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## Freedom in Truth and Love. A Biblical Message of Salvation to a Fallen World

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**Abstract:**

*The exaltation of freedom, by the post-modern society, as man's absolute good based on the supremacy of will over reason led to the negation of any transcendent truth and objective good. The consequences of such direction on human behavior are disastrous. The paper will explicit the Christian understanding of human freedom as a mean to human perfection and divinization by placing it in relation to divine freedom which is necessarily concomitant to and a consequence of divine intelligence and goodness. The definition of human freedom will be drawn from the word of God: its relation to intelligence, goodness and sacrifice in the Trinitarian communion and the act of creation; its relation to image and likeness in the making of Adam; its relation to alterity and love in the extraction of Eve; its relation to obedience and its loss in the fall; its relation to liberation and responsibility in exodus; and, finally, its relation to redemption and perfection in Jesus Christ.*

**Keywords:**

*image, likeness, freedom, truth, love*

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## Introduction

During the French revolution God was rejected, Notre Dame cathedral was desacralized and dedicated to the goddess reason. By rejecting God, the very foundations of reason and its quest for the truth was undermined and the west became slowly disenchanted from the cult of reason under the influence of relativism and individualism. By exchanging “the truth about God for a lie” (Rom 1: 25), “man’s capacity to know the truth is also darkened, and his will to submit to it is weakened. Thus, giving himself over to relativism and skepticism (*cf.* Jn 18: 38), he goes off in search of an illusory freedom apart from truth itself” (John Paul II 1993, 1). Now, in a revolution no less bloody and chaotic than its predecessor, post-modernity is exalting freedom to such an extent that it becomes an absolute, which would then be the source of values” (John Paul II 1993, 32) and man’s ultimate good. Now too, by rejecting reason and truth, freedom is uprooted from its matrix (John Paul II 1993, 34), voided of its purpose, instead of being man’s way to life it became his instrument of annihilation, instead of being the way to perfection and bliss, it became man’s hell.

To the average modern opinion, freedom - as Benedict XVI summarizes it - “would mean that our own will is the sole norm of our action and that the will not only can desire anything but also has the chance to carry out its desire” (Ratzinger 1996, 16-35). This is the natural outcome of the abolition of truth. There is no objective truth, so what I want is the truth. I create myself, I define reality, I become god. I’m free to define my sexuality, do whatever I please with it, or simply abolish it. I’m free to define my age [Husband and father-of-seven, 52, leaves his wife and kids to live as a transgender SIX-YEAR-OLD girl named Stefonknee. (<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-3356084/I-ve-gone-child-Husband-father-seven-52-leaves-wife-kids-live-transgender-SIX-YEAR-OLD-girl-named-Stefonknee.html>)] regardless of biology. Free to define my life and the life of others if it is worth living or not and act accordingly. Free to define my very nature [Man spends \$50,000 on over 100 procedures to transform into a ‘genderless’ ALIEN. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-4274396/Man-spends-50->

000-transform-genderless-ALIEN.html] and the nature of things. The supremacy of the will over reason and natural law, and reason has no freedom to object to the will unleashed, it will be bullied into silence. We are facing a new totalitarianism and we need to question its very foundation like Benedict XVI did in his fine essay: "How free is the will after all? And how reasonable is it? Is an unreasonable will truly a free will? Is an unreasonable freedom truly freedom? Is it really a good?" (Ratzinger 1996, 17).

Now more than ever the Church, as an "expert in humanity" (Paul VI 1965), moved by charity (*cf.* 1Pt 3, 15), has a sacred duty to offer and explicit God's revelation to the world as a remedy to man's fallenness and his tendency to self-destruction. God, throughout the Judeo-Christian revelation, would constantly present Himself as the liberator of His people. Set my people free! From Pharaoh, from sin, from death. Although freedom is at the very heart of God's redemptive action, it is not man's ultimate goal nor his highest good ["Finally, the purpose or fruit of Sacred Scripture is not simply any kind, but the fullness of everlasting happiness. For these are writings whose words are of eternal life; they were recorded, not only that we might believe, but also that we might possess that life everlasting, in which we shall see and love and our desires will be completely satisfied. Then we shall really know that love which surpasses all knowledge, and thus *be filled with all the fullness of God.*" (Bonaventure 2005, 53)]. God wants us to be perfect: "So be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt. 5:48) by knowing Him (Jn 17: 3) ["Now this is eternal life, that they should know you, the only true God, and the one whom you sent, Jesus Christ." (Jn 17: 3)] and loving Him (Jn 14: 23) [ "Whoever loves me will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our dwelling with him." (Jn 14: 23)] and freedom is one *sine qua non* condition to reach this perfection ["Genuine freedom is an outstanding manifestation of the divine image in man. For God willed to leave man «in the power of his own counsel» (*cf.* Sir 15: 14), so that he would seek his Creator of his own accord and would freely arrive at *full and blessed perfection* by cleaving to God". (Second Vatican Ecumenical Council 1965, 17)]. Perfection cannot

be reduced to an illusionary total unbridled capacity to do whatever we wish. Perfection has its conditions. It should be understood in truth: "You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (Jn. 8: 32) willed by a being capable of free choice : "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you" (Matt. 7: 7), lived in love : "You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your being, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself." (Luc. 10: 27) because "Perfection demands that maturity in self-giving to which human freedom is called" (John Paul II 1993, 17).

In the present reflection we will learn from selected books and figures in the Bible lessons on freedom.

### **1. Lesson from God's identity: The Trinity**

The Christian God is a Trinity of Persons/Relations in one divine essence. An eternal self-subsistent relation. God is one, yet there is alterity in this oneness. The Father the "Being-For" gives Himself totally to His Word, emptying Himself "Everything that the Father has is mine" (Jn 16:15), denying Himself to be in the other, the Son the "Being-From" who, in return, gives himself totally to the Father, the love in which the Father gives Himself to the Son and the Son to the Father is the Holy Spirit, the "Being-with". The implications of this revelation on theology and anthropology are abysmal.

God is relational, He is Love. In God's simple essence being and love are one, they are concomitant. So being is relational in its essence: to be, is to be in relation. A sublime contradiction where to truly be, you need to sacrifice yourself, to give, lose yourself in love to the other: you can't love, thus you can't be and you can't be free, if you remain trapped in your egoity: "Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it" (Mt. 6: 25-25). The communion of love in the Trinity is the archetype of sacrifice. A sacrifice in beatitude, that is the very essence of beauty. Thus, being is in its very essence sacrificial.



In this divine community of love God, the Being is supremely perfect, supremely good and supremely free. His will is moved by nothing but His essence that is love, and as Thomas Aquinas says: “He has free will with respect to what He does not necessarily will” (Thomas Aquinas 1920). The Father necessarily knows himself in His Word the Son, He necessarily wills Himself in the Holy Spirit and this necessity is not a limit to His free will, it is His very being. Being self-subsistent, God freely wills everything that is not himself i.e. the creation, in intelligence and goodness. To say God is free is to say that He is moved by nothing outside His very essence that is Intelligence and Love. For man to be free, as we shall see, he has to participate in God’s Intelligence and Love.

## **2. Lesson from the act of Creation**

Creation in the Bible is *ex-nihilo*, out of nothing. There is no chaos to put in order like in the Greek mythology. Creation *ex-nihilo* means that God is the creator of the world, He is not part of it thus He is not the notion of order in the word.

The act of creation has its archetype in the sacrificial love in the Trinitarian communion. Because “God is Love” (1 Jn 4: 8) He can create otherness and because He is self-subsistent, He is free and He doesn’t create it out of necessity and personal need, therefore He governs it with love and intelligence and can bring into existence rational beings who are capable of love and free will.

Creation is an act of divine sacrifice (i.e. love) made in total liberality. The Creator, the Eternal negates Himself to bring into existence something and someone who is not Him: free beings whose freedom escapes both, God’s omnipotence and governance, making them co-creators of their own being, as we will see with the creation of Adam.

The Father created the world through His Son, the Word “All things came to be through Him, and without him nothing came to be” (Jn 1: 3) in overabundance of love, and found the word He created to be good: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. [...] And God saw that it was good” (Gn 1: 1, 25).

Here we need to highlight two fundamental principles:

- Creation has been thought by God into existence. Things have their archetype, their ultimate reference, their truth in God. The nature of every being is a gift from God. While every creature receives its nature by the very act of creation, rational creatures –as we shall see- have to freely accept their nature from God and perfect it by corresponding it to its thought in the Word, then and only then can the creature be in the truth of what it is meant to be.

- The goodness of creation is distinctive of the Judeo-Christian revelation because religious myths see evil as a structural necessity of the word (Bouyer 1982, 96: “Pour le mythe, il n’y a pas distinction entre le monde et sa chute, car le monde ne vient l’être que par la chute des dieux, soit qu’ils se divisent et dégénèrent, soit qu’ils entrent en conflit les uns avec les autres. Pour la Parole, la création, au contraire, est une libre activité de Dieu, qui, procédant de sa pure bonté, est toute bonne en elle-même, quoique d’une bonté limitée et dépendante. Le mal est donc inhérent à l’existence, des dieux comme des hommes. Pour la Parole, il n’y a aucun mal en Dieu, et il n’y en avait aucun dans la créature telle qu’elle est sortie de ses mains”). God is good and there is no evil in him. The creation is good and evil is not part of it nor is it necessary for the use of freedom: evil is an unfortunate consequence of the misuse of free will like in the story of the fall. So, freedom is not a matter of choosing between good and evil, it is the condition to love.

### 3. Lesson from the creation of Adam and the extraction-formation of Eve

“Then God said: Let us make man in our image, after our likeness” (Gn 1:26) « *Na’aseh Adam betsalmenu kidemutenu* », “*tselem*” צלם and “*demut*” דמות have always been translated “*image*” and “*likeness*” based on the Septuagint “*eikon*” and “*homoiosis*” and the Vulgate “*ad imaginem et similitudinem nostram*”. At first glance the two words might seem similar to us. Almost saying the same thing. Among the wide interpretations [(cf. Westermann 1994). For an extensive review of the history of exegesis on image and likeness (Gen 1: 26)] of both words, I chose to follow the interpretation of J.F. Froger (cf. Froger 2017, 186-188)

who closely linked both words to their semantic roots (shadow for image and blood for likeness) putting in evidence a rich difference in symbolism and meaning.

In “*tsalmenu*” (our image) we see *tselem* to shade (Strong’s Hebrew Lexicon #6754) from the root צל *tʃal* shadow: at the heart of the idea of image there is the concept of shadow, “our shadow”. As for “*demuṭenū*” (our likeness) we see the root מד blood (Strong’s Hebrew Lexicon #1818). The idea of likeness is based on consanguinity: having the same blood.

Thus, we obtain: “Let us make man in our shadow, according to our consanguinity”. Although the meaning hasn’t been altered but the elements offered introduce us to an abysmal symbolic dimension that will help us gain a new depth in our understanding of the revealed text.

### **3.1. Made in God’s image/shadow**

The shadow is the first possible image of an object. It doesn’t exist per se but as the interaction of 3 elements: a source of light, the light and an object that absorbs the light. In order to be perceived it needs a screen to project on. A typical example is the shadow of a tree on a sunny day.

If God has a shadow, he needs to have 3 elements: a source of light, the light and an object that absorbs the light. We can see here retrospectively a sketch of the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. The image can be an independent duplication of the form of an object on a screen, while a shadow can never subsist independently from this interaction, this emanation in act. Thus Adam, created in the shadow of God, exists only in relation to the “*us...in our*” that created him. As noted by Gregory of Nyssa (*cf.* Grégoire de Nysse 2002, 92-93) all creatures were created by a simple word or command but man was the fruit of a deliberation between the three Persons of the Trinity [“As if the Creator [...] drew man from the mystery of his own Being. [...] The image must “reflect”, it must, in a certain way, almost reproduce “the substance” of its Prototype. The Creator says, furthermore, “after our likeness”. It is clear that it must not be understood as a “portrait”, but as a living being, who will live a life similar to that of God.” (John Paul II 1978)]. While in God relation is concomitant to existence, for the created world and for Adam in particular

relation is prior to existence. As we saw above, we are thought by God into existence: “let us make Adam” that’s why Descartes’s adage “I think therefore I am” is half true: I am capable of thinking because I was made participant in God’s image, having intelligence and freewill like Him. So it is more truthful to say in faithfulness to the word of God: “I am thought therefore I am” and the more I correspond to the thought of me in God the more I am: “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I dedicated you” (Jr 1: 5).

The earth (*Adamah*) from, which Adam was molded, holds the imprint of God in negative. It is Him, but not yet. Like a program or a metamorphosis that needs to unfold, a potentiality that needs to be enacted.

The image in which man was created, like Origen (Origène 2003, 60-64) among many fathers saw it, is not an impersonal similitude with the divine, but the very person of the Savior. The completion, the perfection of the “*homo capax Dei*” is to become united to his Archetype, the Word of God, the Son who receives the Father in the Holy Spirit like the tree receives the sun in the light: “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation” (Col 1-15). The shadow-image of the Son leaves in us an ontological hunger and thirst, an infinite void and craving, a lack of being that can only be fulfilled by Him the divine saliency that will inseminate our souls with eternal life: His very union with us. Apart from Him nothing can satisfy the human heart.

Thus, in creating Man, God not only takes His son as model but he commits to realizing Him in us at the price of the redemptive incarnation by assuming our very nature. In the gospel of Luke, we see the completion of this prophecy in the molding of the New Adam: “And the angel said to her in reply, the holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will *overshadow* you. Therefore, the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God” (Luke 1, 35).

Mary the holy *adamah* was overshadowed by God so that from her will germinate the New Adam, the Savior, the son of man in whom “*dwells the fullness of the deity bodily*” (Col. 2, 9).

Being created in God's image is a journey, a covenant that culminates in "it's no more I that lives but Christ that lives in me" (Ga 2: 20) and it is in Him that each one of us will find his uniqueness, his true identity and personality since every one of us corresponds to a unique particularity in god's infinite essence.

Man can be defined as the only created being who has to appropriate his quiddity. So, he is necessarily unfinished and necessarily endowed with intelligence and free will in order to know and want to become 'man' in his essence.

Let us now give a closer look at Likeness.

### **3.2. After our likeness/Consanguinity**

Being of the same blood with God means having the same life (*cf.* Gn. 9, 4), having the strongest similarity, being related to him, having his spirit, being driven by His will.

When image gives the idea of capacity and potentiality, likeness is act. It is the very loving union that makes him our Father and us his children.

Jesus in the Gospel of John chapter 8 has shown us exactly in what consists our likeness/filiation in His argument with the Pharisees:

You are doing the works of your father! (So) they said to him, We are not illegitimate. We have one Father, God. Jesus said [...] You belong to *your father the devil* and you willingly carry out *your father's desires* (Jn 8: 41, 42, 44).

Desires define likeness and resemblance. Our father is the one whose desires we have and willingly carry out. The revelation Jesus is making here is of primordial importance. Not only God has desires – his essence is love -, being made in his image and likeness we too are made to love and to desire: we can't be desireless thus we can't be fatherless. Since we are bearers of desires, we should carefully choose the source of our desires: our decisions, morality, life and purpose will depend on it. Only the desires of the true God that are perfectly good and intelligent can make us free.

### 3.3. The extraction-formation of Eve

Then the Lord God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him" (Gn 2: 18).

It is not good that Adam (human nature) should be undifferentiated, not self-aware. So, God will give him a helper, to help the human nature be aware of its essence as given in the act of creation. The extraction of the woman and the awakening of the human nature to its femininity is a fundamental step in the initiation of man to freedom. You can't be free if you don't know who you are. And Adam was made in God's image in precisely the fact that he is man and woman: "God created Adam in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them" (Gn 1: 27).

The archetype of male and female are the activity and receptivity in the Trinitarian processions. Being made in God's image, Adam should not only gain awareness of his activity towards the creation that God ordered him to govern but also his receptivity in relation to God his creator and Father. Adam is not made free only by exercising dominion over creation but also by receiving his nature and essence as a gift from God, by gaining awareness of the image and likeness in which he was made.

So, God starts the beautiful extraction-formation of Eve by asking Adam to name the animals:

So out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air, and *brought them to the man to see what he would call them*; and whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every beast of the field; *but for the man there was not found a helper fit for him* (Gn 2: 19-21).

It is interesting to see that the extraction-formation of Eve started by naming the animals. Adam named the animals that symbolize man's psychic instances and became aware that he is not an animal, he did not find in them a helper fit for him, he can't find his quiddity in his psychic life. He is in this world but not from this world.

Without divine intervention, his ignorance would make vain any attempt of free decision, because freedom supposes self-knowledge and the disposition of one's own nature. No animal can access freedom

because an animal does not have access to its own nature. Adam must not only want life but know the gift by which he receives it.

So, the LORD God caused a *deep sleep* to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his *ribs* and closed up its place with flesh; and the rib which the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and *brought her to the man*. Then the man said, *this at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh*; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man (Gn 2: 19-21).

God took Adam's interiority (his holy of holies) while he was in ecstasy [Deep sleep (*Tardemah*) is translated ἔκστασις in the *Septuagint*: "getting out of oneself."] and projected it outside and He personally brought it to Adam who now became differentiated and representative of the masculine, and Eve of the feminine. God invites Adam to gain self-awareness, he offers him otherness and invites him to become fully relational like his creator: "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh". He recognized his essence in a vis-à-vis initiated by God himself. It is the first exodus (Gen 2: 24) [That is why a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, and the two of them become one body (Gen 2: 24)] to which God calls Adam from his egoity to the ecstasy of love with his precious other rooted in sacrifice, responsibilities and duties. This nuptial relationship is co-creative, the family, the matrix and cradle of humanity, each person's first experience of God if we freely commit to love, or hell is we sacrifice love on the altar of egoity.

Man's realization and freedom cannot be accomplished outside the communion of persons where responsibilities and duties are involved.

#### **4. Lesson from the fall or the loss of freedom**

Eve's extraction-formation came in the context of man's initiation to the accomplishment of his very being, his initiation to freedom and perfection. It took place in a very interesting garden:

The LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and placed there the man whom he had formed. Out of the ground the LORD God made grow every tree that was delightful to look at and good for food, *with the tree of life in the middle of the garden and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil* (Gn 2: 8-9).

From the names of the trees we see the symbolic significance of this text.

The LORD God then took the man and settled him in the garden of Eden, to *cultivate* and *care* for it. The LORD God gave the man this order: *You are free to eat from any of the trees of the garden except the tree of knowledge of good and evil. From that tree you shall not eat; when you eat from it you shall die* (Gn 2: 15-17).

Adam's mission is to cultivate and care for the garden. Man's perfection requires a constant work of intelligence, the acquisition and development of knowledge, so much that God gave him a twofold order: to eat from the trees, and not to eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. We usually focus on the second part of the order and we miss the first part. Adam should eat from all the trees, the trees being categories of knowledge, in order to grow in wisdom. Being created like God with intelligence and free will, we glorify him by acquiring wisdom and it is wisdom that will guide us in making good choices, wanting the right thing and loving. While ignorance is a natural state for a child, it becomes sinful for an adult. We fail to comprehend the evil of ignorance until we see the damage and devastation its consequences bring on us and on our loved ones [We have a tendency to see ignorance as an excuse maybe because of a false interpretation of Jesus's words during his passion when he asked the Father to forgive those who were causing all his suffering because "they do not know what they are doing" (Lk 23: 34). The Father didn't need to be convinced to forgive them, were their ignorance invincible. Their sin is that they didn't want to know when they ought to, and the consequence of their ignorance is an unfathomable evil. Their sin is so big that it requires God's forgiveness and redemption].

The second commandment is to refrain from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. The tree wasn't put there to test Adam, God wasn't tempting him, He doesn't tempt (*cf.* James 1: 13). The tree is a consequence of man's free will: because Adam was created free, God can only invite him to consent to the rules that allow him to be free; thus, freedom includes the possibility of breaking these rules, by ignorance or by rebellion. Breaking the rules is not necessary to experience freedom (as our culture wants us to believe) but it is necessarily possible. The fruit of



knowledge is the fruit par excellence that Adam must not desire and by doing this he loses himself, his egoity, only to find himself perfectly in God. Not eating from it is the ultimate sacrifice in trust and love that man had to do as an echo of God's sacrifice in creating him: negating himself to be in the One who is. Adam the masculine of creation had to accept his receptivity in relation to the Trinity. To have his principle not in himself but in God he had to accept not to be self-referent, the ultimate reference for good and evil, the legislator, the alfa and omega. He had to accept not to be his own god so that God can be his God.

But in order to do so, Adam needed to be himself aware of his receptivity, his spiritual dimension, his holy of holies longing for God's dwelling in it. Adam needed help, and help was given to him in Eve. Because she symbolizes Adam's openness to deification, the void in the human nature that has the shape of God and longing for its fulfillment, Eve was very logically the sole interlocutor Satan would have in order to tempt humanity into following him in his own rebellion against God. And Eve was the one who's mission as helper was to reject such a temptation, such a desire.

Satan an angel originally created good by God, decided to be self-referent, he wanted to be absolutely free by rejecting God as his ultimate principle, he wanted everything for himself, even God. He refused to echo in his being the Trinitarian relation by being in a loving relation with God. He closed on himself in a mortal solipsism and hatred by negating otherness: his fall consists in his irrevocable decision not to sacrifice, in fact Satan is the anti-sacrifice, the anti-love. By negating love, he negates being itself because being is relational so he became "murderer", and by negating being he negates the truth becoming "a liar and the father of lies" (Jn 8: 44).

Rejecting deification in the One good and true God, Satan became a lonely, egoistic, capricious malevolent god, and it is precisely this image he projected on God in his discourse with Eve. "But the snake said to the woman: "You certainly will not die! God knows well that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like gods, who know good and evil" (Gen 3: 4-5). Satan's message was clear: God is lying to you. He is

jealous of you: he doesn't want to lose some prerogatives he has and he certainly doesn't have your best interest in mind. So, you better be your own self-referent gods, defining good and evil. Be free! Free from God, free from any transcendent truth (*cf.* John Paul II 1993, 32). A message we keep on hearing every single day!

Eve believed Satan, and she gave to her husband who ate from the fruit. Adam who received the commandment directly from God, disobeyed Him and instead he obeyed Eve. From that moment, Eve became a deity for Adam. Adam now listens to his self-referent inspiration and unconsciously makes it a god. From that moment on, as human history shows, humans will invent their deities and their cults, projected from the more or less conscious collective imagination and desires, "the latest being atheistic scientific rationality. And now with the advent of individualistic subjectivity, there will be as many gods as there are men" (*cf.* Froger 2017, 391-392).

Both ate and "Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked" (Gn 3: 7) Instead of opening their eyes to the truth, the beauty and goodness of God and be part of it, their eyes were opened to their nothingness. The same nothingness that was calling God to fill it, became unbearable to them. *It became man's source of constant fear: "I was afraid, because I was naked, so I hid"* (Gn 3: 10).

Adam had to sacrifice his egoity to be in the One who is. Instead, like the devil, he refused to sacrifice. *As soon as we abolish self-sacrifice, we institute the sacrifice of the other in a desperate attempt to fill our emptiness, our poverty, our lack of being.* It is inevitable, because the being is sacrificial in its essence: I sacrifice myself to the other in truth and love so "rivers of living water will flow" from within me (*cf.* Jn 7: 38), or I sacrifice the other for my egoity in lie and hatred so I become "liar and murderer" (Jn 8: 44).

The consequences of the original sin on the human nature were devastating (*cf.* 400 – 405): "The soul's spiritual faculties over the body are shattered", "the union of man and woman becomes subject to tensions, marked by lust and domination", "creation has become alien and hostile to man", human nature became "deprived of original holiness and

justice”, “subject to ignorance, suffering and the dominion of death and inclined to sin”. In the words of the beloved apostle: “the whole world is under the power of the evil one” (1 John 5: 19).

If this is not slavery then what is? Humans lost their freedom, by losing the truth, goodness and love. By believing Satan’s lie, humankind lost God because “Truth enlightens man's intelligence and shapes his freedom, leading him to know and love the Lord” (John Paul II 1993, 1). Man became ignorant, wounded, lonely and rebel.

St. Paul describes this reality in a very poignant way:

For I do not do the good I want, but I do the evil I do not want. [...] For I take delight in the law of God, in my inner self, but I see in my members another principle at war with the law of my mind, taking me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Miserable one that I am! Who will deliver me from this mortal body? (Rm 7: 19, 22-24).

Humanity is in need of liberation, salvation and redemption.

## **5. Lesson from *Exodus***

In the process of the redemption of man, Exodus is a source of profound wisdom. We will highlight two moments: Moses’ encounter with God in the burning bush and the Decalogue.

Moses received his mission as liberator of his people in his face to face with God in the burning bush on mount Horeb.

The angel of the LORD appeared to him in a blazing fire from the midst of a bush; and he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, yet the bush was not consumed. So, Moses said, “I must turn aside now and see this *marvelous sight*, why the bush is not burned up” (Ex 3: 2-3).

The marvelous sight was the inhabitation of the fire of divinity in the human nature without consuming it. The burning bush is the first “*Ecce Homo*” a vision of the Son of Man in whom dwells the fullness of deity (Col. 2: 9). It is also a revelation of what the human nature is supposed to be according to God’s will i.e. the tabernacle of the Holy Trinity: “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him” (Jn 14: 23).

Before becoming the liberator of his people, Moses had to be liberated himself and his liberation necessitates two elements:

- God's revelation of his own name that is a communion with him, an access to his intimacy, "God said to Moses", "I AM WHO I AM"; and He said, "Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" God, furthermore, said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, 'YHWH, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.' This is My name forever, and this is My memorial-name to all generations" (Ex 3: 14-15).

- And the true worship of the true God: "Certainly I will be with you, and this shall be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you *shall worship God at this mountain*" (Ex 3: 12).

But first of all, Moses, and later on his people, had to leave Egypt, so "God called to him from the midst of the bush and said, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." Then He said, "Do not come near here; *remove your sandals* from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground" (Ex. 3: 4-5).

Moses was ordered to remove all his mental representations, his a priori, the cultural legacy that he brought with him from Egypt in order to see God in purity, to understand him in truth, as He wants to be understood. By removing his sandals, Moses left Egypt for good and he let the holy land sanctify him, exactly like the apostles had to let Jesus wash their feet: "Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet." Jesus answered him, "Unless I wash you, you will have no inheritance with me" (Jn 13: 8).

Entry into freedom always necessitates a painful exodus, a destitution to see God in a nudity that became unbearable to us, but necessary to know and love God like He wants to be known and loved without projecting on Him any idol, fruit of our imagination, desires and fantasies.

After liberating the Israelites from the slavery in Egypt God brought them to the desert of Sinai. They were liberated but were not free yet. Inner freedom requires the adoration of the true God, an inner exodus

from error and sin to truth and goodness in full obedience to the One who is the Truth and Love:

Then the LORD called to him from the mountain, saying: This is what you will say to the house of Jacob; tell the Israelites: You have seen how I treated the Egyptians and how I bore you up on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now, if you *obey* me completely and keep my covenant, you will be my treasured possession among all peoples, though all the earth is mine (Ex 19: 3-5).

Then He gave them the Decalogue who is, as Benedict XVI beautifully said it:

at once the self-presentation and self-exhibition of God and the exposition of what man is, the luminous manifestation of his truth. This truth becomes visible in the mirror of God's essence, because man can be rightly understood only in relation to God. To live the Decalogue means to live our Godlikeness, to correspond to the truth of our being and thus to do the good. Said in yet another way; to live the Decalogue means to live the divinity of man, which is the very definition of freedom: the fusion of our being with the divine being and the resulting harmony of all with all (Ratzinger 1996, 32-33).

Living by the Decalogue is not a matter of following a set of rules in a legalistic way. It is honoring the very essence of man in teaching him to be relational (loving) in relation to God and his brothers and sisters who share with him the same image and likeness. It is "*the first necessary step on the journey towards freedom, its starting-point*" (John Paul II 1993, 13). The Decalogue is the true promised land and the journey to it is a long process (like the 40 years of the Israelites in the desert) that requires an assiduous work of growth, purification of our ideas and desires, humility, the acquisition of wisdom and all the virtues (*cf.* Wisdom 8: 1-8), but above all, the grace of God: "I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit, *because without me you can do nothing*" (Jn 15: 5).

He is free indeed, he who adores the one true God and is not enslaved to idols, he who doesn't kill but builds people up spiritually, mentally and psychologically, he who is faithful to his precious other having control over his impulses and desires. He is free he who doesn't steal but is generous because money is his servant and not his master, he who is truthful, he who is capable of looking at a woman and not reduce

her to a sex object or a commodity and treat her in honor and respect like a sister. He who doesn't use, abuse and take advantage of others but blesses them: rejoicing at their blessings and mourning at their sorrows.

Living by the Decalogue is the entry into freedom, the only way to accomplish our being. And if we choose not to accomplish our being, we have no other choice but turn bad, become slaves to evil: "Amen, amen, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave of sin" (Jn 8:34), or as C.S. Lewis said it:

When he said, 'Be perfect,' He meant it. He meant that we must go in for the full treatment. It is hard; but the sort of compromise we are all hankering after is harder - in fact, it is impossible. It may be hard for an egg to turn into a bird: it would be a jolly sight harder for it to learn to fly while remaining an egg. We are like eggs at present. And you cannot go on indefinitely being just an ordinary, decent egg. We must be hatched or go bad (Lewis 2001, 198-199).

## **6. Lessons from the Son of Man, the Messiah**

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. [...] And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us, and we saw his glory, the glory as of the Father's only Son, full of grace and truth. (Jn 1: 1, 14)

Jesus Christ is the awaited Messiah, the divine intelligence manifested in a man. It is in Him that we contemplate the union between divine intelligence and human intelligence, divine will and human will. He is the fruit we should eat in order to access God's intimacy and eternal life. He offers himself to us on the tree of the cross to be desired and taken.

He is the "the way, the truth and the life", in Him man's intelligence becomes united with God's intelligence: "eternal life is to know you the one true God and the one you sent Jesus Christ" (Jn 17: 3) and men will become united with God's will. In Him our likeness with God is restored. The consanguinity that we lost in the original sin is given back to us through the covenant of His blood that we are invited to drink. Jesus, prefigured by Moses, is the liberator of God's children and the victor over the devil: "Whoever sins belongs to the devil, because the devil has sinned

from the beginning. Indeed, the Son of God was revealed to destroy the works of the devil.” (1 Jn 3: 8)

But Jesus too, like Moses, had to be prepared in His human nature for His salvific mission. He was “growing in grace, stature and wisdom” (Lk 2: 40-52) and He was made “perfect through suffering” (Heb 2: 10) [“For it was fitting that he, for whom and through whom all things exist, in bringing many children to glory, should make the leader to their salvation perfect through suffering” (Heb 2: 10)] not because of any intrinsic value to suffering per se but because it is precisely in His suffering that we see the perfect union of Jesus’ human will with the Father’s will. Jesus redeemed Adam’s sin in yet another garden the garden of Gethsemane where like Adam he was offered to fully unite His will with the Father’s will, but this time not in the bliss of the garden of Eden but through unfathomable pain, taking on Him all the evil of the rebellion of His brothers and sisters. Paradoxically Jesus became perfect, thus perfectly free, by accepting to be chained, tortured and nailed on a cross... out of infinite love: “Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Yours be done.” (Lk 22: 42)

Jesus is the liberator, the savior, “the firstborn among many brethren” (Rm 8:29) in Him and in Him only we reach true freedom, freedom in truth [“If you remain in my word, you will truly be my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” They answered him, “We are descendants of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How can you say, ‘You will become free?’” Jesus answered them, “Amen, amen, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave of sin. A slave does not remain in a household forever, but a son always remains. So, if a son frees you, then you will truly be free” (Jn 8: 31-36)] and love [“I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another. This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (Jn 13: 34-35)].

In His life and teaching Jesus did not limit His salvific action to the metaphysical reality, He went into practical and existential details to make the “yoke easy” and “the burden light” (Mt. 11: 30) on us and to make us

experience freedom in our everyday reality so that we “might have life and have it more abundantly” (Jn 10: 10). Given the width and depth of the topic of freedom in Jesus’ teaching we will limit our reflection to some aspects of freedom Jesus offers in His teaching to His followers: “Freedom from sin, from the dominion of the evil one, from the slavery of darkness, giving us the grace to know the truth and to act accordingly, to “do his works, and do greater things” (*cf.* Jn 14: 12).

Freedom from time, space (Cantalamessa 2007, 48-53), the absurdity of an ephemeral life and death. He rose our eyes and heart to the kingdom of God, our true place, the answer to the longing of every human heart and by doing so he gave us meaning and purpose to our life on earth. The more our eyes are gazing at him the more difference we make in this world and the more we see death as the long-awaited moment of our face to face with the love of our life: “For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain” (Philippians 1: 21).

Freedom from the loss of value and dignity, from the crippling awareness of our imperfection, inadequacy, self-loathing. We are sons and daughters of the King, and we were bought at a very high price (1 Co 6: 20). The price of His blood (Ga 3: 13).

Freedom from our deadly dependence on money, power, fame and people’s opinion to give ourselves a sense of being and value. Our worth is His love for us, His image and likeness in us (Mt 6: 19).

Freedom from elitism and an inflated ego. “I praise You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants” (Mt. 11: 25).

Freedom from the fear from the future and its uncertainties because our Father knows what we need before we ask Him and to Him we are more important than birds and flowers (Mt. 6: 25-26).

Freedom from the consequences of our wrongdoings and the wrongdoing of people on us because “all things work for good for those who love God” (Rm 8:28). Not only our souls are redeemed but our life too.



Freedom from the absurdity of pain. United with Christ's pain and sacrifice our pain has an eternal value (*cf.* Rm 5: 3-4; 2 Co 4: 17; Mt 10: 38).

Freedom from the prison of anger and revenge through forgiveness. In his commandment to forgive and pray to those who hate and persecute us (*cf.* Mt. 5: 44) Christ gave us the power to resist being contaminated by the evil done to us. He set us free too from the captivity of hatred and revenge that makes past hurts perpetually present to our mind and soul stealing from us the present, God's precious present to us and the only place where we can encounter Him.

Freedom from the fear of commitment and sacrifice by restoring the exclusivity and perpetuity of marriage as covenant (*cf.* Mk 10: 9) and the consecrated life (*cf.* Lk 9: 62). In the modern understanding commitment and responsibility are perceived as obstacle to freedom, yet in fact they are its natural culmination. Man cannot remain perpetual potentiality, eternally unformed, free to be without ever being able to be. This looks more like a curse than freedom.

Freedom from lies and half-truths and the strength to say the truth and be assertive: "let your statement be, 'Yes, yes' or 'No, no'; anything beyond these is of evil" (Mt. 5: 37).

Freedom from our gifts to others by expecting nothing in return. Doing good for the sake of goodness, not for human glory, not for return on investment. Just to glorify God thus protecting our heart from disappointment. (*cf.* Mt 6: 3)

Freedom even from God's gifts, from the drunkenness of the supernatural: "Nevertheless, do not rejoice because the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice because your names are written in heaven." (Lc 10: 20)

Like saint Paul said: "For freedom Christ set us free; so stand firm and do not submit again to the yoke of slavery" (Ga 5: 1) and the yoke of slavery is "immorality, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, hatreds, rivalry, jealousy, outbursts of fury, acts of selfishness, dissensions, factions, occasions of envy, drinking bouts, orgies, and the like" (Ga 5: 20). How many lives have been wasted and how many families have been devastated because of this insane search of man to find his fulfillment

outside of God. While those who live by the Spirit of God bear the fruit of “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law” (Ga 5: 22-23).

### **Conclusions**

In Christianity man’s freedom is an echo of God’s freedom that is inseparable from His divine intelligence and will in the Trinitarian communion. Man (human nature) is made in the image and likeness of God endowed with intelligence and free will, he is made unfinished thus participant in the very act of his creation by God. He needs to acquire his quiddity through the union of his intelligence with the divine intelligence and his will with the divine will. This act of union should be the result of a free choice.

In order for Man to be capable of such a choice, he needs to be self-aware and initiated to otherness: the extraction-formation of Eve is Man’s acquisition of the necessary conditions of freedom: the awareness of being in the image and likeness of God and his openness to the other – Eve – where he can actualize his being in a relation founded on responsibilities, duties and sacrifice (i.e. Love).

Tempted by the devil to follow him in his rebellion against God, Man deified himself in an act of self-reference rejecting sacrifice and closing on himself in a mortal solipsism. He broke free from God but instead of finding freedom, he became slave of evil, ignorance, pain and death.

God, in His covenantal love, committed to save humanity by showing them the way to freedom with Moses through the revelation of His Name and the gift of the law, the Decalogue: there is no true freedom outside a relation with the true God and a filiation with Him by following his desires (the Decalogue) and thus restoring in us His image-consanguinity that we lost in the fall.

The fullness of God’s revelation of His intimacy and the restauration of man foretold in exodus were fulfilled in Jesus, the Word incarnated. In His life, teaching, sacrifice and His Person he offered His followers the way to perfection in the union with the Trinity where divine freedom is found in Truth and Love. To be free is to be fully human in truth and love, fully in

God's image and likeness: to know Him and in Him to know all things, to love Him and in Him to love all things: "So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed" (Jn 8: 32).

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## Marriage in the Eschatological Perspective: Implications on Gender and Marital Intimacy

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**Abstract:**

*This research revisits the patristic views on the Divine economy for marriage and the human body in both the protological and the eschatological settings. It analyzes Saint John Chrysostom's views on marriage and the body, and the implications of Saint Maximus the Confessor's eschatological perspectives on gender. It studies how these views and perspectives are applied in Christian living throughout the centuries. To show this, it looks into the lives of several Christians who are living prototypes of this Christian eschatological vision of the body and marriage. While leaving in Christ, these saintly models have reflected the beauty of God's image in both male and female, whether in marriage or in celibacy. In conclusion, the research upholds that the power of the Holy Spirit working synergically with humanity transfigures both man and woman without losing their natural gender identity, and renders them earthly angels, while opening the way towards the mystical marriage with Christ.*

**Keywords:**

*Orthodox Church, Anthropology, Gender, Marriage, John Chrysostom, Maximus the Confessor, Eschatology, Body, Soul*

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“So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created *him*; male and female He created *them*” (Genesis 1: 27).

“For when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are *like* angels in heaven” (Mark 12: 25).

“Marriage is... an orientation of the self toward the *eschaton*... a journey, an ascent toward the *perfection* of paradise” (Elder Aimilianos of Simonopetra).

### **Introduction**

In the twenty-first century, the rising popularity of various ideologies about gender fluidity and genderlessness is seeking to eliminate difference in gender and refashion gender roles and identity. The core of these ideologies proposes that it does not matter what gender a human being was born with: what matters is how he or she identifies himself/herself. Various gender related lobbies are imposing their ideas through legislations in many countries, regardless of its rightness, psychologically, biologically, or even religiously [1].

Traditionally, there are two genders in human nature: male and female. In this gender binary, human beings are expected to always align with the physiological differentiations found at birth. They conform with their social, cultural, and religious expectations regarding gender expressions, linguistics, and roles, including motherhood, fatherhood, sisterhood, and brotherhood.

The Holy Bible declares that gender is made by God, as stated in Genesis 1: 27, 5: 2 and Mark 10: 5-6. In Orthodox theology, the God-given roles, qualities, and functions of human beings ought to lead to one essential purpose: holiness of life and unity with God (Leviticus 19: 2, 20: 7, 20: 26, 21: 8; Exodus 19: 6; 1 Peter 1: 16; 1 Thessalonians 4: 7). Diverse living experiences of human beings, married and single alike, point to a greater mystery beyond cultural and social differences and technological advances. All Christians, regardless of their gender (male or female) and status (married or single), are invited to become “partakers of Divine nature” (2 Peter 1: 4), being adopted as sons by the glorious Grace, living in a mystical union with God. Deification or theosis is the

main goal of every believer. How does the eschatological meaning of human gender help us understand our life today? Further, how is the relationship between married man and woman lived in eschatology?

For this, this study revisits Christian anthropology, and the essential meaning and purpose of gender. First, it returns to first principles by reviewing the Christians understanding of the body and gender, particularly in the thought of the Cappadocian Fathers and Saint Maximus the Confessor. The original and various understandings given by these holy Fathers open the way to see the picture of the protological intent and eschatological vision of gender. Second, it analyzes how the male female distinction constitutes a natural distinction for humanity. Third, it presents various living models of Christian gender, whether male or female, as icons reflecting Divine beauty and glory, and partakers of Divine nature.

### **Patristic Views of Gender**

#### *The New Adam*

The foundation or starting point for the Christian thought about anthropology is the God-Man Jesus Christ. Christian anthropology is Christocentric. Christ's Incarnation is the basis of this anthropology in giving true life and meaning to humans and their life in Christ (For a further discussion on this topic, see Nassif 2022, 59-64). The effect of His Resurrection is witnessed and experienced every day in the rays of beauty reflected on the faces of holy people. The words of Saint Paul about Christ the "New Adam" being the "image of God" (2 Corinthians 4: 4) are hermeneutic keys for understanding the creation of human beings "in the image [το κατ' εικόνα]" (Genesis 1: 27). Humans are Christ-Image (2 Corinthians 3: 18). Saint Irenaeus of Lyon contemplates creation as *in* the image of the Logos, the Son of God, Jesus Christ, Who is the radiance of God's glory, His perfect Image (Heb. 1: 3), the Divine Logos, and the Prototype and the Archetype of the Father (Saint Irenaeus of Lyon 1994 527. PG 7: 1123A).

The fact that many Christological debates have focused on the Person of Christ and His two natures indicates the significance of the Christocentric anthropology and its impact on orthopraxy. Heresies that

denigrate the body did not accept the Incarnation of Christ as a bodily incarnation, nor the Resurrection of Christ as a bodily resurrection [2] (Carter 2011, 35-55) [3]. As Saint John of Damascus, the champion of the icon, clarifies, it is in the body that God has chosen to find humanity in its fallen state and redeem it through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, since the glory of God has become the “glory of the human body” (Ιωάννης Δαμασκηνός (Saint John of Damascus) 1866, 12; *PG* 96: 564BC) As a result of Christ’s resurrection, death is trampled by death, and life is given to those in the tombs. In the last days, all will be raised incorruptible, but not all will be raised to glory. Some will rise unto punishment, and others will rise unto glory (Saint John Chrysostom, *Homily V on Romans*; *PG* 60: 125).

Indeed, the eternal Son assumed, redeemed, transfigured, and glorified human nature. In order to save His Creation, He appropriated the totality of human existence, thereby affecting its healing and re-opening the way to eternal life: “What has not been assumed has not been healed [τὸ ἀπρόσληπτον καὶ ἀθεράπευτον]” (Saint Gregory the Theologian, Epistle 101, *To Cledonius, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers Series, Series 2*, vol. 7, 440; *PG* 37: 181C). This task of appropriation that Christ undertook in His Incarnation has been for “that He may both save the image and make the flesh immortal” (Oration 38.13; *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers Series, Series 2*, vol. 7, 349; *PG* 36: 318). The call is for humans to “become like Christ since Christ became like us. Let us become God’s for His sake, since He for ours became Man. He assumed the worse that He might give us the better,” as Saint Gregory the Theologian revealed (Oration 1, 5; *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers Series, Series 2*, vol. 7, 203; *PG* 35: 397A).

#### *Human Being as Angel-Likeness*

Christ’s act of renewing human existence is not about a return to a previous state but a forward-looking fulfillment. This fulfillment necessitates to clarify several theological and practical issues. If Saint Paul declares in Galatians 3: 28 that there is “neither male nor female” for we are all one in Christ, does this mean that gender is then obliterated in Christianity? Does this entail the disuse of male-female sexuality? What truth about gender does Christ teach when asked by the Sadducees about



the state of marriage in the resurrection, that “they neither marry nor are given in marriage but are like angels of God in heaven [ὡς ἄγγελοι ἐν οὐρανῶ]” (Mark 12: 25; See also Matthew 22: 30 and Luke 20: 35, 36)? Does this state of angel-likeness (ἰσάγγελοι) mean biological death and the extinction of the physical body? [4] (*On Virginity* XIV.6.70-71; *Sources Chrétiennes* vol. 125, 142). Practically, is this encouraging celibacy as an anticipatory participation in the resurrection, since as some would claim, marriage is a postlapsarian state? Will the state of being married before the eschaton be carried onto the eschaton?

#### *Gender in the Eschaton*

In order to answer these critical questions, we humbly ask God to enlighten our minds and open our ears to hear the divinely revealed teachings of the saints on these issues. The eschatological dimension of marriage and its heavenly destiny is ushered by a liturgical movement in the wedding ceremony. The bride and the bridegroom give their hands to one another, and the priest takes hold of them both, and leads them round the table dancing and singing. In fact,

Marriage, like monasticism, is a longing for the infinite; it is not the satisfaction of a biological drive, but an orientation of the self toward the eschaton. Marriage is a journey, an ascent toward the perfection of paradise (Aimilianos of Simonopetra 2009, 355).

Saint Maximus the Confessor, a high defender of Christology, affirms that the body carrying the marks of gender difference will endure in the eschaton, even though the glory of the last days will overshadow this difference: “The result [of theosis] is that God alone shines through both the soul and body, when their natural identifying marks are overcome by an excess of glory” (Saint Maximus, *Chapters on Theology* 2.88; 170-171; *PG* 90: 1168AB). His affirmation is based on his view that gender difference is made by God Himself, and this difference, which is also biological, is made by God “very good” (Genesis 1: 31) [5]. Thus, since it is made very good, this property of nature as male and female will not be obliterated, abolished, or destroyed, but “shaken off” [ἐκτινάσσω]. Again, the need is to define the use of the verb “shaken off” [ἐκτιναξάμενος]. The

latter verb as used in the New Testament (Mat. 10: 14, Mark 6: 11, Acts 13: 51, 18: 6) points to removing dust from garment, or figuratively the feeling of contempt for others, which is perhaps here the consequences of the fall on the relationship between male and female. Could this “shaken off” action spoken by Saint Maximus mean the change of the human body from natural to spiritual in the eschaton as spoken about by Saint Paul in 1 Corinthians 15: 44? (Maximus, *Ambiguum* 41 PG 91: 1304D-1305B) [Saint Maximus the Confessor 1996, 156-157] It is the case, and it leads to the following conclusion: that the male-female division, which became conflictingly divisive after the fall because of sin, is completely healed in the eschaton in order to bring about the union of everything with God. In *Ambiguum* 41, Saint Maximus offers a cosmological history in which God creates the world through five primordial divisions beginning with the division between creator and creature and terminating in the division between male and female. The human being’s vocation in Christ to unite these divisions (uncreated and created, intelligible and sensible, heaven and earth, paradise and the inhabited world, male and female) by his own deification. This unity is performed by Christ as the New Adam. Thus, all creation is brought together in Christ (Saint Maximus, *Ambiguum* 41; PG91: 1305D) [Saint Maximus the Confessor 1996, 157] [6] (Vlachos 2007, 305)]. The human being (*anthropos*), both male and female, is made again completely whole, united harmoniously together with and in Christ. This way of unity, holiness, and transfiguration is effected though Christ’s mediation which elevates the earth to heaven and eliminates all divisions throughout all creation.

What is the state of humans then? It is a state of wholesomeness: a relationship free from fallen passions (in *apatheia*), filled with true freedom and knowledge of God. In this sense, humans are *equal to* angels, as Christ points in Mark 12: 25. They are not angelic species or bodiless, but *like* the angels in terms of purity, service, and praise to God, always beholding the face of God the Father in heaven (Matthew 18: 10): “nor can they die anymore” (Luke 20: 36). While approaching the Light, they are filled with eternal Light, and reflect this Light as a mirror.

In this way, reflecting as the mirror does, when it submits itself to the purity of God, it will be formed according to its participation in and reflection of the prototypal beauty (Saint Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity*, PG 46: 364; *Ascetical Works...*, Vol. 58, 41).

The imagery of reflection involves participation. This participation is the result of the mystical union with God, which can be lived from today, by way of crucifixion “with him and living with him and sharing his glory and his kingship; offering yourself to God means transforming human nature and worth into the angelic” (Saint Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity*, PG 46: 405; *Ascetical Works...*, Vol. 58, 74).

What is the destiny of human gender in this angelic state? The male and female property will remain forever as an imprint, since it is made, blessed, and given by God as “very good” (Genesis 1: 31). This distinction or difference in human nature is fully revealed in the eschaton as a harmonious icon of glorious beauty. Saint Maximus affirms that the unity in Christ between male and female is not as a fusion into one, but as a unity of both according to their primal principle of existence as being human and sharing the one human nature (*Ambiguum* 41; PG 91: 1309CD). This unity is formulated in a wholesome relationship of holiness, peaceful friendship, and undivided concord (*Ambiguum* 41; PG 91: 1313C). It is in *apatheia*, that is without fallen passions, and by abiding in the communion of divine love that the glorious icon of the *anthropos* shines [7] (Saint Maximus the Confessor 1985, 108-110) [8].

How is this *apatheia* accomplished and manifested while gender persists? The words of Saint Maximus about gender being not abolished but transfigured because one reaches the perfection of love and the “summit of dispassion” is explained by the saintly Archimandrite Aimilianos of Simonopetra in his interpretation of Saint Maximus’ *Chapters on Love* 2.30, related the verse of Galatians 3: 28, as follows:

He knows no difference between male and female. He has no particular awareness of gender, which he has moved beyond, because all men and women to him are like angels. This lack of awareness, this effective ignorance, is itself freedom from the passions (Aimilianos of Simonopetra 2018, 177).

Few centuries before Saint Maximus, Saint Gregory of Nyssa, while commenting on Genesis 1: 27, notes that differences in dominance between male and female are abolished in the new creation in Christ. Since in Christ there is no male or female, the tension between male and female humans has been abolished, and they both have reached a state of complete harmony (Saint Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Making of Man* 16: 9; *PG* 44: 183C). Being angel-like requires that one imitates the purity of angels, which includes *apatheia* (Saint Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginit* 14.4).

In the same line of thought, Saint John Chrysostom has already clarified how, in the resurrection, men and women will be *like* angels in heaven, in terms of possessing the impassability of angels, as follows:

For when bodily passions are henceforth undone and tyrannical desire has been quenched, there will be no hindrance in the next world to prevent man and woman from being together, for every evil suspicion is removed and all who have entered the Kingdom of Heaven can maintain the way of life of those angels and intellectual powers (Saint John Chrysostom's treatise "On the Necessity of Guarding Virginit", in Clark 1999, 248; *PG* 47: 514).

The most prominent human icon of this state of *apatheia* in the Church is the Theotokos, the "woman" Mother of God, who is "more honorable than the Cherubim and more glorious beyond compare than the Seraphim." She is so glorious than the highest ranks of angels because she was given the glory to give birth to God in her womb, nourished and embraced Him with her hands, while the cherubim carry only the throne of God. She is present as mother and guide of the all-male monastic communities of Mount Athos. The author of Her Akathist expresses the Theotokos' life of unity and harmony, healing all divisions, as follows:

Rejoice, Flower of incorruption. Rejoice, Crown of continence... Rejoice, thou who showest forth the life of the Angels... Rejoice, thou who makest things that differ to agree. Rejoice, thou who yokest together motherhood and virginit (From the Hymn Called *Axion Estin* in the Liturgical texts of the Orthodox Church) (The Third Stasis of the Akathist Hymn in: *A Prayer Book for Orthodox Christians* 1995, 223-224).

Christian anthropology sees the Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary as the type and example of what it means to be human, displaying a perfect

synergy between her human will and divine grace, and fulfilling the goal of deification. The glorious Mary is seen as a model for human responsiveness in total freedom and consent to God's call, co-operating "with the economy" (Saint Irenaeus of Lyon 1994, *Against Heresies* 3.11.7; PG 7/1: 953B).

From the experiential life of the Church, one finds another example of how gender division is overcome in this world through ascetic labor leading to purification, illumination, and deification. This example is found in the life of Saint Mary of Egypt, and especially her encounter with Abba Zosimas. Turning away from the slavery of the fallen flesh, Saint Mary endured the harsh labor of asceticism that surpassed not only her powers as female, but also any human power. She became

like an angel in human form. Carnal lusts were transformed by the intensity of longing for God and wholly dedicated to Him. Because she was living in a state of deification, although her body was naked she was not ashamed. She had attained to the condition of Eve in Paradise before the Fall (Vlachos 2007, 304).

Metropolitan Hierotheos of Nafpaktos notes that even though Saint Mary of Egypt reached an advanced state of holiness, when she met Abba Zosimas, she asked to be covered by a rag before getting out of her hiding place and taking his blessing.

By the power of Christ, both of them had transcended the 'divisions' and were living as persons. Their experience reflected in some respect the life of Adam and Eve in Paradise, but, because they were still subject to corruption and mortality, they behaved soberly, modestly, and without boldness (Vlachos 2007, 304).

Though the power of Christ, and in ascetic labor, the state of *apatheia* can be achieved in this life and natural body to a certain high degree, but not fully. For this reason, both Saint Mary and Abba Zosimas, "since they had not yet discarded the garments of skin – bodily corruption and mortality – and were afraid of being too bold, they behaved with mutual respect" (Vlachos 2007, 306). The state of *apatheia* will be fully achieved in the eschaton when the earthly natural body will be changed to a spiritual, incorruptible body (1 Cor. 15: 44) through the indwelling of the Divine grace [9].

The call to angelic life in Christianity is not that of an escape from our human state of male or female, or from the state of being single or married. On the contrary, it is a model of wholeness of life. The life of Saint Macrina the Younger is a clear example of this model. In her human body and throughout her daily life she proleptically participated in the angelic life of the resurrection. Saint Macrina's angelic transcendence of the flesh overcame, if only spiritually (that is, not—yet—corporeally), the oftentimes oppressive division between male and female and reached gender healing and reconciliation. Describing her life in Anisa with the other virgins living with her, Saint Gregory of Nyssa exclaimed:

For just as souls freed by death from their bodies are freed at the same time from the cares of this life, so too their life was far removed from these things, divorced from all earthly vanities and attuned to the imitation of the angelic life (*Macrina the Younger: Philosopher of God*, 121).

Also,

living in the flesh in the likeness of the incorporeal powers, they were not weighed down by the drag of the body, so that their life was borne aloft to the skies and trod on high with the heavenly powers *Macrina the Younger: Philosopher of God*, 122).

Another contemporary example is from the Elder Joseph the Athonite Hesychast. Elder Joseph presents to his spiritual disciples his personal experience in reaching a high state of *apatheia* at an early age of thirty-two:

This is why [in love for the Theotokos] I fought against the flesh more than any other passion. And I was given the gift of purity: the gift of not differentiating between women and men. The passion is not roused within me at all. By the Lord's grace, I received the gift of purity, in full knowledge of what I was receiving (Ephraim 2016, 178).

#### *The Human Body in the Eschaton*

In continuity with the explanation of the gender identity in the eschaton, clarifying the Church's views on the resurrected state and the future transformation of the human body is of great pastoral consequence for today's society which labors to limit the effects of the aging process.

The key for understanding the nature of the resurrected body is to understand that the earthly natural body is raised “a spiritual body” (1 Corinthians 15: 44). In his five pastoral homilies on 1 Corinthians 15, Saint John Chrysostom maintains that the resurrected human body has both a continuity with the present fallen bodies and a discontinuity. He explains that in the resurrection the earthly body is transfigured by the grace of God, but not put away. Chrysostom draws on the state of Christ’s body after the resurrection. Christ’s body clearly bears the nail prints from His Crucifixion. Since the mortal body was “swallowed up by life” (2 Corinthians 5: 4). This is the victory over death. How does this transfiguration or transformation take place in the body? Chrysostom teaches that the sameness is a sameness of essence, but that essence will be more glorious, beautiful, and improved (Chrysostom, Homily XLI, *on 1 Cor.*; PG 61: 356). The future glorious body is a “habitation which is from heaven” (2 Corinthians 5: 2). It is a permanent abode of the soul, which possesses a great superiority to our present one since it shall receive imperishability and immortality, free from fallen passions, for “everything will be joy, everything peace, everything love, everything happiness, everything that is true, unalloyed and stable” (Chrysostom, *Exposition on Psalm 114*; PG 55: 319). Chrysostom reveals that this resurrected body will be “lighter and more subtle” (Chrysostom, Homily XLI, *on 1 Cor.*; PG 61: 359). Thus, the eschatological human shall be an embodied angel, that is having a body but sharing the angelic freedom from bodily necessities (*apatheia*) (Chrysostom, Homily XLI, *on 1 Cor.*; PG 61: 359).

Chrysostom states that our hope as Christians is not escape from the body but transformation, which means being delivered from the corruption that is in body [10] (See: Homily XLI, *on 1 Cor.*; PG 61: 363). How will this take place? Chrysostom uses the image of

the iron when placed in fire becomes fire without losing its own nature so the flesh of believers, who have been given the Spirit. In this way, the crucified [crucifying of passions] and risen body [in the eschaton] will fly with the same wings of the souls (Chrysostom, Homily XIII, *on Rom.*; PG 60: 518).

The carrying of the cross and denying oneself leading to spiritual labor for Christ in the body begins in this earthly life but primarily awaits

the coming Resurrection. It begins in the Baptismal font, when the Christian walks voluntarily on the path of deification, and using his or her unconstrained free choice to live in virtue and achieve *theosis*.

Interestingly, Saint Gregory of Nyssa is convinced that, in the angelic life of the Resurrection, the resurrected body, which includes the male and female distinction as gender distinction, will remain part of the eschatological destiny. However, he objects to the restoration of the sexual organs since they are of no use for procreation (*On the Making of Man* 18: 9, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers Series, Series 2, vol. 5, 399; PG 44: 196AB*), since the eschatological restoration to the original, paradisiacal state does not include procreation in the mode known today [11] (*On the Making of Man* 17: 2, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers Series, Series 2, vol. 5, 407; PG 44: 187D*). Sexual activity will cease in the eschaton (Saint Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Making of Man* XVI: 9, *PG 44 181: 29*). Expressing these thoughts to his sister saint Macrina the Younger, Macrina rightly appeals to divine mystery:

The true rationale of these things is still laid up in the hidden treasures of Wisdom [*cf.* Sirach 1: 25, 4: 18; Proverbs 8: 21] and will not come to light until we are taught the mystery of the resurrection by the deed (Silvas, *Macrina the Younger*, 238).

This new creation in Christ still has each human being characterized by his or her natural distinction in property or sign of male and female.

Another Saint, Jerome of Stridon, author of the *Vulgate*, writing at the end of the fourth century to a widowed Theodora (Saint Jerome, *Letter 75 To Theodora*, 2) affirms that Matthew 22: 3 is not understood as that the natural and real body will be taken away. Human body and gender difference will both remain, as he indicates: Mary will remain the female Mary and Paul will remain the male Paul. He affirms in another place that, "If the woman shall not rise again as a woman nor the man as a man, there will be no resurrection of the body for the body is made up of sex and members" (Saint Jerome 1983: 1-295). The resurrected ones will not cease to be human in terms of relationships. The difference in gender will also remain, However, the "corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal *must* put on immortality" (1 Corinthians 15: 53). Relationships, according to Jerome, will have the spirit of *apatheia*. Thus, he reminds



Theodora that if she had already lived in continence with her husband on earth, then how much more will this be possible in the world to come.

This new angelic-like state in the eschaton has, again, both a continuity with the present state and a discontinuity. Chrysostom affirms that the present form (σχήμα) of this world, including the present form of marriage, is going to pass away in the eschaton (*cf.* 1 Corinthians 7: 31). So, it is not that marriage will be annihilated, but will be changed [Chrysostom, Homily LXX on Matthew, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers Series, Series 1, vol. 10, 410. [12] (On Virginity 11.1)*]. For Chrysostom, all the fasting and spiritual efforts are made in order to prepare all for this newness of life (Chrysostom, Homily LXX on Matthew, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers Series, Series 1, vol. 10, 413*). In fact, marriage is a way of preparation to this angelic life or *apatheia*, same as monasticism, where the flesh is subjected to the spirit. As St. Cyril explains, Christians, whether married or celibate, while practicing Christian virtues, in their daily work of kenotic sacrifice, their fleshly lust is taken away. They “resemble the holy angels, fulfilling a spiritual and not a material service suitable for holy spirits. They are at the same time counted worthy of a glory like the angels enjoy” (Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on Luke, Homily 136.31*). Both men and women are called to active participation in the dynamic transfiguration and renewal, not only of themselves, but also of the whole world. This participation begins in this earthly life and continues in the future life, and guarantees for both the male and the female, a true relation, and a real distinction.

In the eschaton, human sexuality, which embodies a drive towards ecstasy and a deep longing to fully realize unity with the beloved one, will be carried passionately towards unity of love with Christ, the Bridegroom of all, Who unites all in Him. The Book of the Song of Songs reveals this truth about the eschatological expectation of growth in an eternal movement of Divine intimacy. This is celebrated in the eternal heavenly banquet of the wedding feast of the Lamb (Rev. 19: 6-9). As we chant in the Bridegroom Liturgical service in Holy Week, “Behold, the Bridegroom cometh in the middle of the night, and blessed is that servant whom He

shall find watching; and again, unworthy is he whom He shall find heedless" (*The Lenten Triodion* 1994, 511-512).

Furthermore, Saint John Chrysostom teaches that there is an eternal aspect of earthly marriage in Christ, which endures into the Kingdom. Eternity of marriage bond as expressed in earthly marriage is depicted in Chrysostom's *Letter to a Young Widow*. Love itself, since it is eternal, is the power that is able to unite those who have been separated by death. How then will this eternal union of two souls express itself in the Kingdom? The answer Chrysostom gives to this is first negative, that is, how it will *not* express itself: All the worldly necessities of providing for the house will go away (Chrysostom, *On Virginity*, 4.63-68); a man and woman will behold each other in heaven and rejoice in Christ.

Chrysostom describes with boldness and conviction that the veil separating this life from next has been made very thin by Christ. Married couple will joyfully experience blessed reunion in the next life. This restoration to each other will not be to an earthly kind of marriage, but to something even better: "For this [earthly marriage] is only a bodily kind of association, but then there will be a union of soul with soul, which will be more perfect, and of a much more delightful and nobler kind" (Chrysostom, *Letter to a Young Widow*, 7, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers Series*, Series 1, vol. 9, 128). Therefore, the widow will be led to dwell with her beloved for infinite and endless ages. She will receive her husband back robed in glory in an eternal union of soul. This union began in marriage on earth and will reach a far more sublime condition in the eschaton (Chrysostom, *Letter to a Young Widow*, 7, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers Series*, Series 1, vol. 7, 460-461).

Certainly, the future mode of existence for humans will differ from that of this temporal world. What constitutes the precise nature of this difference remains a veiled mystery. The mysterion of marriage will reveal itself even more fully in the eschaton. However, the heart of the marriage memory will remain.

### **Pastoral Implications of Christian Anthropology**

Far from today's postmodern views of gender and egalitarianism, Saint John Chrysostom emphasizes that Eve's creation from Adam's rib signifies an existential relationship and a shared nature. It implies a pattern of equals with differences (male-female). It also reveals that male and female beings are both the human norm (Chrysostom's Homily on Ephesians in: John Chrysostom 2003, 43-44; *PG* 62: 135). Adam sees Eve as "bone of his bones and flesh of his flesh" (*cf.* Genesis 2: 23, Ephesians 5: 30), conjoining her as equal with him. Adam and Eve were so close that they were seen as "one," so God appeared in Paradise speaking to the two as if he spoke to one (Chrysostom's *Homily on Ephesians* in: John Chrysostom 2003, 43; *PG* 62: 135). Saint Porphyrios speaks of Genesis 2: 23 as expressing this great mystery of unity in God: "This is the greatest mystery of our Church: that we all become one in God... This is the Church. This is the Orthodox faith. This is Paradise" (Saint Porphyrios Kavsokalyvitis 2005, 180).

The Church turns toward the living experience of many men and women whose spiritual reason governs their passions, and their soul governs their bodies. These holy people have experienced this transformation and liberation in body and soul through ascetic labor, repentance, purification, illumination, and deification in Christ. In fact, the logos or principle of human nature is the divine *project* which God has prepared for all human beings. This principle or logos is unchangeable (ἀκίνητος) (Saint Maximos, *Ambiguum* 7; *PG* 91: 1101C). The logos of the human nature is for the human, whether male or female, to become "god" by grace.

Saint Basil the Great provides a stunning icon of how there is no male or female in Christ. It is the martyric icon of the holy Julitta of Caesarea. Overcoming all earthly desires of the flesh, she accepted martyrdom with manly strength of spirit, showing, as a woman, no weakness of nature as an excuse:

[...] for we are from the same compound, as men. We are made according to the image of God just as they are. The female is made by the Creator equally capable of virtue as the male. Indeed, are we not cognate with men in all things? For it was not flesh alone that was taken for the fashioning of woman, but bone from bones [Gen 2.5]. Hence,

firmness and vigour and endurance are as equally due from us as from men to the Master. When she had said these things, she was taken to the fire, which enveloped the body of the holy woman like some luminous inner chamber, and sent her soul to the heavenly country, even to the portion that befitted her (Saint Basil the Great, *Homily on the Martyr Julitta* in: Sunberg 2017, 158).

Saint Basil the Great asserts in his exposition of Genesis 1: 27, that God has instilled in both man and woman the same and equal power of soul [13] (Ephraim 2016, 178) (For a patristic survey on the soul, see also the work of Cabe 1021), since this power reflects the fixed image of God in them. He concludes that both man and woman are equally strong in the life of virtue, in sacrifice, and love, but the weakness lies in the molded “delicate body” (Saint Basil the Great 2005, 45-46; *SC* 160: 210-12). Furthermore, Saint Gregory the Theologian explains that in his or her freedom, the human being has the ability to choose a direction, to be drawn after God’s likeness, towards the path of transfigured life, to deification in Christ (Saint Gregory the Theologian, Oration 38.11, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers Series, Series 2, vol. 7, 348; PG* 36: 324A). Thus, the soul is called to educate the body. Instead of remaining a slave, the body comes to labor alongside the soul in serving God, and then God will unite both as a unified entity to Himself in the age to come (Saint Gregory the Theologian, Oration 2, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers Series, Series 2, vol. 7, 206-207; PG* 35: 430-432). Educating the male or female body uses the same spiritual tools of prayer and *askesis*.

### **Conclusion**

This research has reemphasized that both man and woman are of one human nature. Being male and female is a defining aspect of God’s creation, carrying a unique “perichoretic,” or self-emptying complementarity, and beauty in the image of Christ. Thus, the patristic phronema does not minimize the reality of male-female natural differences or antinomies, since it finds their origin in the design of God, in the eschatological perspective, and not as a consequence of postlapsarian state. In fact, this difference is a gift from God, creating unity of love in diversity. This is joyfully expressed by Adam in the account of creation, after discovering his state of loneliness and God’s creation of Eve:

“This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; She shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.” (Genesis 2: 23). The marital relationship will also continue in the eschaton, but will be renewed with much joy, beauty, glory, and honor, according to God’s perfect design.

There is one human nature which is created by God, and within this human nature there is an ontological distinction of male and female as biblically expressed in Genesis 1: 27, Matthew 19: 4, and Mark 10: 6. The call for humanity is to harmonize *hypostatically* with the natural robe of beauty created by God, so as to be crowned with the eschatological glory (For further elaboration on this fundamental understanding, see Loudovikos 2017, 106). We can see this experienced *hic et nunc* in the life of many saints. While living holiness in the human body, these saints reflect the glorious beauty of angels. In this regard, some contemporary writers use a misleading terminology, especially when applying an analogy between the mode of existence of the Holy Trinity (*τρόπος υπάρξεως*) and the male-female distinction. “Mode of existence” applies to the personal or hypostatic existence of the Holy Trinity, while the male-female distinction constitutes a natural distinction for humanity and is not about a mode of existence (Hopko 1976, 56: “The differences between men and women are real and irreducible. They are not limited to biological or physical differences. They are rather different “modes of existence” within one and the same humanity; just as, we might say, the Son and the Holy Spirit are different “modes of existence” within one and the same divinity, together with God the Father”).

The purpose of this life is the next life. The true greatness of man is not found in his being the highest biological existence, but in the fact that he is given to become a god (Nellas 1987, 30). Constant, free, and dynamic growth in love toward deification is what constitutes the greatness of humans and the ineffable beauty of the manner in which God created humanity to be earthly angels. Humans cooperate with God’s grace and freely choose to live a virtuous, angelic life, so as to become “partakers of the divine nature” (2 Peter 1: 4). The body as the Temple of the Holy Spirit is deified, and shines with eternal light in which the soul dives in an eternal love for God. However, we must acknowledge that this new creation

remains a mystery to be unveiled at the end times. Everything revolves around the mystery of God's love, freely given to humans to grow on the likeness of Christ. As Saint Paul reveals, "But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord" (2 Corinthians 3: 18). The words of King David in Psalm 8 acknowledge this mystery:

What is man that You are mindful of him, And the son of man that You visit him?  
For You have made him a little lower than the angels, And You have crowned him  
with glory and honor. You have made him to have dominion over the works of  
Your hands; You have put all *things* under his feet... O LORD, our Lord, How  
excellent is Your name in all the earth! (Psalm 8: 3-9).

### Notes

- [1] Gender ideologies are biased by the influence of surrounding culture and society and by historical circumstances and growing technological changes. Article 14 of the European Istanbul Convention requires state parties to include in schools' curricula teaching material on issues such as "non-stereotyped gender roles," among other things. In other words, it encourages younger generations to reexamine their *gender identity and spread gender dysphoria among children*
- [2] One of the manifestations of these heresies is the view that Jesus Christ did not save the entire human nature. Apollinaris the Younger, Bishop of Laodicea in Syria, thought that Jesus did not assume the *nous* (the rational human soul), but the latter was replaced by the Divine Logos. Thus, he denied Christ's humanity, and Christ's assumption of the totality of human nature. He thought of the rational soul as related to sinful inclinations, which is not fitting for the Divinity of the Person of Christ. Otherwise, there would be two persons of Christ in one, as he claimed. So, he used interchangeably the words *hypostasis* and *ousia*. In other words, Apollinaris argued against "dioprosopic and diophysite christologies" and opened the path to *monophysitism*.

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- [3] This minimalist view of man, held by Apollinaris, called for the nature-will division in the human being which impacted the thought of personalism.
- [4] In the thought of the Old Testament, there has been always a link between marriage and death: marriage and procreation are needed in order to overcome death by continuity through progeny. Chrysostom very clearly teaches that the earthly form of marriage is the offspring of death. Once death is abolished, so will this form of earthly marriage be abolished as well. Since the purpose of earthly marriage is two-fold: to suppress man's licentiousness and to procreate, and since these two purposes will be irrelevant in the Kingdom, then earthly "marriage is no longer useful or necessary."
- [5] *Ambiguum* 41.1-2. Genesis 1 provides Hebrew terms for "male" (זכר) and "female" (נקבה) which are nothing but euphemistic terms for difference in humans, and especially in their physical body, directed related to procreation.
- [6] Metropolitan Hierotheos of Nafpaktos clarifies how Christ had overcome the divisions between male and female, and the human being in Christ's image can also labor to achieve this by growing Divine likeness: "The Word of God has become man through His incarnation, and through His conception without seed by the Holy Mother of God He has overcome the division between male and female".
- [7] In some other writings, Saint Maximus speaks of male and female in Gal. 3: 28 in a figurative way, making them metaphors for the fallen passions of anger (θυμός) (being a masculine characteristic) and desire (ἐπιθυμία) (being a feminine characteristic). In this way, Saint Maximus illustrates the state of *apatheia* attained through freedom from fallen passions. This freedom cements the unity in and with Christ. Thus, married man and woman are freed from corrupted passions. He does not however talk about genderless human being, but a virtuous one.

- [8] (“Commentary on the Lord’s Prayer” 4, trans. [modified] George C. Berthold). The fallen or irrational passions include pleasure, anger, gluttony, and greed. Being in the state of *apatheia* belongs to those who no longer have any desires of the flesh.
- [9] The body of the Lord after the resurrection was such that He entered through the closed doors without difficulty.
- [10] For Chrysostom, the statement of Saint Paul that flesh and blood does not inherit the Kingdom is related to the corrupted flesh and blood. Saint Paul does not refer here to the human body.
- [11] The exact quote goes as the following: “Ἡ δὲ τῆς ἀναστάσεως χάρις οὐδὲν ἕτερον ἡμῖν ἐπαγγέλλεται ἢ τὴν εἰς τὸ ἀρχαῖον τῶν πεπτωκότων ἀποκατάστασιν [Now the resurrection promises us nothing else than the restoration of the fallen to their ancient state]”.
- [12] Chrysostom also describes the virgins as being angelic in two respects: first, they “neither marry nor are given in marriage” and, second, they continuously stand before God and serve him.
- [13] St. Joseph the Hesychast asserts that “for the soul, there is no such thing as a male or female soul, nor a young or old soul; only the grace of Christ overall,” which means that the soul is without gender. However, the flesh is gendered forever.

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## Role of *Energeia* in the Knowledge of God: A Philosophical Discourse

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### Abstract:

*There has been a debate over the valid source of knowledge. Rationalists claim that innate idea or reason provides knowledge while empiricists argue for sense-experience as the valid means of knowledge. Idealists (Plato, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, George Berkeley, Johann Gottlieb Fichte, Immanuel Kant) affirm that reality of a thing lies in its essential nature. Plato, the idealist, declares that reality of a thing resides in its forms [1] (Panthanmackel 1999, 3-6; See also, Gracia 2003, 23). Immanuel Kant, another idealist philosopher holds different view that the essence or noumenon (“thing-in-itself”) of a thing cannot be known, what can be known is phenomenon (thing-it-appears). The realist philosophers on the other hand observe that the ultimate reality of a thing lies at the world of physical object which is existed independently from mental processes. Aristotle, in response to the absolute claim of Plato in the knowledge of reality (forms/ideas/essence) asserts that the essential nature of a thing is expressed in its movement (Ferrarin 2001, 380). In the knowledge of God, many theologians have agreed that the energeia of God is the only and the best element to know God as the ousia of God is beyond comprehension. The Cappadocian Fathers (Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory of Nazianzus) are one group of theologians who advocate the revelation of God’s attributes through his activities. In this paper,*

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*attempt is made to discuss the role of energeia in the knowledge of God with special reference to the Cappadocian Fathers, which will be considered in the light of Neoplatonic philosophy. In this paper, attempt is made to discuss the role of energeia in the knowledge of God with special reference to the Cappadocian Fathers, which will be considered in the light of Neoplatonic philosophy.*

**Keywords:**

*energeia, knowledge, God, philosophy, Cappadocian Fathers*

**1. The Concept of Divine *Energeia*: An Aristotelian View**

In his book, *Aristotle East and West: Metaphysics and the Division of Christendom*, David Bradshaw states that Aristotle is the one who coined the term, *energeia* (Bradshaw 2004, 1). *Energeia* for Aristotle is ‘actuality’. However, he does not separate between actuality and potentiality rather he correlates the two. For him, actuality refers to actuality of potentiality (*dunamis*) (Ferrarin 2001, 20). Bradshaw observes that Aristotle has distinguished *energeia* from *kinēsis* (change or motion) for the fact that motion directs towards certain extrinsic end whereas energies has its own intrinsic end (Bradshaw 2018). Seeing, thinking, living well and flourishing are some characteristics of *energeia* which are activities fully actual as they contain ends in themselves. In this manner, not only ‘potentiality’ and ‘actuality’ but also ‘activity’ and ‘actuality’ are interconnected in Aristotelian philosophy.

**1.1. Divine *Energeia* as Divine Activity: from *Ousia* to *Energeia***

Bradshaw states that *ousia* (substance) of Prime Mover is *energeia* according to Aristotle. Though the Prime Mover is considered as self-thinking thought or ‘thought (that) is a thinking of thinking’, it does not refer to selfish thinking of God himself rather it refers to encompassing all possible intelligible content (Horton 2018). Moreover, the Prime Mover is not considered which embraces all possible intelligible content alone, more significantly he himself is the all possible intelligible content. Simply



speaking, thinking leads to action. In the case of the thinking of Prime Mover, he makes his thinking readable for all sentient being. In other words, it is in the activity of the Prime Mover that his substance has been made known to all generations. The essence or substance (*ousia*) of divine is revealed in the form of divine activity and therefore *energeia* is part of *ousia* in actual sense. In this case, divine thinking or essence plays an active role to acknowledge his essence in the form of *energeia*.

### **1.2. Divine *Energeia* as Divine Actuality: From *Energeia* to *Ousia***

Aristotle primarily refers *energeia* to 'actuality'. By referring *energeia* to actuality, he means to acknowledge divine substance which is contained in divine activity. The movement of divine such as creation clearly expresses the actual essence of himself. The divine *energeia* is fully actual on the ground that the divine activity has its own end that does not require time and space to reach the end (Bradshaw 2018). As Hans Küng has stated in his book, *On Being a Christian* about the interrelatedness between God and the world that there can be no God without a world and no world without God, both divine *ousia* and divine *energeia* are interconnected (Küng 1976, 306). Exclusion of any one of the two would mean demeaning of both. For instance, divine incarnation in the form of human being itself is not only an activity but is also the actual attributes in which divine love is incorporated. In this regard, one can discern divine substance incorporated in divine movement. That is to say, divine *energeia* is none other than divine substance in Aristotelian metaphysics.

### **1.3. Divine *Energeia* as Divine Potentiality/Power**

In his book, *Metaphysics*, Aristotle correlates *energeia* and *dunamis* (potentiality) by stating that where there is *energeia* there is potentiality and no *energeia* no potentiality (Aristotle 1891, 230). For instance, a person who does not build a house practically does not have capacity to build though he/she has knowledge of building whereas actual building of a house reveals his/her potentiality of building a house (Aristotle 1891, 230). One may argue this statement that potentiality or power is not determined by action, or even without really build a house one may have

capacity to build. However, in the case of divine *energeia* the activity of divine itself is driven by divine potentiality. In other words, divine *energeia* acknowledges divine power on one hand and divine possession of power and potentiality on the other hand. The divine activity also acknowledges that divine power engineers divine movement and again the divine activity reveals the potentiality in the activity that energizes (activates) the essence of the divine.

## **2. *Energeia* and Cappadocian Fathers**

The Cappadocian Fathers have contributed a lot in theological enterprise. One of their major contributions in the field of theology is formulation of the Doctrine of Trinity. They are pro-Athanasian as well as pro-Nicean but anti-Eunomius (Arianism) in philosophico-theological orientation. Regarding divine *energeia* in the Cappadocian Fathers, one can trace from their exegesis of Scripture particularly Moses' encounters with God in the Old Testament; and their Trinitarian controversy with Eunomius.

### **2.1. Divine *Energeia* in Moses' Experiences**

The Cappadocian Fathers are considered as the exponent of *via negativa* method in doing theology. Nyssa refers to Moses' encounter with God to illustrate the incomprehensibility of divine nature and the vague operation of God. The biblical accounts include – Moses' vision of God on Mount Horeb at the burning bush (Exodus 3: 2); Moses' vision of God on the clouded mountain top of Sinai (Exodus 19: 18); and, Moses' encounter with God in the thick darkness (Exodus 20: 21 & 33: 20-33) (Kariatlis 2012, 103). The first vision symbolizes entering into the presence of God from darkness, but still cannot comprehend the Being of God. The cloud refers to the curtain between human being and God. Darkness refers to the veil that makes unable to comprehend the nature of God by human intellectual. It also refers to the presence of God. Like Nyssa, Nazianzus also refers to the two Exodus accounts of Moses' vision of God (Exodus 20: 21 & 33: 22) in order to argue for the incomprehensibility of God (Nazianzus 1955a). In the first account Moses stands near to the thick

darkness where God is resided. Nazianzus describes darkness as the veil which separates between created being and the creator (George 1994, 6). The second reference narrates Moses' vision of God in the cleft of the rock. When the divine glory passes by, Moses sees only the back parts of God (George 1994, 6). Nazianzus internalizes the obstacle that "the darkness of this world and the thick covering of the flesh is an obstacle to the full understanding of the truth" (Nazianzus 1955b, 290). He further opines that divine *ousia* can be discovered when a person becomes godlike and divine but this state of life can never be achieved in earthly life (Nazianzus 1955b, 294).

Moses' encounters with God strengthen the Cappadocian Fathers' arguments for the incomprehensibility of divine *ousia* by any form of human intellectual faculty. They also admit the incompatibility of human mind and reason to comprehend the essential nature of God. They hold the view that human can know God in part through the activity of God himself. The divine *ousia* cannot be fully understood and apprehended unless the earthly body is transformed into divine, which is not possible on earth. In this case, the Cappadocian Fathers keep distance between transcendence and immanence in the study of God. The incarnation of Jesus Christ, the Son who is regarded as the first fruit of the Father, who shares the divine *ousia* of the Father is not considered the complete *energeia* of the divine *ousia*.

## 2.2. Divine *Energeia* in Trinity

Philosophically speaking, Eunomius [2] separates between *noumenon* (*ousia*) and *phenomenon* (*energeia*) stating that the two are distinct entities (Gregorios 1980a, 114). To him, *ousia* of the Father alone is unbegotten and can never be shared to anyone. He also holds the view that the divine *energeia* having been generated by the *ousia* can never be considered as unbegotten, that is to say, the *energeia* is something subordinate to God, the Father (Gregorios 1980a, 114). Eunomius employs three terms – *ousia*, *energeia* and *erga* – in order to distinguish the first two entities (Gregorios 1980a, 110). He states that *ousia* can be known through its works or *erga*, and *erga* is conditioned

by *energeia* (activity or operation) of the being (*ousia*) (Gregorios 1980b, 58). Differences in operations result differences in works and further differences in operations are grounded in differences in beings (Gregorios 1980b, 58). Thus, for Eunomius, understanding *erga* is the preconditioning factor to understand both *energeia* and *ousia*.

### 2.2.1. Basil of Caesarea and Divine Energeia: Operation of Attributes

Eunomius equates divine *ousia* and divine attributes. He holds that knowing the attributes of God means knowing the essence of God (Philip 2015, 15). However, Basil keeps distance between essence and attribute stating that divine *ousia* is unknowable or incomprehensible. To Basil, God can only be known through his activity. In his *Letters Vol II*, Basil expresses the incomprehensibility of divine essence that "...we know the greatness of God, and His power, and wisdom, and goodness, and the providence with which He cares for us, and the justice of His judgment, not His substance itself" (Basil 1955: 159). He adds that "...from His operations we know our God; we do not undertake to approach His substance itself. His operations come down to us, but His substance remains inaccessible" (Basil 1955: 160). Though the Son and Holy Spirit are proceeded from the Father and share the same substance with the Father, they can only derive the attributes of God but not the essence of God (Basil 1951, 85, 86; cf. Philip 2015, 20).

### 2.2.2. Gregory of Nyssa and Divine Energeia: Partial Knowledge of God

Eunomius holds the view that the Son and the Holy Spirit are not the work of one and the same (Nyssa n.d., 65). To him, the study of *erga* (work) helps to understand what type of *energeiai* that produces a particular *erga*, and from the knowledge of difference in *energeia* one can classify different *ousiai* to which *energeiai* are attached (Gregorios 1980a, 111). Nyssa refutes the epistemological principle of Eunomius with regard to *ousia* and *energeia* for the fact that *erga* criterion is inadequate to understand the first two (Gregorios 1980b, 58). For Nyssa, there is only one source who is God, the Father. Since the divine *ousia* is beyond

conceivable, it is only through the *energeia* which has been derived in the created orders that one can have partial perceptual knowledge about God (Gregorios 1980b, 59). Nyssa is of the opinion that in order to know the *energeia* of God in both the universe and in the form of image of God within a person, one must live a life of evil-free or to stay away from evil (Gregorios 1980b, 58).

### 2.2.3. Gregory of Nazianzus and Divine *Energeia*: Jesus, the First *Energeia* of God

Nazianzus maintains the absolute unity in the three persons of Godhead or in other words a *trinity* of Persons and a *unity* of nature (Nazianzen 1955, 282). He also argues that there is no difference in essence between the Father and the Son. The point of difference lies only in attributes – the Father is *unbegotten* and source of the Son and Holy Spirit, the Son is *begotten* and becomes the source of all created orders, the Holy Spirit is *proceeded* from the Father and sent to the world (Nazianzen 1955, 282). The Son is the First creation of the divine energy and through him God created the world. In this sense, the Son is the *energeia* that makes divine attributes conceivable to human being in part. Nazianzus affirms that human reason cannot fully comprehend the essence of God (Nazianzen 1955, 282).

### 3. *Energeia* and the Knowledge of God: A Neoplatonism Assessment

Considering the above discussion from the philosophical point of view, *energeia* can be dealt with *phenomenon* of Kantian philosophy. *Energeia* is empirical in the sense that sense perception or sense experience plays significant role in encountering the activity of God. However, it cannot be treated with pure empiricism as empiricism strongly believes that knowledge is derived from sense experience, and denies the idea that reasoning (mind) can conceive the abstract reality (Mayer 1976, 184). It is also phenomenal because *energeia* is the ‘thing-as-it-appears’ which can only be known and perceived by human being. The divine *ousia* which is the ‘thing-in-itself’ cannot be comprehended. In such case, *energeia* in the Cappadocian Fathers can be best fitted to

Neoplatonism [3] (Knowles 1962, 7). This is due to the fact that Cappadocian Fathers in their theologizing keep distance between divine *ousia* and divine *energeia* and between God and humanity, which could be an integration of Platonic and Aristotelian in philosophical sense. Therefore, under this section attempt is made to study critically on *energeia* or in philosophical term, Platonic and Aristotelian philosophy from the Neoplatonic philosophy accompanied by Cappadocian Fathers.

### 3.1. 'Tode ti' and the 'One': Reality of Ousia

In his book, *Aristotle: Fundamentals of the History of his Development*, W. Jaeger holds the view that Aristotle accepts almost all the doctrines of Plato except the doctrine of Forms (Jaeger 1934, 15). Aristotle, being a realist asserts that there is reality existed independently from the contact of mind. He abandons Plato's theory of Forms stating that it is unconceivable in reality (Knowles 1962, 9). Aristotle questions about if the Form individual or universal. He further argues that if the Form is universal, the Form cannot be present in the individual (Knowles 1962, 9). In his *Metaphysics*, Aristotle attacks Plato's theory of Forms arguing that Forms cannot be essences if there is separation among the Forms as essence is the fundamental feature of things. He further argues against the doctrine of Forms that since *ousia* signifies a *tode ti* (substance as separate and some this), *ousia* cannot be treated as universal. Furthermore, Aristotle treats the theory of Forms wholly irrelevant and bids good bye to the doctrine as they are 'jibber-jabber' which cannot be clearly understood. For Aristotle, Forms are irrelevant to human conduct as it denies theoretical economy (operation/activity), and does not contribute to the understanding of perceptible things.

Despite Neoplatonism separates God and the world, it considers the material object/world as the real entity (Hirschberger 1976, 47). Neoplatonism regards God as transcendent and super being which cannot be covered by any category. Plotinus called God 'the One' and 'the Good' (Hirschberger 1976, 47). For Plotinus, the 'One' is infinite, who is beyond all attributes such as goodness, freedom, love and beauty. The One is absolutely transcendent, absolutely good, and absolutely free (Souza

2010, 968). The One is unknowable by human intellectual or any sense perception therefore he is beyond human comprehension. The concept of the One for Plotinus implies to absolute unity devoid of multiplicity and division (Souza 2010, 968). Souza states that Plotinus names the One in various categorical terms, “in the hierarchical order the One is the First; in a logical and numerical manner the One is religiously God, morally the Good, structurally the Simple, metaphysically the Transcendent, philosophically the Supreme, temporally the Infinite, and functionally the Absolute” (Souza 2010, 968). The Cappadocian Fathers complement Neoplatonist doctrine of the ‘One’ by affirming that the divine *ousia* is beyond understanding and beyond human’s reach. In this case, they observe absolute transcendence of divine *ousia* which cannot be revealed even by divine operations (*energeiai*). Nyssa holds the view that the nature of God cannot be revealed by any means. For him, what is known to us about God is his attributes. Divine essence unites the three Persons of Godhead. It is shared among the three Persons of God but cannot be revealed, it is absolutely unknown.

### **3.2. The Sensible World: A Genuine Revelation**

Platonism holds the view that the things which are sensible are temporal and not real; reality exists in unseen (Fox 1957, 24). According to Plato, senses deal only with particulars but cannot know the essence of a particular thing. For him, mere awareness of the external object is not the real knowledge (Gustafson & Ongyango-Okello 2007, 184). In fact, for Plato, essence is real which is associated to universal. On the other hand, appearance is associated to particular and inferior to forms in degree of reality and value. The forms can only be apprehended by reason, not by sense. The forms, on the other hand, are not a property of sensible material, rather they are in the realm of abstract entities – a world of ideas (Cornford 1960, 6). In this regard, the world of ideas/forms is beyond time and space. Plato further holds that sensible world keeps on changing and cannot provide valid knowledge; the world of forms remains constant, which is invisible and real (Cornford 1960, 246). He believes that the universal ideas or forms derived by pure reasoning are more authentic

than that of the knowledge derived by sense organs from particular objects (Gustafson & Ongyango-Okello 2007, 185).

In 'two world vision' theory, Neoplatonism distinguishes between 'intellectual world' and 'sensible world' (Souza 2010, 968). The intellectual consists of three realities such as the 'One', the *Nous*, and the World-Soul. The sensible world refers to the material world. *Nous* and the World-Soul (the individual soul) are emanated from the One. Even the material world proceeds from the One. Plotinus holds the view that although various realities are emanated from the One but cannot be equal to the source. In other words, the emanated realities are the reflection of some part of the source (though not in full form), which are real. The sensible world or material world cannot qualify the intellectual world, but the latter world is the qualifying elements of the One's attribute. William J. Wolf in his book, *Man's Knowledge of God* also states that it is through the Christ's event – his life, death, resurrection, exaltation and return of Christ – that Christians are trying to draw the knowledge of God (Wolf 1955, 54). He further states that though empirical knowledge cannot be claimed as the absolute means of knowing the reality, it provides some knowledge about reality. Likewise, the operation of God reflects certain knowledge about God, which is the real image of God (Wolf 1955, 55). In this regard, Wolf stands in the affirmation that revelation or the operation of God through any form of sensible material provides the knowledge of God. In his article, *The Synthesis of History, Experience, and Reason in the 'Knowledge of God'*, A. E. Garvie states that "the only knowledge of God which avails and satisfies is the vision of God in the face of Jesus" (Garvie 1931, 107). Alister E. McGrath also opines that the revelation of God in the cross of Christ is still *Posteriora Dei* which means revelation in the form of disguise or mask (McGrath 1990, 149). Though the cross reveals the knowledge of God it is still indirect revelation, yet a genuine revelation. For Luther, God reveals in the form of mask which can only be understood only by faith [4] (Kadai 1999, 179, 186). In the same manner, the Cappadocian Fathers also hold the view that what we see and know about God is only the back part of him, but still genuine knowledge.



### **3.3. Moral Discipline: Prerequisite to read *Energeia***

Plato advocates human endeavor and activity towards the higher knowledge. He proposes preparation and purification of the soul and mind by means of moral and intellectual discipline in order to attain the knowledge of Forms (Knowles 1962, 22). He further holds that the knowledge of Forms which is realized in this life remain in part not in full. For Plato, even to get partial knowledge of Forms, one has to prepare the soul and mind by disciplining moral and intellectual life. That is to say, in Plato's idealism, there is a significant meeting point between morality and reason (Patrick 1935, 214). Aristotle on the other hand holds the view that a good moral conduct (beatitude) enables to comprehend both metaphysical and physical reality even in this earthly life (Knowles 1962, 23). In this regard, both Plato and Aristotle recommend maintenance of a good moral discipline of life as a prerequisite factor in pursuit of the knowledge of metaphysical and physical reality.

Plotinus is extremely concerned with moral life of human being. This is area where Plotinus puts the common ideas of both Plato and Aristotle together, of course in mystical manner in his Neoplatonism (Knowles 1962, 27). He is of the opinion that the activity of soul in its union with the knowledge and love with the One can be realized in partial manner in this life. Apart from the good life in this world, Plotinus also concerns with the improvement of the soul from lower level to the higher status. Owing to Plato's physical, moral and intellectual discipline, Plotinus calls for a well discipline and purification of life in order to attain certain perfection in life (Knowles 1962, 27). This perfection in life, according to Plotinus will further lead to the attainment of the knowledge of reality. Plotinus by taking Aristotle's impulse holds that the good life opens the way to the knowledge of reality on earth. He brings the two ideologies (Plato and Aristotle) together by affirming that the moral disciplined life is the key to the knowledge of the reality. However, he declares that the knowledge of reality realizes in this world is partial; in the 'yonder' or hereafter, the reality will be realized in totality (Knowles 1962, 27). Like Plotinus, the Cappadocian Fathers also recommend a good moral conduct in the search of metaphysical as well as physical reality. Particularly, Nyssa holds the

view that a person's morality is the preconditioning factor in order to know the *energeia* of God. Morality for him is a life free from evil (Gregorios 1980b, 58). Obtaining a life free from evil further ensures union with God, which in turn leads to the knowledge of the *energeia* of God. The Cappadocian Fathers affirm that even to understand the activity of God, a person needs to maintain moral discipline with godly life.

### **Concluding Remarks**

*Energeia* or 'activity' plays significant role in the knowledge of every reality. To know the knowledge provided by *energeia*, sense experience becomes essential factor rather than the perception of the mind. However, in the case of divinity, the activity or operation of God does not reveal the essential nature of God. That is to say, the *energeia* of God cannot be regarded as the complete form of the knowledge of God; rather it serves partial knowledge about God but genuine knowledge. Neoplatonism, though rooted into an idealist form still affirms the reality of the *energeia* (the realist view). In other words, both *ousia* (Plato) and *energeia* (Aristotle) are put together in a fashionable manner, which is again engineered by mystical elements. More specifically, in the concept of the 'One', Plotinus blends the universality of Plato and the particularity of Aristotle in the sense that the essence of the One which is universal to *Nous* and World-Soul is presented beyond comprehension; and the operations of the One reveal in particular matters can be known by sense organs. The Cappadocian Fathers, being Neoplatonists stand for idealist view and affirm the incomprehensibility of the *ousia* of God. Nevertheless, they still believe the revelation of God's attributes through the activity of God provides the knowledge of God. In order to understand the operation of God, the Neoplatonists, Cappadocian Fathers prescribe the need of obtaining a good moral discipline or keeping one's life distance from evil. Succinctly speaking, the divine *energeia* is not limited to philosophic realism as the doctrine of divine *energeia* holds that the activity of God does not reveal the *ousia* of God, and not limited to philosophic idealism for the fact that the doctrine recognizes the genuineness of the knowledge of God derived from the activity of God.

### Notes

- [1] Plato reconciled the argument between Heraclitus' view of impermanence of everything which momentarily change into its opposite, and the permanency of the homogenous traits such as being and non-being developed by Parmenides. Plato held the view that the forms or ideas of a thing remain permanent whereas the appearance of a thing goes on changing. In his *Theory of Forms*, Plato authenticated Heraclitus' *becoming* theory and Parmenides' theory of *being* by employing both theories in developing the knowledge of 'particularity' and 'universality' respectively. For he declared, particularity kept on changing but universality remained constant.
- [2] Eunomius is one of the fourth century's heretics. He was a student of Amanuesis of Aetius who has deeply rooted in Arianism. Later on, the Anomean Arians were called Eunomians instead of Aetians. Though Arius advocates the incomprehensibility of God, the neo-Arian Eunomians advocate the complete comprehensibility of the Divine nature. Eunomius, one of the prominent followers of Aetius develops *idealism* that mind could comprehend the full knowledge of God. Eunomius describes God as 'unbegotten' (*agennētos*) which is the very essence of God himself. He further holds the view that the unbegottenness of God (*ousia*) cannot be shared to others. To him, if Jesus Christ is claimed to be the begotten, he cannot be God as the *ousia* of God cannot be shared. Being deeply rooted into Arianism, Eunomius asserts the absolute unlikeness of the Being of the Father and of the Son. For him, the Father is superior and the Son is inferior. The Son's essence is not like that of the Father. The Father's essence is unbegotten or self-existent but the Son's essence is begotten or proceeded from the Father. Eunomius teaches that God is Absolute Being and is Unbegotten. The Son is begotten from God and therefore has beginning. God is beginningless. Eunomius teaches the Son is begotten from the Father and the Holy Ghost is proceeded from the only begotten Son. Eunomius keeps God the Father inconceivable and

out of reach by any means. He also keeps the Son and the Holy Spirit lower to the Father.

- [3] Neoplatonism is a reinterpreted form of Platonic philosophy founded by Plotinus (204–269 AD) in the third century AD. It is a synthesis of different philosophical tradition such as Platonism, Aristotelian philosophy, Stoics and religious mysticism. In many ways Plotinus reproduces the thought of Plato in different fashion. There are lot of Aristotelian insights in Neoplatonism. The Aristotelian doctrines of matter and form, potency and act are applied by Plotinus. Moreover, the Aristotelian epistemology is employed in cognition of the mind in connection to the material world. In this regard, Neoplatonism can be regarded as both philosophy and a religious belief system. Other Neoplatonist philosophers are Porphyry and Proclus. Categorically, Neoplatonism stands for an idealist type of philosophy.
- [4] Luther takes Exodus 33: 20-23 as biblical basis for incomprehensibility of the glory of God by human intellectual faculty – wherein God told Moses, “You cannot see my face; for no one shall see me and live... See, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock; and while the glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, I will cover you with the hand until I have passed by; then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back; but my face shall not be seen.

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## Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite on the notion of time\*

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### Abstract:

*Pseudo-Dionysius knew Plato's texts and those of his descendants well. His familiarity with their works, especially with the dialogue Timaeus, becomes evident in the way he treats the notion of time. Here is where this concept is presented as 'a moving image of eternity', an idea to which Dionysius adheres.*

*The Syrian thinker Christianizes the term and sees it as a series of 'upliftings' and 'returns' towards the principle of life, God. He believes that people live both in time and in eternity.*

### Keywords:

*Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, God, time, Neoplatonic Philosophy, distention, temporality henosis, 'uplifting' (ἀγάγω) and 'return' (ἐπιστροφή), kataphasis, apophasis,*

As for most Byzantine thinkers, for Pseudo-Dionysius, the meaning of the notion 'time' was closely connected to that of Divinity. He expounds his view on this topic around the idea that God "is the Eternity of all things", that he is "of their Time" [DN 937B] (Pseudo-Dionysius 1990, 215; Pseudo-Dionysius 1987a, 120; See also Pseudo-Dionysius 1983; Pseudo-Dionysius 1979; Newheiser 2011, 23-43; Newheiser 2013, 215-221;

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Newheiser 2010, 211-216), and also that, in virtue of the reality of everything participating in divinity, all things have their ultimate and timeless being in it seen as a Person, a 'He/Him'. He is the "subsistence of absolute peace"; "a unity beyond all conceptions" [DN 949C] (Pseudo-Dionysius 1990, 218-219; Pseudo-Dionysius 1987a, 120), and the "Super-Essence" (as implied in DN 936D (Pseudo-Dionysius 1990, 214 – 936 D exists only in J.-P. Migne (ed.) PG 3. B.R. Suchla has not translated this fragment in her edition of Dionysius the Areopagite; she skips it and jumps from 934D to 937A) and DN 937A (Pseudo-Dionysius 1990, 214; Pseudo-Dionysius 1987, 119-120)). God is anterior to Days, to Eternity, and to Time. Obviously that is also valid for Christ and subsequently an event as fundamental for Christians as His Crucifixion denotes, "in a Divine sense" [DN 937] (Pseudo-Dionysius 1990, 214-216; Pseudo-Dionysius 1987a, 119-120) the beginning of their world as well as its centre. In the same sense, the terms "Time", "Day", "Season", and "Eternity" are applied to Him and are supposed to convey the following: he is the

One Who is utterly incapable of all change and movement and, in his eternal motion, remains at rest; and Who is the Cause whence Eternity, Time, and Days are derived. [...] Wherefore, in the Sacred Theophanies revealed in mystic Visions He is described as Ancient and yet as Young; the former title signifies that He is the Primal Being, existent from the beginning, and the later that He grows no old [DN 937B] (Pseudo-Dionysius 1990, 215; Pseudo-Dionysius 1987a, 120).

In connection to time Dionysius also elaborates on the apparent paradox of God being eternal ('the Ancient of Days'; DN 936D) while also having a human nature and living (albeit temporarily) in the mundane world as Jesus. (Pseudo-Dionysius 1990, 214 – 936 D exists only in PG 3; my translation; as mentioned above (in ft. 187). Suchla has not translated this fragment in her edition of Dionysius the Areopagite, Suchla (ed.), CD I; she skips it and jumps from 934D to 937A), 937B (Pseudo-Dionysius 1990, 215), 940A (Pseudo-Dionysius 1990, 216-217; Pseudo-Dionysius 1987a, 121). The Syrian clarifies that, in fact, there is no conundrum in this because God is and can be anything and exist in whatever state he chooses – hence there should be no surprise that he is concomitantly eternal and 'of Time' (*chronos*).



The Pseudo-Areopagite draws our attention to the fact that the things which are called eternal in the Bible “must not be imagined that [...] are simply co-eternal with God, who precedes eternity” (DN 940A) but, following the text accurately, we shall better understand the intended meaning of the words “Eternal” and “Temporal.” I.e. we should regard the reality which “shares partly in eternity and partly in time as being somehow midway between things which are and things which are coming-to-be” (DN 940A) (Pseudo-Dionysius 1987a, 121), or rather between the Supreme Being and the creation. With regard to people, Dionysius upholds that they live in eschatological hope because they ‘participate’ in God’s Being. Their souls undergo the process of *henosis* – the term this ancient author uses for the process of union with God, i.e. deification (this is the case for instance in DN 948D (Pseudo-Dionysius 1990, 217; Pseudo-Dionysius 1987a, 121. On this topic in the work of Pseudo-Dionysius see Ysabel de Andia 1996; and also McGinn 1994)). Dionysius affirms that earthly reality

comes into existence through participation in the Essential Principle of all things [...] for the ‘to be’ of all things is the Divinity above Being Itself, the true life. Living things participate in Its life-giving Power above all life; rational things participate in Its perfection and in Its great Wisdom above all reason and intellect [CH 187A-D (Pseudo-Dionysius, “Celestial Hierarchy” 4, 187A-D, in Migne (ed.) PG 3. The fragment has not been included either in Pseudo-Dionysius 1991a; or Pseudo-Dionysius 1987a); see also DN 644A-B (Pseudo-Dionysius 1990, 128-129; Pseudo-Dionysius 1987a, 62-63)].

For the Areopagite the degree of participation (*μετοχής*) depends on the faculty/readiness to experience, change, and receive illumination. For instance, in explaining why and how the “superior intelligences” participate in the Divine he says:

They are ‘perfect’, then, not because of an enlightened understanding which enables them to analyze the many sacred things, but rather because of a primary and supreme deification, a transcendent and angelic understanding of God’s work. They have been directed hierarchically not through other holy beings but directly from God himself, and they have achieved this thanks to the capacity they have to be raised up directly to him, a capacity which compared to others is the mark of their superior power and their superior order. Hence they are founded next to perfect and unfailing purity, and are led, as much as humanly possible,

into contemplation regarding the immaterial and intellectual splendour. As those who are the first around God and who are hierarchically directed in a supreme way, they are initiated into the understandable explanations of the divine works by the very source of perfection (CH 208C-208D (Pseudo-Dionysius 1991a, 29)).

This source can **enlighten us** only by being upliftingly conceal in a variety of **sacred veils** which the Providence of the Father **adapts to our nature as human beings**. [...] [T]he sacred institution and source of perfection established our most pious hierarchy. He modelled it on the hierarchies of heaven, and clothed these immaterial hierarchies in numerous material figures and forms so that, **in a way appropriate to our nature, we might be uplifted from these most venerable images to interpretations which are simple and inexpressible**. For it is quite impossible that we, humans, should, in any immaterial way, rise up to imitate and to contemplate the heavenly hierarchies without **the aid of those material means capable of guiding us as our nature requires**. Hence, any thinking person realizes that the **appearances of beauty are signs of an invisible loveliness**; CH 121B-121D (Pseudo-Dionysius 1991a, 8-9; Pseudo-Dionysius 1987b, 146; my emphasis).

Simply said, in the process of deification – participation in the Divine virtue – we are conducted not only according to our measure, but also hierarchically; this is clearly stated, for instance, in CH 124A (Pseudo-Dionysius 1991a, 9; Pseudo-Dionysius 1987b, 147).

Participation happens at God's initiative because he, as the ultimate Cause of everything, has a communal nature; according to this, he invites all things to participate in Him (Pseudo-Dionysius 1991a, 20; Pseudo-Dionysius 1987b, 156). He calls people to uplift themselves through symbols [1] and they respond to this. Stephen Gersh refers to this co-operation as to a "downward and upward process" (Gersh 1978; also Gersh 1973, 50 f). The scholar does so when referring to a similar dynamic in the works of the Neoplatonists, but the expression represents equally well what is at work in Dionysius's writings. For the ancient theologian, there is no distinction between 'uplifting' (ἀγάγω) and 'return' (ἐπιστροφή). Within his texts both 'return' and 'uplifting' refer to the same movement towards the one God (Rorem 1984, 100; especially chapter 7 of this book elaborate on "the uplifting and return to God"). (It is

important to underline this with Paul Rorem because other thinkers regarded the two terms as being in opposition; Proclus is their most famous representative (Proclus 1963, no. 158, 138). Also Stephen Gersh describes the manner in which the Syrian utilises the concept of “uplifting” and its cognate notions in order to underline the dynamics of the soul’s activity in time. Such an enterprise on the part of Dionysius is consistent with his stance regarding the divine procession “from simplicity to trinity”, and “from the created word to its governance” (Rorem 1984, 99). The description of this state of affairs and the above considerations imply a cycle; all the ‘motions’ involved in the development of the soul (like Augustine’s *distentio*) happen periodically and in some kind of temporality, a subjective one; this is not only the ‘usual’ *chronos*, even though the latter is also a factor within the process. I would say that for Pseudo-Dionysius this cyclicity (that, as we shall see, is at work also in the case of ‘intelligible beings’) is ‘reinforced’ by eternity, which is linear. The Syrian theologian emphasizes that the incarnation of Christ ‘triggered’ the ‘course’ of salvation, and that salvation itself is a revelatory succession of happenings that mark the evolvment of human nature. All of this is summarised in the Eucharistic prayers. Rorem underscores the fact that a physical/sensible language is employed in the explanation of *henosis/theôsis* within the work of the Syrian despite the fact that “neither spatial nor even temporal movements” (Rorem 1984, 59) are of significance in its unfolding.

Pseudo-Dionysius indicates that the union with God is the final goal not only of the human soul, but **of every element of creation**. He says this a few times with reference to the celestial powers (the various categories of angels); additionally to being engaged in achieving their own *theôsis*, these are instrumental in the deification of people (who need to undergo a process of purification in order to be able to participate in the divine being). The heavenly entities intercede as part of this process because they can better be ‘heard’ by God due to their greater closeness to him:

Similarly, it seems to me, the immediate participation in God of those angels first raised up to him is more direct than that of those perfected through a mediator. Consequently – to use the terminology handed down to us – the first intelligences perfect, illuminate, and purify those of inferior status in such a fashion than the

latter, **having been lifted up** through them to the universal and transcendent source [...] acquire their due share of the purification, illumination, and perfection of the One who is the source of all perfection (CH 240C-D) (Pseudo-Dionysius 1991a, 33-34; Pseudo-Dionysius 1987b, 168 - (in ft. 209 abbreviated as CW); emphasis added).

The *Celestial Hierarchy* is the treatise in which Dionysius particularly refers to the 'divine intelligences' as they "lift up" or move "upwards" toward God [2]. Concerning the "return" of the soul towards "that principle which is above all principles" (CH 257B (Pseudo-Dionysius 1991a, 36; Pseudo-Dionysius 1987b, 169-170)) a direct reference to it is made, for instance, in DN 705A (Pseudo-Dionysius 1990, 153; Pseudo-Dionysius 1987a, 78), and CH 293B (Pseudo-Dionysius 1991a, 43; Pseudo-Dionysius 1987b, 176). The Syrian concludes that "all being drives from, exists in, and is returned towards the Beautiful and the Good" (DN 705D (Pseudo-Dionysius 1990, 154; Pseudo-Dionysius 1987a, 79)). For him, the return always brings an improvement or a 'progressive' restoration, as Dionysius illustrates via the following example that refers to the "return" of Israel (i.e. of any human being) to God (CH 261C (Pseudo-Dionysius 1991a, 39; Pseudo-Dionysius 1987b, 172)); an explanation is also provided for this state of affairs:

Now God, out of his fatherly love for humanity, chastised Israel so as **to return it to the road of sacred salvation**. In order to cause a change of heart he handed Israel over to the vengeance of barbaric nations. This was **to ensure that the men who were under his special providence would be transformed for the better**. Later, in his kindness, he released Israel from captivity and **restored it to its former state of contentment** (CH 240D-241A) (Pseudo-Dionysius 1991a, 34; Pseudo-Dionysius 1987b, 168; emphases added).

Throughout his work, Dionysius also holds that the returns is the movement from the perceptual to the conceptual and, finally, beyond the conceptual to unknowing and silence.

The idea of 'return', which is expressed in various ways in the *Corpus dionysiacum*, is Neoplatonic and has both ontological as well as epistemological connotations. Ontologically speaking, the 'plurality' of the world – its differentiation in various entities – goes back to oneness, to 'that which truly is'. From the epistemological perspective this constitutes

also a progression because it is a return “from numerous false notions [...] to the single, true, pure, and coherent knowledge.” In all the forms in which the notion is exploited by the Syrian, the return is oriented to the highest principle of existence. The *thearchia* (the divine source) “overflows” (i. e. flows out of itself) to be united with the community and the community turns toward the One; [for this discussion see DN 952B (Pseudo-Dionysius 1990, 219-220; Pseudo-Dionysius 1987a, 123), DN 980A-C (Pseudo-Dionysius 1990, 227-229; Pseudo-Dionysius 1987a, 128-129)]. As Rorem explains, “Emanation and return describe respectively divine and human ecstasy” (Pseudo-Dionysius 1987a, fn. 266, 130). The difference between Plato and Dionysius’s concept of return consists in the fact that the Greek philosopher connects it with the epistemological problem of knowing God (Proclus 1963, prop. 39), while for Dionysius it is a matter of ontology; here is where the notion of time is considered. For the latter, God moves into creation (time and space) through *eros*, therefore the return and union with God happens through the movement (diffusion) of love (DN 708C-716A (Pseudo-Dionysius 1990, 156-163; Pseudo-Dionysius 1987a, 80-84)). This course of action takes place on a vertical axis – an aspect that is peculiar to the Dionysian theology; according to it, the concept of hierarchy itself points out towards such a reality. The approach of the Syrian differs from that of Maximus the Confessor for whom, as we have just noticed, the deification involves prominently (even though not exclusively) a horizontal motion. Dionysius argues that *eros*, or ‘yearning’ as it is translated by Luibhéid, is as legitimate a term for divine love as *agape* is. That varies somehow, but not radically, from what we noticed in Plato’s dialogues, where the ontological ground of return is the identification of the transcendent One with the Good (Plato, *Republic* 509b; Plotinus, *Ennead* V, 5.13; Proclus 1963, prop. 8) and with its concrete manifestations in time and space. According to Raoul Mortley, “This is the Greek view of the generation of reality which underpins the development of negative theology.” For this researcher, “The ‘descent’ of essence into material reality eventually leads to its concealment: the knowledge of essence [...] becomes a matter of difficulty” (Mortley 1982, 436). His discussion about ‘negative theology’

makes us remember how important this was for Dionysius, who dedicated a substantial part of his “Mystical Theology” to it as well as to the terms ‘affirmation’ and ‘negation’ (Pseudo-Dionysius 1991b, 143-144; Pseudo-Dionysius 1987a, 136; emphases added). When operating with the latter notions within this framework, the question of ‘time’ comes into discussion again. Ferdinand Edward Cranz elaborates on the relationship time – affirmation/negation in the writings of the Syrian, thus: “Dionysius’s *kataphasis* (affirmation) and *apophasis* (negation) are not distinct moments in time, or two aspects of a linear process. For him, as for the Neoplatonic philosophy which inspired him, they are simultaneous. But – commented by Eriugena – the Areopagite adapted these aspects of his theology to fit a historical model of creation (*kataphasis*) and salvation (*apophasis*)” (Cranz 2000, 102-103) Indeed, in his *On the Division of Nature*, conceived as a dialogue between a Master and a Disciple, John Scotus Eriugena (c. 810-c. 877, Dionysius’s most known Latin translator, indicates the manner in which these two concepts are instrumental within the system outlined by the Pseudo-Areopagite: in knowing God our negations are more “correct” than our affirmations, and the only affirmation one can make with certainty is that strictly speaking nothing can be predicated about the Deity (Scotus Eriugena 1987 (The Irish theologian and philosopher was Dionysius’s most known translator, commentator, and popularizer in the Latin West)). Because, as C. E. Rolt phrases it, “For whatever you deny concerning Him you deny correctly, whereas the same cannot be said of what you may affirm” (Sparrow-Simpson 1983, 206-207). Cranz also explains that the notions of affirmation and negation aid in the understanding of the continuous changeover between emanation of power and return towards God so characteristic to Dionysius’s texts. That may imply that we live simultaneously in the present and in eternity.

## Notes

- [1] The expression “lifting up” is to be found, for instance, in Pseudo-Dionysius, “Celestial Hierarchy”, Heil and Ritter (eds.), CD II, CH 121B, p. 8, 137A, pp. 10-11, CH 241C-D, pp. 33-34, CH 257B, p. 36, CH 257C, p. 37, 260B, p. 40, CH 293B, p. 43; “The Celestial Hierarchy”, in Rorem (ed.), *Complete Works*, p. 79, and also 146, p. 147, 169, 170, 171, and 176. Also in the “Ecclesiastical Hierarchy”, 372B, Heil and Ritter (eds.), CD II, p. 65; in Rorem (ed.), *Complete Works*, p. 196, and in DN 708A, Pseudo-Dionysius, “The Divine Names”, in CD I, Suchla (ed.), p. 155; in Rorem (ed.), *Complete Works*, p. 79. Concerning symbols, see Rorem 1984, 99, 105; also Rorem and Lamoreaux, 1998.
- [2] The expression “Moving ‘upwards’ toward God”, is to be found, for instance, in the following fragments: CH 121B, Heil and Ritter (eds.), CD II, p. 8; Rorem, CW, p. 146 - see also footnotes 7 and 8 on that page; 137C, in CD II, pp. 10-11; Rorem, CW, p. 148; 237C, in CD II, pp. 32-33; Rorem, CW, p. 166-167; 240A-B, in CD II, pp. 33-34; Rorem, CW, p. 167 as well as 260B-C, in CD II, pp. 37-38; Rorem, CW, p. 171; 261A, in CD II, p. 38; Rorem, CW, pp. 171-172; 273A, in CD II, p. 40; Rorem, CW, p. 173; and 273C, in in CD II, pp. 40-41; Rorem, CW, p. 174.

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## To be human – to live life fully

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**Abstract:**

*The study below sets out to analyse the crises of human dignity, starting from man's two dimensions: the immanent and the transcendent ones. One of the consequences of the diminution or loss of the sense of human dignity in a world where faith in God has become a mere option, where God Himself seems to have become optional, consists of the disintegration of communion through an exacerbated individualism. Theologically speaking, the dignity of the human being consists of the extraordinary, paradoxical and incomprehensible fact that man was created in the image of God. Here resides the ontological character of human dignity, its maximum height. And God's image in man, that is to say reason, will, feeling, conscience, awareness, freedom, this essentially divine gift, is accompanied by the possibility of reaching the likeness of God, i.e., the possibility of attaining holiness and immortality or posse non mori, the possibility of not dying. Given that the greatest of all arts is the art of living, we conclude that to be here and to be beyond at the same time, to live the instant and to follow eternity indicates the simultaneous living in the real and the ideal, that is the immanent realism and the metaphysical one of the Christian life.*

**Keywords:**

*human dignity, living, image, crisis, communion*

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### **The crisis of human dignity**

Man is a being who lives in two dimensions: in the immanent and in the transcendent, or, as St. John Chrysostom put it, he is a citizen of both time and eternity. This concept is in full consonance with the Christian teaching about man as being created in the image of God, which confers him the highest possible dignity.

This dignity, unfortunately is not adequately reflected in many philosophic systems that have developed definitions and theories about man. For example, the American philosopher and theologian Abraham Heschel deplores the zoological definitions in which the starting point for understanding man, the term of comparison, is the animal.

One includes here the famous definition of Aristotle who said that man is a social animal, *zoon politikon Anthropos* (Heschel 1965, 20-21). It is important to specify here that his definition that became common knowledge is, in fact, a misinterpretation of the words. In ancient Greek the word *zoon*, before designating an animal, means living being, something that has life – *zoi*; and the word *politikon* comes from *polis*, meaning city. Thus, *zoon politikon* translates as living being in the city rather than social animal.

The concept of living being in the city must be contrasted here with that of living being in the wilderness or of the woods, hence, the above definition is a reference to a civilized being.

Heschel is right to criticize the zoological definitions given to man where the referral point is the animal, instead of a superior being, more precisely God. This lowering to the animal level seems to confirm the Latin proverb *homo homini lupus*, man is wolf to man, or the assertions according to which the world of man is a jungle where the rule of the strongest dominates and where animals chase and devour one other.

One could apply here very well Nicholas Berdyaev's conception about the bestialization of man and the deification of the bestial (Berdiaev 1963, 27).

One of the consequences of the diminution or loss of the sense of human dignity in a world where faith in God has become a mere option, where God Himself seems to have become optional, consists of the

disintegration of communion through an exacerbated individualism. Robert Bellah and his colleagues demonstrated in 1985 in their book *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Bellah *et alii* 1985), how this characterizes American life to an ever greater degree.

One can consider this social investigation, even if it was published some time ago, as a case study that reflects the life of the Western society in general.

Here is, for another example, the way in which the French poet Charles Baudelaire described even in the 19th century the society of his time, in his famous book *Les fleurs du mal*, in the introductory poem: “Stupidity, error, and sin occupy our bodies and work our spirits”, “every day we descend to hell by one step”, “our brains give birth to a population of monsters”, “we breathe death through our lungs.”

He speaks about those who lend their love, about stubborn sins and coward repentance, gentle remorse and other similar vices.

In such a context it is no wonder that we hear absolutely surprising declarations such as the one from Jean Paul Sartre who said that hell consists of other people (*l'enfer c'est les autres*) and also, there is no wonder that seeing the state of the world and especially the moral decline, and foreseeing its evolution, the theologian Pavel Florensky could say that finally there will be no other choice for the world but the Holy Trinity or madness.

### **The grounds of human dignity**

Theologically speaking, the dignity of the human being consists of the extraordinary, paradoxical and incomprehensible fact that man was created in the image of God. Here resides the ontological character of human dignity, its maximum height. And God's image in man, that is to say reason, will, feeling, conscience, awareness, freedom, this essentially divine gift, is accompanied by the possibility of reaching the likeness of God, i.e., the possibility of attaining holiness and immortality or *posse non mori*, the possibility of not dying.

While the image is a given, the likeness is a desideratum. The elements of the image need only be preserved in their originary integrity, whereas the aspects of the likeness require man's specific effort.

This idea is very well reflected by Pico della Mirandola in his work *Oratio de hominis dignitate* where he explains:

We have given you, Oh Adam, no visage proper to yourself, nor any endowment properly your own, in order that whatever place, whatever form, whatever gifts you may, with premeditation, select, the same you may have and possess through your own judgment and decision. The nature of all other creatures is defined and restricted within laws which We have laid down; you, by contrast, impeded by no such restrictions, may, by your own free will, to whose custody We have assigned you, trace for yourself the lineaments of your own nature. I have placed you at the very center of the world, so that from that vantage point you may with greater ease glance round about you on all that the world contains. We have made you a creature neither of heaven nor of earth, neither mortal nor immortal, in order that you may, as the free and proud shaper of your own being, fashion yourself in the form you may prefer. It will be in your power to descend to the lower, brutish forms of life; you will be able, through your own decision, to rise again to the superior orders whose life is divine (Pico della Mirandola 1956, 7).

Man's responsibility towards his own person, his own future and state is also indicated by Swiss philosopher and theologian Maurice Zundel who wrote that "man does not yet fully exist. He must become. This is the object of our hope" (*L'homme n'est pas encore; il faut qu'il devienne. Tel est l'objet de notre espérance*) (Zundel 1988, 3).

In other words, man is an ideal, a task to be accomplished, an idea in total consonance with Christian theology on this subject.

The divine ground of human dignity is expressed also by the Old Testament psalmist who, reflecting at the real state of the human condition, asks rightfully this question of God: "Why do You care about us humans? Why are You concerned for us weaklings? You made us a little lower than the angels and You have crowned us with glory and honor" (Ps. 8, 45).

Thus, if by being created man is endowed with the divine image, one can understand that, ontologically speaking, he is a doxological being, exactly the way we can see in the most beautiful definition given to man that is found in a text from the burial service in the Orthodox Christian

ritual: “I am the image of Your ineffable glory even though I bear the wounds of sin.”

In order to conscientize the beauty, the dignity, the nobility, the height of his being, man must at least once in a while, if not constantly, ask himself the question so often formulated by St. Gregory of Nazianzus in his poetical works: “Who am I?” (Damian 2017, 118-119), a question anticipated by Socrates through his insistent reiteration of the Delphian aphorism: “Know Thyself” (*gnote seauton*).

Generally speaking, when we respond to the question about man, who or what is man, we consider that the interrogative pronoun *who* is the most adequate for a human being, as long as the word *what* is adequate for things. Yet it is good to note that, even if this assumption is correct, both interrogative pronouns can be used, in particular since the *who* consists of several *what*-s.

Keeping in mind that man is made in God’s image and that the image consists of a number of divine gifts according to the partial list mentioned above (reason, will, feeling, conscience, awareness, etc.) the question is to be put as follows: what gifts are there that make man be man? Or, the gifts respond to the question *what*, and they become constitutive parts of the *who*. Without *what*-s there is no *who*.

One can thus understand that concerning the human existence, “to be” is God’s contribution whereas “to become” is man’s contribution, evidently, helped by the divine grace.

Being endowed with the freedom to choose and to decide man can move in God’s direction or in the opposite one. The second choice will lead to death, as it happened in the primordial state, when man, by disobeying God’s order, fell out of the divine communion.

Death, which represents the transient condition of human existence can become a permanent *memento* meant to bring man back on the way towards God. The thought of the fragility, vulnerability and transiential character of the human existence in a certain way expresses man’s longing for the Absolute, for the primordial state. Decrying this kind of condition, the psalmist puts it pertinently: “Man, his days like the grass, his

flourishing like a flower of the field; the wind passes over it and it is gone and its place knows it no more" (Ps. 103, 15-16).

This type of thinking has obviously taken different forms in the evolution of man's understanding of himself. Here is an example taken from post-medieval philosophy: man is defined by his thinking; I think, therefore I am (*cogito ergo sum*) as Descartes put it; a paraphrase of this assertion was I doubt, therefore I am (*dubito, ergo sum*); a higher level in this evolution of thought comes with the Christian conception of man expressed by Kierkegaard: I believe therefore I am (*credo, ergo sum*), yet it has found its highest expression in Dostoyevsky who said, I love, therefore I am (*amo, ergo sum*). This, in fact, is the most appropriate definition given to man, keeping in mind what it means to be created in the image of God who is love.

Speaking of the most adequate definitions given to man one can also think of the aphorism which says that man is what he eats. Just as in modern times there are sociologists who catalogue people based on what they throw into the garbage, so we can think of statistics that describe people in terms of what they eat. From a Christian theological point of view, the highest and most important type of food is the Holy Eucharist, the Lord's body and blood offered in the divine liturgy. The active participation – and taking the Holy Eucharist does imply active participation – of the believer in this Last Supper of Christ helps him become a liturgical being, a being of communion, doxological, deiform, because the human person is fundamentally oriented toward relation, and the supreme model for relation or communion is God praised in Trinity.

It is because man is a deiform being from the beginning, as man was created in God's image, that man has the vocation to holiness which was defined by the Holy Church Fathers as being the longing for God. This is where the authentic sense of life can be found.

Longing is a feeling and feelings are related to the heart. The Church Fathers place a major emphasis on the heart just as on reason, on discernment, the heart being the place where God addresses us, as we



read in the message of the Lord God to Ezekiel: “Son of man, listen carefully and take to heart all the words I speak to you” (Ezekiel 3, 10).

A heart that is not petrified, that listens, which receives the word of God, makes man a *locus theologicus*, a theological place. Thus, himself transfigured by the way he is worked by the divine word, he becomes in turn creator of transfigured and transfiguring beauty, in particular in his relation with those around him. This is how he contributes to the great moral imperative, the need to be human, because, as an American philosopher and theologian put it, what gives value to our existence is not that man is a human being but about man’s being human (Heschel 1965, 29).

### **Sub specie aeternitatis**

In a conversation with a pagan who asked him to show him God, St. Theophilus, the bishop of Antioch (2nd century), replied: show me man and I will show you God. Surely the bishop was demonstrating to the pagan that man is not just the visible biological being but much more than that, the inner being. Man is the image of God, the image of eternity and thus has the capacity of being an iconic presence in the world reflecting the prototype, God. This is not part of his biological condition, but of the inner dimension of his being; it is what makes man compatible with eternity, *homo capax infiniti*, and to live even in the physical life *sub specie aeternitatis*, under the sign of eternity. Contrary to Heidegger’s assertion that we live in order to die (*Sein zum Tode*), Jesus teaches us that, in fact, we live facing the Resurrection (*Sein zur Auferstehung*).

This is why Christian morality insists on cultivating the inner being, that which does not die, the soul, an idea expressed by many of the learned people of the world through all generations. Horace wrote that one does not die completely (*non omnis moriar*) and Shakespeare put it beautifully and significantly in a sonnet: “You are too beautiful to die completely/ And to leave behind just the worms”.

Yet even more than the capacity to enter eternity, according to St. Gregory of Nazianzus, man has the capacity to become light through God’s grace (Damian 2017, 128).

However, the most ennobling expression used by the Church Fathers regarding the supreme state of the human being in the kingdom of God is deification, *theosis*. For St. John Chrysostom this state shows that even in his earthly life one can become a heavenly man or an earthly angel; for Gregory of Nazianzus this state is related to man's conscience of his belonging to God in Jesus Christ and is both man's desire and God's desire (Damian 2017, 122-123), and St. Athanasius the Great considers that deification was the aim of the divine Logos' incarnation in history, for, at the question: why did God become man? his answer was: so that man may become god.

Thus, if man is called to deification, that implies, before anything else, to become human according to Christ's model, meaning to grow in God through the God-man Jesus Christ in His Church, through the Holy Sacraments, through the service of God and of fellow men.

### **The Art of Living**

The greatest of all arts is the art of living, in particular because we live next to other people, we have to live for them. We cannot avoid the ontological relational character of our existence. Sartre wrote that we are condemned to relation. The Church more specifically teaches that the vocation to relation and the courage to live it in most cases means the courage to understand and help others.

When Socrates defined philosophy as the science that teaches us how to die, he in fact, was referring to the art of living because we die the way we lived, that is to say we go into eternity with the conscience we had while living. It is not easy to live actively, involved, and at the same time in full harmony with yourself, with the others and with God. Martin Luther King jr. used to say beautifully in this sense that man cannot be a mirror where he sees himself constantly; he must become a window through which he can see the others and the sky.

As a liturgical being, liturgy meaning public service, man needs to become a liturgist, a servant, a public servant where the neighbor becomes his divine and saving sacrament. This is how he transforms the lay dimension of his existence into a sacramental one. That is the only way

in which he can see the other in the sometimes painful reality of life and can intervene in order to make light out of a wound, as Van Gogh put it. And it is only in this way that he can leave behind a living and ineffaceable example for others, just as is implied in the Japanese proverb that says: “Before me there was no pathway; after me there will be one.” This type of being has to be established in total modesty as stipulated by this aphorism: “Live in the world as if you are not there; yet your absence be felt.” Or, as another well known proverb says: “To be great is no wonder; to be human is a great thing”.

The active living in the present, *carpe diem*, living the instant that hides the eternity and through which we can win it, brings a higher understanding of the gift of life, called by the Holy Fathers illumination. Here is an example:

The disciple asks the elder:

- Where should I look for illumination?
- Here, responds Avva.
- When will this happen?
- It happens right now.
- Why don't I feel anything?
- Because you are not looking.
- What should I see?
- Nothing. Just look.
- At what?
- At whatever comes your way.
- Should I look in a certain way?
- No, look normally.
- But don't I already look in a normal way?
- No.
- Why not?
- Because to look implies that you be here. Most of the times you are somewhere else (de Mello 1986, 12).

To be here and to be beyond at the same time, to live the instant and to follow eternity indicates the simultaneous living in the real and the ideal, that is the immanent realism and the metaphysical one of the Christian life.

The pilgrimage between real and ideal require courage and effort, that is why Jesus says that “The Kingdom of God suffers violence and the violent take it by force” (Matthew 11, 12); this pilgrimage also requires perseverance, just like the Blessed Augustine writes when he refers to the doxological advance towards God:

Sing to the Lord a new song. Sing as the traveler does. He walks and sings. He sings and advances. He sings in order to strengthen his powers. You, too, sing so you become stronger in the right faith and in the holiness of life.

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## Sadness and Acedia Maladies of the Contemporary Spirit\*

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### Abstract:

*One of the most common forms of mental illness is Depression. It is presumed that about 5% of the world's population is affected by this pathology. Depression represents 60 per cent of all psychiatric disorders. According to data from the American Psychiatric Association (APA) in US around 15 million people suffer from depression. Today, in the aftermath of the sanitary crisis generated by the infection with the new virus SARS-CoV-2, the number of depressed persons has increased alarmingly.*

*All newly released data indicate that the passions of the human soul, which are very deeply rooted, lie in fact at the core of these disorders. Among these passions, we would like to raise the importance of Sadness and Acedia. Sadness is the beginning of a road that eventually leads to hopelessness. A man stuck for a long time in such states is a living testimony that his soul is in great pain, and this suffering is very likely to find immediately its expression in the psychic and biological spheres of the body as well.*

*The sinful passion of acedia is intricately bound to the feeling of sadness. Acedia brings fickleness to the soul and body. To cure this spiritual disease we need hope that is given only by repentance and remembrance of death.*

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*Sadness is cured through constant Prayer, Confession and Holy Eucharist.*

*What is certain is that the cure of the spiritual affliction is the first step in one's struggling to regain his mental and physical health. On the other hand, the rising number of diseases and sick people is a sign of the world's estrangement from God, Who Alone comforts and encourages the depressed and disquieted.*

**Keywords:**

*sadness, acedia, depression, prayer, confession*

**Sadness**

Sadness, one of the capital sinful passions, manifests itself in two forms according to the patristic literature: grief that makes us mourn over our sins and sorrow that makes us weep over material things, high-ranking positions or honours that we could not earn. The first one is a redeeming sadness because it begets repentance, the second one on the contrary causes spiritual anxiety. Hereinafter we shall exemplify some of the ways sadness can occur:

In the first scenario, someone is getting sad because he could not satisfy a bodily desire and this deprived him of that pleasure. Saint John Cassian says that sadness comes when "someone sees shattered the hope built in his mind" (Sfântul Ioan Casian 1990, 223), and that "it is conceived by its thwarted desires" (Sfântul Ioan Casian 1990, 385). In this case, sadness shows how the victim stung by it, becomes one with the pleasure of the flesh and one with the worldly values and goods. In this regard, Venerable John Climacus of Sinai explains that "he who hated the world, escaped sorrow; and he who is a slave to those he can perceive, has not yet escaped sorrow. And how could he, who lacks the thing he loves, not be sad?" (Sfântul Ioan Scărarul 2008, 63) He also further says that "if someone thinks he does not feel any love for a thing, but his heart is saddened from the lack of it, such a man deceives himself utterly." (Sfântul Ioan Scărarul 2008, 65-66).

Therefore, in order to escape this evil spirit, one has to free himself of all earthly things. This does not mean to give it all up, but to not let himself get attached to material. The use of worldly goods is natural to man and yet he must not forget that possessions are fleeting and absolutely everything is ephemeral.

Then there might be situations where sadness is caused by anger. Man often becomes sullen for getting too angry or simply for no reason; other times, *per contra*, gets very frustrated for not letting it all hang out or because he did not see the expected reaction his anger was supposed to stir up in the other man (Larchet 2008, 130)... From this, it is understood that passions are intrinsically related to one another, and some of them reliably cause other passions.

The Holy Fathers draw our attention and state clearly that most of the times sadness is inflicted by demons as well. Saint John Cassian writes how sometimes, without any apparent reason, we get unsettled all of a sudden and we feel overwhelmingly sad (Sfântul Ioan Casian 2008, 145). Any sorrow is partly due to the incessant work of demons whether they sparked it, heighten it or keep it in our soul. Especially when dealing with deep *inner sadness for no apparent reason* (Larchet 2008, 131).

The devil, spreading sadness into our soul, day and night, tries to steal all the thoughts that guard our spirit so once is left desolate and all helpless, he could fill it full of wounds (Sfântul Ioan Gură de Aur 2008, 158).

The intrusive demonic thoughts, filled with sadness, cause a great disturbance within us and then slyly tempt our soul to turn to the things behind. They come to us in sheep's clothing, meaning that they take on the appearance of righteous thoughts, "but inwardly they are ravening wolves" (Matthew 7, 15) (Sfinții Varsanufie și Ioan 2016, 204).

Saints *Barsanuphius* the Great and *John* the Prophet say that everything superfluous, wrought in confusion and sadness, is the work of evil (Sfinții Varsanufie și Ioan 2016, 543).

But even when demons are obviously the ones who plot and establish the presence of overpowering sadness, they still need the consent of a weak soul, who falls down immediately before the wicked. That is why the great Patriarch of Constantinople, Saint John, who was

nicknamed 'Golden Mouth', says to his most beloved friend, Stagirios (an ascetic tormented by a demon): "it is not the devil that makes us feel sad, it is actually the sadness that strengthens the devil so much that he can put those evil thoughts in our mind" (Sfântul Ioan Gură de Aur 2008, 159). Sadness often dwells in our heart and soul even before the devil's assault. Then all he does is hasten that sorrowful flow (Larchet 2008, 132).

Our ancient enemy is relentless, he always seeks to gain control over man by intensifying the feeling of sadness, and if he agrees to go down this road, he has every chance of ending up dramatically. "Devil has no stronger weapon than hopelessness, and he does not rejoice so much when we fall in his temptations as when we fall into despair [of God's mercy]" (Sfântul Ioan Gură de Aur 1998, 6). Hopelessness is truly the culmination of all his efforts, and at the same the trigger that could lead even to suicide because man devoid now of all hope, thinks it is all over and sees no way of escape.

But if he had kept his mind clear of the spirits, he surely would have found a possibility to get to the root of his problem and solve it. "With God everything is possible" (Matthew 19, 26), and in His faithfulness, He does always provide a way out so that man can endure trials of any kind.

Since it is the cause of our spiritual death, despair can certainly cause our bodily death, too, for the man who no longer has desire for life, is left only with the thought of death, so he wishes solely to end his life. Saint John Chrysostom alludes to that, saying that this may very well be the work of demons, but insists at the same time upon man's responsibility:

[...] this thought is not only from the devil, it also originates from that overwhelming sorrow, and actually more from that than from the devil, and maybe ultimately only from that. This is shown by the fact that there are many people who are not demon-possessed, but the thought would still strike them only because sadness had fallen upon their souls (Sfântul Ioan Gură de Aur 2008, 158).

Saint John urges all of us to stand against the unclean spirits and to not cooperate with them. In other words, we cannot justify ourselves by simply saying that everything bad comes from the evil one, because we always share a great part of the guilt as well.



Further on the great Antiochian hierarch says that

[...] sadness causes men a lot of troubles even when *Furies* have not taken over them and the devil does not possess them: do we not indeed know that behind most of the people who hung themselves, killed themselves by their own sword, drowned themselves or committed suicide in any other way, it was the sadness who actually made them die such a bad death? And if some of them were also suffering from the falling sickness (epilepsy) when they killed themselves, their tragic end should however not be attributed to the demons, but to the tyranny and violence of sadness (Sfântul Ioan Gură de Aur 2008, 159).

The Church Fathers teach us, consequently, to seek to deprive ourselves of pleasures and material goods, but what they actually advise us is to make use of things, but to not let ourselves attached to material. In case we are grieved because of our anger, the Holy Fathers teach us all the time that in Forgiveness is Bliss, and that we should always look for this in our life.

Sadness is also cured by prayer with a pierced and restless heart and the constant confession of thoughts. The second part is important because by letting ourselves exposed to our spiritual father, we actually humble ourselves before God and thus make the work of demons lose its steam. Then our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ comes to us in the Holy Eucharist, the Mystery of His Body and Blood, and wipes out all trace of evil!

### **Acedia**

Another sinful passion related to sadness having a lot of negative impacts on man is Acedia. These spirits are kindred to such an extent that the Western Asceticism – developed from the teachings of Pope Gregory I, commonly known as Saint Gregory the Great (Lat. *Sanctus Gregorius Magnus*) – actually finds them to be one and the same (Larchet 2006, 167). The Latin equivalent of the original Greek term of *ἀκηδία* is found in the transliteration “acedia”, and while the notion has been described in most of the modern languages in various ways, as “sloth” (laziness), “lack of care” (apathy) or as a state of “extreme ennui” (weariness of life – in Latin *taedium vitae*), all these words still fail to express the whole complex reality of this particular spiritual passion (Larchet 2006, 167).

The Holy Fathers speak with one voice asserting that there is a strong connection between acedia and sadness. Oftentimes sorrow may pass into acedia in the sense of depression. The root cause of this distressed state is the frustration stemming from a certain dissatisfaction (Bunge 2007, 82-83). Given its very complex nature, that unifies the most different thoughts, acedia has the peculiarity to persist for a long time, and this makes our soul get into this characteristic depressed state (Bunge 2007, 87). Saint John Cassian says that “acedia and sadness are born from the movements of the inner self” (Sfântul Ioan Casian 2008, 117).

Gabriel Bunge observes with sorrow that this malady becomes increasingly widespread in our modern society (Diac. Ioan I. Ică jr., *Introducere la o călătorie spre marginea infernului singurătății noastre*, apud Bunge 2007, 12-13). Even though this passion is depicted in detail by the Fathers of the Church, and most of the Christians know quite well its symptomatology, it is paradoxically taken lightly.

As regards to the source of this spiritual disease, Evagrius Ponticus tells us that on the one side there is the devil, and on the other side there is the man’s body: natural acedia occurs when man works himself to exhaustion, beyond his powers, and demonic acedia when on the contrary he sits around doing nothing, lazing his days away (Moghilevskii 2014, 38).

Abba Evagrius thinks this malady is not exactly specific to the anchoritic environment, being rather common among those who live in a community (Bunge 2007, 43).

The passions that oppress Humanity are always and everywhere the same, it is only their manifestations that vary depending on the circumstances in which people live. Laymen are especially tempted by material things, and that is why their spiritual passions are more ‘incarnated’. People who live together in a community, often in a small place, are confronted most of the times with the weaknesses of the brothers who do not succeed in keeping their true calling in focus. Anchorites – hermits in the narrow sense of the term – who have given up both things and frequent contact with people, have to deal with the ‘bare’ evil spirits, who take the form of thoughts (Bunge 2007, 44-45).

The spirit of Acedia is also named the *Noonday Devil* or the *Demon of Sloth* as he attacks the monastic at certain times of the day. Those who live in the Middle East know too well that between the hours four (ten

o'clock) and eight (two o'clock in the afternoon), there is a pause because of the heat during which things are calm and activities are diminished or even interrupted (Bunge 2007, 74).

Evagrius Ponticus says that acedia

is an ethereal amity, a walking in circles, hatred for work, fight against the peace of mind, storm compared with the psalmody, lazy praying, laxity in asceticism, dozing ahead of time, sleep that always comes back, burden of madness, hatred for one's own cell, enemy of any toil, the opponent of perseverance, a muzzle on the meditative self, laziness for studying the Scriptures, partaker in sadness, timekeeper of hunger (Avva Evagrius Ponticus 2006, 60-61).

The man controlled by this spirit is literally not in the mood to do anything – life and all that surrounds him seems dull and meaningless. His faculties are inconstant: his mind is not capable anymore to focus on a certain thing and wanders distracted from an object to another. This state is accompanied by restlessness and anxiety which along with the spiritual loathing (or inner emptiness) are the fundamental features of this passion (Larchet 2009, 264-265). Acedia causes instability of the body and soul: the helpless mind is unable to concentrate on anything. Moreover, he who suffers from this ailment is always roaming aimlessly.

He seeks at all cost to meet other people without a real need, so driven only by this passion, makes up all kinds of so-called 'blissful reasons' to justify himself. This is how he cultivates relationships, most of them frivolous, with various people, which in his tendency to pry he maintains through vain babblings and pointless chatter (Larchet 2008, 139).

Conclusively, the suffering finds everything annoying and can never be content.

The man who wishes to be cured of such a deadly passion has to act decisively and finally turn toward himself. On his way to repentance, a Christian needs to be really attentive to his inner self, and not to search for a remedy outside of himself. Saint Isaac the Syrian says we need a man illumined by an unwavering faith in God, who has been through such things and is truly able to give us guidance and strengthen us (*cf.* Sfântul Isaac Sirul 2016, 345-346).

For the cure of this spiritual disease we also need hope, repentance and remembrance of death. Hope because in times of trial God is the only

One who can deliver us from such desolating affliction, and simply because everything good comes from God. The repentance enables man to start all over again. A Christian has to be fierce because a real change of heart will not come to anyone without a fight. And the remembrance of death brings back to memory the redeeming thought that we are only passing through this world. And indeed David, the king and prophet, said pretty much the same thing but in a more eloquent manner: “surely every man walks about like a shadow; surely they busy themselves in vain; he heaps up riches, and does not know who will gather them.” (Psalms 39, 6) All that matters to us is gain everlasting life. Saint Anthony the Great instructed his monks to have eternity always present to their minds and to reflect every morning that they might not live till night, and every evening that they might never see the morning (Sfântul Atanasie cel Mare 1988, 204).

Nowadays many of us complain that there are not true spiritual fathers anymore, but we forget that when it comes to the grace of God, it is not the father that makes the son, but the son that makes the father. What most people lack in modern Western society is the spirit of “filiality” and without it there cannot be an authentic spiritual paternity (Bunge 2007, 129).

Saint John Cassian gives us the example of Abba Paul of Thebes, the first Desert Father, who actually had everything he could ever need but nevertheless

urged himself and kept working every day continuously as if his livelihood truly relied on it. Once the cave was filled with his supplies, he set everything on fire and burned the things he had accumulated so carefully within a year (Sfântul Ioan Casian 1990, 239).

#### He did that to prove

that a monk is not allowed to idle away his time without working with his own hands and neither to ascend to the heights of perfection, and even if he did not need any labour for his food, he should still fulfil that only for the cleansing of the heart and steadfastness of the mind, so that he will not wander, but stay in his cell where he can achieve total victory precisely over the spirit of disquiet (Sfântul Ioan Casian 1990, 239).

From the presentation of these two spiritual passions, sadness and acedia, it is clear that they both cause great damage to the soul, psyche and body; and due to such unhealed wounds one can experience in time hopelessness, depression and may even resort, as it happens in some cases, to the final act of suicide.

Today's man has to regain that understanding that only by healing his spiritual distress, he can cure himself of his psychiatric and somatic disorders. The increase at present in so many diseases among the population of the world is undoubtedly a signal through which God calls us to repentance, because He wants us to change our lives so that we stop living according to our own will and embrace His holy will.

### **Depression**

As announced previously in the title, the passions of sadness and acedia play a great role in developing depression, which is now one of the most common mental illnesses in the world. The word 'depression' comes from the Latin *depression*, which has the meaning of "heaviness" expressing the disposition of a downcast spirit (that dries up the bones), which is always doubled by apathy, weariness and a disheartening perspective on reality (Avdeev 2011a, 159).

Despite the fact the Holy Scripture does not make any actual reference to depression, we can nonetheless find between its pages descriptions of similar states of mind, and we encounter in the Book of Psalms a whole range of such characteristic emotional states like sorrow and pessimism, torpidity and fatigue (Psalm 31, 3-4), despair (Psalm 37, 2-4), isolation and accusation of the others (Psalms 37, 11 and 54, 6-8), the feeling and the persistence of guilt (Psalm 50, 3), the insufficient or troubled sleep (Psalm 41, 2-3) (Nistor 2015, 99).

As for the prophetic books, we shall dwell only on the Book of Isaiah (61:3) where there is a reference to the feeling of hopelessness, sadness and grief. The prophet sought to "appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness..." (Nistor 2015, 100).

There are protestant authors who are of the opinion that king Saul was in a state of full-blown psychosis with suicidal and homicidal tendencies accompanied by a severe depression (*Dicționar Biblic* 1995, 323) because they think this very attitude is described in the first Book of Samuel (16, 14-16) where in a certain verse we can see how it actually degenerated into a psychotic behaviour: “and he stripped off his clothes also, and prophesied before Samuel in like manner, and lay down naked all that day and all that night” (1 Samuel 19, 24) (Nistor 2015, 102).

The most representative model of psychosomatic suffering that we find in the Old Covenant is the case of Job, who laments his fate before his friends and deeply deplores his birth, wondering bitterly why he did not die then (Job 3, 11-19) and why God does not give death to those who are miserable (Job 3, 20-26) (Semen 2010, 116). Job is one of those rare men who thrown even into the abyss of despair, succeed to climb up to the highest heights of deification (Nistor 2015, 102). In the same book we note that Sadness with all its emotional states, up to the stage of depression, is finally healed by Faith.

The New Testament presents the chronic spiritual sadness or depression in a more nuanced way. Apart from His disciples, who surely had many moments of doubt, disbelief, discouragement or even unfaithfulness, Christ Himself experienced some of these emotional states at the Gethsemane moment when being overwhelmed by a deep sadness, He told Peter and the two sons of Zebedee that His “soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death” (Matthew 26, 37-38). That did not stop Him though from trusting Himself in the hands of His heavenly Father (Nistor 2015, 105). It is significant that in the New Testament suffering and sickness always have a soteriological role.

From a statistical point of view, the situation around the world is the following: estimates say that 264 million people (5% from the overall population) are affected by depression. Women are more affected than men (\*\*\*) “Global, regional, and national incidence...”, 2018, 1817). They are however 2017 data and it is obvious that meanwhile these cases greatly increased their numbers. Most diseases have been increasing at an alarming rate amid the coronavirus pandemic and according to data

from the American Psychiatric Association (APA) in US around 15 million people suffer from depression. Other surveys assess that this level rose even higher: over 26% for women and over 12% for men. Women get depressed twice as often as men (8-12%, respectively 20-26%) (Avdeev 2011a, 160).

Until recently, the highest depression incidence rate was situated between the ages of 30 and 40, but at the moment it may be said that depression has drastically “rejuvenated” because it affects even the young people aged below 25 years. The number of those born before 1940, who had to grapple with depression before the age of 25, constitutes 2.5 per cent. For those born before 1940-1959 this indicator reaches 10 per cent. With regard to more recent periods in time, the increasing tendency stays the same. For 2-3% of the sick people, depression does not depend on external circumstances but for the others is mainly a reaction to stress. The yearbook with the newest antidepressants came to be three inches thick (*cf.* Avdeev 2011a, 161-162). As we can see, in the last 50 years depression experienced a galloping growth. At the same time over the last half century man got increasingly sick with the devastating secular spirit. In the Western world it is absolutely normal to see a psychologist (informal in American, *shrink*) or a psychiatrist if you have certain problems. In contrast, the number of the people who attend church on a frequent basis is in a downward spiral, not to mention spiritual fathers because in the current “emancipated society” there is no such notion...

What is worrying is that “the risk of recurrence after a first episode is up to 50 per cent, 50-90 per cent after two episodes and above 90 per cent after three or more episodes.” (D. Prelipceanu, *Tulburarea depresivă majoră (depresia monopolară, depresia unipolară)*, *apud* Prelipceanu 2018, 474) In order to understand how this disorder manifests itself, we will outline the most common symptoms (Tudose 2007, 171):

- feelings of self-*worthlessness*, hopelessness, helplessness;
- indifference toward everything;
- unjustified feeling of guilt;
- prolonged sadness, uncontrollable and unexplained crying, irascibility or irritability;

- loss of interest in activities and social interactions which were once agreeable and pleasant;

- inability to concentrate or remember details;

- thoughts of death, suicide attempts;

- insomnia or, on the contrary, an increased need for sleep etc.

Observing all these details we realize that the person who suffers from this disorder must be treated with love and care. The spiritual father, in particular, will have to avail himself of all the possible levers at its disposal to support and comfort the penitent tormented by such a terrible anguish. The spiritual fathers and mental health professionals need to acknowledge these people surely must have good reasons for being in this situation because only by developing pain empathy and mobilizing them, they will be able to discover together with the patients the hidden causes of their pain. That leads us to St. Paul's exhortation. "rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep" (Romans 12, 15). The spiritual father has to show a rather maternal and gentle attitude towards everyone who exposes such weakness, and he can protect and caress the suffering by putting his spiritual wings of gentleness and prayer around him.

Among the strongest factors (*cf.* D. Prelipceanu, *Tulburarea depresivă majoră (depresia monopolară, depresia unipolară)*, *apud* Prelipceanu 2018, 469) that can initiate depression onset we mention:

- prior history of depressive episodes;

- genetic susceptibility to depression;

- feminine sex;

- age (of disease onset) under 40;

- sleep disturbance;

- postpartum period;

- somatic comorbidities (Parkinson's disease, diabetes, coronary disease, neoplastic disease);

- lack of social support, stress related to negative life events;

- consumption of psychoactive substances.



Factors (*cf.* D. Prelipceanu, *Tulburarea depresivă majoră (depresia monopolară, depresia unipolară)*, *apud* Prelipceanu 2018, 469) favouring a depression relapse:

- increased number of previous episodes;
- premature discontinuation of treatment;
- emotional overload within the ambient of care;
- somatic and psychic comorbidity.

Unfortunately, in some cases, depression if not treated leads unfailingly to suicide: 60 per cent of those who commit suicide have a prior history of major depression and 8 per cent of those diagnosed with depression will have at some point in their life a suicide attempt (D. Prelipceanu, *Tulburarea depresivă majoră (depresia monopolară, depresia unipolară)*, *apud* Prelipceanu 2018, 474). We take note with concern that 45-60 per cent of global suicides are committed by depressed persons (*cf.* Avdeev 2011a, 161).

Examining all these information, we tend to understand why the psychiatrist D. Avdeev thinks that given the complexity and diversity of depressive disorders at least half of the cases are of a spiritual nature. Depression is the most common spiritual disease and the living Tradition of the Church regards mental disorders as a manifestation of man's corruption by the original sin. By differentiating between a spiritual, an emotional and a physical level within the three-tiered personality organisational framework, the Holy Fathers also drew a distinction between the 'naturally occurring' diseases and the illnesses caused by the work of the devil or originating in the spiritual passions that enslave man (*cf.* Avdeev 2011b, 115). If we looked at our nature through the prism of this conceptual system, our healing could be in a way much easier and would require less money, but at the same time much greater spiritual efforts [In my limited experience, I "happened" to meet once a depressed mother with several such episodes in the past for which she had received medical treatment. As she came to me to confess her sins, I told her to pray regularly and urged her to attend the Divine Liturgy having in mind that in the period immediately following I was going to perform it daily for a long time. Over that whole period of time she did pray regularly, fasted,

attended the Divine Liturgy on an almost daily basis and received Holy Communion from time to time. I was glad to see that after about a month, she had grown to have a totally different state of mind, and actually told me she felt much better]. To treat our spiritual sickness we need to work hard on ourselves rather than spend a lot of money and time in specialist clinics.

As I have said, the Holy Fathers described with great accuracy this illness of the soul and listed it as being among the sinful passions of sloth and sadness, and that is why in this matter spiritual assessment is just as important and corresponds virtually with the medical diagnosis. Depression is a distress signal by which our soul let us know it truly reached a critical point (*cf.* Avdeev 2011a, 169) [If the psychiatrist is a Christian, he will lead the sick man in a straight path. Here is a relevant case with regard to that: Mr. Stathis went to see a psychiatrist for expressing the fear he may have homosexual impulses. He had long tried to deny and reject these desires, but eventually he was forced to seek help for his problem. The psychiatrist made it clear that he was unquestionably homosexual and that he should not evade the issue, but to address it and consider how he could live with that. Mr. Stathis walked away in despair after hearing his words; and because he did not want to accept this state of things, he went to see another psychiatrist, who diagnosed him with obsessive disorder (since this was a fixation) and prescribed him medication and psychotherapy. His fears started to back down and Mr. Stathis was thus able to continue the military service and then complete his career}. (*cf.* Thermos 2010, 98-99).

It must also be taken into account that man does not live anymore according to the way God intended him to be, in communion with Nature, but he lives a very artificial way of life and this is especially true for city people. Let us think of our ancestors who did not have such an easy life: women had to raise, in many cases, more than ten children, took care of the household, and in those days people generally had to deal most of the time with the challenges of war and to face famine, but despite all that they were not falling into depression, or leastways very few were suffering from such mental health problem. And that because Nature enables the

man to become more tranquil, to lift his heart to his Creator, and spending time in Nature always proves to be a godsend for our inner peace and mental psyche. I genuinely believe that returning to our roots, hence escaping from our urban prison, is a valid solution in our fight against depression. *The sine qua non of healing is* nevertheless an intensive spiritual direction focused on the experience of God in daily life and on the vital need for spiritual guidance.

Among the most common methods used in depression treatment are conventional therapies (dialogue, communication) and physical interventions, which include the pharmacotherapy and the shock therapy (Solomon 2017, 122). The Holy Confession is to be used along with other conventional therapies. The therapeutic part that comes through pastoral care can be a great advantage especially when the spiritual father has a profound sense of the spiritual reality, but also strong knowledge of psychiatry.

Andrew Solomon provides patients with a couple of criteria when they are in search of a psychotherapist, and this model corresponds to that of a true spiritual father as well: the therapist must act in good faith; the patient needs to be sure his therapist has an intimate knowledge of his specific techniques; the patient is entitled to feel safe and respected; and last but not least, the therapist must have the ability to establish and maintain healthy relationships based on understanding (Solomon 2017, 134). This portrayal fits thence very well with the profile of a spiritual father as he naturally acts in good faith, manifesting all his love to recover the lost sheep, and has all the sympathy and understanding for the infirmities of the repentant.

Faith and hope in God are the Christian's most precious spiritual gift.

The priest is the most suitable to impersonate a therapist. Tristan Rhodes, a priest I know, told me he actually treated for a number of years a woman suffering from psychotic depression, who kept refusing therapy, but came to him every week to confess her sins. She told him her stories and he talked in his turn about the most crucial things to a good friend, a psychiatrist, and finally told the woman the opinions formulated by his friend. She did receive that way in the most explicit terms mental health support but it actually happened in an exclusively religious context (Solomon 2017, 159).

This cooperation between spiritual father and psychiatrist, if the latter lives and thinks like a Christian, proves to be of a paramount importance in today's society [Some time ago, I personally had a case with a spiritual daughter, whom I urged to see a psychiatrist, but she ultimately had to stop going to him because he was an unbeliever and did not understand her spiritual needs. That is why it is very important for the specialist to be an ardent believer in God. Here is what Andrew Solomon says about one of his female patients: the evening prayers soothe her soul and help her rein in the chaos of depression. "It is such a powerful structure", she says. "You stand up and recite the same prayers every evening. Someone established what you are supposed to tell God, and other people also recite them with you. I lay down these rituals to contain all my emotions. The Holy Liturgy is like a crate made of planks; the texts from the Bible and the Psalms are like a very fine coffer to put in your emotions. Going to Church is a multitude of focus-attention practices which help you advance spiritually"] (Solomon 2017, 160).

From those presented so far we understand first of all that Depression has its spiritual causes and that only by healing our passions, especially Sadness and Acedia, we can cure ourselves of such a terrible disease. Faith alone, when it is complete, can enable man to rise from the overwhelming darkness.

### **Conclusions**

In the present analysis we observe that sadness, which can be caused by a lack of material things, dissatisfaction of a desire of the flesh, anger or the work of the devil, when is not treated in due time, leads together with acedia, to hopelessness and then to depression.

Therefore, the spiritual father has to be very careful about all the details of the confession, and to dig deeper when he sees any traces of sadness and acedia to check whether their roots are not too strong and may not cause the development of some psychic or other kind of affections.

The cure must begin for every Christian with the Holy Confession, the Sacrament of healing, forgiveness and growth. In a more profound and

total sense, without the need of confessing the sins, Baptism or immersion of the Spirit – through which we are all, servants of God, clothed with the garment of righteousness and divine light – cleanses us of original sin, strengthening our spirit, soul and body for “our struggle with the evil spirits” (Ephesians 6, 12).

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## Mapping religious conflicts in contemporary world: causes, trends and solutions

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### Abstract:

*With regret, we note that in the 21st century the culture of peace is a desirable reality. Desirable because today's global engagements, which have accumulated energies of common intent, show us that they fail to stabilize certain poles of conflict in the harmony of peace. Quite simply, religious conflict, whatever the reasons or motives behind it, is present in the world. This study provides an overview of the current situation of religious conflicts and terrorist attacks in the world based on data from Religion and Armed Conflict (RELAC) and the European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report (TE-SAT), with an indication of the particular elements involved in the process of generating, carrying out and possibly resolving them. Tangentially, although necessary for such a study, we will attempt an answer to the question: is interreligious dialogue a concrete solution to minimize the religious conflicts?*

### Keywords:

*religious conflict, interreligious dialogue, identity, terrorism*

### Introduction

The world of the 21st century is not what we thought, in anticipation, of it 20 years ago: a world in which people are happy, a world in which relations between States are based on a construction of common

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interest and prosperity. Utopian perspectives have proved to be some of the most illusory ideas. In the first decades of the present century the world has felt the dramatic impact of armed conflicts in the Middle East (Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria), Africa, Asia, as well as terrorist attacks in the United States and Europe. All the more we feel today, in 2022, the tension of the conflict from Ukraine, which, paradoxically, involves two states with a declared Orthodox Christian majority. In addition to this cruel reality, the social drama has also been amplified by the Covid19 pandemic, which has substantially tested human solidarity.

That the world of 2022 is not one of stability, but one of challenges to human security, is confirmed by the data of *Alert 2022! Report on conflicts, human rights and peacebuilding*, which analyses the conflict situation in 2021: 32 armed conflicts are reported (Africa - 15, representing 47%, Asia - 9, Middle East - 5, Europe - 2, Americas - 1); for the first time in a decade, high intensity armed conflicts accounted for more than half (53%) of all cases worldwide; the number of casualties in armed conflicts has increased; according to United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) data, there were 82.4 million forcibly displaced people worldwide at the end of 2020, more than double than 10 years ago; 98 socio-political crises were identified worldwide in 2021 (Alert 2022! 2022, 7). It can be seen that the reality is not what we want.

In order to solve a problem we need to identify its cause and its vectors of unfolding, as well as the elements that catalyze its materialization. But what we are particularly interested in this study is the religious conflict, not how many there are in the world today, but what is the trend in their unfolding. It is impossible to encompass the dimensions of conflict in these pages, and therefore we will limit our analysis to the religious conflict.

### **1. Religious conflict - conceptualization and particularities**

At a general level, a conflict is “the result of opposing interests involving scarce resources, goal divergence and frustration” (Swanström & Weissmann 2005, 7). Conflict should not only be defined in terms of violence (behaviour) or hostility (attitudes), but also includes

incompatibility or “differences in position on the issue” (Swanström & Weissmann 2005, 7). According to Peter Wallensteen, a conflict consists of three components: *action*, *incompatibility* and *actors*, which makes conflict a social situation in which at least two actors (parties) strive to acquire at the same time an available set of rare resources (Wallensteen 2002, 17) or objectives. Consequently, the conflict defines a confrontation between one or more parties, who aspire to incompatible or competing goals.

If we apply these definitional equations to religious conflicts, we understand much better what their particularities are. Take, for example, Peter Wallensteen's definition. In a religious conflict, the *actors* are believers who have a strong religious affiliation, an affiliation that specifies their identity in all its complexity. The elements that enter into the structure of religious identity are creed, cult, group affiliation. These three factors shape and define the religious identity of the actor involved in the religious conflict. *Incompatibility* in a religious conflict comes down to differences, some radical, in doctrine between the actors involved in the conflict. For example, let us hypothetically consider a religious conflict between Christians and Muslims. Incompatibility between them essentially boils down to the different ways of understanding their own teaching, worship and identification with members of the same community. A Muslim will never accept that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, the Logos, because he has a radical theological understanding of Allah, just as no Christian will accept that Jesus is a prophet and the supreme prophet is Mohammed. *Action*, which is the result of contradiction or incompatibility, can be manifest, i.e. visibly articulated in armed conflict, or non-manifest, i.e. situated at the discursive level of differences of opinions.

F.V. Anthony, C. Hermans, and C.J.A. Sterkens note four types of causes of religious conflict: (a) socio-economic, (b) political, (c) ethno-cultural and (d) religious. In their view, “violent actions are the means of (re)defining religious identity and (re)claiming the authority of one's own religion” (Anthony, Hermans and Sterkens 2014, 170). Socio-economic causes can arise when a majority group has social economic development

and a good standard of living, which would lead to an attitude of intolerance on the part of a minority group that is outclassed in terms of economic development. And not infrequently, discrepancies in economic level between different groups create social frustration, which would lead those in the group with a poor standard of living to act for changing socio-economic conditions. The political causes of conflict between religious groups are varied: discrimination against minorities through the denial of legal rights by the State, the junction of political and religious influences in profiling ideologies with rights-claiming, radical nationalist claims. The ethno-cultural causes of interreligious conflicts are in direct congruence with the political ones, since in many situations religion functions as “a vehicle for building ethnic identity or as a support for nationalism”, leading to attitudes of superiority. It can be also mention the oppositional attitude of a religious group towards globalization, secular and liberal Western politics, that would infringe on the basic moral principles of the religious community concerned. Religious causes of conflicts between religions include differences between teachings, ideologized and exclusivist interpretation of certain norms in sacred texts.

In our opinion, the basic problem of a religious conflict is the *difference* of theologies, of perspectives on the truth, as a point that can generate the concrete action of a manifested conflict, but not necessarily involve it. So this difference does not define the conflict itself. Undoubtedly, the difference exists. You cannot exclude it. Christian theology is irreconcilable on certain doctrinal points with Islamic theology. And the difference is marked by identity, by my specific way of believing, why I believe, what I believe, how I believe, what I believe for. But the difference between particular ways of understanding truth can be a source of rethinking religious particularities in a constructive perspective. Diversity of religious, theological opinions can be accepted as such and can be valued in a human heritage as a challenge to expand the cultural and religious horizon from a linear to a layered perspective. After all, Christian theology can add to the understanding of this diversity by elaborating the idea of *unity in diversity*: each human being, as a person, has a uniqueness that makes him or her particular. The universe of my

uniqueness meets, in communion, another universe of uniqueness belonging to the *other*, which is also unique. My relationship with his otherness does not mean exclusion, but inclusion through respect, admiration, complementarity, congruence and tolerance, within the same framework of community as unity.

We can now better nuance the fact that religious conflict, when it exists, does not necessarily imply an available set of resources as a stake or as an aim, but the reality of differences between religious identities that opts for two possibilities in social expression: either they close themselves in an ideological/theological exclusivism, or they open themselves to the constructive relationship of accepting the *other* with the sum of his differences. *Exclusivism is a radicalization of difference*, a selfish appropriation of the claim to hold absolute truth. At the same time, we should point out that a religious conflict can also take place between two different identities, but within the same religious culture where there are variations of opinion and lack of congruence with the general policy of the group or community.

It should be noted that *identity* is a social construct, fluid in the global rhythm of the world, whose genuine structure is shaped by conditional factors, especially those of the group or community to which it belongs. These factors (social, religious, economic, cultural) impacts an individual's social behavior. In this regard, K.B. Harpviken and H.E. Røislien note that religion has a particular tendency to form strong exclusive identities that divide people into *us* and *them*, making religious identities prone to conflict:

Religious belief systems have a particular identity-forming potential. Religion is not just individual; it is also social, offering each believer a sense of belonging to a community of fellow believers. With its reference to a transcendent source of truth and codification of shared norms, religion serves as a compass for the individual and the religious community alike, locating all believers within an extended ontological setting. An identity with a religious source may, therefore, be exceptionally robust: religion tells you where you belong and where to proceed (Harpviken and Røislien 2008, 354).

This statement, of course, does not confirm the reality of the myth that religion is a source of conflict and violence. In this regard, it is

interesting to follow William T. Cavanaugh who refutes the so-called *myth of religious violence* that religion causes violence because it is (1) absolutist, (2) divisive, and (3) insufficiently rational (See: Cavanaugh 2009). Conflict is created on religious premises. And these premises are interpreted exclusively by religious leaders, who through their discourse and on the basis of religious affiliation to group values, can manipulate believers by radicalizing them to the extent of the most aggressive combatants and “vigilantes”.

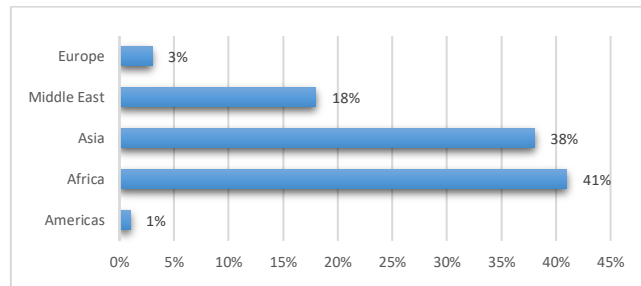
In conclusion, we believe that the stereotypical view that religious conflict is a conflict between religions must be corrected. Religious conflict is a conflict, generated by differences in radicalized theological perspectives, between identities (believers) belonging to different religious communities or groups; a conflict translated into the equation *us versus them*. It is not the religions themselves that generate conflict, some with dramatic effects of loss of life, but the radicalized and obtuse perspectives taken by some individuals, usually leaders, who give an exclusivist interpretation to their own truth, demonizing the outsiders.

## **2. Statistics on global religious conflicts and terrorist attacks in Europe**

We believe it is necessary to present statistics on the current situation of religious conflicts in the world in general and terrorist acts in particular. For this reason we use two sources of information: *Religion and Armed Conflict (RELAC)* (See: Svensson and Nilsson 2018, 1127-1148) and the *European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report (TE-SAT)* (See: Europol, 2011-2022). The data we present in this section provide us with sufficiently up-to-date informations on the barometer of the evolution of religious conflicts and terrorist acts in the world.

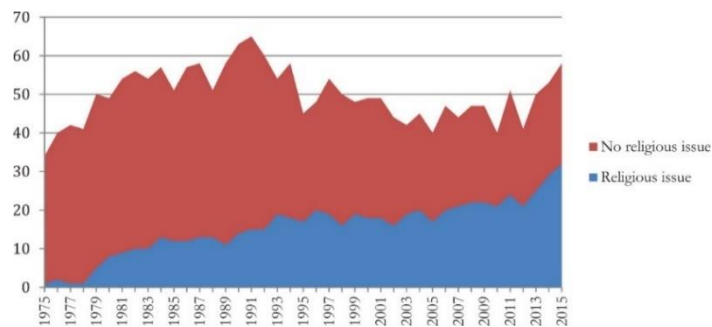
*Religion and Armed Conflict (RELAC)* stands out in that it includes relevant informations about religious conflict conducted on a religious cause (within the same religious tradition) and on religious conflict involving two different religious identities. The data cover the period from 1975-2015. According to *RELAC*, we can see the map of the number of conflicts on religious causes recorded by areas of the world (*figure 1*). It disproves that the Middle East would rank first in the extent of religious

conflicts, which in fact is the third most frequent region in terms of the distribution of conflicts conducted on a religious issue - 18%. What makes religious conflicts in the Middle East more prominent in our attention is due to the fact that they have been highly publicized. Returning to the chart of the distribution of religious conflicts, Africa ranks first with 40-41%, followed by Asia with 38%. In Europe the percentage is 3% and in the Americas 1% (Svensson and Nilsson 2018, 1136).



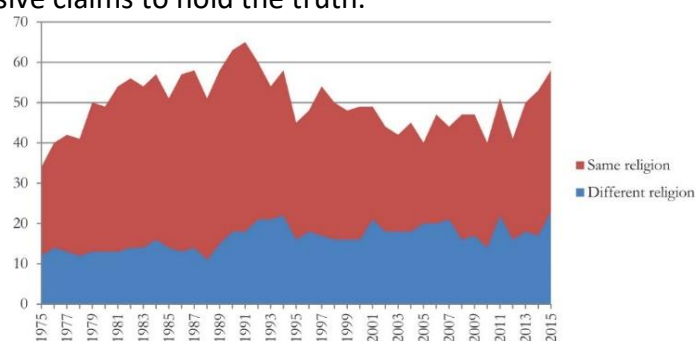
**Fig. 1 - Religious Issue conflicts by region, 1975-2015**

Figure 2 shows a dramatic increase in religiously motivated armed conflicts, from 3% in 1975 to 55% in 2015, most of them caused by the politico-religious initiatives of terrorist groups.



**Fig. 2 - Religious issue conflicts 1975–2015**  
(Svensson and Nilsson 2018, 1136)

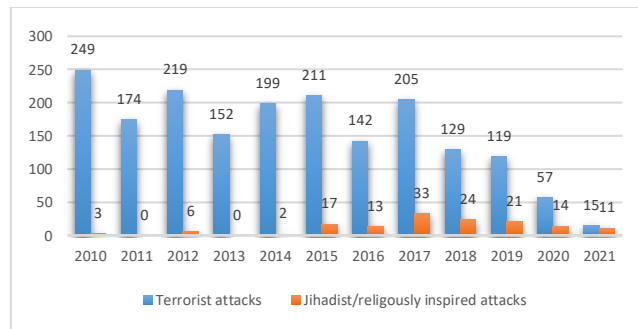
Figure 3 shows a slight upward trend in religious conflicts involving actors (identities) from different religions compared to religious conflicts within the same religion. The data presented invalidate the alarmist views of some scholars that the Western world is or will be in open conflict with the Eastern world, or in other words, Christianity with Islam. Personally, we believe that the thesis put forward by S. P. Huntington - the “clash of civilizations” (See: Huntington 2011) - is not feasible. If, perhaps, 30 to 40 years ago we were thinking along the opinions of S.P. Huntington regarding the cultural, social, economic and religious differences between East and West, we have a completely different perspective today. This is so if we consider, first and foremost, how the dynamics of globalization have reconfigured the structure of religious differences in their interaction. It can be felt in our society a certain familiarity with the *other* who belongs to another religious culture. Meeting a Muslim on the streets of London, for example, dressed in traditional clothes or putting his prayer mat on the pavement, is no longer striking. Interaction with religious diversity is an everyday routine, at least in the Western part of the world. Secondly, the effect of secularization and secularist policies in some Western states, coupled with the alleged contradiction between techno-scientific development and religious truth, is felt at the individual level. The consequence is that religious issues are no longer of interest, at least in their traditional form. Religious issues remain valid, but religion itself undergoes changes in form and substance, changes which de-absolutize the exclusive claims to hold the truth.



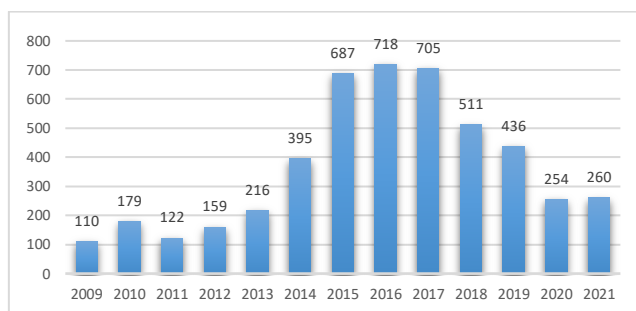
**Fig. 3 - Religious identity conflicts 1975–2015**  
(Svensson and Nilsson 2018, 1138)



Regarding terrorist attacks, *European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report (TE-SAT)* updates the graph of the number of conflicts in the European area between 2010-2021. Of the total number of terrorist attacks (including jihadist/religiously inspired, right-wing, left-wing and anarchist, ethno-nationalist and separatist, other and non-specified), it can be observed a fluctuation in the number of terrorist attacks with religious motives, most of which are jihadist. The highest share is between 2015-2011, as shown in the graph below (*figure 4*) (Data collected from *European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report (TE-SAT)*, 2011-2022; <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/infographics/terrorism-eu-facts-figures/> (accessed 12.09.2022)). The numbers point to the reality that religious violence, generated by paramilitary groups with exclusive religious claims, still occurs. All the more so as we see a number of people arrested for involvement in terrorist attacks (*figure 5*) (Data collected from *European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report (TE-SAT)*, 2011-2022; <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/infographics/terrorism-eu-facts-figures/> (accessed 12.09.2022)). Each of these could cause a number of deaths, and all in the name of a radical interpretation of religious teachings.



**Fig. 4 - Number of religious terrorist attacks in Europe, 2011-2021**



**Fig. 5 - Number of arrests for involvement in religious terrorist attacks in Europe, 2009-2021**

It remains to ask whether religious violence can really be stopped? And if so, how and by whom? It is generally considered that interreligious dialogue is an effective tool for reducing religious conflicts. In the next section we will critically argue this idea.

### **3. Interreligious dialogue: an effective tool to reduce religious conflicts?**

Hundreds, thousands of pages have been written about the definition, dimensions and effectiveness of interreligious dialogue in contemporary society. At the theoretical level, if we stay at this level, things are in an ideal reality. But on a practical level, with application in today's society, the reality of the persistence of religious violence tends to invalidate the effectiveness of interreligious dialogue in the operationalization of conflicts.

Ever since the first official institutionalization of interreligious dialogue in 1893, when the World Parliament of Religions was established in Chicago, one of the cardinal coordinates of interreligious dialogue has been “ensuring permanent international peace” (Barrows 1893, 18). Throughout the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century were established centers, associations, state institutions and foundations, whose program is the promotion of interreligious dialogue. States and their liberal and democratic policies also joined in this engagement for

promoting peace through dialogue, establishing constitutional norms for the rights to religious freedom. Also, different programs have been established in universities around the world in order to raise awareness and implement, through education, religious tolerance. However... religious conflicts persist in forms of dramatic violence. For these reasons, a critical re-evaluation of the approach of the current interreligious dialogue is absolutely necessary.

First of all, at the level of representativeness, it must be established who can speak credibly and knowledgeably on behalf of a particular religious tradition, given the fact that certain religions (Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism) are not centered on a single pole of authority, such as Christianity (ecclesiastical hierarchy). Most religions are polycentric rather than centralized. In another way, the interreligious dialogue addresses and involves in its process the elites (teachers, researchers, political representatives, religious leaders), excluding the ordinary people, who, paradoxically, experience religious diversity daily. This situation induces a formalism in interreligious debates. Meetings, debates, conferences that have interreligious dialogue as their theme are reduced to presentations without any real impact. The theorizing of interreligious dialogue is consumed in that framework, without any echo in the field of society.

Secondly, at the level of applicability, it must be realized that the exclusivist attitude of holding the absolute truth is not constructive for interreligious dialogue. The major challenge that interreligious dialogue addresses is whether you accept an absolute truth of the partner in dialogue, another truth different from your own truth. This interplay of absolute truths did not involve syncretism, so acidly fined by the fundamentalist factions in every religion. Also, the antagonism of opposing attitudes towards interreligious dialogue within the same religious group or community must be overcome.

Thirdly, interreligious dialogue does not presuppose a harmonization of differences in religious perspectives. Capitalizing on differences is an essential stake in the construction of an effective interreligious dialogue. Compromise and relativization have no place in

dialogue. Not infrequently, the de-substantialization of truth has been resorted to in order to make way for peace, on the idea that the principle of an absolute truth risks developing exclusivist attitudes. But the dialogue is not aimed only the peace in the sphere of religious diversity, but it can and must represent an international voice for global ethics and the solution for social difficulties (poverty, human trafficking, medical assistance, counseling and material aid in refugee camps, etc.).

Fourthly, interreligious dialogue implies assuming a nexus of co-participation in the complex horizon of the reality of religious diversity, entering into the religious universe of the other, of course without diminishing our own religious identity.

Finally, regardless of how much energy is put into the interreligious dialogue by those involved in it, without the support and involvement of the political and economic authority factors, the interreligious dialogue is consumed without any minimal social impact.

### **Conclusions**

The complexity, dynamism and polymorphous nature of contemporary multi-religious reality impose a number of challenges in redefining religious identity and its engagement with other identities. Effective engagement with religious otherness is unavoidable today. Unfortunately, on the premise of ideologized stereotypes and subjective interpretations of faith teachings, religious differences are evaluated in a paradigm of exclusivism, leading to conflict. Religious conflict is a persistent reality in the world of the 21st century, whether it results in actual violence or war or is limited to ideological-religious contradictions in exchanges of opinions. Dealing with religious conflict lies primarily in changing people's attitudes, an inner change through awareness of the reality of diversity. *To be in dialogue* with the *other* in the daily and natural course of life, to be in tolerant relationship with him, to look at and think of the *other* in the logic of brotherhood is the concrete solution to transform conflict into coexistence and peace.

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**Studies and Articles of Biblical Theology of the New  
Testament in the review “Altarul / Mitropolia Banatului”  
[“The Shrine of Banat” / “The Metropolitan see of Banat”]  
(1944-1947; 1951-2021)**

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**Abstract:**

*In the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in Caransebeș, the foundations of an ecclesiastical publication of a high academic standing were laid: “Altarul Banatului” [“The Shrine of Banat”] (later renamed, in Timișoara, “Mitropolia Banatului” [“The Metropolitan See of Banat”]). Due to its content, the elegance of its ideas as well as its high standards, it soon compelled recognition among Romanian cultural-theological publications. During about seven decades of quasi-continuous publication, more than 200 studies, articles, commentaries and translations from the field of Biblical Theology were published in the pages of this valuable Orthodox publication; half of them refer to the New Testament. They are all particularly important and therefore, contribute to the Romanian and universal Christian Theology and spirituality by completing and enriching them.*

**Keywords:**

*Caransebeș, Timișoara, the journal “Altarul / Mitropolia Banatului” [“The Shrine of Banat” / “The Metropolitan See of Banat”], New Testament, Romanian Theology*

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### **Preliminary**

In the preamble of a previous study (Dobrei 2021, 109-110), published in the pages of the same university annals of Iași, I mentioned that the bases of a new ecclesiastical publication was being laid in Caransebeș – “Altarul Banatului” [“The Shrine of Banat”]), a journal of a high academic standard, “a journal for the development of the soul and theological science”; due to its content, the elegance of its ideas as well as its high standards it soon compelled recognition among Romanian cultural-theological publications (Suciu 1977, 235-236; Carebia 2002, 180). In this first editorial stage his existence was short, on January 27, 1948 editor Marcu Bănescu being forced to surrender his publication authorization to the State Security Service of Caransebeș (Archives of Caransebeș Diocese 1948).

With it, two other theological publications of Banat disappeared, namely “Biserica Bănățeană” [“Banat Church”], the official organ of the archdiocese of Timișoara, and “Duh și Adevăr” [“Spirit and Truth”], the homiletic journal of the clergy from Banat. The old periodical “Foaia Diecezană” [“The Diocesan Newspaper”], started by the great hierarch Ioan Popasu, continued to be published and in 1949, when the Episcopal Seat of Caransebeș was included in the newly-created Archiepiscopal Seat of Timișoara and Caransebeș, it became “Foaia Arhidiecezană” [“The Archdiocesan Newspaper”] (*Foaia Arhidiecezană* 1949).

However, this publication also ceased to appear in the spring of 1951, being replaced by the official organ “Mitropolia Banatului” [“The Metropolitan See of Banat”] that was actually the result of merging two post-war theological publications, “Foaia Arhidiecezană” [“The Archdiocesan Newspaper”], also the result of merging other two older church gazettes: “Foaia Diecezană” [“The Diocesan Newspaper”] of Caransebeș, which had appeared in 1886, and “Biserica Bănățeană” [“Banat Church”] of Timișoara, which appeared in 1941, and “Buletinul Eparhiei Aradului” [“The Bulletin of the Eparchy of Arad”], replacing the old diocesan publication “Biserica și Școala” [“Church and School”], which had appeared in 1877; in time, as its content became more dynamic and of a better quality, this publication revealed its true identity, namely that



of a continuer of the first theological journal of Banat, "Altarul Banatului" ["The Shrine of Banat"] from Caransebeş (1944-1947), name and mission reassumed as of January 1990 (Dobrei 2013, 41-46).

### **Studies and Articles on the Biblical Theology of the New Testament**

During the nearly seven decades of publication, in the pages of this valuable Orthodox publication were published more than 200 studies, articles, comments, translations and theological readings in the field of Biblical theology; more than half of them are historically and theologically circumscribed to the New Testament. The materials in question were published either in the section for *Theological Studies*, present in all editions of the magazine, or in columns like *Documentary*, *Church Life*, *Ancestors' Faces*, *Remembrances*, *Patristic Pages*, *Moral Readings* etc. Most writings are studies conducted with scientific accuracy by Romanian theologians; others are translations.

As for the subjects of the published materials, they cover a wide range of theological studies related to the New Testament such as Biblical archaeology studies and articles, materials concerning interpretative methods and the history of the canon of the books of the New Testament, their structure and content, the Old Law as compared to the New Law of love, etc.; many of these materials are interdisciplinary studies. Also, the magazine in question contains the comments of Church Fathers and ecclesiastical writers on some of the New Testament books, or on fragments of the Gospels, reviews, notes and bibliographic presentations of certain editions of the New Testament as a whole or parts of it, exegesis and New Testament Biblical theology volumes, studies and articles, as well as several valuable readings and poems of New Testament origin.

In the following pages we tried a systematization (by content) and an ordering (alphabetical and chronological) of all studies and articles published in the pages of this journal; we specify that in their enumeration we opted for the abbreviations "AB" (for the old edition from Caransebeş and for the current one of the "Altar of Banat" ["The Shrine of Banat"] from Timișoara) and "MB" (for the edition "Mitropolia Banatului" ["The Metropolitan See of Banat"] from Timișoara).

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### **Conclusions**

The materials published in this prestigious theological journal from Banat cover almost the entire range of the New Testament. As it can be easily noticed, some aspects are given more attention, such as those related to Biblical archaeology and the Holy Scriptures' interpretative methods of the New Law; as for the rest of the materials, on the whole, they include studies and articles on specific topics. Regardless of their content, they are all particularly important and therefore, contribute to the Romanian and universal Christian Theology and spirituality by completing and enriching them.

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## Metropolitan Antonie Plămădeală, Confessor in the Communist Prison

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### Abstract:

*In our study we will try to bring to light, as much as the bibliographical sources allow, the image of a great scholar, monk and confessor in the Communist prisons, metropolitan Antonie Plămădeală.*

*Sufferance in the Communist prison and not only there was and still remains, in a spiritual sense, the interior frame of the prodigal son. It is always necessary to have a renewal. To such a renewal, metropolitan Antonie Plămădeală was also subjected. He tried through sufferance to resemble the Model – Christ and to become himself a model for the future generations.*

*Our father is part of the academy of great spirits assigned to confess the teaching of the eternal Teacher and Bishop, our Lord Jesus Christ, fathers Iustin Pârvu, Cleopa Ilie, Daniil Sandu Tudor, Bartolomeu Anania, Roman Braga, Dumitru Stăniloae, C. Voicescu. But the real list of those who suffered is endless... May their memory, the example of their life and activity be eternal !*

### Keywords:

*testimony, confessor, prison, holiness, culture*

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## **Introduction**

As a school of holiness, the monastery has mainly the role to render concrete the Christian manner of living on earth, if we refer to our faith. It is the appropriate environment to accomplish on a human level what Christ revealed as God. That is to reflect divinity on our life, a life which is not incompatible with eternity despite its limited aspects. This is also shown in the Rules for the organization of the monastic life: each monastery must

organize its life so that it shows a high spiritual existence, practice of the Christian virtues, humble living of the liturgical services, rich spiritual assistance and example of Christian life both for its inhabitants and for the worshippers (*Regulamentul pentru Organizarea Vieții Monahale...*, 2006, 1).

Sufferance, whenever endured or thought with honesty, proves that crucifixion has not been useless, that the sacrifice of Christ is fruitful” (Steinhardt 2003, 276). In a spiritual meaning, the Christians that are in a prison go through the stages of the inner tragedy of the prodigal son. They feel the need of a rebirth. Every spiritual rebirth is based on a profound interior commotion in the abyss of the sorrow.

The prisoners have understood that they had no other choice but to abide by the destiny in prison as the will of God. The mystery of the sufferance could only be understood by looking at the Cross. Sufferance creates moral greatness for it is a catalyzer of the noble and superior zeal of the human soul. From a Christian point of view, man must aspire to become like Christ. The entire Philokalia is nothing but a teaching, a pedagogy of the manner in which we can become like Christ. To the extent in which we resemble Christ, to the extent in which we come closer to salvation, we need a transfiguration, a transfiguration of our soul. From a natural man, the Christian must become a man with Grace (Brânzaș 2001, 22-24).

## **I. Slatina Monastery – monastic centre of Moldavia**

The Carpathian and sub-Carpathian chain Stânișoara develops on the eastern part of the Eastern Carpathians, starting from the north from Rarău Mountain and continuing to Piatra Neamț with a length of 120 km and transversally they have a width between 30 and 60 km starting from the left bank of Bistrița River to the sub-Carpathian hills of Moldavia. The Stânișoara Mountains have always been rich in secular woods, in glades and sheepfolds where they got their names from. But these mountains

have been especially blessed by God with hidden places, very appropriate for secluded life and for monasteries. For this reason, in the Carpathian chain Stânișoara many hermits of Moldavia have lived and many monasteries have been built, and Slatina Monastery is one of them (*cf.* Bălan 2001, 74).

In this extremely picturesque place through the variety of the landscape and the richness of the forests of pine-trees and beech Alexandru Lăpușneanu decided to build his monastery:

The monastery was built by local and Transylvanian craftsmen, and it was consecrated, according to historian Grigore Ureche, on the 14<sup>th</sup> of October 1558, but the constructions continued even after this date, when a royal house and cells were built together with the towers and the defense walls. The painting, works of some Moldavian painters from the 16<sup>th</sup> century, was completely redone in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

In another document we are told that Metropolitan Gregory II from Neamț is the one who urged the ruler of Moldavia to start building the Slatina Monastery. Unfortunately, the old pisania by Alexandru Lăpușneanu was lost and the one existing now was put there by abbot Nil, in 1582, and it says nothing about the consecration of the place or about the contemporary hierarchs (*cf.* Corugă 1971, 1240).

After 1574 (the end of Ioan Voda's rule), hieromonk Nil, the sole leader and abbot of the monastery completes the Church with the inscription ("pisania"), and took the model of coat of arms of Moldavia from Putna. The pisania is carved in stone in Slavonic, fixed on the wall of the church, above the entrance door. By the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, when the Polish entered into Moldavia, Slatina was ruined and it passed through several difficult moments in 1821 also, when a group of Greek revolutionaries found refuge into the monastery. The edifice was restored by hierarch Philaret Beldiman in 1834, who rebuilt the tower at the gate of the monastery. From 1962 Slatina Monastery became a nun monastery (*cf. Monumente istorice bisericesti...*, 1974, 228).

## **II. The man who grew up with the Church of his nation**

Generalizing, the Church and the State are two forms of the divine will, two manners of expression of the human life. The relations between them are necessary. The state educates persons as citizens, in political liberty, but it does not deal with problems such as: wisdom, religious life. The State itself needs the citizen to be religious. The relation between Church and the State is one of reciprocal acknowledgement. The Church and the State, the spiritual kingdom and the profane one must coexist in harmony (*cf.* Meyendorff 1996, 23).

The Church has always wished to manifest freely and to be accepted as a communitarian identity. In order not to be outside the law, it used manners of organization in agreement with the State legislation, but also with its teaching of faith. It made great efforts to become legal, it made huge efforts to pursue the persecutors that its manifestations are not a threat for the State. The main component of the relation between Church and the political power was that referring to the preaching and defense of the faith. The Church opposed the abuse done by the royals in matters that concerned the teaching of faith. For this reason, the hierarchs of the Church were not only once removed by the emperors because they did not share their opinions regarding the Christian dogma. The patriarchs or bishops thus had two options: they either subjected to the doctrinarian views of the emperors and kept their throne, or they opposed the sovereign and were replaced (*cf.* Gabor 2012, 13).

Anyway, in the life of the Romanian people,

The Orthodox Church has never been a rival or a real competitor of the State, but the space in which the perishing world of the earth meets the eternal Kingdom of heaven, the arch between the «broil» of today and the hope of the Judgment day. To this respect, in all its history, the symphony between the Church and the State was marked by the tension between ideal and insufficient, between the tradition of continuity and the tendency of renewal (Cojocaru 2005, 14-15).

During the persecution of the Orthodox Church, almost 2000 priests were arrested together with intellectuals, politicians, students and farmers who opposed the new regime, suffering and dying for their creed. Orthodox, Reformed, Roman-Catholics or Greek-Catholics, the priests were dragged in cuffs, beaten, starving, forced to work hard and killed in



prisons. The jails and work camps had become real living tombs in which thousands of martyrs and confessors who passed through the Communist prisons, were convicted for the simple reason that they wanted to preserve the faith of the ancestors. The priests were especially chased because they did not want to join an atheistic party that tried to control them for the regime to be sure that they will not oppose it. The presence of the members of the clergy in prisons between 1948 and 1964 was beneficial. Through the presence of the hundreds of priests in jails there existed a real Christian spirituality. The priests have done their duty, both through their teaching and through the celebration of the Holy Mysteries. Due to the priests, a large number of those who were imprisoned could die a Christian death: confessed and communed. The clergy, including the young men and most of the people, were persecuted for their Christian faith and not for their political views or for other reasons (*cf.* Baciu, 2004, 257).

The criteria for conviction was faith. The priests were convicted for their faith in God, for the power with which they preached faith to the people, because they fulfilled their duty of apostles. The confessed Christ and that is why they were sacrificed. Professor Dumitru Stăniloae, Constantin Galeriu, Father Arsenie Papacioc, Archimandrite Benedict Ghiuș, Father Cleopa, Father Iustin Pârvu convicted when he was 30 years of age, Father Ioan Negruțiu, Father Nil Dorobanțiu, Hieromonk Sofian Boghiu, Sandu Tudor (he was the abbot of Rarău Monastery with the eremite name Daniil), Father Nicolae Grebenea, Antonie Plămădeală, Father Arsenie Boca, Father Dimitrie Bejan, Father Mina Dobzeu, Father Ioan Bunea, Father Ilie Lăcătușu, Father Gheorghe Calciu Dumitreasa, nun Mihaela Nicoară, Father Constantin Bucescu, Father Constantin Voicescu and many others are part of a long list of those who were imprisoned (*cf.* Lucinescu 2008, 75).

Those who had important positions in the new structures of power, starting with Vasile Luca and Ana Pauker to Teohari Georgescu, they all wanted to destroy everything they considered to be reactionary nests, especially in Ardeal. The regional communist representatives met with a completely stunning resistance especially in to urban centres in the south

of Transylvania: Braşov and Sibiu (here was the residency of the Orthodox Mitropoly of Ardeal with its famous Andreiana Theological Academy, a real symbol of the Romanian nation, as well as the Roman Mitropoly United with Rome, Greek-Catholic from Blaj) (*cf.* Vasile 2005, 57).

In the summer of 1945, in the religious circles there was a rumor regarding the purification of certain hierarchs and priests from Ardeal. In the context of a wish for political cleaning, it has come to adopt several laws of purification that wanted to verify all the institutions, including the religious ones. Vasile Luca considered that the fascist remains “penetrated into our public life, starting with the administration, state apparatus, Church, school and finishing with the poisoned mentality of the people” (Vasile 2005, 43).

The clergy who criticized the political regime had nothing to wait for but verifications, arrests and detentions over longer or shorter periods of time. Massive arrests took place even from 1945 in all the regions of the country. Recent studies and researches have shown that thousands of Orthodox priests, as well as Greek-Catholic and Roman-Catholic or pastors of various protestant churches have gone through detention (*cf.* Drăgulin 1991, 91-98).

The number of the arrests grew considerably in 1948. The members of the security were more and more irritated when the Patriarch Justinian Marina intervened to free the clergy arrested. On the 12<sup>th</sup> of December 1948, Patriarch Justinian requested from all the eparchies tables with all the priests arrested, which led to a clear situation presented by the patriarchate to the Ministry of Cults. When all this data reached the General Direction of Security, it launched investigations all over the country, which ended with the following conclusions: the intervention of patriarch Justinian “was interpreted as a political victory of the Orthodox Church, which thus received the right to involve and throw out of gear the state affairs” (*cf.* Drăgulin 1991, 236).

It is in 1963 and 1964 that the Communist regime in the context of the internal changes, an especially because of international pressures, moved to freeing political prisoners, including priests. The liberation of the political prisoners was established through the decrees no. 767/1963 and

no. 176/1964, decrees that have never been published in the *Monitorul Oficial*, and not much is known regarding their content (*cf.* Bălan 2000, 250).

The life of a man slips through the fingers simple moments given by the spring smell of the moist ground, by the calming of the summer heat into the water of a river, by the tasting of the fruits taken straight from a tree, by the sound of the steps through the carpet of leaves in autumn, by the joy of the playful snowflakes in winter and by so many other moments that are in a continuous remodeling every single day and across the centuries. The fact that we will present here names of people and places, years, studies, papers, occupations, functions, works, missions, all these just help identify the person we will refer to in the following pages.

Antonie Plămădeală was born on the 17<sup>th</sup> of November 1926 in Bessarabia, in a village called Stolnicești – county Lăpușna and he was baptized Leonida. He studied at the Theological Seminaries from Chișinău (1937-1944) and “Nifon” from Bucharest (1944-1945), at the Faculty of Theology from Bucharest (1945-1948) and at the Theological University Institute from Cluj (1948-1949). He attended doctoral studies at the Theological University Institute from Bucharest (1956-1959). We must underline the fact that in these institutions, while Antonie Plămădeală was studying, important representatives of theology activated. There was gala galaction, Nichifor Crainic, the philosopher Savin and the professors of the old school who had the experience of the Russian Orthodoxy, such as Constantin Popovici, father Luca and many others – the elitist spirit of faith was educated in this combination. The respect for the human being, the respect for his spirit and faith was one of the most powerful principles taught in these schools (*cf.* Buda and Maica Anastasia 2012, 235).

In 1944 he found refuge in Romania. After 5 years he became a monk at Prislop Monastery, and changed his name to Antonie, then he was consecrated as a deacon and he was transferred to Slatina Monastery, where he activated as a teacher at the monastic school, and eventually he became a hieromonk:

Initiate into the monastic life by the advice of his spiritual father, Arsenie Boca from Prislop, who validated his monastic calling and made him a monk, brother

Leonida was taken under the robe of the spiritual overflow in the moment when he became a monk, consecrated by father Daniil himself, as a burgeon detached from the burning bush of faith that irradiated incandescently at Antim Monasatery (Buda and Maica Anastasia 2012, 236).

In the same year he was convicted in absence to seven years of prison for his activity against Communism and he was arrested only in 1954, imprisoned in Jilava jail, judged again and sentenced to four years of prison, then acquitted in 1956. In 1959 he was excluded from the monastery and clergy by the communist authorities and he was forced to find a job as a simple worker in various factories. It is in this period of time that he participated to the hesychast movement "The Burning Bush". Only in 1968 he was able to return to his activity as a priest, and he was appointed secretary in chief at the Theological institute from Bucharest. He attended studies in Theology and Philosophy at the "Heythrop College" close to oxford.

On the 15<sup>th</sup> of December 1970, the Holy Synod chose him to be a patriarchal vicar with the title "Ploieșteanul" (he was consecrated on the 27<sup>th</sup> of December), and he was entrusted with the department of "External Affairs", as well as with the economic department and with the Commission of church painting. He was also the rector of the Theological Institute from Bucharest. He defended his PhD theses in Theology at the College mentioned before (1971), and then at the Theological Institute from Bucharest (1972). On the 9<sup>th</sup> of December 1979 he was chosen to be bishop of Buzău, and on the 10<sup>th</sup> of January 1982 he was chosen to be the archbishops of Sibiu and metropolitan of Ardeal. Metropolitan Antonie Plămădeală became known as one of the great contemporary ecumenists. He was a member in the Romanian synodal delegations that visited other Christian Churches (Orthodox, Catholic, Protestant etc.). He was a delegate of the Holy Synod to the Fifth General Assembly of the Ecumenical Council of the Churches (Nairobi, 1975), when he was chosen as a member in the Executive Committee and in the financial one; he was the head of the Romanian delegation to the Sixth General Assembly of the same Council (Vacouver, 1983); he was a delegate to various meetings of several committees of the Ecumenical Council. He was a delegate at the General Assemblies of the Conference of the European Churches

(Engelberg 1974, Chania – Crete 1979), at various work sessions of the Consultative and Financial Committee. He participated to several sessions of the mixed international Commission for dialogue between the Orthodox Church and the Roman-Catholic Church. He was delegated by the Holy Synod to assist the Romanian parishes from “diaspora” (U.S.A., Canada, Australia, Western Europe). Conferences, courses and communications in Spain, England, France, Belgium, Germany, Sweden, Finland, Italy, Switzerland, U.S.A., Australia and so on; he gave interviews to the press, he spoke on the radio and on TV in the countries mentioned. He was a Honorary Member of the Romanian Academy and of the Academy of Sciences from Chişinău (1992) and of several cultural associations abroad. He passed away on August, 29<sup>th</sup> 2005 (*cf.* Plămădeală 2021).

A worthy successor of Andrei Şaguna, Metropolitan Antonie Plămădeală was an international personality, a hierarch with authentic ecumenical views, lacking hypocrisy, he was a vocation scholar, a magician of the word and last but not least, he was a therapist of the soul:

After I learned how to read, I discovered in the belfry of the church a library with about five shelves of books. It was folklore, small books that I considered extraordinary treasures. My father, a church singer, was also librarian. From there I read in tears the stories of Ion Creangă and Petre Ispirescu as well as many others. For days I'd be sitting happy in the belfry cell. My father left me there alone when he couldn't find anything for me to do around the household and my biggest pleasure was to look into as many books as possible and choose for myself the ones to read at home, although I didn't have much time at home. There was always something to do. I was the babysitter for all my younger brothers whom I had to clean, to cradle – only I know how many times I turned them over and then cradled them to stop crying. The harder I cradled them, the louder they cried. Then I would pick them up from the floor. And it was hard for I myself was just a little boy. The books I would read, I would discuss later on with boys my age. I was living in two worlds: in the one of the village and in that of the books, one more beautiful than the other (*cf.* Buda and Maica Anastasia 2012, 15).

The young Leonida, coming from the countryside, was deeply marked by the valences of the universe of his childhood, oriented towards everything that is Christian tradition and knowledge gathered from the pages of the books in the dusty belfry. All this knowledge of things brought

the young Leonida on the benches of the theological seminary “Gavriil Bănulescu Bodoni” from Chişinău, dreaming to become a priest, but when his family had to flee from the army of the Russian invaders, his parents transferred him to the seminary “Metropolitan Nifon” from Bucharest. He embraced monasticism in a very natural manner, together with father Arsenie Boca, in Prislop Monastery. And since nothing is coincidental in life, a thing demonstrated by the events in the life of the young theologian Leonida, later on monk Antonie, from a students’ trip in the Făgăraş Mountains, in search for a praying oasis, intellectual recuperation and meditation, a destiny will be born: “my love for Sâmbăta remained as a vibration to the ineffable, as a meeting with the ineffable. That was in fact my meeting with God” (Aioanei 2013, 362-363).

The relationship with Sâmbăta Monastery becomes a vivid one, with an atmosphere of early Christianity:

My relations with Sâmbăta, a monastery built by Brncoveanu in 1699, are spiritual and providential relations. There I discovered my monastic life. It was an atmosphere of early Christianity. The faith was alive... (Plămădeală 1999, 178).

As a student he spent almost all his vacations at Sâmbăta Monastery. In 1946 he discovered a quality religious movement, initiated by father Arsenie Boca, a student of father Dumitru Stăniloae, a student at the anatomy classes of professor Reiner, a pilgrim in the Holy Mountain Athos and besides all these, a very good psychologist, an open and clear mind, a spiritual father both for farmers and refined intellectuals (cf. Plămădeală 2000, 273).

Metropolitan Antonie said that at one time there was a group of 12 students from various faculties, whom father Daniil had taken with him to spend a time of formation, so they could join the group from Antim:

one day he took me as well in the belfry from Antim, where he lived, he read some prayers and then he considered me as one of the members of his household (*Şcoala Rugului Aprins mi-a fost suportul de cea mai eficientă rezistenţă şi speranţă*, interview with Metropolitan Antonie Plămădeală, published in the journal *Tribuna*, 2001, 7-8).

Influenced by this quality religious movement named The Burning Bush, in 1946 they went to visit and listen to father Arsenie Boca. Until

1948 they spent every vacation at Sâmbăta, enough for the desire to start growing in young Leonida to become a monk. In 1948 he flew in Transylvania, in Braşov, on a project site, then he went to Baia Mare and in spring he arrived in Cluj. In a single month he passed the exams for the 4<sup>th</sup> year and took his bachelor's degree, then he left from Cluj with an unknown destination. He arrived at father Arsenie who had been forced by the authorities to leave from Sâmbăta and now he was at Prislop, an empty skete in Haţeg. When he was asked if he still had courage to become a monk, father Arsenie Boca told him: "Stay. We will both take responsibility! From now on you are brother Leonida. I will talk to hierarch Mager to make you a deacon. Then we will make you a monk" (Plămădeală 2000, 275).

### **III. Following the Way, dressing with the Truth and living the Life**

An old royal edifice and a royal necropolis, Slatina Monastery close to Fălticeni is one of the rare pearls of Bukovina. Many worthy sons of the Romanian nations have connected their names with this monastery. Here are some of the representatives: Metropolitan of Moldavia Veniamin Costachi, hierarchs Sofronie Miclescu, Calinic Miclescu, Partenie Ciopron, Adrian Hriţcu, the very well-known spiritual father Cleopa Ilie, archimandrite Dionisie Udişteanu, protosyncellus Petroniu Tănase, a former abbot of the Romanian Skete Prodromos from the Athos Mountain, archimandrite Arsenie Papacioc, eremite Paisie Olaru, eremite Daniil Sandu Tudor, as well as many other men of culture, writers, politicians, one of the most important personalities that connected most intensely with Slatina Monastery was the hierodeacon and future hieromonk Antonie Plămădeală. He was very attached to several monasteries, such as Cernica, Antim, Râşca, Prislop and Crasna Skete, but he was also very attached to Slatina Monastery from Moldavia:

I came to Slatina with the recommendation of father Arsenie Papacioc, in 1950, where father Ilie Cleopa was abbot at that time. When I arrived he was not home. I waited until he came. When he arrived – I think he had spoken to father Arsenie Papacioc about my situation – father Cleopa took me to a discussion in a glade behind the monastery. I had nothing to hide. I told the truth, that I was convicted, that I was followed, but that I hoped times will change, that they will improve. So

I stayed at Slatina and I became one of the brothers. While father Cleopa made the community to grow, so it had come to 100 brothers. The community was formed mostly of young monks because everything was very well organized, but not all of them could resist and observe the monastic rules and so some left and were replaced by new-comers. In the end there were 100 monks, those who had found their vocation. He accepted me, I told him I was convicted in absence. Father Cleopa told me he accepted me and no one else has to know anything... My abbot from Slatina, Cleopa, often told us, when we climbed the mountain, how he was accepted in the monastery by abbot Ioanichie from Sihăstria Monastery. Of course, he had also other subjects he wanted to talk about. After father Cleopa, father Emilian Olaru became the abbot (Șeuleau and Dumitriu 1999, 93).

We were almost 100 then, hieromonks and brothers, it was a beautiful community life and the spiritual living was special. We officiated daily the Holy Liturgy, the daily cycle of services, and then we all had our duties given by the abbot. The services of the Church are especially considered to be a living tradition in Orthodoxy. In the monastic life they are even more. I remember now the names of several fathers who were at the monastery at that time, such as father Petroniu, who is the abbot of Prodromos Monastery from the Holy Mountain Athos, father Iuvenalie, father Olarau, father Arsenie, father Chiril, father Paisie, who is now the spiritual father from Slatina Monastery, brother Nicolae, now protosyncellus Nichifor from Neamț Monastery and many others. I remember there was a monk there who for three years did not have a bed in his cell and he slept on a chair. It is here, at Slatina Monastery that I had the chance to speak with Călinescu, who came with many writers among whom Dinu Pillat, Teodor Vârgolici and many others. Eventually I had a longer meeting with George Călinescu, a longer leisurely one so to say.

One day I was sent to Iași, to the Mitropoly, with a report through which father Cleopa asked for monk Daniil (Sandu Tudor) to be accepted into the community from Slatina Monastery and to assign him to Rarău Skete. It was a long story but eventually we succeeded. We, the ones from Slatina, knew him better. While I was at Slatina I had the duty in the chancellery, I dealt with all the documents of the monastery and I also helped in the church and wherever I was needed. I organized the library and the archives of the monastery, the lists of inventory and I also put together a sort of museum. When I thought I was no longer followed, I was caught, trialed and then convicted. After I served my time I returned to Slatina Monastery again, but there I was kicked out when I was in my third year of doctoral studies and I worked for ten years in a Factory of Plastics until I was recovered for the Church by Patriarch Justinian Marina and appointed secretary in chief at the Theological Institute from Bucharest (Fragments from a letter



addressed by Metropolitan Antonie Plămădeală to archimandrite Timotei Aioanei. The letter was subsequently published in the volume *Portrete în cuvinte* 2007, 44. The letter dates from a period of great sufferance of the Metropolitan and it was dictated to nun Anastasia Buda).

Slatina Monastery did not have members from Bukovina or Bessarabia.

But it had started to become interesting for it had a wonderful abbot, the one who has lived until recently at Sihăstria Monastery, Father Archimandrite Ilie Cleopa. This was, of course, before I became a bishop. So, after passing through many troubles, some of which I hadn't solved – because I was already sentenced to 7 years of prison – someone told me about Slatina Monastery, which was far in Moldavia and where a spiritual breeze was starting to feel. With the help of father Arsenie Papacioc, I arrived to this monastery. It was not a sentence monastery. It wasn't a monastery taken into account by the hierarch. It was a simple monastery at the time, and it developed only later on. I went there in 1950, in May. When I saw everything was going well and the Security had not found me, I thought to myself this could go on forever. However, in 1953, of the presence of Bishop Partenie Ciopron who had come for the festivities of the Monastery, who didn't have a bishopric and he too was living in a monastery from Suceava county. Later on he became bishop of Roman. He consecrated me as priest in Slatina Monastery. I was only a deacon then. I had stated to move rather easily thinking that those who were looking for me had forgotten about me in a file. But they discovered me in Iași and arrested me. Meanwhile, Slatina had become a unique intellectual centre, preferred by the intellectuals of the country. Also, father Daniil Tudor had come there and he lived at Rarău. Since Slatina was very famous it was almost inevitable that I was discovered. Nevertheless, the Security had also organized better. I went to Iași because the Patriarch of Bulgaria was there, they caught me and then followed two years of investigation and trial. Although I had already been sentenced in absence to seven years of hard prison. I must remark upon the fact that at Slatina the monks have gotten used to our presence, with the theologians, and respected us accordingly. All those judged in my group had already been trialed and they were serving time. I managed to fool them for six years, but they still got me eventually. I was sure of it. At that time they started the searches for Sandu Tudor. I remember a man came to me, and asked me in great secret of him.... I told him he was at Voroneț in the big church for he had asked me about Daniile the Eremite. And that man left for Voroneț and he was told that Daniil the Eremite was buried in the church. Then he came to Slatina and told me I fooled him. After that he tried to find out from other where father Daniil might hide, but he did not arrest him, he only wanted to find out some things, for he had no reason to arrest the father. It was only later that I found out they were

buying time for later when they would arrest almost everyone. While I was at Slatina Monastery I was alone. There was no one there with mine of all they had arrested before. So I could never engage someone with me. The only one that could get arrested was Father Cleopa, but I defended him fiercely so they could not arrest him (Plămădeală 2002, 67-69).

Years passed by, writing letters to one or the other, but especially writing to the faithful people. Patriarchal vicar at Bucharest, right after he returned from England, bishop at Buzău in 1979, metropolitan of Ardeal, Crișana and Maramureș, in 1982, Metropolitan Antonie Plămădeală took over the vocation of writing that he defined as a “reestablishment of the truth” (cf. Plămădeală 1999, 63).

In the writings of Metropolitan Antonie we find, maybe best put into words, the urgent necessity to write. At a closer analysis of his works we can find, applied with a certain mastership of the word, the Kalokagathia principle, which directs us to the thinking of the great classics, such as Plato in “Republic” or Socrates in his dialogues:

I live every day under the terror of the duty of writing. I cannot afford to stop. No, I don't write only at home. Sometimes I find refuge at Păltiniș, but I also write on the plane and in any free time I have, between the international conferences, and at Bucharest. Everybody knows I carry my materials and writing instruments with me. I've written many chapters of my books in Jamaica, Tokyo, Leningrad, Geneva, Buenos Aires, Melbourne... I don't write only in cultural breaks. I am always in a cultural activity. Borrow me some time. I don't do much. But I think I'm on the path of my vocation. I want to use it all up. I don't know how much this will count, the future will tell (Aioanei 2013, 21, 47, 51, 78, 86, 97, 106, 110, 179 (see the Appendix of Chapter two)).

Mircea Eliade said once that “my vocation was culture not holiness”. Metropolitan Antonie Plămădeală would have said for sure that his vocation was the holiness of culture. Meaning, as Metropolitan Antonie himself said that “real culture is made with the eyes looking to heaven”. They were both right. But the first was tempted by the meshes of the Oriental philosophy and the mystery of the history of religions and the latter was taken by monasticism – not before it sealed him for life with the name of “the father of monks”, Anthony the Great: “He is the saint that gave me strength, confidence and word when I had to do my duty as bishop” (Nemeș 2003, 98).

But why did Slatina remain so deeply carved into the heart of hierarch Antonie? The emotional confessions presented before represent the answer to this question. In Slatina the future successor on the throne of Șaguna experimented the living of the monastic life from the pages of the Paterikon. Slatina, led by its experimented abbot and spiritual father at that time, abba Cleopa, represented for Antonie Plămădeală a spiritual hive, where the prayer and the efforts of the brothers made the honey of the divine grace sweeten the calm moments of prayer and obedience. In the community from Slatina, hierodeacon Antonie received consecration to hieromonk through the hands of bishop Partenie Ciopron, thus experimenting the beauty of officiating the Divine Liturgy, surrounded by the fathers, brothers and many pilgrims who came to confess and receive forgiveness and teachings from the great spiritual fathers from Slatina.

What did hierarch Antonie learn at Slatina? Many saving teachings. To convince ourselves that Slatina was indeed a lavra such as the ones in Paterikon, we let the memories of the one who lived those moments speak. One of the virtues of the monk is poverty which disciplines, but in the same time it makes you free. This virtue he learned from an episode that happened at Slatina with a brother who had come to join the community in his old years, after he had worked for a bank almost his entire life. He had brought with him several pieces of good quality clothing that the abbot and the spiritual father did not accept to be given to the brothers. Later on, abba Cleopa gave it to the charity, to some beggars and thus taught a lesson to father Serapion who attached his soul to some luxurious pieces of clothing. The abbot Cleopa calms down his torment by reminding him: “you lost what you never had, for you are poor of your own free will, as a monk should be” (Plămădeală 2010, 142).

The spiritual life in Slatina Monastery was so advanced at that time that the Patriarch grants it jurisdiction over several other monasteries, trying to resemble the monastic organization in the time of Theodore the Studite. But despite of the efforts, that manner of organization could only partially be replicated, because the times were troubling and adversary to monasticism. The great joy was that at Slatina as in the large Eastern monasteries in the times before prayer never ceased. Each member of the

community read two hours from the Psalm Book, so that the church was never closed, and the Psalms were read permanently. Aside from the duties they all had in the monastery, the abbot took care of the education of the members. In the 50s there was a school here with two cycles frequented by 25 brothers who were about to take exams at the Elementary School from Găinești. The teacher of these novices was hieromonk Antonie himself, freshly received in the community from Slatina Monastery. After two years, abba Cleopa, with the approval of the Mitropoli of Moldavia, opened a real monastic school, a monastic seminary of three years, where there were approximately 40 monk students. The teachers of the theological school were members of the community as well: protosyncell Petroniu Tănase taught Typikon and Church Music; hieromonk Antonie Plămădeală taught Catechism, History of monasticism and Biblical Studies; hieromonk Valerian Pârvulescu taught History of the Romanian Orthodox Church.

To return to that living worthy of the pages of the Paterikon from Slatina, let us add another special lesson on humbleness and pride experienced there by hierarch Antonie. A monk of the community, Ioil, proved himself very painstaking so the Spiritual Council insisted that abba Cleopa consecrated him as a priest, although he had many doubts regarding the real humbleness and ardour of the young monk. Father Cleopa gave in to the decision of the Spiritual Council and consecrated him as priest. In the first forty days he was sent to Rarău Skete to officiate the Holy Liturgy daily, and after a few days father Cleopa receives the news that the angels light up the candles for him in the altar. He recognizes it is a demonic vision and calls hieromonk Ioil to Slatina Monastery and then, without giving any explanations, he sends him to the vineyard from Cotnari. The young hieromonk disobeys saying that he cannot work with mortals since “the angels light up the candles for him in the altar” and leaves the monastery. To this episode, abba Cleopa concludes that a humble John is better than a proud Ioil (*cf.* Plămădeală 2010, 182).

Now we understand why Slatina remained the cradle of the spiritual formation, the school of humbleness, of prayer and of service, of self-sacrifice for the future metropolitan of Ardeal. That is why, in his

memories, Slatina Monastery is that spiritual oasis to which he returned spiritually many times along his tormented life.

### **Instead of conclusions**

The life in the communist prisons of the Romanian gulag was one of physical, psychological, moral and intellectual torture. The Church did not escape. The communists were determined to exterminate all the religions. Ideologically, the faith in God was defined as “opium for the masses”, incompatible with the achievements of the phantasm of social egalitarianism. With Christ’s law of love and with the tolerant spirit planted by the Church in our Orthodox nation, the extermination of the class enemy could not be started. That is why the old Church had to be replaced with the “church” of the scientific and dialectic materialism which had its own feasts, its own illegal “saints”, its own preachers of the dogma of the scientific materialism, capable to form the new man. Death was not death for them, but a passing through to a life infinitely superior. For those who believe in God, death is not a failure, it does not represent an ending point. It is the crossing that surpasses the two environments, a gate to Heaven. To die for Christ is a great happiness for a Christian. The one who really wishes to die for Christ, has to do so firstly for his passions.

Antonie Plămădeală was the most “ecclesiastic” of the Romanian writers and the most talented writer of the clergy. With him, the two literatures that lived in two parallel worlds, detaching the secular heterodoxy of the religious mystery, finally reunite in a bright synthesis from where tomorrow no doubt will come our prophetic and universal solution. For, equally with its Model, the Memory remains essential in the work of Antonie Plămădeală.

The reference to the martyr heroes, whose hearts are alive and work for the justice of God is a work for the earth we live on. Then the living hearts of the martyr heroes will be able to rest in peace for their sacrifice, brighter than our liberty (*cf.* Caraza 1991, 61).

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## Aspects of the russification process in the Bessarabia Orthodox Church during the Tsarist Period (1812-1917)\*

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### Abstract:

*This study covers the way that the russification process appeared in Bessarabia, after this region was annexed in the year 1812 and until the Union with Romania from 27<sup>th</sup> of March 1918. During the 106 years of tsarist occupation, in Bessarabia there was an attempt to impose the Russian model in the civil and church administration structures. The Orthodox Church from Bessarabia, during the period 1812-1918, was a component part of the Russian Orthodox Church. The hierarchical leadership faithfully followed the political direction and those decided by the Synod of St. Petersburg. Of the thirteen hierarchs who served in Bessarabia during the tsarist period, only the first hierarch, Gavriil Bănulescu-Bodoni, was Romanian. All the hierarchs that served after him were Russians. They reported differently to the problems and needs of Romanian believers from Bessarabia, and the Russian hierarchs activity could not be brought to the same denominator. In order to russify the Bessarabia region, the Russian hierarchs gradually imposed in churches and churches schools from Bessarabia the Russian language, excluded the Romanian language*

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*from Theological Seminary in Chisinau in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Furthermore, in all the other schools, was imposed education in Russian language, the Romanian language being totally excluded. In these conditions, the whole education system became a powerful tool for russification, their consequences being disastrous. Towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, in order to make the pastoral mission more efficient among the faithful, the need to print brochures and books in the mother tongue was increasingly felt. The founding of „The Brotherhood of the Nativity of Christ” hastened the opening of the diocesan typography and printing of books and publications in the mother tongue. During the Bishop Vadimir (1904-1908) and in the following period, Romanian books were printed. Through the work and involvement of secular and ecclesiastical personalities who played important roles in the national movement in Bessarabia in 1917-1918, it was possible to obtain the autonomy of the Church, as well as the Union with Romania.*

**Keywords:**

*Bessarabian Orthodox Church; Russian hierarchs; clergy; Russification; Bishop Jacob; Theological Seminary of Chisinau; “The Brotherhood of the Nativity of Christ”*

**I. Situation of the Bessarabia Orthodox Church after the annexation of 1812. The Metropolitan Gavriil Bănulescu-Bodoni**

After the Russian – Turkish war from 1806-1812, the Tsarist Empire annexed Bessarabia. After signing the Treaty dated 16/28<sup>th</sup> of May 1812 at Bucharest, the Russian authorities applied the tsarist model of administration forms of the new annexed territory. The reactions to the annexation of May 1812 were very strong and energetic, both on the part of the great boyars and of the clergy, presenting the immense losses following the annexation (Cernovodeanu 1993, 50). Even the Metropolitan Veniamin Costachi of Moldavia (1803-1842) vehemently protested against the annexation of the territory between the Prut and the Dniester.

Seeing the “fear” of the boyars who did not make diplomatic efforts on the annexed territory issue, Metropolitan Veniamin said: “For Bucovina, Ghica Vodă lost his life, and we for Bessarabia do not even make a protest” (Nistor 2017, 191-192).

An immediate consequence after the annexation was immigration of many population “over Prut”. The desire to settle in Moldova was also expressed by certain clerics who asked for permission of Metropolitan Gavriil Bănulescu-Bodoni (as was the case with Archpriest Dimitrie from Hotin, or priest Vasile Anastasiu and other clerics) (I. Varta and T. Varta 2005, 30). In order to stop the population departure, Tsar Alexander I (1801-1825) offered certain facilities to the inhabitants and in 1818, granted local autonomy (Halipa and Morariu 1991, 14).

At the Bessarabia annexation in 1812, according to the data registered by Metropolitan Gavriil-Bănulescu Bodoni, there were functioning 749 churches for 755 villages and cities, 12 monasteries and 13 hermitages, being at the same time “centers of Romanian culture” (Moraru 1995, 29-30) [The “exact” number of Romanian Orthodox holy places differs in the presentation of some authors. Father Professor Mircea Păcurariu lists 775 parish churches, to which are added several other important monasteries]. In the period 1813 until 1918, în perioada 1813 până în 1918, in the diocesan seat of Chisinau they pastored 13 archiereus. Except for Gavriil Bănulescu-Bodoni, all were Russians, all hierarchs being true servants of the Russian state (Buzilă 1996, 46).

After the annexation, the leadership of the region was entrusted to a “provisional government”. Tsar Alexander I placed Scarlat Sturza at the leadership of the new province. But Scarlat Sturza's “earthly rule” lasted a year, after that being entrusted to I.M. Harting. Against the tendencies of Russification, the Bessarabian nobility and the clergy immediately pronounced themselves, the Moldavian boyars complaining to Metropolitan Gavriil Bănulescu Bodoni that their habits were being violated (Varta 1998, 27).

In April 1818, Tsar Alexander I promulgated the so-called “*Settlement or Regulation of the Bessarabian Oblast*” (Păcurariu 2012, 83). This settlement lasted until 1828, when it was repealed, and at the

suggestion of Prince Vorontsov on 29<sup>th</sup> of January 1929 (governor of Bessarabia in 1823), a new Regulation was promulgated (Păcurariu 2012, 84).

Within the period 1812-1821, the diocese of Chisinau was led by Metropolitan Gavriil Bănulescu-Bodoni. On 4<sup>th</sup> of November 1812, Metropolitan Gabriel asked the Russian Synod to establish a new diocese, mentioning in his project that local traditions should be taken into account, that priests should be exempt from donations to the land, to enjoy the rights as the Russian priests, and the secular domination to not be involved in the Church's affairs. The project was approved by Tsar Alexander I, and in 1813 the Archdiocese of Chisinau and Hotin was established, led by Metropolitan Gavriil himself (Bălan 2010, 26). The establishment of this diocese was contrary to the 34<sup>th</sup> Apostolic canon and the 8<sup>th</sup> canon of the Third Ecumenical Council of Ephesus (431), which provided that the Church of one nation has the possibility of organizing itself ethnically and to lead itself independently of the Church of another nation, and the appointment of a new hierarch also violated canon 16 of Constantinople (Floca 2005, 81-82).

On 31<sup>st</sup> of January 1813, the Theological Seminary was opened in Chisinau - the first school opened after annexation. The studies at this Seminar were in Russian language, and the Romanian language was a compulsory subject. The first rector of the Seminar was Petre Cunițchi (Ețco 2002, 70). After the Theological Seminary opening, other parish schools were established in some localities (Chisinau, Dubasari, Tiraspol, Grigoriopol, Cetatea Albă, Orhei, Dobrușa), in 1838 primary church schools were opened, reaching between 1844-1850 at a number of 326, where 5177 students were studying (Moraru 1995, 33).

In the administrative organization of the Bessarabian Orthodox Church, Metropolitan Gavriil introduced some characteristic measures of the Russian Church. He elected as his vicar Dimitrie Sulima (of Ukrainian descent), "Bishop of Bender and Akerman" (Tighina and Cetatea Alba) even since 1811. In 1813, the "Exarchic Department of Chisinau" (Păcurariu 2012, 95-96) was established, and the following year, following requests from Metropolitan Gavriil (Păcurariu 2012, 95-96), on 4<sup>th</sup> of May

1814, the Russian Synod accepted the request for the establishment of the diocesan printing house. The first book printed in this printing house was the *Liturgy* or the *Servant* (in 1815). During the diocesan printing house, during the pastorate of Metropolitan Gavriil, several church books were printed, as well as grammar books - "*Bucoavna ruso-română*" (1814), "*Short Russian grammar, with interpretation in Moldovan, for the disciples of the seminary from Chisinau*". The diocesan printing house operated with small interruptions until 1883, when it was closed by Archbishop Sergei Leapidevsky. Other Romanian books were printed in Petersburg.

In 1814, a library was opened, and the Seminary established in 1813 remained subordinate to the hierarch until 1823, when its reorganization took place. During all this period, 25 teachers were active in the Seminar (17 Ukrainians, the rest of other nationalities, only one Romanian, the Transylvanian Ioan Buta, son of a priest), so that, according to Father Mircea Păcurariu, "Russification began and through these teachers" (Păcurariu 2012, 97).

Metropolitan Gavriil was also concerned with the edification of an archbishop's cathedral in Chisinau, but the cornerstone was laid by his successor Dimitrie Sulima in 1830. Instead, during his archpastorate, the "Adormirea Maicii Domnului" church from the Capriana monastery was restored and several churches were built in Chisinau ("Holy Trinity", "Saint George"), in other villages or in rural areas. Metropolitan Gavriil died on 30<sup>th</sup> of March 1821, and was buried at the Capriana Monastery.

## **II. The situation of the Bessarabian Orthodox Church under the successors of Metropolitan Gavriil**

The next to lead the diocese of Chisinau after Gavriil Bănulescu was Archbishop Dimitrie Sulima (1821-1844). Although he was of Ukrainian origin, he did not forbid Romanian culture, he was forced to do so due to the resistance of the Romanian boyars who opposed Russification. During the reign of Archbishop Dimitrie, the "unnatural phenomenon" of bilingualism in books published by the Diocesan Printing House appeared in Chisinau, the Slavonic influence being extended more and more on the

printing presses in Chisinau. In the immediate aftermath of the death of Metropolitan Gavriil, in Bessarabia were opened Russian primary schools, in Chisinau (1822), Balti (1824), Hotin and Tighina (1827), and in 1833 - a seven-grade high school was founded in Chisinau (Drăghicescu 2002, 3).

In 1825, Tsar Nicholas I (1825-1855), a great autocrat, ascended the imperial throne of Russia; In 1828 the limited autonomy of Bessarabia was liquidated, and on 29<sup>th</sup> of January 1929, the "Regulation" of Prince Vorontsov was approved, by whose provisions the leadership of the province was handed over to the governor; the Romanian language was expelled from the administration of the region, being established the absolute monopoly of using the Russian language within the state institutions and "a policy of Russification was started against the school, the church and all the Moldovan settlements" (Popa-Lisseanu 1924, 17).

The policy of Russification was also reflected in the church sphere from Bessarabia. During the divine service it was preached in both languages (Russian and Romanian). In a report towards the Diocesan Consistory, it was proposed that the "Moldovan priesthood" could continue to teach children their mother tongue (Ețco 2014, 677). Although he lived among Romanians and knew the problems in the administration and the church (given the dissatisfaction of the local population), the process of Russification begins to intensify during the pastorate of this hierarch. In 1823, the reorganization of the Theological Seminary in Chisinau took place, following the model of those in Russia (in three sections: rhetoric, philosophy and theology). Teachers were required to know the Romanian language, and "Moldovan" students were required to speak only Russian during classes and outside of them - Theological Seminary becoming in time the "main institution for the Russification of the Romanian clergy from Bessarabia" (Niță-Danielescu 2002, 116). It should be noted that some of the students of the Seminary came from certain regions of Russia (in 1828 from 54 de students, 45 were from Cherson, especially from Tiraspol county) (*cf.* Păcurariu 2012, 109).

In order for the Russian language teaching process to be effective, Archbishop Dimitrie proposed that teachers in parish and county schools know their mother tongue and explain to students all the lessons in both

languages at the same time and to be able to answer in Russian and Moldavian (Ețco 2014, 678).

In order to unify the administrative organization of the Church from Bessarabia according to the Russian model, the measure of abolishing the vicariate was taken and the “regional archpriests” were called “superior blagocini”, the Russian Synod asking Archbishop Dimitrie for a “detailed” instruction for them (Popovschi 1931, 38-39). In 1840, a new regulation of the Seminars was approved, which provided 32 hours per week for each class, with all subjects to be taught only in Russian (Păcurariu 2012, 109). In 1837, church primary schools came under the leadership of the state, which had in mind the organization of a new primary theological system, characterized by creation of a network of well-endowed schools with sufficient teaching materials and special curricula (Ețco 2014, 678). We can see that during the time of Archbishop Dimitrie Sulima, through some orders and regulations imposed by the Russian state, education became the “prerogative” of the tsarist leadership and in Church the Russian model of organization and administration became more and more imposed. Also during the time of Archbishop Dimitrie, censorship became harsher, foreign books could only be brought with ministerial approval.

Archbishop Dimitrie Sulima's successor was Irinarh Popov (1844-1858), considered to be a “typical representative of Russian centralism and bureaucracy” (Bălan 2010, 30). Prior to his transfer to Chisinau, he had been a bishop in Vologda County (Buzilă 1996, 48). During his time, “the organization of the Russian-style Bessarabian church was completed” (Bălan 2010, 30). Under the pretext that they did not know the Russian language, the Romanian archpriests were fired and replaced with Russian priests from the neighboring Russian governorates. Only Russian clerics were appointed to the administrative leadership of the diocese. Priests began to wear Russian reverence, and their names have been Russified since the seminary (Danilevschi, Florov, Vlaicov, Popovschi, etc.). Like Archbishop Dimitrie Sulima, he tried to bring in Seminary graduates from Kherson, Camenita, Vladimir counties, but to no avail (I. Varta and T. Varta 2005, 32).

Towards the end of year 1840, a group of Moldovan intellectuals asked permission to publish a newspaper in Romanian, significantly titled "The Romanian", and their request was rejected. The measures taken by Russia after the events of 1848, greatly weakened the contacts between the Romanians on both sides of the Prut, measures that would further isolate Bessarabia from the realities that were happening in the Principalities and from the unionist direction, more and more accentuated.

The second half of the nineteenth century meant a period of great turmoil for Russia, as a result of which Bessarabia would also suffer. A brief characterization of this period is presented by the Bessarabian researcher, Gheorghe Negru:

Politically and culturally isolated, distressed in its natural manifestations, Bessarabia could not experience phenomena of cultural effervescence, similar to those in the rest of Moldova, which gave birth to the national press and theater, impelled the development of modern Romanian literature (Negru 2000, 11).

At the church level, many of the measures taken by Archbishop Irinarh led to fulfillment of the goals pursued by the Russian civil administration in Bessarabia. This can also be deduced from the fact that Archbishop Irinarh invited graduates of the Seminaries from the neighboring dioceses to the churches where the divine service was celebrated in the Slavonic language - being "forced" by the Synod, many young graduates not wanting to come to Bessarabia, although this measure falls within the administrative provisions of Russian rule (the ordination of graduates from other dioceses was an effective means of Russification). Regarding the printing of books in Romanian at the diocesan printing house, the number was low.

Although attempts were made to impose the Russian language in churches, Russian priests often had to preach in Romanian - few of the Romanian priests knew Russian. Another radical measure during the reign of Archbishop Irinarh was to stop the influx of religious books coming from the Romanian Principalities; by different means these books entered in Bessarabia, being of real use for the priests in officiating the divine service (I. Varta and T. Varta 2005, 32).



During the pastorate of Bishop Irinarh, the diocese of Chisinau gets a “precise” direction where the powers of the archpriests are reduced, the effective leadership of the diocese passes into the hands of the hierarch, and the faithful are removed from participating in the affairs of the diocese (Popovschi 1931, 479).

### **III. The apogee of Russification and situation of the Orthodox Church at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century**

The next hierarch to lead the Chisinau diocese was Antonie Shokotov (1858-1871). This hierarch proceeded to a new division of the diocese, abolishing the county archdioceses. During his pastorate, the administrative civil leadership took harsh measures regarding the use of the Romanian language. The union of the Principalities of 1859, which also caused the appearance of unionist tendencies among some Bessarabian boyars, led to intensification of the Russification policy in Bessarabia (Gulica 2014, 664). In these conditions, education in Bessarabia was placed within some conditions and mechanisms for which “exceptional measures” were required to be taken, the pedagogical component of education being subordinated to the political one.

From a memorandum of Governor Platon Antonovici to the Governor-General of Novorossia and Bessarabia in Odessa, Cotebu, we found out that publication of Romanian newspapers was forbidden; and those who wanted or subscribed to Romanian newspapers received them only with the approval of censorship (Negru 1994, 77). At the same time, Governor Antonovich underlined the importance of “political surveillance” of the border between “Russian Bessarabia and the United Principalities”, which was unsafe and flawed (Negru 2017, 223). During the pastorate of Archbishop Antonie in 1866, the Council of State suspended the use of the “Moldovan language” at Chisinau Gymnasium, and a year later - in 1867, it was removed from the curriculum of Chisinau Seminary, although the professors pronounced themselves in favor of teaching the Romanian language; in 1868, the Romanian language was removed in the county schools of Hotin, and in 1871 - in several regions of Bessarabia.

In 1864, Bishop Antony founded a Russian school for clerical girls, and in 1866 another spiritual school for boys. Also during the reign of Archbishop Antony, the number of Russian priests - invited to Bessarabia and coming from neighboring governorates - is increasing. In the Romanian parishes, an attempt was made to impose holding the divine service in both languages, but the ecclesiastical administration from Chisinau failed to obtain the followed "results". This is also clear from the statement made by the Minister of Public Instruction, Count D. A. Tolstoj, who visited Bessarabia in 1867 and noticed that most Bessarabians did not speak Russian, and in most churches the service was held in Romanian. Minister Tolstoy was determined to end the "separation of states", as the union of Moldova with Wallachia "produces an act of obvious attraction to the Moldovan neighbors from Bessarabia" (Boga 1993, 218-219).

The publication of the magazine "Bulletin of the Diocese of Chisinau" was the first and only church magazine published in Romanian in Bessarabia during the nineteenth century, being considered a small ephemeral "victory". Research has shown that regarding the bilingualism criteria, it was respected only in the first two years (1867-1869), and starting with numbers 3-4 from 1869, the Romanian language of some texts was gradually omitted, both from the official part, as well as the unofficial one (Danilov 2011, 48).

After Antonie Shokotov, Archbishop Pavel Lebedev came to lead the Chisinau diocese. During his time, absurd measures were taken to limit the Romanian language. In Chisinau, "already in 1873 - writes the historian Matei Cazacu - only in five boyar houses was it still possible to have a conversation in Romanian" (Bulei 2014, 585). The Chisinau Consistory, in a letter dated 8<sup>th</sup> of June 1873, demanded that the rector and leadership of the Chisinau Seminary to not admit students that did not know Russian language to classes and that the priests would teach the children Russian "before they were sent to school". The election of the Moldovan governor Galin as rector of the Seminary was not welcomed by the civil administration, as "it could develop the Moldovan element in the seminar" and "all actions taken by the leadership of the local diocese for clergy and the whole county Russification" could even be cancelled (Negru

1996, 44), as shown in a report of the head of the Bessarabian government gendarmerie, dated 27<sup>th</sup> of June 1875.

Archbishop Pavel is accused by posterity of pursuing a very harsh policy of Russification. An “unforgivable” accusation is the burning of numerous Romanian books and “he heated with them the stoves of his Metropolitan Church”; another measure was the exile of Moldovan clerics in certain Russian provinces from Pskov, Lutsk, Minsk and other remote areas for “the crime” of not “renouncing the ancestral language” (Pelivan 2012, 121).

Also, measures were taken regarding the administration and use of the diocesan printing house, being introduced a series of restrictions on liturgical books in Romanian, in order to remove them from the use of liturgical practice. During his visits to the parishes, Archbishop Pavel was interested in old books, which he noted in his travel journal. Archbishop Pavel banned the use of these books on the pretext that they were “damaged”, but the purpose was different - to replace them with new synodal editions in the Slavonic language. According to the researcher Maria Danilov, this form of censorship led to the withdrawal from the Bessarabian churches of a significant number of liturgical books from the Romanian churches (Danilov 2018, 116). By an order of the archbishop of 18<sup>th</sup> of May 1880, the Spiritual Consistory had the obligation not to print documents in Romanian, but to use only those that were printed in the diocesan printing house.

The drastic measures taken by Archbishop Pavel had a direct impact on the closure of the diocesan printing house in 1883. Pavel Lebedev showed a hostile attitude towards the Romanian cultural element in Bessarabia, in his opinion - the national school and the Romanian books were “harmful” to the spirit of the Bessarabians. As for the monasteries, most of them officiated the divine services in Romanian; The Russian hierarch ordered that in all the monasteries in Bessarabia to be established - in addition to the Moldavian pew, another Russian one. Between 1872 and 1878, 330 Moldavian churches were closed in Bessarabia; in many cases, Romanian priests were replaced by Russian or Ukrainian clerics, starting the disapproval of believers who began to stop

attending church services. The measures taken by Archbishop Pavel in order to suppress the national element in churches and monasteries, displeased the Bessarabian believers.

Archbishop Paul's successor was Sergei Leapidevsky (1882-1891), who had to work hard to calm the spirits. Although he allowed the people to pray in their mother tongue, in 1883 he asked the Synod for permission to close the diocesan printing house, arguing that the Russian language had been introduced in the churches and that Romanian books were no longer useful. This decision was a serious blow to Romanian culture. In 1884, "Rules for Church-Parish Schools" were published in Russia, and church education was directly subordinated under the strict guidance of the Synod's Procurator. Despite the restrictions, due to the commendable work of some personalities, in 1884 the first Romanian newspaper entitled "Messenger of Bessarabia" appeared in Chisinau, published by Riabcic and Drumaşcu, and in several churches the holy services were performed in Romanian, fact that emerges from notes in the diary of Archbishop Serghie, which mentioned that in some churches the registers of civil status were kept in the Moldavian language (although since 1872 the record in Russian was mandatory) (Ciachir 1992, 57).

During his pastorate, certain attempts were made to confer certain rights on the Romanian language, but they failed (Eţco 2014, 681). In 1884, all the schools near the monasteries were transformed into parish schools, being subordinated to the Diocesan School Council. In January 1891, Archbishop Serghie was transferred to the Odessa Metropolitanate, and after a brief archpastorate of Isachie Polozensky (21<sup>st</sup> of January 1891-21<sup>st</sup> of November 1892), for approximately six years will pastor Neofit Nevodcikov (1892-1898). At the 1894 Diocesan Congress, the idea was proposed that Moldovan students should be able to study in their mother tongue and that books should be bilingual (this measure was also in favor of the Russian language).

The next to succeed Bishop Neofit in the hierarch's seat in Chisinau was Iacov Peatnitsky (1898-1904). In 1898, the Society for the Orthodox Missionary Brotherhood of the Nativity of the Lord was established, which aimed to promote Christian morality and education among the clergy and

parishioners. Realizing the ineffectiveness of imposing the Russian language in churches, Archbishop Iacov sought permission from the Holy Synod to publish literature in Romanian as well, with or without the Russian text (I. Varta and T. Varta 2005, 36). On 5<sup>th</sup> of April 1900, the Russian Synod allowed the activity of the Brotherhood of the Nativity of Christ for the purpose of publishing spiritual reading books in the Moldavian language; the first text printed in Romanian (no. 1) appears on 12<sup>th</sup> of December, 1900, the sheets were printed with parallel text, in Romanian and Russian, with a circulation of over 5000 copies, then distributed to parishes. In 1904, the "Historical-Archaeological Society of the Church of Bessarabia" was established (Parhomovici 1929, 393).

After the 1905 revolution, important changes took place in Russia throughout society, which also affected church life. On 17<sup>th</sup> of April 1905, the Act of Tolerance was approved, granting religious freedom to all citizens of the Empire, and on 17<sup>th</sup> of October of the same year, Tsar Nicholas II published a Manifesto granting other civil rights (freedom of conscience, press, meetings and other matters). Against the background of the new transformations that took place within the Russian society, several Bessarabian leaders supported their national demands, initially in the pages of the Russian newspaper "Bessarabscaia Jizni" and then in the newspaper "Bessarabia" (founded on 24<sup>th</sup> of May 1906) (Varta 1996, 53) and in other subsequent publications ("Viața Basarabiei", "Moldovanul", "Luminator", "Făclia Țării", "Cuvânt Moldovenesc", etc.) (Varta 1996, 53), through which they demanded national, cultural and political autonomy for Bessarabia (Porumbescu 1932, 2).

In the autumn of 1904, Bishop Vladimir Sinikovski will take over the leadership of the Chisinau diocese. Being a missionary in the regions near the Altai Mountains and the Kyrgyz steppe for 18 years, Bishop Vladimir understood the needs of the Romanian faithful from Bessarabia and took several positive steps regarding the organization of the Bessarabian Church. At the priestly congresses of 1905-1906, the reopening of the diocesan printing house, the study of the Romanian language at the Theological Seminary in Chisinau, as well as the publication of a church magazine in the mother tongue were requested (Varta 1995, 50; Varta

2009, 22). On 26<sup>th</sup> of October 1906, the diocesan printing house was inaugurated, and following the requests of Bishop Iacov, by decree (decree) number 15441 of the Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church, it was allowed to publish the magazine "Luminatorul" (*On the occasion of His Majesty the Emperor, the sole ruler of all Russia, from the Most Holy Ruler of the Synod, to His Holiness Vladimir, the Bishop of Chisinau and Hotin, in the "Luminatorul", year LXVI, nr. 1, January, 1933, p. 9*). The first issue of this magazine will be published in January 1908, the magazine having editors - the hieromonk Gurie Grosu and the priest Constantin Popovici (Gurie 1933, 15).

Once with the arrival of Bishop Serafim Ciceagov at the head of the Chisinau diocese in the autumn of 1908, major negative changes would take place in church's life in Bessarabia. The rights gained during the reign of Bishop Jacob (1904) were severely violated by Serafim. As a prominent representative of Russian absolutism, he stood against national demands, especially against the "Luminator" group, which he called as "separatist gang" (Gurie 1933, 16), and took action against the use of language in divine services, which led Ion Pelivan to state that Serafim Ciceagov Zealagov prevented the Bessarabians from praying to God in their mother tongue (Pelivan 2012, 190).

In a secret report, presented to S.M. Lukianov (Deputy Prosecutor between 1909 and 1911), Serafim Szczecov mentioned the existence of a group (composed of 15-20 priests) that leaned towards "Moldophilism", considering them "our worst enemies" (Poștarencu 2014, 627). Several secular and church personalities were to suffer from the abusive actions of the Russian hierarch: Archimandrite Gurie Grosu (exiled in Russia), priests Constantin Popovici, Constantin Partenie, I. Ignatovici, Professor Grigore Constantinescu, etc. Other influential Bessarabians also suffered from the tsarist civil authorities. Ion Loghinescu (teacher from Hotin), is exiled in 1910 in Pernov, Ion Rădulescu - professor at the Theological Seminary in Chisinau is exiled in 1911 in Kameneț-Podolsk, Vasile Vasile Florov (teacher at the Diocesan School for Girls in Chisinau, exiled in 1911 in the Caucasus (Pelivan 1943, 504-505).

Pressure and demands from many civil and church figures for respecting the identity elements and use of the Romanian language in the education system and Church, the movement formed around the hieromonk Inochentie from Balta (who preached in his mother tongue), the proselytism of neo-Protestant cults and other factors, have determined that the Petersburg authorities to allow the use of the mother tongue in churches of Bessarabia in 1913 (Scutaru 2017, 399-400).

During World War I (1914-1918), more than 300,000 Bessarabians fought in the Russian army. Many Bessarabians were sent to the Romanian fronts, which led to the strengthening of their ties with Romanians from the Kingdom and from Transylvania. During the First World War until the Union with the Motherland on 27<sup>th</sup> of March 1918, the diocese of Bessarabia was led by Hierarchs Plato Rojdestvenski (1914-1915) and Anastasie Cribanovschi (1915-1918) (Bălan 2010, 37). These hierarchs were more concerned with involvement in social and humanitarian action in order to help those affected by the war (wounded soldiers, orphans, etc.). However, the tsarist authorities have taken drastic measures against those who show sympathy in a national spirit; doctor Elena Alistar spent 45 days in prison in Chisinau because she claimed “the union of Bessarabia with Romania”, from where she escaped due the intervention of Vasile Stroescu. Teodor M. Ciuhureanu, big landlord from Bălți, was imprisoned for seven months due his unfavorable opinions towards the Russian army and his conviction that the Romanian army “will enter Bessarabia”. For patriotic beliefs, during the First World War, also suffered because the tsarist authorities Iustin Frățiman (exiled in Siberia), C.V. Popescu, Mihail Vântu, Ion Bălțeanu and others (Pelivan 1943, 505-506).

The fall of the tsarist regime in March 1917 made possible the development of the national movement in Bessarabia. On 3<sup>rd</sup> of April 1917, the Moldovan National Party (PNM) was created, a political group that would lead political actions in the region and that would integrate many important political leaders, among them being famous clerics. Their work would success, especially by the happy event of 27<sup>th</sup> of March 1918,

when Bessarabia united with the Romanian Kingdom, being the first province to return to its motherland.

### **Conclusions**

The Russification policy launched in Bessarabia had a strong impact on this region, which has been felt to this day. The annexation of Bessarabia in 1812 meant for the Romanian population an unfortunate event that would open the process of Russification and the erasure of the national identity. This policy of Russification in the nineteenth century led to the annulment of certain rights: the right to statehood and its own legislation, use of Romanian language in Church, school and state institutions, education of children in mother tongue in schools, and publishing books and publications in Romanian.

Russification took place in two main directions: in the city - through the school, in the villages - through the Church. After the annexation of the province, the tsarist authorities gradually took measures to limit the printing and distribution of worship books in Romanian, in churches, as well as in the parish and seminary libraries. The Russification of education had dramatic consequences: in 1912, of the 1,709 primary schools that existed in Bessarabia, none was in Romanian. Regarding the Orthodox Church in Bessarabia, except for Metropolitan Gavriil, all the other hierarchs who pastored after him until 1918 were Russians. They related differently to the needs of the diocese and their activity cannot be brought to the same common denominator.

The most drastic and restrictive measures for Russification took place in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, during the time of Archbishops Antonie Shokotov (1858-1871) and Pavel Lebedev (1871-1882). In 1866-1867, the Romanian language was almost completely banned in Bessarabian schools. The harsh measures taken by the tsarist regime did not have the desired effect, because in many localities priests officiated holy services in Romanian, and the percentage of Russian-speaking connoisseurs was low among priests and much lower among parishioners. The maintenance of Romanian books in the churches of Bessarabia, bringing of other books from the Principality (especially from Moldova),



had a fundamental contribution in preserving the national consciousness among the Bessarabians.

Towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there was an increasing demand for students to study in their mother tongue, these issues being discussed in Diocesan Councils, with Russian hierarchs increasingly aware of the need to print books and brochures in Romanian. But the event that "hastened" the decision of the Russian Synod to allow printing books in Romanian was the establishment of the Brotherhood "Birth of Christ" in 1898, which - in the purpose of their mission among the parishioners, could not convey the message of faith in other way than in the mother tongue, through publications and other methods, which was to happen at the beginning of the twentieth century, by publication of the famous magazine "Luminatorul" in 1908.

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## A Brief History of Romanians in the Serbian Banat

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**Abstract:**

*Romanian inhabitants live in nearly forty villages in that part of Banat which used to belong to the former state of Yugoslavia and which now belongs to the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina, i.e. Republic of Serbia. The Romanian inhabitants were colonized in the area, i.e. in the space of contemporary Vojvodina, mostly in the 18<sup>th</sup> and the first decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century from the eastern parts of Banat. A number of villages were inhabited by settlers from other parts of Romanian ethnic space, before all from Oltenia, Transylvania and Crișana. The newcomers were settled in the places existing since the Turkish, and even medieval times, while in some cases completely new settlements were established. After the World War I and the dismemberment of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, Banat was divided between the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes and Romania. The status of the Romanian minority in Banat was regulated by international contracts signed after the World War I, as well as by various Yugoslav-Romanian contracts. Therefore, conditions were created for the Romanian national minority in the Yugoslav (Serbian) Banat to exercise their national rights, which enabled their survival in the region to the present day. Today, the Romanian minority is found on the territory of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina. Despite their significant decrease in numbers, they still have a rich cultural life and are active in different domains of the society. They preserve their identity due to the existence of schools taught in the Romanian language,*

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*of the Romanian Orthodox Church, as well as due to national mass media that have program in the languages of the minorities as well.*

**Keywords:**

*Serbian Banat, Romanians, identity, cultural movement, education in the mother tongue*

**Introduction**

Romanians live in approximately forty villages on the territory of Banat which had since 1918 been a part of the Yugoslav state, now belonging to the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina, i.e. the Republic of Serbia.

The Romanian population mainly originates from the eastern parts of Banat, although, during the 18<sup>th</sup> and the first decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, population from other parts of the Romanian ethnic area, primarily from Oltenia, Transylvania and Crişana arrived in several villages. This newly-arrived population settled in villages that had existed since the times of the Ottoman rule and even medieval times, while only in some cases they founded completely new settlements. Depending on the origin of the population, the Romanian villages can be divided into several groups. The first group consists of villages found in the vicinity of Vrşac (Vârşet) [The names for villages and towns appearing in this paper are given in their present official form (in the Serbian language), with the name in the Romanian language in the parenthesis]<sup>1</sup>, where the indigenous population of Banat lives and for which there are indications that they are the oldest Romanian villages in this part of Banat. The villages in question are Malo Središte (Sredişteia Mică), Markovac (Marcovăţ), Kuštilj (Coştei), Vojvodinci (Voivodinţ), Sočica (Sălciţa), Jablanka (Iablanca) and Mesić (Mesici), along with villages from the plain surrounding Vrşac, namely, Mali Žam (Jamu Mic), Vlajkovac (Vlaicovăţ) and Ritiševo (Râtişor) as well as an isolated village, Grebenac (Grebenăţ) on the edge of Deliblato Sands. The second group consists of villages found in the Banat plains also inhabited by Banat Romanians: Alibunar, Seleuş (Seleuş), Barice (Sân-Ianăş), Margita (Mărghita), Nikolinci (Nicolinţ),

Vladimirovac (Petrovasâla), Uzdin, Ečka (Ecica), Sutjeska (Sărcia) and Veliki Torak (Toracul Mare) along with some isolated village in the far south: Dolovo (Doloave), Mramorak (Maramorac) and Deliblato (Deliblata). Population from Transylvania settled Jankov Most (Iancaid), Klek (Clec), Ovča (Ofcea), Glogonj (Glogoni), Jabuka (Iabuca), and partly Banatsko Novo Selo (Satu Nou), Ečka, Seleuš, Alibunar and Lokve (Sân-Mihai). Romanians from Oltenia settled Straža (Straja), Banatsko Novo Selo and Lokve (also, partially other places), while the residents of Mali Torak (Toracul Mic) originated from Crişana. In the past centuries, Romanians also lived in other villages and towns of the western Banat in smaller numbers, but they were eventually assimilated by the numerous Serbian population, e.g. Rusko Selo (Chisoroş), Sefkerin (Sefcherin), Dobrica (Dobriţa) etc. Finally, this population was present in Banat towns, such as Bela Crkva (Biserica Albă), Kovin (Cuvin), Vršac and Pančevo (Panciova), as well as in Veliki Bečkerek (Becicherecul Mare, today Zrenjanin) and Kikinda in smaller numbers [For more details about villages with Romanian population in the Serbian Banat] (see: Măran 2009).

### **Demographics**

When it comes to demography, it should be noted that throughout the twentieth century there was a process of continuous decline in numbers among the Romanian population in Banat, which occurred after a period of increased birth rates in the second half of the nineteenth century. The number of citizens began to decline, the first effects being visible already in the first decade of the twentieth century. The reasons are many, but we mention three that, in our opinion, had a decisive role in this process: the declining birth rate, a growing number of migrants to Western countries and Serbianization in places where the Romanian population lived together with the Serbian.

We believe that the first reason, the low birth rate, is the main reason for the decline in the number of Romanians. In fact, the main occupation of the Romanian families was mainly agriculture which meant that their entire existence was closely related to the land they cultivated, so they were reluctant to allow the land to be divided into smaller parts

which would be done if they had a large number of children. To be precise, having more children would mean the division of the estate among the male children, with the female children also receiving land for their dowry, which would, when they got married, become a part of the husband's family's land. As a result of this way of thinking, the birth rate began to decrease, the number of children in the family was usually one or two in higher and middle class peasant families, while the number of families with more than two children was small (these were usually poor peasant families). Such a situation is present to this day.

Extremely low birth rate is present primarily in the richest villages, which had the largest number of inhabitants and the best financial conditions, and this is mostly the case with the villages from the territory of the former Military Frontier, where the idea of the indivisibility of possession was held the longest.

One of the people that dealt with the problems of extremely low birth rate of the population was Doctor Gheorghe Baloş, who, in the first post-war years, monitored the demographic situation in several villages. He presented his findings from studying Uzdin, Veliki Torak, Mali Torak, Nikolinci and other Banat places by using graphs (Baloş 1954, 12-18). He considers the main reason for that to be the practice of early marriage, an issue that was placed on the agenda by the communist government in the early postwar years (Baloş 1954, 28). Propaganda against this practice was present in the press, on the radio, in literary works [The novel "Broken Youth" by Mihai Avramescu, published in 1953, considered to be one of the most successful achievements of the Romanian literature in the postwar period, was written as propaganda against premature marriages] and lectures organized in the villages.

The process of emigration of the Romanian population of Banat to North America (mainly the United States) began even before World War I, and in the interwar period, there was an increasing emigration to the United States and Canada, as a result of the unfavorable economic situation present in the Banat villages. According to certain data (Popi 1976, 93), in the period between 1918 and 1927, 367 members of the Romanian minority emigrated to America. Other sources from around the



same period (1921-1929) do not fully agree with the data from above, citing the figure of a total of 1079 Romanians that left the country (*Jadranska straža* 1930, 255). In the following decades, especially in the years after World War II, the people who left would be the support and inspiration for many individuals and families planning to leave the country and emigrate, in pursuit of happiness and the possibility of a better life on the other side of the Atlantic, at first illegally, and later legally. In the postwar decades, the number of those who went to North America, but also to countries of Western Europe and to Australia, significantly affected the overall demographic situation of the Romanian population in the Yugoslav Banat, certainly in a negative way.

We should not disregard the Romanian optants who went to the Romanian part of Banat in the twenties and whose number, although difficult to determine, is certainly not negligible. Out of a total of 105 Romanian teachers who were active before the war, 72 of them went with their families to Romania (Popi 1976, 93). In addition to the mentioned teachers, other intellectuals, mainly lawyers, civil servants and doctors, also went there, leaving the villages and towns of the western Banat almost without the Romanian intelligence. The number of those who starting from 1930 went to Dobrogea is not insignificant, amounting to a total of about 500 families of poor peasants (Popi 1976, 38).

The end of World War II also resulted in the departure of a number of Romanians to the mother country. This was mostly the case with citizens who were not able to remain at their jobs or in their homes because of their anti-communist stance or because they collaborated with the occupation authorities in one form or another, thus being subjected to persecutions on political grounds, to internment or even physical liquidation. In these cases, rather than families, it was most often individuals that crossed over to Romania. The negative aspect is that, among those who decided to continue to live in Romania, there was a large number of students, who were supposed to take the role of the intellectual elite among their compatriots in the Yugoslav Banat. This is the reason why the problem of a lack of skilled personnel in numerous domains appeared once again. However, this unfavorable situation will

soon be overcome by the emergence of new generations of graduates from Teachers Training College and Gymnasium in Vršac.

As far as the process of assimilation in villages with a mixed population is concerned, it happened primarily due to the unfavorable position that the Romanian Orthodox Church had in Banat during the eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Being under the jurisdiction of the Serbian Orthodox Metropolitanate of Karlowitz, the Romanian Orthodox believers were subjected to a constant process of national assimilation, especially in those places in which they lived together with the Serbian population. This was extremely detrimental to the survival of the population in many mixed villages. A typical example is the disappearance of the Romanian population in Dobrica near Alibunar, where in 1877 there were 1270 Serbs, 1236 Romanians, 82 Germans, 8 Hungarians and 63 Roma (Nikolić 2003, 78), but in the following decades the Romanian population completely disappeared as a result of an intense process of assimilation. A similar situation was present in other places, such as Rusko Selo next to Kikinda, which in the nineteenth century had a Romanian parish and school, but the population had disappeared completely. Then, there is the case of Bela Crkva, a small town in the south of Banat, which was once a powerful economic and cultural centre of Romanians (Popi 2006). Very strong process of assimilation was also present in the first half of the twentieth century in Deliblato, Mramorak, Dolovo, Omoljica, Glogonj, Jabuka, Kovin, Orešac and in the recent decades the trend has spread to the strong centres of the Romanian minority in Banat, namely, Banatsko Novo Selo, Vladimirovac, Alibunar, Ečka, Sutjeska, Margita, Vlajkovac and other places.

The two world wars, the greatest conflicts that took place in the twentieth century, had their effects on reducing the number of members of the Romanian minority, which is to be expected, especially if we take into account that just during World War I the total losses of the male population in the European battlefields were substantial. The death toll of this part of the population in the battles at Galicia and next to Piave, or on other fronts is not precisely determined, except in some places, including Seleuš (Bojin 2000, 80-84), Alibunar (Zăria, manuscript, 24-25) and Uzdin

(A total number of 225 men originating from Uzdin died on the fronts: Spăriosu Grofu 1999, 32).

During World War II there were relatively few casualties among the members of this nationality, even though they should not be completely ignored. The highest death toll was in Alibunar, where there were two deadly attacks. In April of 1941, at the time of the entry of German troops in this place, as a form of retaliation for the murder of a German officer, 53 people of various nationalities were shot, as well as a large number of citizens from other villages and soldiers, along with officers of the Yugoslav Royal Army (Samoilă 2004, 49-50). An even greater tragedy came upon Alibunar on August 7, 1944, when the US Air Force attacked a nearby German airport, also causing huge casualties among the villagers (Măran 2005, 177-181). On this occasion, 146 people were killed, of whom the vast majority were of Romanian nationality. The same day, US planes also bombed Nikolinci, the number of victims in the village being 22. There were also a lot of injured people and the material damage was significant. In other villages the number of registered human casualties was not that high.

Looking at the situation as a whole, the ethnic map of Banat did suffer significant changes as a result of the events during and after the world wars. Although the number of Romanians and Hungarians was in decline, it was not a phenomenon that could significantly change the existing general situation. On the other hand, the disappearance of the German minority after World War II which was due to them leaving Banat, as well as a noticeable increase in the number of Serbian inhabitants, which happened by means of colonization taking place after both world wars (For more details about the founding of the voluntary colonies in Banat after World War I, see: Micić 2013), created a new situation with regard to the numerical relationship among the various nations of the area.

### **Romanians in the western parts of Banat until the First World War**

Some medieval sources indicate that the ancestors of the Romanian people lived in these areas in the time of the Hungarian conquest of the Pannonian plain, while other later sources also mention their presence in this part of Banat. The oldest, and in our opinion the most important source of its kind, is a chronicle "Gesta hungarum" written by an anonymous notary of the Hungarian King Bela III, who mentions the Vlachs, along with Bulgarians and Cumans, as subjects and allies of Glad, the ruler of South Banat, who fought for independence against the Hungarian attacks at the time of their arrival in the Pannonian Plain (*Cronica notarului Anonymus, Faptele ungarilor* 1996, 82-85) [Regarding this event, Anonimus says: "*Et cum uellent transire amnem temes uenit obuiam eis glad, a cuius progenie ohtum descendit, dux illius patrie cum magno exercitiu equitum et peditum, adiutorio cumanorum et bulgarorum atque blacorum*"]. Glad had one of his capitals in the fortress *Keuee* (Kovin). However, in the end, he was forced to surrender it to the invaders.

Sources from the Ottoman period (1552-1718) that mention the presence of the Romanian population in the western region of Banat are quite scarce, but they do exist. There are some sources from the seventeenth century that provide us with evidence of the presence of the Romanian population in western Banat. We mention the travelogue of Evliya Çelebi, who travelled through this region in 1662 and found Vlachs, Bulgarians and Serbs (Čelebija 1957, 84) in Jabuka, a village near Pančevo, thus showing that even in this period, just as today, Banat was a typical multi-ethnic environment. The Katastihos of Peć from 1660 and 1666 also contains valuable information about the population in the villages of the western Banat, which belonged to "the Vlach Nahia" (Popović and Matić 1933, 17), where we find Romanian names (Popović and Matić 1933, 37) [In the village of Veliki Nikolinci in 1666, among other, the Romanian family name Cinci is mentioned, which exists to this day in the village].

When the Austrians conquered Banat in 1717, they found a decline in population and adverse living conditions in these areas. By becoming a part of the Habsburg Monarchy, conditions in Banat became favourable for economic, demographic and cultural recovery of the area, which

suffered a visible stagnation under the Ottoman rule. During the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Austrian authorities undertook a series of measures to restore the devastated Banat. It was imperative to drain the wetlands and convert them into arable land, to develop crafts and trade and to reconstruct agriculture. In order to do this in the most successful way and in order to organize the defense of the Turkish incursions from the south, one of the most important measures was certainly the colonization of various nations, including Romanians, in the sparsely populated western part of Banat. During the 18<sup>th</sup> century, beside Romanians, Banat was settled by Serbs, Germans, Slovaks, Hungarians, Czechs, Bulgarians and to a smaller degree by other nations.

The western parts of Banat were colonized mainly by Romanians from the eastern parts of the province, but also from Transylvania, Oltenia and Crișana. The largest villages inhabited by Romanians were founded on the territory of the Banat Military Frontier, in the vicinity of Pančevo, where the headquarters of the German-Banat Regiment no. 12 was (Mileker 1926, 22-58). Some of these villages have existed in the period of the Ottoman rule (for example, Alibunar, Seleuš, Nikolinci, Sveti Mihajlo), so the newly-arrived population encountered the indigenous population here, while other villages were founded at the time of the colonization (Banatsko Novo Selo, Uzdin, Vladimirovac, Ovča, Mramorak etc.). Some of these villages had exclusively Romanian population, while in others the Romanians lived together with the Serbs or Germans (in the case of villages with German and Romanian population, Germans mostly inhabited a special part of the village and were separated from the Romanians, as is the case in Glogonj, Sarča and Ečka). The largest Romanian villages were located in the vicinity of Vršac, but when the number of villagers is concerned, they were considerably smaller than the villages in the Military Frontier. They had a larger number of the indigenous Romanian population, but colonization happened here as well. Apart from a few exceptions (Vlajkovac, Margita), these were compact Romanian villages, but with a worse financial position than the population in the Military Frontier. Several larger Romanian villages were also founded in the central region of Banat, near Veliki Bečkerek (today

Zrenjanin) (such as Veliki Torak and Mali Torak, Jankov Most). The Romanian element existed in towns, but it was numerically and materially weaker than the German and Serbian citizenship.

Being a predominantly rural population, Romanians were mostly involved in growing crops and raising livestock. In the economic sense, the population living on the territory of the Military Frontier lived in better conditions, which had a significant impact on the cultural development of the mentioned population. Still, the abolition of feudal relations on the territory of the Habsburg Monarchy created conditions for people in the provincial parts to move faster towards economic and cultural emancipation. The abolition of Bach's absolutism (1860), and then of the Banat Military Frontier (1872) contributed to the acceleration of this process. In the last decades of the nineteenth and at the beginning of the twentieth century, involvement in the wider socio-economic, political and cultural processes characteristic of Europe and the whole world was present among the Banat Romanians as well.

The social stratum of Romanian citizenship and intelligence is formed and it is this social stratum that stands at the head of all the national aspirations of Romanians and becomes their leader in the struggle for national rights. In the last decades of the nineteenth and in the early twentieth century the first joint-stock companies were established, primarily credit-money institutions, whose shareholders were recruited from the ranks of the small Romanian bourgeoisie, the intelligentsia and the rich peasantry. The most famous Romanian credit-money institutions were "Luceafărul" from Vršac, "Sentinela" from Banatsko Novo Selo, "Steaua" from Vladimirovac, "Concordia" from Uzdin, "Dunăreana" from Kovin and "Panciovana" from Pančevo.

Despite all of this, the majority of the Romanian people from this territory was still living in economic and cultural backwardness, not giving up on the traditional way of life, full of prejudices and superstitions. However, it was this conservatism, to some extent, that contributed to the survival of the population in these regions in the form of a separate ethnic element. Folklore is, therefore, one of the most important factors that enabled the Romanian population in Banat to preserve their national

particularities, in a situation where this area was located within other countries, Romanians being only a national minority. Western Banat Romanians have never lived within the borders of the home country, but despite this, primarily due to the preservation of centuries-old traditions, they have survived as a people.

Most Romanians living in the western Banat were Orthodox. When Banat became a part of the Habsburg Monarchy, they were passed under the jurisdiction of the Serbian Orthodox Metropolitanate based in Karlowitz. In a period of national revival, this hampered the independent national development. It was not until the end of 1864 that the independence of the Romanian Orthodox Metropolitanate on the territory of the Habsburg monarchy was recognized and Andrei Şaguna was appointed as the Romanian Metropolitan. He spent a part of his working life in Vršac, where he worked as a professor at the Serbian-Romanian Clerical School (Gavrilović 1983, 99-100). The believers living in the southern part of Banat passed under the jurisdiction of the Caransebeş Eparchy, while those from the Middle parts of Banat were under the jurisdiction of the Arad Eparchy. Obtaining ecclesiastical independence enabled a faster national and cultural process of emancipation. On the other hand, a smaller part of the population accepted the union with the Catholic Church, which led to the emergence of two Uniate parishes in the region of the Western Banat, namely, one in Markovac and one in Jankov Most. In the last decades of the nineteenth century there were also Neo-Protestant movements, primarily the Nazarene, which was first mentioned in sources from Banatsko Novo Selo, near Pančevo, in the year 1872 (The archives of the Romanian Orthodox Protopresbyterate in Pančevo, Banatsko Novo Selo, no. 7/1872), from where it spread to the neighboring villages, but also to the entire Romanian ethnic area. In the first decades of the twentieth century there were other Neo-Protestant movements - Adventist, Baptist and Pentecostal, which have to this day been part of confessional reality of Romanians living in the Serbian Banat (For more details about the Neo-Protestant communities of Romanians from the Serbian Banat, see: Đurić-Milovanović and Maran and Sikimić 2011).

The political organization of the Romanian population after the abolition of Bach's absolutism and the signing of the compromise was going in the direction of the joint struggle with the Serbs and Slovaks towards achieving full national rights. The joint Serbian-Romanian participation in the parliamentary elections during the first decades of parliamentary life in Hungary resulted in the selection of Serbian-Romanian candidates in the Hungarian Parliament. It is important to mention the victory of the Romanian political champion Vincentiu Babeş in the electoral district of Bela Crkva in 1873, as well as the victory of the Serbian politician Mihajlo Polit Desančić in the elections in Pančevo and Uzdin districts (in 1874, 1875, 1878 and 1881), largely because of the votes from the Romanian voters. Finally, similar successes were achieved by the Romanian landowner George Mocioni in Moravița district, where most of the villages from the vicinity of Vršac were found, in the elections in 1865, 1869 and 1872 (*Biserica si scol'a* 1887, 104).

### **The situation in culture**

As far as the cultural development is concerned, in addition to the national, traditional culture, the nineteenth century also marks the beginning of the development of cultural movement that reflects the general cultural trends in the territory of the Habsburg Empire and beyond. While in the beginning only individuals were involved in this cultural movement, in late sixties of the nineteenth century and the following decades, it becomes more popular, which leads to a large number of amateur cultural societies being established in most towns. The kinds of activities of these societies are usually choral singing, theater arts, and folk dances and in the years immediately before the outbreak of World War I there was even one Romanian village (Kuštilj) that had the first brass band.

At the end of 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century in this part of Banat there were three branches of the cultural association "Astra" that were established that had headquarters in Vršac, Pančevo and Veliki Bečkerek (today Zrenjanin). Members of the "Astra" were intellectuals and prominent peasants, and its activity consisted of organizing literary



evenings, lectures, opening rural public libraries and distributing literature in the mother tongue, especially the press, calendars and brochures with literary and historical content. Literary and publishing activity had its first results when the first newspapers in the Romanian language were published (“Convorbiri pedagogice”, “Steaua”, “Educatorul”, “Familia”). Even though their publishing was short-lived, they still represent a proof that in this field something was being done. At the same time, during this period several books in the Romanian language were also published (we mention The monograph of the municipality of Alibunar by Teodor Petrișor and The monograph of the Roman-Petre /Petrovoselo/ municipality 1808-1908 by Nicolae Pența) and some journalists and writers published their works on the pages of publications that were coming out in various cities of the Monarchy, such as Budapest, Sibiu, Brașov, Arad, Timișoara, Lugoj.

Although the activity of the majority of cultural workers and activists was limited to the mother land, the Romanian population from the territory of the Serbian Banat still gave a few names that were significant for the entire nation, who made contributions important for the overall development of the national movement of the Romanians on their entire ethnic area. Here we will mention names like Ștefan Popovici Neagoe – a teacher in Budapest, a fighter for the national rights of the Romanians in the Habsburg monarchy, the author of several calendars, Procopie Ivacicovici – a Bishop, Metropolitan and Patriarch, Petru Broșteanu - writer and publicist, corresponding member of the Romanian Academy of Sciences, Teodor Filipescu, a chemist and an ethnographer and others. Because of these figures, the Romanians from Serbian Banat gave their contribution to the overall national development of the Romanian people in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. At the same time, for a shorter or longer period other famous people important for the Romanian national revival were active in the domains of culture and education, but also religion and politics. Here we mention the following names: Paul Iorgovici, Constantin Diaconovici Loga, Andrei Vasici, Andrei Șaguna and Nicolae Tincu Velea.

Among school institutions in the Habsburg period where classes were held in the Romanian language, the most significant is certainly the Serbian-Romanian Clerical School in Vršac (For more details see: Gavrilović 1983), which existed in the period between 1822 and 1865. It prepared clerical staff for the needs of parishes on the territory of the Vršac Eparchy. After the separation of the Romanian Orthodox Metropolitanate in 1865, the classes held in the Romanian language, i.e. the entire department that had Romanian as the teaching language in the Clerical School in Vršac was moved to Caransebeș, the headquarters of the Romanian Orthodox Diocese.

#### **As part of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia**

The division of Banat between the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (Kingdom of SCS), on the one hand, and Romania, on the other, which happened after the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, had as a consequence that the Romanian population of the western part of Banat became a part of the newly formed Yugoslavia. The delineation of Banat between the Yugoslav and the Romanian state was a complex issue, because both sides claimed their right to the entire territory. However, this issue was resolved by compromise, after arduous negotiations that took place in the post-war international peace conferences, as well as by means of bilateral agreements between the two neighboring countries. The delineation of Banat between the Kingdom of SCS and Romania was finally completed in early 1924, when an exchange of the last border towns was done. Because of mixed population living on this territory, in the Romanian Banat a significantly large Serbian minority remained, while on the territory of the Yugoslav Banat, there were around 40 villages inhabited by the Romanian population.

The first census in the Kingdom of SCS done in 1921 showed that in this country there were 69,078 people who declared themselves as Romanians, of whom 67,675 lived on the territory of the Yugoslav Banat.

In the field of politics, the Romanians in the Yugoslav Banat organized themselves in 1923 by forming the Romanian party in the Kingdom of SCS, which, in the parliamentary elections of that year, received the first

Member of Parliament, Dr. Ioan Jianu, a lawyer from Alibunar (Popi 1996, 91). Despite the initial unity in action, eventually, discord appeared among the leadership of this party, which had the effect of weakening the party and its failure in the parliamentary elections of 1925 and 1927. When the "January 6<sup>th</sup>" Dictatorship was established in 1929, this party was banned, as well as all the political parties in the country. The Romanian national minority in this area was not able to organize itself again until 1935, by establishing the Romanian Central Committee, which replaced the former Romanian party. In the parliamentary elections of 1935, Dr. Alexandru Butoarcă, the leader of the Romanian Central Committee, became a member of the Senate of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (Popi 1996, 119).

However, disagreements among the leaders of the Romanian national movement once again appeared in the second half of the thirties, which certainly did not have a positive effect on the position of the Romanian minority in the Yugoslav Banat. The Romanian intellectuals divided into two factions, the first of which supported Dr. Alexandru Butoarcă and was gathered around the weekly "Nădejdea", and the other, composed mostly of Orthodox priests and was gathered around the association "Astra". This division was not overcome until the end of the interwar period.

Education in the Romanian language in the interwar period, especially during the twenties, went through a serious crisis which was caused by the departure of the majority of teachers to Romania. Due to the lack of teaching staff, the classes in the twenties were not held in the students' native language in many elementary schools, or alternatively, the teachers that did teach in Romanian did not know enough of the Romanian language for the education to be of high quality. This issue was finally resolved when teachers from Romania came who had contractual employment, on the basis of the Yugoslav-Romanian academic convention signed in 1933. One of its postulates was that the members of the Romanian minority in the Yugoslav Banat should have their classes in their mother tongue, and vice versa, the members of the Serbian minority in the Romanian Banat should have them in the Serbian language. First

contractual teachers arrived to Romanian schools in the Yugoslav Banat in 1935, which finally created conditions for overcoming this crisis.

It is significant to mention the establishment of the lower classes in the Romanian language in the Gymnasium in Vršac (in the school year of 1934/35) and classes in the Romanian language in the Teacher Training College, also in Vršac, in the school year of 1935/36, as well as the Romanian dormitory in Vršac in 1935 for male students, and from 1936 for female students, too (For more on the problems of education in the Romanian language in the interwar period, see: Popi 1976, 92-123).

In religious terms, the Orthodox Romanians living on the territory of the Yugoslav Banat belonged to the Caransebeş Eparchy (the Southern Banat), respectively, to the Arad Eparchy (the Central Banat) and they were divided into three Protopresbyterates, based in Vršac, Pančevo (Banatsko Novo Selo) and Sarča. Given the small number of Romanian intellectuals, the Orthodox clergy played a significant role in the socio-political, economic and cultural life of the Romanian villages in the region (Măran 2012, 116).

As for the cultural development of the Romanians in Yugoslav Banat between the two world wars, it continued to go in the same direction, despite the new conditions. Since the division of Banat led to their loss of a direct connection to the strong cultural centres in the eastern Banat and Transylvania, the Romanians in the Yugoslav Banat were left on their own, which also had its effects on the cultural movement of the population. One of the big losses was that the intellectual elite, namely, teachers, lawyers, doctors, left the country and went to Romania, which had occurred at the beginning of the twenties of the last century as a result of their aspirations to live on the territory of the mother country after the division of Banat between the Kingdom of SCS and Romania.

The Romanian cultural societies continued their tradition that had begun during the Austro-Hungarian rule. The activity of these cultural societies included primarily choral activity, followed by theater groups and folk ensembles, and during the twenties and thirties, most cultural societies also established their brass orchestras. The activities of cultural associations usually consisted of organizing events, where they performed

choir compositions, recited poems, performed plays, monologues, dialogues, played folk games such as “Călușarul” and “Bătuta” and later in their activity, they added instrumental compositions to their repertoire, which were performed by brass orchestras. These societies were governed by local intellectuals - priests and teachers, as well as enthusiasts from among the more emancipated peasantry. In addition to performances, these cultural societies were present in many other cultural, political and religious events.

When “Astra” was founded in 1936, the Romanian minority received the first association that was registered with the state organs, which allowed, at least for a short period of time, a more organized cultural activity in the Romanian villages.

The literary and publishing activity was modest. In addition to the weekly “Nădejdea” in Vrșac, which was published uninterruptedly in the period between 1927 and 1944, all the others were published for a short period of time. In the same period, only one book was published, along with several calendars and several school textbooks.

The assistance that Romania as a country of origin gave for the cultural needs of this population consisted primarily in the shipments of books and other publications, which mostly came from the library “I. G. Bibicescu” of Turnu Severin to all Romanian parish libraries in the Yugoslav Banat (see: Chipurici 1995), but also in organizing excursions and visits of peasants, pupils and students to different parts of Romania. A special form of assistance sent by the mother country involved contractual teachers who came to the Yugoslav Banat and who, in addition to activities in the field of education, contributed to the improvement of the quality of cultural societies (primarily by being choir leaders, conductors of brass bands and managers of drama sections), while some of them were also writers and publicists (Mihai Avramescu, Teodor Șandru and others).

### **The immediate post-war years**

The Romanian minority in Banat after World War II shared the fate of other citizens of the country; Yugoslavia became a communist country, led by Josip Broz Tito. Repressive measures were undertaken by the

communist authorities towards the rich peasants; forced collectivization, nationalization and other similar undertaken measures also applied to the Romanian minority in Banat. On the other hand, the Romanians had their representatives in government, from the local to the federal level. The Informbiro (Information Bureau) Resolution of 1948 was a difficult period for the members of the Romanian minority who were involved in the government of socialist Yugoslavia, primarily because Romania was one of the countries that took part in carrying out the policy of strong pressures to which People's Federative Republic of Yugoslavia was exposed.

In the early postwar years, the overall cultural activity of the Romanian minority in Vojvodina was coordinated by the Romanian Cultural Association, founded in 1945 with the goal to implement cultural policies of the country's new government. From 1948 onward, the cultural activities of the Romanians in Vojvodina would be the responsibility of the newly formed Alliance of Cultural and Educational Societies of Vojvodina (ACESV), which was responsible for the entire amateur activity on the territory of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina, founded in the heat of conflict with the Information Bureau.

Regarding the theater activity, it is important to mention the establishment of the Romanian National Theatre in Vršac in 1949, which would significantly improve the quality of theatrical life of this minority.

Within the cultural life of the Romanians in Vojvodina, musical amateurism played perhaps the most important role when it comes to the impact on the preservation of national identity. The activities of choirs and fanfares, and even more of folk orchestras and folk ensembles, were far more popular and prevalent in the everyday life of rural Banat than any other form of cultural activities.

The weekly "Libertatea" is the first publication in the Romanian language in Vojvodina that appeared after World War II. The editorial policy was partially changed depending on the changes at the head of the editorial board, as well as on the internal and international political circumstances. As with the overall cultural activity in those years, the activity and editorial policy of the magazine for literature, art and culture "Lumina" was orchestrated by ACESV. In the early post-war years,

publishing in the Romanian language in Vojvodina was largely reduced to printing books with ideological content. The program of Radio Novi Sad began to be broadcasted in 1949. Despite their propagandist character, the shows on Radio Novi Sad would significantly influence the development of culture and national consciousness of the Romanians in Vojvodina.

The introduction of a new government system also meant the establishment of a new school system, which was based on the Marxist worldview. As recently as 1945 the Law on compulsory seven-year schooling was adopted. Starting with the school year of 1951/52, the elementary school was extended to eight years (Spăriosu 1982, 9). Since the school year of 1948/49, the classes held in the Romanian language in the Vršac Gymnasium had been separated into a separate Romanian Gymnasium, which existed in that form until 1956. The Teacher Training College in Vršac also had classes in the Romanian language (For more see: *Instruirea învățătorilor și a educatorilor în limba română la Vârșeț* 2013).

### **Conclusion**

Once the process of liberalization of all spheres of social life started, this created conditions for the Romanian minority in Vojvodina to take advantage of the new situation. The standard of living has increased since the fifties and sixties, which has resulted in creating an ambience favourable for the development of agriculture, which still represents the main economic branch of this population. As a result of the cultural and national policy led by the communist authorities, which was aimed at spreading the communist ideology and integration of all minorities into the socio-political system introduced in the country, the school system in minority languages, including Romanian, started showing evident improvement. This resulted in the emergence of numerous Romanian intellectuals, who would become the main force in all activities at the national, cultural, scientific, economic, political and other levels. In the domain of culture, there are significant achievements: the Festival of Music and Folklore, the Libertatea Cup, Theatre Days etc. In the last half century, numerous societies and organizations have been founded that

still operate, whose main task is to preserve the Romanian language and identity in Vojvodina and Serbia: Society of the Romanian Language, the Romanian Society (Foundation) for Ethnography and Folklore, the Community of Romanians from Yugoslavia (Serbia), Institute of the Culture of Vojvodina Romanians, and the National Council of the Romanian National Minority in Serbia as the main representative body after the democratic changes in Serbia, which began following the events of October 2000.

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## Contributions to the knowledge of the decree 8570/1860 and the abolition of some hermitages, in 1860, from Moldova\*

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**Abstract:**

*The issue of the secularization of monastic assets or their transfer to the ownership and administration of the young State was a topic of great interest to the society of those times and later to historians.*

*However, regarding the non-dedicated Romanian monasteries, many episodes and aspects were overlooked, such as the decree of the abolition of many hermitages and the transfer of their wealth to the management of the State, which was an interference with important consequences in the life of the Church.*

*This study attempts to provide brief, unpublished catagraphic descriptions of some of these monastic settlements as part of a process of secularization that is still insufficiently understood today.*

**Keywords:**

*secularization, decree 8570, hermitage, monastic fortunes, estate, Commission*

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\* This article was written under the guidance of Pr. Prof. Univ. Dr. Ion Vicovan, who gave his consent for publication.

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## 1. Introduction

Starting with 1859, all the actions and legislative projects elaborated for the purpose of a control of the Church assets by the State, will be taken over by the Ministry of Cults and Public Instruction (M.C.I.P), and the first approach was represented by the composition of a body called “Commission regulating monastic fortunes”, being proposed as project coordinator by Colonel Iancu Ghica, and President Grigorie Cozadini (D.J.A.N.I., dos. 49/1859, ff. 30-31).

The Commission began its work in the summer of 1859 with the task of researching the monasteries on site, followed by the preparation of charts of documents, the gathering of information and testimonies on the shortcomings, abuses or dissatisfaction in the community. We do not know if the task of the project to a military cadre, namely Colonel Iancu Ghica, was related to the fact that in the subsequent investigations of the commission, it will be accompanied by Gendarmerie troops, but it is certain that Grigorie Cozadini, former tenant of various monastic estates, will be a consistent figure in the committee, holding various positions or as a simple member.

This commission was most often accompanied by the Minister of Cults and even the Prime Minister, and a report was drawn up following the investigation, and diaries of the actions taken.

One of the first works of the commission was summarized in a report prepared on June 20 and is related to the irregularities found at the Vărativ monastery. In this report, the allegations were made: that the products were unfairly distributed; that the old women live in miserable conditions, following the example of a 90-year-old mother; she is accused of indifference to the helpless and sick, presenting the testimony of a sick woman who complained of hunger and that she had only once met her mother and lived at the mercy and generosity of other nuns.

One of the dominant questions in these questionnaires was related to the monastery's fortune, giving an illustrative passage in this regard: to the Minister's question,

[...] what to do with the fortune of the Monastery ? That it is not used for holding the community? some answer with simplicity that since they have been in

Monastery they know that Monastery is poor, others that their wealth is spent more with the cattle and the employees of the monastery but what to do with the cattle product? Not to know..." (D.J.A.N.I., dos. 49/1859, f. 55).

A nun claimed the fact that in the past years an estate was sold for 40,000 lei [Starting with 1867 these are Romanian coins], money that was also spent on keeping the cattle, which led the commission to find that the significant number of cattle is useless, and the lack of livelihood and search of the helpless and old is the cause of the "of decay of the community." However, we note that in this report, the answers from the community leadership are missing, as well as the names of these nuns who complain and testify about the shortcomings of the monastery, important aspects in terms of legitimacy and credibility of the case studies presented.

## **2. A decree of sad memory for the history of monasticism: 8570/1860**

Law for the abolition of two Monasteries and a number of Hermitages

Art.I The monasteries Doljești, Roman district, and Zagavia, Iași district, and Hermitages: Lipova - Vaslui district, Orgoeștii - Tutova district, Ghereasca - Covurlui district, Tissa – Bacău district, Buciumenii – Tecuciu district, Vânătorii – Neamț district, Preuteștii Suceava district, Brădicești – Fălciu district, Brazii, Troțușanul and Moșunoaale Putna district, are abolished;

Art. II The Hermitages are also abolished: Cruceanul, Pârvești, Bogdănița, Cârțiabași – Tutova district, Agatonul - Botoșani district, Goroveiu - Dorohoiu district, Mera, Cetatea Mică, Porcărețul, Mălinești, Delenii and Golgota or Hușenii – Vaslui district, Zgura and Grumăzoe Fălciu district, Giurgenii – Roman district, and Scânteea – Putna district;

Art. III The churches of these Monasteries and Hermitages will be transformed into parochial churches and will be maintained for the needs of the villages in the House of the Clergy;

Art. IV The monks and nuns who are alive today in the mentioned Monasteries and Hermitages will be relocated to the classified Monasteries, by the law of 1835 and will enjoy the same benefits as members of their communities;

The monks and nuns from the Hermitages included in art.II who will have their own cells at these hermitages, will not be able to be displaced from them, except with their consent, without the provision of art. 6 of this project;

Art.V. The rooms of the monasteries and hermitages abolished, as they will be able to be repaired and, where the need arises, will be transformed into village schools or other settlements for public use;

Article VI From those shown in art. II The hermitages that will have stalls and will prove to have an annual income of 1000 gold coins, will follow until the final organization (...) of communities, but the administration of their fortunes will be offered to the Ministry of Cults according to the rule on classified monasteries;

Article VII They will not use the advantages provided by art. IV all the monks and nuns of the abolished Monasteries and Hermitages, who from 1855 will have become monks against the civil laws and the approbations communicated by the then spiritual authorities;

Article VIII. Until the final reform of monasticism, the monk will be allowed only in the classified Monasteries, and this, in accordance with the civil and religious legislation and with the special authorization of the Ministry of Cults;

We make it known to all and order that these, invested with the seal of the State and entered in the Official Gazette, be executed exactly; for which, our ad-interim Minister of State Secretary to the Department of Cults and Public Instruction, has the responsibility of the execution of this Ordinance.

They gave in our royal residence Iași, the month of August in 9 days, the year of Salvation 1860, and of our second reign in the United Principalities.

Signed Alexander I

Counter-signed Minister of State ad-interim at the Department of Cults and Public Instruction Mihail Kogălniceanu (M.O., 1860, 905).

This ordinance deserves the attention of the researchers of the history of law in the Romanian space, for the novelty given by sharp and incisive formulations that constitute “legal” interferences of the State in the life of the Church.

We note a few elements: in art. I and II it is communicated in an imperative tone the abolition of a number of monastic establishments without other normative formulations or explanatory notes, but only with two mentions - the first in art. VI which refers to the possibility of functioning for a period, in case an annual income of 1000 gold coins per year would be proved, but these will remain in the administration of the State and the other is found in art. IV and exempts from evacuation the

nuns who will prove the ownership of the cells; in art. III orders the transformation of the churches of the settlements into parochial churches that will be maintained from the House of the Clergy, an organism that would be “dissolved” in the State Treasury; in art. V it is planned to repair and reuse buildings as schools or other settlements for the benefit of the community, or in many of the settlements schools already functioned, and subsequent developments have shown us abandonment to the point of ruining buildings (a well-known example in this sense is Doljești-Roman), and in art. VIII provides for the conditioning of entry into monasticism with the authorization of the state.

### 3. Hermitages abolished in the Diocese of Huși

*Lipova Hermitage.* The monastic complex included the abbot's houses in which 16 people lived, endowed with 4 rooms and 2 pantries; the cells “behind the abbot's houses”; the guest cells, in which 12 people lived (6 rooms and 6 pantries) and other cells occupied by the school and the teacher; the cells of the dining room with 3 rooms in which 8 people lived; cells in the orchard with a small stone cellar with 2 rooms and 2 pantries inhabited by 4 people and 5 monks' own cells (D.J.A.N.I., dos. 374, f.2). The numerous cells and the numerous community composed of 73 inhabitants, indicate the existence of an intense monastic life with a household comparable to that of the classified monasteries: 246 “fălci” [„Fălci” it is an old unit of measure representing the equivalent of about 1.5 hectares] farmland, 144 fălci of hay, 169 fălci pasture and 700 fălci of forest (D.J.A.N.I., dos. 374, ff.12-13).

In terms of the movable assets, the household had 9 head of cattle, 4 harness horses and 102 bee families.

*Golgotha or the Hușenii Hermitage.* Here there were many cells: two cells with 4 and 3 rooms, the archondaric with 2 rooms and another 5 cells of the nuns (a cell of the nun Agafia with 2 rooms, one of the nun Paisia Grosu with 3 rooms, a cell with a room of the nun Fevronia Urzică, another with 4 rooms of the nun Zanoide, with 3 rooms and “special” 2 rooms of the nun Agafia Panu and another with 2 rooms) (D.J.A.N.I., dos. 374, f. 4). The community administered 15 cattle and real estate in Ivănești in the

form of 72 fălci of farmland, 16 fălci of hay, 43 fălci of pasture and 40 fălci of forest (D.J.A.N.I., dos. 374, ff.12-13).

*Delenii Hermitage.* The settlement had a wooden church built on a stone foundation, a cellar and a wooden stable, a cellar near the priest's house, a barn and a "fountain" all in "poor condition". Next to them there was the abbess's cell and another 11 cells, all built of beams (D.J.A.N.I., dos. 374, f.7 ).

The property, movable and immovable, was modest, totaling 2 oxen, a cow and a few fălci of farmland (2 fălci), 4 fălci of hay, 5 fălci of pasture, 2 fălci of forest but also 120 cuttings of vineyard, an orchard with trees, small plots of land in the Ivăneștii and Cioranu estate, in the Tutova district (D.J.A.N.I., dos. 374, f. 19).

*Mălinești Hermitage.* Here there is a church built of oak wood "simple inside", a wooden bell tower on a stone foundation with three bells, a barn of beams, all in poor condition.

Overall, there were three cells, one of which was the abbot's house with 4 rooms, another two cells outside the yard and what is a feature, two huts covered with earth, one of which had 3 rooms (D.J.A.N.I., dos. 374, f. 9).

The community here took care of raising 6 heifers, 2 calves and two cows, a total of 10 cattle, and managed part of the Gorceni estate from the Vaslui district: 4 fălci of farmland and 2 fălci of pasture, and the Bosinca estate from the Roman district: 3 fălci of farmland, 3 fălci of hay and 14 fălci of forest (D.J.A.N.I., dos. 374, f. 19).

*Porcăreți Hermitage.* Although the bell tower was built of wood, a peculiarity among the other hermitages was that the church of this settlement was built of brick. There were 6 cells, one belonging to the abbot, with 2 rooms and a "hall in the middle", a "barn" and a spacious cellar (D.J.A.N.I., dos. 374, f. 11).

The movable and immovable property was modest consisting of 2 heads of cattle, respectively 22 fălci of farmland, 15 fălci of hay and 6 fălci of forest (D.J.A.N.I., dos. 374, ff.111-112).



#### 4. The Diocese of Roman and Bacău

If for Vaslui district, the prefect who was responsible for the record of monastic property, does not provide information on the cultic heritage, in the Episcopate of Roman and Bacău this aspect is different, so that most hermitages under the legal effect of the decree of abolition, have a description of heritage cultic.

*Scânteia Hermitage.* The settlement had a wall church and a bell tower with 4 forks that housed two large and three small bells, and the annexes consisted of three houses, one of the abbey, with three rooms, porch and wooden tile roof, another served as a living room, which the third was a barn and stable, covered with reeds .

In the catagraphic situations, the cultic patrimony is highlighted, being mentioned an icon of the Mother of God dressed in silver with a crown polished with gold; a large icon in front of the Mother of God with a silver crown and hands, and "on the back" the icon of St. George with a silver crown; the icon of the "Ascension of the Lord" also clad in silver; a silver censer; a chalice and a silver disk and many garments (D.J.A.N.I., dos. 369, f. 25).

The immovable property of the hermitage consisted of 36 cells and numerous estates: the surrounding estate or the Scânteia estate with 8 fălci of farmland and 28 fălci of forest; Căpotesei estate with 2 fălci of farmland and 2 fălci of pasture; Pătesei's estate with 3 fălci farmland; ()rosesei with 10 fălci farmland and Dăbesei with unspecified surface.

*Trotușianu and St. John hermitages.* We remember the icons existing in the patrimony of these two hermitages at the time of their abolition, so that in the Trotușianu hermitage there was an icon of the Mother of God with silver crown and hands, a necklace with money and gold chain and a cross clad in silver, and in the hermitage "St. John" were inventoried two icons of the Mother of God with the Savior, with a silver crown; an icon of the Savior with a silver crown; an icon of St. John with a silver crown; an icon of St. George and another of St. Nicholas also with silver crowns (D.J.A.N.I., dos. 369, f. 24). The property of the Trotușianu hermitage was a modest one, having under administration 4 fălci of farmland, 6 farmland of hay and 7 cattle (D.J.A.N.I., dos. 369, ff. 18-20).

*Tissa Hermitage* (Bacău). It was also called Silvestri due to the property of the same name, belonging to the Doljești monastery, on which the settlement had its second church (D.J.A.N.I., dos.179, f.59).

If the movable fortune was a modest one, the immovable one included considerable tracts of land: 135 fălci of farmland, 30 fălci of hay, 50 fălci of pasture and 160 fălci of forest (D.J.A.N.I., dos. 179, f. 4) .

*Ghereasca Hermitage* (Covurlui). This settlement, dedicated to "Saint George", had 4 monks who took care of large properties: 104 fălci of farmland, 30 fălci of hay, 113 fălci of pasture and 280 fălci of forest (D.J.A.N.I., dos. 181, f. 11).

The monastic complex consisted of 17 cells, of which the house of the abbot and three other houses were composed of 4 rooms and had walls of twigs and a thatched roof. Some houses were described as "deserted" and other annexes were represented by two fountains with thatched roofs, stables and barns (D.J.A.N.I., dos. 181, f. 11).

## 5. Metropolitan of Iași

*Zagavia and Doljești monasteries*. These settlements are the only ones in the numerous series of hermitages abolished in 1860, which were in fact monasteries and which represented, one by the secular presence, the other by a dynamic activism, important centers of culture, or their abolition also meant the destruction of an ecclesiastical heritage with material and immaterial value.

*Zagavia*. Upon hearing the news of the dissolution of the monastery and the relocation of the monks to the Cosula monastery, in the first reply-address, the abbot of the Zagavia monastery requests permission, both for him and for the rest of his parents, to continue living in Zagavia until the feast of St. George next year because winter is approaching, but a short telegraphic reply is answered in a hasty tone that the other monks cannot stay there.

This dissension will deepen until the beginning of February 1861, when the abbot Veniamin will demand the compensation of a sum of 10,000 gold coins, the equivalent of the sums invested in building the church and the cells but also the debt of the Central House to the

monastery, since 1840, instead of the annual sum of 24,000 lei, only 19,000 were received by the monastery, and the debt of the monastery of 1000 gold coins had been paid by Veniamin upon entering the abbot. Even if sometimes the abbot claims that he paid this debt invoked by the authorities, when entering the abbothood, and other times, that it is in fact the money invested in the construction of the monastery, it is certain that at the time of the monastery's dissolution, the state owes at least 102,000 lei (approx. 3,300 gold coins) only from the difference accumulated in 20 years from the incomplete subsidy given from the central budget (Matei 2021, 441-450).

The annual income, based on the balance sheet for 1859, obtained by the Zagavia monastery was 24,000 lei (D.J.A.N.I., dos. 549), a gain obtained through the estates of Zberenii and Cârjoae, Cârliții (?), Parts of Todirești and the estate around the monastery.

*Doljești-Roman.* Although built in 1764, the monastic settlement soon became " *the pride of Roman County and the nest of peace and even culture of the region* " (Vasilescu 1901, 994). From the beginning of the monastic life here, many founders and believers endowed the settlement with many properties (estates) from which came the income of the monastery. With some unfortunate periods caused by less dedicated abbots under which the estates were lost, the monastery had reached an annual income of 95,596 lei in 1859 (D.J.A.N.I., dos. 549). The estates that the Doljești monastery owned at the time of their dissolution, and passed into the administration of the State are Bu(?)ulucu, Silivestrii, Cordărenii, Șipotenii and the surrounding estate (D.J.A.N.I., dos. 131, f. 6 v.).

## 6. Conclusions

The establishment of structure such as the "Commission regulating monastic fortunes" within the M.C.I.P. and well-defined tasks indicate a major interest in the secularization of monastic wealth.

The activity of this commission will be used as a justifying support both in the wider process of secularization and for the immediate actions such as decree 8570 by which numerous monastic establishments were abolished. The state thus came into possession of the entire estate of

these settlements classified as hermitages, to which were added two important monasteries in historical, cultural or material terms: Zagavia and Doljești.

This ordinance, structured on 8 articles, which can in turn constitute a distinct research topic, marks the emergence of important dissensions in the Church-State relationship, generated by the rigid and imperative actions of the State, by the attempt to monopolize the secular factor in issues of the internal life of the Church (for example, the conditioning of the entry into monasticism by the authorization of the Ministry).

Lipova, Golgota, Delenii, Mălinești, Porcăreți (Vaslui), Scânteia, Troțușianu with "St. Ioan" (Putna), Tissa (Bacău) and Ghreasca (Covurlui) represents a part of the series of hermitages that came under the legal effects of the decree, hermitages about whose material situation at the time of its abolition are known very little or nothing, and this study presents, in this sense, new catagraphic situations.

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## The Revival of the Exegetical Sermon, based on the Inspired Features of Holy Scriptures\*

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### Abstract:

*Being one of the two ways by which Divine Revelation is transmitted, the Bible holds the indisputable primacy in the life of the Church, at least according to theory. The words of God to mankind, written in different times by different authors, dealing with different themes and problems, contains entirely what our Heavenly Father has to convey to the world today (Curtaz 1993, 28-29). Noticing this antinomy, Saint Paul the Apostle conditioned the act of preaching on the study of the Scriptures (1 Timothy 4, 13; Titus 1, 9). Despite such tremendous efforts, nowadays, two millennia after his resounding conversions, we must acknowledge that the confidence of clergymen and the faithful in the authority and validity of evangelical principles is somewhat lower. The present paper aims bringing to your attention the reasoning for which the sixty nine books of the Old and the New Covenant make up together the Book of Books par excellence and for which the foundation of Orthodox sermon will always be the Holy Scriptures.*

### Keywords:

*sermon, exegetical homily, expository preaching, Holy Scriptures, Bible*

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\* This article was written under the guidance of Pr. Prof. Univ. Dr. Vasile Gordon, who gave his consent for publication.

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## **1. The features of the books of Holy Scriptures**

### *Universality*

The spread of the gospel covered the whole world. The unity of Holy Scriptures consists in the fact that the sixty-six books of the biblical canon contain a universal message of divine origin. In the sacred texts resides the Word of God addressed to the world, and not just any words made up by the human mind about the Divinity.

Although, individually examined, each scripture was written for a specific purpose, with a specific addressee, or targeting a particular community, the validity and interest of the contents of Bible in its entirety remain the same for all the , of all times, and of all places, until Parousia.

### *Unity*

The diversity of myriads of biblical forms and genres constructs a whole thanks to the singularity of the source and the unity of the message. The Redeemer's personality confers unity to the history of mankind, from the creation of Adam to the Second Coming of Christ. The recapitulative aspect of His sacrifice The recapitulation theory of the atonement expresses dogmatically the all-encompassing efficacy of the supreme sacrifice that the only sinless Man has brought for us, winning us and freeing us all from the clutches of death. Objective salvation came to the world through obedience to the death of the Lord Jesus (Philippians 2, 8), through His blood (Ephesians 1, 7). Thus, in heaven and on earth, we all may be united again in Christ (Ephesians 1, 10), according to the vocation that was granted to us during the council of the Trinity before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1, 4).

The messianic thread also ensures the continuity of the two great parts of Scriptures, the Testaments. Without being able to quote him in his words precisely, I mention here a free discussion with Archbishop Alexander Golitzin, from which I keep in mind an idea to which His Holiness almost reduced his entire theological contribution: between the New and the Old Covenant there is no distinction in their substance, but both of these Laws or periods send a unitary, organic message. The crescendo of the biblical and historical revelation of the Son of God has a natural progression, but without this evolutionary Self-disclosure being

confused with an overriding of Old Testament teaching by Christian tradition. In his position, Golitzin refused to conceive of any kind of *diastēma* [Gap, spaciality, interval (For „διάστημα”, see the works of Saint Gregory of Nysse: *Against Eunomius, Homilies on the Song of Songs, On perfection, The Life of Moses*)] or fracture between the Old and New Laws, or of any tendency of subordinating the Old Testament to the New one. Therefore, the synthesis of the Pentateuch and the prophets is not limited to the norm of retaliation only, and, on the other hand, the Gospels and Apostolic Epistles are tributary to the contribution of the chosen people, through its exponents, from Abraham to the first writer, Moses, and to the Forerunner of the Lord, the prophet John the Baptist. From Genesis to Revelation, the biblical accounts are presented in an organic continuum, as God’s words to mankind. „And every manifestation of the divine word in creation, in history, and in the final fulfillment of salvation, derives from Christ” (Feuillet 1971, 852).

#### *Inspiration*

All the positive attributes of the Bible lean against the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The universality, unity, and timelessness of the sacred texts, which we dwelled upon in this preamble, are also based on the infallibility of the Spirit, Who knows all things, Who teaches us everything, Who guides us into all truth, Who announces things to come (John 14, 26; 16, 13), and Who wants us to have life in the name of the Son (John 20, 31).

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3, 16-17).

The assistance of the blessed writers was accomplished neither by spiritual or mental possession nor by automatic dictation. The Holy Spirit works by cooperating with man, not by substitution and depersonalization. Thus, the inspired word is also a human word, subject to historical, cultural, and linguistic temporal conditions (Breck 1999, 41). Therefore, on a certain scale, inspiration is a universal phenomenon, which includes not only the authors of the books of Holy Scriptures, but

also the interpreters of sacred texts. In Orthodoxy, however, the teaching activity of the Church is reliant on apostolic succession, the doctrine formulated by the ecumenical synods and the authority of the diocesan bishop being the pillars on whom the dignity of the prophetic calling is exercised.

#### *Actuality*

The permanence or timelessness of the teachings drawn from the contents of the Old and New Covenants is based precisely on their inspired character. Because the anointed authors recorded their testimonies under the breath of the Holy Spirit, they were free from error in doctrine and they synthesized exactly those religious-moral norms by which every nation, from every age, would strengthen its charitable connection and communion with God.

From the pages of Scriptures, the Logos speaks to those born at the beginning of this millennium as relevantly and authoritatively as, from Incarnation to Ascension, He had spoken to His contemporaries with His own Mouth. The same Christ verbally communicated Himself to the prophets before the fullness of the time, the same Christ shared Himself in the collection of sacred texts, throughout our era, to all generations that preceded us.

„The Bible... is a breviary of reality” (Belu 2012, 413). The natural, vivid, and objective manner in which the authors of the sacred texts present their testimonies, provides us with an impressive collection of positive examples (to be followed), and of negative ones (to be avoided), respectively. Models of repentance are King David (2 Samuel [We are using the NKJV notation. The correspondent for the Romanian notation in this case is: 2 *Kings*] 12, 15-20; Psalm 50) or Saint Peter the Apostle (Matthew 26, 75), and counterexamples may be Cain the brother murderer (Genesis 4, 8-9), or Judas Iscariot the betrayer (Matthew 27, 3-5). Also, in this regard, life-changing models are Zacchaeus the former tax collector (Luke 19, 8-10) or Saul the former persecutor of Christians (Acts 9, 3-20), and counterexamples may be the unmerciful rich man (Luke 16, 19-23) or the murmurous thief, the one on the left of the cross of Christ (Luke 23, 39). Models of forgiveness are Joseph the Patriarch (Genesis 50:



14-22) or Stephen the archdeacon and the first martyr (Acts 7, 55-60), and counterexamples may be Simeon and Levi, the sons of Jacob and straight brothers of Dinah (Genesis 34, 7-31). Patterns of patience and meekness are Moses the prophet (Numbers 12, 3) or Job the righteous (Job 1, 20-22; 2, 7-10), and counterexamples may be the idolatrous Jezebel (1/3 Kings 18, 4; 19, 1-2; 21, 7-15) or King Herod (Matthew 2, 16-18; 14, 3-11). In the history of mankind of over six millennia, as it is captured in the sacred writings, the inspired accounts portray such varied characters that a preacher could find, during the preparation of his religious speeches, at least one example of a biblical character for every human virtue or vice that exists.

In each generation, the nature of God and the nature of man remain constant. It modifies and adapts only non-essential elements of the epidermis, and only related to people: the conditions and standard of living, the type of education received, the cultural and social context of the residential area, the technological status and degree of accessibility to the respective facilities etc. Beyond these surface fluctuations, the core of a person's being is always defined by the same psycho-physical structure and is animated by the same deep aspirations, over the centuries.

## **2. Interpretation of Holy Scriptures**

The books of Holy Scriptures do not offer a systematic exposition of Revelation, but a chronological, historical one. The reading of the Bible carries the citizen of every age through the entire journey of mankind on this earth. The language and optics of the blessed writers are distinguished by their sincerity, veracity, and their exceptional care to record reality without tampering or addition, without subjective excuses or accusations.

Through His words to man, God:

- reveals Himself;
- gives laws, commandments, or teachings;
- makes promises or announces future events.

Although close to us through the Incarnation, the Word of God remains covered by a veil within Scriptures, as if in a state of kenosis.

Therefore, guided by the Holy Spirit, the Church constantly interprets Him and, contemplating Him in the spirit of faith and unconditional obedience [Congregația pentru cler, *Directoriu general pentru cateheză* 2001, 104], „listens to Him devoutly, enshrines Him religiously, and exposes Him faithfully” (Conciliul Ecumenic Vatican II 1965, 10).

„The hermeneutic bridge between the biblical event and its actualization in the Church consists neither in the preached word nor in the ecclesiastical institution, but in the Person of the Holy Spirit” (Breck 1999, 35). The Helper has carried on the work of objective salvation of the world fulfilled in Christ, in the sense of the contribution that the Paraclete [Comferter, Consolater (gr. Παράκλητος)] has had (still has and will have) over the ages to the personal appropriation of redemption, on a subjective level, by every man, from all times and all places, up to the Parousia.

Providence’s work in the world has been conducted throughout history in the form of three concentric perspectives:

- the historical event itself;
- preaching the soteriological significance of that event, through the biblical author;
- the interpretation and updating of this preaching by the Church for each new generation (Breck 1999, 43).

From Saint John Chrysostom to modern biblical research, exegesis has been guided by the historical-critical and grammatical methodology of interpreting Holy Scriptures, in an attempt to answer questions about:

- the origin of the text (author, time and place of writing);
- the addressees of the writing;
- the purpose of the writing or its function in the life of the community;
- the original form (framing in a specific literary genre and grammatical study) (Breck 1999, 25).

The fundamental principles of the historical-critical method of interpreting the sacred text are:

- *the historical method*, which seeks to elucidate the historical processes that led to the appearance of sacred texts, taking into account at the same time the reception of those texts that address different categories of people living in different spatio-temporal circumstances;

- *the critical method*, which works with the contribution of scientific criteria, as objective as possible, from text criticism to critical study of writing, so as to make accessible to the modern reader the authentic meaning of biblical texts;

- *the analytical method*, which studies the sacred text in the same way as any other script of ancient origin and comments on it (Mircea 2015, 37).

During the Bible reading, for a Christian, the first obstacle to understanding is the act of *translation*. In a linguistic game, the *traduttore-traditore* (Baltra 2021 (contemporary attempt to harmonize the best intentions of the translator with the requirements of a faultless translation)) paronymy brings to mind the difficulty of preserving, through translation, the original meanings of a text. Every language has, on the one hand, various grammatical or structural peculiarities, and on the other, so-called „untranslatable” phrases and expressions. Along with all this, in the path of interpretation also interferes the gap of time, culture and civilization.

In Protestantism, the New Hermeneutics focuses on the function of language in understanding and interpreting divine revelation (Gibson 2005, 20, 24-25). At the same time, feeling the need for more depth, the biblical scholars of the Reformed denominations also became more and more interested in doubling the proper meaning of the scriptural phrases with a mystical, allegorical one. At the linguistic level, deconstructionism postulates that a text cannot be reduced to a single meaning or sense. Thanks to the genius of Origen, eighteen centuries ago, Christian theology already recognized all these essential subtleties. Of course, Reformed denominations seek spiritual nourishment especially in Scriptures, while

Orthodoxy enjoys the unaltered and uninterrupted worship of the Eucharist by apostolic succession.

However, out of a desire to serve the community and to reach the evangelical message as close as possible to the heart of man, Protestantism gives unallowed credit to the listener's personal experience (Radford 2005, 11-12), to the detriment of the authority of Scriptures and the Church. Thus, any common believer becomes a full agent of the act of communication and interpretation of the Word. In ignorance of ecclesiology, some Reformed pastors came to abandon the breath of the Holy Spirit to the latitude of the individual and the profane (Craddock 1976, 157; 1978, 92-95; 1985, 147-148). The title of Fred Craddock's work, *As One without Authority* (1971), says it all about moving the interpretive authority of Scripture from the institution of the Church and its representatives to members of the congregation (Allen 2011, 74), regardless of their training or level of knowledge. Leaving, therefore, too much room for manifestation of subjective opinion, there is a risk of remaining with a diluted theology, exposed to momentary impressions and even self-deception. However, there are also conservative voices in the West, in whose vision the biblical themes and approaches are chosen neither to increase the popularity of the speaker, nor to produce a sensational, amazing effect, but only starting from the sound principles of evangelical preaching, as God has always demanded of His heralds (Kaiser 1995, 6).

Even if the hermeneutics is not lead according to the taste and preferences of the audience, an act of biblical exegesis is undertaken exclusively *for the faithful* gathered inside the place of worship. The interaction between the homily and the audience will reveal or, on the contrary, obscure the correct understanding of the symbols and meanings of the selected pericope. As the Word of God was explained and applied to those who once heard it from the prophets, the Truth of Revelation and the words of eternal life must be brought to the level, understanding, and need of Christians of our time (Adams 1990, 39). Therefore, the priest will not stop at the first stage of interpretation, that of determining the meaning of an Old Testament or Apostolic writing in its original context,

but will use furthermore this knowledge to expose its current significance for the internal life of the Church, and for the Christian mission in the world.

### **3. Looking into the neighbour's yard: „the expository sermon”**

We point out from the beginning that this chapter is intended neither to promote nor to apologize for Protestant preaching. However, we consider that the right faith is wise and discerning to pick all that is good from every flower, like a Vasilian bee. We clearly state that Reformed preaching is still devoid of the liturgical and sacramental character specific to Orthodoxy. Though, this does not prevent us from paying attention to the level of excellence achieved by Western biblical scholars and the soundness of their study. Because the most prolific preacher does not allow us to ignore the danger of negligence: „Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall” (1 Corinthians 10, 12).

As the Verbal Incarnation of the Logos, the Old Testament Bible precedes His Incarnation in human body and soul by the conception from the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary. Using Holy Scriptures as the main source for ecclesiastical orations, the homilist shows that he does not preach himself. At the beginning of the third millennium, the priest does not evangelize his generation, but actualizes the Gospel of Salvation in the hearing of his contemporaries.

The priest who does not draw forth the contents of his sermons from the divine biblical spring, succeeds only in being merely a word reciter, a word that no matter how dighted would become, remains nevertheless hollow and powerless in its effect over the hearts of the hearers (Belu 2012, 412).

Professor Reverend Father Dumitru Belu appreciated that the homilist who, preaching the Gospel, does not capitalize on the resources of the sacred texts, could be likened to an artist who, ignoring natural landscapes and life with its beauties, spends the whole day only in museums and art galleries, trying to find there a subject of inspiration (Belu 2012, 412). The content and form of biblical communication must nourish all three faculties of the spirit (intellect, affectivity, and will) or the entire human consciousness.

It is called an *expository sermon* [Definition based on the cumulative considerations of PhD Associated Professor Mihai Handaric, and Stephen and David Olford, respectively (father and son, biblical scholars and Baptist pastors, founders of the International Institute for Biblical Preaching)] the ecclesiastical lecture whereby a single concept is extracted and presented to the hearing of believers from the biblical text chosen by the homilist, fully respecting the contextual, historical, grammatical, and doctrinal significance of that pericope, with the specific purpose of determining among the audience, by application, a response that would transform the lives of the listeners into the likeness of Christ (Handaric 2007, 92, 95).

Not necessarily as a critique, but at least as a pertinent observation to the expression itself, the following are to be mentioned. A homily, a sermon whatsoever, is always expositive, because it presents and explains in detail a few consecutive verses, a certain concept, or a central idea. Therefore, the syntagma „expository sermon” seems, to a certain degree, to be pleonastic. Of course, when at the center of worship is the preaching of the Word, and when the source of the Eucharistic Word is no longer the Chalice and invocation of the priest, but Scriptures, then the sermon is treated as a last treasure. Consequently, by harassing, defrocking, and anathematizing Zwingli, Luther, and any other outcasted voices of the Reform, the western church threw outside of its court all the followers of the current for moral renewal. Sadly, getting acquainted with the Bible remained the only positive outcome for Protestantism. This is why, when saying „expositional sermon”, they show the Word of the Gospel as the center of their lives, and this is why, in the Reformed churches the Word is proclaimed, not just preached. Nevertheless, the original and thereby oldest expository form of preaching dates before Christ. A typical „d’var Torah” imparted a life lesson (remark the practical character!), based on Old Testament passages, then Talmudic and Midrashic ones.

We wish to outline here just *the structure of an expository sermon*, according to the rigors of the preachers of the Reformed denominations: introduction, the sentence of the sermon, the transition sentence, main ideas, secondary ideas, conclusion (Handaric 2007, 91, 169-224).

According to the theory and practice of neo-Protestant pastors, the expository sermon is extremely technical, which could serve, for an orthodox priest, as a model of total commitment and professionalism, and also as a stimulus to intensify the work of biblical research and fulfill the vocation of messenger of the Word of God.

Among the essential elements of the expository sermon, we note:

- the detailed exposition of the chosen biblical passage;
- the selection and exposition of a single central theme/idea from the sacred text (the „sentence” of the sermon links its major divisions with one another and ensures organical unity to the body of the speech);
- the biblical foundations that we are appealing of, the main divisions, and even the secondary ideas must be selected exclusively from the content of the chosen pericope;
- the main concern of the homilist is the sending and application of *the message*;
- by *application*, the teaching conveyed focuses on the listener, for he, finding out the answers he needed, would take steps towards the renewal of his life.

In addition to the expository sermon, in the western space we find two other homiletic genres, somewhat related:

- *textual sermon*, whereby the preacher is not strictly limited to the chosen biblical passage, but is also allowed to search in other places from the books of Holy Scriptures for developing the secondary ideas of his lecture;

- *topical or subjective sermon*, whereby, although the theme is appointed based on a certain scriptural pericope, the development of the main divisions of the speech takes place independently of the source text (orthodox homiletics recognize it as a *thematic* sermon, but the second name given by Western pastors suggests that too much freedom in the choosing of the theme and in the biblical grounds used, when extended to the whole of Scriptures, risks favoring the speaker capping, the mediocrity of exposing, and discretionary tendencies in argumentation).

*Biblical commentary* (verse by verse) and *the reading* of Scriptures are not the same as the expository sermon. They both lack the homiletic

structure, the unitary exposition, the central idea around which to organize, and the application (Batson 2008, 28-29). Also, not even the *exegetical homily* obeys all the rules of writing an expository sermon, but rather seems to harmonize the textual sermon with an expository one.

Modern criticism distinguishes three dimensions of Bible-based preaching:

- *the exposition*, which enshrines the relationship between the sacred text and the preacher;

- *the communication*, which aims at the interaction between the homily and the listeners, the actual act of preaching, using the most relevant means of accurate and current sharing of the evangelical message to the faithful;

- *the application*, that captures the meeting between the sacred text and the ecclesiastical assembly (Banting 2006, 42-44).

These three stages of the homiletical process are not to be placed in opposition or in competition with each other, but, dimensioned and proportionately balanced, they configure together the preaching algorithm.

Related to the expository sermon, we distinguish two planes (dimensions), which are being vital for the effectiveness of the preaching of the Word:

- *relevance* (preacher's purpose);
- *application* (purpose of the sermon).

### **3.1. Biblical and homiletical relevance**

Being a derivative form of the Latin „relevare”, which meant „to have (to create) an effect on something”, the term „relevance” possesses conditional and relational implications. A thing is considered relevant when it produces a significant and demonstrable effect on the subject matter to which it has been related (Bekesza 2018, 10). Fulfilling the requirement of relevance during the sermon, the homilist interconnects the sender of the original Gospel message with the receivers, over the centuries.



„Relevance is the heart of preaching” (Bekesza 2018, 5). In order for his presentation to be relevant, the priest carries out while preparing the sermon a process of shaping the eternal truth (Warren 1991, 463) according to the needs of his parishioners and the realities of his time. Relating truth to life involves intertwining a particular biblical social context with the world today. Preaching „in the gap” (Bekesza 2018, 6) designates a concept according to which the priest, through his lecture, has the mission to build a stable bridge between the biblical moment evoked and contemporary culture. The mastery of the homilist consists in the meaningful filling of that temporal and civilizational void.

Relevance delimits the distance that the Word of God travels from the pages of Scriptures to the mind, heart, and deeds of the believer. This does not mean, however, that the Church is so naive to slip into the extreme of absorbing a secularized and decadent agenda. The Bible is already written, thus the moral norms contained in it do not expire, do not allow for reevaluations, do not enter into public debate like human laws do, and are not repealable. The updating of the Word is not to be confused with following the trend or a local cultural current. Therefore, relevance is a two-way street, referring both to the recipients of the Revelation and to the One who reveals Himself. The relevance of preaching is not limited to the abidance of a function of cultural adaptation, but ensures that the communication and communion between God and the peoples of the different eras is maintained. The love of Heavenly Father remains inherently relevant to the truly essential needs and aspirations of man in every age.

### **3.2. Application**

„The application of sermon is not merely an appendage to the discussion or a subordinate part of it, but it is the main thing to be done” (Broadus 1944, 210). Many homilies begin promisingly, depicting the archeology and geography of the Holy Land, exposing various biblical data, but never reaching the listeners by the appropriate accessible and practicable lessons (Lim 2007, 91). The purpose of exegesis in general and

of expository sermon in particular is precisely the application of the contents, and not the display of the speaker's knowledge.

By application we mean the transposition of the teaching received by the members of the audience into the conduct of their daily life. If the relevance describes the process of relating the truth of faith to human life, then the application follows the process of relating the life and deeds of the individual to the confessed truth. Without application, the whole sermon (including memorizing and reciting Bible verses) becomes a banal and monotonous sequence of clichés. Authentic preaching of the Gospel does not resume itself to the repetition of platitudes and impersonal imperatives, but firstly finds the herald himself moved in his heart by the power of the Cross and the Word of God (1 Corinthians 1, 18), which penetrates to the borderline between soul and spirit (Hebrews 4, 12).

In theology, the Word of God is generally referred to as „logos”. Unlike the Greek term, its Hebrew counterpart, „dabar”, appears to be less intellectualized and yet richer in meaning. Being simultaneously word and action, the word „dabar” links the verbal transmission of knowledge (teaching) to its actual accomplishment (Bişoc 2001, 25). Except for Adam, all creation was built by the Word: „For He spoke, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast.” (Psalm 32, 9). Inside the word of the Lord lies an internal dynamism, a power that manifests itself under the rule of imminence and necessity. Language and action, commandment and fulfillment, the effectiveness of the godly words is personal and bears a name above any name, Jesus Christ (Philippians 2, 9-11).

The application is carried out in compliance with the following requirements:

- to conform to biblical truth accurately;
- not to deviate from the original intention of the author and the original purpose of the text;
- be relevant both to the biblical world (of the sacred text) and to the contemporary audience;
- to materialize (itself) by providing examples and practical evidence, so that believers can „visualize” how to implement the teachings received;

- to be intellectually persuasive, emotionally inspiring, and action-driven, so that evangelical principles may flow from the pages of Scriptures and from the mouth of the priest into the life and conduct of the Christian (York and Blue 1999, 73).

„Where the application begins, there the sermon begins” (Batson 2008, 18), Charles Spurgeon postulated. In the light of its social-pastoral dimension, the sermon is a self-exit, it is oriented towards the members of the audience. What distinguishes a sermon from other forms of religious discourse is exactly the ideal it aims at: *a change of (inner) state* of the interlocutor, reflected in the correction of his future behavior [„For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also” (James 2, 26)]. The exposition of the eldest among the Apostles enlivened, created a strong impression on not less than 3000 men from the public. Eventually, however, the question automatically arose: „Men and brethren, what shall we do?” (Acts 2, 37), to which Peter had an active response: „Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins...” (Acts 2, 38) Only when it contains a calling to action can the sermon be applied, implemented, or put into practice.

#### **4. The relationship between Scripture and science: a choice between the revealed Truth and the scientific hypothesis**

During the existential crises, some of us give up on God’s Word or even on Providence. Personally, at one stage in my life, throughout my theological training, while preparing the sermon, I used to behave like this: although I wasn’t avoiding the biblical foundations, I still did not give them due priority, striving to capitalize primarily on the „scientific” argument. I underestimated the power and necessity of faith, on the one hand, and on the other, I outbid the conquests of technology and modern fields of research. It is understood, therefore, that I was placing human wisdom above divine wisdom, from which the anointed authors of the Holy Scripture’s books got inspired and thus misguided. At the moment, I am paying close attention to Pauline’s finding:

For it is written: «I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, And bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent». Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? (1 Corinthians 1, 19-20).

We rush, limiting the author of the *Pentateuch* to the science of his age. How could Moses' closeness to God, the intimacy of a mortal with „The One Who Is” (Exodus 3, 14), be assessed? On Sinai, spending forty days in total asceticism, „the gentlest man on earth” (Numbers 12, 3) was wrapped in the holiness and omniscience of the Most High. About the unspeakable state that the prophet experienced on the mountain of the Lord, Saint Gregory the Bishop of Nyssa dealt in depth in the work *On the Life of Moses* (Gregorii Nysseni 1968; Gregorius Nyssenus 2001; Sfântul Grigorie de Nyssa 1995; Sfântul Grigorie de Nyssa 2021). The testimony of those who saw him just descended from the heights, immediately after the Theophany, is enlightening:

Now it was so, when Moses came down from Mount Sinai (and the two tablets of the Testimony were in Moses' hand when he came down from the mountain), that Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone while he talked with Him. So when Aaron and all the children of Israel saw Moses, behold, the skin of his face shone, and they were afraid to come near him... And when Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil on his face... And whenever the children of Israel saw the face of Moses, that the skin of Moses' face shone, then Moses would put the veil on his face again, until he went in to speak with Him (Exodus 34, 29, 30, 33, 35).

The Maker of heaven and earth „spoke to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend” (Exodus 33, 11). How, then, are the elements of biblical cosmology or the report of the creation of the world recorded by the Lord's prophet in the pages of the *Pentateuch* received skeptically by the public, while mere hypotheses, purportedly scientific and proven interested, are received as normative and authoritative so lightly? The answer does not honor the human species: for the scarcity or total lack of faith. Even some members of the clergy, although formally declaiming the inspiration of the Holy Spirit under which the hallowed authors wrote, yet by the way they relate to the Bible vs. contemporary science paradox, it turns out that they themselves suspect either the slipping of various

incongruities in the sacred text, either the fact that modern technology outperforms the means of knowledge and information available to Moses and to the writers who followed him.

We strongly postulate that Scripture does not contradict itself and is not being contradicted from the outside, by other sources, because so far no human mind, no independent research has been able to thoroughly prove any error or major deviation from scientific truth, infiltrating the canonical biblical text. A revealed dogma of the Church, a truth of faith confirmed by the ecumenical synods is perennial and steadfast. On the other hand, in human science yesterday's certainty is obsolete today, and today's certified discovery will be refuted by tomorrow's studies or measurements.

Let's refer to some concrete data and evolutions. In 1862, physicist Glasgow William Thomson estimated the age of the Earth at a maximum of 400 million years. At the same time, to justify his theory of species evolution, biologist Charles Darwin already considered this time period insufficient. In 1911, geoscientist Arthur Holmes classified one of the rocks he had measured by radiometric dating as 1.6 billion years old. Therefore, in the second edition of *The Age of the Earth*, published in 1927, discussing geological eras, he proposed the age of 3 billion years for the planet, to later add half more. In 1956, Clair Cameron Paterson will move to the isotopic dating of the uranium lead decay chain from meteorite fragments (<https://www.meteorologiaenred.com/ro/edad-de-la-tierra.html>), finally reaching the Methuselah age of 4.55 billion years (*Age of Meteorites and the Earth*) (Patterson 1956, 230-237). Consequently, what we emend in these lines is the easiness with which each scientist, professor or researcher advances the results of his observation and experimentation work, the haste with which he revises or completely replaces the old hypothesis with the new one, someone else's thesis with his own, always with the claim of definitive precision and absolute scientific rigor.

Compared to the Earth, we are told that the Sun is 50 million years older, which for any decent biblical scholar should be a cause for concern regarding the soundness of science's claims. This is because the Book of *Genesis* (1, 14-19) clearly states that the two great luminaries were

created by God only during the fourth day of creation – nota bene! – *after* the earth had already sprouted vegetation and various seeds, during the third day. Undoubtedly, the flora did not appear thanks to the beneficent light of the Sun, but was made only by the word of the Creator, before the star of the day existed. So, our children should be taught that, according to the Holy Scriptures, the Earth is older than the Sun, not the other way around. Nevertheless, they don't even hear this in Church anymore. Therefore, biblical optics leaves no room for question: the sun is also the fruit of God's work. The sun only sustains life on earth and does not represent the primary cause of its appearance, so there is no reason to idolize it. Jewish biblical cosmology is geocentric and creationist, obviously, while the secularist perspective has remained stuck in the atheist heliocentric model.

The same stalemate would hold back our reasoning even if we were to consider establishing the distance from Earth to the Sun, which is stipulated today at almost 150 million kilometers. In the second century B.C., Iparh calculated a 7% value compared to the one that has been accepted today. We jump straight to 1761, when, taking advantage of the collinearity – once in a lifetime – of the Earth and the Sun with the planet Venus, at a certain moment of its transit, Jerome Lalande raised up the number to 153 million kilometers. What tools will a French astronomer have had at his disposal a century before the invention of the light bulb, and half a century before obtaining the continuous flow of electric power? How does the current scientific information fit with Moses' will, or with the unthinkable mysteries and knowledge that the „mouth” of the Lord announced to him? This last question I asked remains open, and the answer will be constructed by each of the readers individually, throughout life, as they advance in virtue and cognition.

However, we find it difficult to accept as emanations of truth any statements which are made in fields whose objective is, *ab initio*, the exclusion of the Creator from His creation. We believe in a Personal God, Who brought the world into existence out of nothing. The formal curricula of education are far estranged from the teachings of the Church, and – dare we say it – even from objective reality. For a long time, science has

been guided by hypotheses and mathematical formulas that were filling the blackboards, but were simultaneously ignoring the necessity for replication or verification by experiment. According to the warning of a visionary and a genius like Nicola Tesla, this is the way to project scientific theories that will have nothing to do with the sense of reality, or with the world we live in. The Czech scholar discerned, of course, between science (necessarily provable) and pseudoscience (operating on hypotheses, speculations, and values on a scale that could never be reproduced or ascertained). Thus, for fear that he may have been entirely right, we often recall Pauline's warning:

For it is written: «I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, And bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent». Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe (1 Corinthians 1, 19-21).

### **Conclusion**

The religious text could not be found anywhere in a purer and more plenteous state than in the pages of the Bible. „Scripture is... the vademecum of the preaching priest” (Belu 2012, 411), but not as a result of piety, nor on the lack of scientific training of the theology graduates. With the sacred text of the Bible as its background and source of inspiration, the exegetical homily has been the most natural means by which the priest has addressed the faithful participating in the Lord's Supper, since the first centuries. By integrating his sermon into the liturgical framework, the preacher has the opportunity to effectively guide, on a weekly basis, the spiritual course of the parish community that has been assigned to him (Vintilescu 1930, 30, 35, 85, 98).

At the end of the preparatory Confessional prayers [This set of prayers, which are pronounced by the priest before the actual confession of the sins made by the penitent, is called „molitfă” in the orthodox rite], the priest declares himself a mere witness to the confession of the penitent. The Apostles did the same when they preached: „That... which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked

upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life... we declare to you" (1 John 1, 1, 3). The orthodox preacher's appropriate standpoint regarding the proclaiming of the Gospel should be based on the attitude of Saint John the Baptist: „I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before Him... Therefore this joy of mine is fulfilled. He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3, 28-30). We can only conclude with a question: how do we look to Jesus Christ in our sermon? How does He grow from the homily we hold? Which are the sources and the contents of ideas that have spread Christianity all over the world? The outcome of the Apostles' and the Church Fathers' preaching from the richness of Holy Scriptures are well known. Our work, on the other hand, is still ongoing...

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## Religious education in the north of the European Union – approaches in the Swedish model\*

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**Abstract:**

*The Nordic countries are associated to Lutheran Churches that have had a very important role in the organization of the religion class, and in its content and finalities. Thus, when talking about Lutheran religious education it is necessary to know the fact that this has been renamed into knowledge about Christianity and perspectives on life (Lied 2009, 263), more precisely it is about learning about religion and from religion (Slotte 2016, 236). The northern states members of the European Union are historically called and defined mono-religious, which over time due to the increase in migration (Lied 2009, 263) have experienced religious diversity, pluralism and multiculturalism. These determined that the attitude would be an open one, wishes for religious activity, or more specifically said, the purpose was to cover the needs of children and during the changes, the class of religion was perceived through cultural meaning or of religious competence. This combination of factors led to religious education being renamed as Ethics.*

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**Keywords:**

*religious education, Norwegian model, Religions and Philosophies of Life, non-confessional*

**Introduction**

In order to understand the system of providing the religion class to the countries from the northern part of the European Union, it is necessary to know first of all that it has undergone changes and has been reorganized due to the socio-political agenda. The Nordic countries are associated to Lutheran Churches that have had a very important role in the organization of the religion class, and in its content and finalities. Thus, when talking about Lutheran religious education it is necessary to know the fact that this has been renamed into knowledge about Christianity and perspectives on life (Lied 2009, 263), more precisely it is about learning about religion and from religion (Slotte 2016, 236). The northern states members of the European Union are historically called and defined mono-religious, which over time due to the increase in migration (Lied 2009, 263) have experienced religious diversity, pluralism and multiculturalism. These determined that the attitude would be an open one, wishes for religious activity, or more specifically said, the purpose was to cover the needs of children and during the changes, the class of religion was perceived through cultural meaning or of religious competence. This combination of factors led to religious education being renamed as Ethics, as well (Slotte 2016, 237).

If a common point of the nordic model of Europe is given by the fact that Lutheranism is the majority, we also have a difference, such as: Sweden, Norway [Even though Norway is not a member state of the European Union, it is a model for aspects related to the presence of religion classes in the public schools of the European Union. It is for this reason that I have chosen to make some clarifications and concordance between the Norwegian model of teaching religion and the other Nordic models] and Denmark - states that have chosen the religion class to be transformed and integrated into public schools as a nondenominational class. So it is about teaching about religion and not learning from religion.

At the opposite pole is Finland, a country where the teaching of religion is done according to the confessional model, a model that includes in the school curriculum aspects related to the history of religions and notions of morals and philosophy are approached.

In the northern part of the European Union there is a system that is modeled after the precepts of the Evangelical Lutheran faith and is based on the religious affiliation of students and parents. This reality is a vulnerable point, because it is a factor that creates problems in the organization and teaching of the religion class. It is common that adherents of certain faiths do not register or declare their religious affiliation, factors that cause the vulnerability of the status of the religion class to be permanently accompanied by tensions. A viable solution to this situation is offered by organizations or associations that are concerned with the necessary steps for organizing the study of religion in public schools, while also involving parents or legal guardians of children to apply for participation in class (Slotte 2016, 242-255).

We can turn to the Norwegian model of religious education, because it is a resort and a landmark for the models of approach and for the organization and teaching of religion classes in the member states of the European Union. The Norwegian model of religious education is an adogmatic one, it is a non-confessional model. It promotes learning about other religions and not learning from religion. In Norway, the status of religion class is mandatory, from first grade to tenth grade for all students. Although the role of the Lutheran Church is recognized in Norway, the diverse cultural mosaic and the continuing dynamics of cultural and religious diversity has made the religion class called Knowledge of Christianity, Religions and Philosophies of Life (Hammer and Schanke 2018, 151).

Since 1889, religion classes have been held without the church being involved, and confirmation of students' participation in the Sacred Mysteries no longer requires it to be reported (About the years, stages and transformations that the Norwegian system of teaching religion has had see at: Lied 2009, 264-274; and Haeshaher and Sandsmark 2006, 275-278). In 1997 the name of religious education was changed to

Knowledge of Christianity, religion and philosophy about life – KRL ('Knowlwdge of Christianity, Religions and Philosophies of Life'; KRL is the Norwegian abreviation), due to some controversy sparked by parents (Lied 2009, 263), who made complaints to the Government of Norway, stating their dissatisfaction. Eight years later, in 2005 the European Court of Human Rights made changes, gave an amendment highlighting that teaching religion does not involve preaching or favoring a particular philosophy of life or religious worship. Two years later, in 2007 the same European Court states that the way religious education is done in Norway does not violate religious rights and freedoms.

Before the above was mentioned, the Government of Norway chose not to allow the class exemption, although it was required by parents on personal grounds and beliefs (Hammer and Schanke 2018, 152). In 2008 another name was adopted, that of Religion, Philosophies of life and Ethics ('Religion, Philosophies of Life and Ethics, RLE is the Norwegian abreviation). The year 2015 brought new changes following debates on religious education, the name being changed to Christianity, Religion, Philosophies of life and Ethics ('Christianity, Religion, Philosophies of Life and Ethics', KRLE is the Norwegian abreviation). For these reasons today in the Norwegian system dominates an analytical view on the teaching of religion in the sense of presenting a link between religion, science and philosophy (Hammer and Schanke 2018, 152).

The political documents about the teaching of Religion, philosophy for life and ethics classes emphasize that students are close to the approach of the class according to the model of learning about and from religion and that it gives them the opportunity to think critically and to be aware of the problems of the world to which they belong:

...schools must promote democratic values and attitudes that do not provide a discriminatory context (...) That is why all students in schools need to develop and discover knowledge about religious minorities and majorities, to be able to participate in debates and dialogues and to have peaceful relations with those who have different religious identity (Hammer and Schanke 2018, 152).

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was also signed by Norway, which refers, among other things, to the responsibility of

parents, but also to the freedom and right of the child to benefit from religious education (Hagesafer and Sandsmark 2006, 276). The way of teaching in Norway is centered on the development of secular thinking, analytical and critical thinking on issues about life that involve students to listen to and understand religion as a cultural phenomenon. This type of teaching has drawn upon itself a series of changes, that is, intercultural competences are being developed, which are actually part of the Council of Europe agenda (The Council of Europe consists of 47 member states and its mission is to focus on intercultural citizen activities and human rights, including education, see Hammer and Schanke 2018, 153-158).

### **The Swedish model**

In the member states of the European Union there is a lot of emphasis on religious freedom, religious affiliation and on belonging to a particular religious cult (Slotte 2016, 242-23).

Sweden is a Nordic country that has, like Norway, a non-confessional educational system for the study of religion, religious education being under the exclusive care of the state (Şelaru and Vâlcu s.a., 66), although we know that most of the Swedes are of Lutheran affiliation. In Sweden, religion class is mandatory for all students, precisely because it does not refer only to a certain faith, nor does it favor only certain opinions (Naeslund 2009, 227). This country is like all the others in Northern Europe, secular, moreover, it was called the most secular country in the world, joining France and the concept of secularity (Niemi 2018, 182-183). And although Lutheran Protestantism had an overwhelming role in the Swedish model of the study of religion, the Swedish model of religious education is perceived through beliefs, values and facts, through thinking split by the phenomenon of secularization that does not allow confessional elements to be presented in the classroom, so it is desired that they would be excluded and replaced by information about different religions (Niemi 2018, 183). The Swedish system becomes multireligious in just a few decades. Thus, in 2000 (Naeslund 2009, 227), when the separation of Church and State 9 The Church of Sweden can be viewed as a national church rather than a state-recognized church: Saiz *et*

*alii* 2013, 29) took place, it was one of the stages that led to the decrease of interest in everything that means faith, religious values and implicitly the religion class. As in the other Nordic European countries, the case of Norway, that of Finland and Sweden, the acceleration of migration (Naeslund 2009, 227) was a factor that led to religious diversity, to secularization, religious pluralism and especially led to the formation of a policy of pluralism.

Between 2011 and 2016 there were public debates about the Swedish context, highlighting the line between religious and secular (Niemi 2018, 183). Sweden was a traditional Protestant country, but in which Christianity was taught confessionally in Swedish schools (Niemi 2018, 184). Next I will describe some defining stages for the Swedish system of religious education. Thus, until 1882 the curriculum was formed by the historical biblical precepts, but with the passage of time there was a decrease in interest in Christianity in general and so, in 1919, 37 years later it is changed with learning about religion, About Christianity in general (Niemi 2018, 184), as in the case of Norway about which I have talked above.

In 1962, 43 years later, the main objectives were introduced, thus resembling the situation of France. The concept of laity was accepted and adopted, which refers to the total separation of the State from the Church. This stage is the main one for setting goals and outcomes in schools, in fact wanting to avoid links that would refer to a religious content (Niemi 2018, 184). Almost five decades later, in 2010, the goals for the study of religion were not only part of the schools' recommendations, but were introduced into law. For this, in 2009, a government proposal was accepted so that the teaching of religion should be done through the nondenominational model and this does not actually mean teaching "without religious content" (Niemi 2018, 184), but was recommended to be a scientific basis of the teaching act.

We can see that the study of religion becomes something more related to intellect and theory, religion is studied from the outside and not from the inside, there is a talk about several religions, there are theories that do not take into consideration the formative dimension of classroom



teaching. In fact we see that all these changes tend to describe an exclusively atheistic speech. In this sense we can offer examples by which the line between the sacred and the profane is clearly drawn. It is about a tradition in Northern Europe, which we also meet in the case of Finland, the morning meeting at church. As in the case of Finland, in Sweden there have been sensitive discussions regarding this religious tradition and not only, in addition to this, the practice of yoga in school (For more information on these situations that have sparked controversy dissatisfactions with parents and higher fora see at: Niemi 2018, 184-186).

Nowadays, the status of the religion class is passed through the filter of the vision of students, who have a hard say on various issues about faith (Naeslund 2009, 227). Similar to Finland, in Sweden, the ethics class is present in the high school students' timetable, through a local program that provides them the opportunity to have classroom activities and open debates (Naeslund 2009, 227-228). From what has been presented so far, we can see very clearly that Sweden is a secular country, dominated by neutrality in relation to religious education in public schools (Niemi 2018, 189).

The perception that religion is a constitutive of society and must be addressed within the general education system seems to discover a growing political agreement in Europe. This is due to religious plurality at European level. The Council of Europe points out the importance of the role of religion in facilitating an intercultural dialogue on "... safety and promotion of human rights, democracy and the role of law" (Council of Europe 2008, 8).

The Council mentioned above organizes meetings attended by representatives of cults with the aim of exchanging ideas regarding education, peace and Human Rights. In *The White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue*, the Council of Europe emphasizes the role of intercultural dialogue: "...It allows the prevention of ethnic, religious, linguistic and cultural division. It allows us to deal with our different identities constructively and democratically based on shared universal values". The same council demonstrates that religious education at primary and

secondary levels has a substantial contribution in understanding religions, their history and in avoiding prejudices (Klutz 2016, 24).

For more than a decade, the European Education Ministers have signaled the importance of measures in order to improve understanding between cultural or religious communities through school education, on the basis of common principles of ethics and democratic citizenship. Regardless of which religious education system dominates, education must take into account religious pluralism and cultural diversity (Klutz 2016, 24-25; Council of Europe 2008, 30-31). We note that religion is seen as a cultural act that favors intercultural dialogue between students, people living in a society that is in a permanent growth of religious pluralism.

The presence of RE in European Public Schools is a strong indicator of how Church – State and Church-School relations are built within a national framework (Willaime 2007, 57). To this are added other factors such as: demographic trends, religious affiliation of the population and the educational system (Klutz 2016, 29). In countries where national identity is closely linked to a confession (Willaime 2007, 57) (e.g. Greece – Orthodoxy, Italy – Catholicism, Denmark – Lutheranism, Finland - Lutheranism and Orthodoxy) repercussions can be observed in the way education is defined and understood, particularly religious education. In this regard, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe mentions that religious knowledge is needed in public school education (Willaime 2007, 59).

### **Conclusions**

During the research about the models of approach in religious education, I became more and more aware that it was wanted to go in the direction of religious education classes to be taught in a purely descriptive, non-confessional, ideological manner. The distinctions between the approaches and models of teaching religion are highlighted in each member state of the European Union through particular contexts. Contexts that take into account other aspects that are closely related to educational values: the relationship between religious cults and the State,

social, political, economic and cultural factors, the non-confessional model of teaching religion is also found in France, a country where education is perceived only at the level of information and does not have a religious specific. The non-denominational model and approach is also found in other member states of the European Union: Estonia, Ireland, The Netherlands, Sweden. As we have seen, the non-denominational model of organizing the religion class is supported and promoted by the state, and the curriculum, the training of teachers, the materials are made under exclusively secular tutelage. Thus the non-denominational model of teaching religion is at the opposite pole of the confessional model. The denominational or confessional model implies a Christian religious education, a model of education that centers on God, The Model and Source of holiness and moral values.

The presence of the religion class in the European education system highlights a progress both in terms of model or approach and in the fact that religion has found its perfection through the Son of God embodied out of love for men: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life". (John 3, 16).

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## Book review

Ioan Dura. 2002. *Dialog, toleranță, libertate. Configurații ale religiei în tranziția de la secularizare la pluralizare*. Cluj-Napoca: Editura Presa Universitară Clujeană, 214 p. (Ioan Dura. 2022. *Dialogue, tolerance, freedom. Configurations of religion in the transition from secularization to pluralization*. Cluj-Napoca: Cluj University Press, 214 p.)

Ioan Dura, deacon and Associated Professor at the Faculty of Theology - Ovidius University of Constanța, is well known in the academic space as a researcher by vocation, specialist in the field of the History and Philosophy of Religions, author of several works of deep analysis of philosophical and religious phenomena (Christian and non-Christian) and, last but not least, organizer and coordinator of the appreciated international conferences Religion, Knowledge, Society (RKS). The books and articles of Ioan Dura are vibrant and always in contact with the latest theoretical and experimental developments in the field of research, stylistically and thematically adapted to a national, regional and global spiritual and social context extremely diverse and volatile, which characterizes - unfortunately - the

current times, but always maintaining that rigor specific to serious topics.

The book *Dialog, toleranță, libertate. Configurații ale religiei în tranziția de la secularizare la pluralizare*, published in 2022 by the prestigious Presa Universitară Clujeană publishing house, gives the impression of an theological approach built according to the strictest criteria of scientific rigor. Despite a humble statement, very appropriate (and rare) for a professor of Theology, of distancing from the claim of exhaustiveness and positioning itself in the direction of a contribution to a deeper awareness, primarily on the part of specialists but also on the part of the general public, of the contemporary religious phenomenon, the book that I am reviewing reaches the level of analysis and clarity achieved by only a few works (for

example: Leonard Swidler, *Dialogue for Interreligious Understanding. Strategies for the Transformation of Culture-Shaping institutions*, Palgrave, Macmillan, 2014).

The themes addressed in the five chapters of the book are dedicated to the synchronous research of the contemporary religious phenomenon, configured in search of a balance, not without inherent contradictions, between globalization and identity, between pluralism and exclusivism. The author rejects the idea that globalization, despite its challenges and risks (pp. 16-17), could ultimately abolish the religious phenomenon. The apocalyptic theory of globalization is considered unfounded: "Theoretical analyses have shown that globalization is not an all-powerful, unidirectional force that levels everything in its path" (p. 15). Globalization itself is not a monolithic phenomenon, but we are dealing with alternative globalizations that determine or generate alternative social movements and consequences including religious ones (Turkish neo-Ottomanism, Taliban movement etc.).

An increasingly arithmetic pendulum of the contemporary world between secularization and desecularization is leading religion to the center status of societies: either as the perpetual enemy of radical theories or as the temptation of absolute power for political

fundamentalism. In relation to its approach, we can say that religion is experiencing a deviant form of effervescence consisting either in an extreme "consolidation" of its own fortifications (isolationism, triumphalism, formalism, cultural and spiritual unproductivity, loss of universality, etc. ), under siege of radical secularism, or in an authoritarian upheaval (reformism without form or substance, deliberate confusion between religion and secular power, political interference in the intimate space of religious life, support for militarism, etc.) designed to destabilize the democratic and peaceful foundations of society. The author, expressing his concern about the uncontrolled reactions that may come, under the conditions outlined above, towards and from the religious sphere, takes a firm stand on the line of moderation and human common sense that should govern a vigorous and fruitful spiritual life and religious manifestations: "Beyond any theological criticisms, which in my opinion are not connected to contemporary realities, a democratic policy, religiously neutral, has made it possible to relocate religion in the public sphere. Moreover, it offers possibilities for tolerance in the same spatiality through regulations and legal rules that are intended to avoid conflict" (p. 42).

The need to guarantee the fundamental right of religious freedom, understood and practiced in democratic societies in terms of both *res humani juris* and *potestas naturalis* (pp. 148-149), cannot, however, be extended to its fullest extent until it has once again reached the ancient meaning of *res Divini juris* on a universal level. Although he subtly suggests this transcendent vocation of religious freedom, the author addresses, understandably given the current context, only its quality of *jus humanis* and that of *potestas*.

It is the dynamism of religion that maintains the perpetual actuality of the teaching and the freshness of its approaches in relation to the human person, in particular, and to other religious beliefs or philosophical systems, in general: "Even religions with a traditional or conservative structure and doctrine do not belong to the past, since tradition, at least in Christianity, does not suggest something confined to the past, but a continuous application of the teaching in today's context, but also in tomorrow's context, which will be different from today one" (p. 45). Or

this healthy dynamism can be identified and characterized by the interreligious dialogue that each religion is willing to initiate and maintain regardless of the impediments and obstacles that might arise in the course of the sincere and mutual openness facilitated by the "working word" (pp. 167-173).

The author initiates a moving manifesto at the end of the work in the favor of interreligious dialogue as an antidote to extremism in general and religious fundamentalism in particular (pp. 182-188). As in a classic work, Ioan Dura, to whom the expression "un homme d'une grande finesse" can be applied without unnecessary aplomb, ends his book by leaving the reader in a pleasant tension of the mind, drawing him in by the thoroughness of his exposition and his style, thus elegantly involving him in the future editorial project, which is already to be expected.

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## Book review

Cătălin Raiu. 2021. *Libertatea religioasă între politică și politici - O analiză politică a standardelor internaționale, legislației naționale și practicii guvernamentale în pandemie*. Iași: Doxologia, 254 pag.

The beginning of 2020, marked by the much dreaded Coronavirus (COVID-19) left its mark of fear, panic, disease as well as death on us. In this context, most governments opted for physical (social) distancing, in varying degrees, by which they tried to reduce the close contact between people as much as possible and thus slow down the spread of the disease. These physical distancing measures taken by governments included quarantine, travelling restrictions, the closure of schools, churches, workplaces, stadiums, cinemas, theatres and restaurants. In Romania, on March 16, 2020, the President of Romania signed the decree regarding the establishment of the state of emergency on the territory of Romania for a duration of 30 days. The effects were immediate: closed schools, businesses, people being either sent into technical

unemployment or losing their jobs, their sources of income, etc.

In this context, in which revisiting the topic of religious freedom can never be redundant, the appearance of Professor Cătălin RAIU's *Libertatea religioasă între politică și politici - O analiză politică a standardelor internaționale, legislației naționale și practicii guvernamentale în pandemie*, published by Doxologia Publishing House, Iasi, in 2021, is salutary.

The reviewed volume includes the Foreword, a preface by Ján Figel', Special Envoy for the promotion of freedom of religion or belief outside the European Union (2016-2019), an Introduction, two consistent parts with a multitude of analysed topics and a rich scientific legislative and theological bibliography.

As the author himself claims: "This book advocates for a more democratic approach towards Freedom of Religion of Belief (FoRB) in accordance with the

European and American good practices, for the usage of international standards, commitments, recommendations and guidelines in order to apply the principles of Freedom of Religion or Belief; the joining of the Romanian Government to the International Alliance of Freedom of Religion or Belief launched by the US Department of State and which already includes almost all post-Communist countries from Europe; the establishment of the Romanian national mandate of Special Envoy for the Promotion of Freedom of Religion or Belief; the enhancing of collaboration with European institutions such as the Agency for Fundamental Rights of the European Commission and the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of OSCE which offers practical solutions for emergency situations, like the COVID-19 pandemic etc.; the advancement of the culture of Freedom of Religion or Belief in the public administration, at least on central level, starting from the minimal effort to religiously alphabetize at least the political decision makers" (p. 248).

Even if the pandemic is not eradicated, the author analyses, in Part I of the volume, the phrase "religious freedom" according to international standards and commitments, emphasizing the fact that "the government cannot suspend

Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) during war or state of emergency. However, FoRB can be limited as an exceptional measure, to re-establish order and public security or, in the case of an epidemic, only as an exceptional measure and with the fulfillment of the following terms: 1. to be provided by law; 2. to serve purposes of the political body in its entirety (protection of security, public order, health, etc.); 3. to be non-discriminatory in language and application; 4. to strictly serve the purpose and announced period (ICCPR, art. 18 et al.)" (p. 246).

In subsequent sub-chapters, the author deals with subjects such as religious freedom and political parties in times of pandemic, emphasizing that "while religious denominations assume natural gestures of social responsibility, parliamentary political parties seem to have abdicated from their essential mission, that of being transmission belts between the state and society" (p. 31). Moreover, he proposes "the introduction of a culture of religious freedom in the public administration, at least at the central level, starting from the minimal effort to religiously educate at least the decision-makers" (p. 55), thus emphasizing the illiteracy in terms of religious freedom.

The fair and moderate understanding of religious freedom is another debated topic, the author

underlining that “in a democratic political regime and based on the rule of law, state policies in matters of religious life should not be generated by an excess of church protectionism or by exacerbated secularism, but by the principle of religious freedom” (p. 56), also explaining the juridical-political principles to be followed, namely: the principle of exercising religious freedom, the principle of state neutrality, the principle of non-discrimination, the principle of the rule of law, the principle of the autonomy of cults (p. 57-59).

Professor Raiu introduces *The US Report on religious freedom, between text and context*, in which Romania is also analysed, in 22 pages and in which “it is indicated that in general, in our country we have a good level of promotion of religious freedom” (p. 77). The author also presents the OSCE report, according to which “Romania is listed among the countries that have taken the harshest measures to restrict religious freedom since the beginning of the pandemic” (p. 87), mentioning that “the freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) has several dimensions: individual, collective, institutional, educational, etc., this being acknowledged as such in the commitments of the OSCE, the UN, the EU or the US State Department. According to art. 4 (2) and 18 (2) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and art. 9 of the

European Convention on Human Rights, freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) is not derogable even during the state of emergency” (p. 87).

The state-denominations dialogue “should have followed this institutionalized dialogue framework to democratically restrict religious freedom, but the dialogue should have also generated partnership opportunities between the state and denominations, especially in social areas where the denominations naturally get involved, according to the tradition and vocation of each individual: social assistance to those affected by the pandemic in terms of access to food, minimal socialization or even medical services, validation of doctors’ recommendations by co-opting local religious leaders as communicators at parish/community level. In a social context in which the fear of illness and death also requires emotional protection measures, in partnership with the state, the denominations would have provided much more effectively the dose of optimism and tranquillity we need when facing the pandemic” (p. 138).

Governmental intervention in the management of the pandemic consisted in a series of clumsy actions, through “restrictions camouflaged in recommendations stated as rules (sic!), transmitted abruptly and dryly through press releases and dubious

documents, without any presence on TV or in social media” (p. 139).

In the legal and theological sense, the phrase “the right to freedom of religious belief” refers to the manifestation of faith in a communal, therefore collective, and institutionalized manner, in this case within the Romanian Orthodox Church. The state legislative framework that regulates the relationship between the state and the denominations in Romania includes the *Constitution of Romania* and *Law no. 489/2006 regarding religious freedom and the general regime of denominations* while church legislation includes *The Statute for the Organization and Functioning of the Romanian Orthodox Church* and its implementing *Regulations*. Given the pandemic context and regulations, following endless efforts on the part of the Romanian Patriarchate, *The Agreement of the Romanian Patriarchate and the Ministry of Internal Affairs in the State of Emergency* was finally issued, an agreement which regulated strictly the service on the night of the Resurrection. Let us only briefly remark that the churches were fenced all this time during the pandemic while the markets, for example, could be attended, with more or less drastic preventive measures.

Moreover, Romania is the only state that issued liturgical

recommendations. Thus, the use of the spoon during the ritual of the Holy Eucharist raised a fierce public debate. In the Byzantine rite, it is used for the administration of the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist. There was pressure for the Romanian Orthodox Church to give up the traditional way of administering Holy Communion and to adopt other ways such as the disposable spoon which is then burned, etc. This aspect strengthens professor Raiu’s argument, namely that “this was not done for theological reasons, but due to the lack of democratic culture”, the Church being seen as “a mere provider of ceremonial public services” (p. 246).

The interference of the Romanian authorities in the sphere of religious freedom occurred both during the state of emergency, through the content of Military Ordinances no. 1 (art. 2) and no. 2 (art. 9), which regulated the suspension of all religious activities, carried out in closed spaces, giving only the possibility of officiating liturgical rituals without the participation of the public, and liturgical/religious acts of a private nature (baptism, weddings, funerals), at which a maximum of 8 people could participate, as well as during the state of alert, Order no. 875/80/2020 for the approval of the rules regarding access to places of worship, the minimum safety distance and specific sanitary measures for the

conduct of religious activities, measures that strictly concern denominations. Also, in the case of the pilgrimage in Iași, the authorities issued additional measures that exceeded the legal framework, with negative effects on the social, legal and spiritual level (pp. 119-124).

The author concludes that “in the case of Romania, the executive decisions of the pandemic period have been ideologically inconsistent: there were, on one side, highly conservative gestures showing that the state wanted to be a super-warden of tradition. On the other side, the state denounced with Marxist rage the liturgical gestures considered all together dangerous to the health of the population, forgetting that religious manifestations are direct expressions of the private conscience and that they can only be restricted similarly with non-religious ones. The decisions were not made based on the “rule of law”, which is the base of standards and international legislation compatible with democracy, but on the “rule by law”, based on some made up ideological ad-hoc frustrations, pro or against the Church and indifferent to the demands of religious freedom and democracy” (p. 247).

Part II, called *Religion and politics*, constitutes a miscellany in which civil society, religious life and the democratic and constitutional regime

based on the supremacy of law are x-rayed (rule OF law, not rule BY law).

As the author informs us in the introduction, “the volume is about state and democracy, not about the Church and theology, about democratic not theological demands... It is rather about the state and the Church, than about the Church and the state”. Furthermore, “the volume does not deal with the restrictions in Romania compared to those in other states. Precisely for this reason, the comparisons that appear in the volume do not refer to the measures taken by different states during the pandemic regarding religious freedom, but to the manner of taking, implementing and communicating the measures. It is not necessarily about what measures were taken, but about the manner in which they were taken and communicated. The book does not discuss individuals, but rather attitudes, mentalities and especially pathologies of Romanian democracy from a political-administrative perspective” (p. 16).

We welcome the appearance of this remarkable work, which highlights the compatibility between democracy and religious faith. The relations between the state and denominations established by law, especially during the pandemic period, require the conjugation of efforts to overcome this difficult period, each in the perspective of its goal, the state

through its means to seek physical healing with the help of medical personnel and the health system and thus to fulfill its purpose, the wellbeing of the citizen, and the Church to fulfill its pastoral, spiritual-cultural, educational and social-philanthropic mission for soul healing, and the

ultimate goal, the salvation of the faithful.

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