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Holiness and Wisdom

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Le rapport entre sagesse et piété dans *l'Euthyphron* de Platon

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Abstract: In this paper, we examine the relation between the notions of wisdom and holiness on the basis of Plato's *Euthyphro*. In their attempts to define holiness, both interlocutors, Socrates and Euthyphro, demonstrate the existence of two different modes of thought, which reveals a kind of opposition between the philosophical perspective and the perspective of traditional theology. The analysis of key moments of the dialogue shows that real wisdom can only be a philosophical wisdom that is able to develop a philosophical conception of holiness. According to Socrates, this conception rests upon two pillars: a notion of virtue related to true knowledge, and a notion of the divine without any anthropomorphism. On the contrary, the alleged theological wisdom of Euthyphro, which refers to the religion of the Greeks, is nothing but a pseudo-wisdom that relies on the authority of the tradition and hence generates the dependence of both virtue and holiness on the anthropomorphic conceptions of the divine.

Keywords: wisdom, holiness, the divine, virtue, dialectic, Socrates, Euthyphro

1. Introduction

L'*Euthyphron* est un dialogue platonicien hors du commun. Il est un texte assez court, mais son contenu est extrêmement riche. Il compte parmi les premiers dialogues écrits par Platon, les dialogues dits « socratiques », dans lesquelles Socrate discute avec ses interlocuteurs sur la définition d'une notion donnée. Dans le cas de l'*Euthyphron*, le thème principal est la piété. Socrate interroge le devin Euthyphron sur la nature de la piété (ὁσιότης) : Qu'est-ce que le pieux (τὸ ὅσιον) ?[1] Mais derrière la recherche de la définition de cette notion se cachent bien d'autres thématiques qui touchent plusieurs sous-disciplines de la philosophie. Ceci concerne aussi bien les aspects théoriques de la logique, la métaphysique, l'épistémologie,

[1] Les mots grecs εὐσέβεια et εὐσεβής correspondent aussi à « piété » et « pieux ».

etc., que la sphère de la philosophie de la religion avec ses questions complexes se rapportant à la nature du divin, au statut de la théologie, etc. La philosophie morale est également au centre des préoccupations de l'*Euthyphron*, puisque les problématiques reliées à la vertu, à la justice et au bonheur sont présentes tout au long du dialogue.

Un autre aspect fait que l'*Euthyphron* est un dialogue bien particulier. Il s'agit de sa relation au procès de Socrate au bout duquel ce dernier fut condamné à mort. Avec le *Criton*, le *Phédon*, et l'*Apologie*, notre dialogue fait partie d'une tétralogie qui a pour thème commun le célèbre procès de Socrate.[2] C'est dans le cadre de ce procès que se divulgue la sagesse socratique dans ses traits les plus concrets. En effet, l'attitude de Socrates vis-à-vis des accusateurs, des juges, et mêmes des amis et disciples fait preuve d'une fidélité à la recherche de la vérité et un amour de la sagesse qui est propre à la philosophie. Socrate, que nous considérons ici comme étant le Socrate des dialogues platoniciens,[3] est un représentant idéal de ce que nous appelons la sagesse du philosophe ou sagesse philosophique.

En tenant compte de tous ces points de départ, nous pouvons dire que l'*Euthyphron* n'est pas seulement le *locus classicus* pour le thème de la piété dans l'œuvre de Platon, mais aussi le milieu favorable pour étudier le rapport de la piété à la notion de sagesse, notamment comme cette dernière se présente à travers le discours socratique. Au premier abord, il semble que les deux personnages du dialogue correspondraient aux deux éléments mis en rapport : Socrate est le philosophe, ami de la sagesse, et Euthyphron est le religieux qui incarne la piété. Néanmoins, il ne faut pas se précipiter – sans effectuer une analyse rigoureuse – vers l'exclusion préalable des hypothèses d'un certain type de sagesse (religieuse ou autre) chez Euthyphron et d'une certaine conception de la piété chez Socrate. Cela dit, l'examen du rapport entre sagesse et piété dans l'*Euthyphron* passe nécessairement par la détermination des différentes conceptions de sagesse et de piété adoptées par les deux interlocuteurs.

Avant d'entamer notre analyse, il s'avère utile de préciser que nous adoptons les deux postulats suivant comme cadres généraux qui escortent nos interprétations de l'*Euthyphron*. Le premier prévoit que le dialogue est un dialogue entre philosophie et théologie. Nous partons de la prémisse que Socrate est le représentant d'un point de vue philosophique et que la position d'Euthyphron peut être qualifiée de théologique au sens étymologique du mot : ici *théo-logie* se réfère à une connaissance des dieux qu'Euthyphron

[2] Romano Guardini, *Der Tod des Sokrates, Eine Interpretation der platonischen Schriften Euthyphron, Apologie, Kriton und Phaidon*. Dritte erweiterte Auflage. (Godesberg : Verlag Helmut Küpper, 1947).

[3] Pour une analyse des aspects complexes de la distinction entre le Socrate historique et le Socrate de Platon, voir : Vasco de Magalhães-Vilhena, *Le problème de Socrate. Le Socrate historique et le Socrate de Platon.* (Paris : Presse Universitaire de France, 1952).

prétend de lui-même.[4] En relation directe avec cette détermination, le deuxième postulat concerne le profil d'Euthyphron et la question s'il est ou non un représentant d'une certaine « orthodoxie athénienne », c'est-à-dire de la position générale défendue par les authorités officielles. Dans la littérature, ce problème a fait couler beaucoup d'encre et on trouve plusieurs arguments aussi bien *pour* que *contre* la thèse de l'orthodoxie d'Euthyphron.[5] Par exemple Croiset, dans l'introduction de sa traduction du dialogue, qualifie Euthyphron de « docteur en théologie traditionnelle »,[6] alors que Burnet le décrit comme « sectarian of some kind ».[7] Sans aborder les rouages de cette controverse, nous maintiendrons, durant notre lecture du dialogue, la constellation de base opposant le théologien Euthyphron, en tant que porte-parole de la théologie athénienne traditionnelle, au philosophe Socrate, qui représente le point de vue philosophique par excellence.

À la suite de cette introduction, et afin de compléter la préparation du terrain pour l'examen des rapports entre sagesse et piété dans l'*Euthyphron*, une dernière tâche reste à accomplir. Il s'agit de fournir une esquisse rapide du cadre dramaturgique composé par Platon. La rencontre entre Socrate et Euthyphron a lieu devant l'Archonte-roi, une institution dont le rôle consiste – entre autres – « à veiller aux procès liés aux crimes de sang et à administrer les cultes traditionnelles de la cité ».[8] Socrate est accusé d'impiété, de corruption de la jeunesse, de non-croyance aux dieux de la cité et d'invention de nouveaux dieux.[9] Quant à Euthyphron, il porte plainte contre son propre père dans le cadre d'une affaire assez étrange. Un ouvrier d'Euthyphron, en état d'ivresse, a tué un esclave du père. Celui-ci a ligoté le meurtrier avant de le jeter dans une fosse et envoyer un messager à Athènes pour consultation juridique (et religieuse). En attendant le retour du messager, il a oublié le prisonnier qui a ainsi trouvé la mort à cause du froid, de la faim et des chaînes.[10] Socrate s'étonne que quelqu'un comme Euthyphron, qui est un devin (μάντης), connaisseur et pratiquant de la religion des Grecs,[11] poursuit son propre père en justice et agit ainsi contre

[4] Cf. *Euthyphron* (5a), (6c), (9b).

[5] Pour une analyse détaillée de ce débat voir : Louis-André Dorion, *Lachès, Euthyphron*. Traduction et édition. (Paris : Flammarion, 2023), 179-185.

[6] Maurice Croiset, *Platon. Œuvres complètes, Tome I. Introduction – Hippias Mineur – Alcibiade – Apologie de Socrate – Euthyphron – Criton.* Texte établi et traduit. Deuxième Tirage. (Paris : Société d'éditions « Les Belles Lettres », 1970), 179.

[7] John Burnet, *Plato's Euthyphro, Apology of Socrates, and Crito.* Edited with Notes. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924), 5.

[8] Alexandra Bartzoka, « L'archonte-roi: une particularité athénienne ». *Ktèma : civilisations de l'Orient, de la Grèce et de Rome antiques*, no. 40, La Royauté dans la Grèce antique (2015), 161.

[9] Cf. *Apologie* (18b-c), (19b-c) et (23c-d).

[10] Cf. *Euthyphron* (4c-d)

[11] Notons ici que les anciens Grecs n'avaient pas de mot équivalent à ce que nous appelons « religion ». Cependant, nous utilisons le terme « religion des Grecs » pour désigner l'ensemble des phénomènes qui se rapportent aux relations des Grecs avec le sacré (cultes, dogmes,

le principe religieux de la piété filiale. Euthyphron répond que ce jugement montre à quel point les gens méconnaissent la nature véritable de la piété, contrairement à lui en tant qu'expert dans les choses divines. Socrate lui demande alors de lui enseigner ce que signifie le pieux et l'impie, car ceci lui serait très utile pour son propre procès. De cette manière commence une riche discussion à la recherche de la vraie définition de la piété, dans laquelle se manifestent les mouvements d'un rapport complexe entre la sagesse et la piété. Ce rapport qui gravite autour des conceptions du divin de la vertu met la sagesse du philosophe face aux propos d'un Euthyphron qui croit savoir ce qu'est la piété puisqu'elle réside au cœur du religieux, son domaine d'expertise.

2. Les définitions de la piété

La discussion entre le philosophe Socrate et le théologien Euthyphron révèle leurs positions respectives sur de nombreux sujets se rapportant au thème principal de la piété. À présent, nous allons brièvement présenter les moments clés de cette discussion, dans laquelle différentes suggestions ont été examinées et réfutées. Le but de cette présentation est de donner un aperçu sur les thèmes qui furent abordés au cours de la conversation. À partir de ces thèmes nous pourrions relever les caractéristiques de chacun des modes de pensée des deux interlocuteurs et ainsi déterminer la relation de celles-ci avec les conceptions correspondantes de la piété.

(T1) : La première tentative (5d – 6e) : la piété est la poursuite du malfaiteur

Pour justifier sa décision de poursuivre son propre père en justice, et pour apporter la preuve que cette décision est l'incarnation même de la piété, Euthyphron donne un argument (ou un indice (τεκμήριον)) qu'il qualifie de puissant (μέγα), cf. (5e) : c'est une contradiction flagrante que de trouver la décision d'Euthyphron impie et en même temps honorer Zeus « comme le meilleur et le plus juste des dieux », alors qu'il a lui aussi ligoté et puni son père Cronos.[12] Ici, Euthyphron se base sur l'autorité des anciens mythes grecs et affirme que son comportement est analogue à celui de Zeus. C'est la raison pour laquelle il donne la définition suivante : « j'affirme que le pieux consiste précisément en ce que je suis en train de faire, c'est-à-dire poursuivre celui qui est coupable d'un crime, qu'il s'agit d'un meurtre,

traditions, comportements, etc.). La caractéristique principale de la religion des Grecs est qu'il n'y a pas de séparation entre le politique, le social et le religieux : tous ces aspects se confondent dans l'unité de la religion officielle grecque qui – selon l'expression de Crahay – « groupe indissolublement trois termes : les hommes, les dieux, l'État ». Cf. Roland Crahay, *La religion des Grecs*, (Bruxelles : Éditions Complexe, 1991), 71f.

[12] Cf. Hesiode, *Théogonie* (403-506), Notons que, dans un autre contexte, Cronos a fait lui aussi usage d'une extrême violence contre son père Ouranos.

d'un vol perpétré dans un temple ou de tout autre méfait de ce genre ».[13] Cette suggestion centrée sur le « je » attire l'attention sur l'hypothèse d'une influence *sophiste* sur le mode de pensée du théologien qui se considère soi-même comme mesure de la piété, et ce en se rappelant de la fameuse formule de Protagoras : « l'homme est la mesure de toute chose ».[14]

La réponse de Socrate est d'une importance particulière. Non seulement il rappelle qu'il ne demande pas des exemples de choses pieuses, mais – en précisant l'objet de son interrogation sur le pieux et l'impie – donne ce qui peut être considéré comme l'acte de naissance de la théorie des Formes chez Platon.[15] En effet, il veut trouver « cette forme elle-même (*ekeino auto to eidos*), par le fait de laquelle toutes les choses qui sont pieuses, le sont ».[16]

(T2) : La deuxième tentative (6e – 11e) : le pieux est l'aimé des dieux

Dans le cadre du deuxième essai pour définir la piété, Euthyphron propose la définition suivante : « ce qui est cher aux dieux est pieux, alors que ce qui ne leur est pas cher est impie ».[17] Socrate montre par une série d'illustrations, en évoquant les préférences contradictoires des dieux Zeus, Cronos, Ouranos, Héphaïstos et Héra, que ce qui est aimé par un dieu pourrait bien être détesté par un autre. On passe alors d'une première version (T2), dans laquelle le pieux est l'aimée des dieux, à une deuxième version (T2*) où on insiste que le pieux soit aimé par *tous* les dieux, (cf. 9e). À ce stade Socrate introduit le fameux dilemme dit *dilemme d'Euthyphron*, en posant la question suivante : « est-ce que le pieux est aimé par les dieux parce qu'il est pieux, ou est-ce parce qu'il est aimé d'eux qu'il est pieux ? ».[18] Euthyphron ne saisit pas tout de suite le sens de l'énoncé et Socrate se met à lui expliquer le problème par le moyen d'une démarche pleine de subtilités logiques et méthodologiques. Le résultat et le constat que le pieux et l'aimée des dieux ne peuvent pas être identiques. D'où l'échec de la deuxième tentative de définition. Cet échec est suivi d'un interlude remarquable (11b-e) dans lequel le personnage mythologique de Dédale est mentionné. Les paroles des deux interlocuteurs sont comme les produits de ce sculpteur légendaire ; ils ne restent pas stables et se mettent sans cesse en mouvement.

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[13] *Euthyphron* (5d) : λέγω τοίνυν ὅτι τὸ μὲν ὅσιόν ἐστιν ὅπερ ἐγὼ νῦν ποιῶ, τῷ ἀδικοῦντι ἢ περὶ φόνους ἢ περὶ ἱερῶν κλοπὰς ἤ τι ἄλλο τῶν τοιούτων ἐξαμαρτάνοντι ἐπεξιέναι (trad. Dorion).

[14] Cf. *Théétète* (152a).

[15] Nous reviendrons sur ce point dans la section 5.

[16] *Euthyphron* (6d) : ἐκεῖνο αὐτὸ τὸ εἶδος ᾧ πάντα τὰ ὅσια ὅσιά ἐστιν (trad. Chateau).

[17] *Euthyphron* (6e-7a) : ἔστι τοίνυν τὸ μὲν τοῖς θεοῖς προσφιλὲς ὅσιον, τὸ δὲ μὴ προσφιλὲς ἀνόσιον (trad. Dorion).

[18] *Euthyphron* (10a) : ἐννόησον γὰρ τὸ τοιόνδε· ἆρα τὸ ὅσιον ὅτι ὅσιόν ἐστιν φιλεῖται ὑπὸ τῶν θεῶν, ἢ ὅτι φιλεῖται ὅσιόν ἐστιν; (trad. Dorion)

(T3) : La troisième tentative (11e – 14b) : la piété est le juste traitement des dieux

Socrate propose une nouvelle piste pour appréhender la complexité de la question. Il aborde le rapport – particulièrement important comme nous allons voir – entre justice et piété par le billet de la question suivante : « tout ce qui est juste est-il aussi pieux ? Ou bien le pieux est-il tout entier juste, alors que le juste n'est pas tout entier pieux, étant en partie pieux, et en partie autre chose ? »[19] Euthyphron suggère alors que « la partie du juste qui est religieuse et pieuse, c'est celle qui concerne le soin des dieux, tandis que celle qui a trait au soin des hommes constitue la partie restante du juste ».[20] Le concept de « soin » (θεραπεία) se laisse interpréter de deux manières. La première lui donne un sens comparable à la situation de prendre soin des animaux et la deuxième le conçoit comme analogue au soin prodigué par les esclaves à leurs maîtres. Comme le premier cas sous-entend que les dieux tireraient profit d'un soin qui va les améliorer, et que ceci n'est pas compatible avec leur perfection, l'option fut rapidement exclue. Quant au deuxième sens – le soin en tant que service (ὑπηρετική) – son examen pousse Socrate à poser une question cruciale : « quelle est cette œuvre [ἔργον] magnifique que les dieux accomplissent en ayant recours à nous comme serviteurs ? »[21] À ce stade, Euthyphron n'était pas en mesure de fournir une réponse satisfaisante et il a préféré se réfugier dans un nouvel essai de définition de la piété.

(T4) : La quatrième tentative (14b – 15c) : la piété est un commerce avec les dieux

La dernière tentative commence par une nouvelle suggestion d'Euthyphron, dans laquelle il mentionne les prières et les sacrifices comme critères de la piété (cf. 14b). En analysant le contenu de cette proposition, Socrate note que la prière, en tant que demande, et le sacrifice, en tant que don, sont les éléments d'une espèce de troc ou de commerce (ἐμπορικὴ) avec les dieux : il arrive alors à la conclusion, approuvée par Euthyphron, que « la piété serait une technique commerciale d'échange entre les dieux et les hommes ».[22] Mais les dons que les dieux vont recevoir des hommes ne sont que les choses que les dieux trouvent agréables (κεχαρισμένον (14b), χάρις (15a)).

[19] *Euthyphron* (11e-12a) : ἆρ᾽ οὖν καὶ πᾶν τὸ δίκαιον ὅσιον; ἢ τὸ μὲν ὅσιον πᾶν δίκαιον, τὸ δὲ δίκαιον οὐ πᾶν ὅσιον, ἀλλὰ τὸ μὲν αὐτοῦ ὅσιον, τὸ δέ τι καὶ ἄλλο; (trad. Dorion)

[20] *Euthyphron* (12e) : τὸ μέρος τοῦ δικαίου εἶναι εὐσεβές τε καὶ ὅσιον, τὸ περὶ τὴν τῶν θεῶν θεραπείαν, τὸ δὲ περὶ τὴν τῶν ἀνθρώπων τὸ λοιπὸν εἶναι τοῦ δικαίου μέρος. (trad. Dorion)

[21] *Euthyphron* (13e) : τί ποτέ ἐστιν ἐκεῖνο τὸ πάγκαλον ἔργον ὃ οἱ θεοὶ ἀπεργάζονται ἡμῖν ὑπηρέταις χρώμενοι; (trad. Dorion)

[22] *Euthyphron* (14e) : ἐμπορικὴ ἄρα τις ἂν εἴη, ὦ Εὐθύφρων, τέχνη ἡ ὁσιότης θεοῖς καὶ ἀνθρώποις παρ᾽ ἀλλήλων. (trad. Chateau)

Le pas entre « agréable pour les dieux » et « aimé des dieux » étant facile à franchir, on arrive alors au constat que le pieux est effectivement ce qui est aimé des dieux. Or ce résultat discuté lors de la deuxième tentative (T2) a été déjà réfuté ; il faut donc recommencer l'investigation qui tourne en rond sans pouvoir achever son but. Euthyphron abandonne la conversation et ainsi se confirme le caractère aporétique du dialogue.

Les quatre tentatives de définition de la piété abordent plusieurs thématiques et touchent à des problèmes variés dont notre bref résumé ne peut exposer tous les détails. Cependant, ayant à l'esprit l'objectif de déterminer le rapport entre sagesse et piété dans l'*Euthyphron*, il s'avère approprié de se focaliser sur un thème central, à savoir le thème des conceptions du divin chez les deux interlocuteurs. Comment Socrate et Euthyphron conçoivent-ils les dieux ?

3. Les conceptions du divin et la question de « l'assimilation au dieu »

La recherche de la définition adéquate de la piété, comme thème principal du dialogue *Euthyphron*, est directement liée à la conception du divin adoptée par chacun des interlocuteurs et révélée à travers leurs propos respectifs. Nous soutenons dans ce qui suit que l'opposition entre les profils du philosophe et du théologien se manifeste comme une confrontation entre deux manières différentes de concevoir le divin. Pour défendre cette thèse, nous proposons de recourir au motif de « l'assimilation au dieu » dont la présence est significative non seulement dans l'œuvre de Platon, mais dans toute la pensée antique.[23]

Dans le cas de Socrate, nous avons un premier indice dès (3b) : Euthyphron mentionne le δαιμόνιον ou le signal divin admis par Socrate et le considère comme explication possible de l'accusation que ce dernier est innovateur en matière religieuse. Mais le δαιμόνιον n'est pas le dieu de Socrate[24] et le philosophe ne déclare pas qu'il est un ἄθεος vis-à-vis des dieux de la Cité. La position de Socrate, telle qu'elle est exprimée dans l'*Euthyphron*, concerne en premier lieu son refus des récits sur les dieux

[23] Pour une analyse de cette doctrine chez Platon et Aristote voir : David Sedley, "Becoming Godlike". In *The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Ethics*. Edited by Christopher Bobonich (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 319-337.

[24] Le statut du *daimonion* de Socrate est un objet de longues controverses. Pour un aperçu des débats contemporains on peut consulter Thomas Brickhouse et Nicholas Smith, "Socrates' Daimonion and Rationality". In *Apeiron* 38, no. 2 (2005), 43-62. Concernant les sources anciennes, notons que « les philosophes médioplatoniciens, Plutarque de Chéronée dans *Le démon de Socrate* et Apulée de Madaure, *Sur le Dieu de Socrate*, accentuèrent la dimension spirituelle du fameux démon (*daimôn, genius*), optant pour la thèse d'une voix intérieure, la conscience, en la liant aux spéculations cosmologiques qui constituaient un enjeu majeur pour l'époque », Baudouin Decharneux, *Socrate l'Athénien ou l'invention du religieux* (Bruxelles : Académie royale de Belgique, 2016), 104.

qui décrivent les violences, les querelles et les injustices, et par conséquent ne correspondent pas au statut et au caractère divin (cf. 6a). En effet, concernant ce point, la position de Socrate s'oppose diamétralement à celle du théologien Euthyphron qui croit fermement et littéralement aux récits transmis par les poètes Homère et Hésiode. Le théologien « assume une compétence singulière dans le domaine de la mythologie ; il croit à la vérité des mythes, qui constituent, dans sa vision, une permanente source d'inspiration dans la vie quotidienne ».[25] Euthyphron exprime sa croyance aveugle aux dieux olympiens en se référant à Zeus et son action contre son père Cronos (cf. (T1)). Il voit dans son imitation de cette action, dans son assimilation à Zeus, l'essence même de la piété. La conception euthyphronienne de la piété découle de son adoption de la conception traditionnelle des dieux olympiens, telle qu'elle est admise par tous les adeptes de la religion des Grecs. Il s'agit d'une conception anthropomorphiste du divin, selon laquelle : « l'être sacré peut acquérir une véritable individualité, avoir un nom, une personnalité, une volonté ».[26] À partir de la déclaration de Socrate qu'il n'accepte pas les histoires, pleines de brutalité, racontées sur les dieux (que Zeus a ligoté Cronos, que Cronos a châtré Ouranos, etc.), nous pouvons détecter le refus de l'anthropomorphisme comme trait essentiel de sa conception du divin.

Le motif de l'assimilation au dieu n'est pas explicitement mentionné dans l'*Euthyphron*, mais il joue un rôle décisif dans l'élaboration de son contenu. L'idée de devenir semblable au divin, de ressembler au dieu, est exprimée de la manière la plus directe dans le *Théétète* (176b) à travers la formule suivante : « l'assimilation au dieu autant que possible ; et l'assimilation consiste à devenir juste et pieux avec le concours de l'intelligence ».[27] Dans ce passage Socrate associe la piété avec la sagesse d'une façon remarquable. Tout d'abord, remarquons le rôle primordial que joue ici la justice en étant combinée avec la piété pour former la condition nécessaire pour s'assimiler au dieu. Rappelons à ce propos que dans les dialogues de Platon, les deux notions de justice et de piété sont très fréquemment citées ensemble.[28] La deuxième remarque qui s'impose en lisant la formule du *Théétète* se rapporte à l'expression « avec le concours de l'intelligence [φρόνησις] ». Le mot grec de *phronesis* est parfois traduit

[25] Dan Solcan, *La piété chez Platon. Une lecture conjuguée de l'*Euthyphron *et de l'Apologie de Socrate* (Paris : L'Harmattan, 2009), 43.

[26] Roland Crahay, *La religion des Grecs*, 64.

[27] ὁμοίωσις θεῷ κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν· ὁμοίωσις δὲ δίκαιον καὶ ὅσιον μετὰ φρονήσεως γενέσθαι

[28] Djibril Samb, *Commentaire de l'*Euthyphron *de Platon* (Paris : L'Harmattan, 2016), 285f. : « La Justice et la Piété sont presque toujours citées ensemble dans les dialogues. Certains les citent l'une à côté de l'autre sans définir la nature la nature de leur relation : le *Lachès* [199d8], le *Criton* [54b7-8], le *Protagoras* [349b1-2], le *Politique* [301d2], le *Théétète* [176b2], les *Lois* [XII 959c1] et la *République* [X 615b8]. Quant au *Gorgias* [507a10-b3], il reprend de façon particulièrement nette la proposition de *l'Euthyphron* ».

par *sagesse pratique* (ou par *prudence* dans les contextes aristotéliciens). L'ajout de cette intelligence ou sagesse pourrait se lire de deux manières. La première envisagerait qu'à l'union formée par le couple justice et piété on va ajouter la condition de la *phronesis*, c'est-à-dire qu'on doit combiner la justice avec la piété en ayant recours à une certaine sagesse. La deuxième possibilité de lecture rassemble les termes piété et *phronesis* pour constituer une forme spécifique de vertu à quoi s'ajouterait la justice. Cette forme, la piété avec intelligence, serait alors ce qu'on pourrait appeler une *piété philosophique*.[29] Comme l'illustre cette suggestion, les interprètes ont beaucoup spéculé sur le vrai sens de cette formule platonicienne, qui dans le *Théétète* décrit l'assimilation au dieu. On trouve par exemple les interprétations centrées sur la thèse que seul le dieu pourrait incarner une mesure adéquate de la juste.[30] Cette thèse présuppose d'un côté l'image d'un dieu parfaitement juste et d'un autre côté la nécessité de se référer au divin pour réaliser la justice. Or, si la mesure ou le critère de la justice, et de la vertu en général, est dépendant d'un concept anthropomorphe du divin, et que les seules sources pour connaître ce concept sont la mythologie et les narrations des poètes, alors nous nous trouvons face à une mesure arbitraire qui fluctuerait selon les exégèses des récits.

En revanche, dans une perspective philosophique la raison soumettrait tous les concepts à l'examen critique et n'hésiterait pas à dévier des itinéraires tracés par la tradition pour assurer le développement de nouveaux concepts. C'est dans ce sens que la doctrine de l'assimilation au dieu est susceptible de subir une transformation radicale avec l'intervention d'un Socrate qui remet en question les opinions des Grecs sur le divin et les vertus. Pour donner un exemple des mécanismes de cette transformation rappelons-nous que la cause de l'échec de la définition (T2) était que le pieux et l'aimé des dieux (*theophilès*) ne peuvent pas être identiques. Dans le cadre des exégèses des passages correspondants, Hazebroucq souligne que le mot *theophilès* admet plusieurs significations possibles et que chez Platon il a plutôt subi un changement graduel de signification.[31] La nouveauté du sens actif de *theophiles* – qui correspond

[29] Nous reviendrons sur cette possibilité de piété raisonnée vers la fin de cet article.

[30] Cf. Marc-Antoine Gavray, *Platon, héritier de Protagoras. Dialogue sur les fondements de la démocratie* (Paris : Librairie philosophique Vrin, 2017), 141. « Car la justice véritable ne s'atteint pas par le respect d'une convention passé simplement au sein de la Cité. Elle implique de prendre dieu pour modèle, parce qu'il n'y a rien en lui d'injuste et qu'il est donc la seule mesure valable des actions justes ».

[31] Marie-France Hazebroucq, Piété et theophilia, *Revue de philosophie ancienne* 16, no. 2 (1998), 55f. : « Être *theophilès* change donc de sens avec Platon et paraît passer du sens passif de celui qui a la faveur des dieux en raison de son mérite au sens actif de celui qui aime le divin, pour en arriver à signifier l'effort proprement philosophique en vue de se rendre semblable au divin, autant qu'il est possible à un mortel. Il n'est pas de plus grand bonheur, signe en général de la faveur divine, que cette transformation et ce commerce avec les Idées. La *theophilia* est bien près de devenir une *philotheia*, mais cette inversion suppose que les Idées soient divines ». Pour une analyse des emplois de *theophilès* dans les dialogues de

à l'effort proprement philosophique afin de devenir similaire au divin – réside dans l'établissement d'une primauté du rationnel dans le rapport entre les hommes et les dieux.

La rationalité nouvelle que Socrate essaye d'instaurer par le billet de sa critique, tantôt explicite tantôt implicite, de l'anthropomorphisme est la continuité d'une longue tradition chez les Grecs. Platon est dans ce contexte non seulement l'héritier de Xénophane, d'Héraclite et d'Empédocle mais un innovateur de calibre qui étend le champ d'application de cette critique de l'anthropomorphisme vers de nouveaux domaines du savoir théorique.[32] L'attitude critique envers les conceptions anthropomorphes du divin a été – dès les premiers attaques contre Homère et Hésiode par les philosophes présocratiques – étroitement liée à la sphère morale, puisque le sens attribué aux vertus découle de ce qu'en pensent les dieux mythologique. Il s'agit d'un long processus historique dans lequel

> la pensée rationnelle s'impose, comme sujet de réflexion soutenue, [et de même s'imposent] le problème de la vraie nature et des vrais attributs du divin [et] le problème de renouvellement de la relation avec la divinité. Ainsi, le discours rationnel émerge de manière explicite dans le domaine morale, en dénonçant les formes traditionnelles de la piété d'un point de vue qui se revendique d'une piété authentique.[33]

La dimension critique favorisée par cette interprétations a été souvent contestée dans le cas de Socrate dont la « position religieuse » fut désignée par « agnosticisme et apophatisme ».[34] De plus, certains commentateurs mettent l'accent sur un côté essentiellement religieux chez Socrate, qui en tant que fils de son temps devait approuver les *doxai* de l'époque sur tout ce qui est surnaturel. Cet opinion semble ne pas négliger le côté critique des interventions socratiques et prend en compte que Socrate est en quelque sorte un réformateur de la religion des Grecs.[35] Mais l'apport de Socrate, du point de vue de l'histoire des idées en général et l'histoire de

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Platon voir : Jean-Yves Château, *Philosophie et religion. Platon Euthyphron.* Traduction et commentaire. (Paris : Librairie philosophique Vrin, 2005), 295-303.

[32] Paul Grenet, *Les origines de l'analogie philosophique dans les dialogues de Platon* (Paris : éditions contemporaines Boivin, 1948), 74 : « Tout comme il déshumanise les dieux, Platon dépersonnalise les principes d'explication physique ou métaphysique ».

[33] Dan Solcan, *La piété chez Platon*, 237.

[34] Cf. Jean-Yves Chateau, *Philosophie et religion*, 176ff. Notons ici que Château ajoute à la page 213 : « L'apophatisme est la position où peuvent se rejoindre une philosophie religieuse et une philosophie critique de la religion ».

[35] Cf. Mark McPherran, *The religion of Socrates* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), 7f. : "we must take seriously the religious side of Socrates. […]. However, he was also a sensitive critique and rational reformer of both the religious tradition he inherited and the new theological and cultic incursions he encountered as they swept through fifth-century Athens".

la philosophie en particulier, dépasse le simple stade de la réforme et touche une dimension *révolutionnaire* qui sépare clairement entre un monde présocratique et le monde de l'après-Socrate. Nous défendons cette proposition sur la base de la détermination d'un statut unique de la sagesse socratique dont on traitera les principales manifestations dans les sections suivantes.

4. La sagesse philosophique de Socrate

Le profil philosophique du maître de Platon ne peut être convenablement reconstruit que par une analyse détaillée de plusieurs dialogues, notamment les dits dialogues de jeunesse dans lesquelles la méthode socratique est magistralement exposée. N'ayant pas la possibilité d'un tel projet gigantesque dans le présent travail, nous nous contentons d'esquisser les traits généraux du profil de Socrate et de sa méthode, et ce à partir d'un nombre de points que nous jugeons essentiels en rapport avec la notion de sagesse. Commençons par ce que Platon écrit au début de l'*Apologie*. Socrate admet qu'il possède une certaine sagesse (σοφία) (20dc) mais il la distingue de « la sagesse attribuée aux 'savants' » d'une manière ironique : « s'il risque d'être σόφος, c'est par la possession d'une sagesse qui est vraisemblablement une sagesse propre à l'homme (ἀνθρωπίνη σοφία), tandis que les autres possèdent, semble-t-il, une sagesse plus qu'humaine (20d5-e1) ».[36] Cette remarque renvoie à une orientation principale chez Socrate consistant dans l'étude des concepts éthiques et des problèmes de la vie pratique des hommes dans la *Polis*. Dans le cadre de cette orientation, Socrate développe une attitude particulière qui est le cœur de ce qu'on peut appeler la *sagesse socratique* et qui serait *le* modèle de la sagesse philosophique. Cette attitude, comme témoigne l'épisode de l'oracle dans l'*Apologie* – c'est-à-dire le dieu affirmant que Socrate est le plus sage (σοφώτατον, 21b5-6) des Grecs et ce dernier désirant comprendre cette affirmation – se fonde sur le constat et l'aveu de son propre ignorance. Chez Socrate, la vraie sagesse réside dans la conscience du non-savoir. Le sage, c'est alors celui qui est bien conscient de son ignorance. Il sait qu'il ne sait pas. Sans vouloir examiner dans quelle mesure cette forme socratique de la sagesse a marqué la notion de philosophie elle-même, nous remarquons ici que la modestie intellectuelle de Socrate s'oppose parfaitement à la prétention d'un Euthyphron qui affirme bien savoir ce qu'est la vraie piété.

D'autre part, la sagesse socratique s'exprime solennellement à travers les caractéristiques de la *méthode dialectique* de Socrate qui se déplore dans des premiers dialogues platoniciens. Nous soutenons que cette méthode peut être conçue en tant que l'unité de deux approches opposées. La première est l'orientation négative, destructrice, qui s'attaque aux faux opinions,

[36] Cf. Dan Solcan, *La piété chez Platon*, 115.

alors que la deuxième est positive, constructrice, et vise la production du vrai savoir. On pourrait associer le premier aspect de la méthode avec la conception de l'*elenchos* (ἔλεγχος) et la deuxième avec celle de la *maïeutique* (μαιευτική τέχνη). *L'elenchos* est la partie de la méthode qui s'engage à réfuter les opinions des interlocuteurs lors d'un examen rigoureux de tout ce qui est dit. La maïeutique, art de l'accouchement des vérités, correspond à la partie productrice de la méthode, dans laquelle de nouvelles idées vraies, ayant survécu à toutes les épreuves, sont autorisées à voir le jour. Dans l'*Euthyphron*, Socrate a fait usage de *l'elenchos* pour réfuter les différentes définitions de la piété que propose le théologien. Il s'est efforcé, au moyen de la maïeutique, pour aboutir à la définition vraie, à l'essence de la piété, mais la fin aporétique du dialogue semble témoigner de son échec. Cependant, le lecteur attentif peut détecter les moments d'un début de succès de la maïeutique même s'ils se sont rapidement éteints car Euthyphron n'était pas en mesure d'aller jusqu'au bout de la réflexion débattue.[37]

Par ailleurs, il faut mettre en relief un autre aspect fondamental de la méthode socratique qui touche à sa signification philosophique. La méthode de Socrate ne se contente pas du côté purement cognitif qui se rapporte à distinguer entre le vrai et le faux, le rationnel et l'irrationnel. En plus de ce côté, elle accorde le même degré d'attention à la dimension *morale* en tant que véritable connaissance du *Bien* qui ne peut avoir lieu qu'en reliant la théorie à la pratique. C'est cette perspective socratique d'une *équivalence entre savoir et vertu* qui impose une double disposition, cognitive et morale, comme condition nécessaire pour acquérir la vraie sagesse. Comme le remarque Paisse, la méthode de Socrate exige non seulement « un effort obstiné et patient », mais aussi « une habilité dialectique », « un travail personnel » de l'interlocuteur qui doit se révéler « suffisamment doué tant au point de vue de l'intelligence qu'à celui de ses dispositions morales ».[38]

La méthode dialectique de Socrate, étant une pratique de la philosophie qui combine la destruction des préjugés avec la construction des idées vraies, ne doit pas être jugée sur la seule base des résultats formels d'une investigation donnée. Car les effets qu'elle produise lors de son déploiement correspondent à la richesse d'une valeur ajoutée qui concerne aussi

[37] Nous pensons ici à la fin de la troisième tentative de d´finition (D3) avec la question sur l'*ergon* des dieux. Ce passage a été interprété comme contenant – d'une maniére implicite – le résultat positif du dialogue *Euthyphron*, c'est-à-dire indiquant le vrai sens de la piété chez Socrate / Platon. Dans ce contexte, la suggestion de Rabinowitz est remarquable : il établit la thèse que l'œuvre des dieux n'est autre que l'appréhension des Idées platoniciennes (et nous ajoutons sur la base de *Euthyphron* (7e) : notamment des *Idées* du *Bien*, du *Beau* et du *Juste* (*Vrai*)). Cf. Gerson Rabinowitz. "Platonic Piety : An Essai toward the Solution of an Enigma". In: *Phronesis* 3, no. 2 (1958), 171. Voir aussi Djibril Samb, *Commentaire de l'Euthyphron de Platon*, 304f.

[38] Cf. Jean-Marie Paisse, « De la sagesse socratique ». *Bulletin de l'Association Guillaume Budé*, no. 3 (1971), 364f.

bien les aspects épistémologiques que les considérations éthiques. Dans ce sens, même le résultat formel de l'investigation – en d'autres termes la réponse à la question de départ – pourrait exister de manière implicite entre les lignes et les passages du dialogue. Et c'est dans cette invitation à dégager l'implicite que se manifeste un autre trait de la sagesse de Socrate. Il est vrai que le déploiement de la dialectique socratique fait que les dialogues platoniciens de jeunesse tendent à se conclure avec des apories. « Mais, on le sait, dans ces dialogues le résultat obtenu n'est pas pratiquement cette notion même dont on suivait la piste : c'est plutôt la création d'une attitude mentale négative, qui néanmoins incline l'interlocuteur vers une détermination positive ».[39] Si on applique ce constat sur le cas de l'*Euthyphron*, qui s'achève sans accord sur une définition explicite de la piété, la question de déterminer la conception socratique (ou platonicienne) de la piété reste ouverte devant toute sorte de spéculation.

Avant de passer à une reconstruction de quelques effets du déploiement de la méthode dialectique de Socrate dans le contexte particulier de la recherche d'une définition appropriée de la piété, nous pouvons conclure cette section par le constat que la dialectique socratique est à la fois une voie qui mène à la sagesse philosophique et une pratique concrète de ce type de sagesse. La méthode de Socrate illustre un type nouveau de *rationalité* philosophique qui repose sur le questionnement des préjugés et des connaissances préétablies. Outre ses caractéristiques pédagogiques, didactiques, et sa valeur proprement scientifique, la dialectique de Socrate se distingue par sa dimension critique. Cet aspect de la rationalité socratique dérange le mode de pensée de la théologie traditionnelle, qui se nourrit de la conservation d'une tradition incapable de se livrer aux risques des changements que peut causer toute approche critique.[40] En effet, en étant l'incarnation la plus fidèle de la sagesse socratique, la méthode dialectique, dont le déploiement n'est pas sans périls, est un long et pénible exercice de la pensée rationnelle critique qui a pour vocation unique la recherche des vérités.

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[39] Léon Robin, *Platon* (Paris : Librairie Félix Alcan, 1938), 69.

[40] Voir Pierre-Maxime Schuhl, *L'œuvre de Platon.* 4e édition mise à jour (Paris : Librairie philosophique Vrin, 1967), 53f. : « Déduisant des thèses avancées leurs conséquences paradoxales, ramenant les affirmations téméraires à un principe auquel il en oppose d'autres, induits à partir d'exemples empruntés à la vie familière, à la techniques des gens de métier, il met ses interlocuteurs en contradiction avec eux-mêmes ; il les trouble dans leur quiétude. Il est le taon qui empêche les Athéniens de dormir [cf. *Apologie* 30c], la torpille qui les engourdit [cf. *Ménon* 80a-d].

5. La piété entre sagesse philosophique et pseudo-sagesse théologique

Lorsque Socrate se consacre à réfuter les tentatives de définition de la piété proposées par Euthyphron, il essaye d'attirer l'attention de son interlocuteur sur l'incohérence des conceptions anthropomorphes des dieux et sur l'insuffisance du concept de vertu qui en découle. La partie positive de cette approche socratique consiste dans l'élaboration de positions alternatives sur les sujets en question. Bien que ceci soit d'une manière implicite, Socrate défend un concept non-anthropomorphe du divin et une notion de la vertu qui ne dépend pas des *doxai* de la tradition. Sa conception de la vraie piété se laisse déduire à partir de ces deux fondements qui forment les pierres angulaires du dialogue *Euthyphron*. Mais la contribution positive de Socrate va encore plus loin. Entre sa critique de la théologie euthyphronienne et son élaboration de positions alternatives sur le divin et la vertu, il introduit la notion platonicienne d'*Idée* (ἰδέα, εἶδος) et localise ainsi l'ensemble du discours sur un plan élevé de la réflexion philosophique. Nous avons vu lors de la discussion de la première tentative de définition de la piété (T1) que Socrate refuse d'approuver la réponse d'Euthyphron parce qu'il exige l'idée même de la piété et non pas des exemples contingents de ce qui est pieux. Cette exigence correspond à la première élaboration de la théorie des Formes de Platon, et le vocabulaire de (6d-e) est consolidé par l'opposition entre (πάθος) et (οὐσία) dans (11a-b).[41] Avec ce type d'intervention, Socrate introduit quelque chose de nouveau dans l'histoire de la philosophie. Léon Robin enregistre la nouveauté de cet événement qui a eu lieu dans l'*Euthyphron* de la manière suivante :

> Si l'on veut connaître la *réalité* ou l'essence (οὐσία) de la sainteté, il faut fixer les yeux sur la *forme* unique (ἰδέα, εἶδος) ou le *modèle* (παράδειγμα), grâce auxquels les choses saintes sont toujours pareilles à elles-mêmes (5 d, 6 de, 11 a). Bref, au savoir purement formel de la Sophistique il s'agit de donner un contenu réel. En outre, dès ces premiers dialogues, une indication positive est donnée sur la nature de ce contenu : c'est l'*Idée* de la chose qui est en question.[42]

Le fondement de la théorie des Formes dans (et dès) l'*Euthyphron* a été attesté par plusieurs interprètes.[43] Mais ce qui nous intéresse ici, c'est en

[41] Djibril Samb, *Commentaire de l'*Euthyphron *de Platon*, 244 : « Bien entendu, tous les historiens de la philosophie ont été frappés par l'emploi des concepts d'οὐσία et de πάθος. Ils apparaissaient ici pour la première fois dans la littérature attique avec des connotations 'ontologique' ».

[42] Léon Robin, *La pensée grecque. Et les origines de l'esprit scientifique* (Paris : La renaissance du livre, 1923), 219.

[43] Par exemple dans Reginald Edgar Allen, *Plato's 'Euthyphro' and the Earlier Theory of*

premier lieu ce que signifie l'introduction des *Idées* pour la nature de l'opposition entre la perspective philosophique de Socrate et la perspective de la théologie traditionnelle représentée par Euthyphron. Loin des interprétations qui considèrent que les *Idées* sont les nouveaux dieux de Socrate,[44] on pourrait avancer que ce que Socrate avait à l'esprit, c'est une dimension *universelle* qui réjouit du plus haut degré de généralité. Pour lui, l'*Idée* est cette unité intelligible qui subsume toutes les variations contingentes de ses possibles manifestations. En contrepartie, l'énumération des exemples ou l'élévation d'un seul cas au rang d'une définition générale – une option pour laquelle Euthyphron opte dans (T1) – ne peut pas atteindre ce seuil de l'universalité qui est propre aux vérités. Le dialogue *Euthyphron* offre une illustration de cette opposition entre les deux perspectives en divulguant les incohérences des conceptions anthropomorphes du divin et en émettant des signes implicites sur ce que peut être une conception alternative qui soit à la hauteur du caractère universel des *Idées*. Contre l'esprit casuistique d'Euthyphron s'établit la recherche socratique des principes. Mais la divergence entre le mode de pensée philosophique d'une part et les positions euthyphroniènnes de la théologie traditionnelle de l'autre s'exposent aussi dans un autre domaine, à savoir celui de la *philosophie morale*.

En effet, c'est autour de la notion de *vertu* que nous pouvons dégager les contours de cette confrontation entre la sagesse socratique et la prétention d'Euthyphron de représenter une forme de sagesse se réclamant de la religion des Grecs. L'enjeu de la détermination de la conception adéquate de la vertu est implicitement présent dans toute la conversation entre Socrate et Euthyphron. Non seulement la recherche de la bonne définition de la piété révèle une interrogation sur les critères de justification pour considérer la piété comme une vertu, mais les deux perspectives de la philosophie et de la théologie se battent pour deux conceptions rivales de la vertu. Pour illustrer cette bataille, et afin de préparer l'appréhension des différentes conceptions de la piété, prenons l'exemple du rapport entre la justice – qui est une vertu centrale dans la philosophie de Platon – et la piété. Ce rapport que nous avons rencontré dans la troisième tentative de définir la piété (T3) apparaît comme un critère majeur pour distinguer entre la sagesse philosophique et la *pseudo-sagesse* de la théologie traditionnelle. Nous désignons par pseudo-sagesse une attitude qui,

Forms (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970), 68. Pour un exemples des jugements contraires, voir Laszlo Versényi, *Holiness and Justice. An Interpretation of Plato's Euthyphro* (Washingston : University Press of America, 1982), 45f.

[44] C'est le cas de Leo Strauss qui en déduit que la seule imitation des dieux possible est la philosophie. Cf. Leo Strauss, *On Plato's Euthyphro. The 1948 Notebook*, with Lectures and Critical Writings. Kerber, Hannes, and Minkov, Svetozar (eds.). (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2023). 46: "the ideas are S.'s new gods. […] if imitating the gods is piety, philosophy is piety […] the only imitation of gods that is possible is philosophy."

notamment en matière d'éthique, admet des *pseudo-valeurs*.[45] Ces déterminations s'avèrent utiles pour démontrer, à partir du rapport entre justice et piété, l'existence d'une opposition fondamentale entre une *piété philosophique* représentée par Socrate et une *piété religieuse* incarnée par Euthyphron. Dans le cas de ce dernier, « [l]a raison pour laquelle la piété, en Grèce ancienne, est indissociable de la justice, est que le 'pieux' correspond avant tout à ce qui est prescrit et autorisé par les dieux ».[46] La piété d'Euthyphron ou le concept religieux de la piété se manifeste à travers l'influence de la mythologie grecque ancienne sur le discours, le mode de pensée et les positions prises par le devin.

Quant à Socrate, le rapport entre justice et piété se caractérise en premier lieu par l'étendue et l'universalité du concept de justice qui lui permettent d'englober le concept de piété comme l'une de ses parties constituantes (cf. (T3)). Ce premier point de départ – d'ailleurs approuvé par Euthyphron (12d) – ne fait pas encore l'essence de la position socratique. Le point crucial de cette position se dégage à travers une considération du système de la philosophie morale de Socrate dans sa totalité. Ce système se compose de trois doctrines qui sont organiquement entreliées et forment ensemble une totalité bien cohérente : (i) la thèse de l'identité de la vertu et du savoir, (ii) la conviction que faire le mal ne peut être que par ignorance et pour cela involontaire, et (iii) le principe que prendre soin de l'âme est la première condition pour vivre heureux.[47] À partir de ces points de base, nous pouvons voir qu'être juste n'est pas déconnecté d'un savoir vrai qui a comme objet l'*Idée* de la justice, que l'absence de ce savoir est la cause des actions injustes, et que la condition du bonheur – comme l'enseigne la *République* – passe par l'acquisition par l'âme de la vertu (et du savoir) de la justice. Que ces opérations n'aient pas la même effectivité dans le cas de la piété pourrait être suggéré du fait que celle-ci n'est pas comptée parmi les vertus cardinales qui se limitent à la sagesse, la justice, la tempérance et le courage. Pour expliquer cette absence de la piété, on pourrait recourir à la thèse inaugurant (T3), c'est-à-dire que la piété est déjà incluse dans la justice. Cependant, il reste clair que justice et piété n'ont pas le même positionnement dans le système platonicien des vertus. Ce système est très différencié chez Platon qui distingue entre des valeurs authentiques et d'autres qui le sont moins. Nous avons déjà mentionné

[45] Nous empreintons ce terme de Goldschmidt qui distingue entre les « valeurs authentiques, reconnus par le philosophe » et les « pseudo-valeurs », dont la capture est une tâche essentielle des dialogues de Platon. « Sagesse, justice, piété, courage » peuvent appartenir au premier groupe, et « [r]hétorique, rhapsodie, nom, amour » sont des candidats qui « pour ceux qui les idolâtrent » peuvent renvoyer à des valeurs mais se révèlent – après l'examen critique – comme pseudo-valeurs. Cf. Victor Goldschmidt, *Les dialogues de Platon. Structure et méthode dialectique*, 91.

[46] Louis-André Dorion, *Lachès, Euthyphron*, 225.

[47] Cf. William Keith Chambers Guthrie, *Socrates* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 130ff.

que Goldschmidt appelle ces dernières les pseudo-valeurs, mais Platon utilise encore beaucoup d'autres expressions pour les désigner : « Il y a des vertus 'niaises' [cf. *Phédon* 68e5] qui n'ont qu'une apparence de valeur [cf. *République VI*, 505d] ; images de vertu [cf. *Banquet* 212a], vertus serviles [cf. *Phédon* 69b] et marchandes [cf. *Protagoras* 357 d]. Il y a, de la vertu, le côté gauche [cf. *Phèdre* 256 e6-7] ».[48]

Quelles sont les implications de ces déterminations sur la conception socratique de la piété ? Est-il adéquat de parler d'une piété socratique qui soit un modèle, un paradigme, pour une piété philosophique ? Dans son commentaire détaillé de l'*Euthyphron*, Leo Strauss fait une série de remarques qui pourraient fournir quelques éléments de réponse. D'abord, il note que la notion de philanthropie (φιλανθρωπία) que Socrate mentionne dans (3d) est aux yeux du philosophe équivalente à la justice ; Socrate est accusé d'impiété parce qu'il est juste et la raison pour laquelle Euthyphron est injuste n'est autre que son manque de philanthropie.[49] De plus, Strauss remarque qu'Euthyphron, en disant que Zeus est « le plus juste des dieux » (6a), ne se soucie pas de définir la justice et ne cherche pas à connaître l'*Idée* de la justice mais se contente de prendre le dieu le plus juste comme modèle.[50] Sa pseudo-sagesse théologique est complétement dépendante d'une conception anthropomorphe du divin issue de la tradition mythologique. Les conséquences de cette dépendance s'expriment dans les tentatives échouées pour définir la vraie piété et ces échecs représentent à leur tour les grands traits d'une piété religieuse conforme à la religion des Grecs. En contrepartie, la piété chez Socrate est un objet de recherche dans le cadre d'une investigation plus générale sur les « Valeurs (ou *ousiai* éthiques) ».[51] Il s'avère que cette recherche ne fait que multiplier les signes qui pointent sur *l'Idée du Bien* dont l'appréhension préoccupe le philosophe et domine son activité. Ainsi on pourrait interpréter le terme « piété philosophique », ou « piété des philosophes », comme étant un engagement semblable à celui de Socrate, c'est-à-dire un dévouement pour la recherche des vérités (sur le divin et les vertus) qui se traduit par une pratique philosophique correspondante. Dans le cas de Socrate, cette pratique fut illustrée aussi bien par le déploiement de sa méthode dialectique qu'à travers sa conduite et ses positions lors de son procès, durant lequel le maître de Platon a exposé les plus précieuses leçons de sa sagesse philosophique.

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[48] Victor Goldschmidt, *Les dialogues de Platon*, 93.

[49] Cf. Leo Strauss, *On Plato's Euthyphro*, 25: "S. is unpopular because he is thought to be a popular or public teacher—he is hated because of his φιλανθρωπία [philanthropy] (= justice). → S. is accused of impiety because of his justice. E. on the other hand is pious, but unjust (lacks φιλανθρωπία [philanthropy]). Far from having the same cause, they stand at opposite poles."

[50] Cf. ibid., 30.

[51] Cf. Djibril Samb, *Commentaire de l'Euthyphron de Platon*, 351.

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A Hesychast Theory of Virtue

Two Types of Epistemology and Practical Philosophy in the Palamite Treatise *Capita 150*

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Abstract: One of the issues debated by St. Gregory Palamas in the sentential treatise *Capita 150* is the practical problem of the genealogy of virtue, which he approaches in an eminently epistemological context. Palamas distinguishes between two modes of knowledge that are, equally, two ways of life: the natural and the spiritual. The natural mode of knowledge is articulated between three *topoi* of the self: perception (*aisthēsis*), the imaginative faculty of the soul (*phantastikon*) and the intellect (*nous*). The data of knowledge come eminently from the senses, being stored in the phantastikon so that later the intellect can lean in an intentional manner on them, thus producing virtues or vices. In contrast, the spiritual way of knowing has to do primarily not with sensory experience, but with that of the Holy Spirit, through which man shares what we know about God, the world, and ourselves. As knowledge of God, it is not a knowledge of the divine being or nature, but a knowledge of Him from His energies which, in order to share an authentic knowledge of God, must be uncreated. From the experience of God's grace, which is an experience of the inner man, another type of virtues arises. These presuppose, like the natural ones, a moral effort to fulfill moral imperatives, this time of divine origin, but springing from the original experience of repentance, which leads St. Gregory Palamas to call them "works of repentance" (*erga tēs metanoias*). They lead to the knowledge of Christ dwelling in the human heart through divine grace, but, equally, they are produced by this interior experience of an almost sacramental nature. As such, they are, ultimately, practical expressions of the love between God and man.

Keywords: Virtue, Practical Philosophy, Epistemology, Divine Nature, Uncreated Energy, Palamite Doctrine

The decline of the hesychast life after the 4th Athonite typicon (1407)[1] and the final conquest of the Byzantine Empire by the Turks (1453,

[1] Pr. dr. Teodor Bodogae: *Ajutoarele românești la mănăstirile din Sf. Munte Athos*, Sibiu, 1940, 36–39.

Constantinople; 1461, Trebizond) led to a relative oblivion of the exceptional theological work of St. Gregory Palamas. It was only in the 20th century that it was rediscovered in its depth and breadth, especially following its theological reception by Fr. Dumitru Stăniloae (1938) and Fr. John Meyendorff (1959), and then, the attempt to completely republish it in five volumes (vol. I, 1962; vol. II, 1968; vol. III, 1970, vol. IV, 1988; vol. V, 1992) by P.K. Christou in Thessaloniki. During this time, some works were published (often with many vicissitudes) in printing houses in the West, under Catholic ecclesiastical censorship[2]. These are, in particular, the texts published in the *Philokalia* edited by St. Nicodemus the Hagiorites and St. Macarius of Corinth in Venice in 1782, as well as those collected in vols. 150–151 of Abbot Migne's *Patrologia Graeca* (1865).

One of these texts is the treatise *One Hundred and Fifty Chapters on Topics of Natural and Theological Science, the Moral and Ascetic Life, Intended as a Purge for the Barlaamite Corruption*, a "true system of natural («physical»), spiritual and dogmatic theology"[3], which programmatically synthesizes the entire Palamite thought, as Robert Sinkewicz, its scientific editor since 1988, observes, because "Palamas may well have been concerned that the debate about the relation between God's substance and his energies had become too divorced from the rest of theology and from soteriology in particular"[4].

This Palamite treaty enjoyed a favorable reception due to its publication both in the *Philokalia* edited by St. Nicodemus the Athonite and St. Macarius of Corinth in Venice in 1782, and in vol. 150 of Abbot Migne's *Patrologia Graeca* (1865), given that the saint's polemical work remained largely unknown (or less known) until the 20th century, since, in the West, his anti-Latin works could not have seen the light of day[5], having to pass, at

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[2] A presentation of this true odyssey of the publication of some of the works of St. Gregory Palamas in the 17th–18th centuries is offered by deacon Ioan I. Ică jr, *Sf. Grigorie Palama – scriitor duhovnicesc isihast și opera sa*, studiu introductive la Sf. Grigorie Palama, *Scrieri II: Fecioara Maria și Petru Athonitul – prototipuri ale vieții isihaste și alte scrieri duhovnicești*, Sibiu: Deisis, 2005, 5–150, in particular: 10–22.

[3] John Meyendorff, *Introduction à l'étude de Grégoire Palamas*, Paris: Seuil,1959 [Patristica Sobornensia 3], 373–374, here 373: "véritable système de théologie naturelle («physique»), spirituelle et dogmatique".

[4] Robert Sinkewicz, *The Early Chapters of the «Capita 150»*, in St. Gregory Palamas: *The One Hundred and Fifty Chapters* (Studies and Texts 83), Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, Toronto, 1988, 1–35, here: 4.

[5] John Meyendorff, *Introduction...*, 374: "La plupart des écrits de Palamas restant inédits, les *Capita* constituèrent jusqu'à présent, avec ses homélies, la principale source de références sur sa théologie. A la difference de la plupart des autre auteurs de *Chapitres spirituels*, il y apparaît surtout comme un dogmaticien: sa pensée s'y exprime dans des formules que sa polémique avec Barlaam et Akindynos a déjà fixées et, pour bien les comprendre, il faut se référer à ses écrits antérieurs, surtout aux *Triades*. Les *Capita* sont cependant précieux dans la mesure où, à la difference des oeuvres directement polémiques de Grégoire, ils nous révèlent le cadre philosophique général de sa pensée."

least in the 18th century, through the Caudine forks of censorship entrusted to the professors of the University of Padua[6].

Moreover, this work itself could not appear in its entirety in the *Philokalia* of 1782, but was subjected to amputations that aimed to remove any nominal references to the opponents of St. Gregory Palamas fought by him: Barlaam, Akindynos or Nikephoros Gregoras. In place of these names, general terms[7] were placed. The very title under which the Palamite treatise appeared was amputated from its last part ("Intended as a Purge for the Barlaamite Corruption"). Most of these chapters were very likely drafted in the period 1344–1347[8], during the civil war, the text being completed, however, by all appearances, in the years 1349–1350, during the first years of the episcopate of St. Gregory Palamas, a fact that is suggested by the existence of several parallels with passages in the homilies of the hesychast theologian[9].

1. Two Types of Knowledge: Natural Knowledge and Spiritual Knowledge

Strictly speaking, Saint Gregory Palamas is trying to provide here an overall perspective on the scientific knowledge of his time (as Father Stăniloae observes, in many of its aspects "surpassed" by the scientific knowledge "acquired in the following centuries" [10]), but also a synthesis of theological knowledge as knowledge obtained exclusively through revelation from God in the Holy Spirit: "Where can we learn anything certain and free from

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[6] Ioan I. Ică jr, *Sf. Grigorie Palama – scriitor duhovnicesc isihast și opera sa*, 83.

[7] John Meyendorff, *Introduction*..., 373: "les éditeurs y ont, en effet, remplacé les noms propres de Barlaam et d'Akindynos par des termes généraux..."

[8] John Meyendorff, *Introduction*..., 373: "En fait, Palamas a trouvé le temps de les rédiger au cours de la période troublée 1344–1347. Ce fait aparaît clairement dans le texte, surtout si l'on corrige la très inexacte édition de la Philokalie".

[9] Robert Sinkewicz, *The Later Chapters of the «Capita 150»*, in St. Gregory Palamas: *The One Hundred and Fifty Chapters*, 36–55; here: 49–54.

[10] Dumitru Stăniloae, *Scholion (footnote) 6*, in: *Filocalia VII*, Romanian translation by D. Stăniloae, second edition, Bucharest: Humanitas, 1999, 425. The Romanian theologian refers in particular to the astronomical knowledge presented by St. Gregory Palamas in this treatise: "Chapters 4–7 depict a vision of the sky that is surpassed by the astronomical knowledge acquired in the following centuries. But there is a truth in what St. Gregory Palamas says: the movement of nature is not carried by a soul, but by its physical laws" (our transl.). See also *Scholion (footnote) 7*, 426: "At that time, the idea was that the material world was composed of four elements: earth, water, air and fire, and above it was ether, as the fifth element. This simplistic idea about the five elements, about their changing proportions, about their arrangement in ever-widening circles that encompass each other, is inferior to the biblical intuition about the great complexity of the world, an intuition that is also peculiar to the Holy Fathers. It was peculiar to science and to a part of Hellenic and Byzantine philosophy, which modern science has surpassed. St. Gregory Palamas made use of that "science" in the chapters up to this point and in several others that follow, pursuing his goal of showing that the soul cannot be present as a moving force in this entire cosmos…" (our transl.).

deceit about God, about the world as a whole, about our own selves? Is it not from the teaching of the Spirit? For this teaching has taught us that God alone is true being, eternal being and immutable being, that he neither received being out of non-being nor returns to non-being, and that he is trihypostatic and omnipotent. In six days he brought forth beings from non-being by a word, or rather, as Moses says, he established everything at once, for we have heard him say, «In the beginning God created heaven and earth»"[11].

It is a completely different paradigm of knowledge, totally different from the natural one, which thanks to divine Revelation offers us a sublime knowledge not only about God and His work, but also about the world and even about ourselves. Thus, both the theology and economy of God, as well as Christian anthropology, are the result of the discovery of God. In a few lines, St. Gregory Palamas synthesizes the entire Orthodox anthropology revealed to us through divine revelation, highlighting the honor and care that man has enjoyed since creation, since he was created following the deliberation of the council of the Holy Trinity, through the direct intervention of God, in the image of his Creator, having the perspective of deification through communion with God through the uncreated grace that springs from the divine being: "Thus was the first of beings brought forth in creation and after the first another and after that still another, and so forth, and after all things man. He was deemed worthy by God of such honour and providential care that before him this entire sensible world came into being for his sake, and before him right from the foundation of the world the kingdom of heaven was prepared for his sake and counsel concerning him was taken beforehand and he was formed by the hand of God and according to the image of God. He did not derive everything from this matter and the sensible world like the other animals but the body only; the soul he derived from the realities beyond the world, or rather, from God himself through an ineffable insufflation, like some great and marvellous creation, superior to the universe, overseeing the universe and set over all creatures, capable of both knowing and receiving God, and, more than any, capable of manifesting the exceeding greatness of the Artificer; and not only is the human soul capable of receiving God through struggle and grace, but also it was able to be united with God in a single hypostasis"[12].

[11] St. Gregory Palamas, *The One Hundred and Fifty Chapters*, ed. R. Sinkewicz, §21, 103 (gr., 102). The following references to *Capita 150* will refer to this critical edition. A translation into Romanian was provided by Fr. D. Stăniloae: Sf. Grigorie Palama, *150 de capete despre cunoștința naturală, despre cunoașterea lui Dumnezeu, despre viața morală și despre făptuire*, in *Filocalia VII*, second edition, Bucharest: Humanitas, 1999, 421–516; also, deacon Ioan I. Ică jr. translated a selection of chapters from part I of the treatise entitled *Capitole antropologice, psihoteologice și economice* in the volume Sf. Grigorie Palama, *Scrieri II: Fecioara Maria și Petru Athonitul – prototipuri ale vieții isihaste și alte scrieri duhovnicești*, Sibiu: Deisis, 2005, 253–286.

[12] §24, 107–109 (gr., 106–108).

As the 14th-century Archbishop of Thessaloniki shows in the next chapter, revealed anthropology presupposes a sacred topography, an understanding of "what place man has before God" (*tina topon echei ho anthrōpos para tō theō*[13]). Within this topography, man has a unique position among all earthly and heavenly creatures: compared to "all other things which this heaven and earth bear"[14], which are "completely devoid of intelligence" (*nou pantapasin amoira*)[15], man is superior; on the other hand, spiritual beings, "even though they be more worthy of honour than we because they are without bodies and are nearer to the utterly incorporeal and uncreated nature"[16] are "fellow servants with us and (...) in the image of the Creator"[17].

Specifically, within the material world, only man is created in the image of God, thus being able to look towards Him – hence his name *anthrōpos*, associated in classical and patristic literature with looking up, towards heaven – to enter into loving communion with Him and to know Him personally. Hence his affinities with God – the divine inclination, faith and loving aspiration towards his Creator: "For of all earthly and heavenly things (*eggeiōn kai ouraniōn*) man alone was created in the image of his Maker, so that he might look in him and love him, and that he might be an initiate and worshipper (*mystis kai proskynētēs*) of God alone and might preserve his proper beauty by faith in him and inclination and disposition towards him, and that he might know that all other things which this heaven and earth bear are inferior to himself and completely devoid of intelligence"[18].

Starting from these premises, St. Gregory Palamas distinguishes between the cosmology and anthropology that man reaches based on the natural knowledge he has on the basis of the divine *image* within him and the cosmology and anthropology revealed by God in the context of His discovery of Himself (of *theology*) and in the horizon of man's living communion with God through the uncreated grace that springs from the being of God (respectively of the *likeness* to God).

Strictly speaking, the second way of knowledge (spiritual knowledge, specific to the Christian man) surpasses the first (natural knowledge, specific to philosophy and natural sciences), being undoubtedly superior to it: "man's knowledge of God and his understanding of himself and his proper rank (which knowledge now belongs to those who are Christians, even those considered uneducated laymen) [are] a more lofty knowledge than natural science and astronomy and any philosophy in these subjects"[19]. Moreover, even the mind's knowledge of its own weaknesses is a superior mode of

[13] §26, 108 (eng., 109–111).
[14] §27, 111 (gr., 110).
[15] §27, 111 (gr., 110).
[16] §27, 110 (eng., 111).
[17] §27, 110 (eng., 111).
[18] §26, 111 (gr., 110).
[19] §29, 113 (gr., 112).

knowledge to that specific to natural knowledge: "also our mind's knowledge of its own weakness and the search for its healing would be incomparably superior by far to the investigation and knowledge of the magnitudes of the stars and the reasons for natural phenomena, the origins of things below and the circuits of things above, their changes and risings, their fixed positions and retrograde motions, their disjunctions and conjunctions, and, in general, the entire multiform relation that results from their considerable motion in that region. For the mind that realizes its own weakness has discovered whence it might enter upon salvation and draw near in the light of knowledge and receive true wisdom which does not pass away with this age"[20].

2. The Natural Way of Live and its Associated Virtues

As a result, two different ways of life arise from this: one based on natural knowledge and the other, on spiritual knowledge, the result of the germinative presence of God's grace in the human heart.

Natural knowledge is obtained by the mind based on empirical observations, made through the senses, and imagination as the capacity to combine at will the data obtained through the senses: "in general all knowledge of anything collected from perception of particulars, we have gathered together from the senses and the imagination through the mind (*ex aisthēseōs kai phantasias ... dia tou nou*), and no such knowledge could ever be called spiritual (*pneumatikē*) but rather natural (*physikē*), which does not attain the things of the Spirit"[21].

Analyzing the manner in which perception proper is articulated, St. Gregory Palamas distinguishes between the latter, the contents obtained through perception, and the perceived bodies. The contents obtained through natural knowledge are not identified with the perceived bodies. Moreover, a distinction must be made between the proper forms of bodies and their impressions (*ektypomata*) in the knowing intellect: "Sight is formed from the manifold dispositions of colours and shapes, smell from odours, taste from flavours, hearing from sounds, touch from things rough or smooth according to position. The formations that occur in the senses arise from bodies but are not bodies though corporeal, for they do not arise from bodies in an absolute sense, but rather from the forms which are associated with bodies. They are not themselves the forms of bodies but the impressions left by the forms, like images inseparably separate from the forms associated with bodies. This is more evident in the case of vision and especially in the case of objects seen in mirrors"[22].

[20] §29, 113 (gr., 112).
[21] §20, 103 (gr., 102)
[22] §15, 99 (gr. 98)

It is a triple epistemological transition: from the bodies themselves to their forms, from the forms of the bodies to the senses, and from the senses to the impressions accumulated through them in the knowing intellect. The first transition, which, in Kantian language, we could call from the thing in itself (*das Ding an sich*) – respectively from the *noumen* – to the *phenomenon*, does not enter into the concerns of the Byzantine theologian of the 14th century. It refers to an ontological background for which Gregory Palamas as a theologian shows no interest at all.

He particularly follows the way in which the forms of bodies are impressed on the senses and are subsequently stored as images in the power of imagination, so that the latter can then combine these images independently of the reality of the bodies themselves and their forms. St. Gregory Palamas pays special attention not only to the way in which empirical knowledge is produced, but also to the power of imagination of the soul. The images obtained through the senses are stored as in a treasury in the imaginative faculty of the soul (*to phantastikon*), so that it can later operate freely with them, separated from perception itself and from the bodies that caused their formation through perception: "The imaginative faculty of the soul, which in turn appropriates these sense impressions from the senses, completely separates not the senses themselves but what we have called the images in them from the bodies and their forms. And it holds them stored there like treasures, bringing them forward interiorly for its own use, one after another, each in its own time, even when a body is absent; and it presents to itself all manner of things, objects of sight, hearing, taste, smell and touch"[23].

The 14th-century Archbishop of Thessaloniki sketches in this sense an epistemological topography of the soul, placing the imaginative faculty of the soul (*to phantastikon*) in the middle, between the mind (*nous*) and the senses (*aisthēseis*). The mind, which is by itself separate from the senses, leans upon these images stored in the *to phantastikon*, operating with them in its own way.

It is a movement of descent (*katabasis*) of the mind, similar to that specific to the prayer of the heart described very plastically by another hesychast author of the 14th century, St. Callistus the Patriarch, in the initial 14 chapters of the treatise «On Prayer» from the Greek *Philokalia*[24], selected from his treatise «100 chapters on the purity of the heart...» rediscovered and published in full fifteen years ago[25]. St. Kallistos the Patriarch investigates

[23] §16, 99–101 (gr. 98–100)

[24] *Tou Makariou Kallistou tou patriarchou Kephalaia peri proseuchēs*, în *Philokalia*, third edition, vol. IV, Athēnai 1961, 296–298. Romanian translation by Dumitru Stăniloae, in *Filocalia*, vol. VIII, second edition [first ed.: 1979], Bucharest: Humanitas, 2002, 215–220.

[25] *Tou hagiōtatou patriarchou Konstantinoupoleōs kyr Kallistou kephalaia R' peri katharotētos psychēs, pōs kata mikron autē kathairetai kai eis theōrian anagetai; codex Matsouki Ecclesiae S. Parascevae (olim monasterii Bylizias 5)*, f. 387–393v., editet by Antonio Rigo în *Byzantion. Revue internationale des études byzantines* 80 (2010), 344–407 and translated into Romanian by Ioan

here the way in which the mind explores the grace-filled depths of the heart, probing them with its intelligible rays[26]. It is about a common understanding of the hesychast authors, a common good of hesychasm. It is not by chance that St. Gregory Palamas articulates his epistemological outline of natural knowledge according to the same model, in which the mind leans, this time not on the heart filled with the living waters of grace, but on the imaginative faculty of the soul. It is a matter of an inner kinetics of the inner man before the reception of grace, i.e. of the natural man: "When the mind lingers over the imaginative faculty of the soul and thereby becomes associated with the senses, it produces a composite knowledge (*symmikton ... tēn gnōsin*)"[27].

In the absence of grace, the intellect's inclination towards the images stored in the *phantastikon* is not purely contemplative, but has an intentional character. It depends on the way in which the intellect operates with the images stored in the treasury of fantasy (of the imaginative faculty of the soul) – with and without passion or in an intermediate way, respectively with and without error: "This imaginative faculty of the soul in the rational animal constitutes an intermediary between the mind and the senses. For when the mind beholds and dwells upon the images received within itself from the senses as separated from bodies and already incorporeal, it formulates thoughts in various ways by distinctions, analyses and syntheses. This happens in different ways: with and without passion and somewhere between passion and apatheia, both with and without error"[28]. Our entire moral life and the articulation of the practical philosophy of natural man depend on these five types of operation by the intellect with the images obtained through the senses (*aisthēseis*) and stored in the *phantastikon*. Strictly speaking, moral life and practical philosophy crystallize at the meeting of intellect (*nous*) and imagination (*phantastikon*). They do not only concern the contents of knowledge obtained through the senses and the imaginative faculty of the soul, but also the *a priori* contents of the mind (or of pure practical reason, as Kant would say): "And these are the situations from which are born most virtues and vices (*aretai kai kakiai*), as well as both good and evil opinions. Since not every thought comes to the mind from these and concerns these, but you could find some things which cannot fall under the observation of the senses since they are passed on to thought by the mind (*hypo tou nou tō logismō didomena*), for this reason I said that in thoughts (*en tois logismois*) not every truth or error (*alētheian ē planēn*), virtue or vice (*aretēn ē kakian*) has its origin in the imagination"[29].

I. Ică jr in the volume *Despre Lumina taborică, rugăciunea lui Iisus și curăția inimii. Scrieri filocalice uitate*, ed. a II–a., Sibiu: Deisis, 2013, 193–228.

[26] *Tou Makariou Kallistou tou patriarchou Kephalaia peri proseuchēs*, §1–§14, especially §7, 296–298.

[27] §19, 101 (gr. 100).

[28] §17, 101 (gr. 100).

[29] §17, 101 (gr. 100).

The virtues (and their opposite, the vices) are the result of the way in which the mind leans on the images obtained through the senses and operates with them, once stored in the imaginative faculty of the soul. By this, St. Gregory Palamas links practical philosophy to epistemology in such a way that it seems to make it an annex of the latter. The accomplishment of good is directly linked to the knowledge of truth. The virtuous way of life of the natural man depends on the accuracy of his capacity for knowledge, namely on the correct positioning in the inner topography of the epistemic faculties of the soul (perception, imagination and intellect) and on the correct interaction between them. In particular, the intentional approach of the mind in relation to the data obtained through sensory means is important. However, unlike Kant four centuries later, Palamas gives a much wider space to perception and the imaginative faculty of the soul both in the process of knowledge and in practical philosophy. For him, both knowledge and the moral life of natural man start from perception (*aisthēsis*) and imagination (*phantastikon*), the intellect subsequently intervening in an intentional manner, to operate with the data obtained in a sensory-imaginative manner. This fact causes the Byzantine theologian astonishment and admiration: "It is a great wonder and worthy of consideration, how beauty or ugliness, wealth or poverty, honour or dishonour, and, in a word, either the intelligible light which grants eternal life or the intelligible darkness of chastisement becomes fixed in the soul through transitory and sensible things"[30]

3. The Spiritual Way of Live and its Virtues as Works of Repentance and Love

If the knowledge and practical philosophy of the natural man starts from the reality of creation perceived through the senses and the power of imagination, the knowledge and practical philosophy of the inner man have their beginning in the direct relationship with the divine, respectively with the grace of God as uncreated energy that springs from the being of God.

This type of knowledge St. Gregory Palamas calls "spiritual" (*pneumatikē*), since it "attains the things of the Spirit"[31]. In contrast to natural knowledge, spiritual knowledge is "certain and free from deceit", being obtained through the divine "teaching of the Spirit"[32].

But how is this way of knowing possible, since man as a natural being is characterized by the natural way of knowing, articulated by the intellect's leaning on the data obtained through the senses and stored in the imagi-

[30] §18, 101 (gr. 100).
[31] §20, 103 (gr., 102).
[32] §20, 103 (gr. 102).

native faculty of the soul? By analogy, spiritual knowledge should be achieved through communion not with the natural ones that the human self receives from nature through perception and analyzes at an intellectual level, but through communion with the spiritual ones, i.e. specific to the Holy Spirit. Except that the Holy Spirit is a divine person of the Holy Trinity, and from this point of view we arrive at an essential epistemological problem typical of late antiquity: how can we know God, since the divine being fundamentally differs from created existences? In other words, how will we get close to God?

St. Gregory Palamas presents this problem in the terms in which St. Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite formulated it in the Christian world: "Every nature is utterly remote and absolutely estranged from the divine nature. For if God is nature, other things are not nature, but if each of the other things is nature, he is not nature: just as he is not a being, if others are beings, and if he is a being, the others are not beings"[33].

It is quite an *aporia*: based on the radical ontological difference between the divine and human natures, it would seem that the only conclusion that could be drawn from this is the impossibility of knowing God, which would lead to the total annulment of the possibility of theology as a science about God and of any form of communion with the divine, that is, of holiness. By doing this, however, Palamas brings the problem exactly to the center of his fierce dispute with the representatives of theology of Western inspiration: Barlaam of Calabria (also mentioned in the title of the treatise by referring to "the Barlaamite Corruption"), Akindynos and Nikephoros Gregoras.

Thus formulated, the aporia seems insurmountable. Nevertheless, there is the divine revelation that God carries out precisely in order to communicate to man truths about Him, about the world and about man himself. Now, the revelation is based precisely on the possibility of a communication between God and man, of a knowledge by man of the divine and a sharing by man of the latter in order to fulfill the prescriptions of moral normativity revealed by God in the Holy Spirit and to achieve their finality which is holiness as likeness to God.

Therefore, there is a possibility of knowing God and of man's communion with Him. This possibility, St. Gregory Palamas shows, is based on the fact that God, although ontologically different from those that exist, is present in His creation, being "the nature of all beings and is referred to as such"[34]. This fact, however, does not have to be realized in a pantheistic manner – the extreme opposite of the aporia of the impossibility of knowing God formulated above – for this communion to be real and not a simple form of determinism. Or, the only possibility to fulfill this condition is to make a clear distinction between the divine nature and the works (energies) of

[33] §78, 173 (gr. 172).
[34] §78, 173 (gr. 172).

God: "But God is the nature of all beings and is referred to as such, since all participate in him and receive their constitution by this participation, not by participation in his nature, far from it, but by participation in his energy. Thus is he the very being of beings and the form in the forms as the primal form and wisdom of the wise and generally all things of all things. He is not nature because he is beyond all nature, and he is not being because he is beyond all beings, and he is not nor does he possess form because he is beyond form"[35].

The Palamite ontological distinction between the divine nature and the divine energies, both necessarily uncreated in order to truly belong to God, makes it possible not only to overcome the alleged aporia of the impossibility of the knowledge of God, but also to explain how it is possible for man to attain holiness as likeness to God. The consequences of this distinction are not only epistemological, but also moral[36], for on its basis it becomes possible for man to approach God, to have intimate communion with Him, and finally the deification of man, which is, ultimately, the finality of the incarnation of the Son of God: "How then can we draw near to God? By drawing near to his nature? But not one of all created beings possesses or will possess any communion in, or affinity to, the supreme nature. If then anyone has drawn near to God, he has surely approached him by means of his energy. How then? Is it by a natural participation in that energy? (*hōs metechōn ekeinēs physikōs;*) But this is common to all created beings. Therefore, it is not for those who are near by nature but for those who approach by free choice (*proaireseōs*) to be near to or far from God. Now free choice (*proairesis*) belongs to rational beings alone (*monōn tōn logikōn*). So only these among all other beings are either far from or near to God, either by drawing close through virtue (*di'aretēs*) or by drawing away through evil-doing (*kakias*). Therefore, these beings alone are capable of wretchedness (*athliotētos*) or blessedness (*makariotētos*). But let us hasten to attain blessedness"[37].

Even if holiness and likeness to God are obtained through communion with God through the sharing of His uncreated energies, this does not occur automatically as a natural act, but presupposes the free will of man, his free decision taken on the basis of a deliberation carried out rationally, with discernment. This requires the transition from the ontological register to the moral register, or, in other words, from the instinctive reception of grace to personal communication with God, an approach of which only rational beings are capable.

Ultimately, irrational creatures also share in divine energies, but they do so exclusively in an instinctive way. Moral rapprochement with God

[35] §78, 173–175 (gr. 172–174).

[36] §78, 173 (gr. 172): "If you accept this as true also for wisdom and goodness and generally all the things around God or said about God, then your theology will be correct and in accord with the saints".

[37] §78, 175 (gr. 174).

through man's appropriation of the Lord's behaviors[38] is an even deeper way of sharing in divine energies, in which they support and guide him as a rational being towards interpersonal communion with God.

It thus becomes clear why Palamas felt the need to begin his treatise with a long digression on created nature and on natural knowledge and morality: man, too, through his rational nature as the image of God, has an important contribution to drawing near to God, for this does not occur automatically, in a deterministic manner, despite the fact that God is omnipotent and works ceaselessly through His uncreated energies, but presupposes his free participation and living involvement in communion with God, achieved, of course, through His grace. Therefore, the Archbishop of Thessaloniki insists in the context of his approach to the problem of the relationship between God's nature and divine energies on the importance of man's conscious assumption of drawing near to God through his performance of good works and leading a moral way of life: "Therefore, this is how far from God we are by our nature – woe unto us indeed! – at least, if we should not draw near to him out of free choice for the good by means of good works and ways (*di'ergōn kai tropōn agathōn*)"[39].

On the one hand, moral striving is specific to the divine image in man as a free and rational being and is necessary for drawing close to God. On the other hand, man's fall into sin considerably affected his capacity to advance towards the likeness of God and to engage in a plenary relationship with Him. Therefore, insists St. Gregory Palamas, there was a need for "the saving economy (*sōstikēn oikonomian*)" [40] of God which culminated in the coming of the Savior Christ through whom we received saving grace. Thus, if it had not been for the death of Christ, "we would not in fact have gained the riches of the first fruits of immortality, nor would we have been summoned up to heaven, nor would our nature have been enthroned above every principality and power «at the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens»[41]. Thus, by his wisdom and power and out of love for mankind God knows how to change to the better the falls which result from our freely willed deviation from the course"[42].

Although he is a theologian of grace as uncreated energy, situating himself in many chapters of this treatise and others like it in Augustinian lineage, St. Gregory Palamas insists especially on the moral efforts of man in the process of deification (*theōsis*). Even if he affirms the importance of the fact that "the kingdom of heaven has drawn near to us through the condescension of God the Word unto us" [43] and that through the sacrifice

[38] Mth. 11: 29.
[39] §79, 175 (gr., 174).
[40] §53, 147 (gr., 146).
[41] Hebr. 8:1.
[42] §54, 147–149 (gr., 146–148).
[43] §57, 151 (gr., 150).

of Christ "we have gained the riches of the first fruits of immortality" and "have been summoned up to heaven"[44], he does not cease to insist on the fact that the moral normativity instituted by God remains valid also for man who partakes of the grace imparted by Christ: "...the commandment of God is with us even now. On the one hand, if we obey it and set our will to live by it, it frees us from the punishment for all our sins and from the ancestral curse and condemnation. But, on the other hand, if we reject it even now and prefer to it the temptation and counsel of the evil one, we cannot but be banished from that life and society in paradise and fall into the Gehenna of eternal fire with which we were threatened"[45].

Unlike the morality of the natural man, which Palamas focused on at the beginning of the treatise in an epistemological context (§15–§20), where virtues (and vices) were presented as the result of the way the mind operates with the images obtained through perception and stored in the *phantastikon*, the virtues of the Christian man are defined by him as "works of repentance"[46]. Now, repentance is not a fundamental experience of the natural man, but is a gracious experience, springing from obedience to the commandment of God. In fact, he shows, "the commandment ... laid before us by God" is "repentance" [47] itself.

St. Gregory Palamas even offers a whole list of virtues as "works of repentance", connecting them to the Kingdom of God that is within us: "Let us acquire the works of repentance (*ta erga tēs metanoias*): a humble attitude, compunction and spiritual mourning, a gentle heart full of mercy, loving justice, striving for purity, peaceful, peacemaking, patient, glad to suffer persecutions, losses, disasters, slander and sufferings for the sake of truth and righteousness. For the kingdom of heaven, or rather, the King of heaven – O the unspeakable munificence! – is within us[48]. To him we ought always to cling (*kollasthai*) by works of repentance and perseverance (*dia tōn ouranōn tēs metanoias kai hypomonēs ergōn*), loving as much as possible him who loved us so much (*agapōntes ōs dynaton ton tosouton hēmas agapēsanta*)"[49].

These are virtues of the inner man, into which, through divine grace, Christ himself, the King of heaven, has entered – absent from the "natural" man or, better said, from the man living in the condition of the absence of grace as a consequence of the fall into sin. So, on the one hand, the virtues as works of repentance are direct implications of the presence of grace that works the disposition of repentance in the heart of man. On the other hand, however, through them we access God or, as Palamas says, «we cling» to Him.

[44] §54, 147 (gr., 146).
[45] §55, 149 (gr., 148).
[46] §57, 151 (gr., 150).
[47] §56, 149 (gr., 148).
[48] Cf. Lk. 17:21.
[49] §57, 151 (gr., 150).

But, above all, the virtues as consequences of fulfilling the divine commandments are the loving response that man gives to God, «who loved us so much». In this sense, from virtues is born the love of God, but vice versa, from the love of God are born the virtues: "The absence of passions and the presence of virtues establish love of God, for hatred of evil things and the consequent absence of the passions introduce instead the desire for and the acquisition of good things. How could one who loves and possesses good things not love in a special way the master who is goodness itself and who alone is both provider and preserver of all good? In him he has his being in a singular manner and him he bears within himself through love, according to the one who said, «He who abides in love abides in God and God in him»[50]. You should know not only that love for God is based on the virtues, but also that the virtues are born of love. And so the Lord says at one point in the Gospel, «He who has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me»[51]; and on another occasion, «He who loves me will keep my commandments»[52]. But neither are the works of virtue praiseworthy and profitable for those who practice them without love, nor indeed is love without works. Paul at one time makes ample demonstration of this when he writes to the Corinthians, «If I do such and such but have not love, I gain nothing»[53]. And in turn, at another time, the disciple specially beloved by Christ does likewise when he says, «Let us not love in word or speech but in deed and in truth»[54]."[55].

It is a dialectic of gracious love and moral effort through which we assimilate the virtues and, implicitly, the Good to which they lead as permanent habits, because in them lies, as D. Stăniloae shows, Christ himself[56]. Ultimately, the virtues as fruits of the moral life and of practical Christian philosophy are almost like sacramental realities that place us in a relationship of love with God, the latter itself further bearing virtues[57].

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[50] 1 Jn 4:16.

[51] Jn 14:21.

[52] Cf. Jn 15:15.23.

[53] 1 Cor. 13:1–3.

[54] 1 Jn 3:18.

[55] §58, 151–153 (150–152).

[56] Dumitru Stăniloae, *Scholion* (*Footnote*) *53*, in *Filocalia VII*, 459–460: "Spiritual goods are one with virtues, that is, with habits and the various kinds of good. Therefore, when we speak of goods, we understand virtues and vice versa. For spiritual goods truly become ours when we assimilate them as permanent habits through our labors. But in them is Christ himself. For He has culminatingly assimilated to Him and therefore from Him radiates in us their power or the power for them, and this power is both spiritual sweetness and happiness for us and for others. The person who is consistently good or strengthened in virtue shows his goodness by radiating his goodness towards others. Virtue is the mode of generous existence, of existence open to others, unlike passion, which is the mode of selfish existence. Through the good that radiates from someone to another, he himself penetrates into that. Through His virtues, which become a source of power for ours, Christ Himself permeates and dwells within us" (our transl.).

[57] Dumitru Stăniloae, *Scholion* (*Footnote*) *54*, in *Filocalia VII*, 460: "The virtues culminate in love, the culminating stage of generosity. But the virtues themselves, as forms of gen-

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erosity, could not grow in us if they were not supported by the impulse of generosity" (our transl.). See also *Scholion* (*Footnote*) *54*, 460: "Love without steadfast deeds, strengthened in virtues, is not true love, but deeds without love are not deeds capable of transforming us either, but remain appearances or sporadic gestures without inner substance, without consistent, lasting warmth, without attachment to the one to whom they are addressed. It leaves the one who commits them isolated and cold".

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Mystagogical Philosophy as Itinerary

Christian Wisdom in the Slavic Primary Chronicle

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Abstract: This article rereads Prince Vladimir's conversion narrative (years 986–988, Kievan Rus') in the *Primary Chronicle* as a patristic mystagogy (a deliberately staged itinerary of purification, illumination and union). Using a symbolic hermeneutic grounded in Gregory of Nyssa, Dionysius the Areopagite and Maximus the Confessor, it argues that the *Chronicle* portrays Rus' encounter with Christianity as a philosophical way of life that unites reason and revelation and culminates in theosis. In this study, "philosopher" is defined as the one who mediates between human inquiry and divine wisdom through a life aimed at likeness to God. St. Maximus the Confessor and St. Cyril-Constantine frame it as knowing "divine and human things" in an eros-driven ascent that is verified in deeds. In the *Chronicle*, the unnamed "Greek Philosopher" functions precisely so. Moreover, the article shows how dialogue functions as a performative engine transforming persons and positions the *Chronicle* within the canon of Christian philosophy in Rus'.

Keywords: mystagogy, Primary Chronicle, Christianization of Rus', symbolic realism, dialogue, participation, Gregory of Nyssa, Dionysius the Areopagite, Maximus the Confessor.

Introduction[1]

The emergence of theological-philosophical consciousness in the early Kievan Rus' can be approached through the conversion narrative of Prince Vladimir (986–988) as preserved in the *Primary Chronicle*[2], where

[1] Unless otherwise noted, all translations from Russian, Church Slavonic, Greek and French are the author's and made from the original-language sources.

[2] The *Primary Chronicle* is an early-12th-century Old East Slavic annalistic compilation produced in Kiev. As a stitched-together historical record (combining origin legends, events of war, church affairs, etc.), it narrates the Rus' past from the 9th to the early 12th century. It is the foundational source for the history and self-understanding of early Rus' and the keystone of East Slavic medieval history.

Vladimir, prior to his baptism of Rus', begins to receive emissaries of competing religious traditions and gradually comes to adopt Eastern Orthodox Christianity from Constantinople. In this article I argue that Vladimir's conversion story is best read as a *patristic mystagogy*: a staged itinerary of purification–illumination–union that teaches wisdom as intrinsically ordered to holiness.

Since the early 20th century, there has been a growing academic interest in the *Primary Chronicle*, similar to the broader body of Old East Slavic writings. However, this interest has primarily been confined to the fields of medieval studies, philology, literature and political history, while its theological and symbolic dimensions (especially the conversion narrative and the figure of the "Greek philosopher") have rarely received sustained treatment that takes seriously the metaphysical and mystagogical logic presupposed by the text's narrative form.[3] This article addresses this gap.

The argument of the article develops from a simple observation: The *Chronicle* arranges Vladimir's path as a triad: first, the testing of emissaries from rival religious traditions; second, the Philosopher's speech, which reframes Vladimir's metaphysical horizon; and third, the encounter of Vladimir's envoys with the Divine Liturgy in Constantinople, where beauty and ritual function as decisive criteria of truth. Read together with the later vow–victory–blindness–baptism–healing–marriage cycle, this architecture depicts conversion as a passage from searching to seeing and from seeing to being transformed. The arrangement is sufficiently patterned to warrant a structural reading that goes beyond chronological reporting of events. The narrative thus suggests that Rus' encounters Christianity as a form of *wisdom in which reason and revelation co-inhere* and culminate in *theosis* through symbolic and liturgical participation.

Methodologically, this article develops a close reading of narrative form as a carrier of theological meaning. The analysis treats dialogue as structurally decisive: The *Chronicle*'s direct speech functions performatively by orienting desire and triggering action. Accordingly, the "Greek Philosopher" episode is approached as the narrative's conceptual core. His speech, together with

[3] As Michail Gromov, the main contemporary specialist in Old East Slavic philosophy writes: "When turning to the literature on the Old Russian period, one immediately notices the following paradox. On the one hand, since [a long time], there has existed a vast stream of research, publications of primary sources, [etc.] on Old Russian history and culture [...]. On the other hand, there is a very weak stream of specialized philosophical literature on this same period. What is the reason for this contradiction? Is it due to the scarcity or perhaps the complete absence of Old Russian philosophy as such – an opinion still held by a few skeptically inclined scholars? Or is it the inability to discern Old Russian philosophy as a distinct phenomenon that escapes too straightforward comparisons with Western, Eastern, scholastic, Renaissance, modern European and other forms of philosophizing?" Mikhail Gromov and N. Kozlov, *Russian philosophical thought of the 10th–17th centuries* [Русская философская мысль X–XVII веков] (Moscow: Moscow University Press [Издательство Московского университета], 1990), 5.

Vladimir's questions, reorganizes the categories through which Vladimir can perceive history, time and material reality as sites of divine presence.

To articulate the theological logic enacted by this narrative structure, I read the *Chronicle* within the patristic symbolic-metaphysical hermeneutic developed with particular clarity by Gregory of Nyssa, Dionysius the Areopagite and Maximus the Confessor. These authors function as conceptual instruments that clarify how conversion can be narrated as ascent, how material and liturgical forms can mediate divine action and how knowledge can be transformative rather than merely cognitive. Taken together, these three authors articulate what the *Chronicle* stages narratively: itinerary, symbol/rite and transformative participation. The term "philosopher" is likewise approached within the late-antique and Byzantine Christian sense of philosophy as a way of life ordered to likeness to God. The article therefore treats the Philosopher figure as a mediator of wisdom and holiness and grounds this usage in early Slavonic and Byzantine conceptual resources.

A crucial clarification concerns the scope of the article. The central claim put forward here is theological-typological and structural: first, to demonstrate that the *Chronicle* itself, by its narrative architecture and dialogical dynamics, presents conversion as wisdom ordered to holiness and culminates in participation and, second, to show that the *Chronicle*'s conversion narrative becomes *intelligible* when interpreted within the Byzantine–Slavic Orthodox symbolic horizon whose liturgical-ontological logic is most adequately described through Dionysian and Maximian categories. The article does not attempt to establish direct literary dependence of the chronicler upon particular patristic treatises, since the *Chronicle* itself does not provide the kind of evidence required for a strict source-critical demonstration. Where "influence" is suggested, it refers to the circulation of a broader conceptual toolkit through ecclesial practice and Old Slavic liturgical language that render such a reading historically plausible, while leaving open the question of direct textual access.

1. The "Philosopher": What are Wisdom and Holiness?

Before retelling the conversion cycle as it is narrated in the *Primary Chronicle*, it is necessary to clarify why the narrative introduces a "Greek Philosopher" at the decisive point of Vladimir's inquiry. The long speech of the "Greek Philosopher" is placed in the middle of the story. The *Chronicle* itself frames the episode as an encounter with "philosophy" and the plausibility of the argument developed in this article depends on spelling out what "philosopher" can mean within a Byzantine–Slavic Orthodox symbolic horizon. Again, it is of particular significance that he is referred to not as a cleric, a preacher or a missionary but specifically as a *philosopher*. A number of modern descriptions reduce the Philosopher's discourse to a

"catechism summarizing the Bible story"[4], a "Greek priest's religious sermon"[5], "an account of world history [...] in the form of a missionary sermon"[6] or a "brief compilation of material from Sacred History"[7]. Such labels are not entirely wrong but they easily miss the narrative's conceptual intention: The Philosopher is introduced precisely where Vladimir's inquiry must become an itinerary, that is, where discernment must become a movement that reshapes desire and practice.

In this article, "philosopher" is used in the late antique and Byzantine Christian sense of philosophy as a way of life. Philosophy is thus treated as teleological and practical: a mode of wisdom ordered toward likeness to God and verified in deeds. I work with a threefold criterion that will guide the reading of the *Chronicle*'s Philosopher episode: first, mediative knowledge; second, eros-driven ascent; and, third, likeness through action. Each element is grounded in patristic usage and is directly relevant to what the *Chronicle*'s narrative requires from the Philosopher as a character.

A particularly illuminating example can be found in the *Menaion* for January 21, where St. Maximus the Confessor is praised:

> Having acquired the knowledge of both earthly and Heavenly things, Maximus has justly been called a philosopher. By the desire (*eros*) for Wisdom, you were seen as the most-excellent imitator of your Christ, O glorious Maximus.[8]

This short snippet from the *Menaion* already contains the core of the Christian meaning of "philosopher". First, philosophy is framed as a knowledge that holds together "earthly" and "heavenly" realities, rather than separating them into unrelated domains. Second, the dynamic principle of this knowledge is *eros*: Philosophy is a movement of desire toward Wisdom. Third, the *telos* of this movement is imitation of Christ, which

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[4] Vladimir Petrukhin, "The Bible, apocrypha, and the formation of early Slavic historical traditions (toward a formulation of the problem)" [Библия, апокрифы и становление славянских раннеисторических традиций (к постановке проблемы)], in *From Genesis to Exodus: Biblical motifs in Slavic and Jewish folk culture* [От Бытия к Исходу: Отражение библейских сюжетов в славянской и еврейской народной культуре] (Moscow: Sefer, 1998), 277.

[5] V. Mansikka, *The religion of the Eastern Slavs* [Религия восточных славян] (Moscow: IMLI im. A. M. Gorkogo RAN, 2005).

[6] L. Müller, "The significance of the Bible for Christianity in Rus' (from the baptism until 1240)" [Значение Библии для христианства на Руси (от крещения до 1240 года)], *Slavic Studies* [Славяноведение], no. 2 (1995): 9.

[7] T. Vilkul, "On the origin of The Speech of the Philosopher" [О происхождении «Речи Философа»], *Palaeoslavica* 20, no. 1 (2012): 1.

[8] The original Greek: "Ὁ γνῶσιν τῶν γηΐνων ἀθροίσας, καὶ οὐρανίων, ἐνδίκως φιλόσοφος, κατονομάζεται Μάξιμος. Σοφίας τῆς ἀμείνω τῷ ἔρωτι, τοῦ Χριστοῦ σου, μιμητὴς πανάριστος, ὤφθης ἀοίδιμε Μάξιμε."

implies that "philosophy" culminates in holiness rather than remaining at the level of speculative contemplation.

As Maximus himself puts it: a human must become "the most unifying laboratory of all things"[9], only then this person is a true philosopher. The human is the site where disparate orders cohere, so the way of knowing is integrative, as a single movement of *eros* directed *toward* the Divine *through* the world[10]. Philosophy, in this sense, is not the flight from earthly things. It is the transfiguration of how earthly things are known and lived. And precisely because knowledge is meant to unify, it is inseparable from desire (*eros*) and from the shaping of life.

This is, following Maximus, "the principle of that wisdom which is revealed to all: that we should know and praise God through His creation and that by means of the visible world we should understand whence we came, what we are, for what purpose we were made and where we are going"[11]. Reason, perception and bodily engagement with the world become instruments of true knowledge and holiness. This reveals a logic that is both *incarnational* and *theotic* (deifying): incarnational, in that all of creation is seen as grace-bearing and worthy of attention; theotic, in that this attention becomes transformative, guiding both the knower and the known toward communion with God. Philosophy is thus a mode of transfigured life that leads to holiness.

The definition from the *Menaion* for Maximus echoes the first definition of philosophy in the Slavonic language that was given by St. Constantine-Cyril the Philosopher (827–869)[12], who, together with his brother Methodius, laid the foundation for the philosophical and theological vocabulary of *Slavia orthodoxa*[13]. The definition of St. Cyril appears in his lengthy hagiography *Vita Constantini*, which is attributed to his disciple Clement of Ohrid:

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[9] Maximus the Confessor, *Ambiguorum* 41 (36), PG 91:1305A–C.

[10] Maximus makes it explicit in his *Mystagogia V*: "ἐξ ὧν ἀμφοτέρων ἡ ἀληθὴς τῶν θείων καὶ τῶν ἀνθρωπίνων ἐπιστήμη συνέστηκε πραγμάτων" (from both of these together, the true knowledge of divine and human things *forms a union*). Maximus the Confessor, *Mystagogia: Una cum Latina interpretatione Anastasii Bibliothecarii*, ed. Christian Boudignon, Corpus Christianorum, Series Graeca 69 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011), 31.

[11] Maximus the Confessor, "First—Fifth Century of Various Texts," in *The Philokalia*, vol. 2, ed. G. E. H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, and Kallistos Ware (London: Faber & Faber, 1995), PG 90:1144–45.

[12] Cf. Two most recent articles in English on this topic: I. Christov, "Why 'Philosopher'? Problems and Misunderstandings Associated with the Epithet of St Cyril," in *Der heilige Methodius, Bulgarien und Europa*, ed. Emil Ivanov and Ivaylo Naydenov (Leiden: Brill Schöningh, 2023); A. Stamatov, "St Constantine-Cyril's Definition of Philosophy: The Beginning of Bulgarian Philosophical Culture," in *Der heilige Methodius, Bulgarien und Europa*, ed. cit.

[13] As Mikhail Gromov notes: "The understanding of philosophy in the spirit of Cyril is widespread in Old Russian culture. More than fifty copies of his *vita* are known, most of them of Russian origin. Old Russian authors frequently refer to his authority, and his definition of philosophy appears in various miscellanies, primers and other composite manuscripts". M. Gromov, "Определения философии в Древней Руси" [Definitions of philosophy in Old Rus'], *Русская философия* [Russian Philosophy] 22, no. 2 (2021).

> 'Philosopher, I would like to know what philosophy is'. – And Constantine, being quick-witted, answered him right away: 'To get to know divine and human things, to approach as close as possible to God and to learn through deeds [through own activity] to become like the One who created him in his image and likeness'[14].

Scholars have sought to trace multiple influences behind this concise definition[15], ranging from the Cappadocian and Byzantine Church Fathers to Alexandrian Neoplatonism. What emerges is a threefold characterization each with a patristic backbone:

1) The philosopher is identified as the mediator between acquired knowledge of created realities and participatory knowledge of the uncreated divine;

2) The philosopher is called to unite these modes of knowledge within a single teleological orientation, i.e. it is not a static intellection but a dynamic ascent, a movement of return *towards* the Divine governed by *eros*;

3) Ultimately, this return entails becoming like God by *active* engagement *in* and *with* the world. Gregory of Nyssa summarized this idea as concisely as possible: "we show Christ by our way of life"[16]. This principle of active participation finds a spiritual parallel in the later Slavic monastic-ascetic notion of *podvig* (подвиг) – as a radical, *kenotic* commitment to transformation.

Thus, the *Chronicle* portrays the first encounter of the Rus' with Christianity as already deeply infused with philosophical content. According to the *Chronicle*, Christianity did not arrive in the Slavic world merely as a set of religious doctrines or ritual practices but as a comprehensive philosophical worldview: The Christian message was mediated through conceptual structures drawn from patristic thought. The three criteria established here will therefore guide the readings that follow: the Philosopher brings a framework in which divine action becomes intelligible through history and the world (mediative knowledge), his speech reorients Vladimir's desire

[14] The original Slavonic: "Он же хытрым умом рече тогда: божиим и человеческим вещем разум, елико может человек приближити ся Бозе, яко детелию учить человека по образу и по подобию сътворшему его". Clement of Ohrid, *Събрани съчинения* [Collected Works], vol. 3 (Sofia: BAN, 1973), 91.

[15] Thinkers whose influence can be discerned behind St. Cyril's definition include both Christian theologians and Neoplatonic philosophers. Among the former are Gregory the Theologian, Photios the Great and especially John of Damascus (with *Philosophical Chapters*). From Alexandrian Neoplatonism, Porphyry's *Isagoge* and David the Invincible's *Definitions of Philosophy* were key. These interwoven strands suggest that Cyril intentionally engaged with both theological and philosophical traditions in formulating his conception of philosophy. See for more: I. Ševčenko, "The Definition of Philosophy in the Life of Saint Constantine," in *For Roman Jakobson: Essays on the Occasion of His Sixtieth Birthday* (The Hague: Mouton, 1956).

[16] Gregory of Nyssa, *De perfecta christiani forma*, PG 46, 256.

and judgment toward a teleological movement of return to God (eros-driven ascent) and the narrative immediately translates Philosopher's disclosure into vows, baptismal transformation and communal change (likeness through action).

2. Summary of the *Chronicle*

Now, it is necessary to learn, at least in broad outline, the story of the conversion narrative. Here, I offer my short summary of the events recounted in the *Primary Chronicle* (years 986–988)[17]: The account of Vladimir's conversion begins with a sequence of encounters and dialogues. Proselytes from Volga-Bulgars (Islam), Germans (Roman Catholicism) and Khazars (Judaism) present one by one their faiths and rites at his court, each of which Vladimir evaluates individually and ultimately rejects. A Greek envoy, described as a Philosopher, follows with an extended exposition of the Christian worldview, during which Vladimir poses three questions concerning the Incarnation, its fulfilment and its sacramental form. Still seeking clarity, Vladimir sends a delegation to observe religious practices abroad. In Constantinople, the delegation experiences the Divine Liturgy and returns overwhelmed by its beauty, saying they no longer knew whether they "were in heaven or on earth". Deeply moved, Vladimir strongly considers the conversion. The narrative then shifts to the battle under Cherson. Vladimir besieges the Byzantine city and declares that, if victorious, he will be baptized. After taking the vow, his army conquers the city. However, soon after, he is struck with blindness. At the urging of the Byzantine princess Anna, he receives baptism and immediately recovers his sight. Following his healing, he marries Anna, and the two return to Kiev. There, Vladimir orders the destruction of pagan idols and calls the people to the Dnieper River, where he oversees the mass baptism of the population, completing the Christianization of Rus'. Thereafter he sends the children "of the best families" to Constantinople for education.

3. Symbolic-Mystagogical Architecture and Dialogue

I argue that the sequence of events narrated in the *Primary Chronicle* surrounding the conversion of Prince Vladimir is far more than a loosely arranged string of political or hagiographical episodes (which is, unfortunately, commonly argued in the scholarly literature). When examined closely, the structure reveals itself to be an intentionally ordered *mystagogical*

[17] See the whole text in English translation in: Samuel H. Cross and Olgerd P. Sherbowitz-Wetzor, eds. and trans., *The Russian Primary Chronicle: Laurentian text* (Cambridge: The Mediaeval Academy of America, 1953), 96–117. Further on in this article, all the scenes from the conversion story are taken from these pages.

itinerary, in which the soul, the people and the state are drawn into progressive stages of purification, illumination and union (perfection). This is structurally analogous to the Mosaic ascent upon the mountain as it is described in Gregory of Nyssa's *Life of Moses* and in Dionysius the Areopagite's *Mystical Theology*. It is noteworthy that Elena Fedorova's concise study, in contrast to the majority of the scholarship, explicitly foregrounds the dialogical and spiritual architecture of the conversion narrative. Though only three pages long, it indicates with precision the approach developed here. Fedorova confirms that "the dialogical nature of Prince Vladimir's story is due to his awakening self-consciousness [...], the ascent from profane to spiritual values"[18].

As I show in my provisional scheme (see page 61), this narrative unfolds in a highly structured, *threefold* form that mirrors both the pedagogical logic of catechesis and the patristic metaphysics of ascent. It begins with discursive encounters (proselytes) and symbolic-visionary disclosure (Philosopher), moves through active participation (vow, destruction of idols) and culminates in sacramental (baptism, marriage) and political transformation (mass baptism, sending kids to Constantinople). The soul of Vladimir becomes the stage upon which these acts unfold, but he also figures as the representative of the people of Rus' and the political body. The conversion enacts a reordering of being itself through an ascent toward participation in the Divine. It is also philosophical in a premodern sense: it argues for the truth by leading the soul toward it. It is not concerned with demonstrating doctrine through proofs. Rather, what's important here is unfolding a metaphysical worldview through dialogue, vision and transformation.

Philosophically, the narrative draws from a range of metaphysical traditions. From patristic mystagogy, the structure resonates with Gregory of Nyssa's model of the soul's ascent, with Dionysius of Areopagite, whose theology operates through *eros*, symbol, ritual and beauty as well as with Maximus the Confessor, who offers a vision of salvation as cosmic reconciliation. Thus, Vladimir's journey can be read as a microcosmic drama of that reconciliation. These frameworks imbue both the form and the content of the conversion narrative. The events are structured as progressive acts of the soul's initiation into divine reality, each deepening and preparing for the next.

Moreover, the narrative's use of *dialogue as its structuring form* is not at all a coincidence. As Fedorova highlights: "Vladimir's speech in this legend is dialogical. The questions that Vladimir asks become stepping stones in comprehending the spiritual foundations of the Christian faith"[19]. Prince Vladimir is portrayed as a figure *undergoing transformation through relational*

[18] Elena A. Fedorova, "Dialogism of the word in the story of choice of faith by Prince Vladimir (according to A. Ukhtomsky)," *Вестник Новгородского государственного университета* [Bulletin of Novgorod State University] 94 (2016): 66.

[19] *Ibid*., 67.

encounter. "Vladimir's speech is not only polemical, it is intimate and confessional"[20]. The dialogical mode reflects the *Platonic conviction* that truth is not imposed but *drawn out through engagement with others, "from much association/companionship" and "through shared life" (Ep.7, 341c).* Each dialogical moment in the narrative moves the Prince (and by symbolic extension, the people of Rus') closer to ontological alignment with the Divine. The first stage is one of purification: three emissaries present their respective religions. Each is heard, considered and ultimately rejected. The second stage brings in the Philosopher from Byzantium, who unveils the symbolic order of salvation, which functions as a moment of illumination. The third stage extends the inquiry into the domain of aesthetic experience. Vladimir sends his envoys to see the religious rites for themselves. Their *ecstatic* response to the Divine Liturgy and bringing this reaction back home marks the completion of the dialogical arc.

As Rachel May[21] has shown, dialogue in the *Primary Chronicle* is the central mechanism of transformation and not just a decorative literary feature: "The pivotal event is most often a speech or dialogue. What is more, these tend to be made up of [...] sentences that accomplish actions by their very utterance: promises, betrayals, threats, invitations, treaties, proposals, and so on"[22]. The chronicler himself, May observes, "is confined to a constative role, fitting his words to the world, while the characters engage in *performative* speech, changing the world by their words"[23]. Here, the dialogical form of the narrative converges with its ontological substance: events do not merely unfold, "events quite literally speak themselves: the characters are permitted to pronounce the crucial statements, and their speeches are what make things happen, not the chronicler's exegetical remarks"[24].

This narrative style is not incidental to the Old East Slavic tradition. "Other European chronicles also use this style, although rarely to such a degree as the Slavic one, or with such verisimilitude"[25]. One of the first researchers of Slavic chronicles (in their historic and linguistic dimensions), Dmitry Likhachev, notes already in 1947:

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[20] *Ibid*., 68.

[21] Although May's primary concern lies in the domain of narrative theory and speech act analysis rather than theological or metaphysical interpretation, her work remains crucial here, as she is one of the few scholars to take seriously the dialogical structure of the *Primary Chronicle* and to treat its performative speech as narratively and structurally central, which is precisely the foundation upon which my symbolic-philosophical reading builds.

[22] R. May, "The Power of Speech: Dialogue as History in the Russian Primary Chronicle," in *Dialogue and Critical Discourse: Language, Culture, Critical Theory*, ed. Michael Macovski (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 48.

[23] *Ibid*., 48.

[24] *Ibid*., 57.

[25] *Ibid*., 59.

> One of the most characteristic features of Russian chronicle writing, sharply distinguishing it from the narrative style of Byzantine and Western European chronicles, is the abundance of instances of direct speech. [...] [It] is distinguished by its vivid, concrete and non-fictional character. It is not literary or bookish language, but rather a living, oral speech that closely reflects the actual words spoken. It is precisely in the direct speech of chronicles that one most strongly senses the dependence of the chronicle on *real life itself*.[26]

4. Philosopher's speech

With this background in mind, we can now turn to the Philosopher's speech itself. With the emissaries of the world's religions dismissed, the narrative turns to the unnamed Greek Philosopher. The fact that the *Primary Chronicle* calls him *философъ* signals a fundamental shift: from religious persuasion to philosophical disclosure. The Philosopher reframes the conversation entirely. What follows is a symbolic narration of the divine economy: the history of God's engagement with the world, ordered according to a metaphysical structure and expressed in typological language. The Philosopher enters into a dialogue with Vladimir, marked by a *rhythm* of three philosophical questions and three theological responses. Each of Vladimir's questions corresponds to a fundamental metaphysical issue: the nature of Being itself, the question of relation between eternity and time and the symbolic realist logic. Each answer unfolds a vision of divine action in time.

Vladimir's first question is interesting in its philosophical depth: "Why did God descend to Earth and suffer such pain?". In other words, why should the absolute unchanging Transcendence enter into the domain of time and death? Why should the Eternal become subject to suffering? The Philosopher responds with a narrative-theological arc that begins with the Creation of the world and the Fall of man. His answer moves through the typological key of the Old Testament, tracing the disorder introduced by sin (human's Fall is both an event in time *and* a metaphysical rupture) and God's salvific promise. Through this retelling, the Philosopher introduces a logic of *katabasis* and *anabasis*, that is central to Christian soteriology. This aligns with categories articulated by Gregory of Nyssa, Dionysius of Areopagite and Maximus the Confessor behind the Philosopher's answer.[27]

[26] Dmitry Likhachev, *Russian Chronicles and Their Cultural-Historical Significance* [Русские летописи и их культурно-историческое значение] (Moscow–Leningrad: AN SSSR, 1947), 114.

[27] The motif of *descent* and *ascent* has been widely examined in the context of Greek Church Fathers. While many scholars tend to simply subsume or collapse the Fathers into the Neoplatonic framework (calling it "Christian Neoplatonism"), I propose to understand their engagement as a deliberate *transfiguration* of Neoplatonic language and ideas within

The scene follows a philosophical *pattern* that begins with Plato' allegory of the philosopher descending once again into the Cave after his "enlightenment" (*Politeia* VII, 519c) and reaches its theological culmination in Byzantine and Old Slavic iconography where Christ's Resurrection appears as a Descent into Hades.

God's *erotic* descent (the Dionysian *ecstatic eros*) is a necessary inversion that enables the restoration of the fallen order. The Philosopher shows that descent is the *only* path to ascent. The divine enters into the condition of sin to transform it from within. A particularly vivid expression of this dynamic appears in Gregory of Nyssa's *Life of Moses*, where the transformation of Moses' rod into a serpent (i.e. descent) and its return to its original form (i.e. ascent) is interpreted as a foreshadowing of Christ: "If a serpent is sin and the Lord became sin, the conclusion should be evident to all: who became sin, also became a serpent, which is nothing other than sin. For our sake he became a serpent that he might devour and destroy the Egyptian serpents"[28]. In this way, the Philosopher introduces the foundational Christian claim: that the transcendence redeems the world *through* immanence, and that the descent of God into the world is not a diminishment of divinity, but its highest manifestation, the fullness of love as self-emptying. As Vasilakis succinctly notes: "Resurrection qua descent to Hades is a fact that is repeated every 'now and forever'"[29]. Or as Kallistos Ware expressed it: "*Kenosis* leads to *plerosis*"[30].

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a Christian theological horizon. Florovsky expressed this most precisely by the example of Dionysius: "The *Areopagitica* bears the stamp of late Neoplatonism, above all in language. The author has a special peculiar and very sophisticated theological terminology. But the Neoplatonic influence does not absorb or suppress him at all. In philosophical and Hellenistic formulas, he concludes a new and Christian content, a new mystical experience. The author is not so much a thinker as a contemplator, and speculative boldness is inwardly tempered in him by the pathos of inexpressibility and a lively liturgical feeling". Georges Florovsky, *Byzantine Fathers of the 5th–8th Centuries: Part 6, Corpus Areopagiticum* [Византийские Отцы V–VIII веков: Часть 6, Corpus Areopagiticum] (Minsk: Publishing House of the Belarusian Exarchate [Издательство Белорусского Экзархата], 2006).

The following is a small selected list of academic contributions relevant to this topic: Maximos Constas, "Maximos the Confessor, Dionysios the Areopagite, and the Transformation of Christian Neoplatonism," *Analogia: The Pemptousia Journal for Theological Studies* 1, no. 2 (2017): 1–12; Nikolaos Loudovikos, "Ecstasy as Descent: The Palamite and Maximian Bedrock of the Theology of St Sophrony," *Analogia* 11 (2020): 77–88; Dimitrios Vasilakis, "Love as Descent: Comparing the Models of Proclus and Dionysius through Eriugena," *Religions* 12, no. 9 (2021): 726; Ann Conway-Jones, "Exegetical Puzzles and the Mystical Theologies of Gregory of Nyssa and Dionysius the Areopagite," *Vigiliae Christianae* 75, no. 1 (2021): 1–21.

[28] Gregory of Nyssa, "De vita Moysis" 2.33, in *Gregorii Nysseni Opera*, vol. VII/1, ed. Herbert Musurillo (Leiden: Brill, 1964).

[29] Dimitrios Vasilakis, "Love as Descent: Comparing the Models of Proclus and Dionysius through Eriugena," *Religions* 12, no. 9 (2021): 4.

[30] Kallistos Ware, *Orthodox Theology in the Twenty-First Century* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2012), 48.

Vladimir's second question concerns the temporality of salvation: "When was this fulfilled? Has it happened, or is it yet to occur?". The Philosopher's reply ("All was fulfilled when God was incarnate") delivers a metaphysical blow to simplistic linear historicism. His answer (including a recounting of the whole New Testament story) collapses the boundaries of past, present and future into a single Christological axis. As Olivier Clément calls it: "le temps déifié de l'Eglise"[31]. This is an example of *paradoxical eschatology*, where salvation is not simply a future promise or a past event, but a present reality grounded in the eternal Logos and actualized within the life of the Church. Incarnation and Resurrection are most importantly transfiguration of time from within. "In the Kingdom, time is called not so much to disappear as to be transfigured"[32], explains Clément. Indeed, as he further writes:

> True eternity is not the negation of temporality, since it chooses to reveal itself in it. It is not by rejecting time and history that man can open himself to the eternity of the Living God; it is through time, when hope, faith and love bring to maturity the moments of encounter: moments as perfectly temporal and perfectly eternal, as Christ is true God and true man[33].

Thus, salvation has happened, is happening and will happen. History becomes typological, sacramental and eschatological. This is the proper hermeneutic lens through which Mark 1:15 can be read.

The development of the *kairotic* understanding of time as divinely charged (a truly *nuptial* relationship between eternity and time) finds its most mature expressions yet again in Gregory of Nyssa, Dionysius of Areopagite[34] and Maximus the Confessor. For Gregory, for instance, "Christ's resurrection is the central *kairos* event of the Christian mystery"[35], positioning Christ as the center of all time, the one in whom all scattered moments are gathered into unity. The Resurrection not only reconfigures *chronos* but inaugurates a new mode of temporality: one that is eschatologically linear and symbolically-nonlinear at the same time. In this framework, the *eschaton* is *already* active, unfolding within the participatory, sacramental life of the

[31] Olivier Clément, *Transfigurer le temps: Notes sur le temps à la lumière de la tradition orthodoxe* (Neuchâtel/Paris: Delachaux et Niestlé, 1959), 51. – To date, Clément's book represents the most extensive and comprehensive treatment of the theme of time and eternity in the Greek Church Fathers known to me. Another valuable source is without any doubt: David Bradshaw, "Time and Eternity in the Greek Fathers," *The Thomist* 70 (2006): 311–66.

[32] *Ibid*., 52.

[33] *Ibid*., 57.

[34] See Elena Ene Draghici-Vasilescu, "Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite on the Notion of Time," *Analele Ştiinţifice ale Universităţii „Alexandru Ioan Cuza" din Iaşi. Teologie Ortodoxă* 27, no. 1 (2022): 71–81.

[35] Richard McCambly, "Taxis and Akolouthia as Used by Gregory of Nyssa," Lectio Divina, 2024, https://www.lectio-divina.org/images/nyssa/Taxis%20and%20Akolouthia.pdf.

Church. That is why, according to Maximus, while the past served as a shadow (*skia*) of the things to come (*ton mellonton*), the present constitutes the true *icon* (*eikon*) of the Kingdom, which is itself the ultimate Truth (*aletheia*)[36]. Yevtic articulates this Christocentric temporal structure as follows:

> History so conceived is understood not merely in the linear sense, in the sense of historic continuity, historical processes, and successive chronological movement and development, but rather in a unique eschatological event, where time and history are contained and at the same time are transcended, overcome, and brought into the new eschatological *aion* of the kingdom. This Event is Christ. [...] So Christ *in* the Church and *with* the Church (by himself *as* the Church) introduces the *eschaton* already here into history. He brings the new *aion* of the kingdom here and now (hic et nunc).[37]

Now, it is precisely within this eschatological horizon that the opening exclamation of the Byzantine Liturgy acquires its full depth. The phrase "Kairos tou poiesai to Kyrio"[38] (uttered by the deacon to the priest in the sanctuary just before the Liturgy begins) marks the liturgical moment as a decisive *kairotic* time for divine action. The Liturgy thereby both extends the act of Creation and manifests the Last Judgment, situating the *ecclesial present* within the fullness of salvific time. Returning to the dialogue between the Philosopher and Vladimir: the Philosopher's narration is ontologically performative. It reconfigures Vladimir's understanding of being, time, history and fulfillment.

The third and final question posed by Vladimir reveals the symbolic core of the narrative: *"Why was he born of a woman, why crucified on the tree, and why baptized with water?"*. This question shifts the dialogue towards *symbolic realism*, to the question of how *material* reality effectuates salvation. It is, fundamentally, a question about the real-symbolic structure of the world and the economy of redemption. The Philosopher's answer unfolds a typological schema initiated by Jesus Christ himself[39] and most fully developed by Gregory of Nyssa. Within this symbolic economy, the elements once associated with rupture or disorder (Eve, the tree of knowledge, the primordial waters) are not cast away but assumed and transfigured. In

[36] Maximus the Confessor, *Scholia in Ecclesiasticam Hierarchiam*, on *EH* 3.2–3, PG 4:137D.

[37] Atanasije Yevtic, "Eschatological Dimensions of the Church," *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 38 (1993): 94.

[38] Psalm 118 (119) [LXX], 126.

[39] The famous post-Resurrection story of Emmaus, in which the resurrected Christ interprets Himself through the *types* of the Old Testament: "Beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in the Scriptures" (Lk 24:27). A few lines further the two desciples recount this transfiguring experience and claim their hearts were *burning* within them as they had the Scripture *opened* to them (cf. Lk 24:32).

place of Eve, there is Mary; in place of the tree of temptation, the Cross; in place of the chaotic waters, the baptismal water. We see here a sort of ontological inversion: the fallen world is redeemed through its own symbols.

As Gregory shows in his exegesis, especially in the *Life of Moses*, biblical narratives are not abstract allegories but God-implanted *types*, i.e. living signs that carry spiritual power and direct the soul upward in its transformation. These *types* are spiritual realities embedded within the biblical text. As Margaret Beirne emphasizes, Gregory's approach rests on the conviction that, "where the meaning is hidden or covered, we must find other ways, searching 'the divine Scriptures with every means at our disposal'"[40]. Thus, his symbolic reading of Scripture is a carefully considered way of *seeing* – a contemplation of *meanings* in which each symbol is revealed in the light of the household of salvation. Scriptural figures and objects *participate* in the mysteries they foreshadow.

This patristic symbolic theology finds its metaphysical deepening in the cosmic-sacramental ontology of Dionysius the Areopagite, in which Creation itself is a vast hierarchy of symbols, where every created thing is a symbolic *theophany* that both conceals and reveals God in its own hierarchical way. Not only do symbols signify, they *effect* what they signify. What is crucial to understand here and what is so often forgotten when speaking of "symbolism" and "holy symbols"[41], is that for Dionysius (and, by extension, for other Church Fathers standing in the tradition), "these symbols are not allegories – they directly signify a higher reality"[42]. More than that: the symbol grants a share of itself, it transforms those who partake in it[43]. In his system, liturgical rites and scriptural forms are *theurgic* acts: they carry divine *dynamis*, because they originate in and operate through God. Here, I stand in direct opposition to such scholars as, for instance, John Meyendorff who consider the Dionysian understanding of liturgy as merely figurative and non-literal. On the other hand, such scholars as Andrew Louth[44], Panagiotis Pavlos[45] and Sarah Wear have, in my view, demonstrated with excellence the real-symbolic function of the liturgy in Dionysius. As Sarah

[40] Margaret Beirne, "Spiritual enrichment through exegesis: St Gregory of Nyssa and the Scriptures," *Phronema* 27, no. 2 (2012): 87; Gregory of Nyssa, *Commentary on the Song of Songs* 5.

[41] Dionysius the Areopagite, *Epistle* 9, PG 3:1105C–1108D.

[42] Sarah Wear, *Dionysius the Areopagite and the Neoplatonist Tradition: Despoiling the Hellenes* (London: Routledge, 2007), 89.

[43] Cf. *Ibid*., 109 and Dionysius the Areopagite, EH 400AD.

[44] See Andrew Louth, "Pagan Theurgy and Christian Sacramentalism in Denis the Areopagite," *Journal of Theological Studies* 37 (1986).

[45] See P. Pavlos, "Theurgy in Dionysius the Areopagite," in *Platonism and Christian Thought in Late Antiquity*, ed. P. Pavlos et al. (London: Routledge, 2019), 151–80.

As Pavlos explains on page 152: "In spite of the temptation of reading the Areopagite Neoplatonically, there is an important Christian modification and variety of the metaphysical, cosmological, and epistemological principles that govern the development and structure of the Dionysian system. The implications of this for theurgy are enormous".

Wear explains, Dionysius inherits the Neoplatonic symbolic-theurgic language of Proclus and Iamblichus but reorients it fundamentally around Christ. The pagan notion of *theourgia* (divine action mediated through ritual) is reinterpreted as God's own salvific initiative, enacted for all in the Incarnation and sacramentally perpetuated through *hierourgia*, the Church's sacred rites. Thus, *hierourgia* is the *participatory* re-enactment of *theourgia*, a kind of *synergy*[46] with God's actions[47]. The sacraments are thus not symbolic "reminders" of divine presence but the very means by which it becomes effective in time.

From this perspective, Vladimir's question is metaphysical. Christ is born of a woman not in spite of matter but through it; baptized not as a simple gesture but to fill water with the *dynamis* of deification. In the symbolic realism of the Fathers, the elements of the Fall become the instruments of transfiguration. The world is thus ritually assumed into the very work of God.

Through these three questions and answers, the Philosopher leads Vladimir into a new vision of reality that recasts history, time and matter as vehicles of divine presence. In this sense, the Philosopher functions as a metaphysical guide and mystagogue.

Conclusion

This article has proposed that the Vladimir conversion cycle in the *Primary Chronicle* is best approached as a narrative of initiation. The text narrates how a person (and, by extension, a people) is led from religious curiosity into a form of life. The story moves from discursive evaluation to metaphysical disclosure and from this disclosure to embodied participation. Read as patristic mystagogy, the Vladimir narrative discloses how wisdom and holiness converge in a staged itinerary that reframes reason and culminates liturgically.

Five results can be stated. First, the conversion cycle displays a deliberate internal pattern. The sequence of testing rival emissaries, the arrival of the Philosopher and the envoy to Constantinople is narrated as a controlled progression in which each stage prepares the next. The later episodes (vow, illness, baptismal healing, marriage) return to the same logic by translating insight into transformation. On the basis of this patterning, it is reasonable to treat the narrative form itself as a carrier of theological meaning.

Second, the *Chronicle*'s choice to place a "Philosopher" at the narrative center is not accidental. Once "philosophy" is taken in its Byzantine-Christian sense as a way of life, the Philosopher's role becomes intelligible. He

[46] Cf. Dionysius the Areopagite, CH 3.2.

[47] Cf. Sarah Wear, *Dionysius the Areopagite and the Neoplatonist Tradition: Despoiling the Hellenes* (London: Routledge, 2007), 102.

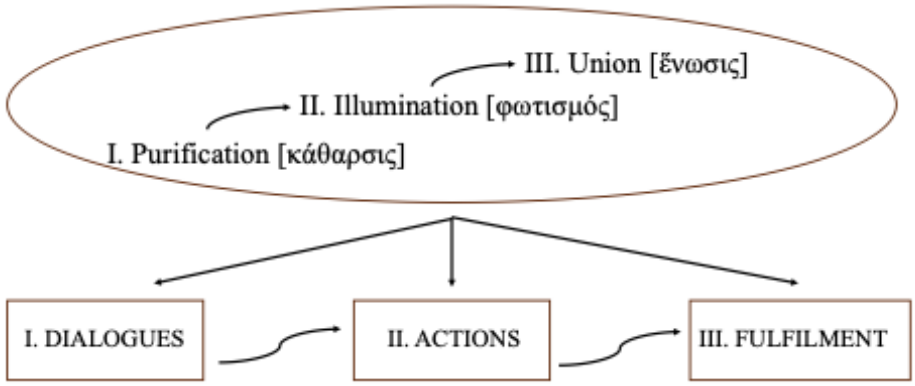
functions as the figure through whom Vladimir's search receives a metaphysical horizon and a practical direction. This is why the definitional work in the first section matters for the later reading. It provides the conceptual profile that the story presupposes when it calls its key "instructor" a philosopher.

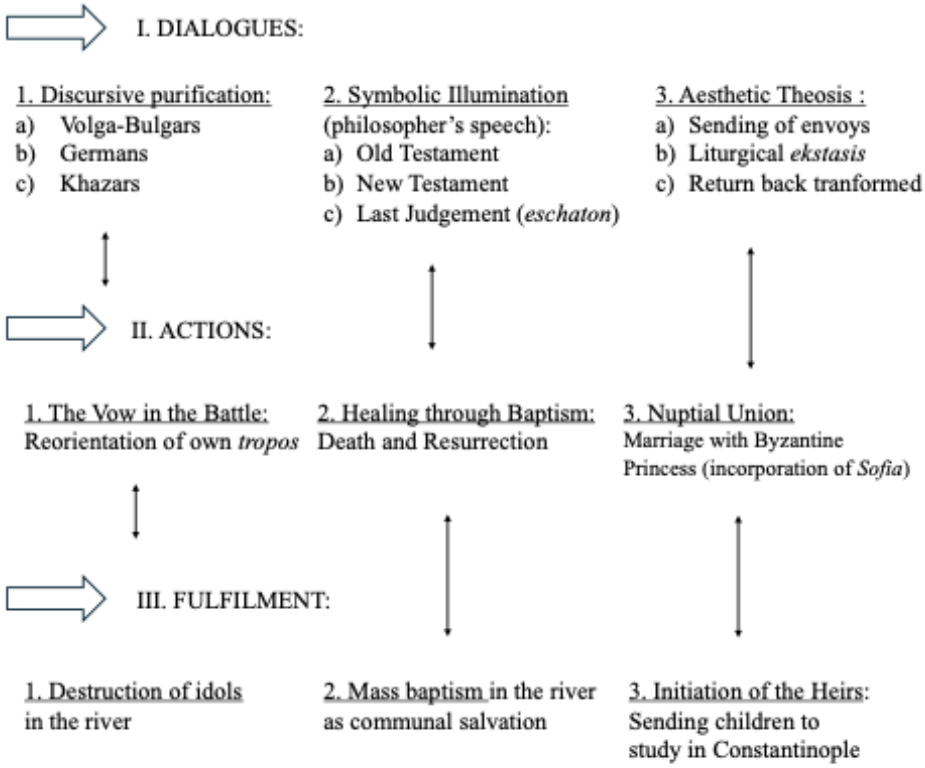
Third, the narrative's use of direct speech is likewise not accidental. The *Chronicle* repeatedly lets crucial turns occur through promises, questions, refusals, confessions and decisions spoken by the characters themselves. In other words, speech in this text often does something: It changes positions and initiates action. If this is correct, then "dialogue" is part of the story's theological content, because conversion is presented as something that happens through encounter rather than through detached reflection.

Fourth, the Philosopher's three-question exchange with Vladimir crystallizes the narrative's metaphysical claims. The questions open three problems that the story treats as decisive: how being and, by extension, salvation works (descent and ascent), how time is charged by divine action (*kairos* within ecclesial life) and how matter can become an instrument of redemption (symbolic realism). The patristic materials brought into the analysis are not invoked to "prove" that the chronicler copied specific texts but to articulate with precision the theological logic that the *Chronicle* itself stages in this dialogue.

Fifth, the *Chronicle* deliberately stages the co-inherence of reason and revelation: rational inquiry (testing, questioning, discernment) moves within, and is completed by, revelatory participation (liturgy, symbols, sacraments). In patristic terms, knowing becomes true only as it is performed in life.

If this reading is on the right track, it points to several concrete research tasks. One is textual and historical: a careful study of the relationship between Philosopher's speech and Byzantine catechetical and homiletic genres. A second is comparative: placing the *Chronicle*'s conversion story alongside other Byzantine and Slavic conversion narratives to test whether the same movement recurs and where the *Chronicle* is unusual. A third is philological and liturgical: mapping early Slavonic liturgical vocabulary and translated materials to see how strongly the participatory and symbolic logic assumed here can be shown in the wider textual environment. Finally, the patristic framework itself can be sharpened: future work can sort more rigorously which patristic categories best illuminate which narrative segments. Taken together, these steps would give the theological reading offered here a clearer historical and linguistic profile.


III. Union [ἕνωσις]
II. Illumination [φωτισμός]
I. Purification [κάθαρσις]
I. DIALOGUES
II. ACTIONS
III. FULFILMENT


I. DIALOGUES:
1. Discursive purification:
a) Volga-Bulgars
b) Germans
c) Khazars
2. Symbolic Illumination (philosopher's speech):
a) Old Testament
b) New Testament
c) Last Judgement (*eschaton*)
3. Aesthetic Theosis :
a) Sending of envoys
b) Liturgical *ekstasis*
c) Return back tranformed
II. ACTIONS:
1. The Vow in the Battle: Reorientation of own *tropos*
2. Healing through Baptism: Death and Resurrection
3. Nuptial Union: Marriage with Byzantine Princess (incorporation of *Sofia*)
III. FULFILMENT:
1. Destruction of idols in the river
2. Mass baptism in the river as communal salvation
3. Initiation of the Heirs: Sending children to study in Constantinople

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The Divine Attribute of Transcendence in Dionysius the Areopagite's Work

Differences and Confluences with the Jewish Kabbalah

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Abstract: This article undertakes a comparative analysis of divine transcendence as conceptualized in the Neoplatonically-infused Christian mysticism of the *Corpus Areopagiticum* and the esoteric tradition of Jewish Kabbalah, with a primary focus on the Zohar. It argues that despite their distinct theological origins and historical contexts, both systems develop sophisticated apophatic theologies to safeguard the absolute otherness of the Godhead, while simultaneously positing a structured series of divine emanations or processions that bridge the chasm between the transcendent source and the created world. The study explores the apophatic methodologies (the *via negativa*), the role of divine names, and the hierarchical structures of emanation (divine processions in Dionysius, the *Sefirot* in Kabbalah). A central, speculative hypothesis is advanced: the potential analogical identification of the *Sefirah Hokhmah* (Wisdom) with the Person of Christ as the *Logos* (the Verb). The article defines the necessary theological and philosophical conditions that would render such a comparison reasonably acceptable within a comparative mystical framework, highlighting both the profound confluences in their structural roles and the insurmountable dogmatic differences that prevent a full equation. The aim is not to syncretize, but to use the comparison as a heuristic tool to illuminate the unique contours of each tradition's approach to the paradox of a transcendent yet self-revealing God.

Keywords: Dionysius the Areopagite, Kabbalah, Transcendence, Neoplatonism, Proclus, Divine Names, Hierarchy, Mystical Theology.

1. Introduction: The Paradox of the Hidden and Revealed God

At the heart of the great mystical traditions of the West lies a fundamental paradox: How can a God defined by absolute transcendence,

existing beyond being, thought, and language, simultaneously be the immanent creator, sustainer, and goal of a finite, material cosmos? This question of the relationship between the hidden God (*Deus absconditus*) and the revealed God (*Deus revelatus*) has given rise to some of the most profound and complex metaphysical systems in religious thought. Two of the most influential of these systems are the Christian Neoplatonism of the author known as Dionysius the Areopagite and the esoteric theosophy of Jewish Kabbalah. Though separated by centuries and profound dogmatic divides, they independently developed remarkably similar strategies to navigate this paradox. Both traditions posit a radically transcendent Godhead that is utterly unknowable in itself, and both describe a process of divine self-emanation or procession through a series of intermediaries that make possible the existence of the world and the soul's potential return to its source.

This article will explore the concept of divine transcendence in the works of Dionysius and in Kabbalah, examining their points of confluence and divergence. It will argue that their shared reliance on apophatic theology and hierarchical models of emanation stems from a common philosophical heritage (explicitly Neoplatonic in Dionysius, implicitly so in Kabbalah) and a shared theological necessity to protect the absolute sovereignty and otherness of the Divine.

1.1. The Enigma of Dionysius the Areopagite

The author of the *Corpus Areopagiticum*—comprising *The Divine Names*, *The Mystical Theology*, *The Celestial Hierarchy*, *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, and ten epistles—presents himself as Dionysius the Areopagite, the Athenian convert of St. Paul mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles (17:34). This claim, accepted for over a millennium, granted his work quasi-apostolic authority and an "indisputable centrality in philosophical-religious thought from the sixth to the sixteenth century"[1]. However, modern scholarship has definitively demonstrated this to be a "literary forgery", one of the most influential in Western history[2]. Philological and doctrinal analysis reveals that the author was a Syrian Christian writing in the late 5th or early 6th century, deeply versed in the Neoplatonic philosophy of Proclus (d. 485), whose work is extensively paraphrased and adapted throughout the *Corpus*[3].

This act of pseudepigraphy was likely a strategic move within the intense theological and political landscape of the early Byzantine Empire. The works first appear officially in 532 at a public dispute in Constantinople,

[1] Ernesto Sergio Mainoldi, *Dionisie Areopagitul. Cel mai influent fals literar din istoria gândirii occidentale* (Bucureşti: Editura Litera, 2021), 7.

[2] Mainoldi, *Dionisie Areopagitul*, title page.

[3] Mainoldi, *Dionisie Areopagitul*, 12, 52–53. Mainoldi states the similarities are "macroscopic" and that Dionysius appears to have personally attended the Neoplatonic school in Athens.

where their authority was challenged[4]. Despite initial skepticism, their "high quality of content" and profound synthesis of Christian doctrine with Neoplatonic metaphysics ensured their unstoppable success[5]. The author, now commonly referred to as Pseudo-Dionysius, effectively "baptized" Neoplatonism, transforming its concepts to serve a Christian theological agenda. The Neoplatonic "One" becomes the Christian God, the theory of emanations is refigured as divine "processions" (*proodoi*), and the intellectual ascent to the One is transformed into a mystical union with God, achieved through the ecclesiastical and celestial hierarchies.

Dionysius is credited with inventing the term "hierarchy", defining the medieval understanding of symbolism, and codifying the orders of angels that remain familiar today[6]. His work, a philosophical masterpiece of the Justinian era, provided a speculative justification for the Church's liturgical and monastic life, framing it as an earthly reflection of a divine cosmic order[7]. This aspect has been rigorously highlighted by Alexander Golitzin in his seminal work *Mystagogy: A Monastic Reading of Dionysius Areopagita* (2014). Golitzin argues that the Corpus is not merely a philosophical appropriation of Proclus, but is deeply rooted in the ascetic and liturgical experience of the Christian East, serving as a "mystagogy" that guides the monk toward union with the Divine.

1.2. The Emergence of Kabbalah

Jewish Kabbalah, a multifaceted esoteric tradition, emerged into public view several centuries after Dionysius, primarily in Provence and Spain during the 12th and 13th centuries. While its adherents claim an ancient lineage, tracing its secrets back to prophetic revelation, its medieval formulation represents a new flowering of Jewish mysticism. The foundational text of theosophical Kabbalah is the *Sefer ha-Zohar* (The Book of Splendor), a sprawling mystical commentary on the Torah written in a distinctive Aramaic. Like the *Corpus Areopagiticum*, the Zohar is a pseudepigraphic work, attributed to the 2nd-century sage Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai and his circle, but composed in the late 13th century by the Spanish Kabbalist Moses de Leon[8].

At the core of Kabbalah is a distinction between the Godhead in its ultimate essence—known as *Ein Sof* (אין סוף, "Without End" or "The Infinite")—and God as He reveals Himself through ten divine emanations,

[4] Mainoldi, *Dionisie Areopagitul*, 21. Hypatius of Ephesus accused the writings of being a forgery at this council.

[5] Mainoldi, *Dionisie Areopagitul*, 16.

[6] Mainoldi, *Dionisie Areopagitul*, 12.

[7] Mainoldi, *Dionisie Areopagitul*, 64. The author suggests the *Corpus* was the "philosophical masterpiece of the Justinian era", aligning with the emperor's political and religious program.

[8] Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1995), 156–204.

the *Sefirot* (ספירות). *Ein Sof* is the absolute, undifferentiated, and unknowable abyss of divinity, analogous in its transcendence to the Godhead of Dionysius and the One of Plotinus. The Zohar states, "Before He gave any shape to the world, before He produced any form, He was alone, without form and without semblance to anything else"[9]. The *Sefirot* are the archetypal potencies or attributes through which *Ein Sof* creates, sustains, and interacts with the cosmos. They form a dynamic, interconnected structure, often depicted as a tree (*Ilan*) or an archetypal human (*Adam Kadmon*), representing the inner life of God and the blueprint for all of creation.

1.3. Methodology and the Central Hypothesis

This study will employ a comparative methodology, analyzing the primary texts of Dionysius and the Zohar to identify structural and conceptual parallels in their treatment of transcendence. It is not an argument for direct historical influence, though a shared Neoplatonic cultural substratum, however diffuse, is a plausible background[10]. Rather, the comparison serves as a heuristic device to illuminate how two distinct traditions addressed a common problem.

The article will culminate in an examination of a specific, speculative hypothesis: that the *Sefirah Hokhmah* (חכמה, Wisdom), the second *Sefirah* and the first point of conscious, articulated thought in the divine emanation, can be seen as structurally analogous to the Person of Christ as the *Logos* (the Verb or Word) in Christian theology. The Zohar describes *Hokhmah* as the primordial point from which all else emerges: "When the Most Hidden of the Hidden wished to reveal Himself, He first made a single point: the Transcendent Light. This is the 'beginning' (*reshit*) which is the first word of creation"[11]. This "beginning" is explicitly identified with *Hokhmah*.

While this resonates vividly with the prologue of the Gospel of John—"In the beginning was the Word"—critical theological nuance is required. As noted in Patristic literature, the "Beginning" (*Archē*) in John 1:1 is not typically interpreted by the Church Fathers as the Logos himself, but rather as the Father (the Principle) in whom the Logos eternally exists. Consequently, the comparison between *Hokhmah* and the Logos is not one of strict terminological identity (i.e., *Reshit* = Logos), but of functional analogy. Both *Hokhmah* (as the primordially revealed point) and the Logos (as the begotten Son) serve as the initial, creative articulation of the Divine, bridging the silence of the absolute Source with the multiplicity of creation.

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[9] Zohar I, 2a. (Translation by the author, based on standard English versions like Pritzker or Sperling & Simon).

[10] Moshe Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 33–36. Idel discusses the complex issue of Neoplatonic influences on Kabbalah, suggesting indirect transmission through various philosophical and mystical currents.

[11] Zohar I, 15a. This passage is a cornerstone of Zoharic cosmology.

This comparison is fraught with peril and requires careful qualification. To make it "reasonably acceptable" as a subject for academic inquiry, several conditions must be met:

1. Structural Equivalence: The comparison must be limited to the *structural role* played by *Hokhmah* and the *Logos* within their respective systems—as the first principle of divine self-revelation, the blueprint of creation, and the bridge between the infinite source and finite reality.

2. Theological Neutrality: The analysis must acknowledge and respect the fundamental, irreconcilable dogmatic differences. The Christian doctrine of the Incarnation—the *Logos* becoming flesh in the person of Jesus Christ—has no direct parallel in Kabbalah. Likewise, the Kabbalistic understanding of the *Sefirot* as divine attributes or vessels, not distinct "persons" in the Trinitarian sense, must be maintained.

3. Focus on Mystical Function: The comparison should focus on the function of these principles within the mystical path—how the contemplation of *Hokhmah* or union with Christ provides a way for the mystic to approach the otherwise inaccessible Godhead.

By defining these conditions, the hypothesis can be explored not as an attempt to equate two faiths, but as a tool to deepen our understanding of the archetypal patterns that emerge when the human mind grapples with the ultimate mystery of the transcendent God.

2. The Unknowable Godhead in the *Corpus Areopagiticum*

Dionysius's theology is fundamentally a meditation on the paradox of a God who is both radically transcendent and lovingly provident. His entire system is built upon this tension. To grasp his concept of transcendence, one must first understand its philosophical roots in Neoplatonism, its methodological expression in apophatic theology, and its resolution in the doctrine of divine processions.

2.1. The Neoplatonic Inheritance: Proclus and the Super-Essential One

The discovery of Dionysius's dependence on the Athenian Neoplatonist Proclus was the key that unlocked his historical context. As Ernesto Sergio Mainoldi notes, "the work of Proclus is almost completely paraphrased" throughout the *Corpus*[12]. Proclus's system is a vast, hierarchical structure emanating from a primary principle, the One (Τὸ Ἕν). This One is utterly simple, beyond all predication, beyond even being itself (*hyperousios*, or super-essential). It is the source of all things, but it is not any of the things

[12] Mainoldi, *Dionisie Areopagitul*, 52.

it produces. From the One emanates a series of divine "henads", followed by Being, Life, and Intellect, which in turn produce the World Soul and the material cosmos. Every effect remains in, proceeds from, and returns to its cause (*monē*, *proodos*, *epistrophē*), a triadic structure that Dionysius adopts wholesale[13].

Dionysius takes this Procline framework and "re-signifies" it within a Christian context. The Neoplatonic One becomes the Holy Trinity, a "super-essential Godhead" that is nonetheless a personal, triune God. He writes, "it is the All-Cause, being neither soulless nor lifeless, not without reason or intelligence... It is not a body... It has no shape, or form, or quality, or quantity, or weight"[14]. While Proclus's One is an impersonal philosophical principle, Dionysius's Godhead is the God of the Bible—a living, willing, loving being, yet one whose inner essence remains as transcendent and inaccessible as the Neoplatonic One. The "philosophical concepts are terminologically resumed but with a radically changed meaning"[15]. This act of appropriation allowed Dionysius to use the most sophisticated philosophical language of his day to defend the profundity of Christian revelation.

2.2. Apophatic Theology: The Via Negativa as Ascent

If the Godhead is "super-essential", beyond being and knowledge, how can anything be said about it? Dionysius's answer lies in his famous distinction between two theological paths: the cataphatic (*via affirmativa*) and the apophatic (*via negativa*).

Cataphatic theology proceeds by affirmation. It takes the names and attributes ascribed to God in Scripture—Good, Just, Wise, Being, Life—and understands them as reflections of God's "processions" or self-revealing energies. God is the cause of all things, so the perfections of creatures must pre-exist in a transcendent way within Him. Thus, we can call God "Good" because He is the source of all goodness. However, this path is ultimately inadequate, because God is not good in the same way a creature is good. All affirmations fall infinitely short of the divine reality.

Therefore, the higher path, detailed in *The Mystical Theology*, is the apophatic. This path proceeds by negation, systematically stripping away every attribute and concept from God, even the highest ones. The mystic, seeking union, must "leave behind the senses and the operations of the intellect, and all things sensible and intelligible... and press forward...

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[13] Proclus, *The Elements of Theology*, ed. E.R. Dodds (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), Prop. 35.

[14] Dionysius the Areopagite, *The Divine Names*, Ch. I, 5. In *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, trans. Colm Luibheid (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 53.

[15] Mainoldi, *Dionisie Areopagitul*, 56.

towards union with Him who is above all being and knowledge"[16]. Dionysius describes this as entering into the "divine darkness" or the "luminous gloom", a state of unknowing that is paradoxically a higher form of knowing.

He writes in a climactic passage:

> We say that the Cause of all things is not body, nor has figure, nor form... It is not in place, or seen; It is not sensible perception... It is not soul, or mind... It is not number, or order, or greatness, or littleness... It is not Being, nor Eternity, nor Time... It is not one, nor oneness, not divinity, or goodness; nor is It spirit, as we know spirit; not Sonship, not Fatherhood... It is of a truth nothing of things that are not, nor of things that are[17].

This radical negation is not an expression of atheism or agnosticism. It is a devotional and intellectual discipline designed to purify the mind of all finite concepts, which inevitably become idols when applied to the infinite Godhead. For Dionysius, transcendence is not merely a philosophical attribute; it is an experiential reality that the mystic must enter through the "unknowing" of apophatic prayer. This is the very definition of "mysticism, as a spiritual experience that goes beyond the limits of the intellect"[18].

2.3. The Divine Processions (Proodoi): From Unity to Multiplicity

If the Godhead is so radically transcendent and unknowable, how does the world exist? Dionysius resolves this through the doctrine of "processions" (*proodoi*), his Christianized version of Neoplatonic emanation. The super-abundant goodness of the Godhead cannot contain itself; it overflows, "as if a kind of ecstatic love", bringing all things into being while itself remaining undiminished and unchanged in its transcendent unity[19]. This creative outflow is not a depletion of the divine essence but an extension of its power and goodness.

These processions are structured hierarchically. The highest realities are the "divine names" themselves—Goodness, Being, Life, Wisdom—which are the first self-revelations of the Godhead. From and through these, God creates the *Celestial Hierarchy* of angels, which in turn transmits the divine light and energy to the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* on earth (bishops, priests, deacons, monks, laity). This entire cosmic structure is a great chain of being, a "sacred order" whose purpose is to lead all creation back to God. As

[16] Dionysius the Areopagite, *The Mystical Theology*, Ch. I, 1. In *The Complete Works*, 135.

[17] Dionysius the Areopagite, *The Mystical Theology*, Ch. V. In *The Complete Works*, 141.

[18] Mainoldi, *Dionisie Areopagitul*, 12.

[19] Andrew Louth, *Denys the Areopagite* (London: Continuum, 2002), 35. Louth discusses the concept of ecstatic, creative love in Dionysius.

Dionysius states, "Hierarchy is a sacred order, and knowledge, and activity, assimilated as far as possible to the God-like, and conducted to the illuminations granted it from God"[20].

This hierarchical system serves a dual purpose. First, it safeguards divine transcendence. God does not interact with the material world directly, but through a series of intermediaries. This preserves His otherness. Second, it makes God accessible. The divine light, too brilliant to be perceived directly, is "veiled" and mediated by the ranks of angels and the sacraments of the Church, allowing finite beings to receive it according to their capacity. The hierarchy is therefore the very structure of divine immanence, the means by which the transcendent God makes Himself present to creation without compromising His transcendence.

2.4. Divine Names and the Limits of Language

The treatise *The Divine Names* is a detailed exploration of cataphatic theology, yet it is everywhere conditioned by the apophatic principle. Dionysius analyzes names from Scripture like "Good", "Being", "Life", and "Wisdom". He argues that these names are true and revealed by God, but they refer to the *dunameis* (powers) or "energies" of God that flow out into creation, not to His hidden "super-essence" (*hyperousios*).

The name "Good" is preeminent because it signifies God's self-diffusive, creative love. The "Good" is what "all things desire", and it is this ecstatic, loving goodness that causes the Godhead to "proceed" forth and create[21]. The name "Being" is also fundamental, as God as "He Who Is" (an allusion to Exodus 3:14) is the cause of all existence. However, Dionysius is quick to add that God is "pre-eminently Being" (*pro-ōn*) and "super-essential" (*hyperousios*), meaning He is beyond the category of being as we understand it.

Every name is thus a paradox. It reveals something true about God's relationship to the world, but it simultaneously conceals His inner nature. Language, for Dionysius, is symbolic. The names are "symbols", not literal descriptions. This understanding of symbol, as something that both reveals and conceals a higher reality, became foundational for medieval thought[22]. Ultimately, even the most exalted names must be negated. The path of the mystic leads beyond names, beyond concepts, into the silent darkness of the unknowable Godhead, where union is found not in knowledge but in love. In this system, transcendence is not a static quality but a dynamic reality that structures all of reality and the soul's journey home.

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[20] Dionysius the Areopagite, *The Celestial Hierarchy*, Ch. III, 1. In *The Complete Works*, 153.

[21] Dionysius the Areopagite, *The Divine Names*, Ch. IV, 1. In *The Complete Works*, 71.

[22] Mainoldi, *Dionisie Areopagitul*, 12.

3. The Infinite *Ein Sof* and the World of *Sefirot*

While the language and historical context of Jewish Kabbalah are vastly different from those of the *Corpus Areopagiticum*, its aetiological structure exhibits a surprisingly similar response to the problem of transcendence. Kabbalah posits an ultimate, hidden Godhead (*Ein Sof*) and a series of emanations (the *Sefirot*) that bridge the gap between the infinite and the finite. This framework allows for a rich and dynamic theology that preserves God's absolute otherness while describing His active involvement in creation.

3.1. Ein Sof: The Absolutely Transcendent and Unknowable

The Kabbalistic concept of *Ein Sof* (אין סוף, literally "Without End") represents the most radical apophaticism in Judaism. *Ein Sof* is God in His purest essence, prior to any self-revelation, thought, or will. It is the infinite, undifferentiated abyss of divinity, about which nothing can be posited. It is not "He" or "She", not a person, not a being, not even "God" in the sense of the God of the Bible who interacts with humanity. The Zohar describes this state as "the Most Hidden of the Hidden" (*Atika Kadisha*), a realm of pure, undifferentiated light that is conceptually equivalent to absolute darkness because it is beyond all perception[23].

Gershom Scholem, the founder of the modern academic study of Kabbalah, emphasizes that "*Ein-Sof*... does not have any attributes at all"[24]. Any attribute, even omnipotence or omniscience, would imply a limitation, a definition that the limitless *Ein Sof* must transcend. This is why the Kabbalists do not direct their prayers or religious life to *Ein Sof*. It is a philosophical and mystical limit-concept, a necessary postulate to safeguard the absolute freedom and otherness of God, ensuring that the revealed God of the *Sefirot* does not exhaust the mystery of the Godhead. The Zohar is emphatic on this point: "No thought can grasp You at all"[25]. This phrase, directed at the divine will emerging from the abyss, applies with even greater force to *Ein*

[23] Zohar III, 128b (*Idra Rabba*). This section of the Zohar, the "Great Assembly", is a primary source for the description of the divine countenances (*partzufim*) that emerge from the ultimate divine mystery, referred to as *Atika Kadisha*, the "Holy Ancient One". See Isaiah Tishby, *The Wisdom of the Zohar*, vol. 1, 273–277.

[24] Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1995), 215. Scholem's analysis distinguishes between the personal, revealed God of the *Sefirot* and the impersonal, hidden Godhead of *Ein Sof*, a distinction he saw as a Gnostic-like innovation within Judaism.

[25] Zohar I, 1b (Introduction). This phrase appears in the Zohar's opening hymn, "The Rose" (*Patach Eliyahu*), and sets the apophatic tone for the entire work. The full context addresses the divine Will (*Ratzon*) that emerges from *Ein Sof*, which itself is beyond even Will.

Sof itself. This absolute transcendence is the Kabbalistic parallel to the "super-essentiality" of Dionysius's Godhead. Both systems begin with an axiom of divine unknowability.

3.2. The Sefirot as Vessels of Divine Light

If *Ein Sof* is unknowable and inactive, how does creation come into being? The Kabbalistic answer is the doctrine of the *Sefirot*. In an act of primordial will, *Ein Sof* withdraws or contracts itself (*tzimtzum*, a concept developed most fully by Isaac Luria but with roots in the Zohar) to make a "conceptual space" for creation[26]. Into this space, a single ray of divine light shines from *Ein Sof*, unfolding into ten distinct stages or vessels, the *Sefirot*. These are not separate gods, but rather the attributes, potencies, or "faces" of the one God as He turns towards creation. The Zohar describes them as "lamps of darkness" which, when illuminated by the flow from above, shine with different colors and qualities[27].

The ten *Sefirot* are typically listed as:

1. *Keter* (כתר) – Crown (The primordial will)
2. *Hokhmah* (חכמה) – Wisdom (The primordial point of intellect)
3. *Binah* (בינה) – Understanding (The intellect developed and articulated)
4. *Hesed* (חסד) – Loving-kindness (The expansive impulse)
5. *Gevurah* (גבורה) – Strength/Judgment (The contracting, limiting impulse)
6. *Tiferet* (תפארת) – Beauty/Compassion (The balance between Hesed and Gevurah)
7. *Netzach* (נצח) – Victory/Endurance
8. *Hod* (הוד) – Splendor/Glory
9. *Yesod* (יסוד) – Foundation (The channel of creative energy)
10. *Malkhut* (מלכות) – Kingdom (The final expression, the Divine Presence or *Shekhinah* in the world)

This system, like Dionysius's hierarchies, serves two functions. It breaks down the singular, blinding light of *Ein Sof* into a spectrum of attributes that can be comprehended by the human mind and can form the archetypal structure of creation. At the same time, it mediates the divine power, creating a distance between the infinite source and the finite world. The *Sefirot* are both the inner life of God and the blueprint for all lower worlds. As Rabbi Azriel of Gerona, a pre-Zoharic Kabbalist, wrote: "The *Sefirot* are the synthesis of the essence of God and His existence for us... they are like the

[26] The doctrine of *tzimtzum* (contraction) is most famously and systematically developed by Rabbi Isaac Luria in the 16th century. However, its conceptual roots are present in the Zohar, for instance in the idea that God had to "engrave a void" or create a "darkness" to make a space for revelation. See Gershom Scholem, *Kabbalah* (New York: Meridian, 1978), 129–135.

[27] Zohar I, 15a. The full metaphor is that of a lamp. The hidden source of light is *Ein Sof*. The *Sefirot* are the "lamps of darkness" (i.e., non-luminous vessels) until the divine light flows into them, at which point each shines with its own particular color and quality.

charcoal and the flame"[28]. The essence remains hidden, but its energies become manifest.

3.3. The Role of Apophatic Language in Kabbalistic Theosophy

Like Dionysius, the Kabbalists employ a profoundly apophatic approach, but it is integrated with a complex symbolic and cataphatic system. The absolute apophasis is reserved for *Ein Sof*. Regarding the *Sefirot*, however, the Kabbalists engage in a torrent of symbolic language, using anthropomorphisms, metaphors, and allegorical readings of Scripture to describe their inner dynamics. The *Sefirot* are called "garments", "lights", "colors", "mirrors", and "pillars". They are mapped onto the human body (*Adam Kadmon*), forming a divine anthropos.

Yet, even here, an apophatic caution prevails. The Kabbalists constantly warn against reifying these symbols or taking them literally. The descriptions of divine wrath (*Gevurah*) or compassion (*Hesed*) are not human emotions but metaphysical principles of contraction and expansion. The Zohar itself is a testament to this method. It takes the biblical text, which is full of seemingly simple narratives and laws, and reveals a hidden, dynamic interplay of the *Sefirot* behind the literal meaning. For the Kabbalist, every word of the Torah is a symbol pointing to the world of the *Sefirot*. As the Zohar puts it, "Woe to the man who says that the Torah comes to tell stories and profane matters... The Torah has a body, which are the commandments... and it has a soul, which is the inner meaning"[29].

This is a form of "relative apophasis". While the *Sefirot* can be named and described symbolically (unlike *Ein Sof*), their true essence remains divine and ultimately beyond the grasp of the symbols used to represent them. The symbols are tools for contemplation, rungs on a ladder of ascent, but the mystic must eventually transcend the symbol to experience the divine light directly.

3.4. Keter (Crown): The Bridge Between Infinity and Emanation

The highest *Sefirah*, *Keter*, occupies a unique position analogous to the boundary between the knowable and the unknowable. It is the first stirring

[28] This famous simile is found in Rabbi Azriel of Gerona's *Sha'ar ha-Sho'el*. A translation and discussion can be found in Joseph Dan, *The Early Kabbalah* (New York: Paulist Press, 1986), 93–94. Azriel was a pivotal figure in the 13th-century Gerona circle, which systematized many pre-Zoharic Kabbalistic ideas.

[29] Zohar III, 152a. This passage is a locus classicus for the Kabbalistic hermeneutic, distinguishing between the external "body" of the Torah (its literal narratives and laws) and its inner "soul" (the mysteries of the *Sefirot*). See Pinchas Giller, *Reading the Zohar: The Sacred Text of the Kabbalah* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 37–40.

of will within *Ein Sof*, the point where the Infinite begins its process of self-limitation in order to become manifest. *Keter* is sometimes called *Ayin* (אין), or "Nothingness", because from the perspective of the lower *Sefirot*, it is so transcendent as to be non-existent[30]. It is the "darkness" of Dionysius's *Mystical Theology* translated into a specific point on the map of divinity.

The Zohar describes the emergence of *Keter* from *Ein Sof* through the metaphor of a spark of "impenetrable darkness" which then ignites the process of emanation. It is the root of both being and non-being. As the primordial will to create, it is the ultimate source of the processions, yet it remains intimately linked to the silent abyss of *Ein Sof*. In many Kabbalistic schemes, *Keter* is considered too sublime for direct contemplation and is often identified with the divine will, a force that is itself beyond comprehension but whose effects are seen in the subsequent *Sefirot*. This "Crown" hovering above the head of the divine anthropos is the ultimate link, the final veil between the absolute transcendence of *Ein Sof* and the dynamic, immanent world of the revealed God. It functions as the crucial hinge in the Kabbalistic system, making the transition from absolute apophasis to symbolic cataphasis possible.

4. A Comparative Analysis of Transcendence and Emanation

Having separately examined the theological structures of Dionysius the Areopagite and the Kabbalah, we can now bring them into direct comparison. This analysis will illuminate their shared strategies for grappling with divine transcendence—the confluences—while also respecting their profound and irreconcilable theological differences—the divergences. The parallels are not necessarily evidence of direct influence but rather of a typological similarity, a shared "logic of mysticism" that emerges when monotheistic traditions integrate Neoplatonic or Gnostic-style emanative frameworks to explain the relationship between the infinite One and the finite many.

4.1. Confluences: Apophaticism, Hierarchy, and the Flow of Divinity

The most striking confluence between the two systems is their foundational commitment to apophaticism. Both Dionysius and the Kabbalists insist that the ultimate divine essence is radically transcendent and unknowable.

[30] Moshe Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 198–201. Idel explores the dialectic of *Ayin* (Nothingness) and *Yesh* (Being) in Kabbalah. *Keter* is the paradoxical point of transition, the "Nothingness" from which all Being (*Yesh*) emerges. It is *Ayin* from the perspective of creation, but the first existent reality from the perspective of *Ein Sof*.

The Unknowable Source: Dionysius's Godhead is *hyperousios* (super-essential), existing beyond being, knowledge, and language. He must be approached through the negation of all concepts in the "divine darkness"[31]. Similarly, the Kabbalists' *Ein Sof* is the Infinite, a realm of pure potentiality about which nothing can be affirmed. It is the absolute zero-point of theology, a necessary void of meaning that precedes all revelation[32]. Both systems posit a silent abyss at the origin of all things, a crucial move to prevent the revealed God from being idolized as the totality of the Godhead.

Hierarchical Mediation: To bridge the chasm between this unknowable source and the created world, both traditions develop a sophisticated model of hierarchical mediation. Dionysius conceives of the Celestial and Ecclesiastical Hierarchies as a series of mirrors, transmitting the divine light in a measured, graded fashion. The purpose of this order is "to enable beings to be as like as possible to God and to be at one with him"[33]. The Kabbalistic Tree of the *Sefirot* performs an identical function. The infinite light of *Ein Sof* is channeled and differentiated through the ten *Sefirot*, which act as vessels, lenses, and archetypes for all of creation. In both systems, the intermediaries do not diminish the source but rather make its overwhelming power accessible to finite beings. This hierarchical structure is the very grammar of divine self-revelation.

The Emanative Outflow: The motivation for this self-revelation is described in remarkably similar terms. For Dionysius, the procession of creation is driven by the "ecstatic", super-abundant nature of the Divine Goodness, which cannot remain enclosed within itself[34]. It is a non-compulsory, loving overflow. The Zohar uses similar imagery, describing the primordial will of *Ein Sof* to reveal itself and the subsequent flow of divine light and life-force (*shefa*) that sustains all worlds. This concept of a dynamic, overflowing divinity stands in contrast to a static, Aristotelian Unmoved Mover. In both Dionysian and Kabbalistic thought, God is not a distant, indifferent entity but a vibrant fountain of being whose transcendence is paradoxically the very source of His immanence.

The Role of Symbolism: Both traditions understand that language about the divine is necessarily symbolic. Dionysius explicitly defines the divine names and liturgical rites as "symbols" that both reveal and conceal the higher reality they signify[35]. For the Kabbalists, the entire Torah is a symbolic

[31] Dionysius the Areopagite, *The Mystical Theology*, Ch. I, 3. In *The Complete Works*, 137.

[32] Scholem, *Kabbalah*, 88-95. Scholem describes *Ein Sof* as "the absolute perfection in which there are no distinctions and no differentiations".

[33] Dionysius the Areopagite, *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, Ch. I, 3. In *The Complete Works*, 198.

[34] Paul Rorem, *Pseudo-Dionysius: A Commentary on the Texts and an Introduction to Their Influence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 159–161. Rorem analyzes the theme of divine "eros" or love as the motive for creation and procession.

[35] Mainoldi, *Dionisie Areopagitul*, 12. Mainoldi credits Dionysius with defining "the concept of symbol, as it was understood by medieval thought".

text, a "garment" for the living body of the *Sefirot*. The Zohar states, "If the Torah were only stories, we could make a better one today. But every word contains a sublime mystery"[36]. This shared hermeneutic of symbolism allows both traditions to maintain a rich, descriptive (cataphatic) language for the divine manifestations while simultaneously upholding the apophatic truth that these descriptions are not literal.

4.2. Divergences: Creation, Incarnation, and the Nature of the Intermediary

Despite these structural parallels, the theological content and ultimate aims of the two systems are fundamentally different. The divergences are as significant as the confluences.

Creatio ex Nihilo vs. Emanation: While both systems use emanative language, their underlying cosmologies differ. Christian orthodoxy, to which Dionysius adheres, insists on *creatio ex nihilo*—creation out of nothing. God creates a world that is ontologically distinct from Himself. Dionysius is careful to frame his "processions" as acts of the divine will that bring forth a separate creation[37]. Kabbalah, on the other hand, is more purely emanationist. The *Sefirot*, and by extension the world, are not created *ex nihilo* but are emanated from the divine substance itself. They are, in a sense, God in His manifest form. This leads to a more pantheistic or panentheistic worldview than is permissible in orthodox Christianity. As Joseph Dan notes, "the *Sefirot* are divine; they are God, and there is no ontological abyss between them and the divine essence"[38].

The Incarnation: The most profound and unbridgeable gap lies in the doctrine of the Incarnation. For Dionysius, and all of Christianity, the ultimate self-revelation of God is not a system or a hierarchy but a person: Jesus Christ, the *Logos* made flesh. Dionysius speaks of "the philanthropic and deifying condescension of Jesus", the God-man who unites the created and uncreated in his single person[39]. This historical, singular event is the axis of Christian theology and has no parallel in Kabbalah. The Kabbalistic system is concerned with the eternal, cosmic processes of divinity, not with a singular, historical incarnation. The absence of this doctrine in Kabbalah and its centrality in Dionysius's thought fundamentally shape their respective views of salvation, history, and the means of mystical ascent.

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[36] Zohar III, 152a. This is a classic statement of the Zohar's hermeneutical principle.

[37] Andrew Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition: From Plato to Denys* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 170–172. Louth emphasizes that for Dionysius, creation is a willed act, preserving the distinction between Creator and creature.

[38] Joseph Dan, *Kabbalah: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 46.

[39] Dionysius the Areopagite, *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, Ch. III, 13. In *The Complete Works*, 223. Dionysius's Christology, though cautious, is central to his entire system.

The Nature of the Intermediary: This leads to a difference in the nature of the intermediaries. Dionysius's "divine names" and "energies" are distinct from the divine essence, a distinction crucial for Eastern Orthodox theology (developed later by Gregory Palamas, who drew heavily on Dionysius)[40]. They are the actions or powers of God, but they are not God's very being. The Kabbalistic *Sefirot* are more substantial. They are the constituent elements of God's manifest personality, the very substance of the divine world. The mystic who meditates on the *Sefirot* is engaging with the inner life of God Himself in a way that is more direct and theosophical than the Dionysian ascent through the hierarchies.

Torah and Church: The practical path to God also differs. In Kabbalah, the path is through the meticulous observance and mystical interpretation of the Torah and its commandments (*mitzvot*). The performance of a *mitzvah* is believed to have a theurgic effect, directly influencing the flow of divine energy within the *Sefirot*ic system and promoting cosmic harmony (*tikkun*)[41]. For Dionysius, the path is sacramental and liturgical, mediated through the "Ecclesiastical Hierarchy". The sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist are the primary means by which divine grace and deifying energy are transmitted to the faithful[42]. The Torah is the blueprint of the Kabbalistic cosmos; the Church is the vessel of salvation in the Dionysian universe.

4.3. The Speculative Hypothesis: Hokhmah and the Logos

We now turn to the central, speculative hypothesis of this article: the proposition that the *Sefirah Hokhmah* (Wisdom) in Kabbalah is structurally analogous to the Person of Christ as the *Logos* in Christian theology. This is a comparative, not a syncretic, exercise. Its goal is to use the comparison to illuminate the specific function of each principle within its own system. To make this comparison "reasonably acceptable", we must first define the conditions under which it can be made, then explore the structural analogies, and finally, re-assert the irreconcilable differences.

4.3.1. Defining the Conditions for a Plausible Comparison

For this analogical study to be academically sound and theologically respectful, three conditions must be strictly observed:

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[40] Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1976), 67–90. Lossky explains the Essence-Energies distinction as the cornerstone of Orthodox theology, with its roots in the Cappadocians and Dionysius.

[41] Isaiah Tishby, *The Wisdom of the Zohar*, vol. 3, 1157–1163. Tishby explains the theurgic dimension of the *mitzvot* as a central innovation of the Kabbalah.

[42] Dionysius the Areopagite, *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, Ch. II & III. Dionysius dedicates extensive sections to the mystical significance of Baptism and the Eucharist (Synaxis).

1. *Functional, Not Ontological, Identity*: The comparison must focus on the *function* or *structural role* of *Hokhmah* and the *Logos*. It does not propose an ontological identity. We are asking, "Do they do the same *job* in their respective metaphysical blueprints"? not "Are they the same *thing*"?

2. Suspension of Exclusive Truth Claims: The analysis must proceed from a phenomenological standpoint, temporarily bracketing the exclusive truth claims of each tradition. It acknowledges that for a Christian, the *Logos* is a unique and final revelation, and for a Kabbalist, the *Sefirot* are the true structure of divine life. The comparison operates at a meta-level of religious studies.

3. Primacy of Incommensurability: The analysis must conclude by highlighting the ultimate incommensurability of the two concepts, particularly regarding the Christian doctrines of Personhood and Incarnation. The goal is not to create a hybrid concept but to use the friction of comparison to generate insight.

4.3.2. Structural Analogies: The First Principle of Manifestation

With these conditions in place, we can identify several powerful structural analogies between *Hokhmah* and the *Logos*.

The "Beginning": Both are identified as the primordial "beginning" of God's self-revelation and creation. The Gospel of John famously opens, "In the beginning (*en archē*) was the Word (*Logos*)"[43]. The Zohar, in its commentary on Genesis 1:1 ("In the beginning..."), explicitly identifies this "beginning" (*reshit*) with the *Sefirah Hokhmah*. "The first thing of all was *reshit*, and this is the supernal *Hokhmah*"[44]. In both systems, this principle is the first egress from the silent, unknowable Godhead (the Father / *Ein Sof*).

The Archetype of Creation: Both serve as the divine blueprint or intelligible form of the cosmos. The *Logos* in Hellenistic and Christian thought is the divine Reason, containing the ideal forms of all created things. St. Paul refers to Christ as the one "in whom all things were created, in heaven and on earth... all things were created through him and for him"[45]. Similarly, *Hokhmah* is described in the Zohar as the primordial, undifferentiated point of thought that contains the seed of all subsequent emanations and all of creation in potential. It is the "primordial idea" or "cosmic thought" of God[46].

The Principle of Revelation: Both act as the primary agent through which the hidden God becomes known. The Father is known only through the Son (*Logos*). As John's Gospel states, "No one has ever seen God; the

[43] John 1:1 (RSV).

[44] Zohar Hadash, 56d, on Song of Songs. See also Tishby, *The Wisdom of the Zohar*, vol. 1, 252.

[45] Colossians 1:16 (RSV).

[46] Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, 218. "Hokmah, 'wisdom,' is the primordial idea of God, in which the whole of creation is contained as a yet undifferentiated unity".

only-begotten God, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known"[47]. In Kabbalah, the unknowable *Ein Sof* is revealed only through the *Sefirot*, and *Hokhmah* is the very first moment of that revelation, the dawning of divine consciousness that makes all subsequent knowledge possible. *Hokhmah* is the "father" of the lower *Sefirot*, begetting *Binah* (Understanding), which articulates the potential inherent in *Hokhmah*.

Association with "Wisdom": The identification is explicit in their names. The *Logos* is frequently identified with the personified Wisdom (Hebrew: *Hokhmah*, Greek: *Sophia*) of the Old Testament Wisdom literature (e.g., Proverbs 8:22-31), who declares, "The LORD possessed me at the beginning of his way, before his works of old". Early Christian theologians like Origen and Athanasius systematically identified the *Logos* with this divine Wisdom[48]. The *Sefirah Hokhmah* is, by definition, this very principle, elevated to a central position within the Godhead itself.

4.3.3. Irreconcilable Differences: Personhood vs. Attribute

Despite these compelling structural analogies, the differences are profound and ultimately define the boundaries between the two faiths.

The primary difference is *Personhood*. In Trinitarian theology, the *Logos* (the Son) is a distinct Person (*hypostasis*) within the Godhead, co-equal and co-eternal with the Father and the Holy Spirit. He is a "Thou" to the Father's "I," existing in an eternal relationship of love. The *Sefirah Hokhmah*, while sometimes personified with masculine symbolism as the "supernal father" (*Abba*), is not a distinct person in the Trinitarian sense. It is an attribute, a potency, an organ, or a dimension of the one God. While the *Sefirot* have their own dynamic life, they do not constitute a "social Trinity". The Jewish insistence on the absolute unity (*Yichud*) of God precludes such a formulation[49].

This leads directly to the second, and most critical, difference: Incarnation. The Christian faith hinges on the belief that the *Logos*, this divine Person, "became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14) in the historical figure of Jesus of Nazareth. This event, the *unio hypostatica* of divine and human natures in one person, is the ultimate scandal and glory of Christianity. It grounds salvation in a specific historical moment and a specific person. *Hokhmah* does not and cannot become incarnate. It remains a cosmic, metaphysical principle. While the righteous individual (*tzaddik*) might be

[47] John 1:18 (RSV, alternate reading).

[48] Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine, Vol. 1: The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100–600)* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 191–193. Pelikan details the early Church's identification of the Johannine *Logos* with the *Sophia* of the Old Testament.

[49] Moshe Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, 140–143. Idel discusses the Kabbalistic concept of *Yichud* (unification) and its tension with the multiplicity of the *Sefirot*, a problem the Kabbalists constantly sought to resolve.

seen as a conduit for the light of *Hokhmah*, he never *becomes Hokhmah*. The ontological barrier between the divine principle and the human person remains intact.

Therefore, while *Hokhmah* and the *Logos* can be seen as analogous solutions to the problem of how the Infinite One produces a finite, intelligible world, they are embedded in fundamentally incompatible soteriological and theological narratives. The *Logos* points to a salvation achieved through faith in an incarnate God-man; *Hokhmah* points to a gnosis and cosmic harmony achieved through contemplation and theurgic practice within the framework of the Torah.

5. Conclusion: Two Paths to the Transcendent

The mystical systems of Dionysius the Areopagite and the Jewish Kabbalah represent two of the most sophisticated and enduring attempts in Western religious history to reconcile divine transcendence with divine immanence. Born of different worlds—one in the crucible of late antique Christian Neoplatonism, the other in the heart of medieval Jewish esotericism—they independently arrived at a similar architectural solution: a radically unknowable Godhead whose creative power flows into the world through a series of hierarchical emanations.

Their shared reliance on apophatic theology to guard the mystery of the divine essence, coupled with a rich cataphatic and symbolic language to describe the divine manifestations, demonstrates a common mystical logic. Both systems create a pathway for the human soul to ascend towards its source, not by a direct assault on the infinite, but by a disciplined journey through the mediated structures of revelation—the hierarchies for Dionysius, the *Sefirot* for the Kabbalists.

Yet, this comparative study also throws their profound differences into sharp relief. The Dionysian cosmos is Christocentric, oriented entirely towards the singular event of the Incarnation and mediated through the sacramental life of the Church. The Kabbalistic cosmos is theocentric and Torah-centric, focused on the inner dynamics of the Godhead as revealed in the eternal structure of the *Sefirot* and activated through the performance of the *mitzvot*.

The speculative comparison of the *Logos* and *Hokhmah* serves as a powerful test case. The structural parallels are undeniable: both are the "beginning", the archetypal wisdom through which the hidden God creates and reveals Himself. But the divergence on the doctrines of Personhood and Incarnation reveals an unbridgeable theological chasm. The comparison is valuable not because it suggests an identity, but because it clarifies precisely what is unique to each tradition. It shows how a similar metaphysical problem can

be resolved in two profoundly different ways, one leading to the God-man on the Cross, the other to the intricate and dynamic Tree of Life.

Ultimately, Dionysius and the Kabbalists offer two distinct paths into the "luminous darkness" of the transcendent God. They stand as monumental testaments to the human spirit's enduring quest to name the unnamable and to build a bridge of meaning to the silent, infinite source of all being. Their differences are a vital reminder of the particularity of religious experience, while their confluences hint at a shared deep structure in the human encounter with the divine mystery.

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From Personhood to Panim

God's Immortal Image according to Father Stăniloae

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Abstract: According to Father Stăniloae, if God is transcendent, He is persona, and His personal character assures His transcendence. His persona transcends even His infinity. Likewise, the image of God in man lies essentially in the character of the person: every person becomes a new "eye" of spiritual transparency. The most adequate, expressive and communicative image of the supreme Image is the human being, or more precisely, the human face. Starting from the fact that personhood is no longer experienced as a mystery, Stăniloae turns to the Bible, which testifies that the face (*panim*) is the essence of a person. This biblical theology of God's shining face or presence (*panim*) is the key to understanding Father Stăniloae's eschatology and, by extension, his entire theology of the person. There is a dynamic and revelatory movement from the anthropological dimension of *eikon–tselem* ("image of God") in his earlier studies, such as *God's Immortal Image*, to the later theology of personhood in Volume 6 of his *Dogmatics*, which is indebted to the biblical dimension of *prosōpon–panim* (the human "face" of Christ). Eternal bliss, according to him, will be the contemplation of the face of Christ; this is the "eternal perspective of deification" — the divine energies conceived in and radiated from the face of Christ.

Keywords: personhood, face-*panim*, *eikon-tselem*, image of God, Christology, eschatology

The Face is the 'Essence of a Person'. The Hebrew word *Panim* (פנים) as 'Face' or 'Presence'

The word face is itself sometimes deeply significant for the Greek ascetic fathers (*Arsenius* 27 and *Joseph of Panephysis* 7).[1] One thinks of the startling and evocative anecdote related in the *Apophthegmata Patrum* about Macarius the Great, which suggests that face-to-face contact provides a kind of solace to those suffering in Hell.[2] Abba Paul the Simple was reputed to have the gift of "seeing the state of each man's soul, just as we see their faces."[3]

The Hebrew word for "face" (פנים) is transliterated as *panim* (paw-neem) or *paneh*. As we will see in his eschatology, Father Stăniloae is very close to this biblical concept when he describes the person of the Savior as a judge.

In fact, the Hebrew word (פנים, *panim*) can communicate either face or presence: "*The capacity of people to physically reflect the glory of God in their bodies and particularly in the face has received little attention. It is true that the human body reveals God's amazing power. In this sense, the body is part of general*

[1] Augustine Casiday, *Reconstructing the Theology of Evagrius Ponticus: Beyond Heresy* (Cambridge University Press, New York 2013), 173.

[2] *Abba Macarius the Great*, 38: "*Abba Macarius said, 'Walking in the desert one day, I found the skull of a dead man, lying on the ground. As I was moving it with my stick, the skull spoke to me. I said to it, 'Who are you?' The skull replied, 'I was high priest of the idols and of the pagans who dwelt in this place; but you are Macarius, the Spirit-bearer. Whenever you take pity on those who are in torments, and pray for them, they feel a little respite.' The old man said to him, 'What is this alleviation, and what is this torment?' He said to him, 'As far as the sky is removed from the earth, so great is the fire beneath us; we are ourselves standing in the midst of the fire, from the feet up to the head. It is not possible to see anyone face to face, but the face of one is fixed to the back of another. Yet when you pray for us, each of us can see the other's face a little. Such is our respite.'...*"; in *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers. The Alphabetical Collection*, Translated, with a foreword by Benedicta Ward, SLG, Preface by Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh, Cistercian Publications 59 (Kalamazoo, Michigan: The Institute of Cistercian Studies, Western Michigan University, 1975), 136–137. In rabbinic literature "When the Holy One, blessed be He, created Adam, He formed him (with two faces), front and back, as it is said, *Thou hast fashioned me in back and in front, and laid Thy hand upon me* (Ps. 139:5)… Another interpretation of And Thou hast laid Thy hand upon me: when Adam sinned, the Holy One, blessed be He, took away one of his faces", cf. Judah Goldin, trans., *The Fathers According to Rabbi Nathan* (2nd ed.; New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 1983), 15.

[3] *Abba Paul the Simple*, 1: "*Blessed Abba Paul the Simple, the disciple of Abba Anthony, told the Fathers that which follows: One day he went to a monastery to visit it and to make himself useful to the brethren. After the customary conference, the brothers entered the holy church of God to perform the synaxis there, as usual. Blessed Paul looked carefully at each of those who entered the church observing the spiritual disposition with which they went to the synaxis, for he had received the grace from the Lord of seeing the state of each one's soul, just as we see their faces. When all had entered with sparkling eyes and shining faces, with each one's angel rejoicing over him, he said, 'I see one who is black and his whole body is dark; […]. Shortly after the end of the synaxis, as everyone was coming out, Paul scrutinized each one, wanting to know in what state they were coming away. He saw that man, previously black and gloomy, coming out of the church with a shining face and white body, the demons accompanying him only at a distance, while his holy angel was following close to him, rejoicing greatly over him*" (*The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, 205–206).

revelation and 'an important form of God's self-disclosure'. But what about the human body's capacity for 'special' revelation as God's radiating glory? The lack of attention to this question is surprising given the vast amount of literature devoted to texts such as the Mount of Transfiguration (Matt. 17:1–9) and Paul's discussion of Moses's shining face (2 Cor. 3)."[4] Their faces and bodies become vessels of the divine nature. The human body, and especially the face of a person, is able to communicate one's relationship with God. The Bible testifies that the face is the "essence of a person."[5] A christophany is related to a theophany and when we read Exodus within the context of the entire Old Testament, the best theological term to describe YHWH's appearance as a man is "christophany."[6] The human body is made in the image of God and was originally designed to embody holiness. We were designed, says Wenkel, to have a face-to-face relationship with God (אל-פנים פנים, panim el-panim, πρόσωπον πρὸς πρόσωπον, prosōpon pros prosōpon).[7] So, the ascetics have the capacity to physically reflect the glory and holiness of God when they meet him face to face, the way the human body can function as a vessel that reflects God's holiness and glory. The human body is capable of being a vessel in which rays of God's glory shine through. Therefore, the people of Israel would see the face (*panim*, פנים) of Moses, that the skin of Moses' face (פנים, *panim*) was shining. And Moses would put the veil over his face (פנים, *panim*) again, until he went in to speak with him (Exod. 34:34–35).What Moses' shining face actually looked like has been debated for some time.[8] The Septuagint translation of Exodus 34:29 uses the vocabulary of glory (δοξάζω, *doxazō*) for the Hebrew verb "to send out rays of light" (קרן, *qaran*). So, Wenkel emphasize that one of the primary focal points

[4] David H. Wenkel, *Shining Like the Sun. A Biblical Theology of Meeting God Face to Face* (Wooster, OH: Weaver Book Company, 2016), 3.

[5] Nonna Vernon Harrison, *God's Many-Splendored Image: Theological Anthropology for Christian Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010), 7; and Charles A. Gieschen, *Angelomorphic Christology: Antecedents and Early Evidence* (AGJU 42; Leiden: Brill, 1998), 141, n. 59.

[6] Wenkel, *Shining Like the Sun*, 8. For a critique of this position, see Andrew S. Malone, "The Invisibility of God: A Survey of a Misunderstood Phenomenon," *EQ* 79, no. 4 (2007): 311–29.

[7] Wenkel, *Shining Like the Sun*, 21. In the first instance the people do not "know" (ידע (what has happened to Moses (32:1). In the second instance Moses does not "know" (ידע (that his face is shining (34:29). Lord has shown him his glory (34:5–7). His face was radiant ("וֹתִּ֥א וֹרָ בַּ דָּ ב) because of his speaking with him" [that is, with the Lord] 34:29). See, on this: Joshua M. Philpot, "Exodus 34:29–35 and Moses' Shining Face" *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 23, no. 1 (2013): 1–11, here 8.

[8] Wenkel, *Shining Like the Sun*, 35–37. One of the strongest pieces of evidence for the fact that a face-to-face encounter with God will physically change a person's appearance is the textual unit of Exodus 34:29–32. Moses' face embodied the holiness and glory of YHWH. The glory on Moses' face was not only brilliant, but permanent. See, also: David H. Wenkel, "A New Reading of Anointing with Oil in James 5:14: Finding First-Century Common Ground in Moses' Glorious Face," *HBT* 35 (2013): 174; and Scott J. Hafemann, "The Glory and Veil of Moses in 2 Corinthians 3:7–14," in Gregory K. Beale (ed.), *The Right Doctrine from the Wrong Texts?* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 296.

that the biblical authors used when referring to the body's ability to communicate holiness is the face.

Father Stăniloae remembers a romanian legend saying that in the beginning the earth was transparent, but Cain strove to cover it over so that the corpse of his brother Abel could no longer be seen in it.[9] He says, "Adams wish to hide from the face of God and escape from communion with him cannot be completely realized, but to a certain extent, it has taken away the transparency that creation and our own being had for God and for that fullness of the riches and love that are possible among humans. In this way the human being has often attained a tormenting solitude like that of Cain."[10] Indeed, the guilt and shame cause Adam and Eve to hide themselves from the presence (פנים, *panim*) of the Lord God among the trees of the garden (Gen. 3:8b). The word translated "presence" is the word for face. Thus, it is not just his spiritual presence they are hiding from but his physical presence as well – his literal "face." They can no longer be "face to face" intimacy with God. Theologically, this view of Adam and Eve's embodiment of a state of righteousness or sin, which Father Stăniloae also hold, reflects the biblical view of personhood.[11] *The important conclusion here is that their bodies reflect their relationship with God and they had to hide from his face*.[12]

The fallen face of Cain in the Garden of Eden illustrates the important role that the face plays in embodying sin. The human body, made in the image of God, is capable of bearing God's special revelation in the form of his radiant holiness and glory. The Jewish philosopher Philo and the Christian theologian Origen both interpret Israel to mean "the one who

[9] Stăniloae, *The Experience of God. Volume 2. The World*, 184.

[10] Stăniloae, *The Experience of God. Volume 2. The World*, 185. The familiar stories of Cain and Abel reveal the character of post-Edenic humanity and the internalisation of transgression. Irenaeus is equally desirous to show that God actively worked to prevent Cain's sin, as well as encourage him toward repentance after the fact. In this he is inspired by the specific wording of the Septuagintal text of Gen 4.7, which differs from the Masoretic. In the reading of the LXX: "οὐκ ἐὰν ὀρθῶς προσενέγκῃς, ὀρθῶς δὲ μὴ διέλῃς, ἥμαρτες; ἡσύχασον· πρὸς σὲ ἡ ἀποστροφὴ αὐτοῦ, καὶ σὺ ἄρξεις αὐτοῦ. But what has direct value on the consideration of God's benevolence towards Cain is the Greek ἡσύχασον – 'be at peace' or 'be calm'. There is no equivalent command in the Masoretic reading, but for Irenaeus this single word is at the centre of the verse's theological meaning. Through it he discovers the divine reaction to the envy and malice in Cain's heart. Irenaeus also employs the verb ἡσυχάζω at 3.19.3, of the Word as 'quiescent in Christ during the temptation' (Lamp, *PGL* 608). It is remarkable that Lampe nowhere notes the verb as present in the LXX of Genesis, nor does he mention Irenaeus' important reading of it. The only other occasions of its usage cited in his lexicon, apart from a myriad of later texts on hesychasm and monastic contemplation, refer to tranquility of life as conducive to prayer; cf. Evagrius, *De oratione* 3; *Apothegmata* PG65:201C. cf., Steenberg, *Irenaeus on Creation* 198.

[11] John Wilkinson, "The Body in the Old Testament," *The Evangelical Quarterly* 63.3 (July–Sept. 1991): 195–210.

[12] Craig G. Bartholomew and Michael W. Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture: Finding Our Place in the Biblical Story* (2nd ed.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2014), 43.

sees God".[9] Those who encounter God face to face are changed internally and externally. Body is capable of being a vessel in which rays of God's glory shine through. The human body can function as a vessel that reflects God's holiness and glory. The fallen face of Cain in the Garden of Eden illustrates the important role that the face plays in embodying sin. Cain embodied his sin in his face. The face of YHWH appears in the narrative as Cain went away "from the presence (or "face" [פנים], panim) of the Lord" (Gen. 4:16).[10] But the Lord questions Cain not just about his internal dispo-

[13] C. T. R. Hayward, *Interpretations of the Name Israel in Ancient Judaism and Some Early Christian Writings: From Victorious Athlete to Heavenly Champion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 17. Cornelis den Hertog, *The Other Face of God. 'I Am that I Am' Reconsidered* (Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2012) 219: The participle *ho ōn* in Exod. 3.14 refers only in general terms to the effective presence of God ('I am *the one who shows himself to be there*'). According to the beginning of the divine discourse in the six chapter of Exodus, says den Hertog, God appeared to the ancestors 'but my name *Kyrios* I did not disclose to them' (Exod. 6.3). The niphal of *yd*ʿ, 'to make oneself known', has been translated by *dēloō*, 'disclose'. Interestingly, this verb may mean 'reveal' (then the name itself is involved) but also 'explain' (then the meaning of the name is concerned). This discourse therefore seems to suggest that according to the translator "either the divine name has not yet been revealed or its meaning has still not been disclosed" (den Hertog, *The Other Face of God*, 201). For 'divine Face' interpretation see: Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1988), 329–334. He explains that the great priestly blessing in Num. 6: 23–27 concludes a cycle of priestly instructions to the people of Israel. It opens with an instruction to the Aaronids delivered by Moses, 'In this manner shall you bless the Israelites', and then proceeds with the blessing itself: (24) May YHWH bless you and protect you; (25) May YHWH brighten his countenance towards you and show you favour; (26) May YHWH raise his countenance towards you and give you peace. At the conclusion of this blessing, there is a final instruction: 'And when they shall put my name over the Israelites, I shall bless them' (v. 27). The same terminology in Ps. 67:1–2 leaves no reasonable doubt that its source is Num. 6: 24–26. In this instance, the psalmist opens his prayer with the invocation, 'May Elohim show us favour and bless us; may he brighten his countenance among us – selah' and the psalmist calls upon YHWH to 'raise over us the light of your presence (se·lāh. :סֶלָה – 'it·tā·nū –אִתָּנוּ – pā·nāw – פָּנָיו – yā·'êr – יָאֵר = *Selah upon us His face and cause to shine* in Ps. 67:1, pā·ne·ḵā – פָּנֶיךָ – hā·'î·rāh – הָאֵירָה = *Make Your face Shine* in Ps. 31:16). These and other references to the Priestly Blessing in the Psalter and, particularly, the recurrence of similar language in the Psalter and many biblical genres, suggest that such imagery as 'shining the face' in favour, or 'raising the face' in beneficence, were widely diffused throughout the culture (Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation*, 330–331). Adam, 370, 372

[14] Samuel E. Balentine, *The Hidden God: The Hiding of the Face of God in the Old Testament* (Oxford University Press, 1982) 45–80. Original word is סָתַר (the verb *sathar or saw-thar'*, *to hide, conceal* [Genesis 4:14: וּמִפָּנֶיךָ אֶסָּתֵר וְהָיִיתִי נָע "and from your face I will be hidden, and I will be a fugitive"; Deuteronomy 31:17–18 and 32:20: וַיֹּאמֶר אַסְתִּירָה פָנַי מֵהֶם "Then He said, I will hide My face"; Job 13:24: לָמָּה־פָנֶיךָ תַסְתִּיר וְתַחְשְׁבֵנִי לְאוֹיֵב "Why do You hide Your face"]. Balentine challenges the common impression given by much of biblical scholarship that the hiddenness of God is not always to be understood as a manifestation of divine judgement in response to man's sinfulness. Particularly in the Psalms, God's hiding is a subject for lament and protest as innocent suppliants charge that they have done nothing to warrant divine abandonment. These implications of the lament concerning an inexplicable divine hiddenness have thus far received inadequate attention (Balentine,

sition of anger, but also about his fallen face: "Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen?" (Gen. 4:6).[13]

To this interpretation, father Stăniloae comes to add that the Absolute Himself has hidden its personal face from man. The image as inner impulse, as tendency toward God, and the features of it have remained but have been, in part, distorted, just as in a "*caricature the facial elements*" remain but are distorted. Thus, he says, "*the image as aspiration toward the absolute has been preserved, but the absolute has hidden its personal face from man, and consequently, the image in man has lost its luminous quality and its clarity*".[14]

The Hidden God, 164–177). To Samuel E. Balentine, *Prayer In The Hebrew Bible. The Drama of Divine-Human Dialogue* (Fortress Press, 1993) a text prayer is a vehicle for theological argument a "Two-way traffic between heaven and earth" (p. 48). For him, this is a bifurcation in theological studies and a matrix of the embedded tradition that itself generates and yields theology – this is the neglected of the subject "prayer" in the theology of the Hebrew Bible as the divine-human relationship, which is 'fundamentaly dialogical' (225–246, 261–264) Gerald L. Schroeder, *The Hidden Face of God: How Science Reveals The Ultimate Truth* (New York: The Free Press, 2001) is an intriguing book that claims to find scientific support for theism. Much of Schroeder's case for the hidden face of God consists of observations of the wonders of nature, "For most of my life I've felt a transcendence within nature, some spiritual rumbling" (p. 123).

[15] Raanan Eichler, "When God Abandoned the Garden of Eden: A Forgotten Reading of Genesis 3:24", *Vetus Testamentum* 65 (2015), 1–13. Eichler analyzes the biblical writer viewed "the fall of Man" and the ensuing relationship between humans and the divine. When Man and his wife disobeyed Yhwh and ate the forbidden fruit, their deed led not only to their expulsion from the garden but to Yhwh's self-expulsion as well, to the "fall of God", who decided that he would go whithersoever they went. This was to keep an eye on his unruly creations. The former point is reinforced in the Eden story itself, which speaks of Yhwh "walking about" in the garden and of Man and his wife hiding from him (3:8–10); the latter by the fact that Yhwh speaks on two separate occasions with Cain (4:6–7, 9–15). Yhwh too is now located outside the garden – Cain's location as being "in the presence of" Yhwh (4:14, 16), a combination of שָׁכַן את ("dwells with") and [א]שכינתיה יקר, "the glory of his Immanence". In this reading Yhwh continues to be overtly solicitous as well as wary of Man (see 3:21), going so far as to continue living with him in order to provide him with vital protection (Targumim is thus consonantally identical to the Masoretic Text but differs from it in the vocalization of the single word: the masoretic vocalization of this word is וַיַּשְׁכֵּן, meaning "he caused to dwell" and targumic renderings is וּשְׁכַן, meaning "he dwelled"). The wording אשרי [א] יקר שכינתיה, literally, "he caused the glory of his Immanence to dwell", is simply the way in which the Targumim, which tend to avoid applying anthropomorphic language to the Deity, render "dwell" when the subject of the verb is God.

[16] Stăniloae, *The Experience of God. Volume 2. The World*, 90. Image that has been weakened, although it is never totally lost. Hence Christ is said to have reestablished the image or to have found the image that was lost, but it is not said that he created it again. Paul Ladouceur, "The Experience of God as Light in the Orthodox Tradition", *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 28:2 (2019), 165–185. The experience of God as interior or spiritual light, frequently called "Uncreated Light," can be interpreted in different ways. The experience of the Divine Light is itself a *theosis*, we become bearers of Light. St. Paul employs these senses of light when he tells the Ephesians that "once you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord; walk as children of light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true)," and he exhorts them to receive the light or truth of Christ: "Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give you light" (Eph 5.8–9; 14).

Without the uncreated light of God, the human being and the world lack illumination. The divine light is not something impersonal, but truly real and personal through Christ. "*Christ is the full light of the human being, a light that not only shows him the purpose for which he was created, but also gives him the power to move forward towards it*."[15]

Father Stăniloae goes on to say that the divine light that we see represents our union with God. Although spiritual in nature and not material, this light makes our body to becoming luminous as well, not only our soul: *"The light from the resurrected body of Christ and from our body that will be resurrected as well as the one that shone forth from His body on Tabor and also the lesser one, that illuminates the face of the people that are purified and good – cannot be a physical light, although it is made known through the body as well. In order to understand this light we have to begin with the light that appears on the face of the good Christian, or with the halo that encircles the heads of the saints. The hesychasts see in their hearts Christ surrounded by this light. The light that surrounded Christ on Mount Tabor had this spiritual character which was visible only for the eyes of the three Apostles*".[16] Therefore, the body of Christ, through the uncreated energies, gives us the possibility of having transfigured, deified bodies: *"Our body will not cease to exist, but will become transparent and we will see unmediated through it God in His glory, because our body will be beyond the splitting in subjective and objective, the laws of nature, the passionate fight for overcoming nature and the fight that we do in order to protect ourselves from the others*".[17]

In Ps 67:1–2, 80:3 and 80:7 God's shining face or presence (פנים) procures salvation (ישועה).[18] Also, we carry the Father's light in the face (*prosōpon*) of Jesus Christ in earthen vessels (2 Chor. 4:4–7), that is, in our bodies, in order to know the glory of the Holy Spirit. Likeness means a radiation of the presence of God within man, a „reciprocal interiority". In the saints this communion is expressed in the way God's glory is reflected in their faces, in anticipation of the age to come. Father Stăniloae uses the language of light and glory to describe the image of God. The body shares the glory of the "Face/Image". The model (archetype) represents the ontological content of the "face" (*eikon*). He considers that the Transfiguration of Christ human Face represented a prefigured image of *the transfigured, shining face of the Christian*: *"His human nature was going to become, through the sacrifice, the environment of the divine light. (...) This light has a spiritual*

[17] Dumitru Staniloae, *Jesus Christ: The Light of the World and the Deifier of the Human Being* [in Rom.], (Bucharest: Anastasia, 1993), 13.

[18] Dumitru Stăniloae, *Jesus Christ: The Light of the World,* 122.

[19] Dumitru Stăniloae, *Jesus Christ: The Light of the World,* 138

[20] On this subject see: David D. Kupp, *Matthew's Emmanuel. Divine presence and God's people in the First Gospel*, Cambridge University Press 1996; Frederica Mathewes-Green, *The Jesus Prayer: The Ancient Desert Prayer that Tunes the Heart to God*, Orleans: Paraclete Press, 2009; Christopher Barina Kaiser, *Seeing the Lord's Glory. Kyriocentric Visions and the Dilemma of Early Christology*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014.

quality although it springs forth from the material human figure, just as the light of goodness show itself on the face of the Christian and especially in the nimbus of saints".[15] On these unveiled shining faces, the divine energy of 'Christ the Image and Glory of God' is being revealed. Here, father Stăniloae offers, quoting from Gregory Palamas, the example of Moses whose face sprang forth divine light. The vision of the divine light can be seen by the persons that are purified. Only through the uncreated light of God, "*the world and the human being are fully illumined only through their Author who lies above them*".[16]

This biblical theology of God's shining face or presence (*panim*) is the key to understand the father Stăniloae's eschatology and, by extension, his entierly theology of person. There is a dinamic and revealing mouvement, from the anthropological dimension of *eikon-tselem* ('image of God') in his earlier study as *God's Immortal Image*, to the late theology of personhood as the Volume 6 of his *Dogmatics*, which is endoubted to the biblical dimension of *prosōpon-panim* (human 'face' of Christ).

2. God's Immortal Image and the Mystery of the Face: "No longer I" – "Suddenly" God's Face

The human *person* represents the Christianity's contribution to anthropology.[17] The key to the whole theology of Father Stăniloae is the person and the communion, because "*in the communion between person and person lies the life of the person*"[18] and the person cannot be conceived as a static reality, but in relation. At the beginning of volume six of his Dogmatic, father Stăniloae

[21] Dumitru Stăniloae, *Jesus Christ: The Light of the World,* 205.

[22] Dumitru Stăniloae, *Jesus Christ: The Light of the World*, 6.

[23] Vladimir Lossky, "The Theological Notion of the Human Person" Chapter 6 of *In the Image and Likeness of God* (St Vladimir's Seminary Press: New York, 1974) 111–123; W. Pannenberg, "Person," in *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart,* edited by K. Galling, 3rd ed. (Tubingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1961), 5:230–235; J.D. Zizioulas, "Personhood and Being," in Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1997), 27–65; P. Ricoeur, "Meurt le personnalisme, revient la personne," in *Lectures 2: La contree des philosophes* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1992), 195–202, 198f.

[24] M. Păcurariu & Ioan I. Ică jr. (eds.) *Person and Communion* [in Rom.] (Sibiu: The Publishing House of the Archdiocese of Sibiu, 1993). Γεώργιος Α. Γάλίτης, „Π. Δημήτριος Στανιλοάε: Ευλαβικό Μνημόσυνο", in *Αναπλάσις*, (Άυγουστος-Οκτώβριος 1994), 110. Gheorghios A. Galitis places Father Staniloae's theology in the "synthesis of the logic with the apophatic". Aristotle Papanikolaou, "Stăniloae, Dumitru (1903–1993)" in *The Encyclopedia of Eastern Orthodox Christianity* Edited by John Anthony McGuckin, *Volume* I (West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2011) 582, says that "his life work is a labor of attempting to articulate an Orthodox dogmatic theology that is existentially relevant and not simply a set of propositional truths".

maintains that "Personhood[18] is no longer experienced as a mystery".[19] This is the reason why, in his eschatology, yearning to defend the mystery of the person, Father Stăniloae uses the biblical term "face" (of both God and man) in his theological description of the person. Also, at the end of his *Orthodox Spirituality*, we will find him, again, referring to the human face of Christ, in which will be concentrated all the energies of the divinity.

The relationship with God as Person, who as such cannot be defined being totally apophatic. Stăniloae stresses what Palamas did only up to some point: the *personal* feature of the uncreated energies. Thus, when speaking about the relation between God and His attributes, Staniloae argues that: "*If God is transcendent, he is personal. Christian apophatic knowledge implies that God came down to meet man's capacity to grasp him as much as it*

[25] Aristotle Papanikolaou, "From Sophia to Personhood: The Development of 20th Century Orthodox Trinitarian Theology" *Phronema*, Vol. 33(2), 2018, 1–20. To Nicholas Bamford, „Gregory Palamas' Energetic Approach to Person: Existential and Ontological Implications," *Studia Patristica* 48 (2010), 241–246 at 241–242, the juxtapositioning of personhood in neopatristic study to the philosophical, for example of the incorporation of the existentialism of Heidegger as evidenced by Zizioulas and Yannaras, has led to 'new' ways of looking at 'person' and, also has led to the examination for the place of 'new' ontologies'. But in reply to a "theology of the relationship" developed through ontology's speculations of the person was the assertion of both Lossky , as well as Panagopoulos of meta-ontological and apophatic character of the person. See also: Aristotle Papanikolaou, „Divine Energies or Divine Personhood: Vladimir Lossky and John Zizioulas on conceiving the transcendent and immanent God" *Modern Theology* 19.3 (2003) 357–385. Ioannis Panagopoulos, „Ontología è theología toû prosópou. He symbolè tês paterikês Triadologías stén katanoés toû anthropínou prosópou," *Sýnaxe* 13 (1985), 63–79 and 14 (1985), 35–47, questions the very possibility and legitimacy of developing an "ontology" of the person starting from the fourth century Greek patristic triadology. Not triadology, but only Christology is one that can lead to a 'theology' of the human person, because human nature is personal as divine-human. Not ontology, but theology reveals the truth of the person who is not an antropological category, but the event of divine-human existence of man, a mode of liturgical existence which man receives it through Baptism in the Church. See, also, Aristotle Papanikolaou, *Being with God. Trinity, Apophaticism, and Divine-Human Communion* (University of Notre Dame Press, 2006) 9–48.

[26] Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Experience of God. Orthodox Dogmatic Theology, Volume 6*, 4/6. Therefore, all twentieth-century attempts to understand the person-nature relationship outside of the apophatic dimension or the mystery of the person, have suffered deviations. So, Zizioulas's strong advocacy of the priority of persons over substance in Cappadocian theology was criticized (Sarah Coakley Michel René Barnes, Lewis Ayres, David Brown, Lucian Turcescu, Aristotle Papanikolaou). Alan Torrance has attacked Zizioulas's 'personalist foundationalism' and 'personalist' ontology (Alan Torrance, *Persons in Communion: An Essay on Trinitarian Description and Human Participation* (T&T.Clark, Edinburgh, 1996) 300, 289–290: „a foundational(ist) ontology of personhood together with attendant notions of personal freedom". Also, C. Gunton avoids the language of 'being as communion' in favor of 'person with relational particularity'. See, on this: Colin E. Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clarke, 1993), 84–87; C. Gunton, "Trinity, Ontology and Anthropology: Towards a Renewal of the Doctrine of the Imago Dei," in *Persons, Divine and Human: King's College Essays in Theological Anthropology*, C. Gunton and C. Schwoebel (eds.) (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, Ltd. 1999), 47–61, 56.

also implies God's transcendence. God comes down through his energies while his personal character assures his transcendence. His person transcends even his infinity."[22] After all, the universe is ontologically grounded personally, that is, in a person, the person of Christ, the Logos. Otherness and communion coincide in Christ, and this conjunction triumphs over death.

He explores the 'mystery of the person' through the relationship between Self-Christ-Face. This biblical and philocalic relationship has also been explored by Olivier Clement, for which the Self is the image of Christ and "the interior expression of a face": "*the Christian knows that the Self is the image of Christ and Christ is the faithful mirror who reflects the truth not only of creatures and objects, but also of the Self that is no longer an undifferentiated abyss but the interior expression of a face*".[23] Regarding this *perichoresis* between Self and Christ, the Holy Apostle Paul says: "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (Gal 2:20).[24] Through the paramount intensity of Christ's

[27] Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Experience of God,* translated by loan Ioniță and Robert Barringer, vol. I, (Massachusetts: Holy Cross University Press, 1994), 102–103: "*The being which remains beyond experience, which yet we sense to be the source of everything we experience, subsists in person. Subsisting as person, being is a living source of energies or of acts which are communicated to us. Hence, the apophatic has, as its ultimate basis, person; and thus even this apophaticism does not mean that God is wholly enclosed within Himself*".

[28] Olivier Clement, *The Roots of Christian Mysticism: Texts from the Patristic Era with Commentary* (Hyde Park, New York: New City Press of the Focolare, 2017), 226. When Christ abides in the Christian mind, the face of the Christian emulates the Lord's face in the same way that the Christian's mind and body reflects the divine light. This is also a "highly visual epistemology", which reminds us of about the Evagrius Ponticus, *On Thoughts* 24, where he says that *it is also possible for you 'to form in your-self your Father's face*'. It appears that, for Evagrius, the face that is missing from the imperfect image is Christ's own face. According to Augustine Casiday, *Reconstructing the Theology of Evagrius Ponticus: Beyond Heresy* (Cambridge University Press, New York 2013) 181–183, Evagrius understands Christ to be the 'face of God and man' and, in the same time, Christ is associated with the 'kindred light' (*Skemmata*, 2) in Evagrian theology. Through true prayer, the monk becomes 'equal to the angels' (Lk 20.36), yearning to 'see the face of the Father who is in heaven' (Mt 18.10). Nonna Vernon Harrison, *God's Many-Splendored Image: Theological Anthropology for Christian Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010) 7, says that 'The Bible testifies that the face is the "essence of a person"'. Christ is the Face of God because He is "the iconic revelation of God; Christ reveals God's face" [Col.1:15]. As we will see, there is a coincidence of the images of the light and the face into the orthodox spirituality of Father Stăniloae also. The starting point is Evagrius who is the first who aims to describe how the mind interacts with God through Christ. Explaining why the mental self-image lacks a face, Evagrius wrote: "*Never having contemplated its own countenance [ὄψεως], the mind is incapable of forming it within itself*" (*Thoughts* 25).

[29] According to Pseudo-Macaire, *Oeuvres spirituelles (Homélies propres à la Collection III)*, ed. V. Desprez, *SC* 275 (1980) 258–260, "*If you have this treasure in your earthen vessel [then] 'out of darkness a light shall shine', shone in your heart… if Christ made his home in your inner self… you became a temple of God and his Spirit dwells in you (ἐν πληροφορίᾳ πίστεως)… you received the experience (πεῖραν) of all these things through the activity (ἐνεργείας) in [your] heart*" (III 28. 2. 2). Also, in *E.M.* 13. 15 he uses Hebrews 10:22 as one of the proof texts for the "fullest and energizing indwelling of the Holy Spirit in a pure heart". This association of πληροφορία with the full indwelling of God in the human heart or soul is the typical Ps.-Macarian use of this term, being "the epiphany of Christ" (II.1.2) by wich we "becomes

presence within me, "I am able to experience the presence of all the others in me as subjects".[25] In *God's Immortal Image*, Staniloae speaks about the internal union between the human being and the divine uncreated light. He considers the human being as a "singular-dual" being. 'We are a single person, yet, inside us, we possess the divine light. This is why during the vision of the divine light the person sees that the divine light seems to spring forth even from the inside'.[26] But, it is the Holy Spirit who makes Christ a "subject in me", experienced as "reciprocal interiority between me and Christ".[27] By means of the holy mysteries, Holy Spirit can imprint Christ on us, as the human person's true model: "I experience as subjects in myself, the central, leading subject"[28], which is Christ, and therein lies the mystery

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all light, all face and all eye" (II.1.2). For him, *πληροφορία* most often refers to the experience of achieved perfection. Only this macarian *πληροφορία* explains the following way in wich father Stăniloae understands this „*perichoresis* between Self and Christ". St. Gregory Palamas extended Christology in the area of Trinitarian theology, so Tabor light is the uncreated energy of Son, that "innate motion" or "active and essential movement of nature". Perichoresis has for Gregory a dynamic character, manifesting the mystery of the Trinity's energy. Thus, hypostases' consubstantiality and mutual perichoresis would be impossible without this unique and same natural movement and without this essential energy. The energy does not exist in itself but into the essence through which it is manifested as being three-hypostatically.

[30] Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Experience of God. Orthodox Dogmatic Theology, Volume 6*, 74. Mixing (syr. *netmazzag*) language is used by Macarius to describe the presence of sin, of grace, of Christ, of the Holy Spirit. However, through this metaphor Macarius emphasizes especially how Christ becomes present in the soul as he was in the Incarnation. And through His presence we are being 'mixed', from within (ἐν ὑμῖν), with the light of the Trinity. Charles M. Stang, 'The Two 'I's of Christ: Revisiting the Christological Controversy' *Anglican Theological Review* 94, no. 3 (2012): 529–547.

[31] Adrian Agachi, *The Neo-Palamite Synthesis of Father Dumitru Stăniloae* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013), 144–145: "However, only persons can attain deification and not the created realm in general, although Creation itself also participates in God".

[32] Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Experience of God. Orthodox Dogmatic Theology, Volume 6*, 74–75. Father Staniloae understood this "reciprocal interiority" through Palamite theology of uncreated light and deifying union. In this regard, Palamas himself interprets Leontius of Byzantium' ἐνυπόστατος through Macarius' uncreated light theology, leading further the maximian synthesis of the 'enhypostatic illumination' – Triade II.iii.29, in Gregory Palamas, *The Triads*, edited with an introduction by John Meyendorff, translation by Nicholas Gendle, preface by Jaroslav Pelikan (Paulist Press: New Jersey, 1983), 84. The illuminating light (φωτισμός φῶς) is Christ (ὑποστατικὸν φῶς). He uses the macarian term of 'ὑποστατικὸν φῶς' (I.17.1.3), to show that the light (φωτισμός) is Christ, shining 'substantially' (ὑποστατικῶς) whitin all human person: *'He Himself is deifying light'* (*Triads* III.i.16, 77). Christ shining forth, the saint becomes "all light", beeing deified by uncreated light of His Spirit. See, on this, N. Tănase, ''Shining Face' as Hidden and Revealed Christology,' *Studia Universitatis Babes-Bolyai Theologia Orthodoxa Journal* (UBBTO) 62, no. 1 (2017): 187–216.

[33] Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Experience of God. Orthodox Dogmatic Theology, Volume 6*, 74/6. See my study „Asceticism for Society – Integrating Body, Soul and Society. In Searching of the 'Real Self' that Actually Is 'Clothed with Christ'" in Flaut D., Hošková-Mayerová Š., Ispas C., Maturo F., Flaut C. (eds) *Decision Making in Social Sciences: Between Traditions and Innovations. Studies in Systems, Decision and Control*, vol 247 (Springer, 2020), 275–295 and C.

of the personhood for father Stăniloae. We receive not only the work of the Spirit, but also the work of Christ, who comes together with the Father and dwells in us. This actual inhabitation of Christ in us and our endless progress in Him is the main purpose of our deification wich is our Christification.[27]

Therefore, God's Immortal Image is Christ illuminating as image in all and, *with His light, He's the one who appears on the shining face of the good Christian.* Being influenced by Gregory Palamas (but not only, Macarius and Symeon likewise), Father Staniloae tried to present in this writing the main aspects of the human being as image of God. When he stresses the "luminous" character of the human being, Stăniloae argues that: „*The human being is a light that enlightens first himself from himself, but realises, in the last stand, that he is not the source of this illumination in the end. The human being illuminates himself but only while being in connection with other persons and the world. We can also say that he illuminates himself and illuminates the world as well up to a certain extent, as a light that springs forth from a luminous darkness. (...)The Absolute on winch depend all is the supreme light and, in the same time, the darkness or the supreme mystery. (...) The human being is a singular-dual existence, which, on the one hand is revealed light, while on the other hand represents a spring of incomprehensible light*".[28]

Thus, the human being is also considered to consist of light and this light is concentrated whitin and upon the 'shining face' of man.[29] The object of

Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989), 211–302.

[34] For more details consult Dumitru Stăniloae, 'The Word of God: Creator, Saviour and Restaurateur for all Time' [in Rom.], *Mitropolia Olteniei,* Nr.l (1991), 7–19; Idem, 'The Christology of St. Maximus the Confessor' [in Rom.], *Ortodoxia,* Nr.3 (1988), 67–72; Idem, 'The Son and the Word of God Incarnate and Risen as Man: The Unifier of Creation in Himself for all Eternity' [in Rom.], *Mitropolia Olteniei,* Nr.4 (1987), 7–24.

[35] Dumitru Staniloae, *God's Immortal Image* [in Rom.], vol. I, (Bucharest: Crystal, 1995), 62.

[36] In rabbinic Judaism this is the main connotation of the concept of image of God. In early Second Temple Judaism the concept of image of God as physical resemblance to God. The imagery is the result of a juxtaposition of Gen 1:26 with Gen 2:7. See, on this, A. Goshen-Gottstein, "The Body as Image of God in Rabbinic Literature," *Harvard Theological Review* 87.2 (1994): 171–195, esp. 173–176 and for a critique of Gottstein's literal understanding of rabbinic references to Adam's body of light, see David H. Aaron, "Shedding Light on God's Body in Rabbinic Midrashim: Reflections on the Theory of a Luminous Adam," *Harvard Theological Review* 90 (1997): 299–314. Also, John R. Levison, *Portraits of Adam in Early Judaism* (JSPSS1; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1988), 178, emphasizes, "the image consists of physical similarity to God". The image is distinct from its prototype in its substance. Concerning the transmission of the likeness to God (bodily luminosity – *shechinah,* שכינה) from Adam to other humans or the whole humanity, the beauty of Adam the first was like the beauty of the *Divine Shekinah* (דיוקנא meaning "dwelling" or "one who dwells"). The Lord created mankind "in a facsimile of his own face". F.I. Andersen, '2 (Slavonic Apocalypse of) Enoch', in J.H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha Volume 1: Apocalyptic Literature and Testaments* (New York: Doubleday, 1983, 1985) 92–221, here 171: "*The Lord with his own two hands created mankind; and in a facsimile of his own face. Small and great the Lord created. Whoever insults a person's face insults the face of the Lord; whoever treats a person's face with repugnance treats the face of the Lord with repugnance. Whoever treats with contempt the face of any person treats the face of the Lord with contempt. (2 En. 44:1–2 shorter*

this particular illumination which receives light and "produces" light for others is not only our mind, but our body and our face, also. Therefore, says father Stăniloae, "*The most adequate, expressive, and communicative image of the supreme Image is the human being or the human face. This has been seen prophetically since the time of Old Testament. For through the human face, the supreme spirituality (or the form of the supreme spirituality) can be communicated. Only through the personal face of the human being – which expresses consciousness of oneself and all others, openness to and love for all, and the capacity to express one's will and affirm oneself – can the divine personal spirituality be expressed in the most adequate manner. Only the human person is able to know God, especially in His inner being*".[28] We notice here, another equivalence between face and person.

Divine Logos, the Son of God, because he is the 'Image' ('Face' for Clement, *Stromate*, 5, 6) of the Father, found the most adequate expression in the human face to communicate to us God's inner life within a human framework. Thus, for father Stăniloae become so important to see "God's inner life in the face of Christ".[29] Christ gives us not only Mystery and Light, but also shares with us the Sonship of God. Therefore, "*Christ, by being a Person that remains at the same time divine and human is always in an action of communicating His infinity. He is always Light above any light and, furthermore, Mystery, always above the finite human [being], Christ is an infinite Mystery in what he communicates to us and infinite Mystery in what remains un-communicated to us. The more he reveals us the [divine] Light, the more His Mystery remains untouched. Christ is Light and unending Mystery in his human nature as well, because His human nature is one through which the Divine Person communicates with us*".[30] Let's keep in mind this equivalence between person and light.

Stăniloae goes further and argues that Christ "made Himself through the Incarnation the Light of the world, its meaning".[31] He extends this discourse on the 'luminosity' of the believer which will be revealed during the Final Judgment, when "*All will want to see Christ illuminating as image in all, because all are illumined by Christ, which is luminous through all, because of the deeds they have worked. However, they all turn aside from the ones in which Christ does not radiate, because they have not helped through their deeds the ones near them to fill themselves during their lifetime with the light of Christ*".[32]

What shines from us is the image of the Trinity, and this spiritual and uncreated light we shall receive it after the Final Judgment, when Christ will be all in all.[33]

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recension)". Silviu Bunta, "The Likeness of the Image: Adamic motifs and צֶלֶם (*tselem*) anthropoly in Rabbinic Traditions about Jacob's image enthroned in heaven", *Journal for the Study of Judaism*, XXXVII, 1 (Brill NV, Leiden, 2006) 55–84.

[37] Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Experience of God. Volume 6*, 110.

[38] Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Experience of God. Volume 6*, 111.

[39] Dumitru Stăniloae, *Jesus Christ. The Light of theWorld* [in Rom.], 76.

[40] Dumitru Stăniloae, *Jesus Christ. The Light of theWorld* [in Rom.], 82

[41] Dumitru Staniloae, *Jesus Christ: The Light of the World* [in Rom.], 114–115.

[42] Dumitru Stăniloae, *Jesus Christ. The Light of theWorld* [in Rom.], 118

3. Building a 'Face Christology' – the Sacramental Theology of Personhood as Face

To father Stăniloae, quoting St. Gregory Palamas, "the likeness of God is not simply the image of one of the persons of the Holy Trinity, but of the whole life-creating Trinity. The human person as image thus reflects in himself, in his spiritual structure and life, the inner Trinitarian life of the divinity".[30] In fact, says father Stăniloae, the fathers in general "make no distinction of content between person and nature. Person is only nature in its real existence.

Hypostasis is fundamental ontological reality. This emphasis leads to new logical terms: enypostatos and anypostatos Father Stăniloae appreciates the baptism as an *enhypostasiation* in Christ, bringing to light our personal faces. For him OTHERNESS[31] MEANS ENHYPOSTASIATION in Christ.[32] The soteriological refunctioning of the biological hypostases in the new

[43] Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Experience of God. Orthodox Dogmatic Theology, Volume 2. The World: Creation and Deification*, translated and edited by Ioan Ioniță and Robert Barringer, preface by Ion Bria (Brookline, Massachusetts: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2000) 95/2

[44] Zizioulas confirms the essential importance of the concept of otherness and dedicates a whole chapter "On Being Other: Towards Ontology year of Otherness" in his work *Communion & Otherness*: *Further Studies in Personhood and the Church* (London: T & T Clark, 2007), 13–98. At Yannaras and to Zizioulas there is an absolutization and idealization of otherness, which, together with freedom, are two fundamental attributes of personhood. Alterity acquires value and meaning only in relation with relational factors: love, fellowship and, also, being/nature. Due to the fact that, at Yannaras, nature denies apriori the person as otherness (the ratio between person and nature is defined under the aspect of: priority, inclusion, transcendence or conflict). According to Nicholas Loudovikos, "Person instead of Grace and Dictated Otherness: John Zizioulas' final theological position," *Heythrop Journal* 52 (2011), 683–699, at 683, at both Zizioulas and Yannaras person identifies itself with grace. See: E. Russell, "Reconsidering Relational Anthropology: A Critical Assessment of John Zizioulas' Theological Anthropology," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 5 (2003), 168–186. Not ontology, but theology reveals the truth of the person who is not an antropological category, but the event of divine-human existence of man, a mode of liturgical existence which man receives it through Baptism in the Church. Fathers have adopted the term *prosopon* in order to avoid recognizing in hypostasis the absolute ontological content. Greek Fathers created a new "meta-ontology".

[45] If it is possible to predicate three ἐνούσιοι hypostases in a single ousia, then two ἐνυπόστατοι natures in one hypostasis, surely it is also possible to predicate one ἐνούσιος, ἐνυπόστατος, ἐνύπαρκτος three-hypostatically energy, in one essence and in three hypostases. St. Gregory Palamas extended Christology in the area of Trinitarian theology. No energy is neither anhypostasized, nor having a hypostasis of its own. But energy as tri-hypostatic unity of the Godhead and common manifestation is due to the mutual habitation and perichoresis of the consubstantial hypostases. To St. Gregory Palamas God's activity or energy is not hypostasis, but in hypostasis, is not being, but in being, it's not self-subsistence, but subsistence in being or in hypostasis (ἐνούσιος, ἐνυπόστατος, ἐνύπαρκτος) [Cap. 122]. Therefore, the energies are understood as enhypostasized. The common energy characterizes the essence of the acting Hypostasis and it is the inexpressible revelation of Three-hypostatic Deity.

personal existence acquired through baptism is a „dynamic refunctioning" (*eine kraftvolle Refunktionalisierung*).[34] "When a man is immersed in this water at baptism, he encounters Christ within it, or he is enhypostatized in Christ;[35] he is fully personalized within the Person of Christ and is filled by the energies of the Holy Spirit that shine forth from Christ".[36]A person goes forth from baptism as a wholly new existence. He is not renewed in one respect only, but, according to Father Stăniloae, his very existence has become "other", because, in a certain way, it has become enhypostasized in Christ.[37] The paradox, however, he emphasizes, is that the one baptized remains meanwhile the same subject he was before.[38]

The formative principle here, says father Stăniloae, is a personalizing force – the very form of Christ is also being imprinted. So, in baptism the human being has received "the form of Christ within his own personal form" and "Christ has given him His own appearance". In this sense he has already clothed himself with Christ from the time of his baptism: "The image of Christ is a genuine and luminous garment; it is Christ Himself. 'For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ' (Gal 3:27)".[39] The baptismal garment represents Christ, but it also represents us who have been clothed in a personal way with the image of Christ (Gal

[46] St. Maximus, *Questions to Thalassius* 61, (PG 90, 644D–645D) in *On the Cosmic Mystery of Jesus Christ*, Selected Writings from St Maximus the Confessor, translated by Paul M. Blowers and Robert Louis Wilken (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2003), 131–143, characterized the deification as an "*enhypostatically enlighment*", thus emphasizing its uncreated character because subsistence in / through the eternal hypostasis of the Word.

[47] Benjamin Gleede, *The Development of the Term ἐννπόσταάτος from Origen to John of Damascus, Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae, Volume 113* (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2012) 131, 133, emphasizes that Leontius of Jerusalem elaborated the correspondence ἐνυπόστατον/ ἐνούσιον in a way similar to Pamphilus by emphasizing the need for a terminologically unified approach to the trinitarian and Christological dogma. Not only makes the flesh insubsist in the Logos, but also both natures coexist in the one hypostasis. Thus, both the Logos and the flesh can be subject of συν(εν)υπόστατος, συνοσίωσις, συνυφίστασθαι or συνπόστασις.

[48] Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Experience of God. Orthodox Dogmatic Theology, Volume 5. The Sanctifying Mysteries, translated and edited by Ioan Ioniță and Robert Barringer, foreword by Alkiviadis C. Calivas* (Brookline, Massachusetts: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2012) 31. Vasilios Karayiannis, *Maxime le Confesseur, Essence et Énergies de Dieu*, Théologie Historique 93 (Paris: Beauchesne, 1993), 48, analizying the Maximian terminology, shows that for St. Maximus the term *enhypostaton* indicates what there is or what exists is one that participates to the essential and natural existence (*Opuscula Theologica et Polemica* 16, PG 91, 205B).

[49] The rapport between nature and hypostasis (or λόγος φύσεως and τρόπος ὑπάρξεως) referred to by the term ἐνυπόστατος can thus be described correctly as insubsistence. Antoine Lévy, *Le créé et l'incréé. Maxime le Confesseur et Thomas d'Aquin aux sources de la querelle palamienne* (Sorbonne: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 2007), 307–308, 311, states that „entire Christological thought of Maximus highlights the subtle interplay between λόγος of nature and hypostatic τρόπος (the hypostatic subject of the rational energeia)".

[50] Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Experience of God. Volume 5*, 32.

[51] Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Experience of God. Volume 5*, 42–43.

3:1). Hence St. Paul declares, "My little children, for whom I labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you" (Gal 4:19). If the baptized Christian continues in this state can say with St. Paul, "it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me" (Gal 2:20). After insisting on the four aforesaid Galatian texts, he concludes: "St. Paul also speaks of these matters: of the increasingly clear impression of the image of Christ upon the baptized; of this process as bringing to light their genuine and personal faces from out of the obscurity of an undefined and formless generality, or from the disorder of the lower impulses. "But we all, with unveiled[37] face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed[38] into the same image[39] from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord" (2 Cor 3:18).[40] As we mirror more and more the image of Christ and thereby make our own personal image more and more distinct, we become increasingly luminous, for our image as person is the image of freedom, of conscience and responsiveness, and in these things the glory of the image of Christ as Person is reflected. The Fathers gave baptism the name "illumination."[41] By this name, says Father Stăniloae, "they sought to bestow upon the human face a markedly personal and responsive character and an increasingly profound consciousness of

[52] ἀνακεκαλυμμένῳ (anakekalymmenō), Verb – Perfect Participle Middle or Passive – Dative Neuter Singular

[53] μεταμορφούμεθα (metamorphoumetha), Verb – Present Indicative Middle or Passive – 1st Person Plural

[54] εἰκόνα (eikona), Noun – Accusative Feminine Singular

[55] In Qumran texts we find also the idea of "Humanity as the Glory of God". The Qumran community believed then, that it was their vocation to fulfil the responsibility originally given to Adam to embody God's own Glory. Adam was created in the likeness of God's Glory, being the theophanic presence of the light or of the perfect light of God's presence. Adam is identified in some way with the Glory occupying God's throne in Ezekiel 1. The identification is not absolute since Adam is only made *in* (ב) the likeness of God's Glory. In the Greek version of *3 Baruch* 4:16, Adam was clothed in the Glory of God before he fell, but he was "*stripped* of the Glory of God (τῆς δόξης θεοῦ ἐγυμνώθη)" probably implies he had previously *worn* the Glory. This kind of Adam theology lies behind Romans 1:23 and 3:23. An identification of the Glory of God with Adam's form is probably also intended by the echo of Isaiah 6:1–3 in Genesis 1:26–28. See, on this: John Behr, "The Glory of God: A Living Human Being", in Elie Ayroulet, ed., *Saint Irénée et l'Humanité Illuminée* (Paris: Cerf, 2018), 93–116; Crispin H.T. Fletcher-Louis, *All The Glory of Adam. Liturgical Anthropology in the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Studies on the texts of the desert of Judah; Vol. 42; Boston; Köln: Brill, 2002), 91–93; Alexander Golitzin, "Recovering the 'Glory of Adam': 'Divine Light' Traditions in the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Christian Ascetical Literature of Fourth-Century Syro-Mesopotamia" in J. R. Davila, *The Dead Sea Scrolls as Background to Postbiblical Judaism and Early Christianity: Papers from an International Conference at St Andrews in 2001* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 275–308.

[56] For the link between the primordial luminosity of Adam's garments, baptismal garments and the luminosity of ascetic holy man, see: Samuel Rubenson, "Transformative Light and Luminous Traditions in Early Christian Mysticism and Monasticism," *Svensk Teologisk Kvartalskrift* 90 (2014) 179–187. Rubenson brings us back to the Desert Fathers becoming fire and radiant light and, for him, the ascent to light is linked to a descent of light.

the eternal meaning of personal life and of its continuation, and also a consciousness of the eternal meaning of the whole of reality in God."[43]

Chrismation inaugurates an "epiphany or manifestation of Christ".[44] This epiphany shows forth the light of the Spirit of Christ shining upon the baptized person's being. Through the holy mystery of chrismation, the believer himself becomes another Christ, becomes the likeness of Christ – which after all means the "Anointed" (*Christos*) – and hence he is also an anointed one, or a Christian (*christianos*). Following the example of the Lord, we too have Christ within us as we come up out of the water of baptism, although He is not yet visibly resting upon us. Hence the Spirit of Christ immediately descends upon us, or "shines forth from Christ within us"[45], this means that Christians devoted to Christ are living a perpetual Pentecost, a continuous participation in His Spirit.[46]

Through chrismation the Holy Spirit penetrates and imprints Himself upon these physical members and organs, and on the spiritual powers on which they are founded; also, in the same way as the holy chrism, the Spirit abides in them as a pleasing fragrance. He imprints Himself as a seal not only on the outside [EXOTHEN] of these members but also on their interiors [ENDOTHEN].[47] It is through the body that the Holy Spirit is communicated to him, and from Christ the Spirit shines forth upon our bodies.[48]

"And if Christ is in you… also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit, who dwells in you" (Rom 8:10–11) 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 Cor 3:18). In order to show that Christ is dwelling in our being through His Spirit, and Christ is revealed through the unveiled face of the baptized, father Stăniloae is quoting from this two texts above.[49]

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[57] Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Experience of God. Orthodox Dogmatic Theology, Volume 5*, 45/5

[58] Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Experience of God. Volume 5*, 60.

[59] Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Experience of God. Volume 5*, 62.

[60] Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Experience of God. Volume 5*, 64.

[61] Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Experience of God. Volume 5*, 69. During the Transfiguration the Apostles, on Tabor, "saw the very grace of the Spirit who later came to dwell in them" (Tr., III, 3,9.). The light of grace "illuminated from without (ἔξωθεν) those who approached it with dignity and sent enlightenment to the soul through sensitive eyes; but today, since it is confused with us (ἀνακραθὲν ἡμῖν) and exists in us, it illuminates the soul from within (ἔνδωθεν)" (Tr., I, 3, 38). The opposition between knowledge coming from the outside (ἔξωθεν) – a human and purely symbolic knowledge – and the 'intellectual' knowledge which comes from within (ἔνδωθεν), says Meyendorff, is already found in Pseudo-Denys: 'This God does not move them towards the divine from outside (ἔξωθεν), but in an intelligible way by illuminating them from within (ἔνδωθεν) with the most divine will, thanks to a pure and immaterial light' (*Hier. Eccl.*, I, 4, PG III, 376B; trad. Gandillac, 249). See, also, Panayiotis Christou, "Double Knowledge According to Gregory Palamas", *Studia Patristica*, vol. 9 (Leuven: Peeters, 1966), 20–29.

[62] Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Experience of God. Orthodox Dogmatic Theology, Volume 5*, 71.

[63] Dumitru Staniloae, *Orthodox Spirituality: A Practical Guide for the Faithful and a Definitive*

Another statement of Father Stăniloae is coming to support my argument regarding his theology of Personhood as Face Christology. For him the Eucharist is very much like a human face: "The Eucharist is made up of numerous feelings, acts, and concerns that come from us to God, and from God to us. In this the Eucharist closely resembles a human face that as a result of this encounter has a complex design, made up of numberless lines that have their origin from us, from nature, and from above; these lines serve to turn this face outward, inward, or in the direction of heaven"[47] and "He effects an instant transformation of the Eucharistic bread into His body, which is an instrument for showing forth His own hypostasis and that of the Spirit."[48]

He abides within us in a real way and we become "fellow members of the same body" (σύσσωμα, Eph 3:6) with Christ and with one another. Through this intimacy and communication perfected in Him, we experience the states, feelings, and activities of Christ, and He experiences ours, penetrated and characterized by His own. "It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me" (Gal 2:20), said the Holy Apostle Paul. The union with the Lord in the Eucharist is a complete union precisely because He is no longer a worker in us only through the energy introduced into us by His Spirit but also through His body and His blood, imprinted upon our body and blood. Therefore, "we find ourselves subjects together with Christ of our body, become also His body, and of His body, become also our body".[49]

Manual for the Scholar, transl. By Archimandrite Jerome and Otilia Kloos, foreword by Alexander Golubov (Waymart, PA: St. Tikhon's Seminary Press, 2003), 199, says that the heart is the ontological *topos* of perceiving God's presence in ourselves, meant to "be filled with divine light". From the 'endothen' presence of the uncreated light of Christ,is radiating then 'exothen' upon the illuminated body and concentrating this light as "shining face". Deified man is endowed with divine energies, which become his own energies. See, also, Marcin Podbielski, "The Face of the Soul, the Face of God: Maximus the Confessor and πρόσωπον," in Sotiris Mitralexis, Georgios Steiris, Marcin Podbielski, Sebastian Lalla (eds.), *Maximus the Confessor as a European Philosopher* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2017), 193-228.

[64] Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Experience of God. Orthodox Dogmatic Theology, Volume 5*, 94.

[65] Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Experience of God. Orthodox Dogmatic Theology, Volume 5*, 92.

[66] Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Experience of God. Orthodox Dogmatic Theology, Volume 5*, 80–81. We recall that for Palamas, man is in a certain sense higher than the angels, greater than them, created according to the image and likeness of God. Man's corporeity indicates that he is more perfectly in the Image of God than the angels. The angels are given to be only reflections of light, but man is predestined to become God. A created incarnate spirit, man is placed between the spirituality of the angels and the carnal corporeality of this world. St. Gregory of Palamas saw in this situation the primacy of man over the angels. The angels are "the second lights", reflecting the light of God. Saint Gregory Palamas, *The one Hundred and Fifty Chapters*, a critical edition, translation and study by Robert E. Sinkewicz, C.S.B. (Toronto: Pontifical Institute Of Mediaeval Studies, 1988) 126–127, Cap. 39: "*The intellectual and rational nature of the soul, alone possessing mind and word and life-giving spirit, has alone been created more in the image of God than the incorporeal angels*" [Ἡ νοερά καί λογική φύσις τής ψυχής, μόνη νουν έχουσα καϊ λόγον καί πνεῦμα ζωοποιόν, μόνη καί τών ασωμάτων αγγέλων μάλλον κατ' εικόνα τοῦ θεοῦ παρ' αύτοῦ δεδημιούργηται].

4. Eternal bliss – the contemplation of the face of Christ. The breath of the Spirit and the eternal value of all human faces

E. After the Fall, says Father Stăniloae, the breath of the Spirit "no longer blows freely within them", because now they are "only flesh instead of life itself."[50] Saints, instead, are those who have incorporated the Spirit and they as subjects arrive at a supreme intimacy with the Spirit. The Spirit does not affirm Himself in the human person through the category of "Thou," like Christ, but through the category of "I," in order to strengthen the "I" of the human person as an "I" who loves Christ.[51] There begins a *kenosis* of the Spirit, who descends to our level in order to raise us up to the level of being Christ's partners. The Spirit is not a hypostasis with a distinct human nature, which means that He is not incarnate as we are or as Christ is, and therefore there is nothing that hinders Him from "infusing[52] Himself as hypostasis into our hypostases, becoming a sort of hypostasis of our persons".[53] This makes Him even closer to us. This intimacy between the

[67] Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Experience of God. Orthodox Dogmatic Theology, Volume 5. The Sanctifying Mysteries, translated and edited by Ioan Ioniță and Robert Barringer, foreword by Alkiviadis C. Calivas* (Brookline, Massachusetts: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2012) 27, 29. Thus, the Lord clothed Adam and Eve not with garments of skins but with garments of glory. 'Garments of light ('ō r)' refers to the clothes of the first man, which were like a torch [shedding radiance], broad at the bottom and narrow at the top. See, Alexander Toepel, "When Did Adam Wear the Garments of Light?," JJS 61 [2010]: 62–71. The homophony between עור ("skins") and אוֹר ("light") was, also, exploited, interpreting the luminous garment as the gift of the Holy Spirit, lost in Eden, recovered in Christian baptism, and brought to full expression in the eschaton.

[68] By the indwelling of Father and Son in the *ἔσω ἄνθρωπος* and through the *πεῖρα of the glory,* shared by the body also, we become "children of light", divinized *(ἀποθεοῦται). This means* becoming 'one spirit' with the Lord. A saint is a person who has been sanctified in his inner self (κατὰ τὸν ἔσω ἄνθρωπον; Coll. II, Hom. 17. 13). For 'dwelling language', says Stewart*'Working the Earth of the Heart'*, 224.

[69] In a special way the human being was created in the beginning by the will of the Father, according to the image of the Son and in the Son, and through the breath (*infusing*) of the Holy Spirit (Gen 1:2; 2:6). Irenaeus' interpretation of the breath of life in Gen 2:7 is only properly understood within the economy of salvation and the vivifying Spirit of 1 Cor 15:45. He employs Adam and Christ as paradigms for the qualitative distinction between the breath in Gen 2:7 and vivifying Spirit in 1 Cor 15:45. The breath of life given to Adam (and by extension to all humanity) is provisional and temporary, abandoning the body after death. The Spirit, which follows after the breath, is eternal and permanent. Following the logic of 1 Cor 15:45, the first Adam is animated or rational, while the second Adam is spiritual (πνευματοφόρος – spirit bearer, a pneumatological being). As a result the animating breath lost its strength and requires the vivification of the Spirit through adoption. Stephen O. Presley, *The Intertextual Reception of Genesis 1–3 in Irenaeus of Lyons* (Leiden: Brill 2015) 146; John Behr, *Asceticism and Anthropology in Irenaeus and Clement* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2000) 535; M.C. Steenberg, *Irenaeus on Creation. The cosmic Christ and the saga of redemption* (Leiden: Brill, 2008) 71.

[70] Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Experience of God. Orthodox Dogmatic Theology, Volume 4*, 100–101.

Spirit and the human person who believes makes the spiritual person feel the Spirit not as a "Thou"; rather, every time he says "I," he hears the Spirit saying in him His own "I." His "I" has become the "I" of the Spirit, and the "I" of the Spirit has become his "I," in a perfect unity without confusion. They are two interpenetrated 'I's and every one feels that his "I" is penetrated by the "I"s of others because the same "I" of the Spirit is present

"Even in this world there is an interpenetration of persons"[56], but none is confused with the others. I have my own ontological definition, but I am not separated from others and from the world. I am in others, and they are in me. This "expresses the total absorption of your person ('face' in original) in the other and of the other's in you,"[57] The mutual discovery of subjects is a work of love. If in the time of prayer the mind sees itself directly and God only indirectly, from the moment that it is carried off from itself it sees God directly, and it no longer knows itself. This is the experience of love in moments of ecstasy: I no longer see myself, but only you; in the horizon of my sight you take the place of my ego. "In fact the divine light is considered

'*It is 'enhypostatic', not because it possesses a hypostasis of its own, but because the Spirit 'sends it out into the hypostasis of another', in which it is indeed contemplated. It is then properly called 'enhypostatic', in that it is not contemplated by itself, nor in essence, but in hypostasis*' (Tr. III.i.9, 71). As well as meaning 'what exists in another hypostasis', *enhypostatic* can also mean 'what really exists', that which is genuine or authentic, e.g., of our *real* adoption as sons by the grace of the Holy Spirit (Tr. III.i.27).

[71] Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Experience of God. Orthodox Dogmatic Theology, Volume 6*, 166. For father Stăniloae perichoresis or 'interpenetration of persons' and has a dynamic character, manifesting the mystery of the energy of Trinity. Like St. Gregory Palamas, Father Stăniloae also, extended Christology in the area of Trinitarian theology, so Tabor light is the uncreated energy of Son, that '*innate motion*' or '*active and essential movement of nature*'. Thus, hypostases' consubstantiality and mutual perichoresis would be impossible without this unique and same natural movement and without this essential energy. According to Amphiloque Radovic, *Le Mystère de la Sainte Trinité selon saint Grégoire de Palamas* (Paris: Cerf, 2012) 170, "nature is the one which is moved by energy, hypostasis is the one who moves, and movement is the energy". For a discussion on the Trinitarian contribution of Gregory Palamas see M. Edmund Hussey, 'The Palamite Trinitarian Models', *SVTQ,* Vol. 16, No. 2 (1972), 83–89. For father Stăniloae's further insights on this theme see: Dumitru Stăniloae, 'The Holy Trinity and the Creation of the World from Nothing in Time' (II) [in Rom.], *Mitropolia Olteniei,* Nr.3 (1987), 28–47; Idem, 'The Holy Trinity and the Creation of the World from Nothing in Time' (1) [in Rom.], *Mitropolia Olteniei,* Nr.2 (1987), 41–69; Idem, 'The Holy Trinity: The Creator, Saviour and Eternal Goal of all Believers' [in Rom.], *Ortodoxia,* Nr.2 (1986), 14–42; Idem, 'The Holy Trinity, Structure of Supreme Love' [in Rom.], *Studii Teologice,* Vol.22 (1970), 333–355, reprinted in *Theology and the Church,* translated by Robert Barringer (New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1980), 73–108; Dumitru Stăniloae, 'Trinitarian Relations and the Life of the Church', *Ortodoxia,* Vol. 16 (1964), 503–525, reprinted in *Theology and the Church,* translated by Robert Barringer (New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1980), 11–44.

[72] Dumitru Stăniloae, *Orthodox Spirituality. A Practical Guide for the Faithful and a definitive Manual for the Scholar*, translated from the original romanian by archimandrite Jerome (Newville) and Otilia Kloos, foreword by Alexander Golubov (St. Tikhon's Seminary Press, 2003), 320–321.

as being a reflex of the loving face of God or of the faces which love each other or love us, of the Holy Trinity. Where light is seen, God is no longer covered with a shadow; His presence is no longer just supposed, but He has uncovered His face, which radiates light".[57]

The union of the mind with the divine light which it sees this fills it and makes it light. "Whoever looks at a light which is shining from the face of a loved one is also filled with it. The light and brilliance from the face of the beloved also reaches the face of the one who loves, and envelops both in a common light and joy".[58] So the mind doesn't only see the divine light beyond itself, but also within.

The face of the Word that shone like the sun is the caracteristic hiddeness of his being. The face of Christ issued radiance and revealed God and the apostles realized that God is a *person* (*prosopon* – which means both "face" and "person"). In contrast to "name" Christology, "wisdom" Christology, and "glory" Christology, Bogdan G. Bucur notes that "face" Christology, one of the early building blocks for emerging Christian doctrine, never become a major player, but was replaced by more precise vocabulary shaped by the Christological controversies of the third and fouth centuries.[59]

At the end of the ages, in eschatological life, Christ's luminous face will illumine all persons and all things. Here, father Stăniloae equates again the Face with Person: "Only this face, only this Person, is seen by all, because they feel that it is this Person upon whom their eternal existence depends".[60]

The light of Christ's face has thus become visibly transparent in his face. The fundamental otherness of the other is to see Him through the human face, first in Himself then in all those in whom Christ takes up His dwelling. According to father Stăniloae "God affirmed, through the human face He gave to His Son, the eternal value of all human faces."[61] After God Himself

[73] Dumitru Stăniloae, *Orthodox Spirituality*, 332.

[74] Dumitru Stăniloae, *Orthodox Spirituality*, 334.

[75] Bogdan G. Bucur, "The Divine Face and the Angels of the face: Jewish Apocalyptic Themes in Early Christology and Pneumatology", in Robert J. Daly (ed.), *Apocalyptic Thought in Early Christianity*, Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology, Baker Academic: Grand Rapids, 2009, 143–153. Bucur outline the occurrence of "face" Christology in Clement of Alexandria, Aphrahat the Persian sage, and in the seven spirits of the book of revelation. The "shining face" theology as luminous metamorphosis of a visionary has experienced three great challenges: the anthropomorphic controversy, iconoclastic debate and the hesychast dispute. See, on this, N. Tănase, „'Shining Face' as Hidden and Revealed Christology" *UBBTO* 62, no. 1 (2017): 187-216.

[76] Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Experience of God. Orthodox Dogmatic Theology, Volume 6*, 184.

[77] Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Experience of God. Orthodox Dogmatic Theology, Volume 6*, 28. According to Jewish sources, the image of God (*tselem*) was especially reflected in the radiance of Adam's face (*panim*). Jarl Fossum, *The Name of God and the Angel of the Lord. Samaritan and Jewish Concepts of Intermediation and the Origin of Gnosticism* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1985) 94; Jarl Fossum, *The Image of the Invisible God: Essays on the Influence of Jewish Mysticism on Early Christology* (Göttingen: Vanderhoeck & Ruprecht, 1995) 14–39, for here 16 ("Light Adam" or "Light-Man") and 20, n. 30 (the word for 'light ' in the LXX is *phōs*, which significantly also means 'man': τό φῶς, 'light'

became man He "have made the face of His uncreated hypostasis out of the human face" and "hrough the fact that the Son of God Himself took on a human face, God became visible as a Person, making His divinity visible through His humanity, although distinct from it".[64] Only the Words Incarnation made God's mystery and infinite light transparent through the human face. Through the Incarnation God Himself made His face out of the human face and gave the fruit of the tree of life – that is, from Himself (Rev 22:2) – to all faces that enter inwardly into communion with His face. Because "the human face in general has in itself the capacity to become the visible[65] image of God" that it shows that the "Son of God is the model for the human image and that God also has an image, a form of manifestation according to which the human face is created".[66] "Christ's face is filled with the divine transcendence" and "Through the relative transcendence of Christ's face, God's absolute transcendence is visible".[67]

To father Stăniloae "The light of Christ's face" is "the light of the Person".[68] This is an another important text in which he appropriates the triptych Face-Person-Light: "From Christ's human face, which is the medium through which the endless understanding and goodness of the divine Person shines

and ὁ φώς, 'man').

[78] Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Experience of God. Orthodox Dogmatic Theology, Volume 6*, 105.

[79] Moses' glory is associated with being created in the image of God, stating that God created man in his own image. The understanding of Moses' face restoring the original luminous *tselem* (Gen 1:27), that Adam had prior to the fall, is also expressed in parallel with the radiant *panim* of the prophet. Linda Belleville, *Reflections of Glory: Paul's Polemical Use of the Moses-Doxa Tradition in 2 Corinthians 3.1–18* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991), 65; A. Goshen Gottstein, "The Body as Image of God in Rabbinic Literature," *HTR* 87 (1994): 183.

[80] Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Experience of God. Orthodox Dogmatic Theology, Volume 6*, 106.PANIM

[81] Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Experience of God. Orthodox Dogmatic Theology, Volume 6*, 106.

[82] The glory of Adam's body and the glory of Moses' face were creatively juxtaposed in 4Q504. A. Orlov, "Vested with Adam's Glory: Moses as the Luminous Counterpart of Adam in the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Macarian Homilies," *Christian Orient* 4.10 (2006): 498–513, says that, the luminous face of the prophet serves in this text as an alternative to the lost luminosity of Adam and as a new symbol of God's glory once again manifested in the human body. Thus, as Andrei A. Orlov, *The Glory of the Invisible God. Two Powers in Heaven Traditions and Early Christology* (New York: T&T Clark, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2019) 124, demonstrated, in early Mosaic, Enochic, and Jacobite traditions *tselem* is often used interchangeably with *panim*. Also, in Matthew's and Luke's transfiguration account, Jesus' luminous face was indeed understood as his *iqonin*. Although scholars have attempted to interpret the symbolism of Jesus' luminous face through the biblical imagery of Moses' incandescent visage (Exod 34:29–30), says Orlov, "another important theophanic trend, which speaks about the deity's *Panim*, remains neglected". The creative interchange between *panim* and *tselem* symbolism will develop a very important influence on Christian theophany. The application of "image" terminology to Moses' story here has profound anthropological significance, since Moses' luminosity becomes envisioned as a restoration of Adam's original *tselem*. The splendor of the *iqonin* of his face shone because of the splendor of the Glory of the Shekinah of the Lord.

forth, the light that will overwhelm everything".[67] He who is now invisible to all and dwells in light will then be revealed to all as He is, and will fill all things with His light. Christ's luminous face will illumine all persons and all things: "The eternal light of which the good will partake is a look and a call that Christ addresses to every one of them, just as the darkness in which the others are left is a turning of His face from every one of them, or His face dismissing them of their own accord. At the same time he who experiences Christ's face turning toward him as an eternal light, eternally inexhaustible, sees himself in everything that Christ finds good in him, but he also sees the others who are enveloped in the same light. On the other hand, the feeling of all that their destiny has been sealed for eternity, without any possibility of change, is interpreted as their experience of the supreme authority of Him who judges from a very high imperial throne. His throne is not only big, but also "white," because it is the throne from which judgments that are unstained by any interest, flattery, or bribe are decided. The overwhelming authority that radiates from the face of the Judge is so great that "from His presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them" (Rev 20:11). Earth and sky are purely and simply seen no more, on account of the authority radiating from this face, which keeps all humans focusing their gaze upon it. It seems that there is nothing else except this face, or everything is included in it. Only this face, only this Person, is seen by all, because they feel that it is this Person upon whom their eternal existence depends."[68]

At that time we will see the image of every human person in Christ: "in every human person we will see a ray of Christ's face".[69] Influenced by the palamite theology, Father Stăniloae points out: "He is the 'light' in person".[70] The Spirit is the hypostasized energy found in the Son,[71] who thus dwells within us, and by whom we are reconfigured (ἀναμορφούμενοι) in conformity with the living word of God.

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[83] Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Experience of God. Volume 6*, 154.

[84] Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Experience of God. Volume 6*, 184. There is a strikingly resembles the statement in 2 Enoch where God's Panim is understood as his entire extent. Francis Andersen, "2 (Slavonic Apocalypse of) Enoch," in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, edited by J. H. Charlesworth, 1.91–221, 2 vols. (New York: Doubleday, 1983–1985) 1.136–1.138: "I saw the view of the face of the Lord, like iron made burning hot in a fire and brought out, and it emits sparks and is incandescent... and I fell down flat and did obeisance to the Lord. And the Lord, with his own mouth, said to me, 'Be brave, Enoch! Don't be frightened! Stand up, and stand in front of my face forever.'"

[85] Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Experience of God. Volume 6*, 189. Regarding the place of the divine light of Christ in divine cult see, also, D. Stăniloae, 'The Significance of the Divine Light in the Spirituality and the Cult of the Orthodox Church' [in Rom.], *Orthodoxia,* (1976), 3–4, 433–446.

[86] Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Experience of God. Orthodox Dogmatic Theology, Volume 3. The Person of Jesus Christ as God and Savior*, translated and edited by Ioan Ioniță, foreword by His Beatitude Daniel Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church, introduction by Andrew Louth (Brookline, Massachusetts: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2011) 91.

[87] Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Experience of God. Volume 3*, 98.

"The supreme Person will be visible through all, and all persons will see each other through all".[71] There will no longer be seen a nature that makes the person difficult to be perceived. We will see God "face to face," but we will also see each other "face to face," not veiled.[72] The body will not cease to exist, but it will be transparent because through it we will see directly God in glory[73], being completely spiritualized. "Subjects will directly experience each other reciprocally"[74], being filled with spirituality and looking into each other's eyes, this will make subjects no longer exterior to each other, but reciprocally inside one another.

Conclusion

"The divine energies are nothing but the rays of the divine essence, shining from the three divine Persons. And from the time that the Word of God took flesh, these rays have been shining through His human face".[75] Thus, says father Stăniloae, final deification will consist of a contemplation and a living of all the divine values and "energies conceived in and radiated from, the face of Christ", according to the supreme measure of man. But by this, in the face of each man, by the *logoi* and the energies gathered in him, the *logoi* and the energies of the Logos will be reflected luminously. So, "Eternal bliss will be the contemplation of the face of Christ".[76] According to him, this is the 'eternal perspective of deification'.

Through the transparence of Christ's body we now see with the unveiled face the unrestricted and eternal glory to which man was raised in Him.

[88] Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Experience of God. Volume 3*, 147.

[89] Cornelis den Hertog, *The Other Face of God. 'I Am that I Am' Reconsidered* (Hebrew Bible Monographs, 32, Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2012), 34–35, refers to Genesis 32. Here, Jacob struggles with a mysterious 'man' during the night. At the end of the struggle Jacob asks this person to bless him (v. 27). The question, 'Why do you ask for my name?' is followed by the statement: 'It [is] *pel'î*' (v. 18). The last word is best taken as a description of something transcending human power and knowledge and as such astonishing ('wonderful'; see esp. Ps. 139.6; also Judg. 13.19). In all probability this word does not qualify the name (in Hebrew: *šēm*) in question, but the person involved: 'I have seen God face to face and my life was saved' (v. 31; the use of *'elohîm* without object marker and without article may suggest some uncertainty about the identity of the other person but this seems to be cleared away by the phrase *pānîm 'el pānîm*, 'face to face').

[90] Therefore, here "glory" and "face" seem to be used interchangeably. He makes clear that this is certainly a matter of kabod-panim's presence of God and its rendering as 'the Present One'. *The Real acquires, as it were, a human face,* the personal and anthropomorphic character of God, throught his 'incarnation'. This is the reinterpretation of the divine name Yhwh, by deriving it from *'Ehye*, a first-person verb form. Indeed, to the Ps-Clementine Homilies and Clement of Alexandria and for Irenaeus or Tertullian, the Face of God is the Son. In this way, he is linking the abiding mystery of "I am", the theology of "divine energies" and "Face theophany" a theophany that both reveals and conceals

[91] Dumitru Stăniloae, *Experience of God. Volume 6*, 152.

[92] Dumitru Stăniloae, *Orthodox Spirituality*, 374.

[93] Revelation 22:4 in Dumitru Stăniloae, *Orthodox Spirituality*, 374.

Thus it is also mirrored in us (2 Cor 3:18). He presents in Himself to the Father all who believe in Him; They are seen in Him by the Father, but He also has them inscribed in His eternal memory, and the Father sees them in His memory. At the same time, "the Father sees Christ imprinted in them in His state of sacrifice and Resurrection".[73] Thus, "the Father sees in Christ's face[74] all those who believe in Him, because on His face is reflected Christ's thought about everyone, and in the face of every believer the Father sees Christ imprinted".[75] He sees Christ advancing in the transformation of every believer after His image until He takes him to His state of resurrection.

By virtue of the second coming of Christ our God, says father Stăniloae, the sons of God must be revealed and their beauty appear fully as what in truth they are. So, it is written: 'Then the righteous will shine like the sun' [Mt 13:43]. Therefore, the human person will rise up with the body. But if it is difficult to define the form of the new world, it is even more difficult to define the form of resurrected bodies. "We always find ourselves before a pneumatic, apophatic order… clothed in glory (1 Cor 15:42–52)".[76] In this way He brings the final "yes" on its behalf and shows that 'God can appear in the world in all His radiance… through the complete revelation of Jesus at His Second Coming'.[77]

According to father Stăniloae, "within the fabric of nature every person takes his place as a new "eye" of spiritual transparence".[78] Through these

[94] Dumitru Stăniloae, *Experience of God. Volume 3*, 145.

[95] From In seeing you I saw the Face of God, lB In seeing you, I see the face of My Son… here an anthropomorphic controversy may be introduced.

[96] Dumitru Stăniloae, *Experience of God. Volume 3*, 146. Here, in my opinion, father Stăniloae interprets the 2 Cor 3:18, where Paul anticipates the believer's metamorphosis: "*all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed (μεταμορφούμεθα) into the same image from one degree of glory to another (ἀπὸ δόξης εἰς δόξαν); for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit*." According to A. Fitzmyer, SJ. "Glory Reflected on the Face of Christ (2 Cor 3:7–4:6) and a Palestinian Jewish Motif" *Theological Studies* 42.4 (1981) 630–644, this sublime theology of the glory of the creator-God reflected on the face of Christ makes him declare that "*Paul's mode of argumentation has sometimes been called 'rabbinic logic', and has been compared loosely to the principle of gĕzērāh šāwāh or 'inference by analogy'*" (Fitzmyer, "Glory Reflected on the Face of Christ" 634, 638). Paul alludes to Gen 1:3, as he paraphrases, 'Let light shine out of darkness', and refers to the creator as the source of the *doxa* that shines on the face of Christ is thus the *eikōn*, the "likeness" of the creator, and in turn reflects the same *doxa* on the faces of those who turn to him, with unveiled faces. As one ray of glory after another is thus reflected first on the face of Christ and then on the face of the Christian. All this comes from the glory of the Father, who first brought forth light from darkness. The intermediary is now Christ, the image of the Father, the creator-God (Fitzmyer, "Glory Reflected on the Face of Christ" 643). See, also, William R. Baker, "Did the Glory of Moses' face Fade? A Reexamination of καρταργέω in 2 Chorinthians 3:7–18" *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 10.1 (2000) 1–15; Susan Grove Eastman, *Paul and the Person: Reframing Paul's Anthropology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2017) 85–108.

[97] Dumitru Stăniloae, *Experience of God. Volume 6*, 162.

[98] Dumitru Stăniloae, *Experience of God. Volume 6*, 136.

[99] Dumitru Stăniloae, *Experience of God. Volume 2*, 80.

"eyes" the incarnate God is at work deepening and enlarging this transparency until it reaches its fulfillment through resurrection. Also, he explains that "the material eye that sees is a mystery, as is the word that a man speaks, being a combination of sound and sense, the filling of sound with sense. Also a mystery is the face of the human being, matter illuminated by thought and feeling".[73] The fire shine forth from the eyes of the Lord. "If the world was created by means of His word, now it is transformed through the light of the face and eyes in which God clothed Himself". In this, he claims, "the superiority of the person vis-a-vis nature is affirmed, as is the latter's dependence on the former. From the words and face of any person there radiates a superior power, due to the spirit. So much more does a power radiate from the Lord's face".[74]

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[100] Dumitru Stăniloae, *Experience of God. Volume 5*, 3.

[101] Dumitru Stăniloae, *Experience of God. Volume 6*, 150. For Nicholas Bamford, „Gregory Palamas' Energetic Approach to Person: Existential and Ontological Implications," *Studia Patristica* 48 (2010), 241–246 at 241–242 and 246, it is unclear yet the relationship of Palamite categories to the discourse of 'person' in contemporary Orthodox theology. To Bamford, „the juxtapositioning of personhood in neopatristic study to the philosophical" (for example of the incorporation of the existentialism of Heidegger as evidenced by Zizioulas and Yannaras), has led to 'new' ways of looking at 'person' by re-addressing the Fathers through a synthesising of the relationality of Heidegger, Buber and Macmurray through existentialism. This in turn has led to the examination for the place of 'new' ontologies', evidenced in the model offered by Zizioulas. See Paul Collins, *Trinitarian Theology West and East: Karl Barth, the Cappadocian Fathers, and John Zizioulas*, (Oxford: University Press, 2001). There are many important scholars who, also, have analysed the use of Aristotle and other significant philosophers by Gregory Palamas. See for example: Stavros Yangazoglou, 'Philosophy and Theology: The Demonstrative Method in the Theology of Saint Gregory Palamas, *GOTR*, Vol. 41, No. 1 (1996), 1–18 and Leonidas Contos, 'The Essence-Energies Structure of Saint Gregory Palamas with a Brief Examination of its Patristic Foundation', *GOTR*, Vol. 12 (1967), 283–294.

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St. Catherine of Alexandria as a Feminine Paradigm of Christian Wisdom

The Theme of the Dispute between Saint Catherine and Pagan Philosophers in the Renaissance Frescoes of Masolino and Pinturicchio (15th century)

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Abstract: Although historical research in the last century questions the historical character of Saint Catherine, since the beginning of the third millennium the interest in the typology represented by her within the pre-modern Christian culture has known a constant increase. The cult of the saint, the significance of her history from a socio-cultural and gender studies point of view, but also her presence as a major theme of medieval, Renaissance and Baroque painting have been studied. The present study aims to analyze the theme of Saint Catherine's dispute with pagan philosophers, an essential episode of the legend of Saint Catherine in two of the most important painters of the *Quattroccento* period: Masolino da Panicale și Pinturicchio. Masolino was active in the first half of the 15th century and offers a sober composition, placing St. Catherine in a didactic posture (*Lehrtypus*). Pinturicchio's composition is more colorful and dynamic, and although he depicts the virgin Christian philosopher dressed in princely clothes, his placement in a discussion posture (*Diskussionstypus*) anticipates the tragic denouement of the *Legend*.

Keywords: St. Catherine of Alexandria, Women Philosophers, Renaissance, Christian Wisdom

1. Saint Catherine as a Christian representative of Alexandrian feminine philosophy

In late antiquity, especially in the Hellenistic metropolis of Alexandria, an interesting social and cultural phenomenon aimed at the emancipation

of women proliferated[1]. The phenomenon is specific to both the pagan world, the case of the philosopher Hypatia (335-415) being the best known in this regard, and to the Christian world (St. Melania the Elder, St. Melania the Younger, St. Macrina, Paula, Eustochium, St. Monica, etc.). In the latter case, a significant role was played by the spiritual and cultural model that the Christian women saints followed, a model very often constituted by a family member – sometimes female like Melania the Elder for her niece Venerable Melania the Younger, sometimes (in fact, most of the time) male like Saints Basil the Great and Gregory of Nyssa for Saint Macrina, or Blessed Jerome for Paula and Eustochium, for whom he played the role of a mentor and a spiritual father.

Considered by today's historiography as a legendary figure created no earlier than the 8th century, Saint Catherine is presented in Christian hagiography as a martyr of noble origin who confessed her faith in Christ, being killed in the anti-Christian persecutions of the early 4th century. Known by a nickname of Arabic origin, Catherine meaning «Wise» in this language, she has been identified with Dorothea spoken of by Rufinus or with Damiana[2]. Eusebius of Caesarea speaks in his *Historia ecclesiastica*[3] of a courageous young woman and „very famous for her wealth, birth and education", without revealing her name, who opposed the dishonest desire of Emperor Maximinus. Although the young woman in the church writer's story was not martyred, but only exiled, there is a striking similarity between the two women, who, moreover, fit into a typology of the learned and philosophically educated Christian woman in Alexandria at the beginning of the 4th century.

Beyond the attempts to historically identify this saint known to us today by an Arabic nickname or considered by a good part of contemporary church history as an «imaginary saint», from a philosophical and theological-systematic point of view, the typology of the emancipated Christian woman exemplified by the personality of this holy martyr is much more interesting.

In one of the lives of Saint Catherine, she confesses that she „learned every philosophical and rhetorical doctrine and other sciences"[4], arguing polemically against classical culture that wisdom does not come from the gods, but is the gift of God, and that the rejection of pagan traditions is

[1] We analyzed this phenomenon in the study Ana Ocoleanu, "Women, Philosophy, and Violence: St. Catherine and Hypatia from Alexandria, or Being Women Philosophers in Alexandrian Late Antiquity," *Diakrisis: Yearbook of Theology and Philosophy* 7 (2024): 53–61.

[2] Dimitrios Tsamis, "Introducere. Viața și martiriul Sfintei Ecaterina" ["Introduction: The Life and Martyrdom of Saint Catherine"], in *Martiriul Sfintei Mari Mucenițe Ecaterina* [*The Martyrdom of the Holy Great Martyr Catherine*], Romanian trans. Laura Enache (Iași: Doxologia, 2018), 7–19.

[3] Eusebiu de Cezareea, *Istoria bisericească* [*Ecclesiastical History*], in *Scrieri*, Partea I [*Writings*, Part I], PSB 13, trans., introd., notes, and commentary by Pr. prof. T. Bodogae (Bucharest: Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, 1987), VIII.14, 334.

[4] *Martiriul Sfintei Fecioare Mucenițe Ecaterina* [*The Martyrdom of the Holy Virgin Martyr Catherine*], în *Martiriul Sfintei Mari Mucenițe Ecaterina*, Romanian translation by Laura Enache (Iași: Doxologia, 2018), 24–43, here 27.

based on the discussion of „true and strong arguments"[5]. This fact makes her exponential for the entire medieval Christian culture, in which she comes to be considered „ain bewärte maistrin in den/ sieben höchsten künsten" (a master in the seven highest arts)[6], showing that she had received an education in the seven liberal arts that formed the medieval university curriculum.

St. Catherine enjoys a special devotion among nuns in both the East and the West, many of the nunneries being named after St. Catherine of Alexandria. Anne Simon, author of a work on the cult of St. Catherine in the German city of Nuremberg in the late Middle Ages, shows how important it was for medieval nuns that this learned saint subordinated her doctrinal opponents, who were, in heated polemical discussions, men and pagans alike, at a time when German women, and not only them, were denied access to the few universities in Europe[7].

This also explains the enormous success enjoyed by St. Catherine even in the post-medieval era, when among the multitude of holy women venerated in the Middle Ages, they are still popularized in books about the lives of saints and, in general, in artistic representations, especially the Blessed Virgin Mary, Saint Mary Magdalene, Saint Catherine of Alexandria, followed by Saint Lucia of Syracuse and Saint Margaret of Antioch[8].

Even though starting with the 19th century, interest in St. Catherine experienced a setback to the point that in 1969, after the Second Vatican Council she was excluded from the Roman Catholic synaxarion[9], given that her historical existence came to be contested, after entering the new millennium, the personality of the holy philosopher from Alexandria returned to the present[10] as an ideal projection and typology of the cultured Christian woman in the Middle Ages, but also in the Renaissance and at the dawn of modernity, eras in which, moreover, women were constantly denied access to attending university courses.

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[5] *Martiriul Sfintei Fecioare Mucenițe Ecaterina* [*The Martyrdom of the Holy Virgin Martyr Catherine*], 30.

[6] Anne Simon, *The Cult of Saint Katherine of Alexandria in Late-Medieval Nürnberg* (New York: Routledge, 2016; first published 2012 by Ashgate Publishing), 10.

[7] Anne Simon, *The Cult of Saint Katherine of Alexandria in Late-Medieval Nürnberg*, 10.

[8] Pamela M. Jones, "Female Saints in Early Modern Italian Chapbook, ca. 1570–1610: Saint Catherine of Alexandria and Saint Catherine of Siena," in *From Rome to Eternity: Catholicism and the Arts in Italy, ca. 1550–1650*, ed. Pamela M. Jones and Thomas Worcester (Leiden; Boston; Köln: Brill, 2002), 94–95.

[9] Dimitrios Tsamis, "Introducere. Viața și martiriul Sfintei Ecaterina" ["Introduction: The Life and Martyrdom of Saint Catherine"], 11.

[10] Among the studies published recently, we specifically mention: Peter Schill, *Ikonographie und Kult der hl. Katharina von Alexandrien im Mittelalter. Studien zu den szenischen Darstellungen aus der Katharinenlegende* [*Iconography and Cult of St. Catherine of Alexandria in the Middle Ages*], Inauguraldissertation zur Erlangung des Doktorgrades der Philosophie an der Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München (München, 2005); Christine Walsch, *The Cult of St. Katharine of Alexandria in Early Medieval Europe* (Altershot, 2007); Cynthia Stollhans, *St. Catherine of Alexandria in Renaissance Roman Art. Case Studies in Patronage* (Ashgate Publishing Company, 2014), 8.

Probably also due to this revival of interest in the personality (legendary or, perhaps, still insufficiently documented historically) of the holy martyr philosopher known in history by the Arabic-origin nickname of «Ecaterina», the saint's name was reintroduced into these Western synaxaria starting in 2002[11].

2. St. Catherine in Western Ecclesiastical Art

Although until the early 1930s it was assumed that the oldest representation of St. Catherine was a fresco in the Catacombs of Cyriaca in Rome, assessed as dating from the 4th century by Abbot Charles Narbey (1899), Edmund Weigand (1937) argued that this dating was unfounded[12], a reassessment of which was „problematic, since the painting is now lost"[13]. Another fresco depicting St. Catherine in the Catacomb of St. Gennaro in Naples, originally dated by Hans Anchelis (1936) to shortly after 763, is placed by recent research about two centuries later, starting from the heorthological considerations advanced by Edmund Weigand and taking into account the discoveries regarding the layers of painting, under the fresco in question being „visible remains of an older layer, which continues above the niche in a baptismal image. Since this baptismal image could only have been created after the foundation of the baptistery under Bishop Paul II (763-765)", the image in question must be attributed „to a later period, recent research arguing unanimously for the 10th century"[14].

However, specialist research admits the dating of a fresco depicting St. Catherine, discovered in 1948 in the church of *San Lorenzo fuori le mura* in Rome, to the 8th century. It is the oldest known and reliably documented representation of the saint. „Unfortunately, her figure is damaged from the middle section, at the level of the hands, down, as well as on the upper part of the head and on the right side of the face, so that only the upper part of the figure, up to the fingers of the right hand and the crown held by the veiled left hand, is recognizable. The inscription to her right identifies her as [SCA] CATERINA. The donor and the artist who executed the decoration are also identified"[15].

Later, representations of Saint Catherine would proliferate in the East in the Byzantine Empire (starting with Cappadocia, in the 10th century),

[11] See Ana Ocoleanu, *Women, Philosophy, and Violence. St. Catherine and Hypathia from Alexandria or Being Women Philosophers in Alexandrian Late Antiquity*, 58.

[12] Argument articulated in a review of Achelis and repeated in: Edmund Weigand, "Zu den ältesten abendländischen Darstellungen der Jungfrau und Märtyrin Katharina von Alexandria," in *Pisciculi. Studien zur Religion und Kultur des Altertums. Franz Joseph Dölger zum sechzigsten Geburtstage dargeboten von Freunden, Verehrern und Schülern*, ed. Theodor Klauser (Münster, 1939), 279–290, here 279–282.

[13] Peter Schill, *Ikonographie und Kult der hl. Katharina von Alexandrien im Mittelalter*, 71.

[14] Peter Schill, *Ikonographie und Kult der hl. Katharina von Alexandrien im Mittelalter*, 72.

[15] Peter Schill, *Ikonographie und Kult der hl. Katharina von Alexandrien im Mittelalter*, 73.

so that in the West, the spread of veneration of the saint from Alexandria can be dated from the beginning of the 13th century[16].

From the point of view of manuscript tradition, the oldest illustrated manuscript that has survived to us regarding the life and martyrdom of Saint Catherine is in the Vatican. It is ms. 807, which represents the *Menologion* written for Emperor Basil II (976-1025). In itself, the *Menologium Basilianum* seems to be a book of illustrations accompanied by text, since, within it, only 16 lines of text are allocated to each saint[17]. Regarding St. Catherine, the manuscript's depiction of St. Catherine's debate with pagan philosophers, symbolizing the successful defense of Christianity, is notable.

In the Middle Ages, a collection of saints called the *Legenda Aurea*, compiled by the Dominican monk Jacob de Voragine, circulated throughout the West from 1263. Chapter 160 of this collection contains the text of the life and martyrdom of Saint Catherine. Voragine's book is a useful reference point, as it was the most popular compendium of the late Middle Ages, surviving in over 500 manuscripts and also in over 150 editions and 50 translations produced in the first century after printing[18].

In the Western Middle Ages, Saint Catherine became the most venerated of the saints, after the Blessed Virgin Mary. In fact, along with Saints Barbara, Dorothea, and Margaret, she was one of the four virgins called „virgines capitalae".

Depending on the artistic trend of the time, the images that reproduced the saint's face, individually or in dispute with philosophers, present different techniques and styles. In general, two main ways of representing Saint Catherine of Alexandria are known in Christian iconography. In one of them, the saint is depicted as a young, beautiful virgin, with long, wavy hair, wearing a crown on her head and holding a book in her hand. Another iconographic variant is the one in which the saint is depicted as a martyr and carries with her the insignia of martyrdom, such as the spiked wheel and the sword[19].

The iconographic cycle dedicated to St. Catherine, including both the history of the dispute with the emperor and the philosophers, and the martyrdom of the saint, will later be represented by numerous painters: Stefano da Zevio illustrated the cycle of St. Catherine in the church of St. Giorgio in Padua, Masolino da Panicale in the church of San Clemente in Rome, Mattia Pretti in the church of San Pietro a Majella in Naples, Michelangelo in the Sistine Chapel, and Guglielmo Borremans in the Church of St. Francis of Assisi in Cosenza[20]. In addition to these, the scenes of St. Catherine's dispute with the philosophers and her martyrdom were also depicted by famous painters such as Coreggio, Van Dyck and Albrecht

[16] Peter Schill, *Ikonographie und Kult der hl. Katharina von Alexandrien im Mittelalter*, 67.

[17] Christine Walsh, *The Cult of St. Katherine of Alexandria in Early Medieval Europe*, 64.

[18] See Pamela M. Jones, "Female Saints in Early Modern Italian Chapbooks, ca. 1570–1670," 99, n. 37.

[19] Julia Koszalka, "Depiction of Catherine of Alexandria in Initial Miniatures on the Pages of Liturgical Chant Books," *Edukacja Muzyczna* 19 (2004): 53.

[20] *Enciclopedia Cattolica*, vol. 2 (Rome, 1949), col. 1140.

Dürer. The most famous paintings of St. Catherine as a martyr are those by Carravagio and Artemisia Gentileschi. Both representations depict the saint alone.

An attribute of the saint is the ring worn by the Infant Jesus, a sign of the mystical marriage with Christ the Savior. In an altar from the years 1475-1479, Hans Memling depicted a scene from the saint's hagiography that refers to the mystical marriage with the infant Jesus. This is in Bruges and is known as the altar of St. John. The same theme of the mystical marriage is also painted by the Dutch painter in a work that is at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. Here, alongside the Virgin Mary and St. Catherine, St. Barbara is also painted. A variation of this theme is the triptych painted by the same painter and which is at the National Gallery in London.

3. The Theme of St. Catherine's Polemic with Pagan Philosophers at Masolino (Basilica of San Clemente, Rome) and Pinturicchio (Borgia Apartments, Rome)

Analyzing the theme of the dispute between St. Catherine and the pagan philosophers in the history of Western medieval representations, Peter Schill identifies two types of iconographic representation of it, based on the standard representations of the life cycle of Jesus at the time. On the one hand, there is what he calls the „Diskussionstypus (= Typus1)", respectively the „type of discussion", in which „the teacher and the disciples stand or sit face to face"[21]. On the other hand, we would have the so-called „Lehrtypus", meaning the „didactic type", in which the master sits enthroned in the circle of his disciples or gives them a lecture[22].

Within the Italian Renaissance we have original interpretations of the two models presented above. Two of the most interesting such interpretations of the theme of the polemic between St. Catherine and the pagan philosophers are offered by Masolino (ca. 1383-ca. 1447) in the first half of the 15th century and Pinturicchio (1454-1513) at the end of the same century.

Born in the last quarter of the 14th century, Masolino da Panicale (c. 1383 - c. 1447) is first mentioned in 1423 as a member of the *Florentine Guild of Painters, Physicians and Pharmacists*, and was probably also an assistant to Lorenzo di Bartoluccio Ghilberti[23] on the gates of the Baptistery in Florence at the beginning of the century. „For four years, between 1423 and 1427, he was to play a decisive role, occupying at the meeting of two styles a

[21] Peter Schill, *Ikonographie und Kult der hl. Katharina von Alexandrien im Mittelalter*, 151–62, here 154.

[22] Peter Schill, *Ikonographie und Kult der hl. Katharina von Alexandrien im Mittelalter*, 155–156.

[23] Giorgio Vasari, *Viețile pictorilor, sculptorilor și arhitecților* [*Lives of the Painters, Sculptors, and Architects*], vol. 1, 2nd rev. ed., trans. and notes by Ștefan Crudu (București: Editura Meridiane, 1968), 314–15.

position similar to that occupied by Pisanello in the north"[24]. In Florence, he later collaborated with Masaccio on the decoration of the Brancacci Chapel in Florence, later leaving for Rome, around 1430, to execute the frescoes at the church of San Clemente, including the Legend of St. Catherine, which some specialists, starting with Giorgio Vasari himself, the biographer of Italian artists, erroneously attribute to Masaccio[25]. A student of Starnina, Masolino remains on the one hand „linked to the «international Gothic»", while at the same time spreading, „and this even in Venice, the innovations of Masaccio. (...) There is no doubt that in this way he contributed, at a crucial moment, to maintaining contact between contrasting concerns, without which neither the clear world of Domenico Venetiano nor the superior balance of Piero della Francesca would have existed"[26].

Masolino's composition *The Legend of Saint Catherine* from the church of San Clemente in Rome is remarkable for its sobriety and austerity. The scene of the dispute between Saint Catherine and the Greek philosophers is particularly striking. The saint stands, gesticulating sovereignly, in front of some old philosophers, who sit like students seated on benches. Masolino's composition clearly falls within what Peter Schill calls the „didactic type" (*Lehrtypus*). But, at the same time, in the image we also have the so-called „Diskurstypus" depicted through an artifice by Masoloni, through which he places on the wall behind the saint a painting in which the saint is depicted talking with the same philosophers, this time in the flames of hell. The authority of the preacher of Christian philosophy is expressed through her sober attire and clothing: Saint Catherine wears a black dress, austere and authoritative, in contrast to the brightly colored garments of the philosophers.

It is noteworthy that the emperor's clothing, depicted as if in a painting or in a niche in the background of the composition, is also black, which also expresses authority, although of a different kind. It is not a spiritual authority, but a political authority. If it were not integrated into a cycle of frescoes that recount the entire history of the martyrdom of Saint Catherine, the scene of the dispute between the Christian philosopher and the pagans could be interpreted as one of her persuasion of her students. Masolino's message, however, goes beyond the actual story and transmits a prophetic idea related to the superiority and triumph of Christianity over pagan religion and philosophical doctrines.

As for Pinturicchio (1454-1513), he was a younger collaborator and, to some extent, a disciple of Perugino in Rome, where he would return, probably after 1485, when he executed several works that would make him famous, including the decoration of the Borgia apartments in the Vatican, a task entrusted to him by Pope Alexander VI and executed in a very short

[24] *Enciclopedia picturii italiene* [*Encyclopedia of Italian Painting*], Romanian trans. of *Dictionnaire de la peinture italienne* (Paris: Hazan, 1972; București: Editura Meridiane, 1974), 144.

[25] Giorgio Vasari, *Viețile pictorilor, sculptorilor și arhitecților* [*Lives of the Painters, Sculptors, and Architects*], vol. I, 318.

[26] *Enciclopedia picturii italiene* [*Encyclopedia of Italian Painting*], 145.

period of time (1492-1494)[27]. Here, Pinturicchio would also paint the scene of the dispute between St. Catherine of Alexandria and the pagan philosophers.

Unlike Perugino, Pinturicchio, who in his youth was influenced by Benazzo Gozzoli and Bartolomeo Caporali, „will prolong until the 16th century the taste for a sumptuous, gilded, picturesque art, expressed without reservations - after the episode of the more moderate frescoes in the Sistine Chapel - in the apartments of Alexander VI in the Vatican"[28]. Vasari will see in this specific style of Pinturicchio a shortcoming of his artistic creation, exemplifying it even with the scene of Saint Catherine's polemic with the pagan philosophers: „In order to please certain people who were not very skilled in this art, Bernardino (Pinturicchio – n.n.) often used to decorate his paintings with relief ornaments, gilded with gold, in order to give them more brilliance and to be more striking, which in painting is a real rudeness. Executing in the rooms I mentioned above (n.n. Borgia Apartments) a scene from the life of Saint Catherine, he depicted the triumphal arches of Rome in relief, while he painted the characters; for this reason, the characters being in the foreground, and the buildings behind them, the things that seem to shrink are in front of those that the eye sees growing; in our art, however, this is a heresy as great as could be"[29].

However, the originality of these settings that Pinturicchio creates cannot be disputed: „the «grotesques», whose first systematic use we have here, frame enchanting and brightly colored scenes; we have, for example, Saint Catherine of Alexandria, in a dress strewn with flowers, among orientals (Prince Djem on horseback appears on the right of the composition) or hermit saints, in a desert of palm trees"[30].

Beyond these eminently stylistic aspects, it is very interesting how Pinturicchio understands to construct the scene of the polemic with the pagan philosophers in which St. Catherine takes part. She, standing and dressed in a magnificent starry dress with a red cape, stands opposite the multitude of philosophers, also standing, around the throne of the pagan emperor. Some of these philosophers wear oriental clothes, turbans or Turkish berets, a fact that emphasizes their paganism and their hostility towards Christianity. Catherine is depicted gesticulating, as if in the middle of her argumentation of Christian truth. Her attire is majestic and calm, while the motley gathering of philosophers seems to be disorganized and heterogeneous.

The emperor pays attention to Saint Catherine's speech, leaning his torso slightly towards her. In the other half of the composition, we also have a motley gathering of listeners, many of them also dressed in oriental clothes. In the background, under the semicircle at the top of the wall, reigns a triumphal arch slightly protruding in relief (the defect that Vasari complained about in Pinturicchio's style), above which sits the statue of a bull that

[27] *Enciclopedia picturii italiene* [*Encyclopedia of Italian Painting*], 178.

[28] *Enciclopedia picturii italiene* [*Encyclopedia of Italian Painting*], 179.

[29] Giorgio Vasari, *Viețile pictorilor, sculptorilor și arhitecților* [*Lives of the Painters, Sculptors, and Architects*], vol. II, 149.

[30] *Enciclopedia picturii italiene* [*Encyclopedia of Italian Painting*], 179.

probably refers to the cult of Jupiter. Below it, in gilded capitals, an inscription adorns the pediment of the temple: *Pacis cultori*, to the worshippers of peace.

It is a message with bitter irony, because the pagan religion proclaims peace through this, but does not hesitate to persecute a wise virgin who is about to overcome the errors of ancient philosophy through "solid and true arguments". If we were to integrate Pinturicchio's composition into the typology outlined by Peter Schill, then it would fall into the „discussion type" (*Diskussionstypus*), unlike Masolino's composition from the church of San Clemente, where, as we have seen, Saint Catherine is depicted according to the „didactic type" (*Lehrtypus*), as a true teacher who teaches philosophers seated politely on chairs. Unlike Masolino's fresco, Pinturicchio's composition is much more extravagant and colorful. Even Saint Catherine is depicted in Masolino in a sober, black dress, which contrasts with the princely attire in the fresco in the Borgia Apartments.

Although the scene painted by Pinturicchio is much more mobile and dynamic, Masolino's fresco provides additional information, as we have already seen, by placing behind the saint a painting depicting her in front of the group of philosophers, who are burning in the fires of hell, this time located in a front that falls within the already mentioned *Diskusionstypus*. Furthermore, Masolino's emperor, unlike Pinturicchio's, has almost no materiality. He is depicted in the background, in the style of a two-dimensional image, with an absent figure.

If in Pinturicchio the slight inclination of the emperor's body, as well as the agitation around the maiden-philosopher and the decidedly pagan decorations have in themselves something threatening, anticipating her martyrdom, in Masolino, the sober virgin dominates the entire composition. The pagan philosophers stand myrrh-bearing like students, seeming impressed by the prospect of eternal torments depicted by Saint Catherine, and the emperor watches impassively from a dark painting placed in the background. Masolino thus conveys not only the message of the superiority of Christian doctrine over paganism, but also that of the victory of Christianity over paganism, which will inevitably prevail in the near future.

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Wittgenstein and the Demystification of Art and Art Rituals

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Abstract: The criteria of Wittgenstein's theories on demystification through art and rituals are inexact; in the realm where the Form of the Good dwells it is impossible to even dimly see and testify to the logical clarification of thought (catharsis). The reason for this impossibility is that catharsis is a biological procedure; which means that it concerns solely the physical, not the mental. Expanding further this idea as regards the use of language that implements catharsis, Wittgenstein maintains that communication signs alone play no part (hence neither do apprehension nor sense impressions) in a language which is disconnected from patterns of relationship that explain life and reality. To pay attention to these signs is to understand merely what happens – not what really is. To transmit them means to apprehend only their patterns – not what lies behind these patterns. And that was exactly, following Aristotle, what the initiates of the rituals as regards the form of the Good, were dedicated to. Their aim was not to grasp the Truth but to experience it through passion, thus putting themselves in a condition to dedicate themselves to its realisation. Plato, on the other hand, thought these rituals were qualified by sophistry. This process does function, however, not only cathartically at the level of thought, but also therapeutically, as healing the evils of times and physical evils and passions. Aeschylus' lesson: that learning is brought about through passion solely, clearly foreshadows Wittgenstein's demystifying ideas on the healing functions of parallel learning procedures.

Keywords: Wittgenstein's Theology; Aristotle; Plotinus; Philosophy of Science; Culture; Aesthetics.

Outlook

Wittgenstein's special kind of belief has been very much ignored nowadays. Except from Marjorie Perloff's *Private Notebooks: 1914-1916 Ludwig Wittgenstein* (Norton, 2022), her *Wittgenstein's Ladder Poetic Language and the Strangeness of the Ordinary*, (Chicago University Press, 1999), T.E. Burke's *Questions of Belief* (Avebury, 1995), R. B. Braithwaite's 'An empiricist's

view of the nature of religious belief', in *The Philosophy of Religion*, 72-91, ed. by B. Mitchell (Oxford University Press, 1971, and D.Z. Phillips, 'Religious Beliefs and Language Games', 121-142, *loc.cit. The Philosophy of Religion*; research which gets at precisely the "logical impossible" in the Wittgensteinian sense, is rare and much too little is done on Wittgenstein and Plato/Aristotle, say. What follows the history of my topic is the argument about my contribution. Wittgenstein has stressed the idea that what lives by argument perishes by argument summoning the logically impossible, the unknown realm of intellectual values.

So, despite appearances to the contrary, more than simply determining whether the truth values of statements of fact are fulfilled or not, we need to supplement our inductive means with the inexplicable, with concepts from the realm of the unknown, according to Wittgenstein. This means that we cannot establish the truth of unrestricted generalisations by empirical means, that we have to supplement them with concepts from the realm of the unknown, to furnish sufficient inductive means, according to Wittgenstein. These fuel, however, both the unwillingness to undertake the logically impossible in our pursuit of truth, on the one hand, and the attainment of the Absolute through the commonplace, on the other. My work links to the impasse which this contrast suggests, as what can be very dimly understood here is that we can be committed to realising the possibilities implied in the unknown realm of values. This means that we cannot push this line of thought further here without mentioning Wittgenstein's puzzle solution, which entails a fragile understanding of the mental absorbed into the physical.

Wittgenstein aims at the logical catharsis (elucidation, clarification) of the content of thought. This means that human beings should adopt such ranges of concepts as to make sense of what really is. As imperfect human beings we necessarily lack a recognizable concept of the ideal, of the world as it really is. The concept of God, in Wittgenstein's sense of the term, forms an idea, which we unconditionally value. Our appeal to it stresses our summoning the inexplicable. Wittgenstein acknowledges that over and above explanation of the world there is something more, which does not fall within our secular ways of thought, within our conceptual range, and must be left unexplained. It cannot be conceptualised or articulated. It cannot stand for anything we are constrained by reason to accept. Paradoxically, it is in the light of this vulnerable situation that our experience of the world no longer strikes us as meaningless. Thus the concept of God can allow the catharsis of the ranges of concepts, as to make sense of the world. Wittgenstein certainly has tried in vain to determine such a conceptual range with scope for expansion from what merely happens (the sensible) to what really is (the intelligible).[1] If, according to this picture, his theory of meaning is intended to fulfil the same purpose in the realm of art, then

[1] Giouli, "The True Objects", 44.

why does he warn us not to search for justification[2] as regards the realm of the intelligible? The question can easily be resolved if applied in the realm of art, because, paradoxically, the intelligible can be understood in secular terms alone. Referring to the pursuit of intelligible values through the commonplace is a possibility in Wittgenstein. Thus, following Wittgenstein, our knowledge of what really exists in the realm of the intelligible has a vital relevance to our dealings with the everyday world. Hence, we can certainly acknowledge the inexplicable only through the commonplace and thus be at peace.[3] Clearly the demystifying tools and trends for so doing are better implemented in the field of art than in that of philosophy.

Wittgenstein's Demystification of Art and Rituals in the History of Ideas

What we are looking for here is to locate Wittgenstein's demystifying attempts to pursue the Form of the Good in the history of ideas. If we look back at a line of Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*,[4] we shall see that the deity's role in history seems to be limited (to be limited *ab extra*) since it cannot show, nor inspire the man committing hybris (an impious and arrogant act) to follow the predetermined historical itinerary to which the deity, itself, leads. Man, himself must take responsibility even in what is so much a predetermined "course of action": the old sin loves, Aeschylus avers, when the predestined time comes, to bring forth new sin. This constitutes an unavoidable cycle of the repetition of evil. Justice, however, counterbalances this cycle and prevents the historical events in their spatio-temporal order from degenerating, i.e. from coming to an end. Human beings, even if they have little chance of determining their historical itinerary, as set *ab extra*, and being conscious of it, of their errors and their sins, do not hesitate to proceed towards such a determination. The expression of such bravery and courage, one could add, implies not only the freedom of Man throughout his struggle to determine his destiny, but also his tragic nature when extrinsic powers overwhelm him and his historical itinerary.

Aeschylus' often-quoted dictum that we learn solely by our mistakes[5] (or πάθει μάθος) is pertinent here, having had a tremendous impact in the history of ideas.

> But Justice turns the balance scales,
> sees that we suffer
> and we suffer and we learn.

[2] *Culture and Value*, 29 and 32. Giouli, *How is Social Science Possible*, 233 and n. 85.

[3] Burke, *Questions of Belief*, 50. Giouli, "Psychology".

[4] Cf. Aeschylus, *Agamemnon*, ll 750-781. Toynbee, *A Study*, IV, 266 and n. 1. Giouli, *The Taming*, 39–40 and n. 13.

[5] *Agamemnon*, 177ff and 250. Giouli, *Punishment*, 19 and n. 15. Nussbaum, *Fragility*, 47.

His dictum recalls Aristotle's dictum on those who are being initiated at the Eleusis Mysteries.[6]

> …as Aristotle claims that those who are being initiated are not to learn anything but to experience something and be put into a certain condition…

Aristotle here refers to the ritual which connects in action – not in theory – that initiation with the initiation into the realm of artistic performances on the stage of a theatre. The link between ritual and theatre in Aristotle's reference is clear as regards his statements that theatrical art ceases to be merely an incantatory procedure aiming to console us for the evils of our time and becomes a cognitive process. Aristotle's idea of staged myths used in this way stresses how little can be done as regards the realisation of some such modern policies and management, if we ignore the importance of theatre as a political institution. Aristotle believes[7] that principles that can be taught and explanations of how desired results are produced, can only be found in theatrical communication and teaching.

Aristotle uses the words of Aeschylus to acknowledge the inexplicable as a call or an invitation in Ancient Greek Tragedy. No form of knowledge can be attained without suffering and passion (πάθει), and the learning we can only very dimly perceive. Aristotle refers solely to experience here; not to the possibility of knowledge of the form of the Good. Wittgenstein shares Aristotle's concern and aims at catharsis with the conceptual apparatus implemented by the theatrical ritual of performing the Good and its Form. The way Aristotle demystifies the initiative taken by the participants in these rituals, whether Eleusinian or theatrical, is very similar to that of Wittgenstein. The example of a Byzantine Liturgy can be used as a parallel with Ancient Greek Tragedy.[8] We have in this conception of Liturgy two choruses with leaders engaged in dialogue using antiphony; also, with "passageways" by which the leaders make their entrances and exits in the sacred place, as happens on the stage of a theatre. A cathartic light was, during a ritual, conveyed by ships from the temple of Delos to the island of Lemnos in ancient times; the same happened in the 4th century BC from Delphi to Athens. This "renewed" light foreshadows the Holy Light in the Byzantine Liturgy.[9] The great philosopher, Pythagoras, is said to have visited the temple of Zeus at the Idaean Cave, located on the eastern slopes of Mount Psiloritis, above the plateau of Nida, in Crete. This is the cave in

[6] Aristotle, *F 15 R3* (*Synesius*, Dio *48A*): καθάπερ Ἀριστοτέλης ἀξιοῖ τοὺς τελουμένους οὐ μαθεῖν τί δεῖν, ἀλλὰ παθεῖν καὶ διατεθῆναι, δηλονότι γενομένους ἐπιτηδείους.

[7] Nussbaum, *Fragility*, 97.

[8] Giannaras, *Τα καθ'εαυτόν*, 185.

[9] Sakellarakis, *Ancient Greek Religion*, 50.

which, according to the excavations of Prof. John Sakellarakis (1936-2010),[10] the greatest Greek god, Zeus, grew up. In his pilgrimage, Pythagoras is said to have remained for twenty-seven days, changing his clothing from black into white, and writing an epigram for Zeus' tomb.

This tradition saves the ritual of initiates as regards, firstly, the demonstration of the throne symbol. Plato comments on the enthronement of the newly initiated at the mysteries of the Corybantes.[11] These comments are answers to the enthronement process, which is accompanied by dancing and sport. According to Plato, the initiates go through the first part of a "sophistical" ritual. These parts of learning, Plato adds,[12] are not serious: for if a man had all that sort of knowledge that ever was, he would not be at all the wiser; he would only be able to play with men, tripping them up and over setting them with distinctions of words. Adding to the point of Wittgenstein's idea of our inability to tackle the issue of distinctions, Plato thought these rituals were qualified by sophistry.

It is in the *Euthydemus* dialogue that inquiring into a good life by the young is used by Plato in contradistinction to what sophistry considers as inquiring into a "wise" life, which, in turn, is not only misleading but also embarrassing for the young.[13] We understand that, according to Plato, the powers of Socratic *aporia* that made people regard Socrates as the most formidable arguer,[14] are absent from a sophistry that inquires into the "wise" life. This is the reason why the initiation ritual was sophistical from Plato's point of view.

However, the above-mentioned tradition also saves the ritual of initiates as regards, secondly, of what can be articulated and executed as pageant. This form of worship has also been testified by Euripides, the other tragic poet, in a choral passage from his lost tragedy "The Cretans".[15] The Chorus' participants address king Minos and are referred to as the initiates of the Idaean Zeus. In the same passage the Cretans appear to be proud of the pure and virtuous life they lead, as they avoid eating meat and wear white clothes, in order to renew the holy light. Tradition testifies also that Plato referred to Minos' miraculously receiving the State Laws from Zeus in the above-mentioned cave in Crete.[16] The sacred vessels which were found in the excavations in Crete, dating from the first half of the second millenium BC, are similar to those ritual vessels later found in Eleusis.[17]

These examples indicate catharsis as the purpose of ritual in art and intellectual life; catharsis constitutes solely an experience according to

[10] *Digging for the Past*, 171ff.
[11] *Euthydemus*, 277 d.
[12] *Euthydemus*, 278 b–c.
[13] Notomi, *Plato's Sophist*, 61.
[14] Notomi, *Plato's Sophist*, 62.
[15] Sakellarakis, *Ancient Greek Religion*, 61.
[16] *Ibid*., 61–62.
[17] *Ibid*., 14–15.

Aristotle – not the pure knowledge of the intelligible. One can also refer to Nietzsche who stresses the ritual of ancient Greek theatre which combines the apollonian element of the realm of the intelligible with the Dionysian element of the secular realm.[18]

Myths also are important both to reveal the essence of ancient Greek religion and to better study the personifications of Apollo and Dionysus.[19] The way in which they were reconstructed by the ancient Greek poets to serve their plots is also of great interest.[20] The use of ritual in these writings is fully developed alongside religious rules[21] in order to implement catharsis. Priests often act in female clothing to make catharsis effective.[22] Some terrifying figures in ancient Greek religion foreshadow the Furies of ancient Greek Tragedy. They can repel evil when they are turned into Eumenides.[23] During excavations, figures of a war deity descending from the sky with a shield in the form of number eight have been found. The number eight is a symbol of worship.[24] This figure has a parallel with the "Deus ex machina" figure in ancient Greek tragedy. The so-called initiates are said, according to tradition (written or oral), to be able to see life and reality in an enhanced manner compared to that of the non-initiates. We can understand at this point how Wittgenstein could have considered the world of the believers as resembling the world of a happy man.[25] This simply means that the conceptual apparatus of those believers could have been extended from seeing merely what happens to seeing what might happen. This extension is traced in Wittgenstein, despite the fact that these possibilities lie altogether outside the competence of the proof-gamers. As we have seen in the passage quoted from *Culture and Value*,[26] every argument there is always a counter-argument. Hence, Wittgenstein can fitly be considered an Apostle for the impossible – though certainly not a mystic.[27]

Every theatrical performance and every artistic performance have distant roots in cathartic acts. The great tragic poet, Sophocles, is said to have been in 420 BC Athens a priest in the health-temple of a local celebrated hero and a doctor at the same time, who was called Amynos.[28] *Katharmos* in ancient Greek religion is not connected with magic but with healing, a familiar, well-used philosophical method according to Wittgenstein. An

[18] *Ibid*., 56–57.
[19] *Ibid*., 42–43.
[20] Moutsopoulos, "Myth".
[21] Sakellarakis, *op. cit*., 17.
[22] *Ibid*., 16.
[23] *Ibid*., 37.
[24] *Ibid*., 36–37.
[25] Wittgenstein, *Tractatus*, 6.43.
[26] 29.
[27] Hintikka & Hintikka, *Investigating Wittgenstein*, 68.
[28] Sakellarakis, *op. cit*., 48.

individual called a pharmakós (φαρμακός)[29] in Ancient Greek religion was the human scapegoat or victim in the ritual. The word *φαρμακός* derives from the expression for a remedy with poison. In Aristotle's texts, catharsis is a biological procedure;[30] a pleasant purgation that follows the passion and suffering of the heroes in tragedy.[31] The necessity for catharsis signifies a quite absurd text of Aristotle in which we read that the only people who are happy are those who are dead.[32]

Juxtaposition of Wittgenstein's Ideas with Plotinus' Competing Theory

What could Plotinus, (204/5 – 270 CE) a philosopher in the Hellenistic tradition, born and raised in Roman Egypt, have told us about the rituals performed in art and those forming part of the Mysteries? Plotinus, said to have been initiated into the Eleusis mysteries, claims that neither the hands nor the eyes of an artist play an important role in artistic creation. It is solely the artist's participation in the creative procedure that matters.[33] Can this dictum of his be seen as demonstration of what Wittgenstein says about the difference between the world of the initiate and the world of the non-initiate? The above-mentioned dictum certainly points to the sense of participation and realisation of the Form of the Good. This is not a mere sensory perception; it is an idea seen as a possibility. Plotinus minimises the role played by the material factor in the creation of a work of art. This suggests his idea of a clear separation between the mental and the physical, in the way, say, Descartes understands this division. That Plotinus favours the mental, giving it a mystic aura, is beyond dispute. Further, Plotinus rejects the idea that the content of artistic experience and artistic rituals is essentially psycho-somatic in nature. The content of experience is strictly spiritual. We know that this rejection of the physical aspect is also illustrated in Descartes' thought.[34]

Plotinus, moreover, claims that there are irrefutable propositions as regards the Form of the Good implemented by the models of truth.[35] His attempt, however, to demonstrate truth is of very little use, because Plotinus thought that it is possible to confirm or refute the values of the Good, an idea which is false from a wittgensteinian stance. Our objection to such possibility does not concern the classical dichotomy between facts and values but the difference between the non-demonstrative realm of the

[29] *Ibid*., 49.
[30] Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1449b–1450b.
[31] Giouli, *How is Social Science Possible*, 205–207.
[32] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1100 a10–20.
[33] Plotinus, *Enneads*, V, 8, 1.
[34] Charles, *Aristotle on Meaning and Essence*, 364–367.
[35] Giouli, *The Taming*, 15.

Absolute from the realm of the proof-game; this latter being defined by Wittgenstein. As seen in the reference to *Culture and value* above,[36] historical proof is irrelevant to belief; hence, Wittgenstein claims that the historical accounts of the Gospels, say, might be demonstrably false. Historically speaking, he states, this is a possibility. However, he continues, belief would lose nothing by fault.

It is possible to disagree with Plotinus' firm belief in rationalism as the only way in which to demonstrate the truth of the inexplicable realm of values. His rationalistic zeal is evident in his ideas that the Form of the Good in artistic products functions in one's mind in a superior way to that of the form found in beautiful works of nature.[37]

Despite Plotinus' attempt to assign a dynamic character to matter,[38] his ideas clearly reduce the material to the mental. Hence, art exists spiritually in the way in which soul exists as an abstract entity, which can provide the soul of those participating in a ritual and being initiated into it, with rational laws.[39] Plotinus refers here to the idea of *awe* (θαυμάζειν) an idea[40] of Aristotelian origin. According to this idea, the soul opens up to the marvel of the Form of the Good, being awe-struck by the vision of it. However, the soul, according to Plotinus, is able to rationally grasp this Form, absorb it and make use of it. This Aristotelian principle of "awe" is differently used by Wittgenstein, as it suggests the idea of human inability to provide reason with irrefutable propositions as regards the truth. Plotinus would have found it intolerable to adopt Wittgenstein's use of the principle of "awe". Clearly, Plotinus would never have wished to dispense with rationalism, and make a virtue of it. We should not attempt to moderate his rationalist zeal by means of this principle, because his interest either in the imitating form of a painting or in the body itself of the painting is minimal.[41]

Plotinus goes to extremes in his ideas on the separation of body from mind. The body, he states, cannot harbour the being.[42] There is no way of demonstrating that a being is harboured by a body nor can any truth about such a being be attained. This being, he avers, degenerates into the physical, thus becoming a figment of the imagination. Getting rid of such figments, which are like absurd dreams, can only lead to the clarification of the soul, he avers.[43] The abolition of such figments implies the definite separation of body from mind. Thus, the inferiority of body as regards the mind will also be annulled, he concludes. Moutsopoulos' assessment is clearly in favour of Plotinus' reduction of the physical to the mental. This simply

[36] 32.
[37] Plotinus, *Enneads*, V, 8, 1.
[38] *Enneads*, III, 6, 7.
[39] *Ibid*., V, 9, 3.
[40] *Ibid*., IV, 3, 18
[41] *Ibid*., VI, 4, 10.
[42] *Ibid*., III, 6, 6.
[43] *Ibid*., III, 6, 5. Moutsopoulos, *Plotinus*, 90ff.

means that image, as a sort of a mirror of consciousness, mystically signifies our experiences in Plotinus.[44] He locates this mirror between two worlds: the conceptual and the sensual, which he manages to unite. Shall we, however, share with Plotinus the possibility of a return to the aesthetic absolute, once we have taken refuge to the imaginary? Following Plotinus, the concept of the One remains unqualifiable; hence, Moutsopoulos takes him to speak of a reductionist theory of mind-matter relations, referring to the view that talk about matter is reducible to talk about mind. But does this idealist theory have adherents at present?

Importantly, Plotinus uses mystifying elements when describing the ritual and the function of this cathartic procedure of separation. His rationalistic zeal enhances the mystifying quality of his treatise on the body-mind problem.[45] The need for a detailed discussion as regards his mystifying rationalism must be stressed here. As we have seen, no attempt to present mystification –and its link to the Eleusinian mysteries– as irrational can be successful.[46] Also, the character of incantation must be assigned to the way mystification functions. Incantation enhances the meaning and protects the effects of these mystifying functions as employed in Plotinus' text. We can see in these texts the mystifying omnipotence of reason, which denies the existence of body as the source of knowledge.

There is, however, a point which could act as a catalyst in Plotinus' so-called rationalist angle.[47] Any change to the rational nature of the human soul through phantasms and sensations means vulnerability, a trauma (πληγή) to man. This is a trauma coming from an *ab extra*, non-controllable and completely irrational realm. Plotinus at this point, according to Moutsopoulos,[48] refuses to explain the nature of the shock that the soul suffers from the impact of the irrational. The process of explaining the nature of this impact would make evident the shortcomings of Plotinus' ideas. Moutsopoulos, however, in an attempt to balance this, stresses the quality of the *impression* of the sensible on the soul as it experiences it. But this idea of *impression* (taken by Moutsopoulos from Plato's[49] *Timaeus*) further evidentiates the shortcomings of Plotinus' ideas. *Impression* simply calls for an empiricist justification –in the way in which Wittgenstein, say, might have produced such a justification. However, Wittgenstein certainly never completely adopts material reductionism.

The term "impressions" is linked erroneously above with Plotinus' ideas of a trauma sensed by the soul. Plato's "impressions" (whether impressions

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[44] *Enneads*, IV, 4, 3; I, 2, 2–7; VI, 2, 8; III, 6, 14.

[45] Giouli, *Vizyenos*, 73–93.

[46] Moutsopoulos, "The Mysterious".

[47] Plotinus, *Enneads*, I, 8, 15.

[48] Moutsopoulos, *Plotinus*, 78 and n. 3.

[49] Giouli, *Intuition*, 4–11. Id. "Plato's Republic". Moutsopoulos, *Aesthetics of Morals*, 101–102 and nn. 35–36.

of ideas or impressions of the elements of nature) have no connection with Plotinus' mystifying functions of reasoning because Plato, paradoxically, never ceases to link the intelligible with the sensible, despite his attempts to pinpoint the difference between them. He certainly never reduces the intelligible to the sensible. This link is emphasised in his explanation of the sophists' account of art. Socrates' claim that art, together with philosophy, makes life worth living, fuels this explanation. Plato's dogmatism and unreserved conservatism, however, always haunts his dialogues.

It is the same term "impressions" that recalls Hume's ideas[50] on the psycho-somatic content of experience: sense-data are apprehended by the mind as impressions or as copies of original impressions.[51] In these "well-lighted" experiences, i.e. in patches of colour, sounds, tastes, etc. lie the foundations of knowledge.[52]This empiricist idea of the universe suggests Hume's atomism,[53] a theory which claims that these elements have no inherent connection with each other. Elements and objects are inherently independent of each other and the existence of one does not guarantee the existence of any of the others.

Wittgenstein, too, is interested in these impressions as apprehended by the mind. In this context he questions whether the world state of affairs reflects relationships of facts. He is reluctant to define a link between the formal and the structural, especially when the term "internal" replaces the term "structural". He employs this replacement to clear up confusions as regards the qualification "proper" to relations. It is impossible, however, he concludes, to obtain the meaning of the "internal" by means of propositions signifying states of affairs and objects.[54] Wittgenstein is faced with an enormous difficulty as regards Hume's ideas on the inherent unconnectedness of the elements of the world. This difficulty lies in the idea of the atomism of impressions-feelings.

Unable to solve the problem of atomism, Wittgenstein refers to the whole idea of logic as being common and generic. We can only feel, he avers, that the truth of axioms may be due to some fortunate accident. Such an accident alone determines the general validity of logic –not its essence.[55] Hence, Wittgenstein reaches a conclusion of the utmost importance, that of the mystical existence of the world. Clarifying further his thought he adds that it is not how things are in the world that is mystical.[56] Here we can understand how Hume's atomism of the elements of the world is incomplete. Atomism calls for a supplement. This can be the idea of the Form of the

[50] Cottingham, *Rationalism*, 77 and n. 19.
[51] Hume, T*reatise*, I, 1, 1.
[52] Burke, *Whitehead*, 68.
[53] Burke, *Popper*, 38–39.
[54] Wittgenstein, *Tractatus*, 4.122.
[55] *Ibid*., 6.1232.
[56] *Ibid*., 6.44.

Good, which *ab extra* imposes order and laws on its elements.[57] That is why Wittgenstein avers that viewing the world as a limited whole *sub specie aeterni* differs from feeling the world to be a limited whole.[58] This is because in the latter case we employ mysticism.

Let us focus on Wittgenstein's treatment of mysticism. The mystical and all that is mystical, he states, cannot be put into words; it can only be made manifest in those things related to it.[59] Hence, Wittgenstein opposes Plotinus' omnipotence of reason, the frailty of reason as regards the treatment of the inexplicable. What is mystical cannot be grasped by reason; it can only be felt as such. To outweigh this incapacity of mind, which resembles an illness, he counter proposes a healthy psychological state of mind. This state ideally can be realised in peace. Plainly, no further inferential steps are needed to identify an explanation in terms of something which does not itself require to be explained. If there were evidence as regards belief in, and summoning of, the inexplicable, he adds, this would in fact destroy the whole business.[60] That is why Wittgenstein claims that the real discovery as regards feelings and impressions of the world, is the one that makes us capable of stopping the study of philosophy when we want to stop. This discovery gives philosophy peace, so that it is no longer tormented by questions which bring *itself* in question.[61] Thus, the mystical does not further concern him. It is needless to refer either to it or to the things that it qualifies. What he is now concerned with is the method of unveiling order-imposed *ab extra* on the world. There is not one single philosophical method, he adds in the above quoted passage, but many methods for solving problems and eliminating difficulties in philosophy, just as there are different therapies to heal evil. Hence, he grounds the parallel between the rituals founding the Form of the Good in the unknown realm of values and philosophical activities as regards a biologically obtained catharsis and healing the evil of times.

The Soundness of Wittgenstein's Demystifying Theories

Wittgenstein rightly points out the impasses suggested by Hume's atomism as regards how things are in the world. In this context he explores the sense in which the impression of colours belongs to a single individual, and not to others. The fact that reason cannot be passed to other minds is once more clarified here. Wittgenstein adds that the idea of belonging never

[57] Burke, *Popper*, 39.
[58] Wittgenstein, *Tractatus*, 6.45.
[59] *Ibid*., 6.522.
[60] Wittgenstein, *Lectures on Religious Belief*, 56.
[61] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, I, 133.

crosses our minds.[62] He further claims that any attempt to name a colour-impression should arouse our suspicion.[63] This means that any link between naming and necessity must be and is indeed controvertible. Suspicion must be aroused, he continues, because there is always a gap between the colour as received by and known to everyone and the visual impressions, which we receive at given moments.[64] Various questions follow this statement: Can everything change with time? How valid can an inductive inference be over a long period? And does the validity of an inference constitute just a simple guide from past to future? One is tempted here to raise the unanswerable question, together with Aristotle,[65] of what it is to be "red", "blue", "yellow" etc.[66]

It is the possessor (a poppy, for example) of, say, "redness" that can suggest the answer to what it is to be red; not the poppy *per se*.[67] This does not mean that the red poppy is not there at all, because it exists conditionally. One can respond to Wittgenstein's challenges and suspicions that analytic truths, as also happens with inductive references, have fixed meanings in all relevant respects, as it is only our criterion of relevance that can make the difference in time.[68] Wittgenstein, in *Tractatus*, espouses anti-realism but not in the form according to which the realism/non-realism argument functions. His version of anti-realism differs from the standard argument. According to him, there is no point in pursuing the fulfilment (or the negation) of the assertion conditions in semantics. This pursuit characterises the realist/non-realist argument. On the contrary, belief in the ideal concept of the world uses a different conceptual equipment to identify events. It frames different statements than those framed by scientists and secular historians. They both (science and belief) thus do not simply disagree over the true-values of the same statements, as these statements are too far apart to contradict or to criticise each other. This is precisely the case with Aristotle, who suggests that one should attempt the realisation of the ideal of truth – instead of first searching to perceive order and reality. We need, however, to be very careful not to undercut the standard argument of realism/non-realism in Aristotle. We can see it at work as regards what merely happens – not what might happen. However, according to Aristotle, we shall always lack the ideal concept of the world as it is in itself.[69] Wittgenstein thus, Hacker claims, propounded no theory of meaning of this kind, having good reasons for avoiding such a programme.[70] Wittgenstein argues that an

[62] *Ibid*., I, 275.
[63] *Ibid*., I, 276.
[64] *Ibid*., I, 277.
[65] Giouli, "Aristotle's Non-realistic Account of the World", 275–276.
[66] Burke, *Whitehead*, 84.
[67] *Ibid*., 36.
[68] Burke, "Science", 211.
[69] Giouli, "Aristotle's Non-Realistic Account of the World", 271–273 and 288–289.
[70] Hacker, *Wittgenstein*, 242.

elementary proposition does not have any truth-conditions,[71] stressing thus only criteria of relevance as regards its soundness. Hence, an elementary proposition has no more truth-conditions than does a tautology or a contradiction.[72] The nature of experiencing reality thus cannot but be a postulate, which is a transitory one. The demarcation which expresses the above-mentioned tension between what is real and what is not real is stressed by Wittgenstein; we come to know the unreliability of perception: "this is not how it is. Yet this is how it has to be!", i.e., this has to be our attachment to the realisation of the ideal of truth.[73]

Aristotle states that we can grasp terms for kinds without knowing how we can grasp them.[74] Wittgenstein stresses this problem claiming that it is one thing to claim that there are certain things which fall equally under the concept "picture-rabbit", say, or under the concept "picture-duck". A picture, a drawing is such a thing, he continues.[75] But the *impression* (his underlining) is not simultaneously of a picture-duck and a picture-rabbit. Wittgenstein once more stresses the unreliability of perception as he avers that it is a mistake to say that a "visual image" is a "visual impression".[76]

There is absolutely nothing that can manifest this resemblance between images and impressions, he states; nothing apart from stating that images and impressions resemble each other and apart from wishing to state this. Such expressions suggest a personal experience and truth; not the experience and truth of other minds.[77] The atomism (as Bertrand Russell calls it) implied here can only be healed by the use of a pattern of relations into which redness, say, just like all elements in nature, fall.[78] Order then, and rules as imposed *ab extra*, are just within the bounds of possibility, but to be unveiled by faith alone. Although faith cannot guarantee reason's results, it can make the attainment of such results less partial and subjective.[79] Unless we adopt a religious angle to make sense of the material in question, relativistic problems may not arise.[80] But it is despite Wittgenstein's reference to this function of faith and reasoning that one must never forget however the illusory character of such knowledge, as stressed here by him. Hume holds that impressions are close copies of original impressions, and ideas are impressions of derivative ideas. Wittgenstein adds that it is only the likeness of objects that can make a striking impression familiar; however, this is merely what happens –not what really is. We should not link impression

[71] *Ibid*., 279.
[72] *Ibid*., 52–53.
[73] Giouli, *How is Social Science Possible*, 164–165 and n. 43.
[74] Giouli, "Aristotle's Non-realistic Account of the World".
[75] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, II, xi, 199.
[76] Wittgenstein, *Zettel*, 630.
[77] *Ibid*., 631.
[78] Burke, *Whitehead*, 37.
[79] Giouli, *The Taming*, 17 and n. 8.
[80] *Ibid*., 16 and n. 5.

and thought together at this point, as any impression is necessarily one which fades – and thus, no longer striking.[81]

In order to get an impression of a verbal expression, we need to transform it into a drawing. We translate it into an imaginary language, following rules.[82] What a pity the picture does not have a soul, so that we can apprehend it, he exclaims. This testifies to man's inability to ever grasp the real objects of truth – thus linking impression and thought. He further explains that communication signs of language exist only within patterns of relationships that explain life and reality.[83] Signs play no part in a language which is disconnected from these patterns. Understanding impressions is impossible if the language is disconnected from those patterns. Indeed, as Hacker puts it, we must understand that words, according to Wittgenstein, are not *connected* with the world at all.[84] We must take notice of these signs, Wittgenstein explains further, to understand what merely happens –not what really is. We must write and transmit these signs to get the impression of the pattern of the sign. Wittgenstein further stresses how useless and unnecessary the production of evidence as regards confirmation or negation of values is. The sign, being an order, like those used in religion, has no relevance to a picture or an impression. We can only translate it into action following certain rules, or some tables.[85] These ideas of his show how important the difference between the realm of the Form of the Good and the realm of the secular is. It is not merely a difference between facts and values but a fundamental difference between the values we pursue and the facts we produce, once we expand our armament towards the realm of the unknown.[86] Dedication to such an expansion, and humility as regards our ability to grasp the truth, makes the difference between the world of a happy man and that of an unhappy. That truth remains impossible to attain, unless we realise the ideal of truth with no relativism, can be seen in Wittgenstein's demystifying procedures; which are parallel with the artistic and religious rituals as exposed below.

Ideas on Wittgenstein's Theories on Demystification through Art

Wittgenstein's idea that the ideal of truth cannot be attained is the main reason for considering him an anti-realist. If we re-visit his ideas on the existence of the world which we can feel as a limited whole, we understand his use of the word *mystical* referring to the nonsensical. He provides us

[81] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, II, xi, 211.
[82] Wittgenstein, *Zettel*, 147.
[83] *Ibid*., 146.
[84] Hacker, *Wittgenstein*, 100–101.
[85] Wittgenstein, *Zettel*, 145.
[86] Burke, *Belief*, 82.

with a feeling parallel to that of an artist during the process of creating a work of art, wishing her/his feelings to be shared by the people experiencing her/his products. This, according to Wittgenstein, is absurd, and impossible to attain.[87] Understanding a poem in the sense its writer would have wished is one thing, he adds; what she/he actually felt while writing it is another. It is as if, he explains further,[88] we all wish to be well received when paying a visit; this, however, does not mean that we expect the person to whom we paid this visit to have feelings of such and such a sort. The realm of the Form of the Good and the realm of the secular are completely different. This difference is even more fundamental than the difference claimed by Plato to exist between the sensible and the intelligible. This fundamental difference was well grasped by those initiating and being initiated into the Eleusis mysteries.

Does Wittgenstein's example convincingly prove that artistic creations are in a different class from other, secular, creations? Resonance, harmony or response as regards a work of art relate to the work of art itself –not to something else conveyed through it. Wittgenstein warns us not to focus on this *something else* (his underlining) of art, because it is beyond expression, unless obtained through the senses.[89] Certainly, we can focus on communication of feelings through, say, music.[90] But then we need to examine the correct use of the words that convey these feelings. For example, how do we know that our feeling or another's feeling concerning the, say, facial expressions that are the same now as previously, are correctly expressed in words?

Wittgenstein offers a radical shift as regards the expansion of our conceptual equipment towards the realisation of the ideal of truth. His attempt to demystify knowledge has a parallel with demystifying rituals and art, as implemented in the following passage.[91]

> Life can educate one to a belief in God. And *experiences* too are what brings this about; but I don't mean visions and other forms of sense experience which show us 'the existence of this being', but, e.g., sufferings of various sorts. These neither show us God in the way a sense impression shows us an object, nor do they give rise to *conjectures* about him. Experiences, thoughts, —*life can force this concept on us* (I underline). So perhaps it is similar to the concept of 'object'.

The function and method of this expansion from the abstract to the concrete aims at the healing of evil. It is always through the commonplace

[87] Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, 58–59.
[88] *Ibid*., 58.
[89] *Ibid*., 36
[90] *Ibid*., 38.
[91] *Ibid*., 86.

that the dedication towards this realisation of the ideal of truth is suggested. Hence, he maintains, the existent of the Form of the Good, say God, is possible as the concept of "object" exists. This, however, does not mean that we can apprehend this Form by means of visions and other forms of sense experience that (existentially) focus on an ontology of the Good. He stresses the ideas that it is only through weakness and through suffering, that we can be educated to be believers. We are then open to change and vulnerable. We should not make conjectures about the unknown realm of values, as we are unable to experience sense impressions about them. Simply, life forces the Supreme Form on us, he concludes. This function stresses the fundamental difference between the realm of the known and that of the unknown. It is a healing process, and implies, besides, that the evils particular to specific periods can be repelled.

Wittgenstein offers an example of how the repelling of evil can take place, as regards the control and limits of, say, bad behaviour and conduct within social relationships. Newton, he avers, would have lost absolutely nothing, if he had acknowledged Leibniz's originality.[92] Quarrels over precedence are cheap and easy, he continues, and are the expression of evil weakness, as they are fostered by vile people. Philosophy tries to heal the unhappiness of these people in order to enable people to see many more possibilities in life than those experienced by unbelievers, and thus to repel the evils of the time. Newton would have gained a lot by acknowledging Leibniz's originality, he states. The experience of envy ought to be taken as a sheer error, he concludes, which can be overcome by esteem and, finally, love.

That is why one should never feel frustrated as regards vain attempts to attain definite, once-and-for-all knowledge of the Form of the Good. A man's dreams are virtually never realised, Wittgenstein states.[93] That is why he accuses Socrates of slipping into a lazy scepticism when reducing the sophist to silence. Obviously, he continues, Socrates had no right to do this, even if the sophist can be characterised as not being free from his ignorance and common beliefs. It is no triumph for Socrates, he adds, just to prove the ignorance not only of the sophists but that of all people. Ignorance, Wittgenstein states, simply exists because nobody can be led by art, science or philosophy to what is good. One can only be led to some place or other, as happens with those being initiated into the rituals explored in art. This weakness of reasoning and aesthetic and religious reasoning, especially, stresses Wittgenstein's idea that the Good is outside the space of facts.[94] This is a moral issue, he avers, as the Divine, i.e. the good, as something supernatural, can only express the Supernatural. We have seen how Aristotle warns us not to lay claim to knowledge gained by such

[92] *Ibid*., 58.
[93] *Ibid*., 56.
[94] *Ibid*., 3.

imaginings following any sundry idealism. Hadrian, the Roman emperor from 117 to 138, is said to consider for example, his marriage and spouse sacred as this was reflected in the bonds and these mysteries to which he, himself, had been initiated. These imaginings prove the false character of reason's omnipotence that challenges the sacred character of the Eleusis mysteries.[95]

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[95] Yourcenar, *Hadrian*, 186.

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To Know Through Touch

Sacramental Wisdom and Erotic Holiness in the *Gospel of Philip*

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Abstract: This article explores the conceptual metaphor of intimacy as epistemic access in the *Gospel of Philip*, where erotic union functions as a sacramental pathway to divine knowledge. Drawing on cognitive linguistics and Gnostic theology, the study examines how metaphors of touch, fusion, and bodily presence encode a form of "wisdom through embodiment." The *Gospel of Philip* frames holiness not as moral purity or ascetic withdrawal, but as a relational mode of knowing—one that privileges proximity, vulnerability, and shared essence. The metaphorical structure of phrases such as "the bridal chamber" and "those who unite will receive light" suggests a mystical epistemology grounded in physicality and mutual recognition. By analysing these metaphors through the lens of Conceptual Metaphor Theory and sacramental phenomenology, the article argues that Gnostic holiness is not merely esoteric but deeply experiential. This reframing challenges dualistic readings of Gnostic texts and opens a dialogue between ancient mystical traditions and contemporary theories of embodied cognition. Ultimately, the study contributes to a broader understanding of how metaphors of intimacy can function as vehicles of theological insight, positioning erotic union as a site of wisdom and sanctification.

Keywords: Gospel of Philip, Valentinian theology, Erotic holiness, Sacramental metaphor, Epistemic embodiment, Cognitive linguistics

1. Introduction: Erotic Holiness and Epistemic Embodiment

The presence of erotic language in sacred texts has long provoked discomfort, fascination, and theological debate. From the Song of Songs to the *Gospel of Philip*, the intertwining of sensual imagery and spiritual aspiration challenges conventional boundaries between body and soul, desire and devotion. In the *Gospel of Philip*, this tension is not merely aesthetic – it is epistemological. Erotic intimacy is not a metaphor for divine union; it is the cognitive architecture through which salvific knowledge is accessed. The text's sacramental metaphors – kisses, unions, bridal chambers – do not decorate doctrine; they constitute it.

This article explores the *Gospel of Philip*'s erotic theology through the lens of cognitive linguistics, arguing that its nuptial imagery functions as a sacramental metaphor grounded in epistemic embodiment. That is, the text invites readers to understand mystical knowledge not as abstract revelation but as an embodied experience, modelled on the intimacy of touch, union, and erotic fusion. This reframing challenges the assumption that Gnostic texts are purely esoteric or anti-material. Instead, *Philip* presents a theology in which the body is not bypassed but transfigured – where knowing is enacted through sacramental participation.

The *Gospel of Philip* is part of the Nag Hammadi corpus, a collection of fourth-century Coptic manuscripts discovered in Upper Egypt in 1945. Though preserved in Coptic, *Philip* was likely composed in Greek during the third century CE. Its theological strata reflect earlier traditions, including Syrian mysticism, Alexandrian exegesis, and Platonic cosmology.[1] The text is widely associated with the Valentinian tradition, a sophisticated Gnostic school founded by Valentinus, who taught in Rome during the second century.[2] Valentinians emphasised the soul's return to the *plērōma* – the divine fullness – through a sequence of sacramental rites: baptism, chrism, Eucharist, and the bridal chamber.[3] These rites were not symbolic performances but ontological enactments, each marking a stage in the initiate's ascent from ignorance to gnosis.

Within this framework, the bridal chamber emerges as the culminating mystery. It is the site of union, not only between human and divine but between fragmented aspects of the self. The chamber is not merely a metaphor for marriage; it is the ritual space where epistemic embodiment

[1] Bentley Layton, *The Gnostic Scriptures* (New York: Doubleday, 1987), 325; Hans-Martin Schenke, *Das Philippus-Evangelium aus dem Codex II von Nag Hammadi* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1987), 15.

[2] Elaine Pagels, *The Gnostic Paul: Gnostic Exegesis of the Pauline Letters* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 3–5.

[3] Einar Thomassen, *The Spiritual Seed: The Church of the "Valentinians"* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 145–160.

reaches its climax. The text's repeated emphasis on touch, kiss, and union suggests that erotic intimacy is the experiential frame through which divine knowledge is modelled. This aligns with conceptual metaphor theory, which posits that abstract domains (like salvation or truth) are understood through concrete, embodied experiences.[4] In *Philip*, the metaphor *knowing is union* is not decorative – it is constitutive.

To analyse this dynamic, the article draws on three key concepts. First, *epistemic embodiment* refers to the idea that knowledge is grounded in bodily experience.[5] In *Philip*, this is evident in the way sacramental acts – especially those involving touch – are framed as revelatory. Second, *sacramental metaphor* describes the use of ritual imagery (e.g., baptism, Eucharist, bridal chamber) not as analogies but as cognitive models for transformation. Third, *conceptual blend* refers to the fusion of source and target domains into a new cognitive structure.[6] In *Philip*, erotic intimacy and divine union blend into a single epistemic act: to touch is to know.

The article proceeds in five sections. First, it situates *Philip* within the Valentinian sacramental sequence, emphasising the role of the bridal chamber as the site of ontological reintegration. Second, it outlines the cognitive linguistic framework, drawing on Lakoff and Johnson's theory of conceptual metaphor and Fauconnier and Turner's model of conceptual blending. Third, it offers close readings of key logia – especially those involving the kiss, resurrection, and union – to show how erotic imagery functions as epistemic architecture. Fourth, it explores the theological implications of erotic holiness, arguing that *Philip* sacralises intimacy as a mode of knowing. Finally, it concludes by reflecting on the broader significance of embodied cognition in mystical theology.

In reframing erotic imagery as sacramental wisdom, the *Gospel of Philip* challenges modern assumptions about the role of the body in spiritual life. It invites us to consider that holiness is not achieved by fleeing the flesh, but by transfiguring it – that to know the divine is, quite literally, to touch it.

2. Theological and Ritual Context

The *Gospel of Philip* cannot be understood apart from its sacramental logic. Though often classified as a "Gnostic" text, it is more precisely Valentinian – a theological school that developed a highly structured vision of salvation through ritual, embodiment, and gnosis. At the heart of this vision lies a sequence of sacraments that guide the initiate from ignorance

[4] George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

[5] Mark Johnson, *The Body in the Mind: The Bodily Basis of Meaning, Imagination, and Reason* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

[6] Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner, *The Way We Think: Conceptual Blending and the Mind's Hidden Complexities* (New York: Basic Books, 2002).

to union: baptism, chrism, Eucharist, and the bridal chamber. These are not symbolic rites but ontological thresholds, each marking a transformation in the soul's return to the divine *plērōma*.

The Valentinian sacramental sequence begins with **baptism**, which purifies the initiate and awakens the divine spark within. Unlike proto-orthodox baptism, which emphasised forgiveness of sins and incorporation into the ecclesial body, Valentinian baptism is framed as the first resurrection – a cognitive and ontological awakening.[7] It is the moment when the initiate begins to remember their origin and destiny, shedding the ignorance imposed by the material world.

Following baptism is *chrism*, or anointing with oil. In *Philip*, chrism is described as superior to baptism: "The anointing is better than baptism, for it is because of the anointing that we are called 'Christians' and not because of the baptism."[8] Chrism is not merely a seal of initiation; it is a sacrament of divinisation. Through anointing, the initiate is infused with the pneuma – the spiritual substance that aligns them with the divine aeons.[9] This rite marks a deeper ontological shift: the soul is no longer merely awakened but begins to be re-formed in the image of its heavenly counterpart.

The third rite is the *Eucharist*, which in *Philip* is treated not as a memorial of Christ's death but as a sacrament of incorporation and nourishment. The Eucharist is the moment when the initiate partakes of the divine substance, not symbolically but actually. "The Eucharist is Jesus," the text declares, "for he is called in Syriac 'Pharisatha,' that is, 'the one who is spread out.'"[10] This phrase evokes both the crucified body and the Eucharistic bread, suggesting that the sacrament is a site of real presence and transformation. Ingesting the Eucharist is not a gesture of remembrance but an act of becoming.

The final and most mysterious rite is the *bridal chamber*. Unlike the other sacraments, the bridal chamber is not described in procedural terms. It is evoked through metaphor, allusion, and erotic imagery. Yet it is consistently listed as the culmination of the sacramental sequence: "The Lord did everything in a mystery: a baptism and a chrism and a Eucharist and a redemption and a bridal chamber."[11] The bridal chamber is the site of union – between the soul and its syzygy, between the human and the divine, between knowledge and being. It is not merely the end of the ritual journey but its telos: the moment when gnosis becomes embodied union.

This sequence reflects the **teleological aim** of Valentinian theology: the restoration of the soul to its original fullness through gnosis. Unlike orthodox

[7] Einar Thomassen, *The Spiritual Seed: The Church of the "Valentinians"* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 145–150.

[8] *Gospel of Philip* 74:12–20.

[9] Ibid., 74:20–75:5.

[10] Ibid., 57:25–58:10.

[11] Ibid., 67:27–30.

soteriology, which emphasises faith, obedience, or grace, Valentinianism centres on **knowledge as salvation**. But this knowledge is not intellectual assent – it is experiential, embodied, and transformative. Gnosis is not something one has; it is something one becomes. As *Philip* puts it, "Truth did not come into the world naked, but it came in types and images. It will not receive it in any other fashion."[12] The sacraments are those types and images – ritual enactments that mediate the invisible through the visible, the spiritual through the sensual.

This emphasis on gnosis as embodied transformation leads to a distinction between two classes of believers: the *psychikoi* (soulish) and the **teleioi** (mature or perfect).[13] The psychikoi are those who participate in the outer forms of religion but lack the inner gnosis. They may be baptised, anointed, and even partake of the Eucharist, but they do so without understanding. The teleioi, by contrast, are those who have undergone the full sacramental sequence and attained the bridal chamber. They are not merely saved – they are united.

The *Gospel of Philip* is addressed to the teleioi. Its dense metaphors, sacramental allusions, and erotic theology are not catechetical tools for beginners but mystical reflections for the initiated. The text assumes a reader who has not only undergone the rites but internalised their logic. It is a manual of mystical epistemology, not a primer on doctrine.

Understanding this context is essential for interpreting the text's erotic imagery. The kiss, the union, the bridal chamber – these are not metaphors for abstract truths but sacramental enactments of gnosis. They are the cognitive and ritual architecture through which the initiate becomes what they know. In this sense, the *Gospel of Philip* offers not a theology of the body, but a theology through the body – a vision in which touch, union, and erotic holiness are not distractions from the divine but the very means of encountering it.

3. Cognitive Linguistic Framework

To understand the epistemological function of erotic imagery in the *Gospel of Philip*, we must move beyond symbolic interpretation and into the domain of cognitive linguistics. This approach treats metaphor not as literary ornamentation but as a fundamental structure of human thought. As George Lakoff and Mark Johnson famously argued, "Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature."[14] Metaphors are not decorative – they are cognitive mappings that allow us to understand abstract domains (like truth, salvation, or union)

[12] Ibid., 67:10–15.

[13] Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 1.6.2; cf. Thomassen, *The Spiritual Seed*, 160–165

[14] George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 3.

through more concrete, embodied experiences (like touch, movement, or intimacy).

In this framework, the *Gospel of Philip's* nuptial and erotic metaphors are not merely poetic – they are epistemic. They provide the conceptual scaffolding through which the initiate understands and enacts divine union. The metaphor KNOWING IS UNION, for example, is not a simile but a cognitive model. It allows the reader to grasp the nature of gnosis through the embodied experience of erotic intimacy. This is not a metaphorical comparison – it is a conceptual blend.

Conceptual blending, as developed by Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner, refers to the process by which two distinct mental spaces – source and target – are fused into a new cognitive structure.[15] In the *Gospel of Philip*, the source domain is erotic union; the target domain is mystical knowledge. The blend produces a new epistemic category: sacramental intimacy. This is evident in passages like "The bridal chamber is not for the animals, nor is it for the slaves, nor is it for defiled women; it is for free men and virgins."[16] Here, the bridal chamber is not a metaphor for heaven – it is the ritual space where embodied union becomes epistemic transformation.

This leads to the concept of *epistemic embodiment* – the idea that knowledge is not abstract or disembodied but grounded in sensory and bodily experience.[17] In *Philip*, this is most clearly seen in the sacramental kiss. "The Savior loved Mary more than all the disciples and kissed her often on the mouth."[18] The kiss is not sentimental – it is revelatory. It is the act through which gnosis is transmitted, not through speech but through touch. The disciples' reaction – "Why do you love her more than all of us?" – underscores the epistemic hierarchy implied by embodied intimacy.[19] Mary receives knowledge not because she is favoured, but because she is joined.

This framework also helps us interpret the bridal chamber itself. The phrase νυμφῶν τῆς ἑνώσεως – "bridal chamber of the union" – is not a euphemism. It is a cognitive blend in which erotic union and divine fusion are conceptually inseparable. The chamber is not a symbol of heaven – it is the ritual site where heaven is enacted. As the text puts it, "If the bridal chamber is hidden, it is the mystery of the marriage."[20] The mystery is not what happens in the chamber – it is the chamber itself, as a cognitive and sacramental architecture.

This approach also clarifies the logic of logion 56: "They say that Christ

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[15] Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner, *The Way We Think: Conceptual Blending and the Mind's Hidden Complexities* (New York: Basic Books, 2002), 40–45.

[16] *Gospel of Philip* 69:10–20.

[17] Mark Johnson, *The Body in the Mind: The Bodily Basis of Meaning, Imagination, and Reason* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 10–15.

[18] *Gospel of Philip* 63:30–64:10.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Ibid., 68:1–10.

died first and then rose. They are wrong. He rose first and then died."[21] This reversal makes sense only within a framework of epistemic embodiment. Resurrection is not a post-mortem event – it is the awakening of gnosis. Christ "rose" when he attained union; he "died" when he shed the material self. This aligns with the sacramental sequence, where baptism is the first resurrection and the bridal chamber is the final death to division.

By applying conceptual metaphor theory, epistemic embodiment, and conceptual blending to *Philip*, we see that its erotic imagery is not ornamental – it is structural. The text does not use nuptial language to decorate doctrine; it uses it to construct a cognitive pathway. The initiate does not learn by hearing or reading – they learn by touching, joining, and becoming. In this sense, the *Gospel of Philip* offers a theology of embodied cognition, where sacramental acts are not signs but sites of transformation.

4. Close Readings: Erotic Imagery as Epistemic Architecture

The *Gospel of Philip* presents a sacramental theology in fragments – logia that resist linear exposition yet cohere around a central theme: intimacy as a mode of knowing. Erotic imagery in the text is not incidental; it is structurally embedded in its epistemology. Through close readings of three key passages – the kiss, the bridal chamber, and the resurrection – we can trace how embodied acts become cognitive events, and how ritual intimacy mediates ontological transformation.

a. The Kiss and Gnosis (GPhil 63–64)

The passage describing Jesus kissing Mary on the mouth has drawn disproportionate attention, often filtered through modern anxieties about sexuality and gender:

"The Savior loved Mary more than all the disciples and kissed her often on the mouth. The rest of the disciples said to him, 'Why do you love her more than all of us?' The Savior answered and said to them, 'Why do I not love you like her?'"[22]

Rather than reading this as a romantic gesture, Valentinian theology invites a sacramental interpretation. The kiss functions as a *ritual of transmission*, a tactile conduit through which gnosis is imparted.[23] In this framework, the mouth is not merely a site of affection – it is the threshold of revelation. The act of kissing becomes a sacramental medium, akin to chrism or Eucharist, through which the initiate receives divine knowledge.

[21] Ibid., 56:15–20.

[22] *Gospel of Philip* 63:30–64:10.

[23] Elaine Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels* (New York: Vintage, 1979), 49–51.

Mary's privileged status is not framed in terms of favouritism but *ontological receptivity*. She embodies the *teleia* – the spiritually mature – whose union with the Savior enables a deeper participation in truth.[24] The disciples' question reveals a hierarchy not of affection, but of epistemic access. Their misunderstanding underscores the gap between external participation and internal transformation.

This passage also activates the metaphor KNOWING IS TOUCH, but more precisely, it models *epistemic intimacy* – a fusion of subject and object where knowledge is not transferred but enacted. As Silke Petersen notes, the kiss in *Philip* is "not a sign of erotic libertinism but a ritualised gesture of spiritual union."[25] It is a moment where cognition and embodiment converge.

b. Bridal Chamber and Union (GPhil 67–68)

The bridal chamber is the most conceptually dense image in *Philip*, appearing as the culmination of the sacramental sequence:

"The Lord did everything in a mystery: a baptism and a chrism and a Eucharist and a redemption and a bridal chamber. […] The bridal chamber is hidden—it is the mystery of the marriage."[26]

The phrase νυμφῶν τῆς ἑνώσεως – "bridal chamber of the union" – signals more than ritual closure; it marks the site of *ontological reintegration*.[27] Within Valentinian cosmology, the soul is fragmented through embodiment and ignorance. The bridal chamber enacts its reunification with the syzygy – its heavenly counterpart – restoring the fullness lost in the fall of Sophia.[28]

This union is not metaphorical in the modern sense. It is a *conceptual blend*, fusing erotic intimacy with divine fusion. The chamber is not a symbol of heaven – it is the ritual space where heaven is enacted. As Gaye Strathearn observes, the bridal chamber "functions as the sacred locus where the initiate transcends duality and enters into the fullness of the plērōma."[29]

Logion 58 reinforces this logic:

"Christ came to repair the separation and bring the ones who belong to him into union."[30]

Here, union is not a future promise but a present sacrament. The bridal chamber is the architectural expression of this mission – a space where

[24] Einar Thomassen, *The Spiritual Seed: The Church of the "Valentinians"* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 160–165.

[25] Silke Petersen, "Marriages, Unions, and Bridal Chambers in the Gospel of Philip," in *Women and Gender in Early Christian Texts*, ed. Stephen J. Davis (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 125–140.

[26] *Gospel of Philip* 67:26–68:4.

[27] Bentley Layton, *The Gnostic Scriptures* (New York: Doubleday, 1987), 325.

[28] Hans Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001), 181–185.

[29] Gaye Strathearn, "The Valentinian Bridal Chamber in the Gospel of Philip," *Studies in the Bible and Antiquity* 1 (2009): 71–90.

[30] *Gospel of Philip* 58:10–20.

separation is undone through embodied joining. It is not the metaphor of marriage that matters, but the *ritual enactment of epistemic fusion*.

c. Resurrection Before Death (GPhil 56)

Logion 56 offers a striking inversion of the orthodox narrative:

"They say that Christ died first and then rose. They are wrong. He rose first and then died."[31]

This reversal is not rhetorical flourish – it reflects a Valentinian reordering of spiritual chronology. Resurrection, in *Philip*, is not a post-mortem event but a *cognitive awakening*. Christ "rose" when he attained gnosis, when union with the divine was realised. His "death" follows – not as physical cessation, but as the shedding of division and ignorance.

This reading aligns with the sacramental logic of baptism as the *first resurrection*.[32] The initiate rises from the waters not merely cleansed, but awakened. Death, in this schema, is not the end but the moment when the old self dissolves into union. As Karen King notes, "resurrection in *Philip* is not about the body's return but the soul's recognition of its origin."[33]

The metaphor RESURRECTION IS AWAKENING reframes salvation as a process of *epistemic emergence*. Each sacrament marks a stage in this ascent: baptism purifies, chrism divinises, Eucharist nourishes, and the bridal chamber consummates. Resurrection is not a singular event – it is a layered transformation, culminating in the bridal chamber where knowledge becomes being.

Together, these logia form a coherent theological architecture. The kiss, the chamber, the resurrection – each models a sacramental epistemology in which intimacy is not peripheral but central. In *Philip*, erotic imagery is not a distraction from the divine – it is the very grammar through which the divine is known.

5. Erotic Holiness: Sacramentality of Touch

The *Gospel of Philip* presents a theology in which erotic language is not peripheral to spiritual discourse but central to its sacramental logic. Far from serving as poetic embellishment, the text's sensual vocabulary – touch, kiss, union, chamber – functions as a medium of theological insight. These images are not deployed to titillate or allegorise; they articulate a mode of knowing grounded in embodied experience. In this framework, erotic intimacy becomes a sacred act, a ritualised encounter through which divine truth is enacted.

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[31] Ibid., 56:15–20.

[32] Thomassen, *The Spiritual Seed*, 145–150.

[33] Karen L. King, *What Is Gnosticism?* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 183–186.

Touch, in *Philip*, is consistently framed as revelatory. The kiss between Jesus and Mary (GPhil 63:30–64:10) exemplifies this dynamic. As discussed earlier, the kiss is not a gesture of affection but a conduit of gnosis. It is through tactile proximity that Mary receives insight inaccessible to the other disciples. This logic recurs throughout the text: "The one who loves the truth is joined to it through a kiss. The mouth opens and the soul is nourished."[34] Here, the kiss is sacramental – a moment where the boundary between self and truth dissolves. The mouth becomes a site of epistemic exchange, and the body a vessel of revelation.

The bridal chamber intensifies this logic. It is described as the "mystery of the marriage" (GPhil 67:26–68:4), a hidden rite reserved for the spiritually mature.[35] The chamber is not merely a metaphor for union; it is the ritual space where union is enacted. The phrase **νυμφῶν τῆς ἑνώσεως** – "bridal chamber of the union" – signals a fusion of erotic and ontological registers.[36] The initiate enters the chamber not to simulate union but to become joined in truth. As April DeConick observes, "The bridal chamber is the place where the soul is reunited with its heavenly counterpart, where the fragmented self is made whole."[37]

This theology of touch stands in marked contrast to the asceticism of emerging orthodoxy. In texts like the *Acts of Thomas* or the writings of Tertullian, the body is treated as a site of temptation, a barrier to spiritual purity.[38] Sexual abstinence is valorised as a path to holiness, and physical intimacy is often framed as a concession to weakness. *Philip*, by contrast, sacralises the body – not by denying its impulses but by transfiguring them. Erotic acts are not distractions from the divine; they are the grammar through which the divine is known.

This reframing aligns with broader Valentinian theology, which resists dualistic separations between spirit and flesh. As Einar Thomassen notes, "Valentinians did not reject the body; they sought to spiritualize it through sacramental participation."[39] The bridal chamber, in this sense, is not a rejection of sexuality but its elevation. It becomes the site where eros is reoriented toward epistemic union, where desire becomes a pathway to gnosis.

The sacramentality of touch also resonates with cognitive linguistic theory. As Lakoff and Johnson have shown, abstract concepts are often understood through embodied metaphors.[40] In *Philip*, the metaphor KNOWING

[34] *Gospel of Philip* 58:25–30.

[35] Ibid., 67:26–68:4.

[36] Bentley Layton, *The Gnostic Scriptures* (New York: Doubleday, 1987), 325.

[37] April D. DeConick, *The Original Gospel of Thomas in Translation: With a Commentary and New English Translation of the Complete Gospel* (London: T&T Clark, 2006), 284–286.

[38] Tertullian, *On the Veiling of Virgins*; *Acts of Thomas* 11–13.

[39] Einar Thomassen, *The Spiritual Seed: The Church of the "Valentinians"* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 145–150.

[40] George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and Its*

is union is not merely linguistic – it is ritualised. The initiate does not learn through abstraction but through participation. The body becomes the medium of cognition, and touch the syntax of revelation.

This embodied epistemology challenges modern assumptions about the role of erotic language in sacred texts. It invites a reconsideration of holiness – not as the suppression of desire but as its transformation. In *Philip*, erotic holiness is not a contradiction but a theological imperative. The soul does not ascend by fleeing the body; it ascends by joining through it.

Such a vision has implications beyond Valentinianism. It gestures toward a sacramental anthropology in which the human is not merely fallen but capable of divine fusion. The body, in this schema, is not a prison but a temple – a place where truth is touched, tasted, and known. As Karen King writes, "The Gospel of Philip offers a vision of salvation that is deeply sensual, profoundly mystical, and radically embodied."[41]

In this light, erotic language in *Philip* is not ornamental – it is foundational. It provides the conceptual and ritual architecture through which the initiate moves from ignorance to union. Touch is not a metaphor for knowing; it is the act of knowing. The bridal chamber is not a symbol of heaven; it is the space where heaven is enacted. And eros, far from being a threat to holiness, becomes its most intimate expression.

6. Conclusion: Toward a Theology of Embodied Knowing

The *Gospel of Philip* offers a radical reconfiguration of salvation – not as juridical pardon or intellectual assent, but as embodied union. Through its sacramental architecture, the text reframes intimacy as the epistemic frame through which divine truth is encountered. Erotic imagery – kisses, unions, chambers – is not ornamental; it is the grammar of gnosis. In this theology, to know is to be joined, and to be joined is to be transformed.

This reframing has implications across multiple domains. For theology, *Philip* challenges dualistic assumptions about the body and spirit, proposing a sacramental anthropology in which the flesh is not a hindrance but a medium of revelation. It invites a reconsideration of holiness – not as ascetic withdrawal but as embodied participation. As Michael Allen Williams notes, "The Gnostic texts do not reject the body per se; they seek to reorient it toward its divine origin."[42]

For ritual studies, the text foregrounds the performative dimension of knowing. Sacraments in *Philip* are not symbolic gestures but ontological enactments. The bridal chamber, in particular, functions as a ritual space

Challenge to Western Thought (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 45–60.

[41] Karen L. King, *What Is Gnosticism?* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 183–186.

[42] Michael Allen Williams, *Rethinking "Gnosticism": An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 145–150.

where epistemic and ontological boundaries collapse. This invites further exploration of how ritual intimacy mediates transformation – not only in Valentinianism but across mystical traditions.[43]

Cognitive linguistics also finds fertile ground here. The metaphors in *Philip* – KNOWING IS UNION, SALVATION IS TOUCH – are not static comparisons but dynamic blends. They model how abstract theological concepts are grounded in embodied experience. This supports broader claims in cognitive science about the bodily basis of meaning, while offering a case study in how ritual and metaphor co-construct religious epistemologies.[44]

Future research might extend this inquiry into comparative mysticism. How do other traditions – Sufi, Tantric, Kabbalistic – deploy erotic imagery to frame divine union? What cognitive structures underlie these metaphors, and how do they shape ritual practice? Similarly, embodied ritual theory could benefit from engaging *Philip* as a text that sacralises intimacy, offering a counterpoint to ascetic paradigms.

In sum, the *Gospel of Philip* does more than speak of union – it enacts it. Its erotic holiness is not a theological anomaly but a conceptual necessity. Through sacramental touch, the initiate does not merely learn about the divine – they become joined to it. In this theology, the body is not bypassed but transfigured, and salvation is not deferred but embodied.

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[43] Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 94–98.

[44] Mark Johnson, *The Meaning of the Body: Aesthetics of Human Understanding* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 3–25.

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REVIEWS

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Nicolae Turcan, *Das verborgene Präsens. Studien zur Phänomenologie und Theologie*, (Kollektion Universitas, Reihe Theologia et Philosophia, Nr. 16), Eikon Verlag, Bukarest, 2024, 169 S., ISBN: 978-606-49-1273-2

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Das Buch von Nicolae Turcan fügt sich überzeugend in eine mittlerweile deutlich erkennbare Forschungsrichtung der europäischen Geisteswissenschaften ein: den Versuch, einen tragfähigen und methodisch kohärenten Dialog zwischen Phänomenologie und orthodoxer Theologie zu etablieren. Es handelt sich dabei keineswegs um eine bloß deskriptive Übersicht über einige prominente Vertreter der modernen Phänomenologie, sondern um den ernsthaften Versuch, jene Spannungen freizulegen, die sich an der Schnittstelle zwischen philosophischer Methode und kirchlicher Erfahrung ergeben. Turcan argumentiert durchgehend nüchtern, präzise und ohne jede begriffliche Effekthascherei.

Bereits auf den ersten Seiten wird deutlich, welches Ziel der Autor verfolgt: Er möchte die sogenannte theologische Wende in der zeitgenössischen französischen Phänomenologie – insbesondere bei Jean-Luc Marion und Jean-Yves Lacoste – in ihrer inneren Logik verstehen und zugleich prüfen, inwieweit diese Entwicklungen in die orthodoxe Theologie integriert werden können, ohne dass es zu methodischen oder sprachlichen Verunklärungen kommt. Die Struktur des Buches umfasst u. a. ein Kapitel über das Verhältnis zwischen husserlscher Methode und Religion, eines über die Metaphysikkritik bei Marion, ein weiteres über die eschatologische Zeitlichkeit bei Lacoste, anschließend eine Analyse der Phänomenologie des Gebets, sodann eine Diskussion über eine mögliche „phänomenologische Wende" in der orthodoxen Theologie und schließlich einen eher essayistisch gehaltenen Text über Verschwendung als Bild der Gabe.

Im ersten Kapitel („Phänomenologie ohne Epoché. Das Problem der Religion bei Husserl", S. 7–28) nimmt Turcan die bekannte Frage nach dem Verhältnis von transzendentaler Reduktion und der Möglichkeit, religiöse Erfahrungen phänomenologisch zu beschreiben, erneut auf. Dabei zeigt er, dass Husserls Epoché – also die methodische Ausklammerung ontologischer Geltungsfragen – den Zugang zur genuin theologischen Dimension religiöser Erfahrung begrenzt. Gott bleibt innerhalb dieses methodischen Rahmens ein „Nicht-Phänomen" im strengen Sinne. Zugleich weist Turcan darauf hin, dass Husserl die religiöse Erfahrung keineswegs ausschließt, sondern sie als Bewusstseinsphänomen bzw. unter dem Aspekt der Konstitution thematisiert.

Die grundlegenden Begriffe – Intentionalität, noetisch-noematische Struktur, Evidenz, Konstitution, Rolle der Intersubjektivität – werden klar, konzise und für nicht spezialisierte Leser gut nachvollziehbar erläutert. Turcans Schluss ist vorsichtig und differenziert: Die Phänomenologie kann beschreiben, wie religiöse Erfahrungen erscheinen, doch was sie theologisch bedeuten, liegt außerhalb ihres methodischen Horizonts.

Eines der dichtesten Kapitel ist jenes über Jean-Luc Marion („Noch einmal über die Überwindung der Metaphysik bei Jean-Luc Marion", S. 29–62)[1]. Turcan diskutiert ausführlich Marions späte Synthese (La métaphysique et après, 2023) und zeigt, wie dessen Metaphysikkritik zum Konzept des saturierten Phänomens und zur Priorität der Gabe führt. Die zentrale Unterscheidung wird dabei mit großer Klarheit herausgearbeitet: Die Phänomenologie kann die Möglichkeit der Offenbarung beschreiben, aber nicht deren Wahrheit.

Besonders hervorzuheben ist Turcans Behandlung der oft geäußerten Einwände gegen die Verwendung metaphysischer Begriffe in der dogmatischen Theologie. Er zeigt überzeugend, dass solche Begriffe in der orthodoxen Tradition liturgisch und doxologisch transformiert werden, wodurch sich ihre Funktion grundlegend von derjenigen unterscheidet, die sie in der phänomenologischen Methodik haben. In dieser Perspektive können Marions Analysen durchaus mit dem apophatischen Grundzug der östlichen Theologie kompatibel sein.

Das zentrale Kapitel des Bandes ist jenes über Jean-Yves Lacoste (S. 63–102), das dem Buch seinen Titel verleiht. Turcan erläutert prägnant, wie Lacoste den Zeitbegriff auf Grundlage der liturgischen Erfahrung und der Eschatologie neu bestimmt. Der „geheime Präsenz-Sinn" – ein präsentischer Modus, der das Eschaton antizipiert, ohne es zu aktualisieren – wird klar dargestellt, und die Bezüge zur orthodoxen Sensibilität werden nachvollziehbar herausgearbeitet.

Hier wäre auch die Formulierung von Karl Christian Felmy erwähnenswert, der von einer „präsentistischen Eschatologie" als Kennzeichen der orthodoxen

[1] Siehe vom selben Autor auch den Band *Apologie nach dem Ende der Metaphysik. Theologie und Phänomenologie bei Jean-Luc Marion*, Eikon, Bukarest, 2016.

Theologie spricht – ein Gedanke, den Turcan implizit weiterführt.

Das vierte Kapitel (S. 103–128) widmet sich der Phänomenologie des Gebets. Turcan zeigt, dass hier ein Übergang von der Beschreibung zur Anrede stattfindet – ein Schritt, der die Grenzen phänomenologischer Beschreibung offenlegt. Die Phänomenologie kann die Form des Gebetsphänomens erfassen, nicht aber dessen theologische Wahrheit.

Im fünften Kapitel (S. 129–140) diskutiert der Autor die Frage, ob die orthodoxe Theologie eine „phänomenologische Wende" benötigt. Turcan lehnt sowohl euphorische Zustimmung als auch kategorische Ablehnung ab. Seine Antwort ist ausgewogen: Die Phänomenologie kann ein hilfreicher methodischer Rahmen sein, aber sie kann nicht den Inhalt der Offenbarung liefern. Ein fruchtbarer Dialog setzt voraus, dass beide Disziplinen ihre jeweiligen Grenzen respektieren.

Das letzte Kapitel („Reduktion, Transfer und Verschwendung", S. 141–154) ist stilistisch freier gehalten und führt die Idee der Verschwendung als Bild für die Überschüssigkeit des religiösen Phänomens ein. Turcan betont, dass in der religiösen Erfahrung stets ein Moment verbleibt, das sich der vollständigen Konzeptualisierung entzieht – ein Übermaß, das offen bleibt für die Begegnung.

Die Originalität des Bandes liegt vor allem in der Fähigkeit des Autors, einen echten, methodisch reflektierten Dialog zwischen der französischen Phänomenologie und der orthodoxen Theologie zu entfalten. Er vermeidet sowohl synkretistische Verkürzungen als auch eine defensive Polemik. Besonders verdienstvoll sind: 1) die präzise Lokalisierung der Phänomenologie gegenüber der Offenbarung, 2) die Darstellung der Anschlussfähigkeit phänomenologischer Begriffe im Rahmen der apophatischen Tradition, 3) der Versuch, liturgische Erfahrung phänomenologisch zu deuten, ohne ihre theologische Tiefe zu reduzieren.

„Das verborgene Präsens" ist ein gereiftes und mutiges Buch: gereift durch methodische Nüchternheit, mutig durch die Bereitschaft, die postmetaphysische Debatte aus orthodoxer Perspektive anzugehen – ohne Angst und ohne polemische Schärfe. Für Theologen ist es ein Zugang zur zeitgenössischen Phänomenologie, für Philosophen eine Einladung zum echten Gespräch mit der orthodoxen Tradition.