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PAULA BUD - IN MEMORIAM

R O O ✝ S

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EDITORIAL

FR. IOAN CHIRILĂ

*The Ressurrection opened the heavens for her and she left for The One Who ressurected
(confession about a noble soul: Lect. univ. dr. Paula Paraschiva Bud – at her passing to eternal life)*

**THE RESSURECTION OPENED THE HEAVENS FOR HER
AND SHE LEFT FOR THE ONE WHO RESSURECTED
(CONFESSION ABOUT A NOBLE SOUL:
LECT. UNIV. DR. PAULA PARASCHIVA BUD –
AT HER PASSING TO ETERNAL LIFE)**

The days of separation and departure are tough, hope is the only one that can raise you above shadows. Such a day will remain for us the 4th of may 2017 when we lead the way of a soul who loved Christ and passed for the dwelling where the day of resurrection and eternal joy commences. More than three years ago, we chanted anastasic hymns at the passing away to the eternal dwelling of our colleague dr. Paula Paraschiva Bud at the shading of the Mother of God monastery, in Floresti. Therefore, I now bring forth a confession about the one who grew and served with us and dedicated herself to searching Christ without cessation.

She saw the light of day in 14 october 1983 in the old town of Brasov, that is radiated by the spirituality and culture of the Schei's, but she grew up in the effervescent cultural setting of Bucharest, being in search of plastic harmonies and studying at the Tonitza High School which she graduated and where she had a national award at the picture Olympiad (the first place). From this period, her parents Olimpiu and Stefania Bud, a family of distinguished intellectuals who peregrined throughout Romania from their hometown Lapus, were left the image of their daughter's painting, *The Chalice Woman*, which was a genuine omen of her searches. She did not seek only for harmony, nor just for the joy brought by stylistic lines, but she ultimately sought for the healing Chalice that could spring abundance of healing. We could also recall the pastel or aquarelle as strong points, but it seemed like a white veil was covering everything, so that it was difficult to see beyond. At Dej, where her grandparents found their place of rest and tranquility, she found out about the Sacred Art department of Cluj and in 2002 she became student at the Faculty of Orthodox Theology. I couldn't help but notice her perseverance, her will to hear and listen and how she prepared for the Sacrament of confession, so I offered her the an Erasmus training stage at the Catholic Institute of



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Paris, that also had a Sacred Art department. She handled English and French very good, she gained from the maternal love of language, but it wasn't easy for her, however she came back victorious, enriched and ready to search for higher goals. She graduated the Faculty with admirable scores, then continued with Masteral studies, and finally she became a PhD Student which she graduated in 2011 with the subject *Shabbat – history and eschatology*, with the mark **Summa Cum Laudae**. The doctoral research was an opportunity to fall in love with the writings of the Holy Fathers, especially of those belonging to Saint Maximus the Confessor and Saint Simon the New Theologian. It was then that she began to protrude in the thinking of the Holy Fathers and long to gain the mind of Christ. Not little was her amazement when she found out that Saint Maximus wrote about Christ's shabbatization of the tomb, but she was overwhelmed by the overflow of grace and light Saint Simon talked about. Thus, she came to confess as we are told in the book of Acts: „And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God” (Acts 8,37), and after she came to this confession, she began searching secretly the sight of Christ by doing the acts of self-sacrifice, service, obey, humbument and frequent Communion.

From this period I observe a profound aspect of self-giving: when two crosses stagger, if they meet, they support each other to keep their peak thrust in heaven. Lady Paula Parascheva was offered a friendship without change. She found Teodora and took her as the gift of God for her and helped her when she went through harsh times, then despite her burden, Teodora proved to be a candle that lit Paula's path in times of hardship. An exemplary friendship, a friendship of sacrifice. Teodora felt the heaviness of today as no other did and I hope that she takes power from the love Paula declared to Jesus above everything.

Paula Parascheva Bud was a patient and tenacious researcher. Besides her PhD research and thesis: *Shabbat – history and eschatology*, our colleague coordinated two collective books (*The Cross – sign, symbol and power* and *Science, spirituality, society*), she also was a co-author of the bibliographic guide that systemized the researches of Romanian Orthodox bible scholars on biblical theology of the Old Testament, the published over 22 researches in biblical journals, in collective volumes, three articles and four reviews. We have worked together for the past six years and surely much has left undone. We attempted to finish the practice books for Hebrew, Biblical archeology and rediscover various manuscripts, but she has hidden from us in the light of resurrection of Christ that our eyes can not yet perceive. She took part in nine national and

international conferences and was affiliated to the Ecumenical Association Romania (a subsidiary of the International Ecumenical Fellowship), and the to the Association for Dialogue between Science and Theology in Romania, the Union of Romanian Biblists, the Centre of Biblical Researches of Cluj-Napoca and to the Society of Romanian Orthodox Biblical Scholars.

She also initiated a project that reveals her devotion for pedagogy – as one who educated people. She got the project for the preparation of Religion school teachers in which thousands of professors could learn new techniques; she poured her soul in the attempt to digitalize ancient literature, she contributed to the writing of a Religion handbook, and like an older sister she has drawn many into the field of research. We were working on the Technological transfer project in the world of art and restoration and even in difficult days she chose to get rest through research. She was a tenacious researcher who really inspired and held initiative. For her great talent and work she received the *Juventute* award from our university in 2011 and the award for excellence in didactics in 2016.

Beyond all of these, she was a figure animated by love for others: some she advised and counselled, others she helped structuring their works and projects, other she gave bibliographical references, but she inspired everyone to gather and settle the path of good for every human being. Both a friend of youths and exigent, stranger from small talks and a support for everyone. I cannot forget how she suffered when she was facing her toughest moments, she was someone who helped raising the Cross high, how wonderful!

She was known both in our country and abroad, as the secretary of the IEF organisation and president of the Cluj subsidiary. An active member said that in her eyes one could seize the light of joy in brotherly meeting, that's why I said: she has hidden in light, and she can't be seen for she is light. The messages from everyone tell how much she was loved.

Now she went in the light of Resurrection to see Christ and calm her soul in the eternal chanting of His angels.

We sowed her under clay so she will spring in eternity telling us that she *found plenty of peace for she moved from death to life*, and here in Life I came for *I have chosen the Virgin, Mother of God, who gave birth to the Redeemer of everyone, Lord we praise Thee!* (chant from the Ritual of children funeral)

We will keep her an eternal and blessed memory!

ORTHODOX EXEGESIS

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1. CONSIDERATIONS ON THE SHABBAT BEFORE THE LAW. AN ATTEMPT TO RECONCILE THE OPPOSITES

Abstract

The religious life during the pre-Mosaic period is rather little known, especially because of the synthetic character of the first chapters of the book of *Genesis*. Implicitly, the problem of the Shabbat remains, with respect to this period, in an area of understanding which is somewhat unclear, without being able to issue definite statements regarding the practice or not of the Shabbat, as a historical-archaeological reality. This lack of effective information generated, in time, the appearance of a series of opinions concerning this matter, opinions which are not only divergent but even opposite most of the time. But these divergences can be reconciled from a theological point of view if we distinguish between the historical and eschatological dimension of the Shabbat.



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Shabbat, Law, rest, history, eschatology

The dynamics of the text of the Scripture as a revealed text is, besides a quality that confirms for the Scripture its unique status as letter of the divine love for the human being – as Saint John Chrysostom wonderfully defined it –, also a source that generates multiple and various interpretations, without them being opposite and thus inconsistent. On the contrary, they find themselves in a relationship of complementarity, each of them contributing to the completion of a text's meaning and understanding. Thus, even though the exegetes' opinions on a certain text often differ (sometimes in a radical manner) and are even opposed to each other, the simple acceptance of this contradiction is not the only possible perspective. One may also choose to look for an area of understanding

that could enhance a *reconciliation of the opposites*: a level of interpretation in which the meaning, arguments and logic of each exegetical position is valued in the extended context of the theological understanding of the Old Testament and of the Scripture as a whole. This paradigm also includes the issue of understanding and respecting the Shabbat during the period prior to receiving the Law on the Mount Sinai (Ex 20). But the exegetes' divergences regarding the knowledge and practice of the Shabbat before the Law can be harmonized, we think, within the frame of a theological interpretation which can distinguish between the historical and eschatological dimension of the Shabbat. In the center of this problem we find the episode of the manna (Ex 16), a text from which some elements are valued by the exegetes with the purpose of determining the moment in which the Shabbat was established.

The episode of the manna (Ex 16) has been subject to several ample historical-critical analyses, generated by its somewhat unexpected content: the situation involves respecting a commandment that was not formulated and addressed to the people of Israel yet. The climax of the book of Exodus, the Decalogue in chapter 20, will offer this commandment a legal status and will thus reserve, for a day of cult, an impressive gravity: a tenth of the Decalogue. Through this integration of the commandment of the Shabbat into the Decalogue, respecting the Shabbat as a historical-archaeological reality, a weekly day of cult, becomes, simultaneously, responsibility/ obligation and an identity mark of Israel. The seemingly chronological inconsistency between the texts from *Exodus* 16 and *Exodus* 20 constitutes the basis of the multiplication, diversification of the exegetical opinions, but it may also be regarded in a positive light: it determines the profound analysis of this text in order to understand its inner logic and the correlations with the whole text of the Old Testament. Moreover, when the problem of identifying the sources of chapter 16 occurs, the difficulty of diversity of opinions between the specialists also occurs, who ascribe most of the chapter to source P (the majority of the critics) and source J (Durham 2002, 223). But this episode is a particular case, whose importance is given not by the sources that constituted the basis of its writing nor by the manner in which these sources were combined, but by the central theological theme of solicitude as a proof of the divine Presence (Durham 2002, 224). Accepting to gather food only for the current day is an expression of the faith in fact that God gives people continuously what is necessary for them to survive. And the adjustment of the manna to the liturgical rhythm given by the alternation *six working days – a rest day* is the sign and the confirmation of the wonderful character of this bread from heaven. Thus,

the theological importance of the episode sets aside any preoccupation for style and structure, an aspect which generated even within the text some repetitions, of priority being the fact that providing the food as a mark of the Presence is combined thrice with the idea of respecting/ sanctifying/ guarding the rest day as a symbol and celebration of the Presence (Sherman 2006, 61). The episode allows, through its content, developing different perspectives of understanding, each of them valuing other elements and leading to distinct theological ideas/ statements.

The cutumiary perspective: bringing up-to-date the Shabbatic tradition

From the perspective of the Mosaic authority of the Pentateuch, one may suppose that some of the elements, including the episode of the manna, are the mark of Moses' thinking and "strategy" to prepare the people to accept and respect the Law. But in the case of a synchronic reading, focused on identifying the intention of the biblical text (*intentio operis*) (Oancea 2007: 187-202), chapter 16 may be regarded simply as a phase prior to the legislation of the day of rest within the Decalogue, and this is what gives the celebration of the Shabbat in this context a cutumiary character. The custom is a law norm sanctioned through a long practice, it requires an accumulation of traditions, of similar acts, which have no legal provisions. Keeping the seventh day through rest in the episode of the manna fits this pattern, by being, according to the biblical chronology, a moment prior to any legal statements regarding the compulsoriness of respecting the day of rest in Israel, an expression which will only occur in the context of receiving the Law on Mount Sinai (Ex 20:8-11).

The supporters of the idea that the Jews knew this day before receiving the Law (Osborn and Hatton 1999, 398) appeal to different arguments and explanations to support this position. A recurring idea is that although the Shabbat was an institution known by the Jews even in the pre-Mosaic period, the keeping of this day suffered a profound degradation during the Egyptian slavery because of the difficulties that were imposed by this special situation (Nichol 1978, 581). It is highly improbable that the Jews were let to rest during this period, even for a religious purpose. This is why one may consider that the institution of Shabbat could no longer function during their stay in Egypt. Even though the idea that the patriarchs as well respected this day is accepted, the Shabbat could certainly not be respected in Egypt (Spence-Jones 2004, 53). This will eventually lead to the necessity of a legislative expression for the observance of the Shabbat, following an extended period of Egyptian slavery in which the people of Israel

had gotten far away from their parents' faith and customs, and had passed through a period of radical change of status. If we remember the moment of Jacob's removal to Egypt, we see that it was determined by a call-invitation from Pharaoh: "and bring your father and your families back to me. I will give you the best of the land of Egypt and you can enjoy the fat of the land" (Gn 45:18). But the situation changed in time, "then a new king, to whom Joseph meant nothing, came to power in Egypt" (Ex 1:8), and from that moment on, the Jews have become from guests, slaves of the Egyptian people, unwillingly taking upon themselves the entire burden which came with this social status. It meant giving up their own faith and religious customs and, implicitly, accepting, more or less freely their masters' faith (Krauss 2001, 24-40). During the entire period of slavery, forced to respect the Egyptian laws (Freedman 1996, 813), which were not familiar with the rest on the seventh day, the Jews could not observe the Shabbat. Consequently, even though Israel kept the memory of a certain sabbatical practice, which Moses brings back to the Jews' attention, their inconstancy in respecting it is obvious (Ex 16:25-30). Naturally, the Israelites were not used to observing the seventh day, which they trespassed almost in a defiant manner (Nichol 1978, 581). That is why Moses, in order to introduce the Shabbat, was forced to punish by death the ones who did not respect it (Ex 31:14) (Nichol 1978, 580).

In the history of the chosen people, the slavery period represented a phase of spiritual degradation, visible even in the way the Israelites related to the day of rest, which generated, first of all, the necessity to bring up-to-date the content and importance of this day in Israel's religious experience. The exegetes speak about this bringing up-to-date in terms of *re-learning*, of *renewal* (Clarke 1999, 57), of *re-establishment* (Spence-Jones 2004, 53), of *clarifying* (Elwell 1996, 23), of *reiterating* (Courson 2005, 281) a pattern which was already known to the Israelites, of a *completion* (Nichol 1978, 581) of the instructions regarding the Shabbat, all these terms involving the knowledge about the weekly Shabbat before Sinai as well as passing through a phase of decline in understanding and respecting it. Despite of this process of bringing up-to-date, it is possible that the generation brought up in slavery could not fully accept this rest day, the Shabbat being characteristic and naturally assumed only by the new generation, brought up in the desert (Spence-Jones 2004, 57) in God's law.

The commandment of the rest in the seventh day is not regarded as something new neither by Moses nor by the people within this episode, the theme of the Shabbat being something generally known (Clarke 1999, 57). The Israelites are not explained

here what is the day of rest or why should they gather twice as much manna in the sixth day. It is interesting to observe the fact that the Israelites ask themselves twice with respect to the consistency of the manna, but never ask what is the Shabbat, which proves the fact that although the Shabbat was known, it was not respected in a particular way until that time (Pfeiffer 1962, 23). Through this food given miraculously, depending on a cultic law (Radmacher, Allen and House 1997, 22), God sanctifies the day of Shabbat and offers a time of physical rest and of re-orientation towards the spiritual things. Thus, what begins as a divine intervention in a critical moment, intervention through which the food for the hungry people is provided, becomes an important lesson about the special nature of Shabbat (Shapiro 2004:169). The rule of gathering the manna allows a double correlation: in the past, with the creating work, at the end of which God rested, and in the future, with the discovery of the fourth commandment which will make Shabbat an integrant part of the Covenant (Stuart 2007, 372).

The historical perspective: inaugurating the Shabbat in Exodus 16 as an anticipation of the Law

Regarding the inauguration of the Shabbat in the episode of the manna (Ex 16), many exegetes express in a favorable manner (Keil and Delitzsch 2002, 364). Even if the existence of the principle which stands at the basis of observing this day even from the moment of creation, as a day of rest and holiness, is accepted, here the term of Shabbat as a weekly day of cult, as a cultic expression of the initial principle occurs for the first time (Nichol 1978, 582). Thus, even if God rested on the seventh day of the creation, He did not command man to do the same thing at that time. But now He gives the law of Shabbat to the people of Israel, a law that would become one of the Ten Commandments as a sign of His covenant with Israel on Sinai (Ex 31:13) and as a sign of weekly recalling the miracle of their liberation from Egypt (Dt 5:15). God established the observance of the Shabbat as a religious foundation before giving the Law and as anticipation of the Law (Stuart 2007, 381). The fact that some came out to look for manna even on the day of Shabbat, shows that this becomes an institution for Israel only after the giving of the Law. If God sanctified the Shabbat here through the gift of manna, He did this as a preparation for its consecration through the Law (Spence-Jones 2004, 37).

The episode of the manna as a whole represents a partial anticipation of the revelation from Sinai, because in chapters 15, 25, 26 the commandments and laws are mentioned, and in chapter 18,16 the civil code is formed (Stuart 2007, 381). Thus, even

if the meaning of the Shabbat and its place within the Law will be fully revealed in Exodus 20:8-11, for now the Israelites are reinforced, in this way, in the faith of God's care which provides them with food even if they stop working for one day and dedicate their time to the spiritual preoccupations. What the fourth commandment brings new is a moment of legislating the Shabbat and not its foundation (Colbu 2012: 33-5). Another perspective upon this episode is the diachronic reading: the possibility is explored that this chapter 16 of Exodus presents an event subsequent to the Decalogue, taking into account the references to the tabernacle and the ark, two elements which occurred, according to the biblical text, after this stage of revelation (Osborn and Hatton 1999, 389).

The creation perspective: Shabbat – part of the world's structures as a whole

To accept the fact that the Shabbat was known to the Jews prior to the offering of the Law leads the exegetes to suppose as well the probability that this day was respected by the patriarchs too, including Noah, thus meaning from the beginning of humankind. The practice is based on separating one day out of seven for the divine rest (Gn 2:2-3) which is considered to be a divine settlement and the first of all commandments addressed to the human being. Shabbat is, from this perspective, more than an institution, it is an element of the order of creation (Gn 2:2-3) (Fretheim 1991, 183), its very holiness deriving from the divine blessing and sanctification from the beginning of the world. Because it is an integrating part of the cosmic order, its sacred character is entirely independent from all human act or being (Sarna 1991, 90).

The affiliation of the Shabbat to the constitution of creation, to the reality of the world might mean that keeping the day of rest was an aspect that depended on the human being's nature, and to this respect, the expression of the fourth commandment: "For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth" (Ex 20:11) speaks about an *ontological argument* (Novak 2007, 77). We see how the human being, without receiving any law to this respect, fulfills the celebration of rest, and this can be easily connected to other liturgical manifestations mentioned by the biblical text, fulfilled also through the nature of the service characteristic for the human being, by virtue of an inner law inherent to man (Kim 1998: 10), for the human being is in the natural state of its creation only when it praises the Lord (Isaac the Syrian, 2003, 111): Cain and Abel's offering (Gn 4:3-4), Noah's offering (Gn 8:20), Abraham's offering (Gn 12:7) and the examples could go on. From all of this one may understand that the legislation of the liturgical practices, their foundation was

only done when the human being's too many mistakes made him forget his Creator and Master, the laws being in this case a support to help him remember and seek the communion with God.

In this context, a problem occurs, that of knowing and respecting the Law before Moses, especially by the patriarchs whose virtue is recognized and accepted both by the Judaic and Christian environment. But the two aspects are not inseparably linked, and we see that Saint Justin Martyr, although he recognizes the virtue of several pre-Mosaic characters such as Adam, Abel, Enoch, Lot, Noah or Melchizedek, he states explicitly the fact that they did not observe the Shabbat (Johnston 1974: 94-5). Within Judaism, the idea that most of the laws given on Sinai, and especially the Shabbat, existed prior to the moment in which they were actually received, is a reason usually associated to the apocalyptic direction of the Judaism (*Jubilee* 3:30-31), which left a print on the rabbinic literature (Johnston 1974: 97). Thus, some rabbis, starting from the text from *Genesis* 26:5: "Abraham obeyed me and did everything I required of him, keeping my commands, my decrees and my instructions" and influenced by the idea of the transcendence of the Law, came to state that Abraham respected the Law entirely (*Yoma* 28b; Johnston 1974: 99). It is hard to exclude firmly the possibility that some elements of the Law had indeed proceedings in the pre-mosaic period in the sense of W. Kaiser's view: "Despite its concision, economy of vocabulary and broad view, one must not think that the Decalogue was founded and promulgated on Sinai for the first time. All ten commandments were part of the God's Law written into the hearts before the stone tables, for all ten appear, in one way or the other, in the *Book of Genesis*" (Kaiser, 1983, 81-2).

On the other side, there is the exclusive assuming of the Shabbat as a gift from God to Israel, but by virtue of which not only the observing of Shabbat wasn't required to the Jews but it was forbidden (*Sanhedrin* 58b; Johnston 1974: 96). A text which supports this idea occurs in *Exodus* 31:12-17, where the Shabbat is presented as an eternal sign between God and Israel (Cohen 1965: 9). We only wish to underline here the fact that on the answer to this problem depends the universal compulsoriness to respect the Shabbat (Johnston 1974: 100). If we accept the idea that this is indeed part of the world's structures and that it was observed from the beginning of the history, it means that it goes beyond the strict frame of a people – Israel (Fretheim 1991, 183) and that it is part of everyone's responsibility.

The Christological perspective

In a key of Christian reading, linking the gift of manna with the compulsoriness of observing the day of rest is not accidental, the Holy Fathers interpreting the two seemingly distinctive elements in a unity of meaning. Following immediately a new moment of dissatisfaction of the people regarding the frugal food (Ex 16:1-3), the gift of manna is not destined to satisfy the greed of those overwhelmed by earthly thoughts, for these receive meat (*quail*, v. 12-13a). In return, the manna is the heavenly food because it is “shadow and image” of the teachings and gifts given through Christ, teachings which nourish both humans and angels. Moreover, this food for the body which God gives Israel from heaven is understood as a prefiguration of the Body which the Incorporeal gives to the hungry for communion (St. Gregory of Nyssa 1982, 47) (Jh 6:32-33). In the day of the Shabbat, this food does not depreciate in order to make a connection to the One Who, while resting in the tomb on Saturday, did not become subject to corruption.

The commandment to gather only the quantity of manna necessary for one day and the simultaneous interdiction to keep from it for the next day are interpreted by Saint Gregory of Nyssa as the expression of the fact that we are not allowed to use images after their fulfillment, and it is not useful for us to gather in this earthly life, out of greed, more than we need (Ashby, 1997, 73), because all of these will transform into maggots (Ex 16:20). But the Jews are allowed to keep the manna from the previous day for the day of holy rest in God’s honor (Ex 16:23) (Semen 1993, 200) because the surplus is allowed when it turns towards something that is not subjected to corruption (St. Gregory of Nyssa 1982, 49), towards the spiritual goods.

Attempt to harmonize the opposites

The perspectives of understanding the manna episode and the way in which this generates divergent opinions regarding the moment of the instituting of Shabbat, presented here briefly, are an eloquent example of the diversity in interpretation which is made possible by the text of the Holy Scripture. Each of these perspectives is supported by convincing textual, logical and theological arguments regarding Shabbat and the moment of its institution, with a direct reference to *Exodus* 16.

The *cutumiary perspective* accepts a tradition of observing a weekly day of cult. The moment of the setting up of this day cannot be determined, and neither if there were any provisions formulated with respect to the manner of celebrating it. What is important here is the simple possibility that the Shabbat day was an institution known

from the pre-Mosaic period which, in the time of Moses, reached a phase of decline and required a process of re-learning, renewal, clarification. The act of offering the manna, in this context, appears as a form of marking this day which is a sign of the divine Providence and a time of returning to God.

On the same level of understanding the Shabbat as the seventh day dedicated to rest there is the *historical perspective*, generated by a reading close to the letter of the text, according to which the episode of the manna occurs as a moment of setting up the day of rest, with a double function: of anticipation/preparation of the Law (Ex 20), of defining the Shabbat as a historical reality given to the chosen people. Here there is a clear distinction between the principle of the rest day known from the creation (Gn 2:2-3) and its cultic expression (Ex 16), stating that the Shabbat inaugurated now will become a law through its integration within the Decalogue.

However, with the *creation perspective*, we move to another level of understanding, in which the border between the weekly day of rest, which is supposedly respected from the beginning of the world, and the Shabbat, as a part of the world's structures, vanishes, a day becoming the expression of a reality which has its origins in God's rest at the end of the creation. From this perspective, the Shabbat as an ontological reality is independent from all legislation and even from all observance from the human being and, thus, it is not impossible that it received a natural cultic expression even from the beginning of the humankind, without being able to say which this expression was. Thus, the meaning changes: the man is the one who, without obeying a law or commandment, tries to become a part of this reality of divine sanctification and blessing which is God's Shabbat (Gn 2:2-3).

In a key of Christian reading, the Christological perspective upon the episode gives the manna a prefigurative value for Christ Himself, the real bread from heaven Who spent a day of Shabbat in the tomb, and His body did not become corrupted.

These perspectives converge in an area of understanding which perceives the Shabbat in essence as a *rest in God*. To this respect, Shabbat was both respected and disrespected, to an individual level, before the offering of the Law on Mount Sinai, because it depended, above all, not on a belonging to a set of legal-cultic rules or on the ethnic affiliation, but on the degree of man's closeness to God. This is why one may accept the fact that the Shabbat was known and lived from the beginning of the humankind, and the patriarchs and their predecessors (Enoch, Noah) were persons whose virtue is confirmed by the biblical text and recognized unanimously by the

Jews and Christians. Together with the institutionalized form of the Shabbat (with the anticipating stage in *Exodus* 16 and with the legislation in *Exodus* 20) it becomes a communitary responsibility and an identity mark which indeed belongs exclusively to the people of Israel. The institutionalized form materialized in a weekly day of cult with its own liturgical rules, never constituted the object of a commandment addressed to the other nations: this Shabbat is God's gift to Israel and it belongs only to Israel. But the Shabbat of the chosen people, as a weekly day of cult is, in fact, a time of ceasing work in order to dedicate exclusively to the spiritual exercise, oriented towards reaching the spiritual rest in God. Thus, besides the perspective of understanding, the Shabbat is constantly associated to the idea of the rest in God, which determines us to believe that, apart from its historical, archaeological, ethnical, martyrial aspect, the Shabbat, in its essence, is the expression of the humankind's *telos* to live eternally in the communion of the eternal happiness with the One who is.

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2. NAMING AND THINKING GOD IN ORTHODOXY

Abstract

The Eastern orthodox theology conceives God's being as unthinkable, reachable only in a humble behaviour and state. God is incomprehensible by thinking, but He is accessible by prayer and sense. The divine names are nothing but symbols of God. God's attributes become perceptible only through spiritual growth and self-cleansing from sins. God's name refers to attributes or self-existences, nothing concrete. Revealing His name to Israel is an act of love and personal relationship. Symbols and names and concepts about divinity must be transcended, and never idolized or worshipped. Both the Christian and Judaic tradition hold God's name as a spiritual headspring with a profound liturgical power. Rather than being thought, His name must be praised and worshipped.



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Keywords

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Naming and thinking God are two distinct acts set aside by the thematic proposal of this program, within a title which calls for profound theological reflection. Which is their relation? What connection can there be between the two, from the perspective of Eastern theology? Naming God, that is, assigning Him different names comes mainly from the seeing and understanding of His works. These names are used, as we can see in the Scripture and the Tradition, in different contexts: praises/ doxologies, demands, thanksgivings, or prayers like, for example, the Jesus Prayer. On the other hand, thinking is an act which takes place inside the human being. According to the gnoseological discourse, thinking is achieved through words. But in the Eastern expression of faith, as well as in the Jewish one, thinking is achieved inside the heart, and the Fathers greatly develop this idea of a descent of the mind inside the heart. The Holy Scripture teaches us the importance of the heart, as a source of all good and evil: "For out of

the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies” (Mt 15:19) and “Behold, the kingdom of God is within you” (Lk 17:21). Starting from these premises, I have structured my paper into three parts: a first part introduces some landmarks on the divine names in the Old Testament and in Orthodox theology; a second part concerns the dynamics of thinking God, mainly referring to the discourse of Father D. Stăniloae; and last, but not least, a third part presents some concrete forms of naming and thinking God in Orthodoxy.

Naming God in the light of Orthodox Theology and Spirituality

When speaking about the names of God, one author should be of reference to us, namely Saint Denys the Areopagite. Within his famous work entitled *De Divinis Nominibus – On the Divine Names*, apart from approaching the different names assigned to God, he marks the limits of a discourse on this subject. Thus, he firmly states that the Holy Scripture has a normative role in any cogitative or nominative act referring to God. We must dare not say or think anything on God apart from what has already been revealed to us in the Holy Scriptures. God is above all words, all thinking, all being, this is why we should go as far as the Holy Scriptures allow us in trying to understand and name God (St. Denys the Areopagite 1993, 45-6). Saint Denys underlines two different aspects: on the one hand, when speaking of God, the human being should always keep a humble attitude; on the other hand, it is impossible for us to understand God, as the Divine Being is above all reason and knowledge, going beyond mind and essence, circumscribing, embracing and anticipating all things, while God remains totally unthinkable and undefinable (St. Denys the Areopagite 1993, 50). We can recognize this type of discourse in the Dogmatic of Saint John Damascene: not only is the Divinity incomprehensible, but also nameless (St. John Damascene 2004, 27). This doesn't mean that we are not entitled to speak about names and divine naming. Saint Denys formulated the following rhetorical interrogation: How, then, can our treaty on the Divine names be explained if God, the One above-all-being, proves to be impossible to name? (St. Denys the Areopagite 1993, 50) A distinction imposes here. The Eastern Fathers have always distinguished between the Being of God and His works (Stăniloae 2006, 146). If God, in His Being, is unthinkable and impossible to know and call by his name, He is, at the same time, defined by many names, equivalent to His uncreated works: He allows us to name Him through those which are proper to our nature (St. John Damascene 2004, 29), using symbols appropriate to the divine things (St. Denys

the Areopagite 1993, 49). Through the variety of these divine works, God Himself is at work. It is somehow paradoxical that He sometimes emphasizes one special work, while being whole in every one of his works (Stăniloae 2006, 146).

These works of God are energies or attributes through the intermediary of which He becomes present in creation and in our lives. “Isn’t this precisely His truly wonderful name, that He is above all name?... But the wise in divine things praise Him for being good, beautiful, wise, God of gods, Lord of lords, Saint of Saints, eternal, the One who Is, the cause of all times, life-giving, wisdom and reason (word), above all knowledge, power and ruler etc.” (St. Denys the Areopagite 1993, 56) We come to know all these different attributes in their dynamics and as much as we become subject to them. These attributes of God gradually reveal their richness, as we become more and more spiritually able of receiving them. This process supposes a descent of God towards us; He communicates something about Him in an understandable manner. Rationally, we get to know Him by his attributes; however, this is schematic and general. We rather get to know Him more intensely from His works. In both cases, our possibilities of expression are limited and even inadequate, using mostly symbols and images (Stăniloae 2006, 149).

In accordance with my doctoral studies in the field of the Old Testament, I would like to introduce here some brief remarks on naming God within the Holy Scripture. As we have seen, the dogmatic treaties and all the statements referring to the names of God underline on the one hand our impossibility of naming God in His essence, and on the other hand, our need of assigning Him names that best describe His works within creation. What is most important is to know that „He is”, rather than to know „what/who He is” (Stăniloae 2005, 19). His existence is the most important element in the nominal registry, and it was synthesized in the name revealed to Moses on mount Horeb: „I am that I am” (Ex 3:14). Discovering the name implied a relationship of communion between the Revealer and the receiver of this discovery. This revelation was to become the centre of all Israelite faith and spiritual experience. Iahve (Freedman 1996, 1010) is the name by excellence, the greatest and frightening, hidden and mysterious. Any other name of God in the Bible is correlated with one of His works, while His ontological name does not have a common meaning or a concrete significance. It is precisely this lack of significance that shows its position in the centre of the Being and of Creation, of which foundation it is. Without having a certain meaning, it gives meaning to all existence (Chirilă 2003, 94). Unlike other names which, by their repeated use referring to God have become proper names, the tetragram is a name assigned only to God.

Inside a phrase, this name is always a subject, and never a predicate, even if his origin is an archaic verbal form (Broșteanu 2005, 131). What interests us for the moment is the theological interpretation of this name. The name YHWH is an expression of a living God, manifesting His power over all living creatures and over life. Moreover, through this name, God expresses His eternal nature (Jacob 1967, 41). This axiomatic formula may also be understood as a definition of the Being of God, through which God expresses His almightiness and aseity (Jacob 1967, 41). In Romanian theology, we have two different discourses on this subject. V. Loichita proposes a double interpretation: from a philosophical-dogmatic point of view, this name presents God as a personal and spiritual Being, having her cause within herself, as well as all the conditions of her existence; from a historical-revelational point of view, God is a loving Father manifesting His care towards Israel and wishing to entrust them of His fidelity (Loichiță 1927: 79-80). A similar interpretation is formulated by Fr. At. Negoita: YHWH contains the idea of being as something unchangeable, independent from any other being; this notion is not conceived as something abstract and speculative, but taking into consideration the historical interventions of God in the life of His people (Negoită 2004, 13-4). One last idea: the interdiction of pronouncing this name of God was founded on Leviticus 24,16: “And he that blasphemeth the name of the Lord, he shall surely be put to death, and all the congregation shall certainly stone him; as well the stranger, as he that is born in the land, when he blasphemeth the name of the Lord, shall be put to death”. Most researchers agree on the fact that the verb *naqab* used in this verse should rather be interpreted as a blasphematory use of the name of God, than as a regular pronunciation (the KJV “I am using introduces precisely this meaning when it translates by „blasphemeth”). I mentioned this issue because I consider that it is still very relevant nowadays: a blasphematory use of the name of God should be avoided even if a death penalty no longer applies.

The names assigned to God in the Bible express His intervention and works within history. Each name is based on certain events or deeds relevant in the history of salvation. Thus, biblical divine names do not belong to a simple nominative level. Any name whatsoever, if comprehended and assumed, does not only represent a conventional mode of social registry or an instrument of elementary communication; it is a form of expressing the essence of the person and a way of a personal interrelating. All of these apply to the divine names. However, in the case of divine names, we should also underline the fact that, at least within the Old Testament, they are a form of expressing

faith (Negoiță 2004, 6). I will propose, later on, a reflection upon this aspect of naming God: assigning Him names as an expression of our faith and dogmatic teaching of the Church.

The Dynamics of Thinking God

The knowledge of God presupposes a continuous process, a dynamic which always leaves space for an ever greater progress in His knowledge. Every idea concerning God must have a certain fragility, transparency, lack of fixity; it must always lead us to letting it aside and creating another. If an idea concerning God remains stable in our mind, we are thus limiting God within the landmarks of this particular meaning, or we might even forget God, while concentrating our entire attention on this respective idea. In this manner, an idea turns into an idol, or a false god (Stăniloae 2006, 126). For this reason, *every idea, meaning or word used with reference to God should make God transparent*, not being contained in it but trespassing all meaning, and bringing to light successively different aspects of His infinite richness. Saint Denys the Areopagite considers that we usually regard words as sensible symbols related to the divine mysteries. He states that we should rather dispose of their symbolic meaning and regard them as pure and unveiled, in order to adore the source of life hidden within them. Through the intermediary of words and meanings, we should actually go beyond them, to perceive the mysterious presence of God. Every thing and word that we use with reference to God is a symbol of His Person and works (St. Denys the Areopagite PG 3, 645). Within these symbols, there are many different steps of meaning, and we are called to constantly advancing on the stair of these meanings, towards unconceivable and unthinkable meanings. The more we use nuanced words and the more we climb up to higher meanings, we come to understand that God is beyond all of them, but He is also the unitary source of their reasons (Stăniloae 2006, 127).

Thinking God is an act of religious experience. As such, it implies more than simple reasoning, because a reality to which the human being participates only by reason, without the implication of the entire being, is not experienced as the true transcendence (Stăniloae 1993, 72). Or God, as He reveals to us, is not a simple construction of our imagination, a self-revelation of the human spirit (Stăniloae 1993, 48), but a transcendent reality; and religion lives with this certitude of transcendence and of a real encounter with the Divinity (Frunză 2001, 49). Father Stăniloae considers that the idea of God is founded on experience, and an experience is religious only as long as it is referred to God (Sève 1994). Moreover, within Orthodox theology, it is believed that we can only

think God when living in Him, in communion with Him. This is how Father Stăniloae's statement should be understood: *thinking God while being in God*.

Father Stăniloae greatly develops another interesting subject: the place of thinking inside the Holy Trinity. He speaks of the Mind (God the Father) plenary discovering Himself in the Reason (God the Son), for His own joy. Reason is an act of the mind or of the Subject reflecting/thinking Himself. In the Reason, the supreme Subject thinks Himself (Stăniloae 2005, 41). This is how the Holy Fathers have understood the relationship between the Father and the Son: analogous to the relation between mind and reason. The Reason (the Logos, the Son) is conceived as an act of the mind, as a reality emerging from the infinite conscience, while remaining in complete solidarity and unity with it. We are talking about an act of *reciprocal self-thinking*, in which every Person reveals her true image through the joy of living a communion with another conscience. This relationship is conceived by Father Stăniloae as a *self-understanding of the divinity*, thus taking a tripersonal character. The tripersonal character is presented as a relationship between thinking and feeling: The Son or Word of God is a product of thinking, while the Holy Spirit is a product of the heart (Frunză 2001, 61).

These are only a few reflections on thinking God within Romanian Orthodox theology and spirituality. Thinking God is not only an act belonging to religious experience, but also the most certain form of our existence (Stăniloae 2005, 13).

Concrete Forms of Naming and Thinking God in Orthodoxy

Reading the Holy Scripture

An important manner of naming and thinking God in Orthodoxy is the lecture of the Holy Scripture, both as a personal act and as an integrating part of the liturgy. Saint John Chrysostom recommended to his listeners a continuous reading of the Bible in their private life, emphasizing its importance within the Christian spiritual experience. Inside the books of the Bible, we can identify the dogmatic teaching of the Church – including the names of God which are of particular interest to us in this moment – and, also, the principles of a moral living within the human society. These truths are eternal and unchangeable (St. John Chrysostom PG 48, 821-2), as they are part of the supernatural revelation, and their main purpose is the salvation of all people (St. John Chrysostom PG 53, 102; PG 57, 35; PG 53, 226-7). The Holy Scripture is the key to knowing God (St. John Chrysostom PG 59, 323-4), for its reading is nothing else than a dialogue with God (St. John Chrysostom PG 51, 89). A spiritual reading hallows the

soul and brings in it the grace of the Holy Spirit (St. John Chrysostom PG 59, 187). I have inserted these few ideas regarding the Holy Scripture in order to understand how important its reading is for each person's private spiritual experience.

The Holy Scripture is the basis for all naming and thinking God. Of all the divine names, the tetragram is particularly connected with the altar or sanctuary, the place where God records His name (Ex 20:24), or „the place which the Lord your God shall choose out of all your tribes to put His name there” (Dt 12:5). The Temple is „the place of the name of the Lord of hosts, the mount Zion” (Is 18:7). This strong relation between the Name of God and the Temple clearly appears in the prayer of Salomon, after the construction of the Temple, when he invokes the Name of God to dwell within the Temple. His prayer has a universal dimension; we can almost say that he is praying God in the name of the entire humanity. Israelites and strangers, „they shall hear of thy great name, and of thy strong hand, and of thy stretched out arm; when he shall come and pray towards this house; Hear thou in heaven thy dwelling place, and do according to all that the stranger calleth to thee for; that all the people of the earth may know thy name, to fear thee, as do thy people Israel; and that they may know that this house, which I have builded, is called by thy name” (1Kgs 8:42-43). Thus, Salomon prays God to fulfill the demands of all people, in order that they may all know His Name. This same name will be used by the priests when blessing the people of Israel (Nm 6:24-25) (Wigoder 2006, 185).

Here is an interesting idea: sometimes, God decides not to unveil His name (Gn 32:30; Jud 13,17), simply defining it as “wonderful” (Gn 32:29), just as the Psalmist utters: “O Lord our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth! Who hast set thy glory above the heavens” (Ps 8:1). This occasional reserve in unveiling His name may be understood as a kind of warning: God cannot be circumscribed neither in time or space, nor in words, this is why we should not seek to understand more than He Himself reveals to us.

The Decalogue contains, among the other commandments, a firm commandment against all denigrating use of the divine name. The Name of God should not be blasphemed, under death penalty (Ex 20:7; Dt 5:11). This severe punishment is due to the fact that God is somehow identified with his name. Consequently, blaspheming His name would be denigrating God Himself. Far from any blasphematory use, this name is (should be) loved: „let them also that love thy name be joyful in thee” (Ps 5:11); it is praised: „I will praise the Lord according to his righteousness: and will sing praise to

the name of the Lord most High” (Ps 7:17); „I will extol thee, my God, O king; and I will bless thy name for ever and ever. Every day will I bless thee; and I will praise thy name for ever and ever”; „Praise the Lord, call upon his name, declare his doings among the people, make mention that his name is exalted”; it is holy: „Our heart shall rejoice in him, because we have trusted in his holy name” (Ps 32:20); it is frightening: „If thou wilt not observe to do all the words of this law that are written in this book, that thou mayest fear this glorious and fearful name, the Lord thy God” (Dt 28:58); eternal: „Thy name, O Lord, endureth for ever; and thy memorial, O Lord, throughout all generations” (Ps 134:13). Forgetting the name of God was synonym to straying away from Him and His commandments (Jr 23:27), and speaking in the name of God conferred to the person His authority (Jr 11:21).

Assigning a name to the infinite, to the indescribable is a very difficult task; a name is somehow a definition, and defining implies a certain limitation or restraint. Thus, the divine names found in the Bible apart from YHWH, like El, Elim, Adonai, Shaddai express aspects of God, and their exploration offers the possibility of knowing God (Cooper 2001, 104). The usual classification of the biblical divine names defines three distinct groups of names: 1) noun names – El, Elohim, Adonay; 2) YHWH, the tetragrammaton, the name of God by excellence; 3) adjectival names: Shadday, Elyon, Qadosh (Loichiță 1927: 73-4). I will not greatly develop the analysis of these names; they are inserted in an extended form in the appendix. However, it is important to acknowledge the richness of the biblical divine names. This is why I will simply insert here a few examples of Old Testament divine names: El-Olam – the eternal God: „And Abraham planted a grove in Beer-Sheba, and called there on the name of the Lord, the everlasting God” (Gn 21:33); El-Ro’i – God who sees me: “And she called the name of the Lord that spake unto her, Thou God seest me; for she said, Have I also here looked after him that seeth me?” (Gn 16:13); El Berit – God of the Alliance: „And when all the men of the tower of Shechem heard that, they entered into a hold of the house of the god Berith” (Jdg 9:46); El-Hay – the Living God: (1Kg 17:36); Melek Olam – Eternal King (Jr 10:10); Adonay – Lord, master (Is 6:1); Shadday – The Strong, the Powerful (Gn 17:1); Elyon – the Most High (Gn 14:18-22); Qadosh – the Saint (Lv 19:2; from this name derives the expression: Qadosh Israel – the Saint of Israel); Iahve Sebaoth – God of the armies (2Kgs 22:19).

The theme of thinking God is also present in the Holy Scripture. I would like to mention here only two texts from the book of Psalms which I consider of great relevance

for our subject. Both of them introduce the idea of reflection in a context of prayer, in a liturgical attitude. Firstly, the Psalmist confesses his love for the divine commandments, upon which he reflects during his prayer hours, thus finding a great spiritual delight: „I will delight myself in thy commandments, which I have loved. My hands also will I lift up unto thy commandments, which I have loved; and I will meditate in thy statutes” (Ps 119:47-48). Secondly, the Psalmist speaks of a meditation on God during the night vigiles: „When I remember thee upon my bed, and *meditate on thee* in the night watches. Because thou hast been my help, therefore in the shadow of thy wings I will rejoice” (Ps 63:7-8). The night is a time of insecurity, this is why the image of thinking and taking shelter under the protection of God becomes more impressive.

The Holy Scripture has a very important place in the liturgy of the Church, particularly in the Holy Liturgy. The first reading from the Epistles does not represent a theoretical presentation of the salvation work; it is both a thankful and doxological reading, expressing the work of Christ for our salvation. This reading teaches us to think about God as loving and caring towards all humanity, and also to think of Him as subject of our doxology (Phil 4:20; 2:9-11; 1,3; Eph 5:19-20; 3:16; Gal 1:5) (Stăniloae 2004, 314). This reading of the Epistles is followed by the reading from the Gospels, thus showing that, in order to think and understand the work and Person of Christ, we need the preaching of the Apostles, who truly and fully understood His teaching (Stăniloae 2004, 315).

The liturgical acts and gestures are very rich in symbolic meaning. I would like to underline a moment which I consider relevant for our theme. During the lecture from the Epistles, the priest places himself aside the throne of Christ. From this throne, during both readings (Epistles and Gospel), Christ invisibly listens and surveys what it is taught about Him inside the Church. He Himself teaches, but He teaches through the Apostles and their successors, or through the Church, while being the warrant of the true teaching (Stăniloae 2004, 316). The biblical readings are the main source of our faith and piety; they are a light to our soul, spirit and heart, just as the Body of Christ is given to us for our bodily and spiritual healing (St. Nicolas Cabasilas, 369).

Before the reading from the Gospel, the celebrant prays God to make the pure light of knowledge of His Divinity shine in the hearts of all the faithful, and also to open „the eyes of our minds” in order to understand His preaching contained in the Gospel to be read. This prayer does not ask for a theoretical knowledge of the dogmas, reserved to those with studies in Theology, but it asks for a knowledge from the light of God,

who becomes Himself light inside the priest and the faithful. We are dealing here with a more profound understanding and feeling of Christ as a Person, as God made man: „In thy light shall we see light” (Stăniloae 2004, 322). The word of Christ is not only meant to bring a theoretical understanding inside the hearts and souls of the faithful, but also to reinforce their will to acknowledge and fulfill His commandments, which suppose a spiritual living (Stăniloae 2004, 322).

It becomes evident that participating to the Liturgy is an effective manner of learning to appropriately think God, His person and deeds, His relation to us.

Praying, Naming and Thinking God

The Christian spiritual experience includes certain ways of knowing God, of entering into personal communion with Him. Among these, the prayer is undoubtedly the most important, both in its private and communitary forms. Taking into consideration the words of Saint Theophane who emphasizes the importance of standing before God with the mind into the heart and thus remaining, uncessantly, night and day, until the end of our life, we can see that prayer is not simply synonym to a request. It should be less a temporary activity than a continuous state of mind and spirit. Praying means standing before God, entering into a personal relationship with Him; it means thinking and acknowledging that we are in God and God is in us (Ware 1992, 18).

In the last hours of His life on Earth, Jesus Christ said to His disciples: „Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full” (Jn 16:24). „Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it to you” (Jn 16:23). These words are the foundation stone of the Jesus Prayer (Archimandrite Sophrony, 2001, 117-8). The Jesus Prayer focuses on the Divine Name because the Name in itself is a personal theophany, a manifestation of the Triune God. As the name bears and manifests the reality of the designated person, a prayer should be addressed to God precisely by using these revealed names (Breck 2008, 306). The name has a mysterious dimension; it reveals the mystery of the person. When the Archangel discovers to the Virgin Mary the Incarnation of the Son of God, he also reveals His Name: „thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name Jesus” (Lk 1:31), the name of Messiah being a *numen praesens*. Thus, the prayer of the Name of God is not a simple speaking-to-God, but participation to His speaking, key to entering into communion with Him. This participation is achieved by the calling of His Name, for which no specialized knowledge is necessary (Chirilă 2002, 96).

In the Hebrew tradition, deliberately invoking the name of God means bringing yourself before Him, in His presence, opening up to His energy, offering yourself as an instrument and as a living sacrifice in His hands. This Hebrew understanding of the Name of God passes from the Old Testament to the New: the demons are banished (Acts 16:18) and the suffering ones are healed through the Name of Jesus (Acts 3:6; 4:30), for his Name is powerful (Ware 1992, 36-7).

Within the New Testament, other names of God are being introduced, like, for example, Saint Paul emphasizes the name of Abba – „Father”. This invocation unveils the profoundness of the Christian prayer „Our Father”, taught to the Apostles by Jesus Himself (Mt 6:9-13). The fundament of this prayer is the idea of divine adoption, through which we all become sons of God. We all come to the Father, but through the Son and in the Holy Spirit. Being united to Christ, to His life, we take part to His own prayer. In and through Christ we come to the Father. Calling the Name of God means calling God Himself; and God becomes present where He is called by his name open-heartedly. By joining Him in prayer, by following and imitating Him, we participate to His mystical prayer in the Holy Spirit. When praying our Abba – Father, we enter in relation with God the Father, we address Him while being united to Christ and through the Holy Spirit. This prayer, even if it only mentions the name of the Father, makes us enter into relation with all the three Persons of the Holy Trinity.

Christ Himself taught us to pray God as our Father. But we are never alone in our prayers: The Lord Himself, through His Holy Spirit, continues to address God as a Father. The true prayer is achieved when the Spirit addresses to God as Father, from within the human heart. This is what Saint Paul says: „the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered” (Rom 8:26). Therefore, the prayer is essentially a divine activity and, as any other aspect of the spiritual life, it needs *synergia*, the working together of God and man.

There are three main kinds of prayer: doxological, Eucharistic and demanding prayers. Within all three, naming God is an essential part. Thus, the Book of Psalms gives us several examples of doxological prayer with reference to the Name of God: „I will extol thee, my God, O king; and I will bless thy name for ever and ever. Every day will I bless thee; and I will praise thy name for ever and ever” (Ps 145:1-2); „According to thy name, O God, so is thy praise unto the ends of the earth: thy right hand is full of righteousness” (Ps 48:10). In this same book, we find similar invocation of the divine name in a Eucharistic context (not to mention the so-called „Thanksgiving Psalms” in

their entire): „Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name” (Ps 103:1). The context of this verse shows that this blessing is based upon all the benefits received from God (see particularly verses 2-5: forgiveness, healing, redemption, loving-kindness, righteousness). Last, but not least, the name of God is invoked within demanding prayers, such as the following: „Quicken me, O Lord, for thy name’s sake” (Ps 143:11).

An authentic and profound prayer can be recognized after its fruits; thus, we can acknowledge the true nature of our prayer through its effects in our personal and social life. Prayers are not only theoretical expressions of our faith; they are a living experience of communion with the living God. As such, they reflect upon our entire life. This is what makes prayer so important in our times: it is a way of salvation, but it is also a way of making a better life for all humanity, rendering the eternity present in time.

Confessing God in our times

„If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation” (Rom 10:9). These words of Saint Paul emphasize the importance of confession. They are as appropriate nowadays as they were when he addressed them to the Romans. Confessing God has a salutary effect both on me and on those who happen to hear my confession. The names of God, as expressions of His divine energies, can be considered synthetical expressions of our faith, which I use even in my *personal prayer*. This private prayer can be understood as an act of confession of faith, and it may have a salutary effect on the contemporary society (Stăniloae 2003, 42). How can that be? Through personal prayer, strong relations are created between people, relations based on eternal values, and not on ephemeral ones. Through prayer, I become part of an ontological dialogue having its roots in the dialogue inside the Holy Trinity, and, in this way, prayer becomes a way of spiritually healing my own being, but also an element of social cohesion (Stăniloae 2003, 49). Another way of confessing God nowadays is the *dialogue*: intercultural, interconfessional, interreligious etc. And a dialogue is nothing else than a meeting through (dia) the word/ Word (Chirilă 2009), thus having a transcendent dimension.

Conclusions

Naming and thinking God are two fundamental acts of the religious experience if they are performed while being/living in God, in communion with Him. They

are primarily personal acts, being a part of the private spiritual experience, but they also have a communitary and social dimension: they are capable of improving social cohesion and also the religious experience of the community. Saint Seraphim of Sarov said that the true purpose of Christian life is acquiring the Holy Spirit. Let us attain it while recognizing and confessing Jesus as the Lord, for „no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor 12:3).

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3. THE HOLY SCRIPTURE. REFERENCES FOR AN ORTHODOX READING IN THE 3rd MILLENNIUM

Abstract

The study approaches the sphere of biblical hermeneutics, with the intention of underlining the utility and actuality of some patristic hermeneutical principles within an orthodox reading of the Holy Scripture nowadays. Saint Chrysostom is a prominent example for the type of lecture promoted within the orthodox environment and, implicitly, by the present study.



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Keywords

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Word and Communication

I would like to start by proposing an effective/ a possible distinction between *word* and *words*: the first, even when written without capital letter, expresses unity, whereas the latter may suggest a certain degree of scattering, a commotion of the unity, a meaning that is closer to "talk", understood from the perspective of "all the vain words" for which we are to answer in the Judgement day. What is the negative compound of this word, why does it become a motive for our punishment? Because it reflects honestly the heart, as our Saviour says: "What goes into someone's mouth does not defile them [...] but the things that come out of a person's mouth come from the heart, and these defile them." (Mt 15:11-18). And if the Word is replaced by words on the tables of our hearts, then the flesh turns into stone again and the man transforms his heart into a wall standing between him and God. At the beginning of the 3rd millennium, we witness the explosive progress of the means of communication, and we are, paradoxically, spectators of a process of terrible isolation. Loneliness has become, for many of us, an acute feeling, in a time when the use of the word, spoken, written or broadcasted has an overwhelming place in the life of the society (Gross 2007, 7).

And if it (the word) fulfils its most profound call when it practices the exchange and is accomplished as a relationship element, capable of reception and dialogue (Gross 2007, 7), it means that a great deal of the words we speak or write today are lacking in consistency, and become too often “words”, incapable of accomplishing an authentic communication. In this context, the Word of the Scripture may become the starting point for a replacement of the word in its true nature, a state in which it becomes a means of authentic communication, a space in which man meets with God and with his neighbor (Gross 2007, 11). But this is not possible if we adopt an exclusively scientific approach of the Holy Scripture, an approach which ignores its revealed character, its importance for the Christian’s life and implicitly its resurrectional testimony. Father John Breck considers that today in the Orthodox Church we must rediscover and develop a biblical hermeneutics faithful, on one hand, to the Fathers’ spiritual approach, and relevant, on the other hand, for the modern world (Breck 1999, 47). This is why I have extracted, for the present case, several hermeneutical references from the works of Saint John Chrysostom, since his exegesis has been determined by pastoral preoccupations, placing himself permanently in the service of the Christian preaching (Breck 1999, 88). Firstly, I would like to linger on a few aspects of the word in the field of understanding characteristic for the Old Testament.

Creative word and name

Being a researcher in the field of Old Testament, when I speak about word I go back, with priority, to the creation of man, there where the word “represents through itself [...] the very essence of the reality which it brings into existence” (Gross 2007, 24). In the strict reality of human existence, Descartes pointed out that the 4th cause of our mistakes may be the fact that we tie our thoughts to words which are incapable to express them completely (Gross 2007, 8). A totally different image is presented to us by the book of Genesis, in which “the thought is a paradigm, the word is the active, dynamic, acting expression of the act itself which exists in the paradigm” (Chirilă 2003, 10). The creation which is fulfilled through word proves proximity of essence between language and world, a profound and fundamental unity of the creation (Gross 2007, 24). This act of creation through word, which has as consequence the appearance on Earth of all the creatures but man is, in the opinion of the Holy Fathers, a reason to praise the Lord: “Behold, the heavens and the earth are; they proclaim that they were created [...]. They proclaim also that they made not themselves: *therefore, we are because we have*

been made; we were not therefore, before we were, so as to make ourselves. [...] All these praise Thee, the Creator of all. But how dost Thou make them? How, O God, didst Thou make heaven and earth? [...] in Thy Word Thou madest them." (St. Augustin 1985, 244-5)

In the same way we find presented in the Book of Psalms the creative act for the praise of our Lord: "Let them praise the name of the Lord, for at His command they were created." (Psalm 148:5). But the image of the creative act presents man as a being which enjoys a special status, as "the only one of all beings made by God's hand" (St. Basil the Great 1986, 372), thus through a direct involvement of God and not through word although, paradoxically, man is the only being that has the gift of speech (Gross 2007, 15). He will be invited to end the creative act by naming the animals: "Now the Lord God had formed out of the ground all the wild animals and all the birds in the sky. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. so the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds in the sky and all the wild animals." (Gn 2:19-20). Thus, man, the only being that has the gift of speech and the power of naming, is the only element for which the creative act is not tied to language and for which the denomination does not end the creative process (Gross 2007, 26). For the Jewish thinking, man is a being of language because his essential mission consists of naming, meaning, to free the language in himself, to free the word in order to translate the language of things into the human language. To name in order to pull the creative energy from the opaque substance that the divine word has put there with the purpose of finding through its language the linguistic intimacy that links the mute creation with God. Finally, through the naming of the livestock, Adam distinguishes himself from this mute universe and becomes aware of his singularity (Gross 2007, 28) as a being destined to dialogue/ to communication with God and with his neighbour within the creation.

The Scripture and the book of nature

In general, one may settle the boundaries of two stages in the communication between God and man: The Edenic dialogue and the communication after the original sin. In his state before the Edenic fall, man had the power of knowing God and good through the natural law, according to which he achieved awareness of the good he was allowed to do and the bad he had to avoid (St. John Chrysostom PG 49, 133; 55, 251). Through this, although he didn't have a written law, man could lead a life of virtue, a life according to God's wish. How? By following the inner voice of his conscience, which he

had as sole teacher (St. John Chrysostom PG 54, 471; 48, 1059). But, besides this advice, man had the communion of the reasons of the beings from which he could achieve knowledge about the unseen features of God, about His eternal power and about the divinity of His nature, consequently with the help of the creatures, as Saint Paul says in Romans 1, 20: “For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities – His eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.” Thus, God has sealed the entire creation with the possibility of feeling and acknowledging His existence and presence (Young 2000: 695). The text expresses, as such, a natural theology most likely rooted in the Jewish-Hellenistic wisdom theology (Dunn 1988, 56).

This means of knowledge is considered by Saint John Chrysostom to be more believable than that transposed in letter for the human being achieves it with the help of things and it is more trustworthy and clear (St. John Chrysostom PG 49, 105). In a time when the human being tries to claim its absolute authority on the creation, seemingly forgetting the responsibility that came with the initial gift of ruling in God’s image, and working not to fulfil its purpose but to destroy it unreasonably, this re-evaluation of the book of nature is necessary for it is of great importance according to the Holy Fathers. I will include here two quotes that I consider to be relevant to this matter.

Speaking about the ways in which God revealed Himself to His creation, Saint John Damascene considers first and foremost the way of natural knowledge: “God, didn’t let us in complete ignorance, for the knowledge of God’s existence is impregnated by Him naturally in all the people. Besides this, creation itself, its conservation and government speak about the greatness of the divine nature” (St. John Damascene 2004, 10). Saint John Chrysostom expresses very clear the fact that the Scriptures have not been given to the humankind from the very beginning, but only later on, because “It was because God was desirous of instructing the nature of man, not by letters, but by things. But what does the expression *by things* signify? It signifies by means of the Creation itself” (St. John Chrysostom 2016, 1). Therefore, according to the word of Saint Paul, not even the pagans have an excuse before God that they didn’t serve Him, because although they didn’t know the Gospels, they could get to know God from his creatures. Saint John explains in detail this possibility offered to the nations: “How were they able to know God, and who hath shewed? Declare this. “God”, saith he, “hath shewed it unto them”. In what manner? By the sending of what kind of prophet? what evangelist? what kind of teacher? if the holy Scriptures were not yet given. “The invisible things of Him”,

says he, “from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal Power and Godhead, so that people are without excuse” (Rom 1:20). But what he means is just this, He hath placed His Creation in the midst, before the eyes of all men, in order that they may guess at the Creator from His works” (St. John Chrysostom 2016, 1).

Explaining a passage from the Genesis, Saint Basil the Great prays for the people to understand Him and to know God from the contemplation of the creation: “May God who, after having made such great things [...] grant you the intelligence of His truth, so that you may raise yourselves from visible things to the invisible Being, and that the grandeur and beauty of creatures may give you a just idea of the Creator – “for the visible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen ...” – thus earth, air, sky, water, day, night, all visible things, remind us of who is our Benefactor” (St. Basil the Great 1986, 109).

“He who understands His creator from the creation of the world, also knows God from the wisdom with which the world has been created. For «God’s invisible qualities since the creation of the world are visible when you think of what He has created»” (St. Basil the Great 1986, 469). Furthermore, he explains in what manner the divine wisdom is revealed in the creatures: “...the wisdom revealed in the world, almost speaking, through the visible things, that they were made by God, for not randomly shines in the creation such a sapience. For as «the heavens declare the glory of God, the skies proclaim the work of His hands» (Ps 18:1) – and they proclaim it without voice – «they have no speech, they use no words, no sound is heard from them» (Ps 18:3), so are some of the words of the wisdom [...]” which “proclaim silently the Lord God, for you to mount to the idea of the unique Wiseman” (St. Basil the Great 1986, 469-70). The whole world is, as seen by the Fathers, built as an environment of the meeting between man and God, so the man must contemplate what he sees in order to understand what he doesn’t see. In a poetical expression, the created world is named “the school of souls” on the way to finding the kingdom of heaven: “...for this world has not been conceived in vain, but for a useful purpose and for the great need that it brings to those who live on earth, if the world is truly a school for the souls gifted with reason and a place where you can learn the knowledge of God, being through what you see and feel in the world a guide of the mind for the contemplation of the invisible things, as the disciple says, that «the invisible qualities...» (Rom 1:20)” (St. Basil the Great 1986, 77)

God's kindness and His care for man are also manifested through the fact that He doesn't abuse of His invisible nature to remain forever unknown, but reveals Himself out of love (St. Athanasius the Great 1987, 69-70). In order to fully understand the manner in which this revelation is transmitted through the creatures, Saint Athanasius of Alexandria appeals to an analogy with the well-known sculptor Phidias, very appreciated by his contemporaries: "...it is said about the sculptor Phidias that his works were recognized as his even when he wasn't present, from the symmetry and the proportion of the parts. The same way you can recognize God, the Creator and Organizer of the world from the creation, even though you cannot see Him with the eyes of your body. For God has not abused His invisible nature – may no-one say that – in order to remain utterly unknown to the people" (St. Athanasius the Great 1987, 70).

The definition of the knowledge of which the Apostle speaks about, is the following, according to Saint Theofilact: "Some of God's qualities are unknown as His own nature is, and some are known, so as all the features that are said to be His nature: kindness, wisdom, power, divinity (meaning glory) (St. Theofilact 2005, 41-2), which Paul names here "God' invisible qualities", understood through His creatures. So God showed to the Greeks His knowledge, meaning what is said about His nature, which is invisible to the human eye, but understood by reason from the order of all things." (St. Theofilact 2005, 41-2)

Saint Theofilact identifies here five "causes" for which the creatures of the visible world have been made, amongst which there is the knowledge of God through their contemplation (St. Theofilact 2005, 43-4).

Saint John Chrysostom underlines the fact that nobody can give an answer for faithless, as long as we can all see the greatness of the nature which speaks herself about her Creator: "Did ye then not hear the heaven sending forth a voice by the sight, while the well-ordered harmony of all things spake out more clearly than a trumpet? Did ye not see the hours of night and day abiding unmoved continually, the goodly order of winter, spring, and the other seasons remaining both sure and unmoved, the tractableness of the sea amid all its turbulence and waves? All things abiding in order and by their beauty and their grandeur, preaching aloud of the Creator?" (St. John Chrysostom 2005, 11)

So this is the praise of the silent creatures, which can be understood both by those who can read and by the illiterates, by the uneducated and by the learned, by poor and by rich, by masters and by servants, by Scythians and barbarians, each person being able to find in it the knowledge about God that his soul desires (St. John Chrysostom

PG 49, 112). This type of communication, through things, is accessible to all the nations, and this is why they are a law to themselves.

Besides this means of communication, Saint John Chrysostom invokes the idea of a direct communication, through which God, “looking into people’s consciences and finding them pure, spoke to them directly, degrading Himself to their capacity of understanding” (St. John Chrysostom PG 54, 582). The direct communication is not restricted only to the Edenic period, but continues after the fall, conditioned by the purification of the heart, that is why those who become part of this communication are real examples of virtue: Noah, Abraham, Job and Moses, the Prophets. And this means of communication is superior to the written communication, Saint John asserting that this is the cause why the written communication didn’t exist in the beginning as a way of communication between God and man. Both the Old Testament and the New Testament have been arranged by God and were fixed in writing because “of the feeble nature of man” (St. John Chrysostom PG 61, 20), who couldn’t stay close to Him, through the moral natural law and through the knowledge about the divinity given to them directly or through creation. Thus, the Scripture is man’s communication with God, “the second way” (Coman 2002, 124). In order to support this assertion, I will present here several passages from the works of Saint John Chrysostom.

Saint John Chrysostom, exegete of the history of salvation

I introduced this concept of *history of salvation* because, although Saint John Chrysostom is the most representative scholar of the Exegetical School from Antioch, well known for its historical-literal exegetical method, he doesn’t conceive history as being limited to man and his powers and works, but considers it to be a “space in which God is present and works directly” (Coman 2002, 128) for the salvation of the humankind. The exegesis that he proposes is based on his spiritual experience which requires a direct implication of the Holy Spirit in the interpretation of the sacred texts: “Everything that is written in the Holy Scripture [...] are «*words of the Holy Spirit*» (St. John Chrysostom PG 54, 514; 53, 65), *words of the divine grace*, which determined the author to write (St. John Chrysostom PG 49, 17-18), *words of our Lord*, spoken through the prophets’ mouth. «The prophets’ mouths are in fact God’s mouth» (St. John Chrysostom PG 56, 110) ...” (Moisescu 2003, 53). But the Spirit’s work is double: he inspires the one who writes, he illuminates the one who reads. For the latter the word of the Scripture is not necessary self-revealing, but only God’s Word, working through

the Spirit, “can open people’s minds for them to understand the Scriptures”, reminding them or illuminating those about Himself, “revealing hidden truths of the eschatological time, to His praise and to the Father’s praise” (Jn 14:26; 16:13-15) (Breck 1999, 10). In this work, man has to participate with the expression of his willingness to know, to understand, to search for the meanings of the Scripture, but this research must not be done with a “suspicious” mind, but in a humble state of mind proper to our helplessness (St. John Chrysostom *PG* 53, 42-43).

Speaking about the different ways of interpretation of the two exegetical schools, the Patriarch Iustin Moiescu noted the fact that the distinction was not one of substance, but of the manner of interpretation of the exegetical principles – mostly common, as a matter of fact – according to the social-cultural context. In this context, Saint John Chrysostom appears, “whose person was guarantee enough for the orthodoxy of a writing” (Moiescu 2003, 13). He is considered to be the meeting point, that of harmonization and completion of the two schools, he is the exegetical personality who fixes the fundamental rules of the biblical hermeneutics. A single example is enough to understand the equilibrium that dominates his exegesis. In his commentary to Psalms (9:4), Saint John distinguishes three types of biblical assertions: the first type which represents only symbolic figures or images, revealing a theoretical or spiritual meaning, and gives the example from Proverbs 5:18-19: *A loving doe, a graceful deer...* a second type of assertions are those which have only a literal meaning (Gn 1:1): *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth*. Finally, the third category of assertions is of those which are authentically typological, in which “the divine meaning receives expression in the historical event” (Jn 3:14): “Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up” (Breck 1999, 89).

A special preoccupation for Saint John Chrysostom is the unity/perfect agreement between the two Testaments (Basarab 2005, 106; Baker 2010, 36). To this respect, his fundamental observation is that “God in His great wisdom reveals dogmatic truths, establishes moral rules, according to the ability of understanding and of living of the people to whom He addresses. And if He had established the two testaments in the same time, for these people, who lead the same life, then there wouldn’t have been any formal differences between them” (St. John Chrysostom *PG* 51, 283). What is the basis of this unitary perception of the Scripture, visible in the entire exegetical corpus of Saint John Chrysostom? He doesn’t dissociate the Scripture from history, but considers it to be rather a “recording in special conditions of the biblical history” (Coman 2002, 144), the biblical history itself becoming

a fundament, and this because it is a unitary history, which notes the development within time of the dialogue between God and His people (Coman 2002, 144). But comparing the two laws from the point of view of the content, Saint John Chrysostom finds the Old Testament to be inferior to the New Testament; of course, not because of God, but because of the people to whom these laws have been addressed. This meaning that in the functioning of a text or of any kind of message, an important role is given to the addressee, directly involved in the understanding, bringing up-to-date and interpretation of the respective text (Eco 1996, 18). The same type of reasoning brings Saint John to conclude that there is a better way to communicate with God than the Scripture, an assertion which may surprise in the beginning, but this “better” doesn’t refer to the quality of the biblical discourse, but to its efficiency in comparison with the receiver of the message which is man (Coman 2002, 134). As we have already seen, the divine pedagogy considered education through things to be a priority, followed by the education through writings and having a descending character (Coman 2002, 135), for our weakness and helplessness.

Conclusion. The Holy Scripture – a permanently new pathway

In the Eastern theology there is no such thing as exclusively scientific biblical research, for in the Eastern exegetic discourse the ecclesial, martyrial aspect, is always a constant co-ordinate. This aspect is based on the patristic tradition, on the perseverance and the unity of the patristic hermeneutical perspective, dominated by the spiritual dimension (Coman 2002, 126). And this because within the Orthodox theological space, lingers the belief that the Scripture is a way of communication, a way of revelation, a way of repairing the communion relationship with God and not a purpose in itself. Saint John Chrysostom says that when God knew that we have gone astray, he started to send us His word through letters, for we find ourselves in a country far away. Thus, the first writings sent by God with the aim to renew the love between Him and the people, have been brought by Moses (St. John Chrysostom *PG* 54, 582), followed by the other sacred writings. That is why “because we have sent away that grace, let’s start a *new way* (to receive it back again)” (Coman 2002, 145). The first step on this pathway remains that of reading more from the Holy Scripture for, as Saint John says, the sacred books are similar to flavours (St. John Chrysostom *PG* 53, 106), and thus, through the continuous reading of the Scripture, we will always have its spiritual perfume all around us.

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4. THE BRASS SERPENT ON A POLE (NM 21:4-9). AN EXEGETICAL STUDY IN A CHRISTOLOGICAL KEY

Abstract

The paper proposes a Christological reading of the brass serpent episode in Numbers 21:4-9 in an anastasic perspective. The story records another moment of discontent in Israel regarding their “worthless” food, discontent which determines a revolt against Moses and, by him, against God Himself. This revolt will call for divine wrath, but God will also be the Healer of His own people (Ex 15:25), through the brass serpent erected by Moses in the desert. The paper focuses on the significance of this brass serpent in the light of John 3:14, trying to distinguish the nuances of patristic Christological interpretation of the episode.



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The human being lets herself, or so it would seem, dominated constantly by a tendency to emphasize the negative side of an event, of a person, of a thing, no matter what this would be. Such an attitude does not build, but dig, slowly but surely, to the foundation of the being, wasting it. That is why I chose this time a theme that offers on the one hand the image of a general pessimistic attitude, and on the other hand it reinforces the image of our faith in God's care and mercy towards us. Therefore, the episode I intend to approach is part of a series of moments that present a lack of trust manifested by the Jewish people towards Moses and, by him, towards God Himself, a series that started right after the exit from Egypt by the by the discontent which was followed closely by the receiving of the manna (Ex 16:2-3). Firstly, I would remark on the fact that the repeated state of revolt and lack of measure of the people, their continuous tendency to rise against Moses, especially on the theme of the frugal food, launches a

series of moments with a Christological prefigurative character: sweetening the waters of Mara (Ex 15:23-25), manna (Ex 16:3-35), water from the rock (Ex 17:1-7, Num 20:2-11) and the episode of the brass serpent (Ex 21:4-9). The patristic interpretation of this last fragment is unanimously Christologic (St. Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Moses, Homily on the Song of Songs*; St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on the Gospel of John, Glaphyra to Numbers*; St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catecheses*; St. Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*; St. Ephrem the Syrian, *Commentary on Tatian's Diatessaron*, St. John Damascene, *Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*; St. Macarius of Egypt, *Spiritual Homilies*; St. Isaiah the Anachorite, *29 Texts*; St. Basil the Great, *Letters*; St. Augustine, *Expositions on the Psalms*), but the nuances are different, as we will observe during the course of this study. Before we take a look at these interpretations, I consider important to make an incursion in the targumic tradition. This can reveal to us inedited meanings of the biblical text; from which we may easily deduct the Jewish perspective on the event.

The targumic tradition

A first addition that we can remark is the mentioning of a direct intervention of God through His voice – ׀׀ ׀׀׀ (bat-kol)/ ׀׀׀ ׀׀׀׀ (kol Yahweh) –, that reminds the people of the serpent from genesis, that God Himself cursed to eat dust all the days of his life (Gn 3:14) and which, despite of this situation, did not have the courage to ever rebel against God. By contrast with this unreasoning being which is considered to be one of the most unimportant beings, man, who is above all creation, is asked for a complete faith and dedication to the True God. However, he is the one who rebels against God and against His providence, a situation in which God, through the memento of the serpent, almost offers him a model of assuming the divine judgement and decision: “Come, all men, and see all the benefits which I have done to the people whom I brought up free out of Mizraim. I made manna come down for them from heaven, yet now turn they and murmur against Me. Yet, behold, the serpent, whom, in the days of the beginning of the world, I doomed to have dust for his food, hath not murmured against me: but My people are murmuring about their food” (*Targum of Palestine*).

Hence, the discontent of the people of Israel enkindles the divine wrath, and the punishment came through the serpents that did not rebelled against God, that is why they are called to bite the unfaithful and the discontent: “Now shall the serpents who have not complained of their food come and bite the people who complain. Therefore did the Word of the Lord send the basilisk serpents, and they bit the people, and a great

multitude of the people of Israel died” (*Targum of Palestine*). Since they were so harshly punished, the Jewish assume their sin and in the same time ask Moses to pray to the Lord for them: “And the people came to Mosheh, and said: We have sinned, in thinking and speaking against the glory of the Lord’s Shekinah, and in contending with thee. Pray before the Lord to remove the plague of serpents from us. And Mosheh prayed for the people” (*Targum of Palestine*). Being aware of the sin, sincere repentance for it and the prayer for forgiveness is the first step in man’s return to God. I would like to observe here one last thing that is a specific expression of the targum: “we have sinned against the glory of the Lord’s Shekinah” (Abelson 2006, 77-93).

The targumic discourse offers a new perspective on the manner of healing of the terrible plague. While the biblical text presents a sole condition of healing a look to the serpent on the pole: ...*whenever a serpent bit someone, that person would look at the serpent of bronze and live* (Nm 21:9), the Targum of Palestine introduces here a remarkable element: the person bit by serpent lived not only by looking at the brass serpent, but also by *directing his heart to the name* (Sf. Dionisie Areopagitul 1993, 45-68; Jacob 1955, 33-50; Chirilă 2003, 87-113) *of the Word of the Lord*: “And the Lord said to Mosheh, Make thee a serpent of brass, and set it upon a place aloft; and it shall be that when a serpent hath bitten any one, if he behold it, then shall he live, if his heart be directed to the Name of the Word of the Lord” (*Targum of Palestine*).

The Jerusalem Targum is even more interesting when it mentions the fact that the one bit by serpent had to turn his face to God in prayer to be healed (“...his face was uplifted in prayer to his Father who is in heaven” (*Targum of Palestine*)). The paraphrasing puts an emphasis on the idea that healing can come only from God. It is what prophet Hosea will express clearly and I hereby introduce the passage with an obvious anastasic message: Come, let us return to the Lord. *He has torn us to pieces but he will heal us; he has injured us but he will bind up our wounds. After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will restore us, that we may live in his presence*” (Hos 6:1-2). This fragment is essential for the manner in which I understand the episode of the brass serpent, and I would even say that it can be regarded as a synthesis of the entire development I intend to make. This despite of the fact that the patristic Tradition, as well as the new biblical commentaries do not emphasize especially the anastasic dimension of the event, for there is not a consensus regarding the possibility of its interpretation in the light of the Cross (*crux interpretum*) nor is there an explicit anastasic discourse in the Old Testament (Chirilă 1999, 160). However, we will see, in the thinking of the Fathers, that the mount

of the brass serpent is a prefiguration of the Crucifixion of Christ, but this Crucifixion does not symbolize other than the victory over death through death. Thus, naturally, the episode is a prefiguration of the Resurrection of our Lord and of our resurrection. We will see, by analyzing several exegetical fragments, that the Fathers speak simultaneously of the healing and the life of the body that the brass serpent brought to Israel, but they also speak of the healing and life of the soul brought by Christ Himself through His sacrifice on the Cross, a healing that is synonymous to a real resurrection of the human being.

A Christian reading

Hence, the passage we focus on, which is not very large, registers the last episode of discontent of the people that occurs in the book of *Numbers*, but it is one of the most severe. If the people murmured often against Moses and even against Aaron, still there are few moments when they rebel against God Himself (Olson 1996, 135). Some even consider that, for the Jewish tradition, this was the last and the most serious apostasy of Israel while he wandered through the desert (Riggans 2001, 157). The content of the passage may be structured as follows: (1) historical frame (v. 4a); (2) the sin of the people (vv. 4b-5); (3) the judgement of the Lord (v. 6); (4) the answer of the people (v. 7a); (5) Moses' prayer (v. 7b); (6) God's answer to His righteous – healing (vv. 8-9) (Cole 2001, 346). I decided to structure my study using as subtitles the verses of the fragment, because this allows me a brief and clear presentation of the results of a modest approach that I intend to fill out subsequently. Verse 8, however, will have a privileged status in the economy of this paper because of its prefigurative Christological character.

We detest this miserable food (21:5)

The main cause for which the people “grew impatient” (21:4) was, without a doubt, the frugally meals they had since they left Egypt. Now, they saw Egypt as a land of earthly pleasures. How many times do the Jewish remember nostalgically of the Egyptian pots of meat (Ex 16:3; Nm 11:4.18), that their souls dwelled on for sure?! (Chirilă 2003, 93) But the people was called to find from now on his pleasure in the Lord (Is 58:14). In the Hebrew text (BHS) we read בְּלֶחֶם הַקֶּלֶקֶל (*balehem haqloqel*) and the synodal edition chose to translate the expression with “miserable food”. Indeed, the word הַקֶּלֶקֶל (*haqloqel*) is based on a root that can be translated with *simple, unsatisfying* (Harris 1980, 800) (2 Sam 19:44; Is 8:23; 23:9; Ez 22:7) (Budd 2002, 234). In fact, it seems that any calumnious word referring to the manna could have been used as long

as it could express the inconsistency of such a diet (Budd 2002, 234), lacking a real nutritional value and which did nothing else but stay their hunger (Clarke 1999). However, this food was not really miserable, but was considered to be so because the people did not look to stay their hunger, but to satisfy their appetency: “Again the pleasures of the table enslaved them, and their desires led them to gluttony. Although they lacked none of the necessities of life, disorderly youths were dreaming of the Egyptian plenty. They were disciplined by very severe scourges: Serpents within the encampment as they bit them injected deadly poison in them” (Sf. Grigorie de Nyssa 1982, 36).

The gift of manna supplies food in an extreme situation, it should have been received by the chosen people as a great blessing from God, Who feeds His people with “bread from heaven” (Ex 16:4). On the one hand, the episode is a testimony of the divine providence, on the other hand, it prefigures the real bread from heaven “that gives life to the world” (Jn 6:33), Christ – “the bread of life” – that God the Father gives to the world (Jn 6:32). Manna as the Eucharistic prefiguration feeds the soul and strengthens the body, but does not incite and it does not satisfy desire, it is the reason for which the Israelites disregard it, since they were still very fond of the worldly pleasures (Ex 16:3; Nm 21:5). And the punishment for the correction of the people was not late in coming, and it was sent by God so that “those who were held by earthly cares, and the worship of idols, and the pleasures of Satan, and all manner of ungodliness, might by this means to some extent look upward to things above, and gaining a respite from things below, might give heed to higher things; and thus advancing, might learn to know that there is a Most Highest surpassing all the creation” (Sf. Macarie Egipteanul 1992, 138).

The Lord sent venomous serpents among them (21:6)

The interpretations offered by the biblical commentaries to these “venomous snakes” are multiple, and they start from the Hebrew original, where we identify the expression הַנְּחָשִׁים הַשֵּׂרָפִים (*hanehashim haserafim*). The first word is a form of articulated plural of the noun נָחָשׁ (*nahash*) (TWOT 1980, 571), a polysemantic noun for which it is hard to identify the precise meaning, here and in Genesis 3 (Clarke 1999). An interesting detail is the flagrant closeness between the words “serpent” (נָחָשׁ – *nahash*) (TWOT 1980, 571), “spell” (שִׁבְחָה – *nahash*) (TWOT 1980, 572) and brass (נְחֹשֶׁת – *nahosheth*) (TWOT 1980, 572), which determined some of the supporters of a critical school to affirm the etiological character of this fragment (Budd 2002, 233; Gray 1903, 274-5; Riggans 2001, 274; Joines 1968: 245-56).

The second word of the expression, הַשָּׂרָפִים (*haserafim*) derives from the root שָׂרַף (*saraf*) which means *to burn* (TWOT 1980, 856-7), but the words deriving from this root may be translated with *serpents*, *seraphs*. A possible interpretation would be that the introduction of a word deriving from the root *saraf*, expresses the feeling of terrible burn produced in the body by the bite of a reptile (Gray 1903, 277). But, as we may see in Isaiah 6:2-6, the seraphs are a category of angels, servants that stay around the throne of the Lord: *Above him were seraphim... And they were calling to one another: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory!"* (Is 6:2-3). What could be the connection between these servants of the Lord and the serpents sent among the people? It was said that the fragment that we study is not about reptiles, but about the messengers/servants of the Lord: who, if in Isaiah 6 they have a doxological service, in Numbers 21 their service is to fulfill the divine punishment over the people. To this respect we may understand the statement of the psalmist: *He makes winds his messengers, flames of fire His servants* (Ps 104:4) (Riggans 2001, 157). Their intervention is followed right after by the admittance of the sin and the return to God in repentance (v. 7), the people asking Moses to pray for them before the Lord: "We sinned when we spoke against the Lord and against you. Pray that the Lord will take the snakes away from us. So Moses prayed for the people" (Nm 21:7). Last, but not least. In a spiritual perspective, the reptiles that the biblical text speaks of are understood as synonymous to the passionate movements of the soul: "by beasts I mean desires..." (Sf. Grigorie de Nyssa 1982, 97-8).

The episode is also interpreted in relation to the sin of our proto-parents, to whom the people of Israel resembled and suffered the same as them through the work of the serpents: "For YHWH engaged every kind of viper to bite them so they died. Since Eve transgressed by means of the viper, he reckoned he might convince them that through their transgression they too could be delivered from the spasms of death" (Barnaba 1979, 129). The punishment that came of the Israelites for these sinful acts is the one that determines them, as I have already mentioned, to become aware of their sin and to return to God in prayer. Moses' intervention for the forgiveness of the people receives an answer from God, Who reveals to him the possibility of salvation/healing.

Make a brass serpent and put it on a pole... anyone who is bitten can look at it and live (21:8)

This is the main point of the fragment, the one that enjoyed a great deal of attention in the patristic literature; I will linger on this verse premeditated. Its importance

is determined by its prefigurative Christological character, expressed explicitly by our Savior in John 3:14-15: “Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes may have eternal life in Him.” The patristic discourse is built on this fundamental idea, but with emphasis on various aspects, which I intend to present here briefly (Sf. Grigorie de Nyssa 1982, 127).

Representation of the mystery of Incarnation

We find this singular interpretation in the commentary of St. Cyril of Alexandria to the Gospel of John (Sf. Chiril al Alexandriei 2000, 123). There are a few elements that deserve special attention. Within the dialogue between Jesus Christ and Nicodemus (Jn 3:1-11), Saint Cyril observes that Christ invokes several moments from the Old Testament that are representations of high truths, hard to understand by the human mind. It is the reason for which Christ “His Word of teaching does not run forth into the boundless and supernatural [...] knowing that he could by leadings by means of figures scarce arrive at knowledge of the truth, rather than by the exactitude of spiritual inspirations” (Sf. Chiril al Alexandriei 2000, 123-4). The Savior’s habit to use examples from the Old Testament to express high spiritual realities is, in St. Cyril’s perspective, also a confirmation of the necessity and benefit that the search of history brings, according to Christ’s advice: *Study the Scriptures [...] these are the very Scriptures that testify about Me* (Jn 5:39). Then, coming back to the biblical episode, Saint Cyril states that healing was determined by two elements that is by looking at the one lifted up together with faith. He says trenchantly: “So much for the history. But it represents in act as it were in a type, the whole Mystery of the Incarnation” (Sf. Chiril al Alexandriei 2000, 124), proving through this type of affirmation, that he distinguishes between the multiple meanings/levels of the biblical text. This is the only patristic fragment that interprets in detail the episode as a prefiguration of the Incarnation, associating the serpent to the sin that brings perdition of men and identifying in it the cause for the Incarnation of the Son of God: “For the serpent signifies the bitter and manslaying sin, which was devouring the whole race upon the earth, manifoldly biting the soul of man, and infusing the varied poison of wickedness. And no otherwise could we escape it thus conquering us, save by the succor alone which is from heaven. The Word of God then was made *in the likeness of sinful flesh*, that He might *condemn sin in the flesh*, as it is written (Rom 8:3) and to those who gaze on Him with more steadfast faith, or by search into the Divine doctrines, might become the Giver of unending salvation.” (Sf. Chiril al Alexandriei 2000, 124).

Image of the redeeming Passion on the Cross

The most frequent interpretation of the lifting of the brass serpent sees in this episode the prefiguration of the passions through which the Son of God brought salvation to the fallen human being: “The serpent on the standard is a type of the passion of salvation accomplished by means of the cross, wherefore they who even looked thereon were preserved” (Sf. Vasile cel Mare 1988, 46). Jesus Christ is the first to interpret this episode as an image of His passion in John 3:14: “...the voice of the Lord teaches clearly that the serpent lifted up in the desert is a symbol of the mystery of the cross (Jn 3:14)” (Sf. Grigorie de Nyssa 1982, 127). By the sacrifice of the Lord, the fallen human being is redeemed from death, just as the people was redeemed from venomous snakes “...through the serpent lifted up, which was the medicine for the death bearing bites...” and which prefigured “*the economy accomplished for us on the Cross*” (Sf. Grigorie de Nyssa 1982, 115).

The bites of the venomous serpents are understood as bites of the desires, as consequences of the reckless passions, and the healing of these passions is only possible if the man directs his sight towards the Passion of Jesus Christ, because “the person who looks to the One lifted up on the wood rejects passion, diluting the poison with the fear of the commandment as with a medicine. For the serpent lifted up in the desert is *a symbol of the mystery of the Cross...*” (Sf. Grigorie de Nyssa 1982, 97-8). If the Jewish people was healed through the faith into the brass serpent, the faith into the Crucified Christ is self-healing: “This was the figure which Moses completed by fixing the serpent to a cross, that whoever had been bitten by the living serpent, and looked to the brazen serpent, might be saved by believing. Does then the brazen serpent save when crucified, and shall not the Son of God incarnate save when crucified also?” (Sf. Chiril al Ierusalimului 2003, 204).

Sign of salvation

The episode is wonderfully synthesized in the Book of Wisdom of Solomon, where said about the serpent lifted by Moses that it is *συμβολον σωτηριας* (see also Heb.), *sign of salvation*: “For when the horrible fierceness of beasts came upon these, and they perished with the stings of crooked serpents, thy wrath endured not for ever; But they were troubled for a small season, that they might be admonished, having a sign of salvation, to put them in remembrance of the commandment of thy law. For he that turned himself toward it was not saved by the thing that he saw, but by thee, that art the Saviour of all (Sol 16:5-7).

The healing power did not come from the serpent especially that the Jewish had already received the interdiction to make any graven image or an image in the form of anything created (Ex 20:4). For that matter, the discourse of the Old Testament presents God as the sole healer, which He Himself acknowledges: *I am the Lord, who heals you* (Ex 15:26). In my opinion, in this healing we find the anastasic dimension of the episode, because healing comes from the One who “trampled down death by death, giving the world eternal life” (Olson 1996, 135). Hence, God Himself works through the image of the serpent to heal His people, but, the important thing is the mystery preached to the people through this healing: “Was it not God [...] who caused the brazen serpent to be made by Moses in the wilderness, and set it up for a sign by which those bitten by serpents were saved? [...], *by this He proclaimed the mystery*, by which He declared that He would break the power of the serpent...” (Sf. Iustin Martirul și Filozoful 1997, 269). Christ’s victory over the serpent as “spokesperson” of evil is complete, He will crush his head (which is synonymous for a complete defeat), a truth announced in the Proto-gospel (Gn 3:15). That is why the episode is also seen as a confirmation of Christ’s complete victory: “...it seems that the type and sign, which was erected to counteract the serpents which bit Israel, was indeed for the salvation of those who believe that death was declared to come thereafter on the serpent through Him that would be crucified” (Sf. Iustin Martirul și Filozoful 1997, 269).

Lifting of the brass serpent was not perceived as a sign of salvation by all the people, which is explained by Saint Basil the Great, showing that in order to have such a perception it is necessary to have a spiritual thinking, the only one that can lift a person to another level of understanding, surpassing the strict plane of history: “Moses, the Scripture says, made a serpent and put it on a sign that is on a cross. Here we have a sign that shows us something unforeseen and invisible: it was seen by the Jewish, but only those with acute minds understood it” (Sf. Vasile cel Mare 1988, 536). Hence, if the look at the brass serpent brought physical life to the Jewish, only those who direct their look towards the crucified Christ will have spiritual life: “Just as those who looked with their physical eyes to the sign lifted by Moses on the cross lived with their bodies, so do those who look with their spiritual eyes to the body of Christ crucified and believe in Him will live (with their souls)” (Commentary on Tatian’s Diatessaron 16.15).

The serpent – image of Christ

To what respect can the serpent be a prefiguration of Christ is, in the text of the Old Testament, it is the image of the enemy (Gn 3:15) and the origin of sin? Firstly,

“Christ is a serpent, as the one who took the resemblance of sin, when He became human” (Sf. Chiril al Alexandriei 1992). Hence, the assumption of a mortal body is considered to be the assumption of a sinful nature. The serpent is the image of Christ because *Christ became sin for us*, it is just another way of expressing the fallen human nature: “He took the image of the serpent for us, or He became sin for us, once the father of sin and the sin born from him is represented by the serpent. Christ took the image of the serpent, for He took our nature that had become sinful...” (Cuv. Isaia Pustnicul 1991). However, The Holy Fathers mention the fact that Christ took this entire nature but “without the sin, hence without the venom of the serpent. And by being a serpent that is not poisonous, even a serpent that, because of the lack of sin, worked the divine power through our nature, the one that looked like a serpent, he ate and destroyed with His greater power the poisonous serpents, defeating the devil, the origin of poison, and overwhelming the poison of sin within people...” (Cuv. Isaia Pustnicul 1991, 210).

Secondly, the serpent is the enemy of man, and it is also the one that makes man an enemy of God, and Jesus Christ assumes this image of the serpent, but without “the evil thought, without poison, or wickedness, he does not bow, he does not breathe, he doesn’t have the breath of enemy”, until the moment when he “*stifles the poison*, that Adam received from the mouth of the serpent and the nature, that became against nature, will return to the natural existence” (Cuv. Isaia Pustnicul 1991, 210). It is a temporary healing assumption of the human nature, and the healing comes, for Israel, through the image of a *dead serpent*, an idea that the patristic discourse insists upon greatly.

How can a dead serpent bring healing? (Joines 1968: 251) “The serpent lifted in triumph on a tree as though it were dead, the tree bringing salvation to those who in faith saw their enemy dead, just as Christ was nailed to the tree in the flesh of sin which yet knew no sin” (Sf. Ioan Damaschin 2004, 141). The dead serpent is, in the opinion of Saint Macarius the Egyptian, the very body of Christ, who while crucified will heal the soul enveloped in passions: “What, however, is the dead serpent? The dead serpent overcame the live ones. Thus it is *a figure of the body of the Lord*. The body which He took of the ever Virgin Mary, He offered it up upon the cross, and hung it there, and fastened it upon the tree; and the dead body overcame and slew the live serpent creeping in the heart...” (Sf. Macarie Egipteanul 1992, 138). The body of Christ crucified brings healing because “In the dead body is life. Here is redemption; here is light. Here the Lord comes to death, and discourses with him, and bids him bring the souls out of hell and death, and give them back to Him” (Sf. Macarie Egipteanul 1992, 138). In the same idea, Augustine asks himself: “What is it to be made whole of a serpent by looking upon

a serpent? It is to be made whole of death by believing in one dead” (St. Augustin 1997, 47) and identifies the latter with Christ Himself Who “trampled death by death”.

On the other side of these presentations we find the discourse of Saint Gregory of Nazianzus who considers that the serpent is not at all the image of Christ (Clarke 1990), but a contrasting image: by looking at the serpent one receives healing precisely because the serpent and the evil that it represents is killed, it is defeated by the work of Christ the Life Giver.

Conclusions

A descending reading of the text of the Old Testament offers a great liberty of interpretation, it allows the association of several moments mentioned by the Old Testament with truths revealed only in the New Testament. From this perspective, the key of the interpretation is the Christological one. The Old Testament prepares the coming of Christ and, to a certain extent, it confirms his Messianic identity, He Himself interprets several episodes as referring to Him. It is also the case of the episode I approached (Nm 21:4-9). For a Christian reading, the event announces the work of salvation achieved, partially, on the Cross from Golgotha. Obviously, this interpretation goes beyond the strictly literal, historical meaning of the text, as the patristic discourse has proved. But, maybe more surprising is the targumic tradition, partly because of the fact that it is less known. And in the bibliographical area we saw that the strictly literal interpretation of the text is surpassed. I think it is important, and I would like to emphasize here, the fact that the possibility of a magical interpretation of the episode is canceled testifying explicitly the necessity of prayer in order to obtain healing.

My approach only wishes to be a starting point for a more profound research of the text, offering the introduction into a varied bibliographical area, which includes the patristic tradition, the Judaic tradition and the modern and contemporary Christian exegesis. I would conclude, in this phase of the research, that the episode is, according to the interpretation of the gospel (Jn 3:14), a prefiguration of the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross. But this annunciation is made in the perspective of the Resurrection, through which the Lord will offer healing to the human nature and eternal life to all those who will turn their faces and their hearts in prayer towards the Lord, Healer – Raphael.

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5. ETHIC AND ESTHETIC VALENCES OF IMAGE IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Abstract

The multitude of images that invade human life nowadays casts off their aprioristic rejection. The last stronghold is the possibility of subjective choice, a real challenge for the contemporary man. But the force of image and the eventual need to protect the mind/heart cannot be truly sighted in its wholeness unless we see it in the perspective of foretimes. The present research points to a return in the Old Testament areal, where the place/purpose of image is controversial, swinging permanently between fragile existence and idolatrous worship. Today, when we talk about image, we automatically refer to its esthetic valence. But, if we refer to image inside the Jewish culture, then we have to mind the fact that this culture stands at the antipode of Greek esthetic tradition, because Jews thought image was not limited to a simple expression of the esthetics, but had deeper, spiritual and ethic dimensions. This explains the rejection of image, determined by the commandment that echoes on Mount Sinai: „Thou shalt have no other gods before me. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.” (Ex 20,3-4). The shyness towards image is not synonymous to a complete and definitive rejection, the image is credited with the possibility to express the presence of the divine, in which case not only is it indulged but it is rather a commandment, becoming a sign of eternity in time: the cherubims on the tabernacle (Ex 25,18) marked the epiphanic core in the middle of Israel and the brass serpent (Nm 21,4-9) mediated the blessed works of „The One Who is”. Thus, we aim to identify certain connections between the importance of image in the Old Testament and its importance nowadays through various frameworks and hypothesis.



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Our endeavour begins with an analysis of the creation rescript (Gn 1:4.10.12.18.21.25.31). The juxtaposition of the two texts, the Hebrew and Greek will shed light on two different traditions, each with its own perception on the created things. Before we analyze the two words בֹּטַח *ḥi* καλός, we shall explore the structure of the book's first chapter: the account of the six days of creation shows a remarkable simetry (Roop 1987, 23), in which the approval of the created things recurs seven times (Chirilă 2003, 26-31) in the Hebrew text through the expression: „and God saw that it was good/beautiful”. So, *good* or *beautiful*? The Hebrew version uses the word בֹּטַח, a word of manifold meanings, that are not part of the the esthetic areal (Strong 1996, 2896). In the Jewish culture, this word is deeply connected with the idea of God: He is the only one good, and His goodness is reflected by His works (Gordon, 2002, 18). Although it appears multiple times in the first chapter, the word reccurs strongly in verse 31, where it is used as an attribute for the entire creation דָּאֵם בֹּטַח (tob meod) (Gn 1:31) is the superlative expression of goodness/beauty, the created things are named by the Creator not only good, but also „very good”. And that which God, as the Creator, calls „good”/”beautiful”, is not the compromise between good and evil (as the human thinking and expression would render), but the reaching of the highest good, in other words, the fulfillment of the divine plan (Spence-Jones 2004,34).

The dialogue between the Hebrew בֹּטַח (tob) and the Greek word καλός

Exploring the LXX text, we observe the translation of בֹּטַח with καλός (Strong 1996, 2570), a word which, besides its primary esthetic meaning, has a secondary meaning, that defines the attributes and qualities tha make something adequate and correspond to its purpose. But here comes the question: if Hebrew has a specific word that designates beauty, יָפֵף (iafah) (Strong 1996, 3302), that does not appear in the first chapter of Genesis, why does LXX still uses καλός, a word with immediate esthetic resonance? An analysis of Greek culture is recommended here. Influenced by Platonism, Greeks thought creation itself was a work of beauty, κόσμος. The Creator was perceived as an Architect, idea that has been developed in the biblical theology of Edmond Jacob: the author of the biblical account of creation portrays God as an Architect who puts the elements of world in place as someone who wants to build a house inside which the dwellers shall feel good and cozy; this building has to be solid, cozy, pleasant, out of dangers. At the completion of His works, God shows contentment: “And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good. And the evening and the morning

were the sixth day.” (Gn 1:31) (Jacob 1955, 111). Philo of Alexandria, influenced himself by the thinking of Plato, adhere to the same conception, describing in details how the ideal plan of the world that exists in the mind of the Architect precedes and controls its materialization (*De Opificiis Mundi* 4, 5). But the influence of Plato’s thinking in LXX is also manifested in other fragments: in Gen 2,1 LXX translates the Hebrew *zaba’am* by κόσμος, and in Gn 1:2 renders the Hebrew *tohu vabohu* by άόρατος και άκτασκεύατος, a translation that is influenced by Platonic philosophy (*De Opificiis Mundi* 4, 5).

The option of LXX can be understood if we mind the fact that *kalonkagathon*, a formula foreseen by Plato, considered goodness and beauty in an endless fusion. That means that in the Greek thinking the two notions imply each other. Therefore, when LXX names light (v. 4), the dry land and sea (v. 10), grass (v. 12), luminaries (v. 18), living beings (v. 21:25) and, lastly, creation as a whole (v. 31) *beautiful*, it refers not only to esthetic attributes but also to the capacity of the created things to fulfill the purpose they were created. In the *Homilies to Hexaemeron*, Saint Basil the Great observes this fact: “Through these words (*And God saw it was good/beautiful* Gn 1:8), the Holy Scripture did not intend to say that God’s eyes were delighted by His creatures, nor that God looks at the beauty of creatures as we do; but that beauty, in its biblical understanding, it’s what is perfectly made and serves to the purpose it was designed for”. (St. Basil the Great 1986, 108). The same idea is present in Saint Ambrosius the Great: God calls each stage of His creation good/beautiful, seizing its immaculate being and perfection: “God, as the judge of the entire work, foreseeing how the work would come to completion, praises His work from its very early stages, knowing from the beginning its finalization... He praises each part as worthy of what comes next” (St. Ambrosius 2001, 65). However, the Hebrew word בֹּרָא LXX translates with *καλος* is an adjective with various meanings denoting, as Strong suggests, both external and internal characteristics (especially moral ones), and not necessarily esthetic ones. The real meaning of the words of the creation account, in which God is content with His creation, is that the creation is perfect, is complete. This resonates with the general setting of the Old Testament and with the fact that beauty did not play any role at all in both the culture and religion of Israel (Tatarkiewicz 1978, 12).

The ethic/esthetic consistency of image in the Jewish culture

The diminishing of esthetic needs among the Jewish people, consequence of rejection of any depiction of God, was naturally followed by moving the center

of interest from the beauty of shape to the depth and richness of matter, which was valued by Jews as the highest beauty (Tatarkiewicz 1978, 19). The lack of interest for the esthetic aspect is noticeable in the descriptions Jews made to buildings, that were not described by their exterior design, but by their functionality. Moreover, the biblical text tells us that Joseph, David and Absalom were beautiful, but does not describe their beauty and that because the Jewish culture did not settle on the exterior aspects. If they did pay attention to the exterior aspect of human beings, they accounted only for those which expressed spiritual experience (Tatarkiewicz 1978, 15). The wisdom books show their Greek influence however: „...but Thou ordered everything with measure, with number and balance” (Sol 11:20b). This genuine Pitagoreic and Platonic idea is different from the fragments mentioned above in which the esthetic aspect is not granted any importance at all. Therefore, one must take into consideration when reading the text, the Hellenization phenomenon of the writing’s background in order to discern whether we are faced with a genuine Jewish conception or not.

Although apparently not preoccupied by esthetics, Jews have a vocabulary that is comprised of many words that describe beauty, both physical and moral. This shows the fact that Jews, being in a permanent search of God, couldn’t have ignored that the entire creation moves/works in a perfect harmony that originates in the divine beauty and perfection. Thus, *iafe* applied to humans, animals things and countries means „beautiful in the most general respect”, *nehmad* means *charming*, or *strong desire* of a certain thing (Gn 2:9), *hemed*, the corresponding noun being used in many ways (Is 32:12; Iez 23:6; Am 11); *nave* derived from *iwa^h* means *worthy of desire*; lastly, *tob mareh* expresses *beautiful appearance*. There is no basis to assert the fact that Jews were refractory to art and esthetics. The Scripture portrays them as skilled workers with craftsmanship abilities, for example referring to the construction of the holy tent and than of the Jerusalem Temple. Rabbinic sources mentions the obligation each man had to ensure that any liturgic service or act of cult is performed best, and thus becomes worthy to be consecrated to God (*Beshallah, Shirah*, 3).

However, moral beauty is by far the most important in the Jewish culture. Spiritual qualities and virtues made someone beautiful, due to the balance between virtue and beauty, the latter is not limited however to the exterior esthetical aspect, but goes beyond, to its essence. Thus, the use of בֹּט in the creation account: the created things are the reflection of their Creator, crowned with the highest attributes, grandeur and magnificence, but not beauty (Tatarkiewicz 1978, 12). Thus, the interest of a Jew is

focused on the moral and ethic aspect of beauty, but we cannot be ignorant of a certain preoccupation for esthetic that is visible later in artistic manifestations.

In this respect, we seize the medieval practice of decoration/ornamentation of the sinagogue's doorposts with representations of certain animals (among which the lion was common – a symbol of Judah), birds and sometimes plants (flowers, vine, etc.). This type of ornamentation was accepted by rabbis when the idolatrous danger was abolished, but some rabbis, more rigorist, forbid them entirely (Abrahams 1958, 29). In spite of these Rabbinic rigors, the cups and lamps used in the liturgic service of Shabbat and other celebrations were decorated with various representations: birds, fish, boats, etc. Moreover, even the walls of wealthy Jews' houses had decorations with Old Testament scenery, while the exterior walls were decorated with common scenes of everyday life (Abrahams 1958, 146). The portraiture art although rare, was known among the Jews from Italy since the 15th century, and in Germany from the 18th century. However, they were specialists in manuscripts and artistic bookbindings, arts and crafts that they probably learned from monks (Abrahams 1958, 220). Still, synagogues prohibited art because it could distract attention during prayer, thus the Rabbis were unanimously against artistic representations including of those four beings from the vision of Ezekiel.

Returning to the Old Testament background, we distinguish three fundamental aspects of beauty and esthetics: the beauty of the universe as a reflection of the Creator: „For out of the grandeur and beauty of beings knoweth you better the One Who made them” (Sol 13:5), the deriving of beauty from the relation between „measure, number and weight” (Sol 11:20) and the futility or inherent peril of beauty, that can lead to moral desecration. The latter is the only one which resonates with the Judaic culture and thinking, the only genuine one, while the other two are consequences of the Greek culture influence.

Idolatry between historical reality and actual danger

The dialogal structure of nature opens the way for man towards knowing the spiritual realities: the intelligible cosmos shows mystically in the physical cosmos through symbols and the physical cosmos exists in the intelligible one, eased by the senses of mind. These two are intertwined, and their connection is mediated by symbols. Their work is one (St. Maximus the Confessor 2000, 9). But, after the fall of sin, the dialogal perspective of creation is replaced by a more desecrated overview, with man being dominated by pride and disobedience, looking towards what he can conquer and

subdue and permanently seeking to satisfy his carnal needs, that progressively grow into passions. This new perspective shows a denaturated vision over nature, through which man no longer seeks for realities beyond the physical realm. This perspective humiliates man among the creatures that, by their nature, should be subdued by him (Chirila 2000, 59). The images that harass ourselves nowadays, are they a serious danger for us?

To answer this question, we first have to determine the meaning of symbol/idol concepts, from the perspective of history and religious phenomenology. In the human history, the religious image did not limit to intellectual or affective *commemoratio* of faith, but was thought as a real *participatio*, objective, to the divine realities it depicted. The shift from its symbolic function to the damnable idolatric dimension emerges when the relation between image and divine reality is lost, and the attention is drawn by exterior representation. Trying to understand the actual mechanism that makes the shift from contemplation to idolatry, we ask ourselves: if all the elements of nature lead to contemplation of their Creator (St. Basil the Great 1986, 166. St. Clement of Alexandria 1982, 121), and the luminaries of sky are by their grandeur the most adequate to express contemplation, why did their contemplation brought so often error? Origen's approach reveals us the way in which a wrong perspective on nature can grant it with extraneous characteristics, transforming it into an object of worship. St. Clement of Alexandria thought that the most critical error is to think of nature as something that is animated, is living, thus making no difference between it and the human being, which ultimately casts man out of heaven and into abyss (St. Clement of Alexandria 1982, 87). As a measure of protection against this transformation of cultic images in idols, as it often happened in the Oriental polytheistic religions, the Hebrew Semitic culture enforced interdictions against any kind of representation of Divinity (Ex 20:1; Dt 5:8).

But which were the polytheistic practices that the son of Israel should have been protected from? It seems that these idolatric cults worshipped animals, plants, cosmic luminaries or other shapes/images made by the human imagination. The idols worshipped thus were no more than lifeless images of the visible world, apart from transcendent realities, and thus they came in contradiction with the religious idea itself. The idols do not have the power to raise the soul to transcendency but, on the contrary, bound it to the physical world. They are the expression of a pantheistic spiritual attitude and thinking, that rejects any reality that is transcendent to the immanent world, namely, it rejects God (Stăniloae 2005, 87). However, these cults were a common reality in Egypt, then they became part of the cult of Yahweh: while they were waiting for Moses

to descend Sinai with the Law of God, Jews made a gold calf that they worshipped as Yahweh (Negoita 2003, 100): „And he received *them* at their hand, and fashioned it with a graving tool, after he had made it a molten calf: and they said, These *be* thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt.” (Ex 32:5). We find this idol also in the books of Kings where Jeroboam who spent a lot of time in Egypt is noted to have raised two gold calves at the temples of Dan and Betel, placed at the two borders of his kingdom: “Whereupon the king took counsel, and made two calves *of* gold, and said unto them, It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem: behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt” (1 Kgs 12:28-29). This was considered a great sin of Jeroboam, which had repercussions on the faith of Israel: „Howbeit *from* the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin, Jehu departed not from after them, *to wit*, the golden calves that *were* in Bethel, and that *were* in Dan” (2 Kgs 10:29).

Apart from this manifestation of zoolatry, there were times in the history of Egyptians when the sun was the center of their religious worship. The Holy Scripture affirms the practice of worshipping the luminaries of sky among the people of Israel: „And they left all the commandments of the LORD their God, and made them molten images, *even* two calves, and made a grove, and worshipped all the host of heaven, and served Baal” (2 Kgs 17:16). From the account of Josiah’s reform we know that the worship to celestial luminaries was carried out on high: “And he put down the idolatrous priests, whom the kings of Judah had ordained to burn incense in the high places in the cities of Judah, and in the places round about Jerusalem; them also that burned incense unto Baal, to the sun, and to the moon, and to the planets, and to all the host of heaven” (2 Kgs 23:5). We also find statements about celestial worship in the books of prophets. Thus, foretelling the fall of Jerusalem, Jeremiah mentions the place where Jews brought incense to celestial luminaries – the roofs of the houses, an offer that desecrated their houses: “And the houses of Jerusalem, and the houses of the kings of Judah, shall be defiled as the place of Tophet, because of all the houses upon whose roofs they have burned incense unto all the host of heaven, and have poured out drink offerings unto other gods” (Jer 19:13). This cult became a common practice even in Jerusalem (Jer 7:17-18). Moreover, Jews became so fascinated of this celestial worship that they even brought it inside the temple. The second book of Kings features king Manasseh of Judah raising an altar for the celestial luminaries inside the temple: “For he built up again the high places which Hezekiah his father had destroyed; and he reared up altars for Baal, and made a grove, as did Ahab king of Israel; and worshipped all the

host of heaven, and served them. [...] And he built altars for all the host of heaven in the two courts of the house of the LORD.” (2Kg 21:3.5).

The book of Ezekiel also reveals idolatrous worship inside the temple of Jerusalem. Abducted by the spirit from Chaldea to Jerusalem, the prophet confesses what he saw: „And he brought me into the inner court of the LORD’S house, and, behold, at the door of the temple of the LORD, between the porch and the altar, *were* about five and twenty men, with their backs toward the temple of the LORD, and their faces toward the east; and they worshipped the sun toward the east.” (Ez 8:16). It is possible that the custom of raising to east had an Egyptian influence after all. Later, this type of prayer is found in the religious manifestations of Essenes and Therapists (Chirilă 2000, 114). About the latter, we find out that they whispered prayers to the east, *begging the sun to rise* (Josephus Flavius 2004, 159). These statements are justified because they prove the transfer of certain cultic elements from a religious tradition to another, a transfer due to the impact these elements had on religious practice and experience.

The madness and lack of wisdom of those who worship the celestial luminaries is approached by Saint John Chrysostom: „But the pagans, marvelling and contemplating the sun, couldn’t understand and pervade its meaning and did not worship its Creator, but stumbled and worshipped it instead and divinized it [...] Is there a more foolish deed that this, for being unable to know the Creator from the creatures, to stumble on them and not raise the sight of your mind to He who brought them into being?” (St. John Chrysostom 1982, 81-2). And again: „What a great madness and lack of wisdom is to bound to the beauty of creatures, to stop and stumble on them and not raise your eyes to their Creator?” (St. John Chrysostom 1928, 85). The pagan gentiles considered the sun as the source of heat and universal life. In order to repel this conception, Saint John invokes the account of the six days of creation that clearly states that vegetations appeared before the sun was created (St. John Chrysostom 1982, 81). However, the sun was worshipped by many other pagan gentiles. In his strenuous effort to protect Israel from this kind of idolatrous practice, Moses proclaimed: „And lest thou lift up thine eyes unto heaven, and when thou seest the sun, and the moon, and the stars, *even* all the host of heaven, shouldest be driven to worship them, and serve them, which the LORD thy God hath divided unto all nations under the whole heaven” (Dt 4:19). And the words of Saint Clement of Alexandria resonate with those of Moses: “Some were deceived by the sight of the firmament; trusting only their sight and following the path of stars, they marvelled the stars and deified them” (St. Clement of Alexandria 1982, 86).

The prophetic proclamation creates a relation between idolatrous worship and adultery. Religious decadence is closely followed by moral depravation, and this is expressed with serenity (Chirilă 1999, 76): „Hear the word of the LORD, ye children of Israel: for the LORD hath a controversy with the inhabitants of the land, because *there is* no truth, nor mercy, nor knowledge of God in the land. By swearing, and lying, and killing, and stealing, and committing adultery, they break out, and blood toucheth blood. Therefore shall the land mourn, and every one that dwelleth therein shall languish, with the beasts of the field, and with the fowls of heaven; yea, the fishes of the sea also shall be taken away” (Hos 4:1-3). The prophet emphasizes the nonsense of the idolatrous cult that estranged Jews from the faith of their ancestors: “My people ask counsel at their stocks, and their staff declareth unto them: for the spirit of whoredoms hath caused *them* to err, and they have gone a whoring from under their God.” (Hos 4:12). The idolatrous worship does not quence the spiritual thirst but feeds the pleasures of flesh, not being redemptive at all (Chirilă 1999, 75): „Because Ephraim hath made many altars to sin, altars shall be unto him to sin. They sacrifice flesh *for* the sacrifices of mine offerings, and eat *it*; *but* the LORD accepteth them not; now will he remember their iniquity, and visit their sins: they shall return to Egypt.” (Hos 8:11.13). It seems that, in the idolatrous worship, there were actual orgies. The vine and stum were indispensable, stirring the passions of man (Chirilă 1999, 149) (Am 2:7-8; 6:6). At times, the idolatrous cult is associated with certain magical practices (Is 2,6; 8,19). The idolatrous cult gradually became a fundamental characteristic of the people. This reality is revealed by the multitude of names derived from the names of idols (Kohler and Blau, *Worship, Idol*).

I referred to this brief review of the idolatrous practices to point out the idolatrous phenomenon in its real amplitude and to demonstrate that the rejection of image among the people of Israel was fully justifiable for it endangered the monotheistic faith of Israel. The prohibition of images was also due to the fact that nature could not be the object of a sacred image because creature was estranged by its Creator through sin. In such a context, image was only capable of depicting a false reality. In the context of image prohibition, where only few symbolic decorations with a high level of stilization/abstractization were allowed in cult, the word became the only and the main element with revelational power among the people of Israel. However, the severe restrictions of the mozaic law against images will be then limited to idolatrous representations, thus opening the perspective of prefigurative images.

Nowadays, we live in an era dominated by image, one might say, of invasive images. If we refer to posters, television, computer images, each one of them imperceptibly surround us from all sides. When it does not show provocative or sensual images, mass-media points out the so called idols (we understand the meaning of this word when we refer it to celebrities that earned our admiration?!), models of behaviour, most of which are rebel. We observe here a virtual relation with the Old Testament realities, where idolatrous cults determined imoral manifestations. We do not intend to reject the need for image, for visual, that exists in every person. But it all resumes to how much they seize us and how they are conveyed – these are the major differences. All these images carve the personality of the modern man, that is a consumer par excellence who takes over a consumist behaviour and allows the invasion of image. The modern man is an essence threatened by form (Chirilă, *Gestul suprapus – eseu*); he risks his interior consistency by letting in so much stimulus which have no authentic or positive value. Isn't this rush to imitate mass-media models, a rush after *modern idols*? Pope John II spoke about the man who worships a thousand idols and ends by getting disunited in himself, a slave of objects. And which are these thousand idols if not the contemporary realities of our days, that when deified are perceived as ultimate purposes that have to be reached to no matter what? Moreover, by the exaggerated care of oneself, man tends to make an idol out of himself, as Adam strived to become like God, but without God (Bitiurcă, *Turnul Eurobabel*). And if we accept that the essence of idolatry is deifying the ungodly than we can assert that our times are profoundly idolatrous. Mankind, that is in a desperate chase of freedom, is offered a simulacrum of freedom conveyed by the rich offer of consumism. The contemporary man can only escape this illusion by returning to authentic values, to the elements that transpire a greater and higher reality, that raise the human soul in this spiritual quest. In the context of this study, these elements are bound with a symbolic power, that have a revelational potentiality in the contemporary world.

Image – the sign of sacredness

In the history of Israel, the image did not always fall short under the incidence of Exodus 20,3-4. Some representations/depictions were not only allowed, but requested as sign of eternity inside history. A first example is the commandment Moses received on Mount Sinai to build the Holy Tent and its insides, including the cherubims carved and cast of metal (Ex 25:18; 26:1.31), by the exact model he was revealed by God. On one side, this commandment pointed out the possibility to express spiritual realities through

artistic means. On the other side, this commandment did not refer to cherubims in general, that could easily draw Jews into idolatry as they could worship other creatures too, but it referred to the depiction of cherubims as servants of God, in the place and posture that could emphasize this dignity the best.

This exception from the general commandment showed that it did not have an absolute character, but the visible reality was important for Jews as long as it was a sign of the invisible, spiritual realities. And for the same reason – Saint John of Damascus tells us (PG 94, 1252) – „Solomon, who received the gift of wisdom, represented the heavens, ruling cherubims, lions and bulls to be made”. The fact that these creatures are depicted in the proximity of the temple – where the true worship to God was carried out – was certainly a guarantee against idolatry. At the time the temple of Jerusalem was built according to the model revealed on the mountain, God Himself chose certain people for this. We observe that the Old Testament rescript regards art as a form of wisdom reserved only to those who are chosen and inspired by God (Ex 31:1-6; 35:30-35; 36:4). It does not refer to certain persons that due to their innate gifts, could complete the rules of Moses, but to an act of divine inspiration: „The LORD thy God, he will go over before thee, *and* he will destroy these nations from before thee, and thou shalt possess them: *and* Joshua, he shall go over before thee, as the LORD hath said. Be strong and of a good courage, fear not, nor be afraid of them: for the LORD thy God, he *it is* that doth go with thee; he will not fail thee, nor forsake thee.” (Dt 31:3.6). It is the clear testimony that divine inspiration is the main criteria of liturgical art, the only art allowed among the Jewish people, which the Holy Scripture distinguishes from general art.

An exceptional situation is the copper serpent (Nm 21,4-9) erected by Moses in the desert at the word of God, for the healing of Jews and as a sign of the presence and work of God among His people. Firstly envisioned by Moses as a symbolic image and empowered by the realities it symbolized (Christ raised on Cross), it seemingly degenerates as an object of idolatrous manifestation, later developing a cult dedicated to the serpent erected by Moses in the desert. (Negoița 2003, 101), thus nullifying its symbolic/prefigurative meaning.

The most controversial sign of sacredness in this age is, without doubt, the icon. But what differentiates the icon from other images, and protects it from degenerating in a random idol? Understanding the place of the icon among the endless number of invasive images requires a correct approach of the concept. Saint John of Damascus claims that the icon is not identical to the original and builds on this idea in the third tractate against iconoclasts: „The icon is a resemblance (*ὁμοίωμα*), a model (*παραδειγμα*),

an imprinting (*εκτύπωμα*) of someone, which shows the one who is presented in it (*τό είκονιζόμενον*)” (St. John of Damascus 1937, 113). Therefore, the icon points to a different reality, it does not mean anything by itself, as object unless it facilitate the relation with an invisible reality. Motivating the existence of the icon, John of Damascus emphasizes its revelational character: „Every icon reveals what it is unseen, hidden. For example: because man does not posses knowledge of the unseen, because his spirit is covered by flesh, nor does he know the future, or the distant realities in space, as one who is limited by space and time, the icon was made up for leading one’s conscience, for showing and pointing out the hidden things” (St. John of Damascus 1937, 113).

But the image potentiality to become a sign of the sacred lies in our perception about it. I began with the example of the icon because it is contemporary, and also it easily conveys its revelational dimension. We are also aware of the recent offenses againts it and the attempt to eliminate it from public spaces. But, the surrounding nature itself is a sign of the sacred for me, if I become capable enough to understand reality in this perspective. Saint John Chrysostom says that things themselves cry out the existence of God (St. John Chrysostom, *On fate and providence*, 17). Therefore, not only do they confess, but they *cry out*, the word showing the obviousness of revelation through nature. In other words, all the elements of nature and the whole creation are witnessing their Creator: „Behold, I see the heaven and the earth and they shout out they were created [...]. Also they cry out that they did not create themselves: „We exist because we were created, we did not exist before so that we could not cause ourselves.” (St. Augustine 1985, 244-5). Saint Paul would write in the Epistle to Romans about the possibility of all mankind to understand the nature’s enunciation about God’s power: „For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, *even* his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse.” (Rom 1:20). Saint Dionysius the Areopagite claims the same thing (St. Dionysius the Areopagite 1994, 82).

I referred to this testimonies (we can find a great variety of patristic writings that approach the revelational character of creation) to support the idea that nature has indeed a revelational potentiality. The idea is fundamental: it does mean anything else apart from the fact that the world we live in, even in the present moment, is a sign of the sacred. Apart from us the pantheistic understanding of nature! We are suggesting a perception on nature based on the Holy Fathers’ thinking, who see nature as a permanenet revelation of the living God: “Thus, you have the dight sky and earth, the sea with its marin creatures, the skyes with all the birds that fly throught. All have been brought from nothingness to being at the word of God, [...] Thou, who love knowledge

and wisdom, contemplate all these things; and, *finding in every one of them the wisdom fo God*, do not cease to admire and praise the Creator for His creature.” (St. Basil the Great 1986, 165). In this context, the ecologic issues (eg. Global warming) must not bring us fear, but meditation on our relation with nature and on how can we harness the power nature has to express the sacred in the tumult of our century.

Conclusions

The synthetic exposition points out the essential aspects of the Old Testament image in its ethic and esthetic dimensions, but not restricting the research field to the Old Testament but attempting to create connections with contemporary realities, of which someone stated: „Le XXI siècle sera t-il spirituel ou ne sera pas”. We do not claim that we found the ultimate answer for the topics approached, instead we try to provoke our conscience by interogations to recent issues like the agresivity of image conveyed by mass-media or the need of an objective appraisal of image through a profound understanding of its multiple valences. I began this study with an analysis on the creation rescript in order to clear out the divergences between the Greek and the Hebrew text concerning the meaning of beautiful/goodness in those radically diferent cultures. The correct understanding of these two concepts in their biblical setting are fundamental for any approach to image. I observed some connections between the Jewish understanding and the Greek one expressed by the relation of the Hebrew word $\Gamma\Gamma\Gamma$ and the Greek word $\kappa\alpha\lambda\omicron\varsigma$, the primary meaning of the words is slightly different but the present study features common points and junctures between the two cultural traditions. Using various bibliographic sources: patristic theology, biblical theology, philosophy and esthetics, we reached to the conclusion that one cannot afford to make judgements about the actual threat of idolatry or the symbolic potentiality of contemporary image. Our research is motivated, on a certain level, by the desire to raise awareness and avoid the threats from the society we live in, through the treasure of the Old Testament rescript which, far from being obsolete, might be more important and actual than ever. In this context, the words of H.D. Thoreau have the power to generate a further research on this topic: „The perception of beauty is a moral test!”

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BOOK REVIEWS

1. Teodora-Ilinca Mureșanu, *Shabbat: history and eschatology or assuming an idea*
2. Elena Onețiu, *Seeking for a deeper meaning of biblical theology*

1. SHABBAT: HISTORY AND ESCHATOLOGY OR ASSUMING AN IDEA

Teodora-Ilinca Mureșanu

Paula Bud, *Șabatul: istorie și eshatologie*
(Cluj-Napoca: Limes, 2014), 378 p.

On the volume: *Shabbat: History and Eschatology*, of the young researcher Paula Bud, many have written about, being previously reviewed. I would like to tell another story, behind the text, and to wander through memories from the beginning of this idea/ topic to the completion of the thesis, sprinkled with fragments and ideas from the book.

From the moment the author chose the topic and assumed the idea at a highly academic level, I came across with all the steps of this academic “pursuit”, when there came ideas or new bibliographical references, but also I managed to keep close when the times were not that bright, when she get stuck in her own ideas or in her guides’ ideas, who proved to be a true mentor, or when it was arduous to find the deep meaning of patristic texts.

Throughout the doctoral studies and even after, the main academical concern of the author was 80% the topic of Shabbat, the day of rest. This can be easily seen in the articles and researches published from 2008 to 2017, the year she passed away. In 2018 a volume was issued for all the research papers and articles, *Studies of exegesis and Old Testament biblical theology*, which provides a specialized or simple reader with a clear image of the author’s theological approaches.

From the very beginning I admit that it is quite difficult to write a text about an author you were very close to, and thus I do not claim full objectiveness. Subjectively, but with the eye of a critic I saw the birth and growth from idea to thesis the Shabbat theme. The author assumed it with earnestness. Not a moment, as many PhD students might consider, was these topic obsolete or nonsense for the author. And, I can affirm that three years of focus exclusively on a topic does not add anything but great value to a research as such.

The thesis was written as it has been lived and thought. Perhaps, one could say the author has a school like approach of the topic, but at last this is the real purpose of a PhD thesis: to clarify, make accesible and shed light on a particular theme, content.

Personally, I perceived this thesis as a path of Paula's becoming, a path that perhaps none of us fully understood that time.

In the first part of the thesis the author presents clearly and concisely the starting point of her endeavour. The correct understanding of terms and concepts is fundamental to draw a coherent discourse path. Paula loved the Holy Scripture, she fell in love with the Old Testament text, thus making the research something natural to herself. The lecture of the text, especially of those fragments related to her thesis with focus and great regard are reflected in the chapter of Biblical premises of the thesis. She also regarded the Holy Fathers who meditated and written on rest, on the day of rest. Among them, she was closest to Saint Maxim the Confessor, and this was induced by Father Ioan Chirila, her PhD guide. As it is impossible to write about something related to the Jewish people and innerent to their history without a serious research and lecture, the author wrote a chapter about the Judaic premises of the thesis. In an endeavour to find the starting points, from the Holy Scripture, to Judaic texts, passing through the writings of the Holy Fathers, to the scholar literature, the thesis begins to build itself with the general name of *Methodological preliminaries*.

With the second part, *Shabbat in history*, the path of introspection is laid down. Simple, cronological, the topic becomes more and more part of the author's thinking, and through lecture, close to the reader. The author reveals through the Old Testament fragments a deep dimension of the Shabbat in the life of the chosen people: "If, first of all, it is a day to seek God, a day to quenche the spiritual thirst, it is also a day to manifest filantrophy, a day of God's love manifested in time and history by His creation. Thus, from this point of view, Shabbat is a time when history meets eternity" (p. 140). The text follows its natural path, approaching then the word of New Testament, with our Lord Jesus Christ's attitude towards the Shabbat. Born and raised in the Judaic culture and laws of Moses Jesus Christ knew the importance of this day for Jews, but also knew that Jews did not mind the social, communional and filantropic dimensions of Shabbat. Jesus Christ emphasizes the spiritual aspect of Shabbat, the author leads the reader step by step, towards discovering through the words of Holy Scripture, the true meaning of this day, the eschatological one, and this is illustrative for "the shadows of those to come" from the Epistle to Collosians (Col 2:16-17).

The author carries us throughout the text through a simple and fluid phrase to the third part of the thesis, the most compelling and challenging, *Shabbat and eschatology*. In this approach, the emphasis is on the architecture of time "where Shabbat is a temple,

by its mediation function” (p. 209). Shabbat is a cultic day when man, “through the liturgical act brings eternity in time [...] is a form of expression of rest that is enjoyed by the human being”, who completes his purpose „coming in communion of love with God” (p. 230). Shabbat – blessed day, sacred day, the seventh day, icon of the eternal contemplation, sign of cosmic liturgy, are just some of the names and meanings through which the author brings us closer to understanding this day/ concept/ image of eternity.

The last part of the thesis, *Experience of eternity in time: the cult* is dedicated to the common roots of Judaic and Christian liturgic cult. Sunday, the day of Lord in the Christian cult, is not a replacement for the day of Shabbat, but a completion of the latter. Here the author insists on the fact that “the eschatological dimension of our existence that is foreshadowed by the seventh day is not, however, a mere reality of the future Christians, because the eternal life has already began in and through Christ Who Ressed, to Whom we are provided access through the liturgical experience” (p. 346).

The work *Shabbat: history and eschatology* is the result of unrelentless work, not at all facile, but obviously the result of team work. It is not the work of Paula Bud, but also the work of Fr. Prof. Ioan Chirila, who aimed to surpass obstacles and limits, who knew and had someone to ask much from, and did so. I strongly believe, without any exaggeration, that their collaboration is a paradigm for all the fellow PhD students. And since it is not a classical review, but more of a sharing of someone who was there for Paula, throughout all these moments, since we met, I deem right to say here that both at admission to PhD studies and their completion were supported and helped by fasting and prayers. I would not have shared this thing unless I was supported to show an authentic approach to PhD studies in Theology. I believe that today, more than ever, we need models, and avoiding false and cheap “hagiographies”, from certain points of view, Paula was and is a model.

For Paula, this thesis was a journey of knowledge, getting close to the Holy Scriptures, to God, to herself, and surely it was not just a research, but an assumption of the words she read and then wrote herself. Perhaps it is not meaningless that she wrote about rest, about eternity, about the unved day because now, I like to believe, she understands from where she is much better the Rest of/ in God, the True Shabbat.

2. SEEKING FOR A DEEPER MEANING OF BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

Elena Onețiu

Paula Bud, *Studii de exegeză și teologie biblică vechi-testamentară*, ed. Ioan Chirilă, Teodora Mureșanu, Stelian Pașca-Tușa (Cluj-Napoca: Școala Ardeleană, 2018), 469 p.

The volume *Studies of exegesis and biblical theology of the Old Testament* appears at the commemoration of two years from the passing to eternity of its author, Paula Bud. She was a lecturer at the Faculty of Orthodox Theology of Cluj-Napoca, at Babeș-Bolyai University. Occasioned by this memorial day, of the one who was kept in the memory of the colleagues and students as a person of “great self-sacrifice” and “proverbial humility” (p. 10), her close collaborators (Fr. Prof. Ioan Chirilă, Teodora-Ilinca Mureșanu and Stelian Pașca-Tușa), brought her “a sign of gratefulness” (p. 7) bringing together in one volume the most important part of her research activity through which Paula Bud brought a significant contribution to the biblical theology of the Old Testament.

The book is printed at Școala Ardealul, a publishing house well known in the academic society of Cluj-Napoca, at not only. Paula Bud collaborated with Fr. Ioan Chirilă, Stelian Pașca-Tușa and with this publishing house on other volume (*The Old Testament in the writings of the Romanian scholars. Bibliographic guide*, 2015), which is a important landmark for Romanian Bible researchers. The volume is consistent, counting 469 pages that are structured in three parts, as follows: the dissertation paper; a collection of studies and articles Old Testament related; a few theological essays from the period of college and masteral studies. The volume is preceded by a testimonial from Fr. Ioan Chirilă and a preface written by Fr. Vasile Stanciu, professors that try to emphasize the main qualities of Paula Bud, whose eyes where “shining with the beautiful light of fraternal relations” (p. 9), a light that generated “an atmosphere of unselfish colegiality, out of any pride or infatuation” (p. 10). Then, we propose a short review of the volume’s content, emphasizing the ideas and passages that I deemed essential in the economy of the book, stressing the dissertation thesis, because it was the first work edited and printed. The first part of the volume comprises, as I previously

mentioned, Paula Bud's dissertation thesis, entitled "Knowledge and recognition of God in nature. A perspective of the Old Testament". The thesis written on the Old Testament discipline, under the guidance of Fr. Ioan Chirila, was written in French, regarding the principles and standards of the Masteral program "Theology and culture". The subject of the thesis is very actual and relevant, its approach being justified by the contemporary context in which the man, often, perceives himself as the master of nature, forgetting on one side the responsibility God entrusted him for nature, and on the other side, acting as a commander of nature. The thesis is remarkable by the fluence of ideas and themes, starting from the contemplation of nature that leads to knowledge, further presenting the idolatrous perspective on nature, then approaching the subject of the miraculous intervention of God in nature by reviewing the main tipologies identified in the Holy Scripture, of persons/ attitudes that can arise as a result of natural knowledge of God effort, ending with the urge to return to the innate nature of knowledge.

The dissertation thesis commences, thus, with a chapter regarding the "contemplation in knowledge" (p. 17) in which, through a careful weaving of patristic and biblical texts with the contemporary theological and exegetical researches, the author emphasizes the in which nature fulfills a work of obedience and submission, being at the same time "life giving as it enables creature with a power similar to that of giving birth" (p. 19), at the same time gloryfing the Creator through respecting the nature's inner laws. The doxology that creation brings to the Creator is destined to human contemplation who, by seizing the beauties of nature and the perfect order in world, can gain knowledge of the attributed of God and those who are incomprehensible or unknown will generate in he who is wise attitudes of doxology and gratitude for the infinite glory and grandeur of God. The author concludes: "limitation is the attribute of created essences, while God is infinite par excellence" (p. 40), a phrase that enables us to seize the clarity and precision of expression, that can offer closure even to a unspecialized readers.

The author draws attention to the fact that man, in his contemplative endeavor, must always embrace a humble approach in order not to fall in the trap of idolatry and come to consider nature as the ultimate reality and grant it with the glory and submission proper just to God. However, Paula Bud proves to be a theologian of faith who, immediately after presenting various idolatrous practices of the people of Israel, emphasizes the providential intervention of God, Who, even though was abandoned by His people, does not cease to manifest love to His people and sends them prophets who

contribute decisively to the redemption of Israel, rooting their prophetic proclamations in cosmological arguments and teachings of God.

In the following part of the dissertation, we are led towards an understanding of God's intervention in nature, through acts of providence. The thesis does mention the points of view opposed to God's providence in the created world, such as: Pantheism, materialism or deism which are then repelled with biblical and patristic arguments chosen with great ability, which leaves us the impression that the author had an impressive knowledge of the two sources. In the second part of this chapter, one can observe the author's ability and boldness to point out, in an original fashion, a subject that has often raised various issues, namely how one should perceive the acts of providence in natural phenomena. The author proposes an approach as such: any intervention of God in nature reveals the innate, natural manifestation of God's reign over the created world. Since the text presents clearly the correct approach to such events, I will cite the following phrase: "the divine act, either manifested in the world through its reign according to laws, or manifested through special interventions [...] is altogether natural, innate [...] God is always present in history but, in certain crucial circumstances, He shows Himself with a higher intensity, in this case, His intervention is equated to a miracle" (p .70).

Lastly, we are introduced to the main typologies of attitudes/states that human persons have towards divine revelations, namely: repentance and admission of sinful self; the prophetic proclamation revealed to fellows; the wisdom through which man pervades superior truths to those of natural knowledge and conveys his fellows support in faith earned by contemplation.

The second part of the volume is comprised of 20 researches and articles published since 2008 (the first year of PhD program), as well as other 4 researches which have not been yet published. Considering the fact that the vast majority of the articles have already been published (their republishing aims to gather them in a single volume in order to facilitate their access), we will not focus on their content. We will only state the fact that from the 24 researches/articles, 9 are related to the theme of Jewish Shabbat, which are a major contribution to Romanian biblical literature on this topic through important points of view in the Christian- Jewish religious dialogue. We also emphasize the scientific character of the articles and researches that meet a high academic standard, aligned to the research method used by prestigious universities.

The last part of the volume is comprised of several theological essays that confirm the author's urge to research since the very first years of college, essays that proved to

be mature and dense in approach. Fundamentally, the theological essays are focused on iconographic topics, echoing the artistic preoccupations of Paula.

The volume *Studies of exegesis and Old Testament biblical theology*, written by Paula Bud, creates us the image of a young researcher that tries to cover various topics of Old Testament theology. Through the way she integrates and analyzes the sources texts, the author proves good knowledge both of biblical languages (Hebrew and Greek), and modern languages (French and English), that she easily uses. Moreover, the text features personal opinions, pertinent analysis, the approach of various topics, some rather sensible, resulting, after summing up and integrating all the elements, a coherent work and material, that is interesting for both biblical scholars and researchers as well as for anyone who seeks for a deeper meaning of reality.

JEWISH TRADITION

Bogdan Negrea, *Rabbi Jacob Neusner și dialogul interreligios*

Onița Burdeț, *Legământul lui Avraam și ritualul răscumpărării*

RABINUL JACOB NEUSNER ȘI DIALOGUL INTERRELIGIOS

Bogdan NEGREA

- **Numele:** Jacob Neusner
- **Locul activității:** USA
- **Timpul vieții:** 1993-2016

Există oameni care se înțeleg pe sine ca fiind impozanți prin scrierile lor. Totodată, există oameni care prin activitatea lor științifică pot să coordoneze direcțiile unei societăți, uitându-și propriile direcții. Peste toți aceștia, există oameni ce știu să-și valorifice existența prin dedicarea ei spre folosul întregii lumi; ascultând, înțelegând, scriind, interpretând, descriind, explicând și dialogând. Astfel de oameni, precum rabinul Jacob Neusner, împământeniți fiind în fundamente morale, pot (re)crea o interdependență culturală, religioasă și/ sau socială între oameni și idei sau, cel mai important, între oameni și oameni.

Schiță biografică

Rabinul Jacob Neusner este un istoric al religiilor de origine americană. S-a născut în 28 iulie 1932 în Hartford, capitala statului Connecticut al Statelor Unite ale Americii. În 1953 a absolvit studiile la Universitatea Harvard ca, mai apoi, să obțină o diplomă de masterat din partea Seminarului Teologic Evreiesc, școală pilot a mișcării evreiești conservatoare și un doctorat în religie de la Universitatea Columbia, ambele realizări fiind obținute la New York.

O bună perioadă de timp a fost petrecută de către Neusner la Universitate Brown din Providence unde, a ocupat poziția de profesor până în anul 1989. Ultimul deceniu al secolului XX și l-a petrecut, cu precădere, la Universitatea South Florida din Tampa, urmând ca mai apoi să plece la Colegiul Bard unde, a activat până în 2014. Calitățile sale profesionale s-au evidențiat prin propriul crez în utilitatea a ceea ce predă.

În anii '60, religia nu era considerată ca fiind un necesar, ne reprezentând interes în sistemul de învățământ american. De asemenea, acolo unde se vorbea despre religie la nivel academic, studiile erau orientate spre teologia protestantă manifestată prin studii biblice, nefiind luate în considerare, prin utilitatea lor, studiile iudaice. Neusner aduce în atenția lumii academice un concept inedit. El este inițiatorul conceptului de

studiu documentar al iudaismului, concept prin care este pus în valoare, într-un mod particular, fiecare document al canonului rabinic prin însuși scopul său.

Neusner a surprins prin numeroasele sale publicații. Un număr de peste 900 de cărți îi stau sub păstorire, unora fiindu-le autor, altora editor, iar toate acestea sunt recunoscute pe plan internațional ca fiind de importanță majoră, fie și numai pentru apartenența lor ideatică la rabinul Jacob Neusner.

Jacob Neusner și-a sfârșit activitatea sa pământească în anul 2016, în data de 8 octombrie, lăsând în urmă un ecou valoric de nedefinit.

Activitate teologică. Întreita perspectivă

În ceea ce privește activitatea sa teologică, Neusner a ales să fie un reprezentativ inițiator și apărător al teologiei iudaice. De altfel, a fost numit, în titlul unui volum dedicat post-mortem de către Aaron Hughes, ca fiind „un iconoclast al iudaismului american.” Activitatea sa s-a centrat cu precădere pe introducerea teologiei iudaice în conceptele teologice americane. Acest fapt l-a realizat în deosebi prin traducere canonului rabinic (*Mișna*, *Tosefta*, *Talmudul palestinian*, *Talmudul Babilonian*) în limba engleză. Gândirea rabinului Neusner se surprinde a fi foarte bine sistematizată în aplicarea învățaturii iudaice. Fondul referențial necesar trebuia să fie actual, lucru concretizat prin traduceri, ca mai apoi să se poată oferi deschiderea spre învățătura iudaică, culminându-se cu accederea spre ipotetic și comunal.

Ca notă distinctivă, Neusner este cel ce deschide orizonturile iudaismului spre un dialog inter-religios axat pe verticalitate, respect și toleranță reciprocă. Conform Enciclopediei iudaice, Neuner și-a manifestat impozanța teologică și influența în trei mari direcții.

Despre *prima direcție* am amintit fragmentar, anterior. Ea se identifică prin introducerea și relaționarea dintre iudaism și studiul religiilor. Această direcție formată își are argumentarea în necesarul teologiei de a cuprinde o arie cât mai vastă de referințe. Neusner a înțeles nevoia de discernere, de transdisciplinaritate, de transcendență și fluiditate a religiei și a substructurilor acesteia. Iudaismul se vede, în acest context, prin istoricitatea sa și prin adaosul criticii sale în descrierea fazei epectatice de descoperire a omului în raport cu Dumnezeu, ca fiind o ramură necesară în studiul religiilor. Acest necesar al studierii iudaismului, Neusner, l-a împământenit prin crearea a două căi.

Prima cale este reprezentată de aducerea înaintea unei agende de carieră prin care se adresează întrebări critice la adresa studiului iudaic. Cu toate că această metodă a

părut a fi revoluționară și plină de succes, studiul iudaismului și al religilor în speță s-a văzut a fi îngreunat, deoarece iudaismul nu este o religie care să răspundă la un istoric de întrebări standard. Acesta este și motivul pentru care Neusner a adus înainte ineditul, prin crearea sistemului de studiu documentar al iudaismului de care aminteam anterior. Personalitățile sau evenimentele nu sunt, în viziunea lui Neusner, mai emblematice decât textul în sine, motiv pentru care istoria iudaismului antic se vede a avea o reverberație pleanară prin termeni, nu prin particularități. Particularitatea se deprinde la nivel de studiu canonic-rabinic, fiecare document având o realitate mistică, discretă, proprie. În acest sens, lucrarea sa *Iudaismul: Dovada Mișnei*, tradusă în ebraică și italiană, este reprezentativă. Totodată, acest tip de abordare este cel ce surprinde și particularitățile înțelegerii iudaismului. Lucrările menite să susțină această abordare au făcut ca, prin modul de prezentare sistematică a iudaismului, Neusner, să evidențieze profunzimea iudaismului. Astfel s-au surprins câteva principii cheie în paginile Pentateuhului, precum: conceptul de merit și puritate pe care și prin care iudaismul le lucrează, respectiv viază.

Cea de-a doua cale este caracteristică lui Neusner datorită activității sale de traducător. Munca lui Neusner este în acest sens inedită, fiind inegalabilă datorită prinfunzimii efortului depus. Neusner, nu doar că a tradus întregul canon rabinic, ci a lucrat și la analizarea și explicarea practică a acestuia.

Din acest punct de vedere, putem considera că munca rabinului Jacob Neusner a fost vitală spre integrare iudaismului în mediul religios – academic american. Aaron Huges spune în acest sens, cu referință clară asupra activității de dezvoltare a studiilor teologice din America manifestată de către Neusner că, „el (Neusner) a creat, în mare parte, de unul singur, câmpul studiilor evreiești din această țară.”

Cea de-a doua direcție s-a evidențiat prin crearea conexiunilor (podurilor) de și între intelect și înțelegere. În acest sens, cu un acces teminologic modern, putem spune despre Neusner că a fost un purtător de cuvânt al ecumenismului. Această a doua direcție s-a manifestat, opus gândirii mediului în care Neusner se afla, prin crearea unor oportunități de dialogare inter-religioasă. Dincolo de munca sisifică de aducere a materialului iudaic spre înțelegerea lui în gândirea americană, Neusner a creat și punți exterioare iudaismului spre a se putea realiza percepția corectă a acestuia în mentalul celorlalte religii. Neusner a favorizat, material, existența unor conferințe și colaborări ce au atras în dialog diferite religii în jurul diferitelor teme cu sorginte comună. În acest sens, activitatea publicistică a lui Neusner nu a rămas nemarcată, cărți precum:

Un rabin vorbește cu Iisus; Biblia și noi: Un preot și un rabin citesc Scriptura împreună, fiind doar câteva reverberații reale ale activității într-un spațiu religios pluricreștin a lui Neusner.

Pentru a înțelege deschiderea rabinului Jacob Neusner spre religiile lumii, trebuie să avem în vedere activitatea sa cu uz didactic, motiv pentru care, spre o bună dialogare cu islamismul, Neusner a conceput manualul *Religiile lumii în America*: o introducere, făcând prin aceasta o descriere primară a diferențelor de dezvoltare ale religiilor în spațiul american. Despre interacțiunea iudaismului cu alte religii în plan conversațional, William Scot Green de la Universitatea din Miami, student și colaborator al lui Neusner, spune: „El a adus iudaismul rabinic în conversație cu alte religii și a făcut chiar iudaismul un subiect principal în studiul religiei din universitatea americană.”

Ca și o reală reminciță a învățaturii sale despre dialogul teologic, în Rabinul Jacob Neusner sau despre inițiativa dialogică a unui iudeu reformat american, Paula Bud a surprins exemplar câteva nuanțe „necesare bunei-desfășurări a unui dialog autentic”, acestea fiind: echivoca tratare a aceleași probleme de către ambele tabere; respectarea integrității celeilalte/celorlalte tabere din partea unei tabere; necesarul respectului unei tabere față de o alta. Pe de altă parte, studiul Paulei Bud surprinde și câteva contraindicații ale dialogării care, în fond, se refuză dacă o tabară afirmă aceasta: că în realitate, creștinismul nu există; că, dacă creștinismul există, nu prezintă niciun interes pentru iudaism (pentru Torah); istorii nefondate și lipsite de cuviință despre Iisus.

A treia și ultima direcție formată de către Neusner este cea a dezvoltării carierei altora. Acest lucru pare să fie un ecou al copilăriei sale. La rândul său, Neusner, își manifestă spiritul paternal asemeni tatălui său care, redactor fiind la Registrul Evreiesc, i-a publicat într-o ediție, fiului său Jacob, de doar 13 ani, primul articol. Posibilitatea financiară de a întreține viitoare valori, ce se prefigurau printre studenții săi temători, nu a rămas pentru Neusner doar o posibilitate. A stimulat cercetările altora prin burse, a îngrijit și a oferit referințe în numeroase lucrări științifice și a încurajat, prin diversele abordări, studiul religiei în America.

În altă ordine de idei, această a treia direcție îl surprinde pe rabinul Jacob Neusner ca fiind, nu doar un teoretician, ci și un filantrop-academic, dacă îl putem numi așa. Și în această direcție și-a manifestat practica învățaturii pe care a adus-o în spațiul American, fiind un iconoclast al iudaismului în America prin întreita apartenență la ceea ce punea înaintea mediului academic american. Îl vedem, așadar pe Neusner, ca fiind un purtător, învățător și viu exemplu a tot ceea ce susținea.

Recunoaștere internațională

Personalitatea și gândirea acestui rabin, crescut în tradiția liberală a reformei evreiești, au atras atenții multiple din partea întregii lumi. Papa Benedict al XVI-lea a fost impresionat de deschiderea oferită iudaismului de către rabinul Jacob Neusner. S-a afirmat despre acesta că era „rabinul favorit al papei”.

În spațiul românesc, așa cum se poate deduce din referințele anterioare, rabinul Jacob Neusner este prezentat cu un atent spirit biografic și teologic de către Paula Bud (cadrul didactic universitar al Facultății de Teologie Ortodoxă din Cluj-Napoca) în articolul dedicat inițiativei dialogice a lui Neusner. În paginile acestui articol este descris dinamismul lui Neusner și învățăturile pe care le surprinde în scrierea sa: Un rabin de vorbă cu Iisus. Disputa ideatică și dialogală, precum și atitudinea intra și inter religie sunt doar două din direcțiile trasate de către Paula în descrierea profilului comunional spre care pleda un iudeu reformat american, pe numele său, Jacob Neusner.

Întreaga mărturie oferită de către rabinul Jacob Neusner este o descriere a absolutului manifestat prin comunicare, dialogare și comuniune. Cu greutate se evidențiază entități ale studiului unei religii care să-și manifeste considerentele într-un mod exterior propriei religii, dar ad-intra și ad-extra concomitent. Rabinul Jacob Neusner nu doar că a oferit iudaismului o nuanță a maleabilului și inter-relaționarului, dar a făcut, prin munca-i inegalabilă, o reală punte de comunicare reversibilă între iudaism și celelalte religii.

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LEGĂMÂNTUL LUI AVRAAM ȘI RITUALUL RĂSCUMPĂRĂRII

Onița BURDEȚ

Continuăm prezentarea tradițiilor iudaice privitoare la familie consemnând principalele repere privitoare la legământul avraamic și la ritualul circumciziei. La fel ca în cazul numerelor precedente principala sursă utilizată este opera lui Menachem Hacoen, *Cartea vieții omului*, tradusă din limba ebraică de Rodica Amel și editată în București la Hasefer în anul 2005.

Evreul – fiul legământului

- deși tăierea împrejur era o practică întâlnită și la alte popoare din vechime, aceasta a primit o conotație religioasă doar la evrei;
- pentru evreu circumcizia este o obligație impusă de Lege prin care își manifestă apartenența la seminția lui Avraam;
- circumcizia este prima porunca asumată de Avraam în urma încheierii legământului cu Dumnezeu;
- înlăturarea prepuțului nu era suficientă în sine, ci avea însemnătate numai dacă era săvârșită cu intenția conservării vechiului legământ încheiat de Dumnezeu cu Avraam;
- înscrierea semnului de legământ în trupul evreului, prin tăierea prepuțului, este un act de bază din complexul de fundamente care are ca scop diferențierea evreului de celelalte neamuri, nu numai prin credință și prin fapte, ci și prin trupul lui;
- circumcizia este prescripția care se situează mai presus de toate celelalte porunci din Tora;
- cel care se naștea dintr-o mamă evreică era considerat evreu, indiferent de etnia tatălui;
- această calitate și apartenență la poporul ales era pierdută în cazul în care copilul nu era circumscris;
- fiind un semn care distinge pe evreu de celelalte popoare, cel ce nu se supunea tăierii împrejur nu putea fi socotit membru al Legământului.

Behor (primul născut al mamei)

- porunca răscumpărării fiului se aplica băiatului pe care mama îl avea la prima naștere;
- primul născut din mamă ce era fiică de Cohen sau Levi, chiar dacă soțul nu făcea parte din seminția sacerdotală, nu trebuia răscumpărat;
- dacă s-au născut gemeni și nu se știa care dintre ei a fost primul, erau răscumpărați amândoi, dar cu un preț unic;
- dacă s-au născut gemeni, băiat și fată, și nu se știa care dintre ei a fost primul, fiul nu era răscumpărat;
- dacă o evreică se căsătorește cu un neevreu, primul ei născut trebuia răscumpărat;
- dacă mama s-a convertit la iudaism în timp ce era însărcinată, primul ei născut era răscumpărat;
- dacă un cohen se căsătorește cu o femeie divorțată, copilul întâi născut era răscumpărat, chiar dacă tatăl era cohen.

Pregătirea ritualului circumciziunii

- nu se făceau invitații speciale pentru acest ritual, ci se aducea la cunoștință comunității data la care avea loc evenimentul;
- se alcătuiă *minian*-ul, cvorumul de cel puțin zece bărbați care asigura buna reputație a ritualului ce avea să fie împlinit;
- pe lângă *moel* și *sandac*, rolurile de onoare erau deținute de companion (cel care duce copilul în sala unde va avea loc ritualul) și de purtător (cel care poartă copilul în diverse momente ale circumciderii);
- dintre obiectele necesare ritualului de răscumpărare amintim: jilțul lui Eliahu (scaunul unde era așezat copilul înainte de a i se face tăierea împrejur), *talit*-ul (un șal care era așezat pe umerii tatălui și *moel*-ului), vinul, lumânările și masa rituală;
- se alegea numele pe care copilul îl va purta de abia după ce ritualul circumciziunii era în tootalitate împlinit.

Ritualul răscumpărării fiului

- tatăl invita un cohen (în a opta zi de la naștere) pentru răscumpărarea fiului său;
- chiar dacă copilul era doar de opt zile, în momentul în care intră în legământ el era pus sub semnul recunoașterii acestui lucru;

- dacă băiatul se năștea în Șabat, el era circumscris în următoarea săptămână în aceeași zi fiindcă ritualul nu suferea amânare;
- singura excepție care permitea amânarea circumciderii era starea precară de sănătate a copilului, confirmată de medic; însă odată vindecat acesta era circumcis numaidecât, dar nu în zi de șabat și nici în zi de sărbătoare;
- la masa festivă de răscumpărare trebuiau să participe cel puțin un cvorum de 10 persoane de sex masculin;
- întâiul născut era îmbrăcat frumos și îmbodobit cu bijuterii din aur și argint în cinstea acestei sărbători;
- ritualul răscumpărării era împlinit de abia după spălarea mâinilor, frângerea pâinii și binecuvântarea acestora;
- cohenul care stătea la masă primea copilul de la părintele său și îndeplinea ritualul după anumite prescripții ce erau enumerate în cărțile de rugăciuni;
- rabinii considerau că suferința pe care o îndura cel circumscris făcea parte din îndelungatul preces de dobândire a desăvârșirii și era prima lecție pe care omul o învață în calea sa spre mântuire;
- după acest ceremonial, toată lumea se reunea la masa festivă, iar la sfârșitul ospățului se rostea binecuvântarea de după masă;
- în cazul evreilor sefarzi, ritualul răscumpărării se împlinea înainte de masa festivă și debuta în clipa în care mama aducea copilul înaintea cohenului și răspunde la întrebarea: Acesta este întâiul tău născut?

Cazuri speciale și cazuri periculoase

- copilul care murea înainte de a i se face circumciziunea, era circumscris înainte de îngropare, fără binecuvântare, pe o piatră, și cu această ocazie i se pune nume, ca Dumnezeu să se îndure de el și ca acesta să fie prezent în ceasul învierii morților;
- copilului care s-a născut fără prepuț trebuie să i se picure sânge, conform ritualului convenit de brit-mila (este vorba de o acțiune simbolică care trebuie îndeplinită);
- un copil bastard era circumscris în conformitate cu toate detaliile care sunt cuprinse în *halaha* cu referire la circumcizie;
- tatăl care a avut doi băieți care muriseră în urma circumciziunii, nu mai era obligat să îl circumscrie pe cel de-al treilea fiu, chiar dacă acesta ar fi fost de la altă mamă.

Ritualul darurilor pentru fiică

- la evrei există obiceiul organizării unei mese rituale cu ocazia nașterii unei fiice. acestui ospăț i se spune: darul fetei;
- scopul acestei mese, la care erau invitați prietenii și rudeniile, era acela de a aduce laudă și mulțumire lui Dumnezeu, precum și de a pune nume fiicei;
- datorită efortului și riscului pe care mama îl suportă în timpul sarcinii i s-a conferit acesteia dreptul de a rosti binecuvântarea *ha-gomel* (Binefăcătorul);
- la fel ca în cazul băiatului răscumpărat, la această masă trebuie să participe cel puțin un cvorum de 10 bărbați;
- datorită importanței pe care numele îl avea la evrei, unii au obișnuit ca numele fetei proaspăt născute să fie anunțat de tată, atunci când acesta era chemat să citească din Tora, în prima zi de Șabat după nașterea fiicei sale.

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KOL NEȚER

Pr. Cătălin Varga, *Cana Galileii și vinul cel nou al Împărăție*

Stelian Pașca-Tușa, *Archeology. Cronological Landmarks (1947-1989)*

CANA GALILEII ȘI VINUL CEL NOU AL ÎMPĂRĂȚIEI

Pr. Cătălin VARGA

- **Denumire:** gr. *Kana*.; ebr. *Qānâ*, lit. „stufăriș”
- **Localizare:** Kefr Kenna, la 6 km N-E de Nazaret
- **Istoric:** sat galilean menționat doar în Evanghelia după Ioan. Cana a fost locul primei minuni săvârșită de Iisus (In 2:1.11), și este de asemenea, locul unde cu un singur cuvânt, Domnul Hristos a vindecat pe fiul unui nobil din Capernaum (In 4:46.50). Este și satul natal al lui Natanael (In 21:2).

Cana Galileii în Sfânta Scriptură și în descoperirile arheologice

În primul rând, localizarea acestui sat ridică o problemă biblică și arheologică. Unii l-au identificat cu Kefr Kenna, la doar 6 km N-E de Nazaret, pe drumul către Tiberiada. Alții cu Ain Qana situat la o distanță de 1,5 km de Nazaret, în vecinătatea satului Reina (Thomsen 1907, 77). Mulți cercetători moderni în schimb, preferă să identifice Cana cu Khirbet Qana – o localitate ruinată situată la 14 km N de Nazaret, pe care arabii locali, continuă să o numească Cana Galileii (Douglas 1995, 191-2). Poartă această denumire geografică (a Galileii), pentru a fi distinsă de Cana lui Așer din teritoriul Tirului (Ios 19:28). Numele de „Cana” înseamnă în ebraică „trestie, stufăriș”, iar denumirea de Kafr Kanna se pare că înseamnă „satul acoperișului”, neavând conexiune lingvistică cu numele qana. Cana este menționată în „Talmudul Ierusalimitean” (*Ter.* 46b), ca fiind un sat al unui tâlhar de secol III, pe numele său, Eli din Cana. Nu există nici un dubiu, dacă facem referire la literatura creștină timpurie (în special Eusebiu și Ieronim), că satul Cana a fost identificat cu Kafr Kanna deoarece este foarte apropiat de Nazaret. Vizitatorii locației Khirbet Qana din secolul al XIX-lea, au găsit urmele unui sat, pe zona unui pînten al muntelui Cana (Jebel Qana – în modernitate este numit Muntele Shekhanya), la Nordul văii Beth Netofa. Studiile arheologice ale zonei de interes, înregistrate în anul 1982, au descoperit rămășițele unei clădiri imense în partea de N-V a satului. Morminte săpate în piatră, de asemenea se pot găsi în partea de S-E a satului, în panta mai joasă a muntelui. Partea superioară a muntelui, era plină de peșteri și cisterne cu apă, aprovizionând satul, deși nu s-au mai găsit rămășițele unui eventual apeduct. Un lung zid coboară pe lungimea vestică a sitului (Freedman 1992, 1241-2). Acest sat, este definit de arheologi, ca fiind unul agricol, cu prese de măslină și struguri

(motivul vinului în Ioan 2 nu apare întâmplător), peșteri pentru stocarea cerealelor și cisterne cu apă și vin (Seiglie 2002, 18).

Cercetătorul J.C. Laney, afirmă în teza sa de doctorat că Kefr Kenna situat la 6 km N-E de Nazaret, este cel mai probabil satul unde Iisus a participat la nuntă. Se pare că aici, o veche Biserică Ortodoxă Greacă, a prezervat vasele de piatră ale vinului mesianic din narațiune. O Biserică Franciscană din inima satului, susține că deține un vechi ulcior al minunii. Un argument geografic este existența unui drum de țară, intersectat cu un drum folosit de armata romană în deplasările ei, începând din Nazaret, trecând prin Cana, Magdala, Capernaum, Betsaida și alte locații de pe marginea lacului. Drumul roman pornea din Ptolemais, prin Sefhoris (Hoffmeier 2009, 140), vechea capitală grecească a Galileii superioare, și de aici prin Cana spre Tiberiada (capitala romană a Galileii inferioare). Orașul aflat la 5 km N-V de Nazaret, era o capitală regională importantă, mai ales după ce generalul Pompei a obținut pentru Roma, dominația asupra Palestinei. În anul 37 î.Hr. Irod cel Mare, a cucerit orașul, însă după moarte lui, romanii l-au distrus. Antipa, fiul lui Irod, preia controlul asupra acestei zone, și începe reconstruirea orașului, muncă depusă între anii 4 î.Hr. – 39 d.Hr. ceea ce corespunde cu toată durata vieții lui Iisus. Observăm din descoperirile arheologice, că în apropierea Nazaretului (locul natal al Mântuitorului), un mare oraș cult și plin de viață înflorea. Dreptul Iosif fiind tâmplar (Mc 6:3), iar Iisus lucrând alături de el, se prea poate să fi fost angajați la proiectul reconstruirii Sefhoris-ului. Nazaret, Sefhoris și probabil Cana, fiind toate învecinate, au fost locuri bine cunoscute de Iisus Hristos. Astfel că, Cana biblică sau Kefr Kenna de astăzi, era o stație între Sefhoris și Tiberiada. Se prea poate ca Ioan 2:12 și 4:49 să indice stația la care se oprește Iisus din călătoria Sa de la Nazaret spre Capernaum, adică Kefr Kenna de astăzi. Deși, nici un text biblic nu indică cu certitudine că Iisus călătorea dinspre Nazaret spre Capernaum prin Cana; putem totuși specula faptul că Iisus se stabilește pentru o vreme în Capernaum după expulzarea suferită în Nazaret (Mt 4:13-16; Lc 4:16-31), eveniment urmat imediat de cea de-a doua minune a Sa în Cana (In 4:46-54), petrecută undeva în primăvara anului 31 d. Hr. (Laney 1977, 92-4).

Cana Galileii în interpretare anagogică

Minunea preschimbării apei în vin se petrece în cadrul unei nunți, aceasta reprezentând pentru iudei, taina Legământului dintre Israel și Dumnezeu (Is 62:4; Ir 2:1-2; 31:33). Iisus Cel venit la nunta din Cana, este de fapt Mirele așteptat de întreg

poporul (Scrima 2008, 33-4). Tradiția creștină inspirându-se din teologia Vechiului Testament, va oferi nunții un sens mistic, nunta Mirelui Hristos va defini unirea desăvârșită a Sa cu Biserica la Parusie (Mihoc 2003, 63).

În cea de-a șaptea zi de după ce Iisus îi alege pe ucenici, se petrece această minune a prefacerii apei în vin. În viziunea evanghelistului Ioan, ziua a șaptea-a coincide cu revelarea slavei lui Hristos în fața ucenicilor Săi în localitatea Cana din Galileea. Din acest moment se constituie prima comunitate mesianică adunată în jurul Învățătorului ei, cu scopul de a-L urma întru totul (Tofană 2003, 206).

Pentru ca minunea să poată fi săvârșită, Mântuitorul insistă ca vasele de piatră, așezate acolo pentru curățirea iudeilor (2:6), să fie umplute până sus, ținând cu strictețe la porunca dată (Marcu 1961, 36). Aceasta pentru că umplerea până sus reprezintă abundența harului epocii mesianice inaugurată de Iisus Hristos și revărsată prin Evanghelie (Sf. Maxim Mărturisitorul 1994, 149-150). Transformarea apei în vin se petrece în întreaga istorie zbuciumată a Bisericii, căci Iisus transformă voințele ușuratice ale oamenilor care se pocăiesc, în modele de statornicie curgătoare, precum a procedat la Cana (Sf. Ioan Gură de Aur 2016, 215).

Vinul avea o dimensiune cultică la evrei, făcea parte din categoria jertfelor nesângeroase (*mincha*), fiind daruri închinat lui Yahwe. Dacă pâinea era o jertfă de sine stătătoare, vinul era folosit în cultul sacrificial doar ca adaos (de precizat faptul că preoții când îndeplineau anumite funcții în cult, nu aveau voie să consume vin sau alte băuturi alcoolice, pentru ca să poată discerne între ceea ce este sfânt și necurat – Lv 10:9-11), întrucât cultivarea viței de vie, și prepararea vinului cultic, presupuneau un efort în plus, o jertfă a omului (Nm 28:5-7; 29:9), lucru ce va fi boldat în paginile Noului Testament, unde alături de pâine, vinul va fi celălalt element euharistic al jertfei supreme, realizată nesângeroasă la Cina cea de Taină (Gălușcă 2015, 89-90). Aici Iisus va afirma că nu va mai bea vin împreună cu ucenicii Săi decât în Împărăția lui Dumnezeu (Lc 22:18), căci aceasta este funcția duhovnicească a vinului, nu să-i îmbete pe oameni (Ef 5:18a), ci să fie consumat în cadrul Împărăției, care poate fi pregustată la Sfânta Liturghie; așadar rodul viței de vie, așteaptă să fie desăvârșit în taina vinului euharistic. Această așteptare eshatologică a transfigurării vinului, a fost înțeleasă de unii părinți, ca fiind un eveniment postpascal, deoarece după Înviere, Domnul aflându-Se în mijlocul ucenicilor, a mâncat și a băut cu dânșii (Sf. Teofilact al Bulgariei 2007, 303), conform mărturisirii sfântului apostol Petru (Fapte 10:41).

Minunea preschimbării apei în vin, la nunta din Cana, se produce și pe fondul

deplinei ascultări a omului de porunca oarecum irațională a lui Iisus Mântuitorul, iar mirarea nunului ce survine pe fondul descoperirii calității net superioare a vinului mesianic, vine să întărească faptul că nici nu puteau fi altfel cele săvârșite tainic de Hristos Domnul (Sf. Chiril al Alexandriei 2000, 111). Iar cel care judecă duhovnicește, pricepe că vasele de piatră sunt simțurile noastre duhovnicești, umplute prin prezența lui Dumnezeu de această minunată băutură, ca bând din acest vin euharistic, să nu greșim în fapte și nici să ne poticnim în dogme, ci să ne păstrăm curați atunci când cu credință consumăm vinul Mirelui Hristos (Sf. Teofilact al Bulgariei 1998, 62-64).

Episcopul Ilarie de Poitiers (sec. IV d. Hr. – Franța), spunea că vinul obținut din apă nu a survenit de pe urma unui oarecare amestec, ci a fost o recreație a materiei, o transformare a ei, căci vinul cel bun, nu se poate obține din elementul mai slab al apei printr-o enigmatică contopire (Elowsky 2006, 97). Prin urmare, vechea entitate piere ca să facă loc noii entități (In 12:24). Întocmai și materia aceasta stricăcioasă va fi transfigurată la Parusie (2 Pt 3:13), pentru ca toate structurile creației să fie reconectate la Arhiereul suprem, precum era odinioară înainte de căderea omului, ca astfel să se desăvârșească lumea sub icoana unei Biserici în extensie, relaționând apodictic cu Creatorul, prin intermediul logoiilor, adică prin raționalitatea divină intrinsecă a creației (Sf. Maxim Mărturisitorul 2000, 16-7). Omul participând astfel cu întreaga ființă, la consumarea deplină a vinului liturgic și cosmic din Împărăția lui Dumnezeu. În această concepție, vinul este însăși viața Domnului Iisus, substanță hieratică ce parcurge timpul, de la început până în eternitate, fiind omniprezent în fiecare etapă a vieții umane, pentru a-i dărui puterea necesară parcurgerii cu demnitate a urcușului duhovnicesc către Împărăția lui Dumnezeu (Prăvălici 2015, 109). Pentru a-i oferi odihna (șabatul) eshatologică necesară, ca prin lucrarea virtuților, atingând nepătimirea, să intre în ziua cea de-a opta (Bud 2014, 281), în pământul curăției simbolizat de Țara făgăduinței.

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ARHEOLOGIE BIBLICĂ – REPERE CRONOLOGICE (1947-1989)

Stelian PAȘCA-TUȘA

Această expunere cronologică punctează principalele descoperiri arheologice care au fost scoase la lumină în site-urile din Israel și în teritoriile învecinate. Principalul punct de referință pentru această perioadă este constituit de manuscrisele ce au fost păstrate timp de mai bine de 2000 de ani în peșterile de la Marea Moartă. Aceste documente sunt de o importanță sporită atât pentru Vechiul Testament, cât și pentru Noul Testament. Menționăm pe lângă aceste manuscrise o decoperire cu o importanță aparte pentru creștini: imensa peștera de pe Valea Iordanului.

Arheologia biblică între 1947-1989

- 1947 Niște beduini descoperă din întâmplare în câteva grote de lângă Marea Moartă manuscrisele cunoscute în literatura de specialitate sub numele de scrierile de la Qumran. John Cook conduce șantierul arheologic din Smirna.
- 1948 O parte din manuscrisele de la Qumran au început să fie cercetate și fotografiate sistematic de către John C. Trevor și William Brownlee în cadrul Școlii Americane de Cercetare Orientală. R. Braidwood conduce un șantier arheologic în Qalat Jarmo (Irac) unde s-au descoperit câteva sate preistorice. Antropologiiștii consideră că aceste descoperiri sunt relevante pentru istoria descrisă în primele patru capitole ale Facerii. Au început escavațiile la Iope sub conducerea lui J. Kaplan pentru Muzeul Jaffa.
- 1949 Athanasius Yeshua Samuel își mută manuscrisele qumranite care erau în proprietatea sa dintr-o bancă din Beirut într-una din New York. În urma confruntărilor armate dintre israeliți și arabi, Qumranul rămâne tot în proprietatea celor din urmă. Ronald de Vaux a început săpăturile la Essene, un site de la Qumran unde a descoperit noi manuscrise.
- 1950 Sub conducerea lui Ludwig Kass au început lucrările de investigare a cimitirului Sf. Petru din Roma care aveau să dureze șapte ani. Escavațiile din Didon (în Moab) au fost conduse de William Merton pentru Școala Americană din Ierusalim. J.L. Kelso și J.B. Pritchard au început lucrările la situl roman din Ierihon.

- 1951 G.L. Harding și R. de Vaux intră în posesia primelor documente Bar Kochba. Beduinii din tribul Tacâmireh descopera noi manuscrise la Qumran. R. de Vaux a descoperit la site-ul din Khirbet (sudul Qumran) un apeduct și un sistem de piscine și cisterne de colectare a apei.
- 1952 Un manuscris din peșterile de la Marea Moartă, analizat de Manchester College of Technology, NW England a descris locația comorilor deținute de comunitatea qumranită. La Qumran s-au descoperit încă cinci peșteri noi în care se aflau sute de manuscrise. Toate aceste fragmente au fost duse la École Biblique în Estul Ierusalimului pentru a fi stocate și studate. Nelson Glueck a început lucrările la Negev. Roman Ghirshman care și-a desfășurat activitatea la Tepe Sialk și Susa a început să escaveze ziguratul elamit de la Chaga-Zambil, în Iran.
- 1953 Joseph P. Free, sponsorizat de Wheaton College, Illinois începe o serie de escavări la Dothan.
- 1954 Kurt Bittel a încheiat cercetările sale asupra Imperiului Hittit la Boghazköy. Munca sa care se află la periferia arheologiei biblice a durat 12 ani. Zakarie Goneiun a condus cercetările în Saqqara, André Godard at Persepolis, Richard Haines la Nippur (unde a descoperit templu Inanna), Philip Hammond la Petra și Kamal el Mallakh la Gizeh.
- 1955 Emil Kunze realizează descoperiri relevante pentru activitatea și opera Sf. Ap. Pavel în Olympia. În cadrul săpăturilor de la Qumran au mai fost găsite încă patru peșteri care conțineau fragmente de manuscrise. S. Yeivin își continuă munca sa asiduă în Cezareea unde un italian, Antonio Frova, descoperă întru teatru o piatră pe care este incriptionat numele lui Ponțiu Pilat. Y. Yadin începe escavațiile la Hazor care durează până în 1958. Ulterior acestea vor fi reluate în 1968.
- 1956 În timp ce G. E. Wright conducea lucrările în șantierul de la Shechem, J. B. Pritchard își începea munca în Gibeon, iar M. Avi-Yohan cerceta pentru Universitatea Ebraică ruinele unei sinagoci din Cezareea. R. de Vaux, Harding și Reed după escavațiile din interiorul și împrejurimea Qumranului au ajuns ce au început în 1952 au ajuns la concluzia că aceste manuscrise au aparținut comunității eseniene.
- 1957 B. Ravani care lucra în Tiberias a descoperit băile unei stațiuni balneare antice.
- 1958 Universitățile Harvard și Cornell în cooperare cu Școala Americană de Cercetări Orientale au început lucrările de escavare la Sardis.

- 1959 UNESCO a promovat un proiect internațional de ridicare a templelor de la Abu Simbel pentru a le feri de inundații. Saul Winberg conduce cercetările arheologice în Corint.
- 1960 Israel Exploration Society a făcut o investigație minuțioasă asupra peșterilor de la Marea Moartă. Y. Yadin a făcut o descoperire impresionantă în En Gedy. Acesta a localizat o tabără romană care a condus apoi la descoperirea relicvelor Bar Kochba.
- 1961 Paul Lapp, directorul al Școlii Americane de Cercetări Orientale (1961-1964), a început escavările în șantierul de la Araq el-Emir. Doi ani mai târziu avea să găsească într-un peșteră situată la nord de Ierihon un papirus din Samaria (722 î. d. Hr.).
- 1962 H. F. Squarciapino a fost angajat la șantierul din Ostia unde a descoperit cea ruinele celei mai vechi sinagogi (sec. 4 d. Hr.) din vestul Europei. Până în 1968, Kathleen Kenyon a continuat să lucreze la situl Ierihonului pentru Școala Britanică de Arheologie din Ierusalim.
- 1963 Y. Yadin a organizat și a finalizat două sezoane mai târziu vastele lucrările arheologice la fortăreața Masada. Lapp investighează 300 de morminte la Dharhr Mirzbaneh, 11 km distanță de Betel.
- 1964 În cadrul lucrărilor de reescavație a site-ului de la Tell el-Ful, Lapp a descoperit un plug de fier în Ghibeia lui Saul. În timpul lucrărilor de la Arad care au durat până în 1967, Aharoni a dezgropat un sanctuar israelit care a fost datat în perioada regalității lui Solomon. J. Callaway și K. Schoonover au condus lucrările arheologice de la Et Tell. O poartă masivă de oraș a fost descoperită la Gezer.
- 1965 Sub conducerea lui A. Negrev s-au desfășurat ample lucrări arheologice la Beerșeba. Lucrările au durat trei sezoane. Lapp descoperă la Bab edh-Dhra un cimitir foarte extins care cuprindea 12000 de morminte din Epoca Bronzului Mijlociu.
- 1967 În urma războiului de șase zile, statul Israel a intrat în posesia Vechiului Ierusalim și a întregii Peninsule Sinai. Y. Yadin a descoperit într-o peșteră de la Marea Moartă un manuscris de o lungime impresionantă (8,6 m).
- 1968 B. Mazar a început excavațiile la zidul sudic al Muntelui Templului. În timpul operațiunilor arheologice de la Giv at ha Mivtar (NE de Ierusalim) s-a descoperit în osuarul de la Yehohanan Ha-Gaqol osemintele unui bărbat crucificat.
- 1969 În cadrul lucrărilor din Vechiul Ierusalim, N. Avigad a descoperit ruinele unei magnifice locuințe eleniste. Sudul Hebronului, escavat de Kochavi a fost propus ca locație pentru localitatea Debir.

- 1970 În același site arheologic s-au descoperit urnele unui oraș preexilic, o reședință irodiană, o baie publică și ruinele unei basilici bizantine. Arheologii au descoperit la Gezer într-o peșteră din perioada Bronzului Târziu un sarcofag de ceramică asemănător cu cele descoperite în Cipru și Creta.
- 1971 La Tell el-Hesi s-au dezgropat 50 de morminte din perioada persană.
- 1972 În cadrul lucrărilor începute cu un an în urmă la Tell Qasile s-a descoperit un templu filistean, singurul care a supraviețuit în Filisteia. Rămășițele a doi stâlpi din lemn confirmă autenticitatea descrierii templului filistean din Jud. 16, 26.
- 1973 În site-ul de la Dan a fost descoperit un altar israelit datat de specialiști în perioada imediat următoare separării celor două regate.
- 1974 la Tell Hesban arheologii au descoperit rămășițele unui copil. După o examinare atentă specialiștii au ajuns la concluzia că în acestea datează din sec. 13 î. d. Hr..
- 1975 La Ierusalim au fost dezgropate câteva morminte datate în Epoca Fierului lângă Poarta Damascului.
- 1976 În cadrul escavațiilor de la Tell Lachish s-a ajuns la concluzia că nivelul III al site-ului a fost distrus de Sanherib în 701 î. d. Hr., iar nivelul II de Nabucadnețar, un secol mai târziu.
- 1977 Ruinele descoperite la Tell el-Hesi care sunt datate în Epoca timpurie a Bronzului indică dezvoltarea agriculturii în această zonă.
- 1978 O inscripție egipteană a fost recuperată într-un oraș canaanit. Aceasta face trimitere la perioadă de cucerire a Palestinei descrisă în Exod.
- 1979 Președintele egiptean Anwar Sadat a anunțat descoperirea orașului Iyon în apropiere de Cairo care a fost oarecând casă pentru Iosif, Moise și Plato.
- 1980 În sudul Ierusalimului s-a descoperit un mormânt despre care unii au crezut că ar aparține familiei lui Iisus.
- 1981 Israel Finkelstein conduce lucrările de escavare la situl Shiloh care vor dura până în anul 1984.
- 1981-1982 Trude Dothab și Seymour Gitin desfășoară ample lucrări la site-ul din Ekron. Acestea au fost continuate și în anii 1984-1988, 1990, 1992-1996.
- 1982 UNESCO a inclus în lista prioritară de conservare zidurile vechi ale Ierusalimului
- 1985-1987 săpăturile arheologice de la Kh. ed-Dawwara și Dhahr Mirzbaneh sunt coordonate de Israel Finkelstein.

- 1989-1996 Amihai Mazar conduce lucrările arheologice de la Beit-Shean.

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KOL YHWH

Pr. Ioan Chirilă,
Reflexii filologice – 2,1-3 (ziua a doua)

REFLECȚII FILOLOGICE – FACEREA 2:1-3 (ZIUA A ȘAPTEA)

Pr. Ioan Chirilă

Am considerat oportun să abordez în acest volum dedicat Paulei Bud, ziua a șaptea a creație. Preocupările ei științifice, dar și slujirea neobosită a aproapelui au avut ca finalitate această zi de odihnă pe care Dumnezeu a binecuvântat-o și a sfințit-o și pentru sufletul ei.

Facerea 2:1

וַיְכַלּוּ הַשָּׁמַיִם וְהָאָרֶץ וְכָל-צְבָאָם

„Și așa au fost săvârșite cerurile și pământul, când le-a făcut cu toată oștirea lor.”

Verbul **כָּלָה** (*kala^h*) – „a săvârși” în formă de perfect profetic, la imperfect pual, pers. a III-a, sg. (**כָּלוּ** – *kulu*) poate fi perceput și într-o dimensiune eshatologic profetică, fiindcă toate au fost create în forma lor teleologică – ca *telos* revelat și în realizare. Altfel spus, în toate este înscris *telosul* particular și universal. O notă aparte ne oferă Septanta cu forma „*συν-*” care induce ideea săvârșirii împreună. Am optat pentru ideea utilizării verbului „a săvârși”, deoarece este foarte aproape de conceptul „a desăvârși” (Mt 5:17) folosit de Mântuitorul pentru a indica ținta spre care trebuie să tindem.

צְבָא (*țava*) – „oștirea/ oștirile lor” (subst., sg. const.) implică o nuanță ce ține în chip evident de anghelologie și de antropologie; acest termen se referă la ființele care populează atât cerul, cât și pământul. Textul grecesc, dar și cel latin fac aici trimitere la podoaba și frumusețea (*ὁ κόσμος / ornatus*) lucrurilor create de Dumnezeu. Folosind versiunea grecească, Părinții au identificat în termenul „*κόσμος*” soarele, luna, stelele, ierburile felurite, belșugul roadelor, fructele pomilor și „toate cele create între cer și pământ” (Sf. Ioan Gură de Aur 1987, 123-124).

Facerea 2:2

וַיְכַל אֱלֹהִים בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי מְלַאכְתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר אַעֲשֶׂה וַיִּשְׁבַּת
בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי מִכָּל-מְלַאכְתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר אַעֲשֶׂה

„Și a săvârșit Dumnezeu în ziua a șaptea muncile/ lucrările pe care le-a făcut și S-a odihnit în ziua a șaptea de toate lucrările/ muncile pe care le-a făcut.”

יָוֵם הַשְּׁבִיעִי (*iom hașevi*) – această expresie va fi tradusă întotdeauna prin „ziua a șaptea”; vom folosi termenul *șabat* doar acolo unde apare שַׁבָּת care înseamnă „a se așeza, a se odihni”. Versiunea ebraică consfințește ideea că referatul creației este cuprins în intervalul dintre „zi una” și „ziua a șaptea”. Cu alte cuvinte, acțiunea creatoare săvârșită de Dumnezeu s-a încheiat în ziua a șaptea. Am făcut această precizare pentru simplul motiv că Septanta folosește în prima parte a versetului „ziua a șasea”, nu ziua „a șaptea”. Dacă privim lucrurile în ansamblu vom înțelege că diferența dintre cele două originale nu implică o contradicție, pentru că Dumnezeu le săvârșise pe toate până în cea de-a șaptea zi.

מְלַאכְתּוֹ (*melaketo*) – îl înțeleg atât în forma de *muncile*, gândindu-mă la primul poem didactic despre agricultură a lui Hesiod (*Munci și zile*), cât și cu sensul de *lucrările* Sale, pentru că El, Domnul este Dumnezeul cel viu care creează, proniază, mântuiește și le sfințește pe toate.

Odihna lui Dumnezeu nu poate fi înțeleasă decât în raport cu lucrările menționate în primul capitol. Această odihnă este de fapt o încetare a actului creator. Dumnezeu „nu s-a odihnit de la toate lucrurile, ci numai de la cele ce a început să le facă. De la lucrurile fără de început și necreate și proprii Lui prin fire, nu s-a odihnit.” (Calist Catafygiotul 2017, 397). Raportând odihna Domnului la om, Părinții consideră că sufletele vor ajunge să dobândească această stare dumnezeiască de abia după ce se vom mântui, concret la învierea de obște și la judecata cea din urmă. Odihna înțelegătoare despre care vorbește Calist ne duce cu gândul la dimensiunea revelatorie deosebită a Șabatului, cel în care vedem că vedem Binele.

Pentru Părinții filocalici ziua a șaptea reprezintă etapa de desăvârșire în care misticul contemplă rațiunile lumii, mintea acestuia aflându-se în odihnă. În acest stadiu duhovnicesc omul realizează mortificarea tuturor lucrărilor naturale din el și se pregătește pentru ziua a opta când mintea îi va fi răpită „în extazul iubirii” pentru contemplarea nesfârșită a lui Dumnezeu: „Cel ce s-a făcut părtaș de odihna zilei a șaptea a lui Dumnezeu [...] se va împărtăși și de lucrarea Lui îndumnezeitoare [...] din ziua a opta, adică de învierea cea tainică...” (Sf. Maxim Mărturisitorul 1947, 190).

Odihna este înțeleasă și ca o stare de comuniune a Rațiunii cu rațiunile, în acea întoarcere doxologică a tuturor în Creator prin rațiunea responsabilă și responsorială a creației care este omul. „Mintea – zice același Calist – se bucură întorcându-se de la

Dumnezeu la sine însuși și cunoscându-se pe sine ca chip al prototipului (modelului) și pe toate cele dintre Dumnezeu și om, așa cum sunt. Căci atunci nu numai că străbate la cele mai presus de minte și de înțelegere, într-un chip corespunzător și în uimire minunată, ci se umple și de bucurie duhovnicească, veselindu-se în tăcere de razele arătătoare de Dumnezeu și de lucrările îndumnezeitoare ce vin peste ea, și unindu-se cu Unitatea cea mai presus de fire a dumnezeirii, în Hristos Iisus.” (Calist Catafygiotul 2017, 393)

Facerea 2:3

וַיְבָרֶךְ אֱלֹהִים אֶת-יוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי וַיְקַדֵּשׁ אֹתוֹ כִּי בּוֹ שָׁבַת
מִכָּל-מְלַאכְתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר-בְּרָא אֱלֹהִים לַעֲשׂוֹת

„Și a binecuvântat Dumnezeu această zi a șaptea și a sfințit-o pe ea ca să devină șabat/ odihnă de toate muncile/ lucrările prin care a creat Dumnezeu cele făcute.”

Verbele **בָּרַךְ** (*barak*) – „a binecuvânta” și **קָדַשׁ** (*qadaš*) „a sfinți” care merg împreună, circumscriu șabatul unui cadru liturgic și mistic, liturgic prin *barak*, mistic prin *cadaș*, adică un cadru al mărturisirii *kalokagathiei* și cel al consolidării acesteia prin Taine.

În numărul viitor vom avea în vedere cea de-a doua zi a creație și vom reflecta la expresia „a fost seară și-a fost dimineață” care precedă finalul fiecărei zile a creației.

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FRAGMENT
DE
MĂRTURISIRE

Stelian Pașca-Tusa,
Paula și-a pus sufletul pentru prietenii ei!
Fr. Ioan Chirilă
O zi minunată, ziua de-săvârșirii Tuturor

PAULA ȘI-A PUS SUFLETUL PENTRU PRIETENII EI!

Stelian Pașca-Tușa

„Mai mare dragoste decât aceasta nimeni nu are, ca sufletul lui să și-l pună pentru prietenii săi.” (In 15,13)

De mă va întreba cineva vreodată câți prieteni de încredere am, i-aș răspunde bucuros că am vreo câțiva prieteni de nădejde... în mâinile cărora nu mi-ar fi teamă să-mi pun sufletul. Dacă ar insista și mi-ar cere să le spun și numele, știi bine că aș începe cu tine...! Să nu-mi spui că asta te miră, acum când nu mai vezi în ghicitură... Și tare mă tem că nu sunt singurul care poate spune aceasta... Ce m-aș fi făcut eu fără tine, Parascheva? Tu care în chip tainic porți numele Sfintei Vineri! Slavă Domnului că mi te-a adus în cale, că mi-a deschis ochii și m-a îndemnat să caut să-ți fiu asemenea. Nădăjduiesc că Domnul n-o să se supere că te-am avut pe tine ca reper, dar prea mult strălucea în tine chipul Său! Acum când chipul tău este așezat pe șevalet, asemeni unei icoane frumoase, cum a zis avă, și când cuvintele tale au ajuns apoftegme în Patericul mirenilor știu sigur că nu am greșit...

De la Paula am învățat (printre multe multe multe altele) să fiu bun și înțelegător cu oamenii. În câteva situații m-am aprins de mânie împotriva unora ce mi-au greșit și eram tentat să fiu răzbunător..., dar Paula mi-a zis că ar fi frumos să încerc să le ofer și mai multă bunătate. Ce frumos! Am fost surprins de mărinimia ei! Și să nu credeți că ea nu făcea la fel. Îmi amintesc că odată a ajutat pe persoană care o vorbise de rău, și nu a ezitat să-i ofere sprijin chiar și atunci când respectivul avea aceiași atitudine față de ea. Eu nu aș fi putut să fac asta, ar fi fost prea mult! Și vorba unui părinte... am fost gelos pe generozitatea ei! Paula a continuat să mă surprindă cu gesturi similare și să mă tragă discret de mânecă, fără să-mi dea de înțeles că intenționează să mă corijeze în vreun fel. Cu câtă finețe a încercat să mă îndrepte!

Paula a fost o călăuză pentru mine! Lipsit de experiență și cam plin de sine am întâmpinat multe greutăți la începutul școlii doctorale. Dacă n-ar fi fost ea deschizătoare de drumuri, aș fi avut multă bătaie de cap! Ce m-aș fi făcut, dacă nu mi-ar fi călăuzit pașii? Treptat, bunătatea și disponibilitatea Paulei de a ajuta, m-a determinat să ies din zona de confort, să șterg câteva tușe de misoginism din sufletul meu și să mă las purtat de îndemnurile și sfaturile ei. Și, nu după multă vreme, au început să apară rezultate bune, bucurii și semne că între noi se poate lega o prietenie adevărată. Nu mi-a fost

ușor să ies din zona de confort! Dimpotrivă, mi-a fost foarte greu să încep să fac lucruri care nu aveau aproape nimic de-a face teologia. Am mizat însă pe intențiile ei bune, pe instinctul ei și pe entuziasmul de a face cât mai mult bine. Uneori îmi era rușine să o refuz. Alteori, chiar dacă eram convins că voi refuza și voi renunța la planurile ei extrem de îndrăznețe, NU-ul pornit din minte, se transforma într-un DA destul de ferm când ajungea pe limbă. Cum se întâmpla asta, habar nu aveam! Dar un lucru e cert: nu îmi pare rău că am ascultat-o! Am ajuns să cred și eu ceea un prieten de-al nostru afirma într-un interviu despre ea, că alături de Paula nu ai impresia că lucrul pe care ți-l propui să-l faci nu se poate face. Cu Paula am înțeles că orice lucru bun încuviințat de Dumnezeu se poate face, indiferent cât de dificil ar fi lucru respectiv!

Colaborând tot mai mult cu ea, am ajuns să înțeleg că pe toate le face spre binele prietenilor ei, adică al celor cu care intra contact. Ca să fiu și mai explicit, Paula nu avea decât prieteni. Dacă pentru o persoană cu care avea rar tangență era dispusă să facă mult ca să o ajute, e simplu să ne închipuim ce a făcut și continuă să facă pentru cei din proximitatea ei. Am scris continuă pentru că Paula este vie, șabatizarea sa este activă și ceea ce a sădit în noi continuă să lucreze. Inițial am fost tentat să cred că mutarea ei în sânurile patriarhului va lăsa un mare gol în toate cele începute de ea, însă nu este așa! În chip tainic ea lucrează prin noi, ne scoate din zona de confort și roadele deja se văd.

Paula mi-a dăruit multe și, spre surprindere și bucuria mea, continuă să o facă și acum! Și-a pus sufletul pentru mine și... îi sunt recunoscător. Cel mai frumos dar pe care-l pot face celei care m-a copleșit cu daruri este să merg și să fac și asemenea!

Șabat șalom, Parascheva!

Cu recunoștință și mulțumire,
Stelian

O ZI MINUNATĂ, ZIUA DE-SĂVÂRȘIRII TUTUROR

Pr. Ioan Chirilă

Am primit o carte, de la Paula, de fapt i-o indicasem pe când lucra la teza sa de doctorat, o lucrare a lui Neusner Jacob, *Un rabbin parle avec Jesus*, și am avut bucuria, acum pe când ea a intrat în eternul Șabat, să găsesc o schiță a unei posibile abordări a Șabatului sub impresia „repetării constante a disponibilității rabinului de a intra în dialog cu Dumnezeu întrupat, dialog pe care îl percepe ca cea mai înaltă formă de respect” (Bud, 2018, 395). Și fiind vorba despre Dumnezeu întrupat mi-am amintit rapid de două lucrări, de Sf. Atanasie cel Mare, *Despre întruparea Fiului lui Dumnezeu* (București, 1988) și de lucrarea lui Moshe Idel, *Fiul lui Dumnezeu și mistica evreiască* (Polirrom, 2010). Iar această apropiere a celor două nume o fac doar pentru expresia lui Idel „morfonominal” care se leagă de Templu și de Fața lui Dumnezeu. Iisus a zis „dărâmați acest templu ... și se referea la templul trupului Său” (In 2,19.21), argumentarea Sfântului Atanasie contra evreilor atinge această coordonată. Dar ceea ce vedem în schița sau notele Paulei este credința într-un tărâm al învierii, al viilor, spunea că „îi este greu să înțeleagă caracterul funebru al Șabatului, deoarece el este un timp al rugăciunii, al pomnirii nominale, el are un caracter pedagogic, dar pedagogia este susținută de Cartea vieții, ori dacă dialogul este încă posibil nu este realizat cu morții ci cu cei vii, persoana e vie” (Paula Bud). Și totuși, recunoaște că suntem marcați „de neputința de a depăși moartea” (PB), deși „moartea e o clipă” (PB), e *keros*, iar noi, totuși am zice „mai stai o clipă”. Stai chiar clipa – *pesach* să învățăm să trecem prin această Mare Roșie, mare neagră... mare disperare!

„Doxologia Șabatului este o veselie” (PB), lipsită de orice notă „de absurditate, determinată de înviere” (PB), de faptul cântat de Însuși Dumnezeu în Facere 1,31 când ne-a mărturisit ceea ce a văzut, că facerea mâinilor Lui era bună foarte, era în viere, era un tot de *haiim*-uri, niciuna nu contrasta cu cealaltă, ci toate se întregeau în străluminarea lor doxologică, căci toate se cer după Cruce, toate se cer după Înviere. Cred că am supărat-o de câteva ori, îndeosebi atunci când, eu neștiind scurtimea zilelor, îi ziceam să se mai odihnească, iar ea voia să se facă tuturor toate. N-am îndrăznit să-i cer să meargă la un alt duhovnic, dar în cele din urmă s-a dus, dar la fel a lucrat, la fel s-a jertfit, la fel s-a grăbit să intre sub Crucea celuilalt, căci toate ale sale se cereau după Cruce, de aceea m-am bucurat când am văzut că acceptă ideea exprimată de mine într-un studiu că

avem o constituentă anastasică, și noi și toate! Această conștiință venea din mărturia lui Iov 19,25-28 prin care încerca să ne îndemne, precum Șabat, să depășim moartea. Bucuria Șabatului răsărea din două făclii, din două candelă: din Lege, din parașa Torei, din acel continuum Simha HaTorah; și din haftaraua profetică care îmbia pe toți să guste din pre-Pesach, din această trecere dincolo de moarte în în-viere. Chiar în moarte fiind „omul nu devine individ, ci rămâne persoană” (PB), iar argumentul ales este de factură exegetică, se referă la chemarea lui Lazăr: Vino afară!, dar surorii îi spusese: crezi tu? Ce spune Legea?, de aceea orice minune este un act dialogic. Și mă întorc la un cuvânt ce l-am zis cândva: persoana este caracterizată de dialogicitate, individul, insul de muțenie și încăpățănare.

Cu Crucea Ta ai călcat moartea, cel care se răstignește, devenind tuturor toate, intră degrab în înviere, căci în sine se statornicește binele lăudat de Dumnezeu că era bun foarte, că toate se cereau a se înnoi de la Izvor. Și ea acum stă în „odihna de Șabat a lui Dumnezeu, căci ea este revenirea deplină a tuturor celor făcute la El” (*Filocalia II*, 1947, 47, 138), chiar și a lui Hristos, căci și El șabatizează în mormânt (*Filocalia II*, 1947, 145). A găsit acea minunată zi în care noi îi dăm Lui inima ca să se odihnească și să ne odihnească de toate ale noastre care nu sunt ale sale.

Auzi, ce minunat e cântul Șabatului, e veselie, e veselia Înviatului care încă nu și-a adunat din colbul uliței plinirea ochiului văzător de veșnicie! E doar o mărturie despre o bucurie găsită degrab!

Notă: Paula a dedicat lucrării rabinului un studiu: „Rabinul Jacob Neusner sau despre inițiativa dialogică a unui iudeu reformat american,” în *Studii de exegeză și Teologie biblică vechi-testamentară*, Editat de pr. Ioan Chirilă, Teodora Mureșanu și Stelian Pașca-Tușa (Cluj-Napoca: Școala Ardeleană, 2018), 388-397.