THEOLOGIA ORTHODOXA

STUDIA
UNIVERSITATIS BABEŞ-BOLYAI
THEOLOGIA ORTHODOXA

CONTENTS

BOOK REVIEWS:

I. BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

THE FIVE CONTROVERSIES IN JERUSALEM: ACCORDING TO THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

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ABSTRACT. This study deals exegetically with five passages from the Gospel of Matthew (21:23-27; 22:15-22; 22:23-33; 22:34-40; 22:41-46). They describe the Saviour's confrontations with the Jewish leaders in the last week of His earthly life. The topics discussed throughout these polemics reflect the theological concerns of Jesus' interlocutors, especially the issues of authority, resurrection, law, and messiahship. These controversies eloquently express Jesus' teaching quality. The Saviour's presence and impact are given on the one hand by the content of his answers and his impeccable rhetoric. Besides the intrinsic theological value of these dialogues, they are also important from an ecclesiological and spiritual point of view.

Keywords: Gospel of Matthew, controversy, the divinity of Christ, resurrection, messianism, New Testament, Matthew 21-22.

The ancient world was - by its very fibre - a world of polemics. Whether in the Greek world (from Socrates onwards, at least) or the Jewish world, this world excelled in ideological duels on the most diverse - and sometimes bizarre - subjects. The rules of such confrontations were usually unwritten, but the opponents always complied. "Those silenced by a speaker's wisdom were publicly shamed and had to be cautious before engaging again, with the same speaker, in a public verbal dispute. When in the literature of the time, the astonishment of some listeners at the wisdom of a speaker (usually the main hero of the episode) was recorded, the intention was that readers would also appreciate the wisdom of the protagonist."[2]

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[2] Craig S. Keener, *Comentariu cultural-istoric al Noului Testament* (Oradea: Casa Cărții, 2018) 114.

Nor was the Saviour spared such confrontations, especially in the last week of His earthly life. While in Jerusalem - the city of the arrogant elite who were resistant to His message - He was often questioned on various subjects. Nevertheless, it is not only Jerusalem, but the Temple itself, or rather the court of nations, that is a place of great controversy. The Saviour enters - literally and figuratively - the territory of his adversaries, in a gesture of the utmost boldness, at a time when plans for his elimination had already been perfected.[3]

The Evangelist Matthew brings these controversies together in a single textual unit (ch. 21-22). If we follow the chiastic view of the Gospel, proposed by C. H. Lohr[4], then Matthew 21-22 must be mirrored by Matthew 8-9. In both sequences, we have - in narrative form - the same idea: authority and invitation. On the one hand, the Saviour asserts His divine authority (through miracle and wisdom); on the other hand, He utters His invitation with equal generosity (through words and gestures). In fact, in these two chapters - 21 and 22 - Christ the Lord confronts the whole of Jewish theology in the heart of the nation of Israel (Jerusalem), standing with dignity and brilliance before its principal representatives.

The five controversies in which the Savior is involved are preceded, in turn, by three significant acts: the entry into Jerusalem (21:1-11), the expulsion of the Temple sellers (21:12-17), and the cursing of the unruly fig tree (21:18-22). "The three symbolic actions all carry the same message. The king of Israel has come to call his people to repent."[5] as did the Old Testament prophets. But this call was met with the arrogance of Israel's elite, who were completely unprepared for their own repentance.

Of the three moments, undoubtedly the most striking was the cleansing of the Temple (21:12-17). We are justified in thinking that this is, in fact, the Temple courtyard, which "had been used as a shortcut for the delivery of goods from one side of Jerusalem to the other. Jesus'] operation must have created an immediate stir. Not a few have wondered, therefore, why the ubiquitous Temple police or the Roman garrison in the fortress overlooking the courtyard did not intervene. Were they afraid that armed intervention might spark a riot? Or did they intervene? Some authors have floated the bizarre idea that Jesus

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[3] For contextual and hermeneutical details of the five controversies, see John P. Meier, *The Vision of Matthew. Christ, Church and Morality* (New York: Paulist Press, 1978) 147-166.

[4] C. H. Lohr, "Oral Techniques in the Gospel of Matthew", *CQB* 23 (1961) 403-435. According to S. McKnight, Lohr's theory "has several important features. In addition to recognizing the structural alternation between narrative and discourse, the hypothesis repeats the connections between the various sections of Matthew as well as the varied themes developed by Matthew." (S. McKnight, „Evanghelia după Matei", in Daniel G. Reid (ed.), *Dicționarul Noului Testament*, trad. Lucian Ciupe și Timotei Manta (Oradea: Casa Cărții, 2008) 950.)

[5] Daniel M. Doriani, *Matthew 14-28* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing Company, 2008) 888.

and his disciples engaged the Temple police and perhaps even the Roman garrison in battle, and that for a time Jesus resisted them by maintaining control of the Temple. This is historically impossible, not only because it does not fit with what Jesus had done up to that point, nor with subsequent events, but also because it would surely have been recorded in the annals of the Jewish historian Josephus Flavius as an event of considerable political and military importance. [The Temple police may have intervened] but only for the purpose of maintaining order until the priests and scholars could come to negotiate a peaceful solution. In other words, Jesus did not oppose the police, nor did he insist that the merchants and moneychangers be allowed to return."[6]

These polemics "reflect the standard methods in ancient debate; questions and answers; deft retorts and attempts to trap opponents in their own words. The Temple Courts, the most frequented place in the city, was a popular place for learning and debate."[7] Therefore, "the victory of a hero's wisdom in the face of a test with difficult questions was an ancient theme."[8] It showcased the most brilliant argumentation and lucid persuasion. And, as we shall see, each had a subject of its own, with its theoretical and practical stakes, but also with its own flavour of argument.

1. The problem of AUTHORITY (21,23-27)

This first controversy takes place "while [the Saviour] was teaching" in the Temple. The Evangelist Matthew uses the verb διδάσκω, which refers to "to give instruction in a formal or informal setting."[9] Here we have the consistency with which - according to all the Gospels - Jesus continues untiringly as a teacher until the last days of his earthly life. While He was carrying out this task, the "chief priests and elders of the people" (ἀρχιερεῖς καὶ οἱ πρεσβύτεροι τοῦ λαοῦ) intervene. Two categories of leaders are suggested: ἀρχιερεύς and πρεσβύτερος, both nouns being plural. By ἀρχιερεύς reference is made to a chief priest, holder of this position by belonging to a priestly family."[10] These archpriests, "mostly from the Sadducees, also made up the political cream - less popular than the

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[6] Albert Nolan, *Jesus Before Christianity* (New York: Orbis Books, 1992) 126-127.

[7] Craig S. Keener, *Comentariu cultural-istoric al Noului Testament...*,108.

[8] Craig S. Keener, *Comentariu cultural-istoric al Noului Testament...*, 111.

[9] J. P. Louw şi E. A. Nida, *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains*, second edition, vol. 1 (New York: United Bible Societies, 1989) 412. The same word describes the teaching of Jesus as a whole (Mk 12:38), but also that of the Holy Apostles assumed by the faithful (Rom 15,14).

[10] J. P. Louw şi E. A. Nida, *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament...*, 543.

Pharisees - who had to balance the interests of both the people and the Roman authorities. They belonged to an elite with hereditary privileges, whose power was backed by Rome; usually such groups despised popular teachers like Jesus as demagogues. At the same time, aristocratic priests had to take account of the opinion of the masses when making decisions that could stir popular discontent.."[11] By πρεσβύτερος, somewhat antithetically, reference is made to "a person with responsibility and authority in matters of socio-religious interest."[12] Always closer to the heart of the people than the former, these elders enjoyed unique respect in the Jewish mind of the time, being somewhat the natural emanation of the mob and the faithful defenders of its interests.

The forefathers of Jesus, therefore, represent - to a large extent - the entire ruling class of the Jewish people, united in both its sacerdotal ("high priests") and popular ("elders") categories: the former in functional dependence on the Temple, i.e., the Written Law; the latter in equally functional dependence on the synagogue, i.e., the Oral Law. Now, if these two socio-religious factions join hands in questioning Jesus, it means that his popularity has reached its peak. The Saviour had literally become "a case", a visible challenge to the Jewish upper class. Hence the question they ask: "By what power do you do these things? And who gave You this power?" (v. 23b).

Here we have two questions in tandem: 'by what? (authority)" and "from whom? (You have authority)". "The first question challenges His right to teach and work miracles in the Temple; how can He act as rabbi and prophet? Their purpose was to draw Him into a trap, for if He had answered, 'human authority, He would have contradicted His actions, and if He had answered, 'divine authority, He would have been guilty of blasphemy. The second question assumes that His authority cannot be from God, a possibility long rejected by leaders. They challenge Jesus to incriminate Himself by His answer."[13]

Both uses of "power" use - in the original version - the same word: ἐξουσία. It simply indicates 'the power to do something, with or without an additional [delegated or externally conferred] authority'."[14] It is intrinsic authority, which one possesses by oneself, whether one exercises it or not. It is the type of power associated in the ancient world with gods or supernatural beings, but it could also be applied to human beings.

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[11] Craig S. Keener, *Comentariu cultural-istoric al Noului Testament...*, 109.

[12] J. P. Louw şi E. A. Nida, *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament...*, 541. As is well known, the notion (and the office) was also taken up in first-century Christianity, being an important part of ecclesiology, especially in predominantly Jewish communities.

[13] Grant R. Osborne, *Matei: comentariu exegetic pe Noul Testament*, trad. Octavian Verlan (Timişoara: Noua Speranţă, 2019) 828.

[14] J. P. Louw şi E. A. Nida, *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament...*, 680.

In fact, the Jewish leaders are interested in *the source of Jesus' power*, the energy that sets things in motion. They were too well versed not to realize that such mighty deeds must have something special behind them, an authority not found in everyone. In the Jewish custom, Jesus answers with another question: "Where did John's baptism come from? From heaven or from men?" (v. 25a). Unexpected and subtle, this question prompted the interlocutors to what the text calls "self-contemplation". In Greek, we have διαλογίζομαι, which means "to think or reason with thoroughness and completeness."[15] They are visibly embarrassed because - they thought - if they had said that John's baptism came from heaven, Jesus would have accused them of not receiving it; if they had said it came from men, people would have lynched them. Either way, they answered was, in a way, risky.

In the end, they chose to respond with "We don't know!" to which the Savior adds, "Neither do I tell you by what power they do these" (v. 27). "Hence the story does not state what Jesus' authority was, but implies that it came from God, like John's, and that the Jewish leaders were wrong to oppose them."[16]

Appealing to logic, the Saviour leads the whole debate to this conclusion: "His authority and John's derive from the same source - from heaven (a Hebrew way of saying from God). This answer corresponds to the Jewish principle that a messenger with a particular commission, acts with the full authority of the one who sent him. The rest of the discussion conforms to the standard debate procedure of the time."[17]

The parable of the two sons (vv. 28-32), spoken immediately after the dialogue, is considered by some commentators to be an integral part of the controversy. According to Ulrich Luz, the two fragments "constitute a single pericope. On the one hand, the controversy does not have a stylistically appropriate ending since there is no closing word from Jesus. On the other hand, the parable has no narrative exposition. Instead, it begins with an immediate question from Jesus to his opponents (v. 28). This takes the place of *the logion* that usually ends a dispute. For its part, the controversy provides the narrative exposition for the parable. Thus, vv. 23-32 must be considered as a single pericope."[18] If this is the case, then the favourable but ultimately disobedient son (for example) is a metaphor for Israel's attitude toward God. The investigation the leaders do is not honest, and their encounter with Jesus does not change them as one might expect.

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[15] J. P. Louw şi E. A. Nida, *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament...*, 350.

[16] Margaret Davies, *Matthew* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2009) 169.

[17] Craig S. Keener, *Comentariu cultural-istoric al Noului Testament...*, 109.

[18] Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 21-28* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2005) 26.

2. The problem of TAX (22,15-22)

In the case of this questioning, the protagonists are no longer the priests and elders but the Pharisees, who "took counsel to catch him in his word" (συμβούλιον ἔλαβον ὅπως αὐτὸν παγιδεύσωσιν ἐν λόγῳ). A Pharisee (Φαρισαιος) was, in fact, "a member of an important Jewish religious and political party in the time of Jesus and the apostles. The Pharisees constituted a significantly larger group than the Sadducees and had contradictions with them on certain doctrines and patterns of behaviour. The Pharisees were strict and zealous adherents of the Old Testament laws and many additional traditions."[19] These are associated with two keywords, both of which are important for understanding the episode. On the one hand, we have the notion of 'counsel/ council', rendered in the text as συμβούλιον. The root of the word - συμβουλος - indicates the action of "engaging in joint planning, planning, often with a harmful or malicious purpose."[20] On the other hand, we have the verb παγιδεύω, used here in the figurative but taken from the hunting register, designating the action of hunting, trapping (proper form absent from the New Testament). Thus, in this case, it is "to obtain information about an error or mistake, with the aim of causing damage or trouble."[21] The combined action of the Pharisees is also due to the involvement of their disciples, sent to Jesus. Another category is added, that of the Herodians (Ἡρῳδιανοί), who were "political followers of Herod the Great and his family"."[22] Their presence somewhat tilts the odds in favour of paying taxes, given that Herod came to the throne with the direct support of Rome. Be that as it may, they question Jesus with much tact and apparent sympathy. Trying to win his goodwill, after calling him "Teacher", they say, "We know that you are a man of truth, and in truth you teach the way of God, and you care for no one, because you do not seek the face of men" (v. 16b).

It is only after these words are spoken that they throw the subject itself into the discussion: 'What do you think? Should we give tithes to Caesar or not?" (v. 17). Both verbs are important here. On the one hand, we have δοκέω which means: "to have an opinion based on appearances that may be significantly different from reality"[23]; on the other hand, we have ἔξεστιν, which has the meaning of "to be obligatory." For "tithes", we have the Greek κῆνσος, which refers to "a tax to be paid by every man to the government." Rephrased, the question

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[19] J. P. Louw şi E. A. Nida, *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament...*, 128. For details on the origin, doctrine, and impact of the Pharisees, see Jacob Neusner and Bruce D. Chilton (eds.), *In Quest of the Historical Pharisees* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2007).

[20] J. P. Louw şi E. A. Nida, *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament...*, 358.

[21] J. P. Louw şi E. A. Nida, *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament...*, 329.

[22] J. P. Louw şi E. A. Nida, *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament...*, 133.

[23] J. P. Louw şi E. A. Nida, *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament...*, 369.

might sound like this: "*What is Your opinion? Is it obligatory to pay tribute to Caesar or not?*"

As far as the Jews were concerned, they "had three kinds of taxes: the Temple tax of 17:24-27; indirect taxes such as customs duties, sales taxes, etc.; and direct taxes or per capita tax paid only by those who were not Roman citizens. The tax referred to in the text is the third type and became a kind of tribute paid by all peoples subject to Rome. The amount was one dinar annually for each adult, women, and men. It was a controversial tax and contested by many Jews. Judah the Galilean led a revolt in 6 AD. So, the Pharisees believed that Jesus would get into trouble no matter what answer he gave, either from the Jews if he said yes, or from the Romans if he said no."[24]

Showing his omniscience, Jesus rebukes his opponents for trying to tempt him. He then resorts to an unusual gesture designed to embarrass them. He asks for a Roman dinar, called in the text νόμισμα, i.e., the common and official currency, to which κῆνσος is added, Matthew attributing to it an exclusively fiscal use (which is incorrect because the dinar was also used in other transactions). Jesus then raises the decisive question, "Whose image is this, and the inscription on it?" - to which the interlocutors reply without hesitation: "Caesar's!". For 'image' we have the word εἰκών - which refers to 'image', and for 'inscription' we have the word ἐπιγραφή, which indicates a short note used mainly for identification."[25]

Thus, "portrayed on the front of the Tiberius denarius that was used in Palestine was the head of the emperor, on the reverse side the imperial mother Livia as a goddess of peace. The inscription reads: "Ti(berius) Caesar Divi Aug(usti) F(ilius) Augustus," and on the reverse side: "Pontif(ex) Maxim(us)." The opponents confirm this in response to Jesus' question. It is unlikely that the point of the demonstration is to show that, as Jews who possess coins with human images, they violate the law; in that day almost, all Jews probably used such coins. Nor is the issue that they violate the prohibition against images in the Temple itself; in the forecourt of the Temple, where the booths of the money changers stood, their Tiberius coin will not have been the only one. The point is rather that by using a coin that is invested with political and religious symbols of the power of the Roman emperor they have long since acknowledged his claim to power."[26]

Therefore, the stakes were much more subtle than simple taxation, which was already a given. "The payment of tax to the representatives of the Roman emperor expressed the subjugation of Israel and could be interpreted

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[24] Grant R. Osborne, *Matei...*, 862-863.

[25] J. P. Louw și E. A. Nida, *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament...*, 393.

[26] Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 21-28...*, 66.

as disloyalty to the God of Israel."[27] Specifically, "Jesus' opponents try to force him to choose between rebellion - which would have allowed them to blame him before the Romans - and conformity to the Romans - to whom, they believe, he was hostile (because he confronted their leaders in the Temple)."[28]

The Saviour's verdict is: "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's" (v. 21). It follows - unequivocally - that the payment of tribute to Rome is obligatory (which, in fact, it is). Interestingly, the Saviour does not further justify this obligation but simply sticks to the logical approach proposed above: what bears the image of Caesar must ultimately return to Caesar.[29] Even more interesting is that - without being asked - Jesus adds the other part of the truth: *Give to God what is God's*. "This challenge thus constitutes the actual surprise of the text for the original hearers and for the first readers. It comes at the end and is thus the goal of the text. It follows that the issue in this text is precisely not a determination of the relationship of Jesus or of his followers to the state. To that degree the most important concern with the text in the history of its interpretation completely misses its intention. The challenge to give God what belongs to him remains brief; it comes across as an isolated text. The readers must supplement it from the biblical and Jewish tradition: God is the one who "casts down nations before himself and overthrows kings" (Isa 41:2). To him belongs "the earth and all that is in it, the world and all who live in it" (Ps 24:1). Everything belongs to God-heaven and earth, all people, and of course, also all empires and all emperors. Thus, the sense of the idle text also becomes clear."[30]

This being the case, the connecting word καί (relating the two "debts") is not mere copulative conjunction but should rather be translated as "also", thus suggesting that what follows is a much higher and perennial truth in relation to what has already been spoken. Therefore, Jesus' response absolves Him of "the charge of disloyalty to Rome without actually claiming loyalty, [without offering a concrete solution], since it neither defines *the things that are Caesar's nor the things that are God's*, nor does it consider the circumstances in which they collide. Even if a coin with Caesar's image was in some sense Caesar's, the narrative teaches that the whole world is God's... Perhaps the statement

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[27] Margaret Davies, *Matthew...*, 173.

[28] Craig S. Keener, *Comentariu cultural-istoric al Noului Testament...*, 111.

[29] Note that - in Jesus' words - there is no reference to the divine origin of imperial authority, as we find in Romans 13:1. The fact is not to be interpreted antagonistically but merely observed. "He simply means: since you already have the tax coin, pay the tax and do not ask such underhanded questions. Since Jesus was no Zealot, he would have agreed with his opponents that the tax coins owed the emperor are to be paid, but that is not what is decisive here. For this reason, he does not offer a theological rationale for the command to pay taxes; he merely calls attention to the *tax coin*." (Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 21-28...*, 66)

[30] Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 21-28...*, 66-67.

discourages open rebellion against Rome, sparked by a refusal to pay taxes. However, the teaching in the rest of the narrative encourages dedication to God even in martyrdom circumstances."[31]

Ulrich Luz[32] Is of the opinion that the pericope - in its stakes and emphases - is less important than the passage in Romans 13:1-7. In the Pauline text, the dogmatic and pastoral attitude is much more clearly defined, establishing to some extent the Christian's attitude towards the king. However, judged on the level of the Gospels, the text provides the Saviour's perspective on the matter, and this fact cannot be overlooked. As a brief review, it should also be noted that "primary exegesis emphasizes the fundamental character of obedience to God ["give to God what is God's"]. Discussions of the relationship with the state do not become important until the modern period. The text plays an important role in the Reformation tradition. For Reformed interpreters, in particular, submission to the state is drawn as naturally as possible from the Gospel text. He is of the opinion that the pericope - in its stakes and emphases - is less important than the passage in Romans 13:1-7. In the Pauline text, the dogmatic and pastoral attitude is much more clearly defined, establishing to some extent the Christian's attitude towards the king. However, judged on the level of the Gospels, the text provides the Saviour's perspective on the matter, and this fact cannot be overlooked. As a brief review, it should also be noted that "primary exegesis emphasizes the fundamental character of obedience to God ["give to God what is God's"]. Discussions of the relationship with the state do not become important until the modern period. The text plays an important role in the Reformation tradition. For Reformed interpreters, in particular, submission to the state is drawn as naturally as possible from the Gospel text."[33] This is how - depending on the era and the political configuration - the Saviour's statement received different emphases. What remains unchanged, however, is precisely the emphasis placed by Jesus - and later by the apostles - on the believer's dedication to God as a primary condition in relation to all his obligations to the secular power.

3. The problem of RESURRECTION (22,23-33)

This controversy takes place on the same day as the previous one, and its protagonists are the Sadducees.[34] The term Σαδδουκαιος (always plural in

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[31] Margaret Davies, *Matthew...*, 174.

[32] Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 21-28...*, 63.

[33] Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 21-28...*, 63.

[34] The situation is partly similar to the first controversy (21:23-27), where the presence of the Sadducees is decisive (except that, in this case, they are called "high priests", alluding - probably - to the ruling class of the Jewish priesthood).

the New Testament) indicates "a member of a politically influential Jewish party in Jerusalem. The Sadducees were a smaller group than the Pharisees (see 11:49), but often held control of important political and religious positions. Denial of the resurrection of the dead and acceptance of only the first five books of the Old Testament are important elements."[35] in terms of their profile.[36]

The periscope is divided into two equal fragments (the question - vv. 24-28; the answer - vv. 29-32), where "both the question and the answer contain quotations from Scripture. In the Sadducees' question, Scripture appears first and is the starting point for their cunning argument. In Jesus' answer, it comes at the end and forms the core of his conclusive answer. The theme of the controversy is given by the word "resurrection" (ἀνάστασις), which occurs four times (vv. 23, 28, 30-31)."[37] The Evangelist Matthew, in an editorial note, characterizes the Sadducees as "those who say there is no resurrection" (λέγοντες μὴ εἶναι ἀνάστασιν). This is the premise of the question he formulates, "Teacher, Moses said: If anyone dies childless, let his brother take the widow to wife and raise up offspring to his brother. So, there were seven brothers among us; and the first married and died, and had no offspring, and left his wife to his brother. Likewise, the second and the third, down to the seventh. After all of them the woman also died. At the resurrection, then, which of the seven will be the woman? For they all had her to wife" (vs. 24-28).

The species raised by the Sadducees "refers to the law of levirate marriage, a custom practiced in many cultures both in antiquity and today (see Deut 25:5). The custom conferred economic and social protection on widows in some Eastern societies for the protection of the family, where women could earn an adequate income. In Jesus' time and even afterwards, scholars studying the law continued to give various interpretations to this Old Testament principle, although the rabbinic rules were different in some respects from the Old Testament." Note the concern of Jewish theology with life after death, even though - somewhat paradoxically - the Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection of the dead.[38] It is known that "one of the subjects of constant contention between the Pharisees and the Sadducees was that the latter did not believe in a future

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[35] J. P. Louw şi E. A. Nida, *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament...*, 128.
[36] An eloquent compendium of Sadducee (and other Jewish religious parties) doctrine is: Anthony J. Saldarini, *Pharisees, Scribes and Sadducees in Palestinian Society* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2001).
[37] Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 21-28...*, 68.
[38] For contextual details on death, burial and resurrection in Judaism, see: A. P. Bender, "Beliefs, Rites and Customs of the Jews, Connected with Death, Burial and Morning", in *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, nr. 2, Vol. 6, 1884, pp. 317-347; M. T. Finney, "Afterlives of the Afterlife: The Development of Hell in its Jewish and Christian Contexts", in J. C. Exum and D. J. A. Clines (eds.), *Biblical Reception* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2013) 150-171.

resurrection of the dead."[39] In this questioning of the Saviour, we have, rather, the moving of the Pharisee-Saducee dispute into a neutral space, it being clear that Jesus belonged to neither of these categories. For a moment, in an entirely spontaneous way, the Saviour becomes a kind of judge in a sensitive issue that at that time dated back several centuries.

Reduced to its essence, the Sadducees' dilemma was: *"In the event of the resurrection, is the civil and social order of this world preserved in the next world? And if it is preserved, how is this order restored under the conditions of successive marriage in the case of a long-lived widow?"*. Ancient Judaism confirms that, in interpreting the law, "scholars often debated hypothetical situations. But later rabbinic literature is also full of situations in which questions posed by pagans, apostates or those deemed heretics, such as Sadducees, are mocked."[40]

The doctrine that in the next world we will be like angels, asexual and without the possibility of marriage, was somewhat old at the time of the controversy. "Such views are expressed in Jewish apocalyptic literature from the 2nd century BC to the 2nd century AD. The resurrected righteous are depicted living in peace forever, their ordinary mortal lives transformed into immortal lives of glory. Two images are commonly used to express this transformation. Daniel 12:2, as well as other texts influenced by this book, compares the eternal life of the righteous to that of the stars: "And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall arise, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt." The stars were corporeal creations believed to continue forever, and as supposed sources of light, they provided an effective image of the resurrected righteous. But other apocalyptic works compare the lives of the resurrected to those of angels. Angels are described as somewhat as human beings, but more glorious (e.g., Dan 3:25; 8:15-17; 9:21; 10:5-6, 12-21), and as created beings who exist eternally, they did not need to give birth to children (e.g, 1Enoh 62,13-16; 2Bar 51,5)."[41]

After rebuking them ("you go astray not knowing neither the Scriptures nor the power of God"), the Saviour states that, at the resurrection, no one marries, but men "are as the angels of God in heaven" (ἀλλ' ὡς ἄγγελοι ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ εἰσιν). If an angel (ἄγγελος) is "a supernatural being who listens to and serves as a messenger of a supernatural entity"[42], then it means that the glorified bodies of the resurrected will enter the same register of existence. This new and perfected life will be consummated in "heaven" (οὐρανός), which indicates "the supernatural dwelling place of God and other heavenly beings. The word also contains another spatial component denoting that which is above, but the notion

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[39] Craig S. Keener, *Comentariu cultural-istoric al Noului Testament...*, 183.

[40] Craig S. Keener, *Comentariu cultural-istoric al Noului Testament...*, 113.

[41] Margaret Davies, *Matthew...*, 176-177.

[42] J. P. Louw şi E. A. Nida, *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament...*, 143.

of dwelling is more significant than location above the earth."[43] By what he says, Jesus does nothing but "demonstrate the absurdity of the Sadducees' question. [The Saviour starts from the premise] that they not only share the belief in a future resurrection, but also, like Him, are of the opinion that the resurrection life is more than a mere continuation of earthly life." [44] Once this similarity is established, Jesus reaffirms the resurrection of the dead with a quotation from the Old Testament: 'I am the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob' - an excerpt from Exodus 3:6. Here reference is made to 'one of Israel's fundamental beliefs. It is the foundation of God's covenant with the people of Israel; for this reason, God is addressed as such precisely in prayer. Particularly impressive here were the eighteen blessings, the first berakah of which is addressed to *'Yahweh, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob'*, and the second *berakah* praises Yahweh, 'who makes the dead alive. The God of the patriarchs is for Israel the God of the covenant who accompanies them and will redeem them."[45] Therefore, the fact that God would raise the dead was - for the Jew - a belief consistent with his prayers and doctrines.

Jesus' final statement is most eloquent: "He is not the God of the dead, but of the living" (v. 32f). There are two hermeneutical perspectives on this phrase. It can be seen as a premise (possibility I) or as a conclusion (possibility II): "In the case of the first possibility, the evidence is logically impeccable: God is (a), as Exodus 3:6 says, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (v. 32a). But because he is (b) the God of the living and not of the dead (v. 32b), the patriarchs must be alive. That is, they must have risen from the dead. In the case of the second possibility, the whole stakes fall on Exodus 3:6. In this case, one has to consider the Jewish belief of the time, namely that the patriarchs of Israel are presently living with God and interceding for the people."[46] So, regardless of the perspective taken, it is clear that Jesus links the life of the patriarchs in the presence of God to the

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[43] J. P. Louw şi E. A. Nida, *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament...*, 2.
[44] Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 21-28...*, 70-71. "Belief in the future resurrection of the dead is documented as early as the 2nd century BC and was not just a basic belief of the Pharisees who, according to Josephus Flavius, were popular among the common people; it was already part of the common belief system... However, the Jewish texts clearly offer a different point of view: in the next world there is no eating and drinking, no giving birth and multiplying, no trade or traffic, no envy, enmity, or conflict. Instead, the righteous sit there with crowns on their heads and bask in the radiance of God's glory. The trend underlying the opposite view is clear. Jesus must thus be the initiator of a deeper, more spiritual understanding of the resurrection that contradicts the common Jewish views. This new understanding will then find its logical development in the Pauline understanding of the resurrection as a new creation and the "spiritual body" of 1Cor 15,35-44. While it is true that the resurrection understanding of Matthew 22,23-33 and that of 1Corinthians 15 are closely related, both are rooted in a widespread Jewish belief." (*idem*)
[45] Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 21-28...*, 72.
[46] Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 21-28...*, 72-73.

possibility and chance of the resurrection of the dead. Although again, the life of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the full presence of God is not explicitly stated, it can be implied by association with current Jewish belief. The link between the acceptance of the resurrection of the dead and the "power of God" to which Jesus referred is also possible. Not only were the Scriptures to be known, but the heart was to be involved in the act and outcome of faith.

Here we have yet another plea for resurrection built on the intrinsic character of God. As it is stated, "God would not claim to be the God of the departed; on the contrary, His faithfulness to the covenant means that if He is their God after death, death does not have the last word. Other ancient writers used similar arguments to demonstrate that the patriarchs remain alive. One of the most common Jewish prayers of the period declares God's faithfulness to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as a living reality for contemporaries."

The narrator's conclusion ignores the Sadducees. Their reaction is not mentioned, but rather that of the "multitudes" (ὄχλος). The simple people, without wealth and training, were amazed by His teaching, while the Jewish leaders remain insensitive and refractory. For "astonishment" we have the Greek ἐκπλήσσω, which means "to be so astonished as practically to be overwhelmed."[47] For "teaching" we have the word διδαχή, which refers to the content (rather than the style) of what is transmitted. This valorization of the multitudes (in relation to the Sadducees) is nothing more than a final irony of the narrator, who wishes to inform us of the much more open character of the simple and redeeming compared to the opaque attitude of the arrogant and refractory.

4. The problem of LAW (22,34-40)

The context of this controversy is determined by the previous episode. The fragment is rhetorically stable, with an introduction (v. 34) and a conclusion (v. 40). The introduction highlights the competitive relationship between the two religious parties. Thus, "when the Pharisees heard that he had shut the mouths of the Sadducees, they gathered together" (v. 34). Note here the two verbs: "to shut (his mouth)" and "to gather (together)". For the first, we have φιμόω, which means "to silence someone"; and for the second we have συνάγω, which means "to make people (and others) gather together." This Pharisaic gathering is important, especially in the context of the Saviour's last days. All the evangelists point out that as he was on his way to crucifixion, the Son of God was spending more and more time in the company of the Jewish leaders.

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[47] J. P. Louw şi E. A. Nida, *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament...*, 311.

The text suggests that among the Pharisees, a certain "teacher of the law" - for whom the noun νομικός is used[48] – they call on Jesus. In an editorial note, the evangelist is careful to inform us that he, "tempting Jesus, asked him". For "to tempt" we have the Greek πειράζω, which means "to obtain information to be used against a person, trying to cause someone to make a mistake." And so, approaching the Saviour, he asks, "Teacher, which commandment is greater in the Law?" (v. 36). We must know that the question was by no means exotic. Jewish discussions about the greatest commandment were very popular at the time. In fact, Jesus' contemporaries were looking for the one "that could best sum up the whole Law, [among the variants being] honouring one's parents and loving one's neighbour as oneself."[49]

The Pharisee calls Jesus, "Teacher!" (διδάσκαλος), meaning "a person who gives instruction."[50] Only the Pharisees - or at least some of them - use this term when in dialogue with Jesus. Moreover, "for Matthew, Jesus the Messiah reveals the will of God. In his public ministry, Jesus the Messiah teaches others about God's will and reveals it, but the act of teaching and the act of preaching are largely ignored or rejected. Although the terms have fallen out of favour with Matthew Gospel scholars, teacher and preacher are important categories for understanding Jesus in Matthew."[51]

The actual question was, "Which commandment is greater in the law?" (v. 36). Although seemingly innocuous on the surface, the substance is nevertheless malicious (as in a previous dispute - v. 15). The trouble concerning the great commandment is to be sought in the rabbis' custom of distinguishing between "small" (meaning "light") and "great" (meaning "heavy") commandments. Thus, "on the one hand, they divided the commandments and prohibitions of the Torah into 248 commandments and 365 prohibitions but, to emphasize the seriousness of God's demands, they emphasized that even the "small" commandments were of supreme importance. On the other hand, they had to raise the question of the basic principles of the Torah. They thus had to specify

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[48] A rare term in the New Testament for an expert in Mosaic law. In the case of this occupancy, it should be noted that some manuscripts do not use it, vaguely indicating that the speaker is one of the Pharisees present.

[49] Craig S. Keener, *Comentariu cultural-istoric al Noului Testament...*, 114.

[50] J. P. Louw şi E. A. Nida, *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament...*, 415. The respect enjoyed by a "teacher" is also indirectly emphasized in another passage in the Gospel of Matthew, where we read that "there is no disciple above his teacher" (10,24).

[51] S. McKnight, „Evanghelia după Matei", in Daniel G. Reid (ed.), *Dicţionarul Noului Testament...*, 955. "Scholars, in their tendency to go beyond the category of "teacher" to describe Jesus, have avoided an important category. What is certain is that in Matthew Jesus is described as a teacher by those who are not disciples (8:19; 9:11; 12:38; 17:24; 19:16; 22:16; 22:24), while His disciples never call Him "teacher"." (*idem*)

which commandments cannot be broken even when one faces martyrdom... thus showing what is decisive in the Torah."[52]

Jesus is therefore exposed to a test on a subject intensely debated in Jewish antiquity. And what follows, in response, is nothing more than a retelling of the commandment in Deut 6:5 ("You shall love the Lord your God from your heart, with all your soul and with all your strength"), where the verb "to love" (in its Hebrew sense) has a very wide spectrum of meanings: from sexual love to family love, to friendship, to various political or Godly loyalties. In the words of Jesus, the great commandment is: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And the second, like this: Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. These two commandments contain the whole law and the prophets" (vv. 37-40).

Love is to be directed, first, to "the Lord God" (κύριον τὸν θεόν). Putting together κύριος ("a title for one who exercises supernatural authority over all reality."[53]) with θεός ("supernatural being perceived as the creator and sustainer of the universe."[54]), refers to a certain solemnity of the name and the impact it - as an expression of being - has. Towards God, the believer must show constant love, for which we have the verb ἀγαπάω, which means "to have love for someone or something, based on sincere appreciation and utmost consideration." "In the Jewish interpretation of Deut 6:5 the love of God is expressed first in deeds of obedience, of piety, of faithfulness to the Torah. To love God is to give one's life for his commandments."[55]

The elements involved in loving God are - in Jesus' words - three: 'the heart' (καρδία: "a figurative extension of the meaning of καρδία' heart', which does not appear in the NT in a literal sense; the causal source of a person's psychological life in its various aspects, but with special emphasis on thoughts."[56]), "soul" (ψυχή: "the essence of life in terms of thought, will and feeling; the inner self, mind, thoughts, feelings, heart, being"[57]) and "the mind" (διάνοια: "the psychological faculty of understanding, reasoning, thinking, and deciding; mind."[58]). These three component parts - heart, soul, mind - essentially describe the whole human being. Jesus wants to show that the love of his disciple must be so deep that it springs from the deepest realities of being.[59]

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[52] Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 21-28...*, 81-82.

[53] J. P. Louw şi E. A. Nida, *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament...*, 138.

[54] J. P. Louw şi E. A. Nida, *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament...*, 136.

[55] Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 21-28...*, 82.

[56] J. P. Louw şi E. A. Nida, *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament...*, 320.

[57] J. P. Louw şi E. A. Nida, *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament...*, 320.

[58] J. P. Louw şi E. A. Nida, *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament...*, 323-324.

[59] Note the replacement of the notion of "power" ("with all you might") in Deuteronomy with that of "mind" ("with all your mind") in Matthew. The Evangelist - most likely - made this change

In the same way and with the same intensity, man must also love his neighbour as himself. This time Jesus quotes from Lev 19:18, where the Lord's command reads: "Thou shalt not avenge thyself with thine own hand, nor bear hatred toward the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." "The context of Lev 19:11-18 is important. It deals with God's fundamental ethical commandments toward the neighbour, also toward one who is socially weak or an opponent in a court of law. Standing parallel to "to love" are not to steal, to deal falsely, to lie, to swear falsely, to defraud, to rob, to curse, to render an unjust judgment, to slander, to hate. Lev 19:34 adds not to violate the rights of the alien. The history of Jewish interpretation points in the same direction. "Love" means practical behaviour and solidarity according to the commandments that God has given the community of Israel."[60] And so, in defiance of the Jewish nationalist understanding, Matthew extends the notion of "near" to every human being, regardless of ethnicity.[61] So we have good reason to believe that "in the tradition of Jesus, the balance between love of self and love of neighbour is disturbed."[62] Restoring this balance was very important, and the Saviour does just that.

From a hermeneutical point of view, "applying Jewish techniques of interpretation, Jesus links the two commandments (Deut 6:5; Lev 19:18) based on a common key phrase in Hebrew: *And you shall love*. Jewish ethics repeatedly emphasized love for God and neighbour"[63], even if there were sometimes contradictions or inconsistencies. Naturally, in a natural logic, the Jews knew in their heart of hearts that love of neighbour confirms the love of God. Being increasingly selective about loving the other was a weakness that needed to be addressed, thus arriving at a holistic understanding of love: God and the other.

Jesus' conclusion is eloquent: "in these two commandments are all the law and the prophets" (v. 40). The two sections - the Law and the Prophets - made up the Holy Scriptures of the Jews in the first century. The writings (the poetic and wisdom books) would be added later, when the Jews - under pressure from Christian adventurism - completed their own canon. The Great Commandment - which sums up the two commandments, in fact - is nothing other than the perfect balance between the vertical and the horizontal of life.

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because of an intellectual impulse added to the love of God, very common in the collective mind of Hellenized Jews.

[60] Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 21-28...*, 83.

[61] Jesus puts the question of love of neighbour in the same terms as in other earlier passages: Mat 5,43-48; 19,19.

[62] Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 21-28...*, 84.

[63] Craig S. Keener, *Comentariu cultural-istoric al Noului Testament...*, 114. "Other teachers also used these commandments as summaries of the Law, which is also possible because of the contexts in which they appear in the Old Testament." (*idem*)

That's why "Jesus' answer is just the kind of answer with which no Jew would have found fault, and, in the narrative, no further question is put to Him."[64]

5. The problem of MESSIANITY (22,41-46)

One of the structural perspectives on the Gospel of Matthew is biographical-theological. "This model, first developed by N. B. Stonehouse and then improved by E. Krentz, has been fully worked out by J. D. Kingsbury and D. R. Bauer. In essence, the model recognizes the essential biographical dimension of the Matthew Gospel drama, but sees it subordinated to a general theological program."[65] The theological program mentioned refers to the messiahship of Jesus, which can be seen as the red thread of the whole Gospel. Thus, the section of Matthew 1:1-4:16 describes the person of the Messiah; Matthew 4:17-16:20 describes the proclamation of the Messiah; and Matthew 16:21-28,20 describes the suffering, death, and resurrection of the Messiah. "Jesus's identity as "the Son of David" and God's "Messiah" within the Gospel of Matthew is indisputable. Whereas Mark has three references to Jesus as the "Son of David" (Mark 10:47, 48; 12:35), Matthew includes nine (Matt 1:1; 9:27; 12:23; 15:22; 20:30, 31; 21:9, 15; 22:42). Peter's confession that Jesus is "the Messiah, the Son of the Living God" is met with Jesus's affirmation of the confession as revealed by the Father from heaven (16:13–17). Jesus is referred to as "King of the Jews" and receives obeisance from foreign dignitaries even as a child (2:1–12). Further, Matthew's opening genealogy redounds with echoes of Davidic kingship as it begins with the words: "the record of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham" (1:1). The Davidic messianic aspect of Jesus's identity is highlighted in the way Matthew structures his genealogy, neatly moving in three periods of fourteen generations—from Abraham to "King David" (1:2–6a), from David and the period of the kings to the Babylonian exile (1:6b–11), and from the Babylonian exile to the birth of Jesus "who is called the Messiah" (1:12–16; cf. 1:16b)."[66]

If the Gospel itself revolves around the messiahship of Jesus, it is to be expected that one of the controversies will remain within the same thematic perimeter. Only this time, the Savior initiates the dialogue while the Pharisees are gathered. The question was, "What do you think of Christ? Whose Son is he?". To which the Pharisees replied, without hesitation, "David's!" (v. 42). It is only at this point, in perfect rhetoric, that the Saviour states the whole point:

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[64] Margaret Davies, *Matthew*..., 177-178.

[65] S. McKnight, „Evanghelia după Matei", in Daniel G. Reid (ed.), *Dicționarul Noului Testament*..., 950.

[66] Joshua W. Jipp, *The Messianic Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2020) 33.

"How then does David, in spirit, call him Lord?". This question rests on the messiahship of Psalm 2, one of the texts with a Christological impact in the Old Testament. Jesus therefore concludes, "If David therefore calls him Lord, how is he, his son?" (v. 45).

For the phrase "as it seems to you", we have the Greek δοκέω, which refers to "to regard something as presumably true, but without particular certainty."[67] Jesus is asking the Pharisees for an opinion. By the way the question is put, the Saviour does not insinuate any conviction in his interlocutors, but rather initiates a calm and friendly dialogue. For the noun "son" ("Whose Son is [the Christ]?") we have the Greek υἱός, which refers to "a non-immediate male descendant (possibly involving a gap of several generations)." It is the descendant we are talking about, not the direct son of anyone, which poses no difficulty for the questioners. The Messiah has always been perceived as the descendant of David, who will act in the spirit of this great and unrepeatable king of Israel.[68]

Although Christ/One is the royal descendant of David (Is 9:7; 11:1; Ps 2), "people perceive sons as subordinates, a perspective that does not fit Jesus. The one who would reign in the Kingdom of God was David's "Lord", not just his descendant; he would thus be greater than the risen David." [69] It is Jesus' messiahship that makes Him different from any ordinary lineage. If on the human level, in each generational succession, descendants are better or worse, more capable, or less capable, as far as the Son of God is concerned things are quite different, even unprecedented. He is descended from David, but he is - ontologically speaking - greater than David, however important the Davidic dynasty may have been for Jewish history.

His interlocutors had to understand that "Jesus is understood to be the Christ, and the messianic descendant of David (1.1–2.12; 9.27; 12.23; 15.22; 20.30-31; 21.9,15), yet Jesus' humility made him a better messianic agent of God than David was. Hence it was appropriate for David to call Jesus, the Christ, his successor, 'lord'."[70] As the biblical text suggests, "one of the Pharisees were able to respond to Jesus's question. Nor from that time on did anyone dare to ask

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[67] J. P. Louw şi E. A. Nida, *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament...*, 368.
[68] For details on the notion of messiahship, see: Sunghoo Choi, *The Messianic Kingship of Jesus. A Study of Christology and Redemptive History in Matthew's Gospel with Special Reference to the Royal-Enthronement Psalms* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2011); Larry W. Cruch, *Messianic Psalms* (Christian Faith Publishing, 2021); David Rudolph, Joel Willitts, *Introduction to Messianic Judaism. Its Ecclesial Context and Biblical Foundation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 2013); Kevin S. Chen, *The Messianic Vision of the Pentateuch* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2019); Ruben A. Bühner, *Messianic Hight Christology. New Testament Variants of Second Temple Judaism* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2021); Michael L. Morgan, Steven Weitzman (eds.), *Rethinking the Messianic Idea in Judaism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015).
[69] Craig S. Keener, *Comentariu cultural-istoric al Noului Testament...*, 114.
[70] Margaret Davies, *Matthew...*, 178.

him more questions. The attempt to undermine Jesus's authority as a teacher by asking questions designed to entrap him or to show that he lacks legitimacy has been a failure. Those who fear him will now only intensify their conspiracy to destroy him. Jesus, however, must do what he has been sent to do, which means that he cannot avoid saying and doing what those who plot against him will use to have him killed."[71]

Broadly speaking, "Matthew presents Jesus as God's royal Son who enacts God's rule and saves his people by means of: (1) delivering his people from their sins; (2) authoritatively teaching, interpreting, and obeying God's Torah; (3) enacting merciful and compassionate royal justice through his deeds; and (4) inviting and enabling his disciples to share in his messianic rule and pattern of life. Jesus is the Christ who, as God's final Davidic king, enacts God's kingdom by saving his people from their sins; rightly teaching, interpreting, and embodying God's law; and enacting mercy, compassion, and justice for God's people."[72]

Matthew's editorial note after recounting the five controversies is illuminating. We learn that "no one was able to answer him a word, nor did anyone dare to question him from that day on" (v. 46). We understand that this was the last day of the confrontations, the circumstance in which the Saviour silenced his adversaries. They could neither answer (ἀποκρίνομαι) nor ask (ἐπερωτάω). Their silence betrayed their weakness. Though their hearts remained hardened, though they would still question Jesus, they could not. The risk to themselves was too great since they had been publicly defeated by the Saviour's wise and authoritative answers.

Conclusion

Unlike the other gospels, Matthew emphasizes in a special way the polemical character of Jesus' final service. This evangelist, "carefully edits his source and makes clear that the issue is not whether the Torah is valid but how it is to be correctly interpreted. There is little doubt that we see here a current halakhic dispute between the pharisaic understanding of the law and the Scriptures and the alternative exegesis of Matthew's community which it traced back to Jesus himself. Each of the opposing in situations therefore has its own authoritative tradition in terms of law observance. It seems clear in view of its prominence in the Gospel that the issue of the Torah and its correct interpretation was one of the contributing factors to the eventual separation of the Matthean community from the Jewish parent body."[73]

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[71] Stanley Hauerwas, *Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2006) 194.

[72] Joshua W. Jipp, *The Messianic Theology*..., 34.

[73] David C. Sim, *Apocalyptic Eschatology in the Gospel of Matthew* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 190-191.

A comparison between the episode of the Master in the Temple astonishing the teachers of the Law (Luke 2:46-50) and the hypostases just discussed may be illustrative. Albrecht Dürer's famous painting *Jesus among the Doctors* (1506, oil on wood, 64.3 x 80.3 cm, Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum, Madrid) shows Jesus as a teenager (as he would be shown at that age), surrounded by the elders of the people. This encounter "takes on the character of a dramatic intrusion. The artist himself, who painted this picture during a stay in Venice, declares in a letter to a German friend, dated 23 September 1506, that he has made "a picture such as he has never made before". What is new about it? First, as several important studies have shown, the Gospel narrative is drastically purged in the name of an eminently pictorial mise-en-scène... Neither Mary nor Joseph, says the Gospel, understood that Jesus was not really an intruder in the Temple, for he was, so to speak, "at home". By his presence and his words, he proclaims his identity and reverses the intrusive relationship. Suddenly, it is the guardians of the Temple who become the Other. Dürer thus places his young and apollonian Jesus at the centre of the composition and relegates the "doctors" to the periphery. The Son of God is calm, focused, serene. The doctors are troubled, confused. Some protest, others doubt. Jesus is seen facing them, his head slightly bowed. The doctors are represented in various poses, mostly in three-quarter or profile. The Christic frontality seals identity, the Jewish profile - alterity."[74]

By contrast, the benevolent attitude of the time turns, at the end of three years of messianic activity, into open adversity. Then they were amazed by the wisdom of the "teenager", now they are outraged by Christ's words. Then the conversation was friendly and cordial, now it is heated and oppressive. It was not Jesus who had changed in the meantime, but the attitude of the Jewish upper class. As the evidence of his divinity grew, so did the resistance in their hearts. But by some providence, even adversity brought God's wisdom to light. These controversies, born of contempt and contestation, gave Jesus the opportunity for an unprecedented conceptual victory. Somewhat foreshadowing his Passion, the altercations with the leaders showed us an almost unknown face of Christ, that of a fighter for truth and the interests of the heavenly kingdom.

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[74] Victor Ieronim Stoichiță, *Imaginea celuilalt. Negri, evrei, musulmani și țigani în zorii epocii moderne: 1453-1800* (București: Humanitas, 2017) 23-25.

II. HISTORICAL THEOLOGY

THE POLITICAL ROLE OF THE ORTHODOX CLERGY IN THE UNION OF THE ROMANIAN PRINCIPALITIES (1859)

DRAGOŞ BOICU[1]

ABSTRACT. The union of the Romanian Principalities was a decisive moment in the history and evolution of the modern Romanian state, but its realization cannot be separated from the actions of the bishops and clergy, who were co-opted in the electoral process from the very beginning. The activity of the clergy was not strictly limited to the bureaucratic management of the elections but revealed a set of political beliefs, actively supporting the idea of Romanians' national unity. This paper aims to insist on the political partisanship of the clergy respectively, on the immediate consequences of their involvement in political life.

Keywords: Romanian Orthodox Church, Union of the Romanian Principalities, State and Church, Sofronie Miclescu, Nifon Rusăilă, Alexandru Ioan Cuza

According to the Canonical Tradition of the Orthodox Church, the clergy are categorically prohibited from being part of a political party under punishment of defrocking because pastoral care transcends politics: "Politics means a descent into the immanent, into narrow interests and temporary visions. Instead, pastoral care means the exact opposite of politics, that is, the spiritual ascent to the eternal, the renunciation of self and one's own interests, always bearing in mind and heart an eschatological vision of the world."[2].

The incompatibility between the priestly mission and the "worldly cares" was ascertained from the early age of the Church and was incriminated by canons (6, 81, 83 of the Apostolic Canons., 3 and 7 of the IVth Ecumenical Council, 10 of

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[2] Irimie Marga, *Drept Canonic* (Sibiu: Ed. Universităţii "Lucian Blaga", 2009), 2.

the VIIth Ecumenical Council, 11 of Constantinople 861). But at the same time, the concept of Byzantine symphony legitimized the principle of harmonizing the action of the Church with the political interests of the Empire. Moreover, the Church spiritually justifies and ideologically legitimizes the activity of the state[3]. The legacy of the Byzantine vision of close collaboration between the autocrat and the patriarch of Constantinople has survived in a form that has undergone no significant changes in all the medieval states of south-eastern and eastern Europe where there were Orthodox Churches. The two great disadvantages of this symphonic relationship have survived and have been perpetuated: the abuse or temptation of politics to impose on the Church a certain vision, whose ethical consequences were in contradiction with the teaching of the Gospel, but also the desire of certain clergy to intervene in political life, interfering in support of one political actor to the detriment of another.

The Romanian principalities were no exception to this perpetuation of the Byzantine paradigm, and the fragility of the relationship between Orthodoxy and politics became even more obvious during the Phanariot era (1711/1716-1821) when the Ottoman Empire imposed Greek aristocrats – from Istanbul's Fanar district – to rule Moldavia and Walachia. But the power vacuum emerging against the background of frequent changes of Phanariot rulers led to the bishops taking on an implicit political role, because they were constant presences in the life of the principalities and guaranteed a form of stability and continuity through their spiritual authority. Thus, the bishops and the clergy of the Orthodox Church ended up having a decisive contribution to the political destiny of Moldavia and Walachia.

An extremely relevant episode for understanding the political impact the Orthodox Church had in Romania through its clergy is represented by the Union of the Romanian Principalities of Moldavia and Walachia in 1859.

Context

The idea of uniting the Romanians in a single state had been taking shape since the end of the 16th century, but in the 19th century it was outlined more and more clearly, such as during the uprising of Tudor Vladimirescu (1821) and during the Revolution of 1848, when the 1848 European revolutions ignited Romanian national movements in Walachia and Moldavia – which were (with some interruptions) under the suzerainty of the Porte since the 15th century.

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[3] A contemporary eloquent example is the position of Russian Patriarch Kirill on the conflict in Ukraine.

Fearful that the revolution might spread into Russia, the Tsar invaded Moldavia and pressured the Porte to crush the rebels in Bucharest (Walachia). Dissatisfied with Turkey's weak resolve, Russia invaded Walachia as well. Russia withdrew from Walachia and Moldavia in 1851 but returned yet again in the summer of 1853, thus precipitating the Crimean War (1853-1856). In 1854 Franz Joseph and the sultan forced Tsar Nicholas I to withdraw his troops from the principalities, and imperial and Ottoman soldiers soon occupied these territories. Russia's defeat in Crimea forced the Tsar to seek peace, ratified in 1856 by the Treaty of Paris, which abolished the Russian protectorate and replaced it with a joint European guarantee.

In 1856 the active campaign for the union of Walachia and Moldavia began. The movement had the support of France because many Romanian revolutionaries took refuge there after 1848 and lobbied Napoleon III to press for unification; the Habsburg Empire, the British Empire, and the Ottomans, however, opposed the unification efforts, while Russia opted to let the Romanians decide.

A decisive contribution to the achievement of this political goal was made by the Orthodox Church of the two Principalities, because of the long-standing intertwined relations between state and Church. The fortunes of the Church had been closely bound to the political destiny of the two principalities ever since their founding. The bishops did not conceive of the state as separate from the Church and did not engage the prince and boyars in a contest for supremacy[4].

The Church of Moldavia had the status of a metropolis (with two suffragan bishoprics: Roman and Huşi), being led by Metropolitan Sofronie Miclescu (1851-1861). The Walchian church was also organized as a metropolis (with three suffragan bishoprics: Râmnic, Argeş and Buzău) and was led by Metropolitan Nifon Rusăilă (1849-1875). A special place in the structure of the Romanian Orthodox Church belonged to the dedicated monasteries in Romania (Romanian monasteries dedicated to the Holy Places of the East), so called because the main part of their incomes was set aside for good works in the East, and thus contributed crucial resources to the survival of Orthodoxy under Muslim rule.

The Orthodox Church and the support of the Union of Principalities

With the 1856 Peace Treaty of Paris, the seven-year terms of the two rulers [Grigore Ghica in Moldavia, and Barbu Ştirbei in Walachia] expired, and the Porte appointed two kaymakams (deputies): Teodor Balş in Moldavia, and Alexandru Ghica in Walachia. Their mission was to prevent or at least to delay

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[4] Keith Hitchins, *Românii. 1774-1866*, (Bucureşti: Humanitas, 2013), 67.

as much as possible the union of the Romanian principalities. On the other hand, both the Moldavian Orthodox Church and the Walachian Church joined the unionist parties and supported their actions.

As Alexandru Ghica (1856-1858) allowed the Romanian revolutionaries to return from exile and sided with the Unionists, the efforts of Walachian clergy were harmoniously combined with the government's support, engaging in the elections for Ad hoc Divans.

Following the Conference of European Powers reunited in Constantinople on January 13, 1857, it was decided to convene these Ad hoc Divans; these were consultative assemblies whose purpose was to express the will of the people regarding the final organization of the principalities. The Ad hoc Divans were made up of representatives of the Church, of the great nobility, of the bourgeoisie, as well as of delegates of the townspeople and peasants.

The circular and pastoral letters addressed by the bishops to the priests gave testimony of the instructions meant to contribute to the formation of a general opinion favourable to the Union. Thus Calinic, the bishop of Râmnicu Vâlcea (1850-1868), addressed on April 15/27, 1857, an exhortation to his priests according to which "one of the duties that behoves our position in such a serious circumstance, is to raise prayers to the Heavenly Father for the unification of the Romanians, in a single will and thought" [5]. In a letter dated November 2, 1857, addressed to the Ad hoc Divan, the same bishop stressed that

> "so far I have not ceased to pray to the merciful God, both myself and all the churches in our diocese, to perform this mercy of His, for the unification of Moldo-Romania into a single state and under a single government, as contained in the four points of the national program, as brothers united in the faith in God, orthodox, sons of the Eastern Church, of the same language and of the same nation"[6].

In his turn, Bishop Filotei of Buzău (1850-1860) sent a circular letter in January 1857 urging the clergy to pray for the unification and brotherhood of Romanians in "one will and a thought to elect their deputies worthy of their trust, to support and demand the rights and life of their homeland"[7].

However, Metropolitan Nifon Rusăilă turned out to be a bit more reserved. He initially hesitated to give his support to the unionists, and even

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[5] Ene Branişte, "Din activitatea Sfântului Calinic Cernicanul, episcopul Râmnicului-Noului Severin (1850-1868) în perioada Unirii Principatelor", *Glasul Bisericii* 27:11-12 (1968): 1161.

[6] Ene Branişte, "Din activitatea Sfântului Calinic Cernicanul", 1162.

[7] Gabriel Cocora, "Episcopul Filotei al Buzăului, luptător pentru unirea Ţărilor Române", *BOR* 77:1 (1959):44.

delimited himself from them in the first phase of their actions[8]. However, from 1857 onwards he joined the other bishops, composing a series of prayers and special requests that were to be included in the litany and the divine service officiated throughout Walachia[9]. As chairman of the Ad hoc Divan, he delivered a speech at the opening of the proceedings designed to persuade even the most sceptical about embracing the idea of unified principalities. He said:

> "Look, gentlemen, and you will see that we are all Romanians, the same feelings bind us, and the same blood unites us. We all have a homeland before us, let us have a single thought and a single purpose. Let us be inspired by the same love and the same holy faith, so that the Heaven may bless our efforts [...]. Unite in the same fraternal and national thought, with that strength of soul that I believe you have make it so that the interest of all may take the place of particular interests and with a clear mind, with a steadfast faith in the Almighty, with courage and peace the foundations of the great and glorious edifice of the Romanian people" [10].

Following the consultations within these public assemblies, four essential points were established: 1. The authority and neutrality of the principalities; 2. Their union in a single state under the name of Romania; 3. A foreign hereditary prince from a European dynasty whose descendants were to be raised in the country's religion; 4. Representative and constitutional government.

The political influence exerted on the people by Metropolitan Nifon, the suffragan bishops, and the clergy in general is highlighted by the request made by the new kaymakams on October 18, 1858: "The clergy, as people who according to the word of Holy Scripture, and according to their position in society, are to be the teachers and rulers of the people, are compelled to be in today's important circumstances with special regard to the duties of their calling, as spiritual fathers" [11].

Meanwhile in Moldavia the clergy were even more engaged in unionist actions, all the more so as the kaymakam Teodor Balş did everything he could to prevent Moldavia and Walachia from reaching an agreement in principle. He suppressed press freedom and instituted censorship so that unionist ideas could no longer be promoted, and he replaced Union supporters in central and local administration[12]. Therefore, it was natural for Teodor Balş to direct his

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[8] Corneliu Zăvoianu, "Mitropolitul Nifon al Ungrovlahiei şi Unirea Principatelor", in *Biserica Ortodoxă Română şi Unirea Prinicpatelor – Moment aniversar (1859-2009)* (Bucureşti: Cuvântul vieţii, 2009):70-71.

[9] Corneliu Zăvoianu, "Mitropolitul Nifon al Ungrovlahiei", 78-79.

[10] *Românul* 26 (1/13 oct 1857): 80-81.

[11] *Buletinul oficial* 85 (24 oct.1858): 370.

[12] Mircea Păcurariu, "Atitudinea slujitorilor Bisericii Ortodoxe Române faţă de actul Unirii Principatelor", *BOR* 85:1-2 (1967): 78-79.

attacks against the leaders of the Moldavian clergy who supported the Union of Principalities, a hostile attitude that manifested itself immediately after reading the firman convening Ad hoc Divans, which had to include bishops and representatives of the clergy.

Probably the most important unionist centre in Moldavia was located at the Socola monastery in Iași where the abbot and director of the Seminary established here was Filaret Scriban. Together with Neofit Scriban, his brother and teacher at the same Seminary, they led a real offensive to support the union between the two Romanian provinces. Neofit Scriban wrote a series of articles published until the establishment of censorship, such as the **Unirea și neunirea Principatelor Române [**The *Union and non-union of the Romanian Principalities*] (June 1856), **Foloasele Unirii Principatelor Române** [*The Benefits of the Union of Romanian Principalities*] (July 1856) in which he approached this political ideal in an extremely serious note: Moldavia's destiny is at the crossroads, and the options were to either embrace light (union) or death[13]. Published in the form of a brochure, the two extracts were printed in tens of thousands of copies and had a high impact on the awareness of the population on the issue of the union.

In the unionist propaganda, the Scriban brothers were supported by all the students of the Central Seminary, by the priests and deacons from the villages, by the "catechists" (Religion teachers) from the districts, who had studied at Socola and were trained as active promoters of the union[14].

Another apostle of the unification of the Romanians in the principalities was Archimandrite Melchisedec Ștefănescu, rector of the Seminary from Huși (1856-1861), future bishop of Ismail (1865-1879) and Roman (1879-1892). On June 29, 1856, he delivered an emotional speech entitled "Jertfă pentru unirea Principatelor" [Sacrifice for the Union of Principalities], in which he argued that "if for the Romanians in the principalities a new era has arrived, which calls them to 'Union', this is a proof that they are on the way of mankind's universal progress"[15].

However, among the main anti-unionists, besides the kaymakam Teodor Balș, there was also the Metropolitan of Moldavia, Sofronie Miclescu[16]. It seems that this attitude was motivated by the uncertainty regarding the fate of the Orthodox metropolis of Iași after the potential union. This happened due to the

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[13] D. Hrițcu, "Arhimandritul Neofit Scriban, fruntaș unionist și poet al Unirii", *MO* 36:1-2 (1984): 43-44.

[14] D. Hrițcu, "Arhimandritul Neofit Scriban", 45-46.

[15] Eftimie Luca, "Referiri ale episcopului Melchisedec la unirea și unitatea românilor", *MMS* 54:1-2 (1978), 9-12:664.

[16] Iustin Androne, "Câteva aspecte cu privire la Unirea Principatelor Române din 1859 – detalii inedite", https://episcopia-italiei.it/index.php/ro/comunicate/8144-cateva-aspecte-cu-privire-la-unirea-principatelor-romane-din-1859-detalii-inedite (22.03.2022).

anti-union influences which, to a certain extent, had come to convince him that a common legislation could demote the Metropolis of Moldavia to the rank of a simple diocese[17]. In the meeting with Victor Place, the French consul in Iași, the metropolitan made his concerns public, but in the end he was convinced that these fears were unfounded. From this moment Sofronie Miclescu became a fervent supporter of the Union of Principalities.

Due to the unionist attitude of Metropolitan Sofronie, a great dispute started between the political authorities and the representatives of the Church. The government and Bishop Meletie Istrati of Huși, a staunch supporter of the anti-union current, called on the metropolitan to sign a letter of thanks to the Sublime Porte for the appointment of Balș as kaymakam. In exchange for this gesture, Sofronie was promised that his nephew, Calinic Miclescu, abbot of the Slatina monastery, would be promoted to the rank of bishop of Roman[18]. The two, however, flatly refused and that is why the kaymakam's supporters started a furious campaign to denigrate Sofronie among the clergy with the idea of compromising him. Calinic Miclescu was removed from his position of abbot by the prefect of Fălticeni under the accusation that he disturbed the people with his unionist ideas[19].

As already mentioned, in January 1857 was issued the Sultan's firman by which it was decided to convene Ad-hoc Divans, both in Moldavia and in Walachia. First, elections had to be held to send deputies to these meetings. In order to force Sofronie Miclescu to exclude the unionists from the representatives at the consultative assemblies, on February 10, 1857, the kaymakam tried to remove from the metropolitan's jurisdiction the territories recently returned in 1856 (southern Bessarabia), invoking the canonical authority of Bishop Meletie Istrati. On February 12, the French consul Victor Place wrote to Count Walewski (the French Foreign Minister), informing him of the political interferences in the Moldovan Church, of the defamations brought to Sofronie and of the canonical situation of southern Bessarabia. Tensions eased after the unexpected death of Teodor Balș, on February 17 / March 1, 1857[20].

Nicolae Vogoride was appointed kaymakam in his place, another declared anti-unionist, who continued the pressures and denigration of Sofronie, initiated by his predecessor. He also carried on the fierce campaign against the realization of the Union of the two Romanian Provinces.

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[17] C.I. Ialomițeanu, *Nifon, mitropolitul Ungrovlahiei. Viața și activitatea sa* (București, 1896): 21-23.

[18] Nestor Vornicescu, "125 de ani de la Unirea Principatelor Române. Participarea mitropolitului Moldovei Sofronie Miclescu la înfăptuirea Unirii Principatelor Române – 1859", *BOR* 102: 1-2 (1984): 79-111

[19] Iustin Androne, "Câteva aspecte".

[20] Mircea Păcurariu, "Atitudinea slujitorilor", 78.

On March 20, 1857, Vogoride resumed the manoeuvers initiated by Balș and demanded that southern Bessarabia be placed under the canonical protection of the Huși Diocese. Sofronie Miclescu remained steadfast in his views and wrote a letter of protest, on March 22, in which he condemned with strong arguments the interference of politics in the internal life of the Church. On March 26, the Metropolitan Church of Moldavia issued the act of organizing the Consistory for the Church in southern Bessarabia, led by Archimandrite Filaret Scriban, who remained in this position until May 1857.

On the occasion of compiling the electoral lists, the political authority urgently asked Miclescu to exclude the Scriban brothers and the unionist clergy and encouraged the abbots of the dedicated monasteries not to participate in the vote. In the end Sofronie won the battle, all the abbots of the dedicated monasteries being on the electoral lists. Desperate, Vogoride dismissed Filaret Scriban from the position of director of the Socola Seminary and from the position of abbot of the homonymous monastery, but also as president of the church consistory for the three counties in southern Bessarabia.

In parallel with the domestic actions against Sofronie, the kaymakam took steps in Constantinople to accuse, defame and even dismiss him. Vogoride's campaign was supported by representatives of the Habsburgs, the British and the Ottoman Empire, so Austria's representative in Iasi, Gödel-Lannoy, in a letter to Vienna's foreign minister, said it was very important that the metropolitan not be part of the unionists and even that severe measures should be taken against him[21].

On April 19, 1857, Vogoride obtained the support of the ecumenical patriarch Cyril VII, who sent an epistle to Metropolitan Sofronie in which he spoke of unworthy conduct incompatible with the high ecclesiastical office he held. Consequently, the patriarch recommended that the Church of Moldavia support the local government and advised him to renounce this attitude, otherwise much more energetic measures would be taken. Sofronie responded at the end of April with a letter rejecting the accusations against him, showing a lot of tact and courage. However, the ecumenical patriarch ignored Sofronie's arguments and decided to remove him from his see. This did not happen due to the intervention of the representative of France in Constantinople (Édouard Antoine Thouvenel). Vogoride also raised the issue of the dismissal of the metropolitan in front of the government, without obtaining the support of the ministers, even dividing the anti-unionist party.

In this situation, the only option left for Vogoride was to falsify the elections for the Ad hoc Divan, hastening and setting their dates between July 7 and 10, 1857; furthermore, the electoral lists were drawn up arbitrarily, removing

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[21] Iustin Androne "Câteva aspecte".

many of the Union's supporters. Consequently, the clergy, discovering this deceit, boycotted the elections by not voting. Thus, out of 3263 priests from Moldavia, only 191 were registered on the lists, out of which only 16 voted[22]. Sofronie Miclescu also did not participate in the elections "which are not able to meet the purpose of the Treaty of Paris" and withdrew to Cucuteni, where he notified the European Commission in Bucharest of the illegalities and arbitrary procedures of the government. The ambassadors of France, Russia, Prussia, and Sardinia to Istanbul protested and severed diplomatic relations with the Ottoman Empire, which were resumed only after the Osborne Pact of August 9, 1857, between France and England. The Sublime Porte was forced to cancel the Moldavian elections and hold new elections in August-September 1857.

The Consul of Austria in Iaşi, Gödel Lannoy, noted that "the abbots of the monasteries and the priesthood chose under the influence of the Metropolitan the most notorious unionist deputies [...] in addition to all this, the Metropolitan arbitrarily made use of the Seminary of Socola, the monks of the monasteries and of this Seminary, and apart from these, the whole priesthood from Iaşi is influenced by him" [23].

The presence of elected clergy in the Ad hoc Divans of Moldavia and Walachia (September-December 1857) certainly had a favourable effect on making the Union of Principalities happen, as the metropolitans were the presidents of the consultative assemblies. On this occasion, a series of common demands were made regarding the authority and independence of the principalities, as well as their union in a single state under the name of Romania, under the leadership of a foreign prince, chosen from a ruling dynasty of Western Europe.

Despite the election results, an international conference in Paris (March 22-August 19 1858) reaffirmed the separation of Walachia and Moldavia under Ottoman sovereignty, but it allowed for a common coinage and uniform laws and titled the two states the "United Principalities", even though they were ruled by two distinct governors, two governments, and two deliberative assemblies.

The Unification of the Romanian Principalities

The Romanians themselves overcame the imposed separation in 1859 when the separate assemblies at Bucharest and Iasi unanimously elected the same man, Alexandru Ioan Cuza, governor of both principalities. A crucial role in this double election was once again played by the Orthodox clergy, led by the two metropolitans.

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[22] Mircea Păcurariu, "Atitudinea slujitorilor", 84.
[23] *Rapoartele consulatului Austriei din Iaşi (1856-1859)*, edit. Dan Berindei (Bucureşti, 1959): 208, 221.

Based on Article 49 of the Paris Convention (1858), the kaymakams of the Romanian principalities were each replaced by a "collective" of kaymakams. Thus, Nicolae Vogoride handed over the leadership of Moldavia to Anastasie Panu, Vasile Sturdza and Ştefan Catargiu[24], while in Walachia Alexandru Ghica was replaced by Ioan Manu, Emanoil Băleanu, Ioan Al. Filipescu. The role of these lieutenants was to ensure that the deadlines for drawing up the lists of those with the right to vote and the representatives eligible for the election of the new governor of each principality were met. It was also implied that they had to oversee the entire electoral process, which also involved managing the position of the Orthodox Church in the Principalities on this issue. But the way in which the role of the clergy in the two principalities was approached was quite different.

In Moldavia, on December 10, 1858, Panu and Sturdza asked Metropolitan Sofronie Miclescu to release the "voters' minds" from the "vows with which they could be burdened by cunning party conspiracies and to instil in them the redeeming feelings of impartiality and duty to the motherland". These prayers for being released were to be read in all churches in Moldavia on December 14, 16, 17 and 18 in the presence of local authorities and voters, who thus became free from the vows "with which they would have been bound to a party or another" [25].

In Walachia, the group of kaymakams warned Metropolitan Nifon on October 18, 1858, to take the necessary measures to weigh the enthusiasm of the clergy who had come under

> "deceptive entanglements and not to be preachers of cunning conspiracies; but in the contact in which they will put themselves with the people, let them first be a model of moderation and love, of peace and public concord, to instruct the people not to get lost in deceptive ideas, which would disturb the public peace and bring the country to ruin, to seek to appease any spirit of disillusionment, to urge all to renounce all personal passion, all envy and to unite all spirits, to unite them in the care of good order, and to gain from the co-operation in which the public it is now called, a result worthy for the country"[26].

One can easily read between the lines the fear of Ottoman reprisals if the people would boycott the elective process already established in agreement with the European powers and the mediation of the clergy required to maintain order.

Thus one can see how important the Church's mission was in the political destiny of the two principalities, but at the same time the nuances of the clergy's involvement in political life became clear: in Moldavia they had to ensure and even encourage the freedom of conscience for a fair electoral process. While

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[24] Nestor Vornicescu, "125 de ani de la Unirea Principatelor", 104.
[25] Nestor Vornicescu, "125 de ani de la Unirea Principatelor", 105.
[26] *Buletinul oficial* 85 (24 oct. 1858):370

in Walachia any attempt to slip away from established procedures had to be mitigated, thus discouraging the manifestation of freedom of conscience. On the other hand, the respective requests from the secular authority also reflect the specific situations faced by each principality. In Moldavia, the stake was also the release of Metropolitan Sofronie from the unfortunate influence of the conservative Stefan Catargiu, while in Wallachia there were unsuccessful attempts to stop a "revolutionary" trend expressed by the population. On January 23, 1859, as the results of the Bucharest elections seemed favourable to the Conservatives, the National Party would mobilize an impressive number of union supporters who would put pressure on voters[27]: members of the lower strata broke the cordons of law enforcement and stormed the elective assembly, to prevent the election of any former ruler or of their descendants[28].

If we take into account these requests made by the kaymakams, we can appreciate even better how important the role of the Orthodox clergy was in creating a special political destiny, especially since they distanced themselves from the instructions received and went much further than the provisions established by the Paris Conventions (1856 and 1858).

Thus, under the presidency of Metropolitan Sofronie Miclescu, the elective assembly of Moldavia elected Colonel Alexandru Ioan Cuza as ruler on January 5, 1859. The vote was preceded by a new urge addressed by the bishop to the 48 deputies to seek "only the good of United principalities and the future of the Romanian Nation"[29]. The last vote belonged to the President of the Assembly, Metropolitan Sofronie Miclescu, who once again uttered the words from the proclamation of the Union in the ad-hoc Divan: "Where the flock is, there is also the shepherd".

More daring is the attitude of Metropolitan Nifon, who, as president of the elective assembly in Walachia, encouraged the cessation of the meeting of January 24, 1859, for the organization of a secret deliberation which ignored the international provisions, and the 64 deputies led by the metropolitan unanimously elected Alexandru Ioan Cuza as ruler also. This act defied the Paris Convention and consecrated the union of Moldavia with Walachia.

Metropolitan Nifon's national policy was even bolder as he took the initiative to unite the two legislative assemblies of Moldavia and Walachia in a single representative body (January 24, 1862), convened under the leadership of the Metropolitan of Bucharest, who subsequently became the first president of the

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[27] Radu Mişu, "Clerici şi mireni promotori ai Unirii Principatelor", ", in *Biserica Ortodoxă Română şi Unirea Prinicpatelor – Moment aniversar (1859-2009)* (Bucureşti: Cuvântul vieţii, 2009): 256.
[28] Corneliu Zăvoianu, "Mitropolitul Nifon al Ungrovlahiei", 89.
[29] Nestor Vornicescu, "125 de ani de la Unirea Principatelor", 109.

Senate[30]. At the same time, the name "United Principalities" was abandoned and replaced, at least in the internal documents, with "Romania".

No good deed goes unpunished

Despite the substantial support offered by bishops and clergy for the creation of this political ideal, immediately after the historic union of January 24, 1859, the Orthodox Church found itself in a delicate position, targeted by several reforms and legislative acts that profoundly affected its activity and the position it held in society.

From the beginning of his reign, "Cuza proved to be an ardent supporter of the secular state. He was determined to place the Orthodox Church under the supervision of the state in all matters, except the strictly theological ones, an objective which he largely achieved"[31]. Thus, in almost all sectors of church life, Prince Alexandru Ioan Cuza brought renewals.

The first episode took place in the second half of 1859 when Metropolitan Sofronie Miclescu came into conflict with Cuza over the administration of the estates of the Romanian non-dedicated monasteries. At that time, the dedicated monasteries in Walachia owned 11.14% of the arable fields and forests, and the non-dedicated monasteries owned 16.55%. In Moldavia, the dedicated monasteries owned 12.16%, while the non-dedicated monasteries owned another 10.17% of the country's arable fields and forests. To these surfaces were added those estates held directly by the metropolises and bishoprics[32]. That is, about a quarter of the exploitable areas of Romania were in possession of the Orthodox Church, and therefore the economic stake was very high.

Under the pretext that the monasteries' estates were not well administrated, some of their assets were transferred by the government to the state administration. The biggest impact of this measure was felt by the monasteries of Neamț, Secu Văratic, Agapia, Vorona, while two other monasteries and 31 hermitages were disbanded (August 16, 1860). Two months later, Cuza would promulgate the law "on the transfer rate on the properties of public establishments", which provided that 10% of the net income of real estate owned by the Church should reach state ownership. In the next two years, through successive procedures and legislative dexterity, all the arable fields and forests of the non-dedicated monasteries were to be secularized[33].

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[30] Corneliu Zăvoianu, "Mitropolitul Nifon al Ungrovlahiei", 101.

[31] Keith Hitchins, *Românii, 1774-1866*, 382.

[32] Mircea Păcurariu, **Istoria Bisericii Ortodoxe Române**, vol. III (București: EIBMBOR, 1994) 116.

[33] Adrian Ignat, "The Law on the Secularisation of monastic estates andthe consequences of the application thereof", *RT* 101:2 (2020): 149.

Metropolitan Sofronie expressed his disagreement with these measures, stating: "Alexander the First (1400-1432) endowed the Church, and Alexander II robs it. I will ring out the bells of all the churches and announce his tyranny." [34]

It was not long before the government retaliated and on November 7, 1860, a decree was issued to suspend the metropolitan and send him into exile with a considerable escort of gendarmes at the Slatina Monastery. On December 9, 1860, the Legislative Assembly of Moldavia decided to appoint a special 5-member commission to examine the government's decision against Metropolitan Sofronie. The result was unexpected. On January 17, 1861, the commission presented the findings of its investigation, challenging the accusations against the high hierarch and accusing the government of abuse of power. As a result, the government resigned. However, on January 18, 1861, Metropolitan Sofronie sent to Prince Cuza the act of resignation from the Metropolitan see of Moldavia, and four months later, on May 18, 1861, he died[35]. After a vacation of almost two years, Sofronie's nephew, Calinic Miclescu, was elected deputy (1863) and later he became Metropolitan of Moldavia (1865). The delay in the appointment ensured a reasonable period for other reforms to be enforced without encountering any serious resistance in Moldavia.

The process of secularization or transfer of church and monastery assets to state property will continue with the "Law for the secularization of monastic estates" of December 13, 1863, which provided in the first article that all monastic estates in Romania are and remain state assets. This time the possessions of the dedicated monasteries were targeted – a point very strongly highlighted by Prime Minister Mihail Kogălniceanu, who claimed before the voting that:

> "foreign monks, with income from Romanian estates, gave the example of the scandal, they used the income of dedicated monasteries to support an anti-national policy, in order to fight the Romanian nationality [...]. It would be a national sin to leave so many goods in the hands of foreign monks and always rebellious against the local laws" [36].

This law also completed the process of secularizing the estates of non-dedicated monasteries, but the president of the Senate, Metropolitan Nifon, did

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[34] Constantin N. Tomescu, *Scurtă povestire istorică despre Sfânta Mănăstire Neamţu şi despre aşezările monahale supuse ei (mănăstirea Secu şi schiturile Vovidenia, Pocrov, Sihăstria, Sihla şi Icoana)*, 1942: 55.

[35] Bogdan Racu, „Mitropolitul Sofronie Miclescu al Moldovei: retragerea din scaun şi trecerea la cele veşnice", https://doxologia.ro/viata-bisericii/biografii-luminoase/mitropolitul-sofronie-miclescu-al-moldovei-retragerea-din-scaun

[36] M. Kogălniceanu, *Discursurile parlamentare din Epoca unirii (22 septembrie 1859-14 decembrie 1881)*, (Bucureşti, 1959) 167.

not take any official position. This fact is very well underlined by Nicolae Dobrescu, who states that

> "One thing was not done on the occasion of secularization, and it is unfortunate that it was not done; namely, a special purpose Fund hasn't been set up to serve the maintenance of the Churches, the support of the clergy, as has been done in other countries, in Austria (Bukovina), France, Italy and even Russia. It is the fault of the hierarchs of that time ... for not having said their word in favour of the Church, of the clergy"[37].

One reason we can speculate is that Metropolitan Nifon was very careful not to find himself in Sofronie Miclescu's situation.

Conventionally, it is considered that the reasoning based on which the Romanian Orthodox Church surrendered without too much resistance was the hope that the state would assume responsibility for the maintenance of places of worship and the material support of the clergy. Unfortunately, for almost five decades, these wishes remained at the level of mere intention, without concrete actions on the part of the state. For example, the Communal Law of 1864 provided that "Every commune is obliged to take care of the cult, the church or the churches to which it belongs. The commune is obliged to pay the priests of its churches". Unfortunately, the local administration did nothing to improve the material condition of the priests and parish churches, which remained as they were before, supported only by the contributions offered by the community members.

However, today both the representatives of the Orthodox Church[38] and those of the Romanian state[39] consider that by taking over the church estates by the state, during Cuza's reign, the legal principles by which the state undertakes to support the Church were regulated. In this sense, the law established the payment of a part of the salary for clerics from the state budget. This argument is invoked by the Church every time the state considers giving up the financing of cults.

The Romanian Orthodox Church received a more concrete support from the secular authorities in the issue of affirming the autocephaly of the Romanian Orthodox Church in 1864 (acknowledged by the Ecumenical Patriarchate in 1885). In addition, it ensured the legal conditions for administrative-church

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[37] Nicolae Dobrescu, *Studii de Istoria Bisericii Române contemporane*, vol. I (București, 1905): 151-152.

[38] † Daniel Ciobotea, "Unirea Principatelor s-a făcut pe Dealul Mitropoliei din București", https://ziarullumina.ro/actualitate-religioasa/stiri/unirea-principatelor-s-a-facut-pe-dealul-mitropoliei-din-bucuresti-16413.html (19.03.2022).

[39] *Statul și cultele religioase / Secretariatul de Stat pentru Culte* (București: Litera, 2018): 17, 86.

unification in 1865 – when the Metropolitan of Walachia became the "primate" of the Orthodox Church in the new state of Romania. This act was followed by the establishment of the Holy Synod in 1872 as the central governing body and the reform of theological education[40].

In such a context, we are not surprised by the attitude of some bishops such as Metropolitan Calinic Miclescu, who after the abdication of Alexandru Ioan Cuza (February 23, 1866) tried to dismantle the political unity created to return to the *status ante quo*. The metropolitan's participation in the anti-union movement of April 3, 1866, is notorious, when many inhabitants of the city of Iași tried to storm the palace where resided Lascăr Catargiu, the locum tenens after Cuza's departure. Calinic blessed the crowd, signed the separatist declaration, and, with the cross in his hand, set out at the head of the rebels, who were eventually dispersed with gunfire, among those wounded by bullets being the metropolitan himself[41].

Conclusions

The investigation of this historical episode shows the crucial role played by the bishops and clergy of the Orthodox Church in the Romanian Principalities, which became according to the Constitution of 1866 the dominant Church in Romania. In just a few years (1856-1859) the Orthodox bishops and priests managed to create a radical political change in Romanian society, by actively supporting the idea of Romanians' national unity. As can be seen, the Orthodox bishops exceeded their mandate under the Ottoman firman (1857) or the Paris Convention (1858) and showed a surprising spirit of initiative, proposing and guaranteeing bold political solutions – the union under one ruler. Thus, the great European powers were faced with an accomplished fact.

Although visibly weakened by social changes, but especially by the evolution of cultural paradigms in the last three decades, the political role of Romanian Orthodoxy is far from over. Increasingly challenged by the Millennials, the political commitment of the Romanian Orthodox Church is not officially approved or supported by the synodal authority. However, in practice, bishops and priests still have a notable influence among Romanian citizens, especially in rural areas, as reported in the 2014 presidential election, when the clerics

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[40] Mircea Păcurariu, **Istoria Bisericii Ortodoxe Române**, vol. III, 109.
[41] Al Florin Țene, "Rolul clerului în realizarea Micii Unirii al Țărilor Române de la 1859 și al elaborării Legii presei din timpul domniei lui Grigore Alexandru Ghica", *Luceafărul* 12:1 (2020), https://luceafarul.net/rolul-clerului-in-realizarea-micii-unirii-al-tarilor-romane-de-la-1859-si-al-elaborarii-legii-presei-din-timpul-domniei-lui-grigore-alexandru-ghica (20.03.2022)

supported the "Romanian, Orthodox" candidate, to the detriment of to the one who was a "foreigner and of another denomination". Even if after this "election campaign" the candidate supported by the Orthodox Church lost, it was found that the support of the Church in Romania is still an important factor in shaping public opinion or political attitude.

It remains to be appreciated by posterity whether this involvement against the backdrop of ideological sympathies, or in the hope of material benefits, was favourable to the Church in the long-term. And at the same time, it will be possible to determine whether the bishops and clergy were puppet masters or mere puppets.

III. SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

KENOTIC DIALOGUE – A PARADIGM FOR CHRISTIANS' RELATIONS WITH THEIR NEIGHBORS

TEOFIL STANCIU[1]

ABSTRACT. This article represents an attempt to argue that if we are to apply Christ's kenosis to our relationships, then a kenotic dialogue will be the appropriate way to interact with others. Starting from Martin Buber and some Christian thinkers, this paper will also emphasize the relational dimension of God's image in human beings and the subsequent dialogue this image entails. Assuming the premise that Jesus Christ is the perfect human expression of God's image and that this reality also impacts our human nature, the consequence might be that his kenotic dialogue with the world prompts an analog dialogue between God and us (in prayers) and between our neighbors and us. Because kenosis can be a tricky concept, it is adequate to mention that the kenotic perspective employed in this paper is that set out by the Orthodox theologian Dumitru Stăniloae. Finally, we hope to convince the reader that Christ's kenosis is simultaneously the foundation and the model for our relationships network and enables us to a new way of interacting with people.

Keywords: dialogue, relationships, communion, kenosis, the image of God

Introduction

When social hostility is so acute that dialogue can sometimes seem an inaccessible or useless luxury, it becomes urgent and necessary to reflect on a theme that addresses the foundations of a possible dialogue with one's neighbor. In what follows, we will explore the possible basis for such a dialogue, which leans upon the relational dimension of the image of God in man and the very

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definition of the human person. All Christians have Jesus Christ, the God-Man, as their supreme role model. From an Eastern Orthodox theological perspective, the incarnation cannot be considered without the kenosis of the Son, and this kenosis has consequences for his and our human nature. Therefore, it is assumed that an essential aspect of humanity – such as relationships – has kenotic features in the case of those who claim faith in the Christian God. Moreover, the person, defined by and placed in a relational network, cannot be imagined without dialogue. We will therefore seek and analyze the kenotic dimension of this dialogue.

Relationship and dialogue

Any discussion about otherness and the relational foundation of the human person has, at least in the Modern era, a solid landmark in Martin Buber's thought, which reasserts the absolute priority of relational over individual existence decisively and establishes some essential references when starting from the prologue of John's Gospel.[2] He lays down axioms such as "In the beginning is a relation" or "Through the Thou a man becomes I."[3] Furthermore, these are based on the "primary word *I-Thou*" which "establishes the world of relations."[4] Buber can therefore speak about the "effort to establish a relation," the "mold for the soul," and "the inborn Thou," denouncing the inconsistency of the individualistic definition of the human being.[5]

Many Christian thinkers will take advantage of this modern landmark established by Buber and enter into a dialogue with him, highlighting the compatibility of Christian teaching with this perspective and demonstrating its biblical and theological soundness. According to Denis de Rougemont, the notion of person, as defined by Christianity, is truly revolutionary and can only be understood against the backdrop of the formulations and distinctions laid down at the Councils/Synods of Nicaea and Chalcedon, where the divine and human natures are distinguished in the hypostasis of Jesus Christ.[6] Moreover, the person exists as far as he/she is relationally grounded.

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[2] Cf. Ioan Augustin Doinaş, "Preface", in Martin Buber, *Eu şi tu*, trans. Ştefan Augustin Doinaş (Bucharest, Humanitas, 1992), 14.

[3] Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, trans. Ronald Gregor Smith (New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958), 18, 28.

[4] Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, 6.

[5] Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, 54.

[6] Juerg Haener, *From Denis de Rougemont's thought to the concept of European citizenship: divergence or convergence?* (Master's diss., Institut Européen de l'Université de Genève, Geneva, 2011), 12-14.

In an anthropological context, Alistair McFadyen argues that human relationships with God *"are structured from [His] side as a dialogue"* meant to provide "space for free human response," and thus, humans are designated, in Buberian terms, as a *Thou by the* divine *Self*.[7] Dialogue is therefore ontologically subsistent in human beings since relations are embedded in the divine image according to which they were created, and the human person is invited to respond to a preexistent call from the beginning.

The Romanian theologian Dumitru Stăniloae also seems to think along this line since, for him, the interpersonal relationship holds such a great significance - in an anthropological perspective – that one can speak of a "communicational anthropology," in which otherness is essentially "dialogical" and it is constituted "as a circumscription of a communitarian personalism."[8] Indeed, when addressing the question of the divine image in human beings, Stăniloae constantly speaks about the relation.[9] And about an unceasing dialogue with God and with one's neighbor.[10] On the other hand, the same author identifies this image with "the capacity to become the subject of divine love."[11] A capacity that cannot be reflected upon outside a relational and dialogical framework, for the word finds its fulfillment in the communion of persons.[12] In order to do some justice to the discussion of the image (while mentioning that the analysis of the various interpretations is not an objective of this article) in Stăniloae's thinking, it must be said that, according to Eastern Orthodox theology, the image is complemented by the likeness, where the image is the longing for God (or the possibility for a relation with Him). The likeness is the process and destination of the conformity with the absolute model of the image – a process designated by the term *deification*.[13] If we look at the historical debates[14] Although the image is not reduced merely to the relational aspect, it necessarily includes it as one of its decisive and inescapable aspects. The fundamental character of the relational dimension is revealed in that, to acquire likeness, a human being (as a bearer of the image) needs communion. Furthermore, this communion means a relationship with God and, consequently, a personal relationship with one's neighbor; otherwise,

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[7] Alistair I. McFadyen, *The Call to Personhood. A Christian Theory of the Individual in Social Relationships* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990), 19 (italics added).

[8] Sandu Frunză, *O antropologie mistică. Introducere în gândirea Părintelui Stăniloae* (ed. a II-a, București, Eikon, 2016), 47, 56. Note: All the translations from Romanian sources were rendered by the author of this paper.

[9] Dumitru Stăniloae, *Teologia dogmatică ortodoxă*, (ed. a II-a, vol. I, București, Editura IBMBOR, 1997), 267 sqq.

[10] See, for example, Stăniloae, *Teologia dogmatică*, vol. I, 269.

[11] Dumitru Stăniloae, *Iisus Hristos sau restaurarea omului*, București, Basilica, 2014, 91.

[12] Cf. Stăniloae, *Iisus Hristos sau restaurarea*, 111.

[13] See the discussion in Stăniloae, *Teologia dogmatică*, vol. I, 270-273.

[14] Marc Cortez gives a valuable and concise inventory in the chapter "Imago Dei" of his book *Theological Anthropology. A Guide for the Perplexed* (London & New York, T&T Clark, 2010).

there could be no relationship with God. Love of God necessarily results in love for one's neighbor.[15] Even the selfish – or, to use another term, individualistic – man "cannot escape from the ontological bond with others," not even when he/she tries to use them or turn them into objects of one's desires.[16]

Stăniloae overlaps the status of a "communicating God's dialogue partner" with the very "unceasing persistence of [his] image" in human beings, "[f]or the image is revealed in human's dialogue with God."[17] Thus, for the Romanian theologian, dialogue is not an optional function of the person. However, instead, it structures the person ontologically and existentially since he/she exists only under the dialogue initiated by God and is permanently invited to participate in this dialogue. The Orthodox thinker states categorically that no "I" can be defined as long as it is not opposed to and imposed by a "*you*," a "you" that challenges "I" and one that "I" must enter into dialogue with, must pay attention to, contemplate and understand, simultaneously understanding oneself concerning this distinct "you," in the ambiance of faith and love.[18]

Starting from the same Buber, but taking the discussion further and adding important psychological nuances, Paul Tournier can state that this capacity to enter into dialogue makes possible, from a psychological point of view, the distinction between the individual and the person, for "the individual associates, [while] the person lives communion."[19] The individual is defined by separateness while the person by relationship, but the individual and the person are two poles between which human beings move in a dynamic in which either the traits of the individual or those of the person predominate at any given moment.[20] Moreover, in terms of theological anthropology, it can be noticed that what makes a difference between the individual from the person is the type of relationship that people engage in, for it is the individual who has lost the kind of harmony which is inherent to the person and this loss affects human nature itself. Here lies our self-sufficiency, breaking the unity that stems from the communion – which translates the "participation in communion with God."[21]

It could be objected that those who do not know God or believe in him are not actually in dialogue with the Creator. However, "even he who hates this name and imagines himself to be without God if he wholeheartedly utters the Thou of his life – the one that nobody can limit – he is addressing God."[22] And from a

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[15] Stăniloae, *Teologia dogmatică*, vol. I, 274-277.

[16] Stăniloae, *Teologia dogmatică*, vol. I, 273.

[17] Dumitru Stăniloae, *Chipul nemuritor al lui Dumnezeu* (Bucureşti, Basilica, 2013), 39, 56.

[18] Cf. Stăniloae, *Iisus Hristos sau restaurarea*, 32-40.

[19] Paul Tournier, *Personajul şi persoana*, trans. Rodica Bogdan (Oradea, Decenu.eu, 2020), 144.

[20] Buber, *I and Thou*, 89-90.

[21] Stăniloae, *Teologia dogmatică*, vol. I, 279.

[22] Buber, *I and Tho*u, 104.

theological perspective, those who "because of [their] non-communication remit to a minimum of existence,"[23] neither lose the divine image nor can completely interrupt the dialogue. Christ himself identified with humans in their separation from God.[24] Furthermore, we can say that as humans, he assumed the status of non-communication with the Father, without this separation being absolute and irreparable. Nevertheless, we can never experience the intensity of the feeling of abandonment in the same manner as Jesus did on the cross. Moreover, at the human level, whenever a moment of authentic dialogue is established between two people, each of them also enters into a silent dialogue with God, and this happens "even if the man is unfaithful or thinks he is unfaithful [...] every time the scale of values is at stake in the inner struggle, every time a man relates to a norm of truth, beauty, good, right."[25] Consequently, human being lives their personhood within these two *personal* dialogues, which are closely linked but do not necessarily occur in synchronicity, and rarely reach those crucial and memorable moments of maximum intensity.[26]

It seems legitimate to say that, from what has been discussed up to this point, the idea emerges that the human person can only be defined by taking into account this innate relational dimension. That relationship presupposes engagement in an existential and communitarian dialogue, which is also an ontological aspect of existence. This quality of the person derives from the fact of creation in the image of God and the possibility of being loved by God, as an indestructible divine seal, and therefore of relating to Creator. The immediate consequence is the capacity to engage in relationships with one's neighbors since it is impossible to picture a divine love that does not unite people with one another. There can be no authentic relationships without a profound dialogue between people. "it is only through dialogue that we become true subjects and share a personal existence."[27]

Kenosis and relationship

The theme of kenosis – which goes back to Philippians 2:7 – has generated a considerable amount of exegetical, theological, and polemical material throughout the two millennia of Christianity, but these avatars are not the subject of this article. Although there have been various theories and approaches in doctrine's

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[23] Stăniloae, *Chipul nemuritor*, 55.
[24] Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh, *The True Worth of a Man*, sermon delivered at the University Church of St. Mary the Virgin (Oxford, October 22, 1967),
http://www.mitras.ru/eng/eng_03.htm, accessed July 10, 2021.
[25] Tournier, *Personajul și persoana*, 179.
[26] Tournier, *Personajul și persoana*, 178.
[27] McFadyen, *The Call to Personhood*, 22-23.

history, there is an essential kenotic strand (strongly emphasized by Russian thought, but also by patristic sources to which neo-patristic thinkers have referred) in twentieth-century Orthodox theology.[28] We will select our interlocutors from this line of thought for the present discussion. It is important to note that the various conceptions of kenosis have never remained strictly in the realm of theological reflection, but they also had various consequences in the sphere of spirituality.[29] Anthropology or on relations between theology and other disciplines. At the same time, one could argue that the kenosis of Christ has implications for humanity in general and for Christians in particular.

Although, when regarded from the outside, Eastern Orthodox perspectives on kenosis might seem relatively homogeneous, considering the genuine commitment of these theologians to remain faithful to the patristic tradition, even though they display a specific diversity, with at least two broad strands – which also find their correspondence in patristic thought: Those who consider that the act of kenosis consists in "the humility of the Logos who assumes human nature"; and those who, starting from the etymology of the term, talk about a quick emptying or shrinking of the glory of the Son. These differences in understanding suggest that the "mystery of the kenosis" is not only challenging to circumscribe theoretically but remains a topic open to investigation.[30] This fact is illustrated especially by Sergei Bulgakov's bold kenotic theology, which generated extremely vehement reactions in his days and continues to be a source of debate.[31] We believe that these preliminary considerations (which are little more than a sketch) are nevertheless sufficient for a minimal introduction to the subject since a more detailed analysis is beyond the scope of this paper.

For furthering the discussion, I have chosen as a point of reference the perspective of the Orthodox theologian Dumitru Stăniloae, who considers that "[k]enosis consists precisely in the appropriation of our nature [i.e., human nature with its weaknesses] in all its pure bearing of sorrows by God the God-Word" and that it expresses "the relationship of intimacy between the divine hypostasis and human nature," implying a "restraint of Christ from manifesting

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[28] For a panoramic view, see Florin Toader Tomoioagă's work, *Taina chenozei în teologia ortodoxă a secolului al XX-lea* (Iaşi, Doxologia, 2015). The book is based on the author's doctoral research.

[29] One such example is "Russian kenoticism," an ascetic current which, exaggerating the humiliation of the Son in the fact of the incarnation, promoted a spirituality based on the annihilation of personality" (article "Kenoza," in Ion Bria, *Dicționar de teologie ortodoxă A-Z* [ed. a II-a, Bucureşti, Editura IBMBOR, 1994], 231). Cf. and Tomoioagă, *Taina chenozei*, 180-184.

[30] Cf. Tomoioagă, *Taina chenozei*, 99-102. The author states that some Orthodox conceptions of kenosis could be placed in the area of theological opinion or teologumena rather than dogma (102).

[31] Vladimir Lossky's reaction is recorded by Paul L. Gavrilyuk, Gavrilyuk, "The Kenotic Theology of Sergius Bulgakov," in *Scottish Journal of Theology*, vol. 58, no. 03 (August 2005), 265-267. Cf. and Tomoioagă, *Taina chenozei*, especially 185-203.

all divine power through the body in order not to annul it," his divine nature remaining unchanged.[32] The kenosis presupposes two successive "acts": the assumption of human nature by God the Son followed by the obedience of Jesus Christ as a man to God, which leads him to take upon our limitations, suffering, and, finally, death itself.[33]

Glancing ahead a little, one of the effects of kenosis, of particular interest here, is that of "abolishing from human nature the selfish disorders of anger and lust, of teaching it humility, gentleness, and tenderness through which harmony, respect, and *communicativeness* between people can be restored."[34] In other words, the balanced relations and the dialogue among people are indisputably affected by Christ's kenosis, which makes it possible – not only in a theoretical manner, or just for his human nature, but also concretely, for each one of us – to overcome the effects of sin. Moreover, in this case, the person of Jesus Christ functions not only as a role model to imitate but also as the very foundation for our possibility to engage in this action. From image to likeness, one cannot progress without the redemption accomplished by Christ.

Therefore here we find the grounds for the "kenosis after kenosis" (how it is termed in theological literature) that "translates... our participation in the kenosis of Christ, which is the only way to the Kingdom."[35] However, the various consequences of kenosis are not always explored in greater depth and detail for the individual existence of believers. For example, the entire mission of the Church in the world can be understood, from a particular perspective, as a historical kenosis.[36] How this communal kenosis becomes effective in the personal existence of each individual Christian is still to be discovered and studied in depth. However, we can already see that the relationships – and the dialogue they imply – have significant kenotic features.

Summing up the elements of the previews discussion, it can be stated that relationship and dialogue are inherent to the human being by virtue of the divine image. On the other hand, this image is fully manifested in Christ so that he also becomes *the locus* where we contemplate what our integral humanity entails. Nevertheless, the incarnate word chose kenosis as the way to assume human nature. Consequently, the man Jesus Christ appears to us as the kenotic

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[32] Dumitru Stăniloae, *Teologia dogmatică ortodoxă*, (ed. a II-a, vol. II, Bucureşti, Editura IBMBOR, 1997), 46, 47, 50, 51.

[33] Stăniloae, *Teologia dogmatică*, vol. II, 48.

[34] Stăniloae, *Teologia dogmatică*, vol. II, 51 (s.n.).

[35] Tomoioagă, *Taina chenozei*, 142-145.

[36] Holy Bishops' Council of the Russian Orthodox Church, *Bases of the Social Concept of the Russian Orthodox Church*, available at http://orthodoxeurope.org/page/3/14.aspx, accessed July 21, 2021.

presence of the Godhead. However, this kenosis impressed a mark on his humanity and consequently on our humanity. This means that both our relational capacity and the continuous dialogue we are engaged in by the way we have been created are inevitably kenotic insofar as we identify with Christ, and we long to grow in the likeness of God by the power of the Holy Spirit. In the following, the kenotic dialogue will be considered.

The kenotic dialogue

In the famous prologue of the Gospel according to John, the meaning of the Logos undoubtedly implies a discursive-dialogical dimension, even if it is not limited to it.[37] In other words, the Logos can indicate more but no less than an invitation to dialogue addressed by God to humans. Moreover, this "more" means that revelation is transformative; that is, the Son who revealed the Father for us came to transform us according to his image.[38] The implication is that the incarnation itself has a subsistent dialogical dimension with a specific flavor: it is a dialogue that changes human beings. "Because God's communication takes dialogical form, it should be conceived of in terms of grace"[39] – grace that opens us up to the possibility of coming closer to God and restructuring our relationships with others.

On the other hand, if we accept this kenotic paradigm as presented above, we cannot speak about incarnation and ignore kenosis, which is, in fact, *the how* of incarnation. There is no way to know God better than in Christ, and we know the Son in no other way than through the kenosis that he assumes and lives out as man. By way of kenosis, the word became flesh, and, in this way, he made himself intelligible to us, being "fully open to others, giving them the same power by sharing in his flesh."[40] Because of that, human beings share the possibility of genuinely opening themselves to their neighbors in a dialogue in which we are able to listen and understand. Moreover, as Stăniloae argues, the kenosis of the Son is dialectical, which means that our inability to understand Christ's kenosis deepens it.[41] Even if this deepening would mean that the incarnated word is taking upon himself the confusion of humans, incapable of grasping the presence of God or, even worse, of considering it a false claim – which actually was the case as we know from the Gospels – Jesus' refusal to impose himself by

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[37] See the discussion of Jewish, Greek and Gnostic influences in John's sense of "Logos" in Dan Tomuleț, *Revelație și transformare. O interpretare a Evangheliei după Ioan* (vol. 1, București, Eikon, 2019), 22-26.

[38] Tomuleț, *Revelație*, vol. 1, 86-90.

[39] McFadyen, *The Call to Personhood*, 19.

[40] Stăniloae, *Teologie dogmatică*, vol. 2, 67.

[41] Stăniloae, *Iisus Hristos sau restaurarea*, 183-187.

force of argument or by a permanent display of power can be seen as a kenotic response. It is a response that – by deepening the kenosis itself – it emphasizes, in fact, God's power manifested in the very form of human weakness. At this level, the dialectic of kenosis is revealed in the dialogue of the incarnate Son with the world. Furthermore, his example could suggest similar dialectics for the Christian's dialogue with the world.

The language itself is restored through the kenosis of Christ, for in him, our words recapture their "unifying communicative function."[42] The Scripture mentions several times and in various forms that no one spoke with Jesus' authority (Matthew 7:28-29, Mark 4:41) or that he had the words of eternal life (John 6:68), a fact noted by those who met him and heard him speak. He also sometimes uses the word in a way that mirrors the moment of creation: God spoke, and things came into being; when Christ speaks, he saves, heals, sets free – thus confirming his very mission. It seems, however, that Jesus also used the language to hide (Matthew 13:10-17) or in a manner that only a few would understand, which is why he used parables. The gap between the words of the word and people's limited ability to understand – even the apostles encountered difficulties in understanding him and did not believe all that Christ said, a fact evident after his death – may be indicative of what has been lost in terms of communication and language for human nature affected by sin and the consequences of the fall. At the same time, it may signal what can be recovered when a person benefits from the restoration of the connection with God through the mediation of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. The need for dialogue is clear, but it remains to be seen what kind of dialogue can be shaped by Jesus' model for the Christian presence in today's world.

Dialogue with God

If the implicit inner dialogue of any human being (regardless of one's beliefs) with God could be placed in the sphere of axioms that we hold as part of a particular worldview, there is nevertheless an explicit and assumed form of prayer as an active human dialogue with the Creator. In prayer – where we are not only speaking but also waiting for God to answer – we can experience God's answer as well as God's silence or absence, argues Anthony Bloom, but our experience is not of a similar kind to the abandonment experienced by Jesus Christ on the cross.[43] However, even if God would respond promptly and

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[42] Tomoioagă, *Taina chenozei*, 92.

[43] The absence could reflect one of the following: "1) sin as an obstacle to encountering God, 2) an opportunity for spiritual growth, and 3) a false vision of oneself". Cf. Roman Rytsar, *The Kenotic Theology of Anthony Bloom Metropolitan of Sourozh (1914-2003), in Anthropological Perspective*, Ph.D. diss (Ottawa, Canada, 2012), 334. A brief explanation is in order here: since not all of his works are available in English, the citation of Anthony Bloom, Metropolitan of Sourozh, was

predictably, on our part, it would still be needed a deliberate kenotic exercise of self-denial in order to hear God.[44] In fact, silent (contemplative) prayer can be seen as a spiritual extension of Christ's kenosis, and it involves the manifestation of our willingness to allow ourselves to be transformed by the adventure of encountering God. Along with uttering their prayers before God, by being silent human beings "make room" for God to answer and manifest himself according to his strong will. It is a freely assumed process that presupposes discipline and risk (resulting in the form of asceticism), a process that human beings do not try to manipulate God but make themselves willingly vulnerable before a free and loving personal God.[45]

Even if we admit that this type of dialogue is one that implies a kenosis of humans, it should be noted that we are using merely an analogy when we apply the same term to the Son and to the creature. The kenosis of the perfect one – who, even after the incarnation, remained without sin – cannot be identical to the kenosis of those affected by the fall. For us, kenosis is upward; it elevates us to God, strips us from what is harmful, and fills us with what is beneficial. On the other hand, in Orthodox theology, *the* divine *kenosis* is mirrored by the human *theosis*,[46] God descended to us so that we can ascend to him to overcome our condition affected by sin and its consequences. This being so, our dialogical kenosis is not primarily about being understood and making ourselves known, but rather (though not exclusively, for dialogue implies exchange and reciprocity) about understanding and discovering the otherness of the one who reveals himself to us – whether God or neighbor.

The dialogue with our peers

The vertical dialogue of prayer, insofar as it is honest, is poured out over our relationships with others, with those who can be drawn into the conversation with God first of all through intercessory prayer for them. Out of prayer also stems "the courage to raise a prophetic voice"[47] – legitimate when it speaks on behalf of those who need their voice to be heard. In a paper about Christian responsibility, Stăniloae describes it as mediated by word, prayer, and dialogue in an interconnection that is based upon the humans' mutual recognition of personal existence in obedience to God.[48] Dialogue is an innate feature of the

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sometimes mediated by the translations of Roman Rytsar, who dedicated his doctoral research to the theology of Anthony and who also used material available only in Russian.

[44] Rytsar, *The Kenotic Theology*, 342-343.
[45] Sarah Coakley, *Powers and Submissions: Spirituality, Philosophy, and Gender* (Oxford, Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 34-36. The author speaks of the "defenseless prayer of silent waiting on God."
[46] Stăniloae, *Teologia dogmatică*, vol. 2, 39.
[47] Coakley, *Powers and Submissions*, 35.
[48] Dumitru Stăniloae, "Responsabilitatea creştină", în *Ortodoxia*, nr. 2 (1970), 181-191.

person and also a responsibility to be taken and carefully managed by the believer by virtue of the respect that the humanity of the other, as an equal bearer of the divine image, demands. To recognize the image of God in another means, in this key, to extend to him or her the invitation to personal dialogue that God addressed to the creature from the very beginning. The human person is not the initiator but just a mediator of this dialogue, and in so far as he or she lives out the faith in God, he/she closes a circle when the divine offer to engage in a dialogue is expressed not only in terms of a need for a pious individual response (which has its significant role) but above all in terms of openness to communicate with everyone, thus nurturing the hope of reconciling all humanity and all creation with the Creator. It is interesting, however, that "again and again man brings about, instead of realization, a reflection to him who reveals: he wishes to concern himself with God instead of with the world. Only, in such reflection, he is no longer confronted by a *Thou*, he can do nothing but establish an It-God in the realm of things, believe that he knows God as of an *It*, an so speak about Him." [49] Man must therefore resist the temptation to picture himself as an individualist in his dialogical relationship with God and to reduce the goal of existence to a vertical relationship with the Unseen One, which renders irrelevant relations with his neighbor, who appears to us as a strange and problematic other.

The transformative exercise learned in the dynamics of speech and silence, to which the dialectic of Christ's kenosis is added as a model to follow, can be used for a dialectical and kenotic dialogue with other members of society. In both cases, silence is a self-imposed discipline out of respect for God in one case and for the bearers of his image in the other. As a motivation, we can appeal to the desire to understand instead of fighting back; it can be a strategic silence that allows for a more appropriate and complex response that aims for a higher level of understanding. There is a need for presence and distance, where the presence can mean "public engagement or social responsibility," and distance can be the form of the "critical faithfulness to Scripture and Christian tradition." Following in the footsteps of Jacques Ellul, the dialectical approach can become a form of handling reality, especially when confronted with opposing points of view or when tension needs to be loosened up. The silence that allows the opposing side to be heard and its objections to be taken seriously can even be a way forward for the believing community's relationship with secular society. [50]

Returning to Martin Buber and his relational perspective, this can be taken as a benchmark that can be accepted even by those who do not share the Christian worldview with regard to the inherently relational nature of the human

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[49] Buber, *I and Thou*, 115.

[50] The ideas in this paragraph are based on David J. Neville's article, "Dialectic as Method in Public Theology: Recalling Jacques Ellul," in *International Journal of Public Theology* 2 (2008), 163-181. The quoted excerpts are on 175.

person. In his terms, the truth is that "without *It,* man cannot live. Nevertheless, he who lives with *it* alone is not a man."[51]

It is within this relational framework that Buber will subsequently set the problem of dialogue, which he will also explore as "silence that communicates."[52] However, for Buber, the dialogue was critical not only for the actual fulfillment of any relationship but also from the perspective of relating to the truth, for there is in us the need to see the truth. Moreover, in this quest, we are stimulated, enriched, and confirmed by the interaction of others with truth.[53]

For the purposes of this article, filtering the topic through Martin Buber's perspective was not a stringent necessity, as long as it did not alter the course of the argument in any significant way. Nevertheless, this tentative circling around the Jewish philosopher's thought opens a window to a contribution from outside the Christian environment that illustrates how truth can be viewed from many angles and, at the same time, opens the discussion toward a perspective that exceeds the theological paradigm and reaches a philosophical one. Moreover, the fact that Buber is a dialogue partner for several of the authors quoted (Stăniloae, Tournier, or McFadyen) may be an example of interaction with interlocutors from other faith traditions and from other spheres of knowledge, of dialogue which, although it is carried out in the intellectual realm, could be taken as a model of good practice in other fields.

If in the dialogue with God, the specifically kenotic nuance is given by a confident attitude of the heart in prayer, in which a person makes room for God, in the dialogue with one's neighbor, this kenotic mark can have many faces. We could begin with a non-ostentatious style of communication, one deeply rooted in the richness of Christian tradition and sensible to some basic longings of every human being. Then, a confident Christlike presence, in which any conversation partner can see the divine love and life of God displayed in the Christian speaker's being. Programmatic and strategic silence, accompanied by the refusal of aggressive and vindictive reactions, could facilitate a more effective dialogical practice with greater chances for genuine reconciliation. Likewise, lamenting the relational and conversational disorder generated by the fall and its consequent inabilities stands out as a possible hallmark of a kenotic start of a dialogue. If fellow human beings are bearers of the divine image and participants – however inactive – in dialogue with God, then a kenotic human interaction cannot objectify them, but, on the contrary, it has the potential to energize their personal dimension, to push them

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[51] Buber, *I and Thou*, 60.

[52] It is the very subtitle of a section of Martin Buber, *Between Man and Man*, trans. Ronald Gregor-Smith (London & New York, Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2004, ebook).

[53] Cf. Martin Buber, *Distance, and Relation*, in Asher D. Biemann, ed., *The Martin Buber Reader. Essential Writings* (New York, Palgrave MacMillan, 2002), 211.

away from individualism. However, the same respect for the divine image is implied in framing any dialogue around the truth while keeping clear in our minds the conviction that we do not possess and understand it in its fulness, and we will always share a perspective of it. Finally, as we have seen, dialogue also involves the risk of personal transformation. Moreover, if Christ freely and lovingly chose kenoticism, respecting people's freedom and loving even those who wanted. In that case, our kenotic dialogue with the world implies *de facto* the acknowledgment of the freedom of those who do not share the same perspective or even reject it (no matter how valid it may be in our eyes), and this reality should not impinge on our love for the other.

Conclusions

As one can observe, the entire approach depends on the centrality of Jesus Christ when we define the image of God in human beings and the consequences of this centrality for our relational-dialogical anthropology. Since, from an Eastern Orthodox theological perspective, kenosis cannot be separated from the incarnation, everything that the incarnation of the Son brings to us as a benefit takes on this kenotic imprint. Furthermore, if one of the essential elements of the divine image is revealed in our relational capacity, the redemption of humanity is materialized in the restoration of our relational ability. Dialogue is at the heart of reality with God and one another.

The kenotic dialogue presupposes a dynamic that follows the example of Jesus Christ, not only as a simple imitation game but also relying on it as an innate structure of our Christian identity. Reconciliation mediated by Christ allows us to emerge from individualism (but also from gregariousness) towards authentic communion and genuine dialogue in which consensus is not the ultimate goal. However, truth is wrapped up in the charitable cote of love for one's fellow human beings and the encounter with the other in his or her reality as a person, everything nourished by the hope of the redemption of all humanity and all creation.

Without claiming to be the only legitimate way for the Christian to dialogue with others, the kenotic dialogue unquestionably imposes a particular way of interacting with the other. Furthermore, the potential of such a dialogue is worth capitalizing on, as long as it is based on an analogy intimately linked to how God revealed himself to us as man and the immediate consequences of this revelation for our humanity.

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CRISIS OF LANGUAGE: SEMANTICS IN GOD-DISCUSSION OF THE FATHERS

CHONGPONGMEREN JAMIR[1]

ABSTRACT. The early Christian discussion on the doctrine of God occurred primarily within the Hellenistic culture. Christians borrowed both concepts and religious and philosophical vocabularies from the existing culture to appropriate their faith. These concepts and vocabularies have inherent meanings associated with them. Thus, a Hellenization of Christianity has been argued for in the existing literature. On the other hand, baptizing them into Christian usage also resulted in a dehellenization of the cultural concepts and vocabularies. This essay focuses on the linguistic aspect of the interaction of Christianity with culture during its early years. It argues that Patristic discussion on God and Godhead needs to be understood within the dynamics of the crisis of language and the semantic differences that accompanied patristic appropriation of the Christian faith.

Keywords: Culture, linguistic, logos, patristic, Trinity

In one of the earliest attempts to articulate the concept of the Trinity using vocabularies drawn from Indian culture, Keshab Chandra Sen, the nineteenth-century Indian theologian, stated: "In this plane figure of three lines you have the solution to a vast problem; The Father, Son, and the Holy Ghost … *Sat, Cit, Ananda*; Truth, Intelligence, Joy" (italics mine).[2] In Hinduism, *Parabrahman* (the supreme being) is indivisible, yet can be considered in terms of the inner relation of *sat* (being/truth) *cit* (reason) and *ananda* (bliss). The use of these Sanskrit words and the corresponding composite word *Saccidananda* has been both acclaimed as "more adequate than the Nicene Formula" and criticized as

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[2] Sunand Sumithra, *Christian Theologies from an Indian Perspective* (Bangalore: Theological Book Trust, 1990), 50.

given to modalism and "diluting the distinction of the three persons in the Godhead".[3] A linguistic issue here is the value of adopting existing vocabularies from the culture to communicate religious ideas. This essay will attempt to let the wisdom of the Church fathers speak to this contemporary issue by analyzing how language played a key role in the God-discussion of the early church.[4] What were the original meanings inherent in the words used? How did the early Christians reconstruct their meaning? How was it received at the time?

Social studies since the mid-twentieth century have seen much importance given to the semantic study of language. The tendency is to address meanings at the level of words, phrases, sentences or discourses.[5] A key issue in linguistic studies has been the dynamics of language change, which has seen a shift in the way linguistic change is perceived. *Traditional grammarians, according to John Lyons, assumed that their task was to "preserve" language from "corruption".[6] They assumed that changes in content and form of the language constitute a degradation in the quality of the language. Lyons, however, argued that that is not necessarily the case, for changes in language are often necessitated by a need to communicate efficiently in a changing context. As such depending upon the need, new terms could be incorporated into a language, either "by 'borrowing' them from other languages or by forming them from existing elements in the vocabulary"; sometimes, "fresh distinctions may be drawn and old distinctions lost"; or "the same distinctions may come to be expressed by different means".[7] In the face of new ideas or situations, all languages undergo a crisis situation, out of which new forms or meanings emerge. The change in the semantics of the language, in turn, affects the discourse in the society, both in the way ideas are perceived or communicated.*

Language is intricately tied to the culture of the land. As Peter Burke in his *Social History of Language* posited, it "reflects the society (or culture) in which it is spoken". [8] The language used in the God-discussion in early

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[3] Sumithra, *Christian Theologies from an Indian Perspective*, 50.

[4] The essay asked a linguistic question and therefore does not intend to commit to a hermeneutical analysis of the term *Saccidananda* and its usage in Indian Christian Theology. For a detailed discussion on *Saccidananda* as a trinitarian concept, see Boyd, Robin. *Introduction to Indian Christain Theology.* Madrasi: CLS, 1975; Upadhyah, Brahmabandhab. "I bow to Saccidananda." In Julius Lipner and George Gispert-Sauch. *The Writings of Brahmabandhab Upadhyay*, Vol. 1. Bangalore: United Theological College, 1991; Abhishiktananda, Swami. *Saccidananda: A Christain Approach to Advaitic Experience.* New Delhi: ISPCK, 1974.

[5] Barbara H Partee, "Semantics" in *The MIT Encyclopedia of the Cognitive* Sciences, eds Robert A Wilson and Frank C Keil (London: The MIT Press, 1999), 739-41.

[6] John Lyons, *Introduction to Theoretical Linguistics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 42.

[7] Lyons, *Introduction to Theoretical Linguistics*, 43.

[8] Peter Burke and Roy Porter (eds), *The Social History of Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 3-4.

Christianity reflects the linguistic culture of the time. Christine Mohrmann, in her discussion on linguistic problems in the early church, has shown "how deeply a language is bound to the cultural and spiritual milieu" of the land. Thus, there is always the risk that existing "traditional ideas interfere with the new thoughts".[9] When new ideas are introduced into a given culture, the affinity of the message intended with the inherent meaning in the vocabulary of the language is key to effective communication. In the case of a semantic gap, the language often underwent changes in an attempt to accommodate meanings not originally envisioned in its cultural usage. *Graziano Lingua spoke of a crisis of classical language in late antiquity in the light of its contact with Christianity. Christians used terms taken from classic vocabularies to express their theological ideas, but in the process, Christian writers even "bend the language", triggering a crisis of language in the Greek. The existing language thus underwent "*a semantic transformation in the attempt to address some aspects of reality which were not envisioned by the previous usage of these words".[10] This is well stated by Richard Trench in his *Synonyms of the New Testament*: "When the Christian Church was forming its terminology, which it did partly by shaping new words, but partly also by elevating old ones to higher than their previous uses, of the latter is more readily adopted those employed in civil and political life, than such as played their part in religious matters; and this, even when it was seeking for expression of religious truth".[11] Thus, early Christian adoption of existing religious and philosophical vocabularies was often accompanied by a crisis of language, resulting in semantic transformation.

Much has been written on how the existing religious and philosophical ideas have influenced the God-discussion in the early church. Thomas Gaston has argued that early Christian apologists "found natural allies in the monotheistic Platonists" and that the latter has greatly influenced the development of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. He wrote: "Not only did they introduce the triadic conception of the God-head but eventually, the Neo-Platonists would be instrumental in establishing the coequality of the members of the Trinity".[12] Similarly, Aleksandar Santrac has argued that "the inner dynamics of the relationship between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit have been formulated using Plato's distinction between

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9   Christine Mohrmann, "Linguistic Problems in the Early Christian Church" *Vigiliae Christianae*, vol. 11, No. 1 (March 1957), 19-20.

10   Graziano Lingua, "Trinity, Number and Image. The Christian Origins of the Concept of Person" https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11196-021-09835-9

11   Richard Chenevix Trench, *Synonyms of the New Testament* (London-Cambridge: Macmillan, 1865), 122.

12   Thomas E. Gaston, "The influence of Platonism on the early Apologists" *The Heythrop Journal* (July 2009), 578.

the Good, *Nous*, and *Pneuma*.[13] Thus, the critical influence of Greek philosophy in the God-discussion of the early church has received much attention. However, others have argued for a dehellenization process, whereby Greek concepts were baptized into a whole lot of significance in the light of the message of Christianity. Christoph Schwobel argued that the "ontological conceptuality" provided by the various schools of philosophy "could not without modification express the unity of God in different identities".[14] Thus, he proposed that trinitarian theology should start from "Jerusalem" (the Bible) not with "Athens" (Philosophy). Thus, while some argued that the conceptualization of God in the early church was shaped by the existing religious and philosophical tradition, others, argued that though philosophical mediums were utilized, the context was derived from the Bible. This essay will speak into this debate, with an emphasis on linguistic change. I will argue that the Patristic discussion on God and Godhead needs to be understood within the dynamics of the crisis of language and semantic differences that accompanied the patristic appropriation of the Christian faith. While the vocabularies were borrowed from the existing philosophical and religious deposits, new meanings were often attributed to them.

Semantics in logos discussion

A case in point is the linguistic crisis in the usage of the term logos in early Christianity. Its earliest Christian usage is to be found in the Johannine reference: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made" (John 1:1-3 NIV). Irenaeus of Lyon indicates that the Johannine logos was in opposition to Gnostic usage of the term. Irenaeus, who was a student of John's disciple Polycarp of Smyrna, posits that the fourth Gospel was a polemic against the teachings of Gnostic Cerinthus, who was accused of distorting the divinity of Christ (*Adv. Haer.* 3.11.1; ANF 1:426). In response, John asserted that the "Logos was God" who "became flesh and dwelt among us". In doing so, he refuted the Gnostic belief that the divine cannot come in contact or mix with the material world. Ignatius of Antioch, a disciple of apostle John, in what is the first instance of reference to the logos outside the Johannine corpus, wrote of Jesus as the "eternal logos", who was the son of God, and not "proceeding forth from silence" (*Epis. Mag.* 8; ANF 1:62), a clear reference to Gnostic understanding of logos.

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[13] Aleksandar S. Santrac, "Three I know not what: The influence of Greek philosophy on the doctrine of Trinity" *In die Skriflig/In Luce Verbi* 47(1) (2013), 2.

[14] Christoph Schwobel, "The trinity between Athens and Jerusalem" *Journal of Reformed Theology* 3(1) (2009), 39.

The Gnostics spoke of a protological drama in which thirty aeons emanated from Silence, the First-aeon, which together with the First-aeon formed the divine Pleroma (*Adv. Haer*. 1.1.1-2; ANF 1:316-7). Elsewhere, the logos is also an alternate title for the aeon principally called "Saviour", who is the product of all the aeons in a corporate act of worship of the First-aeon (*Adv. Haer*. 1.2.6; ANF1:318). In both cases, these aeons are later emanations from the First-aeon, and as such, they are located at an ontological and epistemological distance from the First-aeon.[15] What we see in Gnosticism is an attempt to appropriate the logos within the web of cosmic creation and redemption story that had developed in their system. It resulted in a logos that was a divine being, but a created one. The Gnostic logos was, therefore, neither the Supreme God nor an incarnate Christ; rather, it was an emanated, inferior divine being or aeon.[16]

In contrast to the Gnostic logos – an emanated being – Irenaeus referred to the logos as the "Son of God", who "eternally coexisted with the Father, from of old, yea, from the beginning", and "through whom all things were made" (*Dem. Ap. prea.* 6; Behr:43).[17] The notion of the role of logos in creation is well developed in Irenaeus. He wrote, "[T]here is but one God, who made all things by His Word" (*Adv. Haer.* 3.11.1; ANF 1:426). Elsewhere, he wrote, "[God] formed all things that were made by His Word that never wearies" (*Adv. Haer*. 2.2.4; ANF 1:361). Also, "[W]e should know that he who made and formed and breathed in them the breath of life, and nourishes us by creation, establishing all things by his Word, and binding them together by his Sophia – this is he who is the only true God . . ." (*Adv. Haer.* 3.24.2; ANF 1:259). Irenaeus's attribution of an agentive role to the logos in creation is not a novelty. In Neo-Platonism the logos is identified with the *demiurge*, an intermediary divine being, of Plato's *Timaeus*.[18] Here, the need for an intermediary is necessitated by the platonic concept of divine transcendence, whereby there is a gap between perfect form and imperfect matter, God, and the material world. In Stoic philosophy, logos is used to describe both the governing faculty of a human being and the divine force that created and gave the order to the physical world.[19] The Jewish philosopher Philo took the concept of logos from Greek philosophy to Jewish

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[15] Jackson Lashier, "Irenaeus as Logos Theologian" *Vigiliae Christianae*, vol. 66, No. 4 (2012), 350.

[16] Pheme Perkins, "Logo Christologies in the Nag Hammadi Codices" *Vigiliae* Christianae, vol. 35, No. 4 (Dec. 1981), 382. Thomas Marsh, *The Triune God: A Biblical, Historical and Theological Study* (Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 1994), 69.

[17] Irenaeus. 1997. *On the Apostolic Preaching*, trans., John Behr. Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press.

[18] Santrac, "Three I know not what…, 2.

[19] J. Dillon, "Logos and trinity: Patterns of Platonist influence on early Christianity", in G. Vesey (ed.), *The philosophy in Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 3; A.A. Long, "Stoic Psychology" in *The Cambridge History of Hellenistic Philosophy*, eds, Keimpe Algra et al (Cambridge: Cambridge University press, 2005), 560-584.

thought, and thus, acted as the bridge to later Christian usage of the term. Following Platonism, he identified Yahweh as the "One" who is "qualityless", "unnameable", and "unutterable", and thus altogether incomprehensible to the human mind.[20] This platonic concept of divine transcendence entails that Yahweh could not involve directly with the material world. Therefore, Philo posits that Yahweh created the material world through the mediation of the logos. The logos was "the first being of God", the highest of the intermediary beings.[21] Thus, for Philo, the logos was a divine being generated by God who was involved in the creation of the world. This understanding of the logos resulted in the attribution of a diminished divinity to the logos.

In contrast to the Platonists, Irenaeus did not maintain God's transcendence through spatial language; rather, he defined God as a "higher order of being" who freely relates with creation without a "filter".[22] Thus, his logos was not an intermediary being necessitated by God's transcendent nature. For Irenaeus, as Jackson Lashier rightly pointed out, the contrast between the Father and the logos "is not between God on the one hand and the logos on the other, but between God and the logos on the one hand and all other created things on the other hand".[23] Thus, the logos was not a lower, intermediary being; rather, "The Father and Son share invisibility and visibility equally".[24] This negates any notion of a diminished divinity for the logos. Lashier argued that Irenaeus came to this conclusion because his "interpretation comes not from the philosophical notion; rather, from the Scripture".[25] This is evident in his appeal to the apostolic tradition in his discussion of the logos. Irenaeus cited the apostle John as the scriptural authority by writing, "even as John, the disciple of the Lord, declares regarding him: 'All things were made by Him [that is, the logos], and without Him nothing was made'" (*Adv. Haer*. 2.2.5; ANF 1:361-2). He also identifies the presence of the logos as a mark of Paul's theology when he writes, "[T]he apostle [Paul] did, in the first place, instruct the Gentiles ... to worship one God, the Creator of heaven and earth, and the Framer of the whole creation; and that His Son was His Logos, by whom he founded all things . . ." (*Adv. Haer*. 4.24.1; ANF 1:495). Thus, in refuting the Gnostic concept of the logos, Irenaeus subscribed to the traditional understanding of the logos as an agent of creation; yet, his commitment to the *regula fidei* made him reject any notion of diminished divinity of Christ.

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[20] Gaston, "The influence of Platonism on the early Apologists", 574.

[21] See Frederick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy, Vol. 1* (London/NY: Continuum, 2003), 458-62.

[22] Lashier, "Irenaeus as Logos Theologian", 349.

[23] Lashier, "Irenaeus as Logos Theologian", 355.

[24] Perkins, "Logo Christologies in the Nag Hammadi Codices", 385.

[25] Lashier, "Irenaeus as Logos Theologian", 354.

Another of Irenaeus' contributions to the logos discussion, which was to have a significant influence on the semantics of the word is the notion of the logos as the one who reveals the Father. The logos, Irenaeus wrote, "reveals the Father to Angels, Archangels, Powers, Virtues, and all to whom He wills that God should be revealed" (*Adv. Haer.* 2.30.9; ANF 1:406). Elsewhere, he wrote: "And his Logos knows that his Father is, as far as regards us, invisible and infinite; and since he cannot be declared [by anyone else], he does himself declare him to us; and on the other hand, it is the Father alone who knows His Own Logos." (*Adv. Haer*. 4.6.3; ANF 1:468). This pre-existing logos was incarnated "at the end of the times … was made man among men, visible and tangible" (*Dem. Apos. Prea.* 6; Behr:43). In Irenaeus, therefore, we see an ontological and epistemological understanding of the logos, who co-existed eternally with the Father, and therefore can reveal him. This definition of logos as the divine agent of revelation, as Jaroslav Pelikan argued, "owed very little to [Greek] philosophical speculation",[26] and thus, a Christian contribution to the semantic discussion of the term.

While Irenaeus' logos represent a dehellenization of the concept, there were others whose logos Christology was shaped by the existing cultural understanding. A case in point is Justin Martyr, who understood the logos as subordinate to God: "For next to God, we worship and love the Logos who is out of the unbegotten and ineffable God, since also He became man for our sakes, that, becoming a partaker of our sufferings, He might also bring us healing" (*II Apol.* 13; ANF 1:193).[27] Justin's subordination of the logos goes with his platonic understanding of divine transcendence. He posits that no one with even the "smallest intelligence" would dare "to assert that the Maker of all things, having left his super-celestial matters, was visible on little portion on earth" (**Dial. Tryp.** 60; ANF 1:227). The act of biblical theophany, therefore, cannot be the action of God; rather it must have been done by another "God" or "Lord", the logos. Thus, in his *Dialogue with Trypho* he wrote, "I shall endeavor to persuade you, that He who is said to have appeared to Abraham, and to Jacob, and to Moses, and who is called God, is distinct from Him who made all things, numerically, I mean not [distinct] in will" (*Dial. Tryp*. 56; ANF 1:223). Thus, as Pheme Perkins aptly phrased it, for Justin, "the Father is transcendent; the logos or Son is knowable".[28] Justin saw the logos as "god", but not the one true God.

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[26] Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*, *Vol. 1, The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600)* (Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press, 1971), 187.

[27] Justin also spoke of the logos as a divine being, who was involved in the action of creation. In his *Second Apology*, he wrote, "And His Son, who alone is properly called Son, the Word who also was with Him and was begotten before the works, when at first He created and arranged all things by Him, is called Christ…" (*II Apol.* 6; ANF 1:190).

[28] Perkins, "Logo Christologies in the Nag Hammadi Codices", 385.

Rather, the logos was the primary mediating agent between the world and the transcendent God. He referred to the logos as "a certain rational power", "begotten from the Father", and through whom all things were made (*Dial. Tryp.* 61; ANF 1:227). The language of power[29] here reflects platonic understanding of the logos as an active and immanent power in the world, which was ontologically subordinate to the static, transcendent One. This allows them "to affirm the creative and providential function of God in the world while keeping the divine nature free of mixture and contact with material creation".[30] The logos' ability to engage with the material world, therefore, condemned him to a diminished divinity.

The association of logos with the power of God leads to the development of the twofold stage theory of logos, which asserts that the logos existed eternally in God, and then, prior to the creation of the world, it was generated as a distinct person.[31] In his *Second Apology*, Justin wrote, that the Son, the word, was with the Father, and then, "begotten before the works [of creation]" (*II Apol.* 6; ANF 1:90). Tatian also expressed the same view in stating that the logos first "was in him" and then it "springs forth" (*Orat. ad Gr.* 5; ANF 2:67). Similarly, Athenagoras states that "God, who is the eternal mind, had the logos in himself, being from eternity instinct with the logos" as "the first product of the Father" to serve as "an idea and energizing power of all material things" (*pres.*   *peri0 Ch.* 10; ANF 2:133). The idea of the twofold stage generation of the logos can be traced to Philo, who spoke of the logos as God's reason (or mind) and later becomes a distinct being, an agent of his creation and a representation of the immanent law of the universe.[32] In contrast, Irenaeus could not accept any notion of the beginning of the logos. Appealing to the Johannine statement, "In the beginning was the logos", Irenaeus would argue that the logos, the Son, is "always coexisting with the Father… from the beginning" (*Adv. Haer.* 2.30.9; ANF 1:406). Though Irenaeus was primarily addressing his Gnostic opponents' assigning the logos "a beginning and course of production" (*Adv. Haer.* 2.13.8; ANF 1:375), he also ended up rejecting the twofold stage theory. Instead, he affirms a single stage theory whereby, the logos "was to have no beginning at all, not even a beginning preceded by an eternal existence in the mind of God"[33];

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[29] Justin used the power language again in his *First Apology* when he wrote, "Jesus Christ is the only proper Son, who has been begotten by God, being his Word and first begotten, and power" (*I Apology* 23; ANF 1:170).

[30] Lashier, "Irenaeus as Logos Theologian", 345-6.

[31] H.A. Wolfson, "Clement of Alexandria on the Generation of the logos" *Church History*, *Vol. 20, No. 2* (June 1951), 72.

[32] Jean Danielou, "The philosophy of Philo" *Theological Studies*, IX (Dec. 1948), 585.

[33] Harry Austryn Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Church Fathers, Vol. I: Faith, Trinity, Incarnation* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1956), 200.

rather, the generation of the logos from the Father was from eternity. Thus, once again Irenaeus' commitment to the *regula fidei* bats away the cultural understanding of the vocabulary. The semantic significance of Irenaeus' posture is evident in that his single-stage theory came to be considered orthodox.

Like Irenaeus, Origen of Alexandria also subscribed to a single-stage theory of the generation of the logos. For him, the Father begets the son in an eternal act, and therefore, there was never a time when the son was not.[34] Origen insisted that the logos was distinct from the Father, but eternal, so that none could "dare to lay down a beginning for the Son, before which he did not exist" (*De Princ.* 4.4.1; Butterworth 315).[35] However, his pupil, Dionysius of Alexandria, was perhaps inattentive, and went on to state that the Son "was not before he came to be" (*ap. Ath. Dion.* 4; NPF 2/4:177). The creature status of the logos was further propagated by Arius, also of Alexandria, who famously said of the logos, "There was when he was not". The logos, Arius declared, is "only called Word conceptually, and is not by nature and of truth Son of God, but is called Son… by adoption" (*ap. Ath. Dion.* 23; NPF 2/4:185). Furthermore, he argued that the logos was "alien and unlike in all things to the Father's essence and propriety" (*ap. Ath. Ar.* 1.6; NPF 2/4:309). In Arian thought, the logos was a being necessitated by the transcendent nature of God. Thus, Arius posits that the mediatory logos is necessary since the creatures "could not endure the untampered hand of the Father and be created by him" (*ap. Ath. Ar.* 2.24; NPF 2/4:361). In Arianism, therefore, Christian understanding of logos swung back to something very close to a platonic understanding of the logos as a created divine being, who bridged the gap between a transcendent God and the creation.

The reaction of the Nicene Fathers to the Arian logos was the defense of its eternal sonship. To do so, they had to dig deep into the existing philosophical vocabularies on the person and substance of God. In the process they found themselves engaged in a number game, trying to untangle semantic issues pertaining to the trinitarian assertion of three and one.

Linguistic of numbers

The challenge for Christianity was its affirmation of monotheistic faith while negotiating the revelation of divine reality involving the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. How to explain these realities without falling into the pitfall of Tri-theism was the real challenge. Justin was treading dangerously when he

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[34] Allan Coppedge, *The God Who is Triune: Revisioning the Christian Doctrine of God* (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic, 2007), 92.

[35] Origen. 1936. *On First Principles,* trans., GW Butterworth. Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock.

spoke of the three persons in a hierarchical sense: "we reasonably worship Him, having learned that He is the Son of the true God Himself, and holding Him in the second place, and the prophetic Spirit in the third" (*I Apol.* 13; ANF 1:167). Origen also shared a hierarchical Trinity, in which, the Father alone is ungenerated, and is superior to every being that exists, "for he imparts to each one from his own existence that which each one is; the Son, being less than the Father, ... the Holy Spirit is still less (*De Princ,* 1.3.5; Butterworth 34). In Origen's thought, the unity of the three in the Trinity is maintained because the Father is the fountainhead, and the other two are "an extension of his Godhead".[36] In this way, he used middle platonic schemes of procession to retain the biblical character of Christian faith in a God of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The third-century Platonist, Plotinus, spoke of a triad of One, Intellect and Soul, in which the latter two mysteriously emanated from the One, and "are the One and not the One; they are the One because they are from it; they are not the One, because it endowed them with what they have while remaining by itself".[37] In the same vein, Origen spoke of the procession of the Son and the Holy Spirit from the Father. Through this, Origen was able to refute the Monarchian reduction of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit to an indistinguishable monistic deity by asserting the individuality of each person of the Trinity. Nevertheless, in this system, the Son and Spirit are always in some sense derivative of, less than, and subordinate to their source, the one God, that is, the Father.

Plotinus described the distinctiveness of each member of the triad as a *hypostasis*, a Greek word meaning, "being"; while the sameness is described using the term *homoousios*, a compound word – *homo-ousia* – meaning "same in essence".[38] *Hypostasis* and *ousia* were to become the key vocabularies in the anti-Arian or Nicene articulation of the concept of the Trinity. The problem was, in antiquity the terms *hypostasis* and *ousia* was synonymous, and often used interchangeably.[39] Thus, Athanasius was to say "*hypostasis* is *ousia* and means nothing else but very being" (*ad Afr.* 4; NPF 2/4:490). Origen, however, made a distinction between the two: *hypostasis* carried "a sense of individual subsistence", while *ousia* refers to the substance, as indicated by his use of the

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[36] Coppedge, *The God Who is Triune*, 92.

[37] *Enneads* 85 as quoted in Dale Tuggy, "Trinity", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2013 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2013/entries/trinity/, 74. Plotinus argues that what which comes from the One could not be the same as the One, because otherwise the One would not have been the One, but many. Dmitri Nikulin, "The One and the Many in Plotinus" *Hermes* 126 Hd., H. 3 (1998), 336.

[38] Tuggy, "Trinity", 75.

[39] Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition*…, 219.

term *homoousios*[40] to state that the Son shares one substance with the Father.[41] Origen, therefore, started the process of baptizing the terms *hypostasis*, *ousia* and *homoousios* in Christian terms, and thus sets a precedence for the semantic development of trinitarian thought.

The adoption of platonic vocabularies – *hypostasis*, *ousia* and *homoousios* – for Christian trinitarian formulation stirred up a linguistic discussion on the precise meaning of the terms. The problem lies with the semantics that was already associated with the words. In Neo-Platonism, the term *hypostasis* was used "to describe the different lower degrees that descend from the One to the many". [42] Thus, the term already assumed a language of emanation and hierarchy. It was in this sense that Origen used the term, whereby the *hypostasis* of the Son was inferior to that of the Father, inasmuch as He is ungenerated (*De Princ,* 1.3.5; Butterworth 34). In the same vein, Arius talked about "a Triad" of *hypostasis*, "not in equal glories", "One more glorious than the others in their glories unto immensity". The Son, he continues, "has nothing proper to God in proper subsistence (*hypostasis*). For He is not equal, no, nor one in essence (*homoousios*) with" the Father (*Tha., De Syn.* 15; NPF 2/4:457). The Son, who was begotten "before eternal times" is inferior since he is not eternal, or coeternal with the Father, nor does he share in the Father's unbegotten nature (*ap. Ath. De Synodis* 16; NPF 2/4:458).[43] The same principle was applied to the Holy Spirit in the controversy surrounding Macedonius, who opined that the Holy Spirit was a creature, and "is inferior to, and less than [the Father and the Son] in every point; in power, in glory, in dignity" (Gr. Nys. *Adv. Mac.* 2; NPF 2/5:316). The challenge of the notion of emancipation and subordination was also evident in the debate in the Council of Nicaea over the use of the words *homoousios* and *homoiousios*. The two Greek words, though differing in just one alphabet, was decisive to speak of the coequality of the godhead in the Trinity. The *homoousios* camp won the day with the Nicene Creed affirming that the

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[40] "…the Son is homoousios with the Father, that is, of one substance with the Father, but foreign from the substance of a creature" (Pamphilus, *Apology for Origen* 94; Scheck 83). St Pamphilus. 2010. "Apology for Origen" *Fathers of the Church* tran. Thomas P Scheck. Washington, D.C: The Catholic University of America Press.

[41] Coppedge, *The God Who is Triune*, 92.

[42] Lingua, "Trinity, Number and Image. The Christian Origins of the Concept of Person"

[43] The distinctiveness of the Father and the Son is clearly stated in Arius' statement of Faith quoted by Athanasius: "We acknowledge One God, alone Ingenerate, alone Everlasting, along Unbegun, along True, alone having Immortality, alone Wise, alone Good, alone Sovereign… who begat an Only-begotten Son before eternal times, through whom He has made both the ages and the universe; and begat Him, not in semblance, but in truth; and that He made Him subsist at His own will, unalterable and unchangeable; perfect creature of God…" (*ap. Ath. De Synodis* 16; NPF 2/4:458).

godhead shares the same substance. The *homoiosius* camp represents a tendency, which, unlike the Arians, acknowledged the divinity of Christ, yet was only willing to accept that the son shares a likeness of substance with the Father, thus, subordinating the son. In the council of Nicaea, the fathers of the church rejected the hierarchical understanding of the Trinity and asserted the belief in three co-equal *hypostasis*. Against subordination, it introduced the concept of consubstantiality, which was used to argue for the full divinity of the Son, as Athanasius asserted in his *Orationes Contra Arianos,* "He is very God, existing in one essence (*homoousios*) with the very Father" (*ap. ath. Ar.* 1.9; NPF 2/4:311). This means a redefinition of the vocabulary was necessitated if it had to convey the trinitarian concept proposed at Nicaea.

The immediate challenge was the semantics inherent in the then-cultural usage of the trinitarian vocabularies*.* The term *homoousios* could be interpreted either as implying "materialist ideas of God"[44] or uniting the Father and the Son so closely together as to lead to Sabbellianism (Modalism).[45] The Nicene affirmation of three *hypostasis* runs the risk of Tri-theism. The issue involves the notion of singularity inherent in the word *hypostasis*. In Platonism *hypostasis* is an ontological concept of concrete singularity.[46] Thus, identifying each person of the Trinity as a *hypostasis* runs the risk of understanding it to mean three gods. Gregory of Nyssa reported the reaction of many to the Nicene definition of the three *hypostasis*: "Peter, James, and John, being in one human nature, are called three men; and there is no absurdity in describing those who are united in nature, if they are more than one by the plural number of the name derived from their nature". Thus, they reasoned, "how is it that in the case of our statements of the mysteries of the Faith, though confessing the Three Persons, and acknowledging no difference of nature between them, we are in some sense at variance with our confession, when we say that the Godhead of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit is one, and yet forbid men to say 'there are three Gods'" (Gr. Nys. *Tres. dii*; NPF 2/5:331). The problem was compounded by the ambiguity involved in the semantic relation of the word *hypostasis* with *ousia*, which, as noted earlier, was often used interchangeably. Basil summarized the conundrum thus, "Many persons, in their study of the sacred dogmas, failing to distinguish between what is common in the essence or substance (*ousia*) and the meaning of the *hypostases*, arrived at the same notions, and think that it makes no difference whether *ousia* or *hypostasis* is to be spoken of". This landed

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[44] Franco Beatrice, "The Word 'Homoousios' from Hellenism to Christianity" *Church History, vol. 71, No. 2* (June 2002), 253.

[45] David M. Gwynn, *Athanasius of Alexandria: Bishop, Theologian, Ascetic, Father* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 64-5.

[46] Lingua, "Trinity, Number and Image. The Christian Origins of the Concept of Person"

them either in Sabellian or Tri-theism, as Basil stated: Therefore to some "it seems just as appropriate to say one *hypostasis* as one *ousia*" (leading to Sabellianism). On the other hand, "those who accept three *hypostases* suppose that it is necessary, on the basis of this confession, to assert a division of *ousias* into the same number" (leading to Tri-theism) (*Ep.* 38.1; NPF 2/8:137).

In the post-Nicene era, the Cappadocian Fathers started to untangle the semantic ambiguity by differentiating *hypostasis* from *ousia*, by appealing to Aristotle's distinction between universal and particular categories to describe the persons of the Trinity. In a very Aristotelian language, Basil wrote, "ousia has the same relation to hypostasis as the common has to the particular. Every one of us both shares in existence by the common term of essence (ousia) and by his own properties is such an one and such an one". Applying it to Trinity, he wrote, "In the same manner… the term ousia is common, like goodness, or Godhead, or any similar attribute; while hypostasis is contemplated in the special property of Fatherhood, Sonship, of the power to sanctify" (*Ep.* 214.4; NPF 2/8:255). Thus, for Basil, the relationship between the unity of substance and the diversity of the hypostases should be read in analogy to the relationship between what is common and what is particular.[47] Basil wrote: "The distinction between *ousia* and *hypostasis* is the same as that between the general and the particular; as, for instance, between the animal and the particular man. Wherefore, in the case of the Godhead, we confess one essence or substance so as not to give variant definition of existence, but we confess a particular hypostasis, in order that our conception of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit may be without confusion and clear" (*Ep.* 236.6; NPF 2/8:278). With this distinction, Basil identifies *ousia* with the Aristotelian second substance (universals) and *hypostasis* with the first substance (individuals).[48] The semantic significance of this is that a clear distinction was made between the two words, *hypostasis* and *ousia*, which traditionally were often used interchangeably, as certain semantic emphasis associated with each were reinforced and affirmed with Christian appropriation.

On the question of three *hypostasis* and Tri-theism, Basil points out the problematics in transfiguring or projecting ideas "from finitude to infinity".[49] To say that three *hypostasis* means Tri-theism is to subject infinite things to finite calculation. In his *De Spiritu Sancto* he stated, "For we do not count by way of addition, gradually making increase from unity to multitude, and saying one, two, and three, nor yet first, second, and third. For 'I', God, 'am the first, and I am

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[47] Lingua, "Trinity, Number and Image. The Christian Origins of the Concept of Person".

[48] George Karamanolis, "Early Christian Philosophers on Aristotle" in Andrea Falcon (ed.), *Brill's Companion to the Reception of Aristotle in Antiquity,* ed. Andrea Falcon (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 216), 475.

[49] Lingua, "Trinity, Number and Image. The Christian Origins of the Concept of Person".

the last'" (*De Sp. Sant.* 45; NPF 2/8:28). Augustine also shared a similar attitude in stating "when the question is asked, what three? Human language labors together under great poverty of speech. The answer, however, is given three "persons", not that it might be [completely] spoken, but that it might not be left [wholly] unspoken" (*De Trin.* 5.9; NPF 1/3: 92). Here, Basil and Augustine recognized the semantic difficulty as human speech labours under a great dearth of words while attempting to define the dogma of the Trinity. As Ligua points out, "the nature of numbers itself is extraneous to the reality of the Trinity", since "divine reality transcends the operations of mathematics that are only suitable for created things".[50] Vincent Brummer in his critique of the Cappadocian Trinity stated that the trinitarian formulation with three discreet divine beings still "looks more like tritheism than like monotheism".[51] However, Brummer is here guilty of quantitative distinction of the godheads, which Cappadocians and Augustine tried to avoid, in spite of the limitation of human language.

The formal Latin equivalent of the Greek *hypostasis* and *ousia* are *essentia* ("being") and *substantia* ("substance") respectively.[52] Adopting these two words to express the trinitarian concept would have landed the Latin fathers in a similar conundrum as their Greek counterparts. The problem was avoided with the use of the term *persona.* Latin theologian Tertullian was the first to use the term to speak of the intra-trinitarian distinction (*Adv. Praex.* 2; ANF 3:598). In classical usage, the term *persona* has been associated with a judicial identity as well as with social role and function. Therefore, as Ligua pointed out, the term has "a precise social value, keeping together the element of individuality and that of relationality". Thus, there was no difficulty in using the word to express intra-trinitarian distinction as "the word expresses in itself both the dimension of real and objective identity and the relational dimension".[53]

In the post-Nicene discussion, the semantics in the mathematics of numbers dominated the God-discussion of the fathers. What came to be the Christian doctrine of Trinity represents, in linguistic terms, a modification of Plotinius' teaching of *hypostasis* and *ousia*, though Christianity rejected the hierarchy of divinity it proposed. The Cappadocian solution was the singularity of the *ousia* (substance) while maintaining the individuality of the *hypostasis* (person). This radically changed Greek metaphysics, as it "shifted attention

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[50] Lingua, "Trinity, Number and Image. The Christian Origins of the Concept of Person"

[51] Vincent Brummer, *Atonement Christology and Trinity: Making Sense of Christian Doctrine* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2005), 99.

[52] Keith E. Johnson, *Rethinking the Trinity and Religion Pluralism: An Augustinian Assessment* (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic, 2011), 243.

[53] Lingua, "Trinity, Number and Image. The Christian Origins of the Concept of Person".

from the universality of being to the singularity of substances".[54] Though the *hypostasis* shares the same *ousia*, they exist individually, and thus, challenged the traditional notion of the universality of being. Thus, the patristic redefinition of philosophical vocabulary has a wide-ranging impact on the language and philosophy of the culture.

Crisis of language

The third-century church father, Tertullian famously wrote, "What indeed has Athens to do with Jerusalem?" (*Praes.* 7; ANF 3:246). He called Plato "the caterer to all these heretics" (*De Anim.* 23; ANF 3:203), and that heresies are themselves instigated by philosophy (*Praes.* 7; ANF 3:246). Tertullian epitomized those early Christians who reserved an antithetical attitude towards culture, yet, he himself was captive to the culture. K.J. Popma called him "the most brilliant representatives of culture during the early Christian period", identifying him within the cynic tradition of hostility toward culture.[55] An erudite writer, Tertullian was up to date with the philosophical and rhetorical tradition of the time. Some scholars have even placed him within the Second Sophistic Movement,[56] a movement characterized by a renewed emphasis on rhetoric and oratory. Tertullian, therefore, is perhaps the best example of someone, who was blatantly unsympathetic to culture, yet was well-cultured in his use of the cultural mediums for communication. On the other hand, were those early Christian writers who expressed much enthusiasm toward cultural engagement. Origen, for instance, enthusiastically employed the existing philosophical and rhetorical tools in his writings. One of Origen's pagan contemporaries said of him: "in his life conducting himself as a Christian and contrary to the laws, but his opinions of material things and of Deity being like a Greek, and mingling Grecian teachings with foreign fables" (Eus. *Hist. Ecc.* 6.19.7; NPF 2/1:266). For Origen, "biblical doctrine and philosophical speculation are both essential components" of theology.[57] Augustine compared the situation to Israel fleeing from captivity in Egypt at the time of Exodus, who, though they left the idols of Egypt behind them, carried the gold and silver of Egypt with them, in order to make "a better use" of them. Likewise, Augustine continues, "all branches of heathen learning ... contain also liberal instruction which is

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[54] Lingua, "Trinity, Number and Image. The Christian Origins of the Concept of Person".

[55] K.J. Popma, "Patristic Evaluation of Culture" *Philosophia Reformata*, vol. 38, No. 1 (1973), 99.

[56] Eric Osborn, *Tertullian: First Theologian of the West* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 29.

[57] Pelikan, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition*, 48-9.

better adapted to the use of the truth (*De Doc. Christ.* 2.40; NPF 1/2:554). Thus, the taxonomy of early Christian attitude towards culture identified two categories of fathers, one sympathetic to and the other antithetical to the culture. However, the fathers even of the latter category could not totally disassociate themselves from culture, particularly from the use of cultural medium to communicate the Christian faith. The fathers were children of their time, and naturally, they drew from the existing religious and philosophical vocabularies to express their Christian faith.

When Irenaeus, the second-century church father, wrote that the Valentinian Gnostics speak a language that "resembles ours", but intend different meanings, he underlines a prevailing semantic problem in Patristic discussion: a plurality of meaning. The Gnostics, according to Irenaeus, have craftily clothed their teachings in "an attractive dress", so that to the "inexperienced", it appears to be "more truth than the truth itself". Thus, he applied himself to show how "absurd and inconsistent" their claims were (*Adv. Haer*. I Preface 2; ANF 1:315). The issue at hand is the subjective nature of the words used by the early Christians as they infused meanings to words to serve certain purposes in the transmission of the faith they professed. The words were drawn from a common bank of religious and philosophical vocabularies, yet each heterodox group of Christians often used them to mean differently. This intra-ecclesiastical problem reflects a larger linguistic issue, or rather, a crisis of language, which resulted from the Christian infusion of meanings to existing vocabularies. Early Christians used the language that was prevalent in the existing philosophical and religious discussion and applied them to their theological articulation. These vocabularies already had meanings inherent in them before they were given a Christian one.

Much has been written on the Hellenization of Christianity since the German historian Adolf von Harnack made a case for it.[58] It has been argued that Hellenization radically altered the essence of Christianity. In particular to the discussion on the concept of God, a strong case has been made on the influence of platonic and stoic philosophy.[59] A case has also been made of a reverse movement of "dehellenization", whereby the infusion of Christian ideas resulted in modification in existing concepts, both in content and form.[60] In particular to linguistic studies, this essay has shown how Christian adoption of existing religious and philosophical vocabularies in the culture resulted in a linguistic

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[58] Von Harnack, Adolf. 1902. *What is Christianity? Lectures delivered in the University of Berlin during the Winter-term, 1899–1900,* trans. by Th.B. Saunders. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons - London: Williams and Norgate, 214-221.

[59] See Gaston. "The influence of Platonism on the early Apologists". 573-580.

[60] See Schwobel, Christoph. "The trinity between Athens and Jerusalem". 22-41.

crisis, whereby the language underwent a semantic evolution. It resulted in either an emphasis on certain aspects or the introduction of new meanings. I have shown that Patristic appropriation of the Greek philosophical concept of logos led to a rejection of its culturally attributed diminished divinity and an emphasis on its revelatory role. Furthermore, the association of the term with sonship also resulted in a shift from an agentive to an ontological understanding of the term. The logos was neither the platonic thinking faculty of human beings nor simply the stoic creative agent of God; rather the logos was a person, Jesus Christ. Patristic appropriation of the terms *hypostasis* and *ousia* also resulted in a clear distinction between the two. They were no longer synonymous or interchangeable terms; rather were definitive terms to speak of the person and substance of beings. Patristic appropriation also rid *hypostasis* of its platonic notion of emanation and subordination. The Nicene trinitarian formula affirmed the co-equal existence of three *hypostasis* in a singularity of *ousia*. These patristic redefinitions had repercussions on metaphysical and epistemological levels. Language, as Burke noted, "shapes the society in which it is spoken".[61] Changes in the form and content of the language are bound to have a return effect on the philosophy and conceptual framework in society. A case in point is the way the Greek concept of person has come to be understood, which has repercussions on the way the concept has been applied elsewhere. The valorization of individuals in the way the term *hypostasis* has come to be understood challenged the traditional placement of truth in the universals, and thus, has widespread epistemological consequences.[62] Marcel Mauss is right to say: "Our notion of the human person is still fundamentally the Christian notion".[63]

The value in the adoption of existing vocabularies in the culture to communicate religious ideas continues to invite debate even today. In particular, the concept of *praeparatio evangelica* calls for identifying bridges between Christianity and other religions. In a multi-religious context like India, for instance, many words, phrases, or concepts from Hindu texts and traditions have found their way into Christian theological discussions and literature. Since the nineteenth century, the appropriateness of the adoption of religious vocabularies present in the culture for Christian theologizing has been proposed and even criticized. The adoption of the term *saccidananda* noted at the beginning of this essay is a notable example. The terms *sat*, *cit* and *ananda* were baptized with Christian meaning, whereby the Father is identified with "truth/being", the Son with "reason", and the Holy Spirit with "bliss". In Hinduism, the three constitute

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[61] Burke and Porter (eds), *The Social History of Language*, 3-4.
[62] Lingua, "Trinity, Number and Image. The Christian Origins of the Concept of Person".
[63] Marcel Mauss as quoted in Lingua, "Trinity, Number and Image. The Christian Origins of the Concept of Person".

an inner relation within *parabrahman,* the indivisible supreme being, which is encapsulated in the concept, *saccidananda*. Bryan Lobo has shown that the Christian appropriation of these concepts has challenged the existing understanding of *Parabrahman* as an impersonal God to a personal one, with *sat*, *cit* and *ananda* as three aspects of the Godhead.[64] Thus, one can speak of a crisis of language in the culture due to its contact with Christianity. In regards to Christian theology, the key issue is the lingering presence of its cultural meaning, whereby *saccidananda* speaks of the "aspects of Godhead" rather than "relationships within the Godhead".[65] Thus, its effective adoption requires a semantic evolution toward conforming to the orthodox Christian Trinitarian understanding.

The experience of the early church shows that existing vocabularies as they are, seldom capture the full extent of the meaning intended by the Christian message. The language often had to undergo a crisis leading to the addition of new meanings or words, or a reinforced emphasis on certain semantic aspects. This can speak into the contemporary discussion on *praeparatio evangelica* in that the adoption of cultural vocabulary need not entail its transplantation as it is; rather as Popma puts it in his discussion on the Patristic estimation of culture, "a source-reorientation in the light of the Scripture"[66] is necessary. Swoebel had called for a need to be "dependent on the language of God" in the Scripture, whereby "the technical expression of the doctrine of Trinity constantly needs to be filled with the content of the biblical witnesses because this is their subject matter".[67] Patristic experience informs us that the adoption of vocabularies from the culture to communicate Christian dogma is useful, even necessary; yet, it needs to be done with adequate qualification to conform to the Biblical teaching of the concept.

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[64] Bryan Lobo "Tripersonalising the Hindu God of 'Advaita Vedanta – Parabrahman" *Gregorianum, Vol. 92, No. 1* (2011), 177-9.

[65] Peter May, "The Trinity and Saccidananda" https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/ijt/07-3_093.pdf, 98.

[66] Popma, Popma, "Patristic Evaluation of Culture" ,113

[67] Schwobel, "The trinity between Athens and Jerusalem", 37.

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FAMILY AS THE CHURCH IN MINIATURE: A PANACEA TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN CHRISTIAN FAMILIES IN AFRICA

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ABSTRACT. Observably, many African Christians, on church-going days, put on reverend moods and are kind towards one another, both at home and at the Church premises. It is not uncommon that these same Christians are violent the rest of the week, treating members of their families unkindly. This shows how much the church is revered as a holy institution. This is the problem of sacred-secular dichotomy; between the church and worshipping days versus away from the church and non-worshipping days. Therefore, we argue that if the human institution –the family, is understood as God's own instituted basic unit of the church and therefore holy, peace will prevail among its members. The approach applies the principle of *analogia entis* to argue that the human family is God's family in the same manner we speak of the church as the Family of God since both are prefigured in God's eternal plan. In this research, the anthropological data is gathered by non-probability sampling.

Keywords: violence, women, family, Africa, spirituality.

Introduction

It is noted that sub-Saharan Africa is rapidly converting to Christianity. Pew Research Center (PEW) 2010 researched Religion and Public Life and found that roughly nine in ten people in many African countries they surveyed reported that religion was vital in their lives.[2] Religion and civilisation should be expected

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[2] Mahoney, A. "Religion in families, 1999–2009: A relational spirituality framework" *Journal of Marriage and Family*, *72*, (2010): 805-827 also cf. Vaaler, M. L., Ellison C. G., & Powers, D. A. "Religious influences on the risk of marital dissolution. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, *71*, (2009): 917-934. Also confer with Takyi, B. K. "Religion and women's health in Ghana: Insights into HIV/AIDs preventive and protective behaviour." *Social Science & Medicine*, *56*, (2003): 1221-1234.

to pacify hostile mentality and bring about social tranquillity, yet the reverse is true. Isn't it a paradox that as societies become more religious and educated, the more they become hostile towards their species and creation? Isn't it a paradox, too, that as we advance technologically, we use technology to invent more sophisticated weapons of mass destruction than ever before? It has been reported that the world's superpowers, the US, Britain, China, North Korea and Russia, have developed nuclear weapons whose capacity for destruction is much more than witnessed during the Nagasaki and Hiroshima incidents seventy years ago. Despite its advancement in Biblical studies, isn't it also unfortunate that the church still uses the Holy Scriptures to endorse gender discrimination, a recipe for domestic violence? This pegs the question: How would families profess Christianity, a religion that advocates for peace and love, still experience Domestic Violence (DV)? What is missing in the Christian teachings or values that, if discovered and included, would curb this social menace?

Employing the principle of *analogia entis,* this paper hypothesises that if the Human Family is understood as an *Ecclesia in Miniature* prefigured in God's eternal plan, Human Family should experience tranquillity like that which exists in the Holy Trinity. This trajectory is premised on human social institutions being prototypes of eternal divine mysteries, and ecclesia, crafted after the Trinitarian order, provides an example of family tranquillity.

1.0 Domestic Violence

1.1 Definition and forms of Domestic Violence

The Cambridge dictionary defines violence as "actions or words that are intended to hurt people." In connection with that, the World Health Organization (WHO) defines Domestic violence as "acts of physical aggression, sexual coercion, psychological abuse and controlling behaviours."[3] Further, the World Bank defines Domestic violence as "all acts of physical, sexual, psychological or economic violence within the family or domestic unit or between former or current spouses or partners, whether or not the perpetrator shares or has shared the same residence with the victim."[4] It is also referred to as Intimate Partner Violence (IPV).

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[3] World Health Organization, 2013; Global and Regional Estimates of Violence against Women: Prevalence and Health Effects of Intimate Partner Violence and Non-Partner Sexual Violence. *World Health Organization* http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/85239/1/9789241564625_eng.pdf. Accessed on 24/05/2018.

[4] World Bank 2005. https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/socialsustainability/brief/violence-against-women-and-girls Accessed on 16/01/2018.

"Zero violence 254 walk" defines DV as "the willful intimidation, physical assault, battery, sexual assault, and/or other abusive behaviour as part of a systematic pattern of power and control perpetrated by one intimate partner against another."[5] Thus, DV may include physical violence, sexual violence, psychological violence, and emotional abuse.[6] It further notes the varying faces DV bears. Some of these faces are obvious, while others are subtle and secrete. Such noticeable physical injuries resulting from DV would include, among many others: Second Degree Burns, Third-degree burns, Hot water scalding, Broken bones, Bruised body parts and Sexual abuse.[7] It further documents other forms of DV in Kenyan families, such as

> child marriage; female genital mutilation; (forced) marriage; forced wife inheritance; interference from in-laws; sexual violence within marriage; virginity testing; widow cleansing; damage of property; defilement; depriving the applicant of or hindering the applicant from access to or a reasonable share of the facilities associated with the applicant's place of residence; economic abuse; emotional or psychological abuse; forcible entry into the applicant's residence where the parties do not share the same residence; harassment; incest; intimidation; physical abuse; sexual abuse; stalking; verbal abuse; or any other conduct against a person, where such conduct harms or may cause imminent harm to the safety, health, or well-being of the person.[8]

1.2 Causes

In many Christian families where DV is experienced, causes may include: financial misappropriation and constraints, alcoholism and drug abuse, withdrawal of conjugal privileges and rights, religious pride and judging others as not saved well enough, miscommunication or lack of it, misunderstanding, mistrust, suspicion, hatred and even other forms of disagreement and selfish interest. According to Majawa, "the root cause of irreconcilable differences in the Church and society is the failure to listen from the heart and the indifference caused by sin."[9] This is also true of family conflicts. Such an attitude caused by

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[5] http://www.zeroviolence254.org/16-sobering-kenyan-domestic-violence-statistics. Accessed on 16/01/2018.

[6] Ibid.

[7] http://www.zeroviolence254.org/16-sobering-kenyan-domestic-violence-statistics. Accessed on 16/01/2018.

[8] Ibid., (Rephrased and reformatted).

[9] Clement Majawa, "The Dialectical Method of Augustine and Pelagius: Lessons for Peacebuilding Processes in Africa." *African Ecclesial Review*, Vol. 59, Nos. 1 & 2, March-June 2017: 82.

our sinful nature aims at achieving selfish motives. In the absence of trust and conscious awareness of one's sinfulness, families and society at large cannot realise peace or development.

Besides the above, in the history of the church, it has been noted that Christians have interpreted some scriptural texts masculinely to demean women. They have used such scriptures to justify the molestation of women.

1.3 Prevalence of Domestic Violence in Families

Taking DV from the perspective of how women are treated in families in Africa, Pope Benedict XVI notes that although in some communities in Africa, women have been accorded opportunities just like their counterparts –men, "There are still too many practices that debase and degrade women in the name of ancestral tradition."[10]

"Zero Violence 254 Initiative" campaign in Kenya notes the alarmingly high rates of Domestic Violence, albeit the unreported incidences.[11] According to the 'The Daily Nation[12] "Statistics indicate that 42 per cent of Kenyans have been affected by domestic violence…."[13] Many of these victims did not seek legal redress, nor did they report the incidences. This, therefore, means that the percentage could be higher.

The World Health Organization[14] reports that Domestic violence is a problem everywhere. The survey shows that 35% of women worldwide have experienced physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence. The UN Woman[15] Indicates that up to 70% of women have experienced physical and/or sexual violence in their lifetime from an intimate partner.

Studies conducted in Kenya, albeit statistics showing that Kenya is 80% Christian –according to National Census 2009, have all documented high levels of female abuse by their intimate partners.[16] A pastor's wife teaching at a theological

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[10] *Africae Munus*, Article no. 56.

[11] http://www.zeroviolence254.org/16-sobering-kenyan-domestic-violence-statistics. Accessed on 16/01/2018.

[12] Daily Nation. Wednesday, 16 March 2016. Daily Nation. Wednesday, 16 March 2016. - Search (bing.com)

[13] http://www.zeroviolence254.org/16-sobering-kenyan-domestic-violence-statistics. Accessed on 16/01/2018.

[14] World Health Organization, 2013.

[15] UN Women 2016; Facts and Figures: Ending Violence against Women. www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/facts-and-figures. Accessed on 16/01/2018.

[16] Jewkes, R., Levin, J. B., & Penn-Kekana, L. "Gender inequalities, intimate partner violence and HIV preventive practices: Findings of a South African cross-sectional Study". *Social Science & Medicine*, *56*, (2003): 125-134. Cf. Kimani, M. Taking on violence against women in Africa: International norms, local activism start to alter laws, attitudes. *Africa Renewal, 21*, (2007): 4-22

college in Nairobi sought divorce from her cruel husband, who served as a parish priest. The wife claimed that although her husband did not physically assault her, he was quarrelsome and threatened to kill her with her daughter. He demanded sex by force.[17] In another different incident, a pastor reported an incident where a Church elder's wife ran to his house half-naked, pursued by her Christian husband in the middle of the night, brandishing a machete ready to kill her.[18]

Due to cultural orientations, many of the male victims of DV do not come out to the public to report the aggression. The few cases that have captured the Kenyan Media in the recent past have caused the victims social stigma. In a survey among Christian families in Nyeri, it was observed that patriarchal structures made men shy off from reporting incidences of violence.[19] According to a survey carried out in 2015 concerning DV against men, it was found that men-battering is more rampant among Christian families than in non-Christian families. For example, it was established that DV was rare among Muslim families.[20]

1.4 Reasons for the perpetration of Domestic Violence

Among reasons advanced for the perpetration and perpetuation of this vice, especially in families in general, include illiteracy, ignorance by victims and insensitivity of law enforcers. It is argued that victims of DV are not aware of existing legal structures for redress. "Access to Justice Report" conducted by the UN[21] notes that high illiteracy levels prevented active victim protection. Regarding ignorance of the existing legal framework, reports indicate that the victim protection system is weak and worsened by high levels of legal illiteracy in the country, especially among GBV survivors. The "Zero violence 254" initiative notes that many of the victims of DV do not even know that all forms of DV are punishable crimes in a court of law. Due to their unawareness of their rights, they have become silent sufferers.

Lastly, according to Kenya Domestic Household Survey, despite awareness of existing laws and literacy, only 5% of the survivors of DV in 2014 reported incidents of violence and were willing to go to court. The remaining 95% did not want to take up the matter with law enforcement organs, citing the insensitivity of law enforcement as the reason.[22]

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[17] Informant Q1 (identity concealed for their integrity, dignity and confidentiality).

[18] This information was captured in a Church service at St. Philips –Jericho Nairobi as the Pastor of the Church made an application of his sermon.

[19] David, Kariuki Mwangi, "Causes and Effects of Domestic Violence on Married Men of Anglican Church of Kenya: Ruruguti Deanery, Nyeri County –Kenya", an MTh thesis presented to St. Paul's University 2017.

[20] Ibid., Kariuki quotes Kubai, 2014.

[21] UN Women 2016.

[22] Kenya Domestic Household Survey (KDHS) 2014.

2.0 Existing Proposed Solutions

2.1 Conscientisation:

"Zero Violence 254" initiative posits that if victims of Domestic Violence were conscientious of their rights and made aware that there exists a legal law like "Protection Against Domestic Violence", an Act that protects every individual human person, this vice would be minimised. Therefore, its vision is to "create awareness of the 'Protection Against Domestic Violence Act, ensuring that victims of this vice know their full rights in case there is an emergence of these acts again."[23]

2.2 Establishment of legal structures

The "Zero Violence 254" initiative appreciates the fact that Kenya has established a legal framework against all forms of violence, which include "The sexual Offenses Act (2006); Employment Act (2007); Prohibition of FGM Act (2011); Counter Trafficking in Persons Act (2010); Protection Against Domestic Violence Act; Gazettement of Sexual Offences Medical Treatment Regulation and PRC Form; and the Victims Protection Act."[24] However, it notes that the insensitivity of law enforcers – delayed processes for justice, corruption in legal corridors, cultural prejudices, and many other factors has made many victims not seek legal redress, hence the need to establish functional legal structures.

2.3 Hermeneutical and Catechetical approach

Majora, in the article "The Dialectical Method of Augustine and Pelagius: Lessons for Peacebuilding Processes in Africa", echoes the concerns of Pope Paul II in observing that peacebuilding, although it has been discussed in many ways, it lacks approaches that are informative, formative and transformative in approach. He argues that this is only possible if the approach employs a "catechetical and pastoral approach that employs Christian values, African peacebuilding processes and the Church, society and educational institutions."[25] As if to underscore the reason why insurgent groups in Africa are not going away despite the effort done by international governments, Majawa posits that it is because there lacks an appropriate peacebuilding strategy based on catechesis and spirituality that is founded on the concept of the Church in Africa

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[23] http://www.zeroviolence254.org/16-sobering-kenyan-domestic-violence-statistics. Accessed on 16/01/2018.

[24] *Kenyan Woman*

[25] Majora, 2017: 63.

as a Family of God.[26] He further notes that "This is also a contributing factor to tensions and divorce in contemporary Christian communities and marriage, respectively."[27]

Majora, approaching the solution to violence in general from a Christian theological point of view, postulates that for a family to realise peace, justice and development, there has to be a conscious awareness of the fact that all are sinners and need forgiveness and the grace of God.[28] Thus, besides developing trust among members of a family or society, it is imperative that members also accept that they are sinners and appreciate others' faults and divergent views in love. Such an attitude will foster love, trust and faithfulness in the family and reduce Domestic Violence.

Biblical scholars, using Post-Colonial hermeneutics especially, the hermeneutics of suspicion over that Biblical texts that portray women as inferior and not created in the image of God like their counterpart –men, or in general, those scriptural texts that do not affirm and enhance the life of humanity should be regarded as not being the divinely inspired word of God and should be ignored.[29]

2.4 Critique of existing Solutions

The fact that the "Zero Violence 254" initiative appreciates the fact that Kenya has established a legal framework against all forms of violence begs the question: if legal literacy or conscientisation of victims on the existence of legal systems were the solutions to any forms of violence, why is it that according to surveys carried out by the "Access to Justice Report" by UN Women in 2015, 72% of the survivors seen in the facilities in 2014, only 5% were willing to go to court and the rest were unwilling to pursue justice?
Secondly, why is it that victims of domestic violence and any other forms of violence from regions that are considered literate (as demonstrated here below and possibly aware of existing laws) are reported to be unwilling to report the incidences and seek legal redress?

In 2013 - The Kenya Police Service received 3,596 defilement cases. Out of this, 913 cases were of rape, 242 cases of incest and 124 cases of sodomy.

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[26] Majora, 2017: 63.

[27] Majora, 2017: 63.

[28] Majora, 2017: 82.

[29] Lydia Mwaniki, "Reading Paul Sympathetically: From a Hermeneutic of Suspicion to a Hermeneutic of Reconstruction (1Coronthians 11:1-16)" *Journal of Gender and Religion in Africa,* 19, No. 2. (December 2013:21-36) and also confer with John M. Kiboi, "From Post-Colonial Hermeneutics of Suspicion to a Dialectical Theology of Instantaneous and Progressive Divine Revelation", *African Christian Studies*, Vol. 31, Number 4, (December 2015):31.

It is also reported that 5,143 cases of Gender Based Violence (GBV) come from 131 regions across Kenya. Of these regions, it is noted that the worst regions as far as physical violence against women is concerned are: Western (51.6%); Nyanza (49.5%); Nairobi (46.1%); Eastern (40.6%); Central (32.8%); Rift Valley (32.4%); Coast (27.4%); North Eastern (12.1%); With regards to sexual violence against women, records indicate that: Western (25.3%); Nyanza (19.4%); Nairobi (21.8%); Eastern (12.9); Rift Valley (9.7); Coast (9.1); Central (8.7); North Eastern (0.4 per cent).[30]

According to the Kenya Bureau of Statistics, the National population census of 2019, regions with the high illiteracy index are Turkana (Northern - 82%), Wajir (North-Eastern - 76%), Garissa (North-Eastern - 74%), Mandera (North-Eastern - 70%) and Marsabit (North-Eastern - 68%).[31] Note the drop in Domestic Violence with the drop in education levels.

Judging from the statics above, the rate of violence seems to decrease with a decrease in the level of literacy; compared to Western and North Eastern. If, according to the "Zero Violence 254" initiative, conscientisation of the masses is the solution to domestic violence, why is it that according to the statistics by KDHS, regions with a higher rate of literacy and with better infrastructure as listed above are leading in GBV?

According to Devries et al., studies have shown that women are mainly violated or abused in a relationship, despite the substantial gains made in education, health and political arenas.[32]

Despite the effort by the Kenya government to put in place a legal framework to address the vice, for instance, there are eight laws that address GBV issues, starting with the supreme law, which is the Constitution of Kenya 2010, all forms of violence are still witnessed. This then demonstrates the ineffectiveness of conscientisation theory and the establishment of legal structures as a solution to curbing DV in families.

Hermeneutics of suspicion and catechesis as a solution to DV is challenged when we consider it from the perspective of Levitt et al., who notes that 24 % of the United States Christian women who have suffered domestic violence have justified the act by use of the language of submission and male leadership in marriage as being cited by their religion.[33]

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[30] These statistics have been derived from "Kenya Domestic Household Survey (KDHS) 2014.

[31] https://victormatara.com/most-educated-counties-in-kenya/ accessed on 11/05/2022 at 03:29 EAT.

[32] Devries, K. M., Mak, J. Y. T., García-Moreno, C., Petzold, M., Child, J. C., Falder, G., Watts, C. H. Global health: "The global prevalence of intimate partner violence against women", *Science*, *340*, (2013): 1527-1528

[33] Levitt, Heidi M., Rebecca Todd Swanger, and Jenny B. Butler. 2008; Male Perpetrators' Perspectives on Intimate Partner Violence, Religion, and Masculinity. Sex Roles 58: 435

It is for the reasons that conscientisation and establishment of legal frameworks have not improved the situation of Domestic Violence, nor has hermeneutic and catechesis, that we propose a new approach; the analogy of the Human Family as a Church in Miniature.

3.0 Family as Church in Miniature: A Panacea to Domestic Violence in Christian Families

3.1 The Principle of Analogia entis

The Roman Catholic Church in the "Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith" identifies *sin* as the root cause for all forms of oppression when it states: "… the most radical form of slavery is slavery to sin. Other forms of slavery find their deepest root in slavery to sin."[34] For this reason, an attempt should be made to liberate humankind from sin, and all forms of oppression shall be liberated. Attempting to use conscientisation (functional approach) is like addressing the symptoms and leaving the root of the problem unaddressed. Consequently, due to our fallen state, we have failed to recognise the fact that family, though a human institution, was instituted by God Himself patterned on the union and communion of the Holy Trinity. Human institutions are a reflection of what is in heaven. Jesus teaches us to pray, "May your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." If we were able to recognise this fact, we would respect members of the family or the institution of the family. It is for this reason that we are proposing likening the Human family to the ecclesia and to the Holy Trinity by the principle of *analogia entis*.

At this point, we propose that if the principle of *analogia entis* is applied by Christian families in looking at the institution of family, then the problem shall be remedied. The argument is based on the fact that, observably, many Christians appear to revere Church premises and days of worship. On Sundays, many families suspend aggression towards each other, and they reverently walk to church. Hence our argument is that if the institution of the family is seen in the light of the ecclesia, the institution of the family will be regarded with reverence.

According to the principle of *analogia entis*, God provides humanity with the gift of reason to use to infer from created order the existence of God and His will. This has always happened through the General revelation (cf. Rom. 1:20). The Church has already used the unity of the African family to explain the concept of the "Church as the family of God". I.e., the unity of the African family is a revelation of God's nature of existence in His immanent Trinity as family.

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[34] Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith: Instruction on Certain Aspects of the "Theology of Liberation", Translation: Vatican Polyglot Press, IV: 2, 1984.

In the principle of *analogia entis*, the language used is just but analogous. The justification for this principle is based on the argument that even in the Bible and in the church, the language of analogy is used.[35] Such mysteries as the union in marriage can also be used to explain the divine union in the Holy Trinity, with the union of the Holy Trinity being the ultimate superior union that informs the expected union in marriage.

Before we apply the analogy of likening the human family to the church, it is essential to explain the meaning of the church, its origin and the fact that it was prefigured in eternity in the mind of God.

3.2 The Meaning, Origin and Adumbration of the Church in the Old Testament

The English word church is derived from the Greek Kyriakos, which means thing or place pertaining to the Lord. Another Greek equivalent which seems to emphasise the aspect of people rather than the place is *ekklesia*. *Ekklesia* derives from the root word *ekkaleo* (I call from, or I convoke). This word from secular Greek usage referred to the assembly of people (*demos*). It is in this sense that the word is used in Acts 19, 32, 39, and 41.[36] Therefore, the word church could mean place or assembly of people.

In the Septuagint (LXX), *ekklesia* refers to an assembly convened for religious purposes, e.g. worship (Deut. 23, 2-3; 3Kings 8,5,14,22; Ps 21, 22, 26), and especially the assembly on Mount Sinai where Israel was established as God's holy people and received his law. This, therefore, means that Israel was convoked by God himself as his people. The Word *ekklesia* is often used to translate the Hebrew word *qahal* or its derivatives. In the Septuagint, *qahal* was sometimes translated by other words, especially synagogue, which often translates *edah*, i.e. a "gathering."[37]

If *ekklesia* is a convocation of people as used in *edah* and *qahal*, then it is clear that whenever God called people to worship him, it was a form of the ecclesia. If we understand the church in this sense, then we can trace such convocations and gatherings in various significant events in which God gathered people or called them into being for the purpose of worshipping him right up to the time of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. According to Nyamiti, "From its

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[35] For example, when Jesus teaches his disciples to pray to God, referring to God as "Our Father…." The church refers to Jesus as the "Lion of Judah", or 'Rock of ages. All these are by analogy. Therefore, since Jesus himself and the church have used analogy, then we too are justified in applying it to divinely revealed truths.

[36] Charles Nyamiti, *Some Contemporary Models of African Ecclesiology: A Critical Assessment in the Light of Biblical and Church Teaching,* CUEA Publication, Nairobi 2007, p. 3.

[37] Nyamiti, 2007: 3.

origin, humankind was called to live in community (Gen 1, 27p 2, 18)…and to live in friendship with God (Gen2, 8-25)."[38] He further states, "The process of the formation of God's people started with the election of Abraham, with whom God made a covenant (Gen. ch. 15 and 17)… and during the Exodus of Israelites from Egypt…."[39] Following the repeated breakage of the covenants by Israelites as chosen people, the prophets who were sent to renew the covenants foretold that "in the future, only the faithful and holy remnants of Israel would benefit from the divine promise... This prophecy was reaffirmed in the centuries following the Babylonian Exile and nourished the messianic hopes of the Israelites…."[40] He further connects these promises/prophecies to the inauguration of the church in the New Testament. He says, "The founding of the Church by Jesus Christ in the New Testament was the fulfillment of the prophecy."[41]

Worth noting as a significant point at which God convoked a people to be set apart is during Noah's floods in Gen 6. This was a form of *qahal* in that, through Noah, a convocation was made, and after the floods subsided, they worshipped God (cf. Gen 8:20).

Further recognition of vestiges of the ecclesia is notable in the calling of humankind into existence in the Garden of Eden. God called the first human from non-existence into existence so that they could worship Him. The first human family formed the first worshipping community (cf. Gen. 4).

3.3 Church and Human Family Pre-figured in Heavenly Trinitarian Union

Fogliacco warns against using earthly categories univocally to apply to God's divine realities. For example, according to Fogliacco, the Trinity is not a family, although the Bible uses familial terms such as Father and Son. His position is that such use of familial terms should be understood as an analogy. He explains that "the Son originates from the Father through generation, but not in the way human or animal offspring originate from their parents. Nor is the Holy Spirit the wife of the Father, which would make the Spirit the mother of the Son."[42]

Although Fogliacco warns against the univocal application of earthly categories to heavenly mysteries, it is true that there are familial relationships in the Godhead. In the Holy Trinity, we have the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. These relationships imply that the Father is the Father to the Son and that the Son is Son to the Father. Already this is the archetype of a family on which the earthly human families are modelled.

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[38] Nyamiti, 2007: 4.
[39] Nyamiti, 2007: 4.
[40] Nyamiti, 2007: 4.
[41] Nyamiti, 2007: 4.
[42] Quoted by Nyamiti, 2007, p. 118.

The sub-title above presupposes that the church has its foundations in the Heavenly Trinity, as reiterated by the first African Synod – of the Roman Catholic Church. It states, "The Church-as-Family has its origins in the Blessed Trinity at the depths of which the Holy Spirit is the bond of communion."[43] In regard to this understanding, Idara explains, "Thus the Church-as-Family of God is rooted in the relations that characterise the Trinity –love and communion."[44] He further quotes the Synodal assembly to bolster his argument. The Synod fathers had stated: "Mystery of the love in the Triune God is the origin, model and purpose of the Church, a mystery which finds suitable expression for Africa in the image of the Church-as Family."[45] Based on this understanding, Idara concludes, "Therefore, the family of God's children [the Church] is born from above (cf. John 3:1-21) with one God as the creator of all (cf. Eph 4:6)."[46]

Through the principle of analogia entis, one can use the relationship in an African family to understand the nature of ecclesia in the Trinity. One of the relationships in the African family is that of ancestor-descendant in which the parent is an ancestor to the child, and the child is an ancestor to the parent. Using this analogy, Nyamiti explains the Trinitarian familial relationships using African ancestorship. He declares that "… God the Father is, analogically speaking, the Ancestor and Ancestress of his Son, and this latter is his true Descendant."[47]

In the Trinitarian family, just like in the human family, there is filial love. The Father loves the Son, and the Son loves the Father. Out of this love, "… the Father and the Son communicate the Holy Spirit to each other in token of their mutual sanctity as well."[48]

As an ancestor or ancestress would expect of the descendant an oblation, in the Holy Trinity, the Son offers a pneumatic oblation to the Father as an act of love, and in return, as it is expected of the ancestor to reciprocate the descendant's act of love, the Father send the Holy Spirit as an act of love too to the Son. This act of offering an oblation of the Holy Spirit to the Father and

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[43] First African Synod, "Message of the Synod," no. 20, quoted in Otu Idara, "The Church in Africa as Family and Trinitarian Communion: Insights from Bernard Lonergan" *African Ecclesial Review*, Vol. 56, no. 4 December (2014): 334.

[44] Idara, 334.

[45] First African Synod, "Propositions," no. 8, quoted in Otu Idara, "The Church in Africa as Family and Trinitarian Communion: Insights from Bernard Lonergan" *African Ecclesial Review*, Vol. 56, no. 4 December (2014): 334

[46] Otu Idara, "The Church in Africa as Family and Trinitarian Communion: Insights from Bernard Lonergan" *African Ecclesial Review*, Vol. 56, no. 4 December (2014): 334.

[47] Charles Nyamiti, Jesus Christ, the Ancestor of Humankind: Methodological and Trinitarian Foundations, CUEA Press, Nairobi, 2005, p. 73.

[48] Charles Nyamiti, Jesus Christ, the Ancestor of Humankind: Methodological and Trinitarian Foundations, CUEA Press, Nairobi, 2005, p. 72.

the Father reciprocating with the same is an act of common worship in the Godhead*.* All these activities are *mission ad intra*.

In these acts of oblations and aspirations, we perceive the perfect form of worship taking place in the heavenly realm. Thus, in this heavenly holy Trinity exists a complete ecclesia, an archetype of the earthly ecclesia. The worship taking place in the heavenly holy Trinity is the archetype of worship expected in the earthly human family as the basic unit of the earthly ecclesia. Thus, within the heavenly Trinity, we have the Trinitarian family and Trinitarian ecclesia, which form the archetype for the earthly family and earthly ecclesia. The relationship between the heavenly ecclesial family and the earthly ecclesial family is that the heavenly family is an archetype of the earthly ecclesia, and the earthly human family is a facsimile of the heavenly ecclesia.

Thus, the church can be said to have been prefigured in eternity in the mind of God, i.e. God conceived the idea of the church in eternity. From eternity when God conceived it to the time it (Church) was born on the day of Pentecost (with its vestiges in the Old Testament events as already illustrated), it can be spoken of as a gestation period. Magesa notes that "According to the patristic writers, the Church originated from the pierced side of Jesus Christ on the Cross."[49] In other words, "it was through the paschal event that the Church was born."[50] According to Cardinal J. Ratzinger, "John's testimony about the effects of the spear thrust (John 19, 34f) suggests this view, if it is true that the blood and water symbolise…the sacraments of baptism and Eucharist, which are the sources of the life of the Church."[51] According to Magesa, Pentecost day was for the church like an official birthday.[52]

Idara posits that understanding the Trinity from the *ad intra*-life of the triune God (immanent Trinity) can shed light in terms of understanding the church as the family of God, specifically with regards to the bond of communion between and among the three divine persons."[53] He concludes that Trinitarian communion is an "archetype for the ecclesial community, that is, the Church-as-Family of God modeled on the bond of communion between the three divine

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[49] L. Magesa, "African Ecclesiologies", in Virginia Fabella and R.S. Sugirtharajah (eds.), Dictionary of Third Word Theologies, NY (Orbis), 2000, p. 73 quoted in Charles Nyamiti (ibid.), p. 17.

[50] L. Magesa, "African Ecclesiologies", in Virginia Fabella and R.S. Sugirtharajah (eds.), Dictionary of Third Word Theologies, NY (Orbis), 2000, p. 73 quoted in Charles Nyamiti (ibid.), p. 17.

[51] Cardinal J. Ratzinger, *Voici quell est Notre Dieu*, Paris, 2001, p. 185 quoted in Charles Nyamiti, *Some Contemporary Models of African Ecclesiology: A Critical Assessment in the Light of Biblical and Church Teachings*, Vol. 3 CUEA Publications, 2007, p. 17.

[52] L. Magesa, "African Ecclesiologies", in Virginia Fabella and R.S. Sugirtharajah (eds.), *Dictionary of Third Word Theologies*, NY (Orbis), 2000, p. 73 quoted in Charles Nyamiti (ibid.), p. 17.

[53] Otu Idara, "The Church in Africa as Family and Trinitarian Communion: Insights from Bernard Lonergan" *African Ecclesial Review*, Vol. 56, no. 4 December (2014): 335.

persons."[54] He goes further to state, "The mutual interpenetration.[55] of the divine persons is a vital component of Trinitarian theology."[56]

The nature of the mutual interpenetration of the persons of the Trinity (perichoresis) "captures the Christian doctrine that the three divine persons dwell mutually within each other, draw life from one another, and are what they are by relations to one another."[57] This is the nature of the church in the holy Trinity. Therefore, we conclude that in the same way the church is born from above, so is the human institution of the family.

4.0 The Ecclesia Understood as Family of God and Family understood as ecclesia

4.1 Church as Family of God on Earth

Fogliacco recognises the existence of interrelationship between the human family and the heavenly Trinitarian family in the fact that,

> The family is a perfect image of the divine being as the fountainhead of being, as the mystery of eternal generation and eternal spiration, as an overflowing source of intra divine life.' This is because, among other forms of society, the family is a generative community' whose members originate from within it. As a generative principle, the family is the origin of all other communities. It is the life that reproduces itself. Here, more than anywhere else, 'being' stands revealed as the source of being…, as fullness that overflows its boundaries and communicates itself to the other." Moreover, the notion of relation is inseparable from the family –so much so that in the English language, the members of a family 'are called not only relatives but, quite simply, 'relations.'[58]

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[54] Otu Idara, "The Church in Africa as Family and Trinitarian Communion: Insights from Bernard Lonergan" *African Ecclesial Review*, Vol. 56, no. 4 December (2014): 340.

[55] The Council of Florence (1441 CE) declared that "The Father is wholly in the Son and wholly in the Holy Spirit; the Son is wholly in the Father and wholly in the Holy Spirit; the Holy Spirit is wholly in the Father and wholly in the Son" (cf. Dezinger, H. *Enchiridion Symbolorum*, tran. Roy J. Deferrari, Washington: Loreto Publications, 2004, p. 1331. Quoted in Otu Idara, "The Church in Africa as Family and Trinitarian Communion: Insights from Bernard Lonergan" *African Ecclesial Review*, Vol. 56, no. 4 December (2014): 336). This doctrinal teaching is called perichoresis.

[56] Otu Idara, 2014: 335.

[57] Lacuna, M. *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life*, New York: Harper Collins, 1991, p. 271 in Otu Idara, "The Church in Africa as Family and Trinitarian Communion: Insights from Bernard Lonergan" *African Ecclesial Review*, Vol. 56, no. 4 December (2014): 336.

[58] Quoted in Nyamiti, 2007, p. 119.

However, our presentation of the church as the Family of God on earth has to be analogical. We have to illustrate the familial relationships in the Godhead before we turn to show how the earthly church as the family of God is patterned after the divine Trinitarian relationships. Fogliacco notes that "...unlike the God of non-Christian religions and the one known by philosophy, the Christian God is Father who gives life to a Son who is 'Other' than himself. 'In turn, Father and Son together give their being and life, and what emerges from this inner communication is a second 'Other', the Holy Spirit."[59] He then concludes that "the Christian God is specifically 'a dynamic mystery of inner communication...' here is the typically Christian image of God as community-in-diversity."[60]

In a human family, members are consanguineously related, i.e. by blood, and through procreation, new members originate.[61] Besides relations emanating from consanguinity and procreation as means of increasing membership of family, there are relationships that also emanate from a variety of mutual relations. The church, as the family of God, has vertical and horizontal relations.

> (1)The Christian faithful are vertically related to God and horizontally to one another through divine grace, just as family members are related through blood ties; (2) new Church members originate within the Church through Baptism, just as new members in a family originate within that family through procreation; (3) Baptism links the ecclesial members vertically to each divine Persons and horizontally to each other in the church.[62]

Fogliacco notes that

although the similarity between consanguineous ties and relations through grace is striking, one should not forget that through grace, God communicates himself to us and, as a consequence, grace enables us to participate in the very life of the Trinitarian Persons. Therefore, if relations in a human family create links based on biological (consanguineous) ties, 'grace creates a bond between Christians and the three divine persons, and between one Christian and another, that is based on theological similarity, namely, the Holy Spirit and the love infused by him.[63]

Based on the foregoing understanding, Fogliacco concludes that 'the communion and intimacy that exists –or ought to exist –among the members of the church far surpasses the love that flows among the members of any human society, family included.

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[59] Quoted in Nyamiti, 2007, p. 120.
[60] Quoted in Nyamiti, 2007, p. 120.
[61] Fogliacco quoted by Nyamiti, 2007, p. 122.
[62] Fogliacco quoted by Nyamiti, 2007, p. 122.
[63] Fogliacco quoted by Nyamiti, 2007, p. 122.

4.2 Trinitarian Family as Archetype of Human Family

Christ teaches his disciples to pray, "May your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Is it not in God's will that human institutions reflect the heavenly settings? Therefore, is it not Christ's wish that the human family on earth replicates the heavenly family? If whatever happens on earth is a facsimile of what goes on in heaven, then the human family can be spoken of as a type of the heavenly family – of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. John Paul II describes the family as a Church in the following words: "We must examine the many profound bonds linking the Church and the Christian family and establishing the family as the church in miniature in such a way that in its own way the family is a living image and historical representation of the mystery of the Church."[64] Thus, inasmuch as we may liken the church to the human family, the human family can also be likened to the divine mystery (Church); this is by the principle of *nexus mysteriorum*. This, therefore, makes the human family sacred, although fallen. I.e. both the human family and the church as the family of God on earth are rooted in the Holy Trinity as a family and ecclesia.

Therefore, the family as a small church is hereby exhorted by Pope Paul II to root its endeavour to achieve peace both in the families and in the world in genuine prayers and fasting. He states, "Prayer entails conversion of heart on our part. Prayer is the way to true peace, true unity and true reconciliation in our life."[65] Thus, the human family as a sacred and divine mystery instituted by God and called into being by God Himself at creation can be spoken of as the church in miniature, which is definitively holy and also progressively becoming holy in the same manner we speak of the church. The family's holiness here is based on the fact that it is God himself who has called it into being. It thus derives its holiness from God, whom He Himself is holy. God intended it to be the fundamental unity of the church, the archetype of the church which was later to be inaugurated by Jesus.

If in the heavenly family, the persons of the Holy Trinity are mutually intertwined with each other, bound by the code of love, the Holy Spirit, this is an example of what should be in regard to the human family and the church. As Nyamiti notes, "The love of Christ for his Church is the model according to which husbands ought to love their wives."[66] Christ gives his life for the church, and therefore, in the same manner, husbands are expected to sacrifice for their

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[64] John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio, Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 74 (1984), no. 49 in Otu Idara, "The Church in Africa as Family and Trinitarian Communion: Insights from Bernard Lonergan" *African Ecclesial Review*, Vol. 56, no. 4 December (2014): 331.

[65] John Paul II, "Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation," *Ecclesia in Africa*, Vatican, 1995, no. 111 quoted in Majawa, 2017, p. 75.

[66] Nyamiti, 2007, p. 9.

wives or family, for that matter. He further notes, "The ecclesial functions are given 'to knit God's holy people (the Church) together for the work of service to build up the Body of Christ until we all reach unity in faith and knowledge of the Son of God and form the perfect Man fully mature with the fullness of Christ himself"[67] (Eph. 4, 11-13). Nyamiti further notes that "If these live by the truth in love, they will 'grow completely into Christ, who is the head by whom the whole Body is fitted and joined together…" (Eph. 4, 15-16).[68]

In the same manner, the church, as the Family of God on earth, ought to live a life that has no forms of exclusion as they are one people of God and children of God the Father (Eph 4:1-6), without any ethnic or sexual/gender distinctions, the human family should be spoken of. In the same way, the church is a family of God who shares in the same heavenly call (Heb. 3:1, 12) as they are a household of Christ (Heb 3:6), as the human family should be. Otu Idara declares that "Here Paul is referring to the Church as a spiritual family that transcends blood ties and race to embrace all persons who share a common faith in Christ."[69] The Church as a Family of God is complete in that it has Christ himself as their High Priest, who is already interceding for them in heaven (Heb 5:1-10; 9: 11-11). As such, as we speak of the church as a Family of God that ought to have respect for everyone and love for (fellow believers),[70] the same should be said of the human family since they both are born from heaven.

4.3 Family as Ecclesia; A Panacea to Domestic Violence in Christian Families

In the "Congregation for Doctrine of the Faith, Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Collaboration of Men and Women in the Church and in the World", the fathers of the church note the importance and role of the family in shaping the behaviour and therefore the peaceful co-existence of humanity both now and in future. It states,

> The family is the 'sanctuary of life and a vital cell of society and of the church. It is here that 'the features of a people take shape; it is here that its members acquire basic teachings. They learn to love inasmuch as they are unconditionally loved, they learn respect for others inasmuch as they are respected, and they learn to know the face of God inasmuch as they receive a first revelation of it

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[67] Nyamiti, 2007, p. 9.

[68] Nyamiti, 2007, p. 9.

[69] John Paul II, Familiaris Consortio, Acta Apostolicae Sedis 74 (1984), no. 49 in Otu Idara, "The Church in Africa as Family and Trinitarian Communion: Insights from Bernard Lonergan" African Ecclesial Review, Vol. 56, no. 4 December (2014): 330.

[70] Nyamiti, 2007, p. 9-12.

from a father and a mother full of attention in their regard. Whenever these real experiences are lacking, society as a whole suffers violence and becomes, in turn, the progenitor of more violence.[71]

Pope Benedict XVI goes further to note that "The Family is the best setting for learning and applying the culture of forgiveness, peace and reconciliation."[72] He states,

> In healthy family life, we experience some of the fundamental elements of peace: justice and love between brothers and sisters, the role of authority expressed by parents, and loving concern for the members who are weaker because of youth, sickness or old age, mutual help in the necessities of life, readiness to accept others and, if necessary, to forgive them. For this reason, the family is the first and indispensable teacher of peace.[73]

If we can understand the human family as a basic unit of the church from which basic foundations of virtues are inculcated in human beings and that at this level, people's characters are formed, then our concerted effort to change society and alleviate the problem of Domestic Violence should shift from the argument that by establishing laws and conscientisation of victims could minimise Domestic Violence in families and redirect them towards recognition of the family as a holy institution.

Conclusion

Thus, if Earthly ecclesia is patterned after the heavenly Trinitarian ecclesia and Earthly human family is patterned after the heavenly Trinitarian family, then Ecclesia is Family of God, and Human Family is Ecclesia in Miniature. Now, if Human Family is Ecclesia in Miniature, then Ecclesia in Miniature (i.e. Human Family) is the Family of God too and therefore sacred and holy.

This conclusion is premised on the argument that in the same manner, the church is a family of God on earth as it is a replica of the heavenly holy Trinity, which is a family of God (*mission ad intra*), so to the earthly human family is a replica of the heavenly holy Trinity as a family in heaven. Therefore, whatever is

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[71] CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH, Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Collaboration of Men and Women in the church and in the world (31 May 2004), 13: AAS 96 (2004), 682. In Africa's Commitment: Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Africae Munus* of his Holiness Pope Benedict XVI, Article no. 42. (Henceforth simply referred to as *Africae Munus*).

[72] *Africae Munus*, Article no. 43.

[73] *Africae Munus*, Article no. 43.

said of the Trinity as ecclesia whose attributes include unity, love and mutual interpenetration of the three persons of the Godhead, and what can be said of the church's unity, love, peace, holiness should be said of the human family as it replicates the heavenly Holy Trinity as a Church and of the church on earth. Just as the church as the Family of God on earth ought to live a life that has no forms of exclusion, sexual and gender discrimination or violence, so to the human family with God as the head and Christ as the saviour and the Holy Spirit as sanctifier. Therefore, understanding the human family as the ecclesia in miniature leads to it being respected and revered as it is God's *mission ad extra*.

Since many Africans South of the Sahara are either converting to Christianity or are Christians and Christians revere sacred spaces and institutions, understanding the human family as ecclesia (sacred institution) will reduce the rate of Domestic Violence.

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III. PRACTICAL THEOLOGY

THE BYZANTINE REPRESENTATION OF THE 'ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE NATIVITY OF THE THEOTOKOS' – UNDERLYING APOCRYPHAL TEXT, PATRISTIC REFLECTIONS, LITURGICAL PERSPECTIVES, THEOLOGICAL HIGHLIGHTS, AND ICONOGRAPHIC PATTERN

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ABSTRACT. The present study aims first and foremost to provide (ikon) painters with the theological content required to carry out a theoretical process of familiarisation with the basic notions that they would be recommended to take into consideration before starting to work on an ikon. In the absence of this information, a painter would find it difficult to understand the theological message of the event they are rendering in art form and therefore encounter significant hindrances in attaining the final goal of their confession of faith. Furthermore, by highlighting the way the pattern of representation of the ikon/scene has evolved and subsequently crystallised, this paper seeks to enable (ikon) painters to understand the defining elements that lie at the foundation of the Byzantine model for representing an event are, to avoid the exclusion of certain essential details from their renditions, which need to fit into the dynamism of Church Tradition. To that end, we have set out to apply these theoretical rigors to a scene from the life of the Mother of God – the announcement of her birth –to provide the reader with the opportunity to take note of the steps to follow before creating an ikon/scene.

Keywords: annunciation of birth, apocryphal, Church Fathers, hymnography, hymnographic pattern

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Introduction

The Announcement of the Nativity of the Theotokos is one of the most significant events in the history of humankind, as it marks the arrival into the world of her who would give birth to our Saviour. We have therefore found it suitable to apply to it the model through which we seek to outline the theological preparation that the (ikon) painter needs to go through before creating their piece of art. Another reason that led us to select the episode of the Announcement of the Nativity of the Theotokos is related to the underlying text that the entire narration is based on. As it is not a biblical text, but an apocryphal one, the theoretical content of the event might be treated with reluctance or suspicion by artists. However, considering that this apocryphal text has been embraced by some of the representative Fathers of our Church (St. Maximus the Confessor being of particular note), it has acquired credibility as a source. One is compelled to also mention the fact that the sources employed by painters are not limited solely to the Holy Scriptures, as they may also take inspiration from apocryphal writings, especially if the events they render (the youth of the Mother of God in particular) are not found in the pages of the sacred texts.

The methods we have resorted to in conducting this research are specific to each subsection of the study. We have capitalised on the analysis paradigms used by specialists in the fields concerned to produce brief synthetic overviews. We started from a critical edition of the *Protoevangelium of James*[3] and compared its content with the information we found in the works of the Fathers who wrote accounts either of the entire life of the Mother of God or significant events in her life. The patristic texts we looked to belong to Epiphanius the Monk[4], Saint Simeon Metaphrastes[5], Saint Maximus the Confessor,[6] and

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[3] *Descoperirea sau Protoevanghelia lui Iacob* [The Revelation or Protoevangelium of James], in *Trei vieți bizantine ale Maicii Domnului* [Three Byzantine Lives of the Mother of God], translated by Ioan I. Ică (Sibiu: Deisis, 2007), 221-235.

[4] Epiphanius the Monk and Priest, *Cuvânt despre viața Preasfintei Născătoarei de Dumnezeu și anii ei* [On the Life of the Most-Holy Theotokos and Her Years], in *Trei vieți bizantine ale Maicii Domnului* [Three Byzantine Lives of the Mother of God], translated by Ioan I. Ică (Sibiu: Deisis, 2007), 7-26.

[5] St. Simeon Metaphrastes, *Cuvânt despre câte s-au întâmplat de la nașterea și creșterea Preasfintei Stăpânei noastre de-Dumnezeu-Născătoarea, de la nașterea cu dumnezeiască cuviință a lui Hristos Dumnezeu nostru și până la săvârșirea ei de-viață-purtătoare, încă și despre arătarea veșmântului ei scump și cum această mare bogăție s-a făcut comoara creștinilor* [On the Events from the Birth and Upbringing of Our Most-Holy Lady Theotokos, from the Divinely Ordained Nativity of Christ Our Lord, to Her Life-Bearing Passing, as well as on the Apparition of Her Precious Garment and on How This Great Prize Became the Treasure of Christians], in *Trei vieți bizantine ale Maicii Domnului*, translated by Ioan I. Ică (Sibiu: Deisis, 2007), 27-70.

[6] St. Maximus the Confessor, *Cânt de preamărire, slavă și laudă a Preasfintei Împărătese, Preacuratei și Preabinecuvântatei Născătoare de Dumnezeu și Pururea-Fecioară Maria, și însemnarea cu privire la viața sa neprihănită și fericită de la naștere și până la moarte* [Extolling, Glorifying and

Saint John Damascene[7]. For the section dedicated to the way the event of the announcement of the Nativity of the Theotokos is captured liturgically, we used an edition of the December Menaion[8] that mentions the conception of the Mother of God on the ninth day of the month. The iconographic references we have identified originate from the first half of the second millennium (11th-16th century), from the main orthodox areas – Greek, Macedonian, Serbian, and Russian – and exist in the form of either mosaics or frescoes. Aside from emphasising the details present in the Byzantine pattern that has become generalised in the Christian East, we sought to identify the connections between the artistic representations and the underlying text, which, in this case, is of an apocryphal nature.

The analysis paradigm preceding the actual act of artistic creation takes inspiration from several volumes in the literature, authored by prominent specialists in the field: Daniel Rousseau[9], Leonid Uspensky, Vladimir Lossky[10], and Constantine Cavarnos[11]. We identified the essential points in these writings that should be considered, and we organised them within a well-defined structure, outlining the theological fields that iconography deems as both sources and reference points: the biblical / inter-testament / apocryphal one; the patristic one, the liturgical one, and the dogmatic one. These fields of reference, followed by a section dedicated to the manner of artistic representation of the event, make up the main components of the study: the underlying apocryphal text, patristic reflections, liturgical perspectives, and theological highlights.

1. The Underlying Apocryphal Text

The Nativity of the Mother of God is not mentioned in the texts of the canonical Gospels. The accounts regarding the Holy Virgin begin with the event of the Annunciation. However, there is one apocryphal writing from the early Church, dating from the first part of the 2nd century, which records several moments in the childhood and youth of the Holy Mother. The *Protoevangelium*

Praising Hymn of the Most-Holy Pure Blessed Empress, the Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary and Notes on Her Chaste and Blissful Life from Birth till Death], in *Trei vieți bizantine ale Maicii Domnului*, translated by Ioan I. Ică (Sibiu: Deisis, 2007), 79-212.

[7] St. John Damascene, *Despre Sfânta Născătoare de Dumnezeu* [On the Holy Theotokos], in *Trei vieți bizantine ale Maicii Domnului*, translated by Ioan I. Ică (Sibiu: Deisis, 2007), 262-266.

[8] *Mineiul pe Decembrie* [The Menaion for December] (Bucharest: Tipografia cărților bisericești, 1992).

[9] Daniel Rousseau, *Icoana – lumina feței Tale* [The Ikon – the Light of the Face], translated by Măriuca Alexandrescu (Bucharest: Sofia, 2004).

[10] Leonid Uspensky and Vladimir Lossky, *Călăuziri în lumea icoanei* [Giudance through the World of the Ikon], translated by Anca Popescu (Bucharest: Sofia, 2003).

[11] Constantine Cavarnos, *Ghid de iconografie bizantină* [Byzantine Iconography Guide], translated by Anca Popescu (Bucharest: Sofia, 2005).

of James mentions the events preceding the birth of the Mother of God. This source would be embraced by Church Tradition and subsequently, become the main text to lie at the foundation of four feasts dedicated to the Mother of God (the Conception – 9th December; the Nativity – 8th September; the Entrance into the Temple – 21st November; the Dormition – 15th August)[12].

Her parents, Joachim and Anna, were devout people, who constantly took part in the ordinances at the Temple of Jerusalem. Joachim would bring a double gift each time, to thank God for the blessings they had received. However, they were elderly and had no children. When Joachim's gift is rejected by the temple due to his not having a 'begotten issue in Israel', he is aggrieved and retires into the wilderness to fast for 40 days. Remembering that Abraham the patriarch was granted a child in his old age, Joachim prays to the Lord to bless him with one as well. His wife, Anna, herself filled with sorrow at her barren womb, joins her husband in his cry: 'O God of my fathers, bless me and regard my prayer, as you blessed the womb of Sarah, and gave her a son, Isaac.'[13] Her sorrow turns to joy as soon as the angel of the Lord brings her news that: 'the Lord has heard your prayer; you will conceive and bring forth, and your progeny shall be spoken of in all the world'[14]. Anna promises the angel that, be the child a son or a daughter, she will devote it to the Lord. Joachim, too, is informed by an angel that his wife has become pregnant and will give birth to a child. He is joyful and brings many offerings to the Lord at the temple of Jerusalem, then returns home. Anna comes out to meet him, embraces him and exclaims: 'Now I know that the Lord hath greatly blessed me. For behold, I who was as a widow am no longer a widow, and I who was barren shall conceive!'[15].

2. Patristic Reflections

Epiphanius the Monk and Priest also provide a few details regarding the parents of the Holy Mother. Anna was the daughter of Matham, a priest from Bethlehem, while Joachim was the son of Panther and the brother of Jacob, the father of Joseph. Thus, Joseph's father and the Virgin Mary's were brothers.

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[12] Ioan Ică, *Viețile Maicii Domnului – sinteze narative ale tradițiilor mariologice ale Bisericii* [The Lives of the Mother of God – Narrative Syntheses of the Church's Mariological Traditions], in *Trei vieți bizantine ale Maicii Domnului*, translated by Ioan I. Ică (Sibiu: Deisis, 2007), 270.

[13] *Protoevanghelia lui Iacob* [The Protoevangelium of James], 222. T.N.: The English version of the citations from the Protoevangelium of James in this paper have mostly been extracted from the Internet Archive
http://web.archive.org/web/20080605060200/http://ministries.tliquest.net/theology/apocryphas/nt/protevan.htm.

[14] *Protoevanghelia lui Iacob*, 223.

[15] *Protoevanghelia lui Iacob*, 223.

Anna married Joachim and they lived in Galilee for fifty years without having any children. At the time of the Feast of Dedication, Joachim was in Jerusalem. While he was praying in the temple, he heard a voice from the sky tell him that he would have a child and that he would be praised through that child. Following that event, Joachim returned home, and Anna conceived a child, whom she named Mariam, after her elder sister. This miracle brought joy to all her relatives[16].

Saint Simeon Metaphrastes records several details regarding the events preceding the birth of the Mother of God, which he borrowed from a sermon by Saint Gregory of Nyssa (*In Diem Natalem Christi*, in *PG* 46, 1137D-1141B). The content of this writing mentions that a 'hidden history' (the *Protoevangelium of James*) suggests that Joachim was one of the most rigorous followers of the Law, a man of good repute in Israel. Saint Gregory's account focuses on Anna, the mother of the Holy Mother, who is thought to resemble Anna, the mother of Samuel. Similarly, to the latter, the former went to the temple and prayed to God for a child, whom she promised she would devote to the Lord, should she be given one. Anna received a divine sign that her prayer had been heard in due time, she gave birth to a baby girl, whom she named Mary, thus showing the grace that God had bestowed upon her[17].

Saint Maximus the Confessor states that Joachim and Anna were respected by the community, as they were perceived as descendants of the royal family of David. He further mentions that the tribe of Judah and that of Levi became intertwined through marriages. Thus, Saint Maximus also emphasises the sacerdotal quality of some of David's descendants: 'The blessed Anna was a chosen branch of the same house, which foretold that the King who was to be born of their child would be a Priest in the highest meaning of the word, as he would be God and man'[18]. Both Anna and Joachim prayed to God for children, not only to relieve them of the shame that the gossip of dishonourable people burdened them with but also for the glory of the entire world. Joachim heard a voice from the sky while he was in the temple, while Anna, having received the news from her husband, was herself delivered an announcement from God, while she was praying in their garden at home. The announcement was followed by conception and birth. The girl was named Mary, which translates as 'the enlightener'. Joachim gave a great feast, inviting all his neighbours, who were in awe at the birth and praised God[19].

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[16] Epiphanius the Monk and Priest, *Cuvânt despre viața Preasfintei Născătoarei de Dumnezeu* [On the Life of the Most-Holy Theotokos], 9-10.

[17] St. Simeon Metaphrastes, *Cuvânt despre nașterea și creșterea Preasfintei Stăpânei* [On the Nativity and Upbringing of the Most-Holy Lady] , 28-9.

[18] St. Maximus the Confessor, *Cânt de preamărire, slavă și laudă a Preasfintei Împărătese moarte* [Extolling, Glorifying and Praising Hymn of the Most-Holy Empress], 82.

[19] St. Maximus the Confessor, *Cânt de preamărire, slavă și laudă a Preasfintei Împărătese*, 83.

Saint John Damascene is another one to confirm the genealogy mentioned by Epiphanius the Monk, stressing the intertwining of the two tribes: '... Thus, Jacob and Heli became brothers from the same mother: Jacob, of the tribe of Solomon, and Heli, of the tribe of Nathan. Heli, of the tribe of Nathan, died childless and Jacob, his brother, of the tribe of Solomon, took his wife and brought forth issue in the name of his brother and so, Joseph was born. Thus, Joseph is by nature the son of Jacob, who is a descendant of Solomon, but, by law, he is the son of Heli, who is a descendant of Nathan"[20]. Similarly to Saint Simeon Metaphrastes, he, too, notes the resemblance between Anna, the mother of the Mother of God, and Anna, the mother of Samuel, showing that the Virgin Mary is the fruit of prayer and promise. Saint John implies that Joachim lived in Jerusalem, not far from the Sheep Gate [21].

3. Liturgical Perspectives

The event of the conception of the Mother of God is celebrated in the Orthodox Church on 9th December. The hymns of Vespers and Matins (written, among others, by St. Andrew of Crete) provide a lyrical portrayal of various moments of those mentioned in the *Protoevangelium of James* and highlight the importance for the whole of humankind of the conception of the Theotokos in the womb of her mother, Anna.

The hymns begin with the call to rejoice addressed by Anna to all the tribes of Israel: 'The barren woman who, in manner past hope, beareth as fruit her who will give birth to God in the flesh is made radiant with joy and danceth, rejoicing and crying aloud: "Let all the tribes of Israel rejoice with me! For, lo! I have conceived in my womb and put away the disgrace of barrenness: for thus hath the Creator been well pleased, and, hearkening unto my prayer in those things which I have desired, He hath healed the pain of my heart."'[22] Anna, filled with immeasurable joy, calls upon everyone to rejoice with her who until recently had been barren. This highlights the kindness, care, and almightiness of God, who turned a mortified womb into a source of life.

The troparion of the feast places the news of the birth of the Virgin and the incarnation of God in close connection: 'Today, the bonds of barrenness are loosed, for God, hearkening unto Joachim and Anna, doth manifestly promise

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[20] St. John Damascene, *Despre Sfânta Născătoare de Dumnezeu* [On the Holy Theotokos], 263.

[21] St. John Damascene, *Despre Sfânta Născătoare de Dumnezeu*, 263-4.

[22] *Mineiul pe Decembrie* [The Menaion for December], 115. T.N.: English version from *Menaion, December* Tr. by Isaac Lambertsen, 2000 (https://www.ponomar.net/maktabah/MenaionLambertsenDecember2000/1209263.html).

them that they will, beyond all expectation, give birth to the divine Maiden, from whom the Infinite One Himself, becoming man, shall be born. And He commanded the angels to cry unto her: Rejoice, thou who art full of grace, the Lord is with thee!'[23]. The hymnographer stresses the miracle of the conception as well: Joachim and Anna, who was barren, received the news of the conception of a child, despite their physical limitations. This same context also contains a reference to the news of conception brought by another angel to the Virgin Mary in Nazareth.

The feast's kontakion focuses on the joy imparted upon the world by this conception: 'Today the whole world doth celebrate Anna's conceiving, which was brought about by God; for she gave birth unto her who ineffably gave birth unto the Word.'[24]. Even though it is said that the conception 'was brought about by God', one is not to take that to mean that it was like the conception of the Son of God. Had that been so, the conception of the Word through the descent of the Holy Spirit and the overshadowing of the Father would not have been anything new to humankind. Here, too, the hymnographer underscores the connection between the conception of the Holy Mother and the supernatural birth of the divine Logos.

The ikos traces a resemblance between this conception and two similar events in the Old Testament: '"You are He Who once gave the great Isaac as a son to Sarah in deep old age by Your overshadowing and Your promise. You, o Almighty, are He Who opened the barren womb of Hannah, the mother of Samuel, Your Prophet. And now You look upon me and accept my supplications and fulfil my entreaties," cried the chaste and barren Anna with lamentation; and the Benefactor heard her plea. Wherefore, with joy, she conceived the Virgin who beyond comprehension conceived the Word of God.'[25]. Using the text of the *Protoevangelium* and the writings of the Fathers who embraced the apocryphal text, the hymnographer associates Anna's situation with that of Sarah, the wife of Abraham the patriarch (Gn 18:10-15) and with that of Anna, the mother of the prophet Samuel (1Kgs 1). In the latter case, there is also a prayer through which Anna asked the Lord for a son in the temple. She was unable to have children, which is why her husband would bring twice as many offerings to the temple. She promised the Lord that she would devote the child to the temple, in the same way, that the mother of the Mother of God did.

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[23] *Mineiul pe Decembrie*, 117. T.N.: English version from *Menaion, December* Tr. by Isaac Lambertsen, 2000

[24] *Mineiul pe Decembrie*, 124. T.N.: English version from *Menaion, December* Tr. by Isaac Lambertsen, 2000

[25] *Mineiul pe Decembrie*, 124. T.N.: English version from https://www.johnsanidopoulos.com/2015/12/synaxarion-for-conception-of-saint-anna.html

4. Theological Highlights

The apocryphal writing the *Protoevangelium of James* tends to claim that Anna became pregnant without Joachim's intimate embrace: 'For an angel of the Lord has also come down to Joachim [who was in Jerusalem, emphasis added], and said: "Joachim, Joachim! The Lord God has heard your prayer. Make haste and go from here, for behold Anna, your wife, [who was in Nazareth, emphasis added] has conceived."'[26]. Even though the author of this writing sought to indirectly highlight the chastity of the Mother of God, the latter was born following the physical intercourse of her parents. It is only the conception of the Son of God that is endowed with uniqueness, through the descent of the Holy Spirit and the overshadowing of the Highest.

5. Iconographic Representation

The Byzantine mosaic at Dafni Monastery (11 km from Athens, Greece), dating back to the 11th century, portrays the good news of the birth of the Mother of God, brought by angels to both Anna and Joachim. The elements presented in this mosaic are inspired by the *Protoevangelium of James*, apocryphal writing which enjoyed great credibility in early times, so that the iconography, hymnography, and patristic writings describing the life of the Mother of God draw their inspiration from it. Anna's presence in the garden, the laurel, the sparrows and their chicks nesting in it, the maidservant Judith showed standing on the threshold, Joachim's stay in the wilderness, and the angels bringing the good news are all details present in the narration of the apocryphal text. The same pattern of representation can be found in the Byzantine mosaic of the Chora Church in Constantinople (today Istanbul, Turkey), which was transformed into a mosque (Kariye) in the 16th century. This mosaic exhibits a new detail that appears in the apocryphal text: two shepherds are portrayed next to Joachim. The content of the *Protoevangelium* informs us that Joachim ordered them to prepare an impressive number of animals for sacrifice: ten unblemished female lambs for the Lord God, twelve calves for the priests and elders, and one hundred kids for the people[27].

The group of frescoes dedicated to the life of the Mother of God in the Cathedral of the Transfiguration in Mirozhsky (Pskov, Russia), dating from the 12th century, offers one the chance to observe the way painters have conceived the sequence of events leading to the birth of the Mother of God. The artists portrayed the main stages within small frames separated by borders. The

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[26] *Protoevanghelia lui Iacob*, 223.

[27] *Protoevanghelia lui Iacob*, 223.

details provided by the apocryphal text and the models of representation that have already come to dominate the Christian East have determined painters not to stray from the Byzantine pattern that had become generalised even in the Russian area.

In Serbia, Macedonia, and Greece (including Mount Athos), the iconographic pattern has been followed faithfully. The details that differentiate the examples that we provide do not concern the defining elements of the pattern, whether it be scenes that are part of a sequence of events or individual scenes. Most frescoes portraying the two moments of the announcement of the Nativity of the Mother of God tend to establish a connection with the events preceding this scene: the priests' refusal to receive the gift that Joachim and Anna brought to the Temple of Jerusalem and the encounter/embrace of the two after receiving the good news from the angels. The fresco at the Monastery of Saint Dionysius, dating from the 16th century, is part of the first category. The scene shows the husband and wife before the priest, although the *Protoevangelium* only records the presence of Joachim before the cleric. Moreover, the author of the apocryphal text claims that Joachim said nothing to his wife about what had happened at the temple, to avoid distressing her further, but retreated into the wilderness instead, for prayer and askesis[28]. To capture both the sorrow and the joy of the two, the painter thought it fit to represent Anna before the priest as well. This does not undermine the relationship between the underlying text and the artistic representation. The painter is granted the freedom to interpret and insert additions or modifications into the event recorded by the apocryphal text, but also by the biblical one, with the aim of highlighting the message the artist seeks to convey. Furthermore, to stress God's intervention that defeats the order of nature, the painter chose to replace the angel with a semi-calotte (symbolising the sky) with three rays coming out of it.

Among the frescoes that continue the scene of the announcement of the nativity of the Theotokos with the scene of the married couple – Joachim and Anna – embracing, we name the following: the fresco of the Church of the Holy Virgin in Peribleptos (Ohrid, Macedonia – 14th century), which is part of a wonderful group of paintings illustrating events from the life of the Mother of God; the fresco of the Monastery of the Mother of God in Pec (Serbia, today's Kosovo), dating from the same century; and the fresco of the Vatopedi Monastery, from the 14th century. It is worth noting that none of these scenes leaves out the servants ordered by Joachim to prepare the animals for his sacrifice of thanksgiving. In the case of the Pec fresco, one of these servants appears before Anna as well. He is probably the one sent by Joachim to inform her that he had returned from the wilderness and was going to the temple to bring an offering. A particular detail is remarkable in

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[28] *Protoevanghelia lui Iacob*, 221-2.

the Athonite fresco, where Joachim is represented in two situations: the first marks the announcement of the angel, while the second shows his command to the servants regarding his gift for the temple.

The iconographic pattern specific to the Byzantine area which dominated the most important territories in that area is recorded in the *Hermeneia* of Dionysius of Fourna: 'Houses and a garden with many kinds of trees and, in the middle, Saint Anna praying and an angel (in flight) above her, blessing her. And, outside the garden, on a mountain, Joachim praying and an angel blessing him as well.'[29]. The title given to this pattern in the *Hermeneia* is 'the conception of the Theotokos'. The description of the scene suggests that it concerns the announcement of the conception of the Mother of God. We would like to specify once again that the conception of the Theotokos in her mother's womb is different from the one recounted in the Gospel of Luke (1:34-35). It is highly possible that the painters who thought out this representation might have had in mind Luke's version of the conception of the Lord in the womb of the Virgin Mary. Therefore, we stress that the conception of the Mother of God was carried out through the intimate embrace of her parents. Consequently, the pattern described by the *Hermeneia* needs a different name.

Conclusions

The working paradigm and the case study we have analysed provide (ikon) painters with a substantial starting point in terms of both knowledge and scientific analysis in view of outlining an enterprise preceding the actual act of artistic creation. The reader has been able to ascertain the way in which the theoretical and theological concepts are found, intertwined, and complete one other in the fields of reference that we approached: the biblical / inter-testament / apocryphal one; the patristical one, the liturgical one, and the dogmatical one. It would be desirable that, in the future, this initiative should be embraced and applied further to other events in the life of our Lord, found either in the apocryphal literature or in the biblical one. It would be interesting to see the manner of perceiving the influence of apocryphal writings on the way in which events in the Holy Scriptures are represented iconographically. The Annunciation could make the object of such an approach.

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[29] Dionysius of Fourna, *Erminia picturii bizantine* [Hermeneia of Byzantine Painting] (Bucharest: Sofia, 2000), 138.

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EARLY CHILDHOOD IN TODAY'S FAMILY. THE CHRISTIAN LANDMARKS IN THE LIVES OF OUR CHILDREN

MIHAELA BRÂNZĂ[1]

ABSTRACT. Early childhood represents the most important developmental period. Parents are nowadays confronted with serious challenges in their educational strivings. Many young spouses choose to learn about child psychology to overcome the difficulties raised by a baby's presence. Christian parents delineate their educational efforts by taking into consideration God's commandments. Prayer and patience are combined so that a loving dialogue conducts all the family interactions. Pre-schoolers are extremely attentive to what their parents do every day. Their kind gestures and words form the child's personality. Participation in the liturgical program of a church proves the authentic faith of the parents. Accustomed to the intense atmosphere of a dynamic ecclesial community, the Christian children are taught how to use theological teaching in their daily life. They learn important rules and limits about emotional reactions, expressing compassion, and loving their family, friends, and even strangers. The model provided by mum and dad always had a formative effect. Christian parents instil in their children the willingness to follow love, faith, and trust as the main virtues that a human being can hope for.

Keywords: loving parents, self-control, emotional balance, prayer, compassionate hearts.

Introduction

Today's world has significant impacts on young people's existence. The most evident of all is the considerable amount of information available through the Internet. The libraries still represent important meeting points for passionate readers, but using the Internet at home, in the street, in school, and at work has certainly become a habit. The impact on our daily life is definitely enormous.

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Studies are proving the negative effects of digital media mainly on children's development. All parents should be aware of the risks taken when their child is exposed one too many hours to a screen. Psychologists constantly emphasize the tremendous role of voluntary attention in the entire process of brain formation. Left for hours in front of the TV or mobile phone, the child loses the strength to focus on learning activities. To derive benefit from the huge amount of non-stop digital media, every child should be taught how to become selective and to exert self-control when it comes to the overwhelming influence of these new technologies. Otherwise, parents should expect many unpleasant surprises along the way of their child's evolution.

Time crisis is one of the main problems in raising children nowadays. Parents are daily confronted with huge amounts of real hard work. They sometimes admit to being overwhelmed by the unnecessary requirements at their workplace. Living in a globalised society has in itself different negative consequences, such as the generalised perception that a child may represent a serious obstacle to a prosperous career. Caught up in demanding jobs, many married people decide to postpone a possible childbirth for the years to come. Your own children have become an unnecessary burden[2]. The long-term good intentions of young families are more and more monopolized by a *childfree* ideology that supports abortion and contraceptive methods. Instead of giving birth to children, future mothers feel forced to reject the possibility of becoming a parent. Maternity is not anymore a gift and paternity is clearly disconsidered. Even Christian Orthodox families that should be aware of the appalling sin of killing an innocent unborn child end up using abortion as a solution to the enlargement of the family circle. Those families that have decided to keep all their babies and not trashing them away are a total surprise within the Church. Unfortunately, this is a reality of our sleeping conscience as a religious body. Love must be served with responsibility in any family[3]. Assuming all the troubles and demands that can come over your family is the only way to build your happiness. Asking help from God readjusts and drives away fears of not being able to deal with future challenges, especially the material ones. Children are not meant to obstruct their parents' professional objectives but to impose the necessary limits needed for complete family life.

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[2] *The Basis of the Social Thinking of the Russian Orthodox Church*, in Germano Marani, Ioan I. Ică jr (coord.), *The Social Thinking of the Church Basis – Documents – Analysis – Perspectives* (Deisis: Sibiu, 2002), 233.

[3] Feodor Borodin, *How to Raise a Happy Child*, trans. Diana Guțu (Sophia: Bucharest, 2021), 137.

1. Early Childhood is a decisive period in family development

Early childhood is the most important developmental period of someone's life. Even though many parents realise their role in the upbringing of their children they may discover that coping with all the responsibilities is exhausting and they could try to escape them in various ways. Some parents choose to spend considerable time outside their home involved in activities that are mistakenly considered as unavoidable. Some fathers are even convinced that taking care of the children is exclusively a wife's duty. Instead, they only need to gain money so that they can assure the security of the entire family. For these parents educating a child can become a serious struggle in the current society. Children's education requires mainly self-change. Most adults see themselves forced to fight with their flaws and shortcomings in order to get the best out of their family life. Early childhood is a sensitive stage in the formation of a child that comprises the first seven-eight years. It always involves dedication and respect for the unique personality of the child and, undoubtedly, consistent and purposeful love. It also demands inner strength and substantial willingness to get more and more informed about relevant aspects of children's development. Participation in training programs concerning children education is often met among the young families who thus recognise their inabilities to raise babies. Nowadays it is highly recommended to follow their example.

The maternal love offered in the first year affects the emotional life of the baby for the entire life. Studies have proven so far that babies already have the capacity to learn things while they are in their mother's womb. They clearly perceive the parents' negative attitude towards their coming into the world and they react to it. Later on, these children are confronted with neurosis and the tendency to get involved in dangerous acts such as drug consumption and delinquency[4]. In other words, they simply hate themselves and feel a compulsive need to punish their own person. Psychologists emphasize the importance of the nine months before birth when a pregnant woman should be surrounded by people who appreciate and support her without hesitation. Her mental state affects the unborn child. After birth, this baby becomes extremely susceptible to stress. The learning process slows down and thus it deteriorates significantly. In school, they attract easily teachers' animosity because they stubbornly refuse to cooperate. When confronted with an intense level of emotional pressure these children search desperately for their mum's protection. Researchers from Yale University affirm that a high level of persistent stress hinders the development of the prefrontal cortex which is responsible for our thinking abilities[5]. At the

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[4] Tinca Crețu, *Development Psychology* (Polirom: Iași, 2016), 98.

[5] Walter Mischel, *The Test of the Marshmallow Development Strategies of the Self-control Ability*, trans. Cristina Drăgulin (Curtea Veche: Bucharest, 2017), 60-1.

same time, stress slowly destroys the functions of this essential part of the brain. When parents constantly quarrel in the nearby of the cot the baby's brain starts to suffer from stress. This is one of the reasons why sometimes children feel relieved when parents finally decide to divorce. Taking into account the fact that most divorce cases usually take place at an early age, especially when the little ones are between three and six years old, it is explainable why these children are so nervous and reluctant to adults' requirements[6].

Communication within a family starts prior to the marriage of the spouses. The friendship between the two is the basis for the future dialogue developed in their home. A friend always had a special place in our lives. She or he deserves full attention. The friendship between a woman and a man is essential before a marriage takes place. For a Christian, knowing your future partner well before deciding to form a family is a mandatory responsibility because it consolidates their love and contributes to a proper choice[7]. Ultimately, it helps the two persons to avoid a lifetime of suffering and distress. Their abilities to communicate prepare slowly the dialogue with the children they intend to give birth to. At the same time, the friendship developed before marriage expresses their emotional balance. This is meant to build the peaceful family climate that a child necessitates for growing healthy. The parents' inner balance determines the emotional evolution of the baby. The negative reactions to the baby's presence inflict a deep emotional suffering. The lack of maternal love affects tremendously the child's development. After birth, many women find themselves unable to initiate a warm dialogue with the baby. Unfortunately, their new-born child receives no concrete opportunities to enjoy a safe and friendly environment that usually creates a secure attachment, especially to the mother. In this case, the interaction pattern of the family does not provide the fulfilment of the baby's emotional needs.

2. Emotionally balanced children are the result of parents' strong self-control

The formative value of family relationships is unquestionable. Parents represent the example that children follow. Their influence upon the children at early age determines their entire life. Adults who fail in their educational endeavors have the unfortunate capacity to make their children unhappy in the long run. It is easily noticeable that these children tend to remain stuck in some kind of emotional suffering that only time can heal. The love between parents inspires

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[6] Anne Bacus, *The Child from Three to Six Years Old The Physical, Mental, Emotional, Intellectual and Social Development*, trans. Traiana Necşa (Teora: Bucharest, 2005), 7.

[7] Nicolae Tănase, *The Ideal Husband, The Ideal Wife* (Anastasis: Sibiu, 2011), 12.

children to become loving companions for other people. Participation of parents in the life of the Church opens up children's hearts toward the unseen world of God. When both mother and father are authentic believers, children will most probably be the same in adulthood. Religious education demands as any other segment of a child's education a lot of voluntary attention. One of the main tasks parents have during their children's early age is to concentrate on activities that develop this attention because it plays a decisive role in all developmental stages comprised within a person's childhood, from birth to adolescence. Walter Mischel, the famous psychologist that did the "Marshmallow Test" in 1960, recommended that parents install rules and rituals that help little children to control their immediate desires[8]. This effort consolidates self-control. One example can be the observance of the time you shut down the TV or computer. During the first six-seven years, a child must develop inhibitory control over feelings and gestures. Is obvious that all adults need to have very good self-command when they are near a child. Already at three years old, children are able to talk about feelings with their close ones. Conversations between mothers and children should offer enough explanations about emotions because children are usually avid about finding out the reasons that stand behind the behaviour of adults[9]. These discussions help preschoolers understand more and more the inner life of others. At the same time, they absorb the rules that guide our emotional life in a particular place and background. The pre-schooler may gain emotional competence if the parents are preoccupied to teach proper ways to handle emotions. Being emotionally competent enables you to define well your own states of mind and identify correctly other people's emotions. Using local vocabulary which defines feelings as they are used in your community depends mainly on how adults choose to talk around the child. The capacity to offer emotional support to someone in trouble and adapt to your negative emotions is a quality that emotionally competent children gain an early age if parents stay really close and observe how they express emotions, especially when they interact outside their home. This is the reason why constant exposure to relevant groups of people that can influence positively the child's behaviour is a recommended educational approach. Christian teaching emphasizes the capacity of a family to teach the little ones what compassion is. Experts involved in youth drug abuse firmly affirm that compassionate people are usually less likely to emerge in self-destructive actions. In Christian education building a kind heart in your children is mandatory. Understanding the importance of emotions within the relationships developed with others is incumbent upon parents from an early age. Gentleness

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[8] Lucy Jo Palladino, *Parenting in the Age of Attention Snatchers. A Step-by-Step Guide to Balancing Your Child's Use of Technology*, trans. Miruna Andriescu (Polirom: Iasi, 2015), 52.

[9] H. Rudolph Schaffer, *Introduction in the Child's Psychology*, trans. Thea Ionescu (ASCR: Cluj-Napoca, 2007), 134.

and kindness should be instilled into children by the adults' daily gestures. Self-control over your emotional life must be learned in the first seven years of life and it remains one of the most precious educational treasures a person can have. Cuddling and fondling always represent the start in developing emotional competence. Children need most of all to feel the love of their close adults so that they can become confident in their initiatives towards others.

3. Prayers and good deeds in early childhood represent the sources of the social Christian behaviour

All these aspects necessitate a considerable endeavour from parents. Some of them are sometimes overwhelmed by the outbursts that a child can have. They realise that they need to do something in order to be able to get over this period without disturbing or destroying the relationships with the child. Considering all the difficulties that can prevent from taking good care of children, many parents start learning child psychology with great interest. Thus they try to find answers to their specific situation. For Christian parents, prayer remains undoubtedly the main educational resource. Children must be taught at an early age to pray when they experience distress. Praying daily is a practice that Christian parents are called to develop within their families. Unfortunately, there are just a few parents that still preserve it and struggle to enhance the opportunities to tell prayers when children are around. These prayers are meant to strengthen family unity which God always blesses. Prayer is an excellent method to help children become aware of the needs of other people that may be in trouble. Good deeds do not necessitate every time a thing to offer but they can include time dedicated to praying for others. Parents should make sure that children learn at an early age about the entire panoply of deeds that they can exert for the benefit of their neighbours. The entire Christian theology is about praying and doing good to others. In this respect, Saint Paul the Apostle emphasizes in his epistles the positive role of the Christians in a world of scarcity and physical suffering. Nowadays children can participate with their parents in philanthropic activities. There are numerous occasions in our society to do so. Sunday is the perfect day to spread Christian kindness. After participation in the Holy Liturgy, a family may involve children in simple but important deeds for the others[10]. Some parishes have special programs organized with the intention to give children the possibility to act as a benefactor.

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[10] Alexie Graciov, *What Any Boy Should Know or Spiritual Conversations About What is Important in Life*, trans. Cristea Florentina (Egumeniţa: Galaţi, 2017), pp. 34-5.

Besides the visible results of these projects, children may use the interaction with fellows of the same age in order to develop their Christian social behaviour. Parents are aware of the direct educational benefits for the development of children. Involved in action groups of little friends that help sick and lonely people, children take the time to feel useful to somebody. At the same time, they play undoubtedly the role of an authentic Christian missionary. Good deeds wear always the divine light within them, but the children are even more special representatives of the Christian philanthropy. Their presence intensifies the joy of the beneficiaries. Involving children in philanthropic actions together with other children has in time an important side-effect that should be pointed out. At the preschool age children are self-centered. Adults are often forced to limit their tendency towards egoism, haughtiness, stubbornness, envy, laziness, greed or avarice[11]. And many other flaws and weaknesses that the human character may be "endowed" with. Getting acquainted with the hardships of different people makes children more responsible and ready to offer support every time a new opportunity would arise. And doing so they form for themselves a Christian conscience that is always based on certain values such as unconditional love combined with a strong faith in the help of God, powerful reciprocal respect, perseverance enabled by ever-lasting patience and many more. Consequently, it is highly recommendable to take notice as a parent of all the bad habits that your child may have and intervene by slowly providing organized occasions to counteract their development. Children become messengers of the Christian teaching and the future laity[12].

Parents need to offer their offspring not only the best model of parenthood but also a conjugal life full of affection. Every person receives at baptism gifts from the Holy Spirit that should be activated along the course of life. This special divine bestowal received through baptism is used when the Christian believer serves others[13]. One of the most important services is to pray for another. Showing children, a conjugal relationship full of respect and sacrifice is the best way to open up children's hearts and fulfil them with love. A kind-hearted child will not lose the chance to pray for loved ones and other people.

The human brain's development ends around the age of 25. Early age and the years to follow represent the period when the constant habits of the child create neural paths within the brain. The habits developed during childhood, especially in the first seven-eight years, are preserved for the entire life.

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[11] Saint Vladimir of Kiew, *About Education*, trans. Adrian Tănăsescu-Vlas (Sophia, Siluana: Bucharest, 2020), 113.

[12] Radu Preda, *The Signs of the Time* (Renaşterea: Cluj-Napoca, 2008), 139.

[13] *The Basis of the Social Thinking of the Russian Orthodox Church*, 187.

Reading and doing sports, for instance, are two activities that must be encouraged at an early age. The human brain does not have a special area that determines and coordinates the desire for reading books. In other words, a human being can survive without the delight induced by the written text. However, it was discovered that children who read during childhood develop parts of the brain that considerably improve their language and, ultimately, their thinking capacity[14]. As emphasized earlier, praying should be a common exercise for a Christian pre-schooler. It always necessitates voluntary attention which is the essential element in learning perseverance. Without strong attention gained through constant effort, children find themselves helpless when confronted with difficult activities. Psychologists consider that a child should have the inner capacity to confront hardships. It is well-known that the main reason children and young people start using drugs is the lack of inner strength to overcome harsh moments in life[15]. Another important element that develops when children start praying is gratitude for what they have around them. It is common sense wisdom to appreciate the people God has surrounded us with. Christianity considers gratitude leverage of communication in itself. Expressing gratitude for all the benevolence that God offered us is a way to recognize His grandeur. At the same time, praying for the ones next to us is the single way to maintain unity of a group[16]. Encouraging the children to pray for others plays a certain role in their socio-emotional development. They have the possibility to experience at the early an age that God responds to their warm prayers. Praying frequently becomes a habit that slowly imprints decisively into the brain. The child's prayers have determined the divine grace to work for the benefit of others and this is indeed a perceptible miracle. When prayers are fulfilled, children learn easily to entrust themselves to the care of God. Praying is a precious educational method that makes the child aware of the presence of God and His wonders. Love showed to others by praying for them activates the gifts received at baptism. Praying for others must be perceived as a direct consequence of the revival experienced within the baptism. It strengthens the unity within the Body of Jesus Christ that is the Church. The meaning of praying for another person becomes clearer later when the child will be able to understand the sense of life as a gift from God.

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[14] Lucy Jo Palladino, *Parenting in the Age of Attention Snatchers,* 111-2.

[15] Tatiana Şişova, Galina Kozlovskaia, *Dialogues About the Problems of Children and Adolescents*, trans. Adrian Tănăsescu-Vlas (Sophia: Bucharest, 2021), 284.

[16] Zaharia Zaharou, *The Seal of the Christ's Presence in the Heart of Man*, trans. Monahia Porfiria, Monahia Tecla (Basilica: Bucharest, 2020), 142-3.

4. The constant participation of the family in the divine service develops generosity in children's heart

The model played by parents is tremendous. There are studies that prove that a faithful father who constantly prays determines the child to remain connected to the Church's worship in adulthood. The consistent behaviour of grown-ups helps pre-schoolers understand that the world functions because everyone abides some rules[17]. Adults reacting the same to the bad behaviour of children teaches them the idea that there is the constancy in the manner people act in particular circumstances. Observing adults allows the little ones to untangle reality. At the same time, the preschool child starts perceiving reality as having limits established by adults. These limits reassure children that they are safe in their surroundings. When limits and by rules remain stable, children tend to relax and not experience fear or anxiety. The life of prayer and going often to a church should characterize the life of a faithful adult. Accompanying parents to church on Sundays is a special moment during the week. The child feels its solemnity and absorbs the peaceful gestures of the parents. Participating in the divine service is thus an event. The parish where a family goes is where the child should have the experience of a community that loves Jesus Christ. All its initiatives are driven by the urge to serve one another, following the example of our Lord, the Son of God. Children are very perceptive. They appreciate kind people at once. The groups of people met in the church can provide sheer examples of loving and dedicated God's servants. Generosity inspires children to become attentive to others and understand what their needs might be. The ability to share things with another is learned at an early age[18]. Christian parents need to stay alert all time and assure themselves that their children have enough opportunities to practice generosity. Their little hearts are endowed with the quality to expand indefinitely with the help of divine grace that always brings love along. An ecclesial community develops thus a child's emotional competence. Children interact with many adults and children while in church. They are given an extra chance to express their feelings and speak about them. Poor emotional functioning is often diagnosticated when children use negative conduct. At the age of five pre-schoolers can analyze in an impersonal manner the emotions they experience and succeed in managing them properly[19]. Furthermore, they are able to react to others' emotions and act upon them with positive effects. For instance, if a child is an angry way too much a pre-schooler can diminish this outburst so that

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[17] Cindy Terebush, *Teach the Whole Pre-schooler: Strategies for Nurturing Developing Minds*, trans. Cristina Firoiu (Trei: Bucharest, 2020), 122-3.

[18] Feodor Borodin, *How to Raise a Happy Child*, 96.

[19] H. Rudolph Schaffer, *Introduction in the Child's Psychology*, 151.

the affected fellow calms down completely. Unfortunately, this precocious quality of the pre-schooler is often noticed in those children coming from households where parents quarrel a lot in the presence of children. In these cases, the irresponsibility of the adults is paid with the untimely growing up of the little ones who learn conflict resolution and useless suffering too early.

Taking part in the activities developed by a parish allows children to do good deeds. This atmosphere of constant dedication strengthens perseverance which is the necessary engine of a strong will. Parents should offer proper occasions for the child to solve problems. The will of a child starts developing around the age of five and it necessitates help from adults. Confronted with different dilemmas pre-schoolers are forced to identify solutions. Christian parents have now the possibility to teach their children that answering to God's love involves prayers, repentance and good deeds that boost generosity. Asceticism represents the way Christians create an equilibrium between divine will and their lives. This daily struggle leads us to His resemblance[20]. Our will obeys God's will and gains unexpected energy to surpass all difficulties and perils.

Children need to see their close ones loving others. Parents' preoccupation to teach children how to express their warm feelings towards people in distress is extremely important. Surrounding others with care and mercy is the proper model to raise a sympathetic child. During childhood there are many opportunities to help practically neighbours, friends or strangers having trouble. Keeping always an eye open and a warm heart for good deeds represent the best path to develop a child's personality. It is easy to notice that nowadays human ability to care for others that are not a part of your family has considerably diminished. It is important therefore to offer the little ones the opportunity to practice in specific moments and situations the good deed. Compassion must be instilled in children's souls starting with the first seven years. When this parental effort takes place, many lovely surprises can be offered by loving children. But the most important of all will be their interest to take care of their own parents when they are going to be old and sick. In this endeavour to bring up compassionate offsprings, a faithful mum and dad have the examples of the Saints. Our Church has plenty of well-doers among the Saints. Everyone knows Saint Nicholas and his exceptional good acts. Saint Mina and Saint George, Saint John the Baptist and Saint Andrew are famous in the world. A Christian is urged to dedicate time for the benefit of others. When it comes to good deeds, a family should provide occasions when children are asked to use their creativity to show love to those in trouble. Money is not always at hand to be able to intervene right away when

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[20] John Breck, *The Sacred Gift of Life Bioethics Treatise*, trans. Irineu Pop Bistriţeanul (Patmos: Cluj-Napoca, 2007), 43.

someone necessitates help. Becoming a volunteer in a philanthropic organization can be an option. A Russian priest was totally surprised by one of his adolescent sons who had a party for the children of a sick woman. He did not have money and then he decided to cook some pancakes with different fillings for these friends that were sad and concerned about their mother's difficult situation.

5. Gentle playful parental authority favors communication between children and adults

Gaining a good heart is indeed a wonderful gift that Christian parents can cultivate. It is mandatory to use the proper authority skills in order to succeed. Harsh punishment is not recommendable unless it is justified. Imposing parental will requires a lot of wisdom, calm, and love. Priests encourage parents when a situation becomes too tense to use specific tasks within the family circle in order to avoid conflicts with their children and still inspire responsibility. When a family has more than two children parents discover easily that their parental style needs adjustments[21]. Indulgent overprotection is not a successful educational method, even though many parents would like to maintain this status quo for all their children. Family rules and limits are changed because parents start to feel overwhelmed. Pre-schoolers are extremely attentive to the way parents handle each situation as far as individual child care is spread among brothers and sisters. It is well known the negative reaction of the older child to a new baby. Mothers are 'the main actress' in a family and they need to be able to show the same love and respect to all children. It is undisputable and a difficult task for a single person. That is why fathers should be invited and given space to play their specific roles. Men tend to be left out when it comes to raising babies. They go to work long hours and when they return home, they should be offered tasks that are incumbent upon them. They can also keep a crying baby in their strong arms and survive the moment every time[22]. Some fathers feel often marginalized in their families. They tend to experience isolation and rejection. A wife must take good care of the male sensitivity and allow her husband to find out the mysteries of early childhood while she does the same thing.

A positive image of the father is extremely important for educating healthy children. Boys experience the need to have a positive paternal example to follow during childhood and after that. When a father avoids constantly

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[21] Ecaterina Burmistrova, Mihail Burmistrov, *The Mathematics of the Family Life Two Points of View About a Happy Marriage*, trans. Adrian Tănăsescu-Vlas, Sophia, Bucharest, 2020, pp. 111-2.

[22] Lawrence J. Cohen, *Playful Parenting*, trans. Anacaona Mîndrilă-Sonetto, Trei, Bucharest, 2012, pp. 52-3.

parental responsibilities or expresses a harsh attitude towards the family as a whole, children search for protection to the female actors of the family circle. The lack of paternal affection leaves deep wounds inside a child's heart. In these circumstances, boys try to identify themselves with a male model found inside their gang, in a football team or in movies[23]. And there is needless to say that these outsiders do not have the educational impact necessary to form in long run an emotionally healthy adult. Statistics show that where a father goes to church and prays during the day, children remain faithful believers in adulthood. But not only that helps considerably in raising happy children. The availability of the father to get involved in a child's play has special importance in itself. The bond between the child and the father strengthens and it remains unchanged during the entire childhood. Many parents do not have time or refuse to become an active part of the children's activities even if they are often invited to do so. These parents did not have the possibility in their own childhood to play with one of the adults and now, when they have their own children, feel uncomfortable in this novel situation. Psychologists affirm that a playful attitude towards the child's whims and negative behavior may change completely the whole parental effort. This is the reason why they strongly recommend especially to the fathers to bend down their knees and sit down on the floor to start playing with their child. Games represent the way children discover the world around them before they go to school around the age of seven. Having an adult next to them in this process changes completely their understanding of the surroundings. Children become confident to explore their perceptions of people and situations. The pre-schoolers usually strive to gain deep insight into adults' reactions and actions. Surprisingly, at the age of three, a child already identifies correctly not only the emotions experienced by another but also the reason which determined them. Their emotional sensitivity functions undoubtedly to the maximum. Also, playing is how children let the adults understand that something goes wrong with them and that they have some kind of suffering. The inside world of a pre-schooler is marvelous. When parents play with them cuddling and embracing them a lot, these little children may start crying without a reason. This means that they have experienced so much happiness while playing with their parent that they have to empty their own soul in some way. And crying is the way they find it possible. It is indeed a strange reaction that parents must be aware of. This single example indicates once more that early childhood represents a complex and amazing period in a child's development. Reading the parental education literature is therefore highly advisable. Books about children's

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[23] Vasile Thermos, *Advice for a Healthy Raising of the Children*, trans. Şerban Tica, Sophia, Bucharest, 2009, p. 198.

development offer considerable support for raising a child. They teach parents what to take notice of and how to use their parental objectives for the benefit of all the members of the family, including grandparents, aunts or uncles, cousins and close friends. Many mistakes are avoided when reading psychology books. Mum and dad find new leverages to deal with particular situations and often discover their own flaws and shortcomings. The Orthodox children's education teaching insists on the personal improvement of the parents, suggesting that their strive for a holy life is what makes children grow up healthy and happy. The bad habits of the parents are rapidly copied by little children and preserved for the rest of their life if the adults do not realize their negative influence on their offspring and intervene to do some change in their faulty personalities. But this of course necessitates a merciless battle with your inner conflicts and habits for the sake of the children.

6. Strong connection with the child at an early age represents the premise for an authentic Christian destiny

Christian parents are responsible in front of God for the evolution of their children. Every effort to offer them a complete education has consequently divine support when it is asked. The prayers of the parents contribute enormously to the development of a healthy child. The connection of the adults with the divine grace influences directly their ability to communicate with the children. The affection oriented towards the child needs to be genuine. The impossibility to be a part of the life of your child does not exist. Every parent must consider parenthood as a priority. There has been a lot of turmoil in the existence of many families who decided to disregard children and leave for a foreign country to gain more money. In these cases, many children remained at home with close relatives, hoping that their parents would return soon. This unhappy situation proved that children are not just simply pawns on a chess table, but unique human beings that miss terribly their mum and dad.

Children need to see their parents daily and watch them how they choose to live so that they can become their role models. All the good habits that a child attains at an early age are developed under the kind eyes of the parents who act as positive examples. A Christian child is taught how to say a prayer before sitting down at the table, how to contribute to the well-being of the entire family by executing some precise chores, how to avoid harmful decisions such as smoking and overeating, how to control emotions and show unceasingly respect to parents or any other person. Loving God's commandments depends almost exclusively on parents' ability to live authentically their own faith. Their desire to

remain close to the life of a church influences terribly children's development. Jesus Christ is the center of their life and all they do for the benefit of their family is in accordance with His teachings. In today's world keeping a close relationship with the Son of God requires a doubled effort than centuries before. Many temptations come across their good intentions and call for a compromise that ultimately affects the relationship with God. Faithful parents that follow all God's commandments are rare. But they definitely impress with their capacity to love each other, their children and their fellows, no matter who they happen to be. Children find in these parents a wonderful example of divine maturity that needs to be replicated later in their own adulthood.

Faithful parents imbibe any gesture with divine grace. Even their words bear divine grace. They share it with the ones hearing them. These parents detain impressive knowledge not only about the Church's history but also about its Tradition. They put into practice the spiritual progress that derives from the Christian teaching. They notice easily by fulfilling commandments that God loves greatly all the humanity. Love, faith and trust are the most important theological virtues that a child should learn from their close adults. They are enough to help them build a beautiful and compassionate destiny.

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Book Review:

Ermil i Stratonik. Sveti ranohrišćanski mučenici beogradski (Ермил и Стратоник. Свети ранохришћански мученици београдски), ed. Dubravka Preradović (Дубравка Предадовић), Balkanološki Institut Srpske akademije nauka i umetnosti, Belgrade, 2022, 216 p. /in Serbian with summaries in English/ ISBN 978-86-7179-117-5

This year, the Institute for Balkan Studies of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts published a collection of papers about "Hermylos and Stratonikos. Early Christian martyrs of Belgrade", edited by Ph.D. Dubravka Preradović, research associate of the institute.

Deacon Hermylos and his jailer Stratonikos are authentic martyrs of the early Christian Singidunum. They received the wreath of martyrdom at the beginning of the 4th century, during the reign of Emperor Licinius, probably in 315, by being thrown into the Danube together. After three days, their holy relics emerged from the river and were buried in a tomb cut into a rock, eighteen miles downstream from the city. Their martyrdom soon became the focus of their cult. Due to the threat of its destruction by the Huns, in the middle of the next century, the relics of the martyrs were transferred to Constantinople, which decisively influenced the further shaping of their cult.
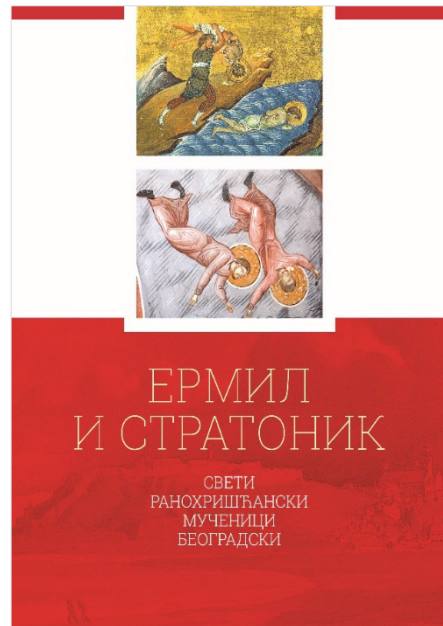
Conceived as a monographic study, the collection of papers consists of six articles, which are divided into three chapters. They are preceded by a foreword (p. 11–14) by Ph.D Danica Popović, retired Principal Research Fellow of the Balkan Institute, and *Editor's Foreword* (p. 17–23), where the reasons and immediate motivation for writing this book are presented. At that point, scattered in the works of domestic and foreign researchers, focused on certain aspects related to the history and hagiography of these martyrs, a brief overview of previous research on Saints Hermylos and Stratonikos is given. Regarding the identification of the original tomb of the holy martyrs, there have been various assumptions. These circumstances called for the need for a synthetic approach to the topic. A contemporary effort to renew the cult of the two Belgrade martyrs within the Serbian Orthodox Church can also be noticed, a fact that has certainly led to the decision to dedicate one of the chapels in St. Sava's temple in Belgrade to Hermylos and Stratonikos, the oldest saints of the city.[1] The awakening of the cult of the long-celebrated martyrs additionally motivated the need to review and systematize the knowledge gained so far about them in one comprehensive publication, thus achieving a unique scientific and ecclesiastical contribution. Therefore, the historical knowledge and various aspects of the cult of the early Christian Belgrade martyrs were collected in a comprehensive, thematically divided, scientifically based, and methodologically flawless way.

The first chapter, which is dedicated to the place and time of Hermylos and Stratonikos suffering, contains the text **"The Christianization of Late Antique Singidunum: from a Roman Castrum to an Early Byzantine Bishopric"** (p. 27–61) prof. Ph.D. Olga Shepehar. The reader is presented with an image of ancient Singidunum's later history, the religions practiced in it, as well as the beginnings of Christianity in the city. In addition to the Singidunum's bishops, who were involved in the dogmatic disputes of the time, the local martyrs were important figures in the city's early church history. The presence of Christianity in the area of today's Belgrade from the 4th to the 6th century is also evident in certain (mostly portable) archeological findings.

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[1] Saint Deacon Hermylos and soldier Stratonikos were the first known, historically credible, Christians in Singidunum, who suffered for their faith in the city itself. It is known from the text of the Martyrdom of Saint Polyon, as well as from Jerome's martyrology, that some little earlier, in 304, the priest Montanus and his wife Maxima belonged to the church community of Singidunum and they died in Sirmium, the seat of the Illyricum prefecture. Some written sources mention Donatus, Fortunatus and Hermogenes as Singidunum's clerics, and Sirmium's martyrs who died during Diocletian's persecution, but the authenticity of the latter can be questioned.

The next chapter is dedicated to the cult and iconography of Hermylos and Stratonikos during the Middle Ages, and it consists of two articles by Dubravka Preradović "The Cult of Hermylos and Stratonikos in the Byzantine Capital" (p. 65–89) and "Representations of Hermylos and Stratonikos in the Medieval Art of the Eastern Christian World" (p. 91–133). The Belgrade martyrs were especially revered in the Byzantine capital, where their relics were transferred from a tomb near Singidunum. During the 6th century, the two Belgrade Saints' Martyrdom (Passio) had already been composed – a rare and precious example pre-Metaphrastian hagiography, as well as other hagiographic (praise, synaxars) and hymnographic (canon, troparions) compositions. According to the provisions of the Typikon of the Great Church, their memorial was marked twice a year (January 13 and June 1) at several locations in Constantinople, which have also been discovered. Finally, based on the testimony of the pilgrim Anthony of Novgorod, it is known that around the year 1200 the skulls of the two martyrs were kept in the altar of the church of St. Sophia. The text on their iconography includes representations of Hermylos and Stratonikos in the Eastern Christian world during the Middle Ages. Preserved representations of Saints Hermylos and Stratonikos, although modest in number, can be found in both miniature and monumental paintings, as well as on calendar icons. The two saints were depicted, together or individually, as martyrs without distinct saintly attributes. St. Hermylos is rarely portrayed as a deacon. Within the painted calendars and menologia, in addition to their representations as holy martyrs, there is also a depiction of their common suffering by drowning in the Danube.

The collection's final chapter is comprised of three articles and it's dedicated to hagiographic and liturgical written sources. In the first, "**The Passio of Hermylos and Stratonikos**" (p. 137 –150) prof. Ph.D Darko Todorović brings a translation of the text of the Passion of Hermylos and Stratonikos into modern Serbian. It is preceded by an extensive introduction and is accompanied by appropriate philological and historical comments. Observations on the literary value of their Martyrdom and its representation in the Byzantine manuscript tradition are presented here. This is analyzed in the following text "**The Memory of Hermylos and Stratonikos in Constantinopolitan Typika**" (p. 153–161). Its author, Lazar Ljubić – based on the analysis of the cathedral and monastic typika that originated in Constantinople or reflect the Constantinopolitan liturgical practice - reconstructs the manner and degree of celebration of the two martyrs. As it spread to the Eastern Christian world through liturgical books, the cult of Hermylos and Stratonikos reached the Slavic world, as Miloš Jovanović writes in his text on **The Prologue Vitae of Hermylos and Stratonikos in the Serbian Manuscript Heritage** (p. 163–181). The prologue has been observed in various editions (Varlaam's and Lukije's redaction). Here, texts of

their Prologue Vitae are also critically published. Both synaxars belonging to the editors of Constantine of Mocisia and those with verses at the beginning were taken for analysis.

Elegantly composed in terms of design, this book contains many great illustrations (fifty-two in total), i.e. reproductions of icons, frescoes, manuscripts and archeological artifacts, which are mentioned in the articles (list of illustrations, p. 187-190). A rich list of historical sources and relevant professional literature used in the production of texts points to the level of studiousness of this collection (bibliography, p. 191–216). Additionally, at the end of each text, an extensive summary in English is given.

In conclusion, the book *Hermylos and Stratonikos* is the first book dedicated to two early Christian martyrs, who had died on the territory of what is now the modern-day Serbian capital, Belgrade. The systematization of knowledge about Saints Hermylos and Stratonikos, in addition to undeniable scientific value, also provides a solid basis for further nurturing their respect.

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Book Review:

Marius Telea, *Istoria și spiritualitatea Imperiului Bizantin* (*The History and Spirituality of The Byzantine Empire*), vol. I: *Istoria Imperiul Imperiului Bizantin* (*The History of The Byzantine Empire*), Alba Iulia, Editura Reîntregirea, 2021, 884 p.

Associate Professor Marius Telea's work *The History and Spirituality of The Byzantine Empire* (*Istoria și spiritualitatea Imperiului Byzantine*), volume I: *The History of The Byzantine Empire* (*Istoria Imperial Imperiului Byzantine*), deals with the most critical aspects of the Byzantine Empire from its founding in 330 until its fall on May 29, 1453. This work, essential for knowing the history of the great Byzantine Empire, is structured in eighteen chapters, from page 29 to page 724, and each chapter has rich bibliography in foreign languages and Romanian. At the end of the book, the author presents six appendices, which allow the reader to quickly capture the most critical events in the history of the Byzantine Empire.

This paper is precious because it crowns decades of research work in the academic field and the many specialized studies that Associate Professor Marius Telea has published over the years.

The author presents the notion, object, importance and topicality of Byzantine history, culture, and spirituality in the introduction. Chapter I presents the basic notions of Byzantine terminology, the periodization of Byzantine history, culture and spirituality, and the stages of the history of Romanian-Byzantine relations. Chapter II comes in support of those passionate about the study of

Byzantinology. This chapter presents the history of Byzantine research, journals, and periodicals, in which the most valuable and essential studies in this field were published. In chapter three, the author presents the Romanian contributions to Byzantine history, culture, and spirituality, together with the directions and orientations of Byzantinology research in Romania. Chapter four presents the historical-geographical framework of the Byzantine Empire.

Chapter V, titled *Emperor Constantine the Great, founder of the Byzantine Empire*, presents the general characteristics of the time, the reign of Diocletian, the tetrarchic system and the reforms of this emperor, after which it continues with the detailed presentation of the Emperor Constantine the Great's reign, the founding of Constantinople, the emperor's reforms in administration, army, economy, finance, and the legislative field. Emperor Constantine the Great's religious policy, his activity on the Lower Danube, and his successors are also presented. The chapter mentions the failed attempt of Emperor Julian the Apostate to restore paganism, after which it continues with the reign of the emperors Jovian, Valentinian I and Valens.

Chapter VI presents the Christological struggles and crises caused by the massive barbarian migrations. Chapter VII, *Theodosius I: The Triumph of Christianity in the Empire. His descendants* present the general characteristics of the time, the usurpations of the Empire's Western part. It continues with a detailed description of the reign of Emperor Theodosius I, the Empire's division, and the successors Arcadius and Honorius. Chapter VIII is dedicated to Emperor Theodosius II, presenting the general characteristics of the time, the foreign and domestic policy, and the emperor's religious policy. In Chapter IX, the author presents the Byzantine Empire from the middle of the fifth century to the beginning of the sixth century, the emperors Marcian, Leo I, Zeno and Anastasius I, their religious policy, and the importance of the Fourth Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon in 451.

Chapter X is dedicated to the reign of Justinian. This chapter presents the rise of the Justinian dynasty and the domestic, foreign, and religious politics of Emperor Justinian and his successors. In Chapter XI, the author presents the Heraclid dynasty, the Arab danger, the religious problems caused by Ekthesis and Typos, and the Byzantine Empire's transformations in the 7th century. Chapter XII is entitled *The Isaurian and Amorite Emperors and the Iconoclastic Crisis 717-867*. The author captures in this chapter the general characteristics of the era, presenting the foreign and internal policy of the emperors of these two dynasties, after which he describes the two phases of the iconoclastic crisis of 728-780 and 802-843, which shook the Byzantine Empire. Also, this chapter presents the rebirth of education and culture and the religious issues that troubled the Byzantine Church in the second half of the ninth century.

The peak of the Byzantine Empire dates back to the Macedonian dynasty 867-1081, which is presented in Chapter XIII. Thus, the author presents the general characteristics of the time, the foreign policy of the Macedonian emperors, the Christian missions to the Slavic peoples in the IX-X centuries, and the missionary activity of Saints Cyril and Methodius. Also, this chapter has presented the organization of monasticism on Mount Athos. Unfortunately, during the Macedonian dynasty, although the Byzantine Empire reached its peak in 1054, the most painful event in the history of the Christian Church, the Great Schism, broke the unity of Christianity. After the death of Emperor Basil II, starting in 1025, the Byzantine Empire went through a period of crisis. In Chapter XIV, the author presents the regime of the military aristocracy and the Komnenos dynasty 1081-1185. Also, this chapter presents the Byzantine Empire's socio-economic situation and the external political context. It also mentions the religious policy of the Komnenians, the state organization and the crusading phenomenon.

Chapter XV presents the dynasty of angels 1185-1204, the revolt of the Asanists and the creation of the Vlach-Bulgarian Empire 1186-1396. The author writes about the Fourth Crusade from 1202-1204, its diversion, the Byzantine Empire's division by creating the Latin states, and the Greek formations of Nicaea, Trebizond, and Epirus. The chapter continues with a description of the Lascarid dynasty 1205-1258, the Byzantine Church's situation during the Latin Empire of Constantinople (1204-1261), and the reconquest of Constantinople by the Greeks in 1261.

Chapter XVI presented the Byzantine Empire from the second half of the 13th century and the first half of the 15th century when it was ruled by the Palaeologus dynasty from 1258-1453. The author presents the internal and external situation of the Empire, the Council of Lyon in 1274 and its failed attempt to restore Christian unity. Furthermore, the chapter presents the period of the civil wars within the Byzantine Empire and the triumph of hesychasm, too. Chapter XVII describes Byzantium and the Balkan states in the face of the Ottoman offensive between 1355 and 1402. The last chapter is dedicated to the collapse of the great Byzantine Empire. The author presents the Ottoman crisis and the prolongation of the Byzantine agony between 1402-1421, after which he continues with the Unionist Synod of Ferarra-Florence (1438-1439). The chapter also describes the last moments of Byzantine resistance to the Ottoman Turks and the last decade of the Byzantine Church's existence before the Empire's fall. Unfortunately, the existence of this great Byzantine Empire ended on May 29, 1453, when Constantinople fell to Muhammad II. The eighteenth chapter concludes with a description of the myth of the third Rome.

The seven appendices are remarkably consistent and are intended to make it easier for the reader to access the most critical events in the history of the Byzantine Empire.

With a rich bibliography, this paper is also a fundamental research tool for those who want to deepen one of the major topics that the author proposed for analysis and discussion, the great and fascinating Byzantine Empire. Studying bibliographic sources to restore the best possible image of the Byzantine Empire with all its institutions brings a new and essential contribution to the literature, paving the way for further research in the directions the author opens. All this proves the author's excellent capacity for effort, and the meticulousness in observing the nuances and details reflected by the available sources, confirms the importance and necessity of the appearance of this work.

Through this scientific paper, Associate Professor Marius Telea significantly contributes to the studies of Byzantinology in Romania, registering in the gallery of the most important Romanian Byzantinologists. Considering the contributions to the field of research and the logical and analytical nature of the approach, we warmly recommend the book *History and Spirituality of the Byzantine Empire*, Volume I: *The History of the Byzantine Empire*, and congratulate its author, Associate Professor Marius Telea.

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