of exceeding the created world, and this final frontier is not one that can be reached through the undertakings of the search for pseudo-realities. The presence of God in man challenges to knowledge, knowledge that can bring the joy of existence, and this joy, this existential hedonism is possible only through the experience of true reality, which is the together living with God. The non-embrace of God is actually a potency and capitalization of our capacity for comprehension. But this capacity for comprehension cannot be assimilated to the demiurgic thirst that Cioran is talking about:

There is in man a demiurgic thirst, that he satisfies either through a spiritual excess and an inner vision, or through the active integration into historical making. The accelerated rhythm and the wide wind of the great cultures satisfy a demiurgic thirst. In truth, they constitute totalities with a cosmic nature, so much so that their size exceeds the humane (Cioran 2017: 29)

The demiurgic thirst that Cioran reminds of, and that he considers to be the mobile that develops a real and dynamic culture, cannot be mistaken for the thirst for the existential hedonism that we reminded of above, and that is in fact a pre-taste of the knowledge freed by the contingent and the false confidence of finding the truth. Cioran, blinded somehow by the greatness of western cultures, does not take into consideration the fact the greatness of a culture is not founded on its contingent, but on its capacity to align to the reality *itself*, that we call *Being per excellence*:

Faith, the ability to believe, is not in a direct connection with the measure of man's education. But we see that in our times, when education has spread, faith has declined; however, that should be the opposite: the more comprehensive the knowledge of man is, the more he should become aware of the great wisdom of the creation of the world (Arhimandritul Sofronie 2014: 126).

Not the blind activism discovers the *culture of the Spirit*, but the entering into the mysterious universe of faith.

5. The mystery of Christian life: between pleasure and pain

Contemporary catechesis cannot dispense of the fact that modern man need to be spoken to about pain. The overbid and satiation of the discourse about pleasure forces to a re-assessment of the place of pain in a society that promotes pleasure as a unique ideal in life. The modern discourse that focuses on the *new man, the man free of risks, insured*, is opposed the harsh reality off pain, of the cosmic drama that often in an unseen manner embraces man, leading him to the implacable destiny that is death and the dissolution of the imaginary universe of pleasure. The exclusive focus on the role of diminishing the evil in society diminishes the conscience of the need to fight the “forces of darkness”, about which the Gospel warns in the gravest manner. By adopting the solution of a Marxist race, the Church may risk exactly the relevance of the discourse that has in its centre thee preaching about passion as the only means that leads to the experience of the true reality. It is over-spoken about this unity, about the well-being, about the necessity of a configuration of a terrestrial climate favourable for the Church’s activity, but it is often forgotten that the imaginary reconstruction of the lost paradise cannot be possible by starting with mundane restorations. The discoursed focused exclusively on the idea of the *efficiency* of the method and the coherent *structuring* of the decisional factors forgets that the role of the Church is not reduced to the one of a social, cultural or economic bond. Without denying these aspects, the contemporary catechesis has the obligation to rediscover patristic sources and to interrogate in what manner the appeal to these sources, for hundreds of years, has made possible the access of many persons inspired by God into the tasting of the Kingdom. Why has this tasting for hundreds of years, as an essential action for the preaching about the Church, been possible with established means (asceticism, enlightenment, perfection, deification) and from a certain point, the contemporary catechetical discourse feels the need for a concept renewal and for a stripping of the safe robe of the only path preached by the Fathers? The discourse about death cannot be euphemised. Contemporary catechesis does not have the role or the right to present to the world a *cool* Church, in which the spirit of the same world may develop freely so long as it does not exceed the structures of a small-minded moralism marginally inspired by the vast flow of Traditiona. The Church is not nor

should it be *cool*, encouraging a cheerfulness born out of concepts without bases. Cheerfulness and well-being are born at the end of the fight, at the end of the ascension on the ladder of virtues, where the fighter is encountered by the One that is eternal joy. This joy is also present during the fight, but is not in the nature of things for the fight to be replaced by the elation of joy. Life and Mystery of the Church are strongly connected to the ascetic effort and not to a psychological joy imprinted only by the well-being created by various concepts that remain at the stage of *logos* unexperienced from an ascetic point of view (among these being the concept of unity, overbid):

The Holy Sacraments are also connected to the ascetic life. Following the teaching of the Saint Fathers, the godlike grace receives various names, depending on what it grants man. If it cleans him of sins, it is called cleaning grace and energy, if it enlightens him, it is called enlightening energy and if it inspires him spiritually, it is called spiritually inspiring grace (Ierotheos 2016: 227).

The stadiality of the ascetic fight does not leave room for a superficial joy, entirely detached from the idea of a serious commitment of this fight. We propose an analysis of the essential text of Father Archimandrite Sophrony Saharov, which from my point of view, could constitute one of the most important bases of contemporary Orthodox catechesis:

Prior to being able to serve, and more importantly, in the capacity of mentor or guide, the man himself must go through the hell of repentance, to overcome the time-worn enmity of man with God, to receive from Him the blessing through the vision of the Uncreated Light, to strengthen himself in a love with dedication to Our Father, to bear with patience His permanent presence, of His Judgment in each step of daily life (Arhimandritul Sofronie 2014: 61)

The bearing of pain is, thus, not a proof of spiritual smallness. Judgment, the perspective of hell, the reality of death are coordinates that do not leave room for the installation of a ontologically unfounded cheerfulness (and that may often be an open gate to harsh sins). The hell of repentance about which Father Sophrony speaks is the hell of the full awareness of the ontological risk that existence itself entails. Triumphalism and activism stop at the conclusion of the insufficiencies repaired within the strict structure of the created world, proposing, as I have reminded above, the illusion of a terrestrial paradise. It is essentially

what all the ideologies of Neoprottestant formations do: transforming the transcendental into a quantifiable immanence, escribed to the concrete data of efficiency. The capacity to serve, preach, inform and theologically train is however, given only by the bearing of personal hell, of the deepening into the hell of repentance that reveal true joy. *The hopeful cry* about which the Fathers speak is the key for the understanding of the absurdity of the activist undertaking in a Church that existentially bears the Fathers' entire philosophy practised. Father Sophrony also states:

The blessed despair that Lord has given me emanated in me a prayer that did not give me time to stop enough time on one thing; this wonderful despair threw me into an indescribable abyss, where all troubles were gathered (Arhimandritul Sofronie 2014: 65).

The love for thy neighbour, manifested either through prayer, or through the act of charity, must not fail in an advertised activism, considered to be the final norm of Christian living. The bearing of personal pain, but also of the neighbour's pain, is done in the privacy of the heart and of the cleaning of sins. The real help that we can give to our neighbour is his and our awakening from the predictability of the escribed fact and the ascension to another level of understanding of the relation, in which spiritual coordinates gain other dimensions: not visibility, but the privacy is what makes philanthropy to be authentically transfiguring.

These things are also valid in the case of catechesis: the informal is potentiated by the *background* of the initiation in private. However, this initiation entails effort, renunciation, crucifixion of the mind in front of the Fathers' theology. The introduction in Church of contemporary philosophies that focus exclusively on personal development, as well as on the capacity of emotional intelligence and cognitive intelligence to set up the universe of existence, is highly dangerous. These theories offer a certain psychological comfort through the fact that it offers control tools of spiritual movements, but they are dangerous, firstly because they alienate from the Fathers' philosophy that did not set high value on personal development outside the awareness of the relation with God and of the bearing of the ascetic path of pain, detachment from the convenience of sin:

The essential truth in which it deciphers the living of the Fathers of the wilderness is the positioning of the concrete human being face to face with God. This is the

main reason for the rejection of the world, for total alienation, for retirement into wilderness. The existential key per excellence is the purification of my relationship with God, positioning into an unmediated connection with the Doer, who is the source and meaning of life per excellence. There is no other explanation for the retirement of man from the world and their installation into wilderness. If the world and the ones in it hinder or even make impossible the achievement of a continuous, consistent and to the full dialogue with God, then there is only one path, the rejection of the world and positioning into a space in which the ones in the world are not to be found or are to be found in an extremely low dosage, so that they do not endanger the achievement of the purpose (Coman 2016: 99).

Things are also valid for *conceptual wilderness*. I propose this term because it very eloquently expresses the crisis that the catechesis and contemporary preaching may reach if we do not very carefully take into consideration all the warnings that we find in the patristical theology.

We run away from the philosophy of the world not because it is bad in itself, but because it proposes a convenience of thinking that alienates us from the patristically ascetic philon. Any attempt to determine the self-awareness in a hedonistic manner, it pushes the Christian outside Tradition. This is very subtly promoted by the new guidelines in modern psychology, guidelines that offer the feeling of a balance and of a programmed intellectual and emotional construction, but which, from a realistic-theological perspective, throws man into the small-minded structures of worldly solutions. These structures cannot offer a real detachment from the pleasure-pain circle, but circumscribe man to the fatalities of his own limits, in an unsuccessful attempt to construct the *new man*. The interference that such theories may create in the attempt of clean positioning in front of God is highly alarming. Excessive psychologisation of Christian life creates psychological limits that will be very difficult to overcome, especially when a clear analysis of the I in its most private coordinates is necessary.

Not any fear is good and redeeming [...]. The hurtful fear is that which puts into our soul the fright of death, that which makes us surrender in front of high rank persons. How could the one that fears this to react against sin until death in times of martyrdom and to pay what he owes to God, Who died for us and then rose? The one that fears the demons also has hurtful fear in him. Shortly, such a fear appears to be a passion that is an offspring of faithlessness. No man who believes that he has next to him an almighty help fears the ones that try to affect him (Sfântul Vasile cel Mare 2000: 144).

The words of Saint Basil the Great may be successfully applied to this tendency for excessive psychologisation, which actually represents the lack of faith in God's help. Man tries to build a universe by himself, in which the unforeseen fluctuations of spiritual dynamics may be deconstructed in case they do not correspond or interfere with the safety of the edifice. The fear of the pain that the unforeseen may hide is masked by this edifice in which psychology tends to take the place of the encounter with real problems and their solving within the structures of pneumatologic healing. Psychological insurance would not be condemned if it would minimally add to the dynamics of Christian living. However, unfortunately, the dynamics of Christian living is reduced to a set of predictable reactions that can be improved and this reduction does not have any connection with the vivid reality of authentic spiritual healing. Man is insured against the unforeseen, in hedonistic movements, but does not have the courage to face reality in its most genuine aspects. In essence, it is a replacement of the possibility of seeing the uncreated light with the possibility of seeing a created, encouraging light, but limited to the structures of the created world:

The world of the mind, the world of abstract ideas is in itself similar to the light, but it is still the natural light of the mind, the sphere of reason similar to the light; it is the condition of abstract intellectual contemplations, that is accessible to man through his nature and not a godlike impartation above nature. God is not the world of ideas. God is a concrete, real, personal being. God is truly a vivid God. Who has known through primary experience of the states mentioned, hearing about the vision of the Tabor Light, may understand its vision as being the vision of uncreated light. However, who has known both shall know the distinction between the uncreated Godlike Light and the natural light of the mind (Arhimandritul Sofronie 2014: 149).

The risk of confusing the light of the true vision of God with the natural light of the mind is high, especially due to the fact that the latter may wear deceiving aspects. This deceit that the natural light of the mind induces coincides exactly with the man's need to ensure a stability of life, at any cost. Psychologisation offers the feeling of this stability, induces the feeling of security and causes that well-being which results from the conscience of a balance of existence, but it does not offer the true healing:

Because the ones that have seen this light, have not seen God, because God is light. The ones that have not received this light, have not yet received the grace,

because by receiving the grace, we receive the godlike light and God. The ones that have not received Him yet, they ones that have not partaken from the Light, are to be found under the yoke of the Law, in the realm of shadows and faces, are still children of servants (Lossky 1995: 134).

The state of servitude that excessive psychologisation entails and refers to - for it addresses created structures and realities, with created tools, offering applicable to created structures-, makes the feeling of stability, of security and of balance be a feeling that is limited to the role of psychological state, that cannot offer thee guarantee of a real security. The hesychast Saints, when they speak about the vision of the uncreated light, have into consideration exactly this aspect: tasting the godlike life is the only path that offers solid guarantees against the vicissitudes of any type that could threaten the stability of life:

It is one thing to follow hackled feelings, and it is another thing to heal our heart, making it bearer of the godlike love, in line with the evangelical commandment. It is one thing to remain in the borders of scientific, objectifying knowledge of the phenomena of creation, and it is something immensely higher, to know the One Who has been before the the matter of this world. It is one thing to wear a body torn by the passions of this world, and it is something different to make it a place for the Spirit of God (Arhimandritul Sofronie 2014: 183).

Conclusions

The contemporary catechetical discourse must courageously approach the issue of hedonism, proposing patristic solutions. The temptation of excessive psychologisation and the offering of solutions that can be adapted only to the emotional or psychological level, without effects in the setting of authentic, spiritual healing, is a solution that can harm, on the long term, the life of the Church itself. Hedonism, the pursuit of pleasure, the mistaking of the true existence with similar surrogates are realities that we cannot deny and that, paradoxically, find their answer in patristic theology.

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