

Father Constantin Galeriu – Model of Patristic Theology Convergence with the Reception of this Theology in a Contemporary Catechetical Context

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Abstract:

*The reassertion of the rooting of Romanian theology into the Patristic theology cannot be considered a poncif. The 20th century represented a period of serious supply to Patristic sources, achieved through high-principled translations executed by father Dumitru Stăniloae, as well as by other translators of the Patristic text. In this presentation we shall focus on several theological elements presented in the reference paper drafted by father Constantin Galeriu and defended as a PhD thesis in 1973, *Sacrifice and Redemption 1*, attempting to achieve connections of certain themes approached in this paper to their reflections presents in the Patristic theology, and especially in the Theological-Homiletic work of Saint Gregory Palamas.*

Keywords: *Palamas, Stăniloae, theology patristic, catechetical teaching, homilies*

Preliminaries

The thought that determined me to make this choice was born after re-reading the introduction written by Father Galeriu for the first complete edition of *The Homilies* of Saint Gregory Palamas (Sfântul Grigorie Palama 2004: IX-XXXV), but also after certain catechetical questions arisen by the recent problematizations belonging to Metropolitan Bishop Ierotheos Vlachos regarding the place of Patristic theology in the contemporary catechetical space:

Speaking of the deformation of Orthodox Tradition, we have in mind mainly the loss of the hesychast path and the transformation of the Church into an ideology, based on the model of other religious and humanist ideologies. [...] The place of the spiritual Fathers was thus taken by moralist catechists, who burdened the youngsters with such a moral guidance which only a hypocritical man could seem to respect. This is because they believed that Christ's commands could be

fulfilled only by man's will, without knowing the stages of traditional spiritual life - the cleansing of the heart, the enlightenment of the mind and deification -, nor their consequences on the soul and body (Ierotheos 2014: 80-81).

For this purpose, Father Constantin Galeriu was a constant promoter of access to Patristic theology, which he considered the headstone for any contemporary speaking about God, and implicitly of any catechetical endeavour:

Saint Gregory Palamas addresses the Christian world a message: how theology must be made and what is its responsibility before the nowadays crisis of secularism. Genuine theology does not start from below, towards conquering the above, but starts from above, towards transfiguring the ones below, same as man is not deified before God has become human, overcoming justice through love (Sfântul Grigorie Palama 2004: XXXII-XXXIII).

Thus, in this context of the need for revitalizing the contemporary catechetical discourse by resorting to Patristic tradition, we shall briefly describe two definitive concepts present in the PhD thesis of Father Constantin Galeriu – freedom and sacrifice –, attempting to always connect them with their specific foundation either to Saint Gregory Palamas (taking into account the social and catechetical impact that the Saint's Homilies had in the 14th century), or to other Fathers or theologians.

I. Freedom as Relationship: Principle and Defining Value of Contemporary Catechetical Construction

The overbid the idea of freedom represents a challenge for contemporary pastoral care. A person identified with the notion of freedom, but at the same time the person's wholeness cannot be shattered by the freedom selfishly taken upon oneself. Father Galeriu states to this end:

The notion of the ego is born in contact with other egos. Man sees himself man amongst other people, he becomes a person amongst persons. Thus, religion explains the human person in relationship to another person, in its relationship to the absolute personality of God (Galeriu 1998: 65).

In the spirit of Patristic theology, Father Galeriu interprets the notion of freedom in close connection to the notion of relationship. Man is developing, in the Father's opinion, in relationship with his fellow

humans, with God and with himself. We see such a succession of relational states in line with which man finds and builds his true identity.

It is interesting that Saint Gregory Palamas, in the same *spirit* of Patristic tradition, also proposes a succession of relational states which could ensure the full manifestation of freedom. Thus, in *Homily I* addressed to Thessalonians, the hesychast teacher highlights the importance of becoming aware of the relationship as a foundation for any social endeavour (thus, implicitly, as a foundation for the manifestation of freedom):

We are all brothers because we [all come from] one Master and Doer, who we all have in common as Father. But this fellowship is common, as one [that we have] towards the irrational nature and [towards] the one lacking feeling. [Then], we are brothers to one another also because we are all from one, from earthly Adam, [as well as] because we are all made in God's image (Gen. 1, 27) (Sfântul Grigorie Palama: *Omilia* 60, 4).

But this is also common for us and for all peoples. However, we are brothers to one another even more because we are the same nation and we live in the same place, and above all else [we are brothers] as ones who are rich in having a common mother, the Holy Church and the righteous faith, whose ancestry and fullness is Christ, the True Son of God, Who is not only our God but who has also deigned to be brother and Father. And not only these, but also our head, gathering us into one Body and making us members to one another and to Himself (Sfântul Grigorie Palama translated by Coresciuc 2019: 25-32 – *Omilia*, 1.1).

As father Galeriu would say, *man sees himself man amongst people*. The conscience of relationship and freedom is born from the conscience of this fellowship that Saint Gregory Palamas speaks about. The relationship is founded on the freedom of God's creation act, on the assumed freedom of belonging to the human nature (paradoxically, the given of the nature is the most notable assumption of freedom !) and on the freedom given by the embodiment into the mysterious body of Christ, the Church. The function of a member of the mysterious body is the premise for the development of relational freedom. Michel Henry states so beautifully:

Our life, the tonalities in which it transforms itself are incapable of giving themselves life. The ego living in them lacks in turn the power to bring itself in the I that exists. This native weakness can be recognised in each of its powers, none of which can give themselves the power to exercise (Henry 2005: 131).

Man is not fulfilled plenary in the situation in which he considers himself or behaves self-sufficiently. The growth in love and relationship with God and thy neighbour, about which Father Galeriu and Saint Gregory Palamas reminded is illuminating and intrinsic to the discovery of freedom. Christ is the *ancestry and fullness* of the fellowship previously mentioned by the hierarch of Thessaloniki. *The ego*, Father Galeriu states, *is within us, and us is not born from the ego, but as an addition of egos* (Galeriu 1998: 64). The context of saying the first Palamas Homily – an extremely tense political situation and with realities difficult to imagine for an assumed-Christian parish - is debunked by Saint Gregory Palamas by the appeal to the valorization of relational freedom. *The ego*, of any nature it would be and whatever situation it may attempt to justify, as long as it does not take into account the otherness and does not seek foundation into the reality of the otherness it gives rise to fundamentalist and extremist attitudes. Moreover, the collective *us* is not founded on the assembly of certain mechanically enlisted *egos*, without a free adhesion. The function of a member of the body of Christ cancels the impersonal adhesion to an assembly animated by identitarian-sectarian principles.

Relational freedom is discovered in the Orthodox theology especially on the highest steps of spiritual life. *The ego* cannot swallow up any type of spiritual experience, keeping it in a selfish manner only for its own satisfaction, because as Metropolitan Bishop Ierotheos Vlachos warns, *when we face the gifts of God with a selfish and proud attitude, we get to somewhat defile ourselves* (Ierotheos 2014: 187). This is actually what Father Galeriu would profess about the relationship between the spiritual guide and the disciple in a dialogue with Andrei Pleșu, highlighting this impossibility of the *ego* to be free and plenary outside the relationship:

I would even dare say that, as the Son refers to the Father, also the spiritual son refers to his spiritual father. The son is under the obedience of the Father and is permanently the Person He sent. Thus, we have here the fundamental, originary model of a father-son relationship into the Father and Son, into the Holy Ghost (Galeriu *et alii*: 1991: 27).

Thus, the *ego* comes to fruition through the relationship with another *ego*. God reveals Himself to man in a relationship full of love, but

at the same time, man himself is a revelation for God: : *The revelation brings God closer to us, relates us through His grace, as we ourselves are a revelation to Him* (Galeriu 1998: 218). This human-God relationship is not a simple prize or a simple personal reward, but it opens for the man the perspective of a maximum integration into God's desire of potentiation of His entire creation.

Freedom as a relationship is a truth of the nature. Maximian reflections on the origin of evil [I refer here especially to *Filocalia* trans. Stăniloae 1994, vol. III: 31), and the insistence with which Patristic theology observes that evil is a lack of, a *reality* without an ontological foundation, helps us understand why father Galeriu considered that man himself is a revelation to God. Evil, an accidental *reality*, cannot diminish the deepness and gravity of the relationship and the freedom that the relationship instils into the existence. God shall not cease to see man in the depth of the truth of the nature, as He created him, as well as into the virtue of the *reason* for which He created him. And man shall open himself towards this gaze ceasing to generalize creation and to idolize fragmented knowledge:

And if you shall clear your mind of any thought, even the good ones, and shall return in full towards yourself, through a permanent attention and continuous prayer, you shall truly enter into the godlike rest and shall acquire the blessing of the [seventh] day, contemplating yourself in a Noetic manner and through yourself ascending towards God's gaze. As the purpose of prayer is the rapture towards God (Grigorie Palama translated by Coresciuc 2019: 223-236 – *Omilia* 17.10).

The manifested truth of the lack of ontology of evil opens the perspective of a forever possible renewal of creature in the development of the relationship. Father Galeriu returns to this truth and highlights the importance of theological reassessment of the neighbour and the relationship with him: *my neighbour reappears to me in the grace of his Paschal form; nature it self expecting the discovery of the sons of God reveals the grace and order irradiating in it from the Creator* (Galeriu 1998: 232). The Paschal form that Father Galeriu speaks about is exactly the *truth of things* [Phrase commonly found in the works of Saint Gregory Palamas], the intact irrationality face of the created, the gift of likeness still in potency or already being introduced into the work.

The entire cosmos is built and reset before the discovery of this Paschal image, sacrament of a future world, handsel discovered from this life, spiritual configuration meant to fill the creation with the grace of God, provided that man understands his possibility and capacity to activate the Paschal image.

II. Sacrifice: Interpretation of the Reason that God Imprinted on the Creation

It is well-known the attachment that Father Galeriu has manifested towards the theology of Saint Maxim the Confessor. The Maximian description of man as microcosmos opens the path of understanding the creation as a space of presence and manifestation of the rationality imprinted by God on it. The sacrifice that man is indebted to undertake in his quality of creature also entails the awareness of this rationality present in the creation, and this awareness places man in the state of humility towards the ineffable gift of this imprint of rationality. Father Galeriu states:

Based on the Orthodox theology, man was invited, from the beginnings, not only to one supper of God, as it does not stand before him only as an offering of the Heavenly Father, but one who tastes and feasts; but also as a field of activity, of exercise and endeavours, fruits and crowning, as a book, as divine text given for us to interpret (Galeriu 1998: 99).

Creation calls man to the interpretation of supreme meanings, to the discovery, or rather the *rediscovery* of the world. As Father Galeriu states, man assumes an *axiological conscience*, meant to configure the manner in which it shall relate to the creation. The sacrifice consists in this assumption of the *axiological conscience*. Man does not report anymore to the creation as an impersonal system of consumption, but it imprints his own manner of being the sacrificial limit of the valorization of the rationality of creation.

Seated in heaven in order to maintain the creation in its unitary form, man is entrusted the great gift of freedom, so that through freedom he can be like the Creator Himself. The sacrifice is an expression of freedom and the assumption of the position of creator - the image of the Creator. Offering this perspective on the sacrifice, Father Galeriu admirably falls within the theological philosophy which outlines the

profile of man in its perspective of sacrificer of creation. To this end, we render a short passage that belongs to Metropolitan Bishop Ioannis Zizioulas and that shows how much the positions of the two contemporary theologians are alike:

When man takes the world in his hands and replenishes it in a creating manner reporting it to God, then he frees the creature built in its limits and gives it the possibility to genuinely exist. Thus, when the man is a priest of creation, he also becomes a creator himself (Zizioulas 1999: 89).

Sacrifice is not isolation and morbid retreat on the self, but an opening and creative action, achieved into the likeness to God. The care towards one another, which is in itself a sacrifice, elevates man to the state of likeness in reality to God. Father Galeriu speaks about this care of God for His creation, the care which is a spring of light for creatures and that becomes for man a model to be followed in the assumption of the sacrificial attitude towards the neighbour especially towards the creation in general:

In the teaching of [Saint Gregory Palamas, n.n.] the connection, the holy union through which the Divine Providence cares for, supports the creation freely, is creatively asserted, sharing to the creatures gradually, from Himself, for each one of them, the meaning, light, love. The image of God forever shines on them, so that God and the world, the work created by Him, as well as the gracious union between the uncreated and the created, into light and love think together in a providential manner (Sfântul Grigorie Palama 2004: XIII).

Man is not perfected and cannot become a spring of meaning, of light and love for his neighbours if he remains in his own universe tightly closed to the *realities imprinted with the truth*. No one cannot *think in a providential manner with God* or with his neighbour if he does not succeed in empowering himself for the sacrificial dedication.

The rationality imprinted by God to the creation is admirably described by Father Galeriu in this statement quoted above: [*God and His creation*] *are found in a providential manner together*. Man becomes himself a providence of God's creation, more so, he situates himself in the sacrificial co-work with God. The act of creation in itself is a sacrificial act, for God, in the sacrament of His eternity, has contemplated on the existence of other realities than Himself, which became possible by the activation of sacrificial love.

We cannot not make the connection between this statement of Father Galeriu – [*God and the creation*] *think together in a providential manner* – and a small passage from *The 43rd Homily* of Saint Gregory Palamas in which the providential endeavour and the sacrificial endeavour of the Canaanite woman is graphically described, in relation to the demonization of her daughter:

Being convinced and believing and running with ardour she suddenly becomes pleading and missionary who is heard [by everyone], calling from afar: “Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is demon-possessed and suffering terribly..” [And the plead of the Canaanite woman continues] : The one lacking feeling has the misfortune, while I am burning from my reins, having the feeling of passion, and to Your mercy I cry - Lord, Son of David, being of his seed from the human [nature], but Master of all, as God before time-, with whose permission my daughter is tormented by the demon. If with mercy, You shall turn Your face towards us, then that servant of Your anger shall shortly disappear. The Canaanite woman offers herself as guarantee between God and man, arbitrating in a providential manner the existential remodelling of the daughter tormented by the demon. As Father Galeriu would state, God and the Canaanite woman think in a providential manner together (Grigorie Palama translated by Coresciuc 2019: *Omilia* 43.2).

The sacrifice, in all its forms, is based on respect for God’s creation. The entire theological discourse regarding the ecology adopts this perspective of the sacrificial respect for the initial meaning of the creation imprinted by God. Father Galeriu states: *The world is also the sacrament of man’s love. In it and through it, man discovers his love, greatness and power of giving and he offers it as well as an offering to God and his neighbours* (Galeriu 1998: 98). Man is developing his ethical attitude towards the creation on the ethical attitude towards himself and towards God. The sacrifice consists in not seeing the theological act as a personal satisfaction act, but of opening towards the reason that God assigned to the creation and the relationship.

The danger of not ethically assimilating the world as an offering is present in the gesture itself of privatising the religious act. As we are speaking about sacrifice and about its importance in deciphering the meaning of creation, we cannot not recall even in passing the ethical disaster that the narrow view on the relationship with God can cause. Briefly, God reveals to us an attitude of sacrifice, and the reception of this sacrifice is also done in a state of fully assumed sacrifice:

The sacrifice employs the entire existence. And the divine or human person as a subject and the entire nature as a matter or its content. It also employs the entire destiny, Revealing Himself at the same time as an instrument of the perfect relationship between the believer and God and man and man, and a path towards renewal and creation (Galeriu 1998: 278).

The privatisation of the religious act, the removal from the adequate understanding of ecclesiology, the departure from the community space in favour of a selfish retreat in receiving the Sacraments and the living flow of the dynamics of living in the Church, there are as many shades clearly showing that the non-assumption of the sacrifice at an ecclesial level leads to a distortion of the understanding of the reason that God imprinted not only on the creation, but also on the Church in its entirety. Such a privatisation can be exceeded only through the effort of understanding the community space of the Church:

By partaking in the same Christ in His permanent state of sacrifice, one exceeds not only the separation between the members of the community from a certain church place, but from all the communities in various church places where the same righteous and complete faith in Christ is confessed (Stăniloae in Sfântul Maxim Mărturisitorul 2000: 105).

The *reciprocal providential* thinking cannot accept a disintegration in the natural order of the man-God-man relationship. Any individualization and defection from *koinonia* actually represents a step back taken in the own moving forward of the man individualised towards God. In other words, Saint Gregory Palamas describes this state of defection from the *reciprocal providential* thinking that Father Galeriu reminds us of:

Thus, due to the sin in our case we also have civil rising and rout, which brings on all types of wickedness, and lodges the beginner of evil into the heads of the rising and into the persons who are rising, [beginner] who transforms them into wild beasts. And it is not an exaggeration to state that it makes the ones in which it dwells in such a manner that they shall acquire the nature of demons (Grigorie Palama translated by Coresciuc 2019: 25-32 – *Omilia* 1.8).

Conclusions

The question that we are endeavouring to answer through the few reflections of this study is fundamental for understanding the dynamics of contemporary catechesis. Father Constantin Galeriu proposes a paradigm of approaching the pastoral relationship through a continuous reporting to

the Fathers and to the living tradition of the Church. The freedom of answer upon God's call is defined by the assumption of the sacrifice, as a certain path of revealing of this call. Father Galeriu does not report to the theology of the Fathers in an archaeological or descriptive endeavour, but finds in the Patristic words a genuine spring of his own view on realities (views which bear a personal touch, but which do not alienate in no way from the integrating dimension of the traditional-Patristic thinking). Father Constantin Galeriu is an excellent model of the convergence of Patristic theology with the reception of this theology in a contemporary catechetical context, offering an optimal solution before the *temptation* of borrowing catechetical methods stripped of the *genuine philosophy*. In this brief presentation we have chosen two of the topics characteristic to Father Galeriu's discourse and which offer only a partial image of the manner in which the Father considers to be rooted into the Patristic theology. The reality much exceeds these types of conceptual approaches, Father being in itself a Patristic image, full of wisdom and distinction of thinking and of the solutions offered by the Fathers. In the pastoral activity of Father Galeriu, the reality of not sticking to the fixed words of the Patristic text is embodied, but its animation through deeds, in this ultimate existential employment both for the one carrying out and for the one *suffering* it.

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