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# DIAKRISIS

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**Volume 2**

*Concepts and Experience of God*

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**CONCEPTS  
AND EXPERIENCE OF GOD**



# Divine Injustice: Violence and Violation as Prophetic Image of God

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## Abstract

While the Judeo-Christian religious tradition promotes an image of God characterized by mercy and compassion, one cannot deny the startling images in scripture of a wrathful God who seemingly condones sexual violence and rape as divinely-sanctioned punishments. This article reviews existing interpretive strategies designed to salvage the image of a merciful and compassionate deity despite depictions of a violent and sexually-violating God in the scriptural texts. These attempts at interpretation, however, are not without their limitations and problems. After surveying and critiquing attempts at interpreting images of divine wrath, this article seeks to reinterpret the texts as a divinely-inspired and implicit critique of the religious tradition itself – one which has enabled and even promoted sexual subjugation, violence, and trauma in the name of God.

**Keywords:** Divine vengeance, sexual violence, trauma, prophetic tradition, scriptural interpretation

**I**MAGES OF GOD HOLD POWERFUL sway over one's faith, framing the tenor of relationship with the divine. An individual's prayer life, a community's understanding and relation to the divine, and especially one's outlook on punishment and redemption hinge upon such images and conceptions of God. While the Judeo-Christian religious tradition espouses a tradition teeming with images of God's compassion and merciful love, it is also replete with contrasting depictions of divine wrath, vengeance, and violence. One troubling trope in particular recurs throughout the prophetic tradition — that of sexual shaming, violence, and even rape as a form of justified or deserved punishment.

Divine decrees of sexual violence provide chilling examples of how the prophetic tradition gives expression to YHWH's wrath. Such images should arrest and disgust any reader, and they prove even more difficult in our contemporary context following revelations of sexual abuse in the Church and society's wider reckoning with sexual predation endemic in a number of institutions. How can one worship a God who not only condones, but seemingly decrees and even participates in rape as a fitting punishment for infidelity? How ought we to grapple with challenging biblical texts in which YHWH appears to advocate sexual violence as an appropriate and deserved punishment?

This article examines possible interpretive strategies to wrestle with the concept of a violent, vengeful God in the Judeo-Christian religious tradition, specifically as manifested in the prophetic tradition. Faced with texts that promote rape as a form of divine justice, I examine both the successes and shortcomings of a number of approaches to these texts. Renouncing or silencing troubling passages, reducing their function to mere metaphor or figurative use, contextualizing the works within a specific historical moment of a community in crisis, or identifying the limitations of the human agent (the prophet) have all proven effective ways of preserving the image of a compassionate and merciful God despite the brutal violence depicted in these passages. Yet each of these approaches fails in certain respects.

Perhaps another method of interpreting instances of sexual violence at the hands of God would prove beneficial. Without denying either the genuine human or divine authorship of the biblical texts, I wager that the answer lies in separating the literal sense of the human author's words from the divinely-designed end of the inspired text. Ultimately, I propose that we can read in these passages a divinely-inspired critique of the religious tradition — instances in which God reveals the limitations of even those acting in his service and offers an implicit critique of certain elements within the tradition itself.

## **Sexual Shaming and Rape as Prophetic Motif**

Before reviewing existing interpretive strategies that wrestle with troubling images of God, it is first necessary to consider the use of sexual violence as a motif within the prophetic tradition. The fiery invective of the prophets promises divine judgment in the form of cataclysmic disaster. Amongst other means of depicting such catastrophe, the texts frequently employ images of sexual shaming and violation as a paradigm for divine punishment. This prophetic trope recurs across a number of texts, not as some mere idiosyncratic quirk of rhetorical style unique to one author. Major prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel all make extensive

use of sexual violence as a manifestation of divine judgment, and minor prophets such as Nahum similarly draw from this alarming yet effective imagery. Consider YHWH's depiction and explanation, through the voice of Jeremiah, of the impending siege and invasion of Jerusalem by the Babylonian army:

And if you say in your heart, "Why have these things come upon me?" it is for the greatness of your iniquity that your skirts are lifted up, and you are violated... This is your lot, the portion I have measured out to you, says the Lord, because you have forgotten me and trusted in lies. I will lift up your skirts over your face, and your shame will be seen. I have seen your abominations, your adulteries and neighings, your shameless prostitutions on the hills of the countryside. Woe to you, O Jerusalem! (Jer. 13:22-27)<sup>1</sup>

God seemingly endorses the stripping and public shaming of an adulterous woman as an appropriate punishment for infidelity. Amy Kalmanofsky notes that the language employed here in describing the "skirts" and one's "shame" being seen publicly "can be understood in these passages as euphemisms for female genitals and suggest that Zion, the personified city of Jerusalem, is stripped and then sexually violated."<sup>2</sup> The "sexually suggestive and violent imagery" describes the conquest of Judah by the Babylonians — God's own instrument of chastisement — as the enemy "undresses and invades Judah."<sup>3</sup> Jeremiah continues with frequent recourse to such depictions of violation and shaming to express judgment and punishment, using similar motifs in his Oracles Against the Nations concerning Edom and Babylon (Jer. 49-51). Indeed, YHWH does not reserve this punishment exclusively to the unfaithful Israel.

While Jeremiah makes frequent and unrelenting use of such violent depictions, they are not a unique characteristic of his own prophetic style. Similar language appears in oracles of judgment against Nineveh and the Assyrians in the prophet Nahum 3:4-6, and much longer, graphic accounts against Israel and Judah in Ezekiel 16 and 23. In each instance, the punishment of shaming and violation is justified by noting the promiscuity, infidelity, and "whoring" of the one deserving punishment:

Because of the countless debaucheries of the prostitute... I am against you, says the Lord of hosts, and will lift up your skirts over your face; and I will let nations look on your nakedness

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all biblical citations come from the NRSV.

<sup>2</sup> Amy Kalmanofsky, "'As She Did, Do to Her!' Jeremiah's OAN as Revenge Fantasies," in *Concerning the Nations: Essays on the Oracles Against the Nations in Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel*, ed. Else K. Holt, Hyun Chul Paul Kim, and Andrew Mein (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 116.

<sup>3</sup> *Idem*.

and kingdoms on your shame. I will throw filth at you and treat you with contempt, and make you a spectacle. (Nah. 3:4-6)

The agency of YHWH in these texts is clearly emphasized as the perpetrator of the violation and shaming. The (male) deity exacts the punishment of rape and shaming against (largely female) victims. Yet it is important to note that prophetic imagery of sexual violence is not exclusively depicted as a male aggressor against a female victim. While the majority of these instances invoke rape as the appropriate punishment against a female subject for “infidelity,” “whoring,” or “lusting after” others (notably Ezek. 16, 23; Jer. 13:22-27), the prophetic tradition also includes graphic instances of sexual violence perpetrated against male subjects (Jer. 49:8-10). In his oracle against Edom, Jeremiah depicts vengeance in the form of sexual violence against a male victim (personified as Esau), with the voice of God raging, “I will bring the calamity of Esau upon him, the time when I punish him...as for me, I have stripped Esau bare, I have uncovered his hiding places, and he is not able to conceal himself. His offspring are destroyed [ravaged]<sup>4</sup>, his kinsfolk and his neighbors” (Jer. 49:8-10). The wrath of God extends not only to the violation of the male Esau, but also of “his kinsfolk and his neighbors” in a retributive punishment whose scope seemingly knows no limits.

Finally, while many of these texts provide for sexual punishments for what are metaphorically depicted as sexual sins — “lusting after” others, or “infidelity” through idolatry and foreign alliances — the punishment can also fit the crime in instances of revenge. Against Babylon, Jeremiah’s YHWH decrees, “take vengeance on her, do to her as she has done!” (Jer. 50:15), and Isaiah describes divine vengeance in uncovering the “nakedness” of Babylon so that “your shame shall be seen” as a consequence of Babylon being too harsh and merciless despite being the very instrument of divine chastisement against Judah (Isa. 47:1-6). Throughout these texts, divine justice appears as a capricious and vindictive endeavor to shame, humiliate, and violate both Israel and her enemies.

## Attempts at Salvaging the Image of God

Faced with graphic depictions of sexual violence at the hands of YHWH, many readers find these texts repugnant and incompatible with their understanding of God. How ought communities of faith to understand

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<sup>4</sup> Leslie Allen translates “destroyed” as “ravaged,” continuing more directly in the trope of sexual violence. Allen observes that the emphatic proclamation by God that “I will bring calamity” assures that behind the invaders “would stand the person of Yahweh, who was to give them access to property and human life.” See Leslie C. Allen, *Jeremiah* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 488-497.

texts in which God seemingly endorses, justifies, and even perpetrates sexual violence? Can we maintain or salvage the image of a compassionate and merciful God?

A number of interpretive strategies have been adopted in grappling with these images, each with its own benefits and limitations. Let us consider several of these approaches: (1) a repudiation or silencing of the text itself; (2) understanding these images as merely a metaphor for war and invasion; (3) situating the composition and reception of the texts within their particular historical context, namely a community in crisis; and (4) highlighting the limitations or misunderstandings of the prophetic agent himself.

### *Silence & Renunciation*

The easiest and most evident way to deal with challenging passages is simply to ignore them, to renounce them as misrepresentations of God or as offensive texts that are incompatible with the community's prior concept of the divine. The individual or the community can simply excise these difficult passages from the canon or discount them as a corrupting influence. This is, in effect, how many religious traditions have addressed these very images of divinely-sanctioned sexual violence. Susanne Scholz notes that, during Talmudic times, the rabbis "understood the grave theological challenges of these passages" and "prohibited the liturgical reading of a text such as Ezekiel 16...they ordered the biblical poetics of rape to remain unread in public settings."<sup>5</sup> The Catholic Church adopts a similar approach and omits most images of sexual violence from liturgical reading and the lectionary, and rarely (if ever) do these passages appear as meditations for retreats or spiritual reading.

Such an approach, however, is not without major problems. From a methodological standpoint it establishes a questionable and dangerous precedent, especially if we consider these texts as the genuinely inspired word of God. As *Dei Verbum* establishes, "since everything asserted by the inspired authors or sacred writers must be held to be asserted by the Holy Spirit, it follows that the books of Scripture must be acknowledged as teaching solidly, faithfully and without error that truth which God wanted put into sacred writings...therefore, all Scripture is divinely inspired...."<sup>6</sup> The task of the interpreter is not to discount select passages of Scripture that might prove challenging, but to discover what is "that truth which God

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<sup>5</sup> Scholz goes on to note that "despite the various efforts to keep these texts out of sight from 'ordinary readers,' they have always been part of the biblical canon." See Susanne Scholz, *Sacred Witness: Rape in the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 205-6.

<sup>6</sup> Paul VI, *Dei Verbum: Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1965), §11.

wanted put into sacred writings.”<sup>7</sup> Excising or denying difficult passages is an abdication of that responsibility. Furthermore, if we take “the content and unity of the whole of Scripture” as an interpretive principle, a tattered and redacted text will severely diminish the ability to interpret authentically.<sup>8</sup>

Not only does this approach do violence to the integrity of the scriptural text as it has been received by the community, it also opens the doors to cherry-picking any passages we may find palatable while avoiding anything that challenges us throughout the entirety of Scripture. Glossing over or silencing these passages may be a well-intentioned endeavor to preserve the image of a merciful God, but we cannot deny that such imagery exists (and pervades) the Scriptural text and the religious tradition itself.

### *Mere Metaphor*

A more subtle way of discounting these passages — one which preserves their position within the text yet which neutralizes their offensive literal meaning — is to reduce them merely to figurative language. Rape and sexual violation serve as effective metaphors for military incursion and conquest, and they provide unmistakable images for the audience of the prophetic words to grasp.

Kathleen M. O’Connor describes rape imagery as “apt language for invasion” to capture the experience of “violence, intrusive and painful physical penetration, traumatic powerlessness and shameful humiliation of women, husbands, brothers, and sons.”<sup>9</sup> The hyperbolic use of rape to convey the sense of futility and trauma experienced by a conquered people certainly provides an attention-grabbing means of conveying one’s message.

Most commentators seem content to treat these passages as a flourish of rhetorical style and a metaphorical means of conveying the experience of warfare. While plausible as an interpretive strategy, it is insufficient. For although the passages can function in a metaphorical, figurative way, they do not do so exclusively. Rape and sexual trauma were — and indeed still are — the literal and brutal reality of warfare. To reduce these passages to a simple metaphor flattens the truly startling nature of the text, and seeks to avoid its challenging and provocative nature.

To remind readers of this point, Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite reads these passages alongside experiences of rape victims and trauma in armed conflict — not simply in the ancient world, but also in more recent military campaigns. She examines harrowing accounts of sexual violence in Vietnam, Kuwait, Nanking, and the Bosnian conflicts during the 20th century, rec-

<sup>7</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>8</sup> *Dei Verbum*, §12.

<sup>9</sup> Kathleen M. O’Connor, *Jeremiah: Pain and Promise* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011), 54-55. As quoted in Kalmanofsky, “‘As She Did, Do to Her!’ Jeremiah’s OAN as Revenge Fantasies,” 117.

ognizing that “rape” does not function simply as figurative language for invasion during warfare. “At some point the term metaphor loses its meaning when it is a literal description of what is taking place,” she observes, recalling the very real, brutal nature of warfare that can be lost when we metaphorize the language of sexual trauma.<sup>10</sup> The prophetic accounts call to mind not only the reality of impending military invasion and conquest, but also the fact that any number of people will suffer horrific atrocities as a result — especially those most vulnerable. The visceral repugnancy of the passages nonetheless gives some voice and recognition to the horrors that the most vulnerable suffered, oftentimes horrors that have been glossed over or silenced without further acknowledgment.

Thus, while we cannot endorse a literal reading of the text that promotes an image of “God as rapist” or that sexual trauma is a divinely-decreed punishment, discounting the passages through silence or neutralizing the text through metaphor pose significant interpretive problems. Beyond the mere problems of interpretation, I would also suggest that such an approach is a grave injustice to the victims who actually did endure the brutal reality of these events. Voice is seldom given to the experience of the victims and the conquered in warfare, let alone preserved for the religious imagination of future generations.<sup>11</sup> To silence or to ignore that lived reality is, as the philosopher Paul Ricoeur warns, effectively to “kill the victims twice.”<sup>12</sup>

### *A Community in Crisis: Meaning Making and Clinging to God*

Another means of wrestling with these difficult texts is to understand them in the light of the context in which they were composed, received, and preserved. Perhaps these texts that depict divine vengeance are not an experience of divine vengeance in the moment, but a subsequent projection or interpretation by a community in crisis. As an attempt to make sense of traumatic events and to preserve meaning amidst chaos and collapse, the community imputes the agency of punishment to God as a means of upholding divine control over their destiny and an affirmation that, ultimately, God’s governance and order still stand.

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<sup>10</sup> Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite, “‘You May Enjoy the Spoil of Your Enemies’: Rape as a Biblical Metaphor for War,” *Semeia* 61 (1993), 71.

<sup>11</sup> “Rarely do we find such an artifact preserved for posterity. Even more rarely does the literary tradition of the defeated come to play a pivotal role in subsequent cultural history.” See Louis Stulman, “Art and Atrocity, and the Book of Jeremiah,” in *Jeremiah Invented: Constructions and Deconstructions of Jeremiah*, ed. Else K. Holt and Carolyn J. Sharp (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 99.

<sup>12</sup> Paul Ricoeur, “The Memory of Suffering,” in *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative, and Imagination*, trans. David Pellauer (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 290.

For a community facing imminent invasion and collapse, ascribing agency to YHWH rather than to mere chance or to the power of foreign gods provides a last-resort source of comfort and assurance:

That God's rape is a "text of terror" is central to its purpose and to its capacity to defend God. For Judean victims, defeat by Babylon means that Judah lost the war to superior deities, to Marduk and his pantheon. It means that Judah's God is ineffectual, effete, and has "been disappeared." But if God is the author of Zion's rape, God is not disappeared, not a defeated lesser being, not diminished, but powerful.<sup>13</sup>

For the victims, the punishment is neither chaotic nor unmerited. By ascribing agency to God and seeing the calamity as divinely-sanctioned (and justifiably merited) punishment, the community is able to preserve some semblance of trust in divine governance, power, and order in an otherwise chaotic and calamitous time. YHWH remains in control as the social and political order crumbles. By ascribing these events to the will of God as deserved punishment for infidelity, a coherent framework of meaning emerges that remains stable amidst the larger experience of chaos. Stulman contends that the inclination "to hold this 'tiny country' responsible for virtually all its troubles, to explain its political misfortunes by way of moral causality, is a rigorous attempt to create symbolic coherence in times of social convulsion."<sup>14</sup> Such an attempt is necessary for the preservation and survival of the community:

For the sake of community survival, the text places war, military occupation, exile, and captivity — traumatic events in ancient as well as modern times — within a framework of meaning. More directly, this literature asserts that the nation's concentration of pain is not beyond the scope of God's concern or governance, nor is it the result of capricious geopolitical or mythic forces.<sup>15</sup>

To that end, the narrative of human sinfulness eliciting divine punishment provides a clear-cut (albeit superficial) explanation for what in reality was a far more complex array of contributing factors to the events that unfolded in the fall of Judah. O'Connor reads in these texts of terror

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<sup>13</sup> Kathleen M. O'Connor, "Reclaiming Jeremiah's Violence," in *Aesthetics of Violence in the Prophets*, ed. Chris Franke and Julia M. O'Brien (New York: T&T Clark, 2010), 46.

<sup>14</sup> Louis Stulman, "The Prose Sermons in the Book of Jeremiah: Duhm's and Mowinckel's Contributions to Contemporary Trauma Readings," in *Bible through the Lens of Trauma*, ed. Elizabeth Boase and Christopher G. Frechette (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature Press, 2016), 135.

<sup>15</sup> Idem.

an attempt at clinging to God and preserving meaning as God's Chosen People:

...What I see in this shocking violent imagery is a provisional effort to make sense of the disaster, to hold onto God, to cling mightily to the Creator in the midst of destruction all around. I see engagement in life-giving, world-altering interpretation. I see in God's violence a potent stammering toward meaning... of making sense of the senseless.<sup>16</sup>

This attempt at making meaning and a coherent narrative through theological interpretation can also provide a therapeutic means of expressing the community's history, offer a cathartic outlet for healing and release, or function as a theological reflection for self-understanding. As trauma literature and a meditation on war itself, the words of the prophets can "show the people the reality of their suffering, as if in a mirror. To see and to name this reality as what they have suffered is the first step toward healing."<sup>17</sup> In short, it is for the good of the community, the preservation of their worldview, and the prospect of recovery that God be identified as the agent of disaster.

Importantly, the use of rape imagery and revenge fantasies against Judah's own enemies serve to bolster this framework of meaning that upholds divine governance and order. When the prophet Nahum rails against the Assyrians and Nineveh, or Isaiah and Jeremiah prophesy divine retribution against the Babylonians, their oracles fit into a theological understanding that God employs agents of divine chastisement, yet if they overreach or go too far, God's justice demands retribution for their transgression. Such an understanding also serves to highlight how God's own (human) instruments can exceed the scope of their mission (a point to which we shall return momentarily when discussing the role of the prophet himself).

With respect to Assyria and Babylon, both are depicted as the rods of divine punishment, the means by which YHWH exercises judgment on the unfaithful Israel and Judah. Yet within this framework of meaning, divine retribution is visited upon both empires for their own excesses and merciless behavior. Richard Clifford traces this to the "Isaian two-stage view" of history, noting that for the prophet Nahum, "in stage 1, Assyria is an instrument of the Lord's chastisement of Israel; in stage 2,

<sup>16</sup> O'Connor, "Reclaiming Jeremiah's Violence," 47.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 46. O'Connor elaborates that, "Trauma and disaster studies suggest a different way to understand. The fact that rape is appalling and unbearable, unspeakable and unacceptable is surely the point! To be victims of invasion *is* appalling, unbearable, unspeakable, and unacceptable, a ripping apart, an intimate destruction of life. This poem of God's violent rape of Zion gives the people back their story and brings to speech the profound terror and harm of Babylonian assaults" (46).

Assyria will undergo punishment for grossly exceeding the divine mandate. Upholding the righteous and chastising the wicked are two sides of the one coin of justice."<sup>18</sup> Christopher Frechette interprets Isaiah's invective against Babylon in a similar manner, where God condemns Babylon for showing no mercy, and "even on the aged you made your yoke exceedingly heavy" (Isa. 47:6). He contends that, "while not disagreeing with traditions that YHWH intended the destruction of Jerusalem in order to punish Israel, Isa. 47 nevertheless condemns the human agents, symbolized by Daughter Babylon, for the manner in which they enacted that destruction...."<sup>19</sup> Congruent with the larger framework of divine governance and order, the vengeance justly exacted upon Babylon will be carried out by YHWH himself, "the acknowledged arbiter of justice and meaning...the violence is imagined not as blind rage but in conjunction with the new interpretation that the violations experienced by the Judeans at the hands of the Babylonians were wrong."<sup>20</sup> For the community that has experienced a collapse of social and political order, trust in a cosmic order and in the ultimate justice of YHWH provides a stable source of meaning, security, and trust.

Attention to the historical context surrounding the original composition, reception, and preservation of these texts is the exegetically responsible and necessary approach to interpretation. Yet again, it is insufficient and has its limitations. Such a move requires that we bracket the divine authorship of the text, however, and view the narrative either as a projection by the people undergoing the cataclysmic events, or a subsequent theological interpretation of historical occurrences. To equate the text with the community's theological reflections on historical events or as a projection onto God places too much emphasis on the historical or psychological aspects of the human author/community. While this approach is useful to understand the historical context of the prophecy and its importance to the community which underwent these events, it fails to address the continued and living value of the text. What does the inspired text have to offer to faith communities today, and how do we make sense of images of divine violence when read in our present context?

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<sup>18</sup> Richard J. Clifford, "Nahum," in *The Paulist Biblical Commentary*, eds. José Enrique Aguilar Chiu, Richard J. Clifford, S.J., Carol J. Dempsey, O.P., Eileen M. Schuller, O.S.U., Thomas D. Stegman, S.J., and Ronald D. Witherup, P.S.S. (Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 2018), 853.

<sup>19</sup> Christopher G. Frechette, "Daughter Babylon Raped and Bereaved (Isaiah 47): Symbolic Violence and Meaning-Making in Recovery from Trauma," in *Bible through the Lens of Trauma*, ed. Elizabeth Boase and Christopher G. Frechette (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature Press, 2016), 80.

<sup>20</sup> Idem.

***Blame the Messenger:  
The Limitations of the Prophet***

One final means of interpreting passages of sexual violence at the hands of God is to construe such passages as a misunderstanding on the part of the prophet himself, a result of the prophet's very human (and very real) limitations. According to this approach, God's message became "lost in translation" and the text reflects more the designs of the prophet than of God.

As noted above with respect to Babylon and Assyria, the human instruments by which YHWH actualizes his plans in history can exceed the scope of their mission — something that the prophetic tradition itself explicitly recognizes (Isa. 47:3-6; Nah. 3; Jer. 50-51).<sup>21</sup> It is not inconceivable then — perhaps even likely — that the prophetic office can also transgress "too far" and outstrip the message of God.

One must keep in mind the limitations of the human agents employed by God, even if the prophet may be called and inspired. Abraham Heschel construes the prophetic office as being more than a mere messenger. Rather, he sees in the prophetic office a share in the feeling of the divine pathos. He notes, "the task of the prophet is to convey the word of God. Yet the word is aglow with the pathos. One cannot understand the word without sensing the pathos...the fundamental experience of the prophet is a fellowship with the feelings of God, a *sympathy with the divine pathos*...."<sup>22</sup> To have a share in the divine pathos and to communicate it is no small feat, one which calls into question the ability of the human mind to conceive of and subsequently to communicate the mind of God.

The prophetic tradition includes its own self-critique on this front, with God declaring through the prophet Isaiah that "my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways...for as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Isa. 55:8-9). Even if the divine pathos were to become effable to the human mind (which is far from guaranteed), its reception by a limited mind and the prophet's later communication of that message in human language opens two stages of potential corruption or misconstruing. Further, if the prophet is purportedly "sensing" or "feeling" the divine pathos, how ought one to discern and to separate the frustrations and feelings of the prophet himself from those of God?

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<sup>21</sup> The wider gamut of salvation history also shows how, with the sole exception of the Blessed Mother, the human agents employed by God are all fallible and sinful individuals who fail in certain respects. The stories of Judah, Moses, Saul and David, Peter and Paul all attest to the limitations and shortcomings of agents who are nonetheless inspired, chosen, and used by God for divine purposes.

<sup>22</sup> Abraham J. Heschel, "What Manner of Man is the Prophet?" in *The Prophets* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 26.

This line of reasoning could provide a means to discount more difficult passages as a misunderstanding or corrupting human influence on the divine words — or, perhaps more charitably, the need for the prophet to use hyperbole and extreme language to convey some sense of that which is ultimately unsayable/incommunicable in human terms. If that is the case, we can thus understand the use of rape imagery and sexual violence as a device of the prophet that gestures toward, but does not fully capture, the sense that God intended. Yet just as with the metaphorical readings or the approach of simply discounting difficult passages, such an approach poses major problems to the integrity of the Scriptural text as the inspired word of God. Furthermore, questioning the ability of the prophet to communicate the divine message undermines not only difficult passages, but the entire prophetic tradition (if not the very notion of revelation itself). While the genuinely human author undoubtedly carries his own personal views, feelings, and limitations, we cannot use them as a means simply to discount aspects of the text as it has been produced and received.

## **Another Solution? A Perennial Challenge to the Religious Tradition**

Despite the problems and pitfalls with the previous methods of interpretation, drawing a distinction between the human agent and God's intent provides an insightful starting point for a different approach. As noted at the outset, while I deny neither the genuine human nor divine authorship of the biblical texts, I wager that the answer lies in separating the literal sense of the human author's words from the divinely-designed end of the inspired text. Images and understandings of divine violence and rape are certainly the work of a human author — this is without question, as we have received a written text in history through human hands. Yet they are also the result of genuine divine authorship and inspiration. It is this second pole of the equation that provokes our problem, and the question remains, "to what end?" What purpose or what truth does God intend to communicate in "inspiring" such passages, if not the *prima facie*, literal meaning of the text?<sup>23</sup>

By inspiring texts that communicate such repugnant and alarming images of God, I believe that God imbues within the prophetic tradition itself an implicit, divinely-inspired critique of the religious tradition, especially in its espousal of patriarchal structures and attitudes that promote sexual subjugation and enable sexual violence. In order to clarify and to separate the spiritual sense of the Scripture and its divinely-inspired end

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<sup>23</sup> *Dei Verbum*, §12.

from the literal meaning of the words, let us consider some principles from the tradition of Catholic biblical interpretation.

Pope Benedict XVI makes an important differentiation between the “literal” and “spiritual” sense of Scripture, and the need to transcend the strict “letter” of the text as if it were simply an historical artifact. Rather, he argues for a rediscovery of “the interplay between the *different senses of scripture*,” and how “transcending the literal sense [makes] the letter itself credible.”<sup>24</sup> Perhaps more than any other point in Scripture, biblical rape texts and images of divine sexual violence necessitate such a transcendence of the literal sense to make “the letter itself credible.”

Admitting genuine human authorship (including human influence, limitations, potential for mistake or error, or a “blurring of the lines” between God and God’s agent) does not deny the divine inspiration and authorship of the texts. Rather, it forces the biblical reader to reconsider (1) the role of the genuine human authors of the texts, and (2) how one understands the “truth” of Scripture as divinely-inspired.

It is a mistake to believe that “affirming the Sacred Scriptures to be the inspired word of God entails denying that they are also genuinely human word.”<sup>25</sup> The Catholic understanding of the scriptures maintains that the texts “have God as their author and have been handed on as such to the Church herself,” yet that “in composing the sacred books, God chose human beings and, while employed by Him, they made use of their powers and abilities... as true authors.”<sup>26</sup> This interpretive approach neither denies the genuine divine authorship of the Scriptures nor does it ignore the human context and influences on their composition. Consequently, since “God speaks in Sacred Scripture through men in human fashion, the interpreter of Sacred Scripture should carefully investigate what meaning the sacred writers really intended, and what God wanted to manifest by means of their words....”<sup>27</sup> Thus a level of interpretation and discernment is necessary to unpack the true meaning of the text — divinely inspired as it may be, a product that is both truly authored by God and truly authored through human beings.

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<sup>24</sup> Benedict XVI, *Verbum Domini: Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2010), §38. Emphasis added.

<sup>25</sup> Gerald O’Collins, S.J., *Rethinking Fundamental Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 226.

<sup>26</sup> *Dei Verbum*, §11: “Those divinely revealed realities which are contained and presented in Sacred Scripture have been committed to writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. For holy mother Church, relying on the belief of the Apostles...holds that the books of both the Old and the New Testaments in their entirety, with all their parts, are sacred and canonical because written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, they have God as their author and have been handed on as such to the Church herself. In composing the sacred books, God chose human beings and while employed by Him, they made use of their powers and abilities, so that with Him acting in them and through them, they, as true authors, consigned to writing everything and only those things which He wanted.”

<sup>27</sup> *Dei Verbum*, §12.

Ascribing the literal words primarily to the human prophet (and existing tropes and motifs that the prophets inherit from their own tradition) rather than to YHWH helps to contextualize the otherwise shocking language of sexual shaming and violence at the hands of God. This perspective will also prevent us from subscribing to an image of a wrathful God who endorses and promotes sexual violence. Nonetheless, such an attribution of the words to the human author rather than to YHWH need not deny the inspired nature of the text. Yet we must examine what God intended to “manifest by means of their words,” not necessarily dictate verbatim for transcription.

What God makes manifest by means of these words is the reaction of disgust. It is here, in disgust, that I suggest a true sharing in the divine *pathos* occurs. These texts give us pause, they trouble us, they challenge us. The very fact that these passages arrest us and elicit disgust shows that they cannot simply be ignored or glossed over — and perhaps this is the point! To silence or to metaphorize them runs away from the challenge and denies that they have something very real and pressing to communicate today. Without endorsing the literal meaning of the words, the divine author grabs our attention and forces us to recognize something of significance in these texts, to be unsettled by such passages and to wrestle with them.

One possibility is that God is using the prophetic tradition and its tropes of sexual violence to force us to confront violent aspects within our own religious tradition. Indeed, on a human level and in the world of the text, these passages demonstrate how concepts and ideas of God can be (and have been) used to justify experiences of violence, war, subjugation, and rape. Attempts at “culturally inscribing” God into the “poetics of rape” should shock and appall the reader, and such a reaction may well be the truth God wishes to make manifest through the text.<sup>28</sup>

In recognizing and resisting misappropriations of God for violent and oppressive ends, we are nonetheless also confronted with the tragic reality that the Judeo-Christian religious tradition contains and has promoted such violence. It has been used to justify and to perpetuate patriarchal attitudes and institutions that promote (or at the very least enable) sexual subjugation, violence, and trauma. Through these texts, God and the prophets place that

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<sup>28</sup> Susanne Scholz, *Sacred Witness*, 183. “What is needed in reading such rape rhetoric is a ‘voice of advocacy’ that names the violence, holds the perpetrators accountable, and questions the divinely sanctioned abuse of power. Such an interpretation also emphasizes that ‘this misogynist text really says nothing about YHWH’ because in this poem androcentric culture and history have ‘culturally inscribed’ God in the poetics of rape.” See also Johnny Miles, “Re-reading the Power of Satire: Isaiah’s ‘Daughters of Zion,’ Pope’s ‘Belinda,’ and the Rhetoric of Rape,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 31, no. 2 (2006): 215. As quoted in Scholz, *Sacred Witness*, 183.

historical heritage front and center to each generation anew — an unsettling yet necessary recognition that challenges us continually in a perennial critique of the tradition itself.

As a written text received and passed down through tradition, the inspired prophetic words continue to function as a challenge to each subsequent generation. Walter Brueggemann describes the power and function of a written prophetic utterance quite aptly, noting:

Written utterance has a kind of freedom from context that spoken utterance does not. And this written utterance explodes always again in odd, energetic, and transformative ways. Such texted reality is a great and relentless enemy of silence. The community of this text has learned, many times over, that enforced silence kills (see Psalm 39:1-3)...the text authorizes the mute to speak, and to know what to say, in the face of life-cancelling power.<sup>29</sup>

Indeed, the inspired word of God, “living and effective” (Heb. 4:12) shall not return empty but “shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the things for which I sent it” (Isa. 55:11). These words of God continue to challenge us – to wrest us from complacency, to think critically about our own religious tradition, and to strive ever more toward justice and the building of the Kingdom. Seen in this light, the prophetic tradition’s unsettling images of a violent and violating God does not promote rape as an instrument of divine justice — rather it reveals its absurdity and perversion. Far from promoting or endorsing sexual shaming as divinely-decreed punishment, God uses these texts to challenge and to critique a tradition that enables and has promoted sexual subjugation and violence throughout its very history. In this way, God’s truth manifests itself through the otherwise disturbing and difficult passages that pervade the prophetic tradition.

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<sup>29</sup> Walter Brueggemann, “Texts that Linger, Words that Explode,” *Theology Today* 54, no. 2 (1997), 189.

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# Negation as Infinite Affirmation: The Apophatic Theology of Saint Dionysius the Areopagite

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## Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to identify the meaning of negation in Dionysius the Areopagite's apophatism: how and towards which reality does it orient contemplation and what does it actually say about God who reveals Himself? My fundamental thesis is that, in fact, apophatic negation in Dionysius the Areopagite's teachings, as well as in those of other Eastern fathers conceals a super-affirmation, it indicates an infinite affirmation, beyond any determination. The meaning of the apophatic negation can be grasped at the confluence of three specific supra-intelligible terms: the alterity, the transcendence and the excess (the infinity).

**Keywords:** apophatic theology, Dionysius the Areopagite, Eastern Orthodox Tradition, alterity, transcendence, infinity

ACCORDING TO A CLASSICAL (AND DEFINING) statement for the apophatic thinking of most Eastern Fathers, beginning with the Cappadocian theologians, we know that God Is<sup>1</sup>, but what He Is, in His essence, that

<sup>1</sup> I have decided to use capital letters both for God's Being and for the divine "Is" in order to emphasize the "ontological difference" between the Being of God and the being of the world. The homonymy of being is richer than the way Heidegger presented it and the fundamental ontological difference is between the Being of God and the being of the world, not between being and beings. Heidegger believes that God is a being, although a supreme one, still simply a being, and theology is a positive ontic science, as it deals with the historical event of "christicity". Heidegger implicitly denies the divine, eternal and uncircumscribed nature of Christ. This would be his crypto-arianism. Also the heideggerian criticism of the western onto-theology was then adopted by all the contemporary postmodern, deconstructionist and nihilists trends, and, unfortunately, without sufficient criticism even by some western Christian philosophers (such as Jean-Luc Marion in *Dieu sans l'être*) and Eastern theologians (Christos Yannaras in Heidegger and the *Areopagite*), who found too many common points (not necessarily legitimate, in my opinion) between

we cannot know.<sup>2</sup> I think this statement becomes even stronger and more significant if we reverse it: we don't know what God Is, but we do know that He Is. Thus, the negation of all possible determinations and analogies represents a background against which the affirmation that God Is shines with overwhelming light, at the border between the intelligible and the supra-intelligible, since the certainty that He is can only spring from the luminous gift of faith, which is a fixed supra-intelligible affirmation. In his notes to Dionysius the Areopagite's *Mystical Theology*, Dumitru Stăniloae writes: „above all negation is the affirmation that God is Who He is.”<sup>3</sup> The same approach is obvious in John Chrysostom's liturgical anaphora: *For Thou art God ineffable, unknowable, invisible, incomprehensible, Thou art eternal, Thou art unchanging, Thou, and Thine Only-begotten Son, and Thy Holy Spirit*. Apophatism does not in fact discuss the fact that “God is eternal and is unchanging.”<sup>4</sup> In his work *On the Holy Spirit*, when referring to the first sentence of the Gospel of John, “In the beginning was the Word” (John 1, 1), Saint Basil the Great notes that “no matter how we stretch our intellect, we cannot go beyond the word *was*”<sup>5</sup>, while for Saint Gregory Nazianzus “God is that which may not be doubted”<sup>6</sup>. As Yaroslav Pelikan points out, apophatic theology becomes, beginning with the Cappadocian Fathers, “a theory of language”<sup>7</sup>, a method to signify the transcendence of God.<sup>8</sup>

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Heidegger's thinking and *Dionysius the Areopagite's* apophatism, which was unfortunately interpreted in a neo-platonic key, by accepting the separation of the One from the Being, a hypothesis rejected by Plato in Parmenides. Heidegger is also the main figure responsible for introducing Nietzsche's nihilist view into the postmodern philosophical thinking.

<sup>2</sup> John D. Zizioulas, *Lectures in Christian Dogmatics*, edited by Douglas Knight (2008, repr., London: T&T Clark, 2010), 54-57.

<sup>3</sup> Dumitru Stăniloae, *Notes to the Mystical Theology in Saint Dionysius the Areopagites. Complete works and the Scholia of Saint Maximus the Confessor* [in Romanian], trans. Dumitru Stăniloae (Bucharest: Paideia, 1996), 256, note 271.

<sup>4</sup> In his commentary to John Chrysostom's liturgical anaphora, father Dumitru Stăniloae notes that the apophatism of the Holy Fathers accentuates “the fact that God is uncircumscribed”, but as a lived experience, not simply as a fact we can grasp intellectually. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Spirituality and Communion in the Orthodox Liturgy* [in Romanian] (Craiova: Mitropolia Olteniei, 1986), 263.

<sup>5</sup> Zizioulas, *Lectures in Christian Dogmatics*, 55.

<sup>6</sup> Zizioulas, 56. In Zizioulas' opinion, „*apophaticism* does not mean that we have surpassed the concept of being or gone beyond ontology. [...] The verb *to be* is not only permissible in discussion of God, but it applies most directly and uniquely to God, for God is *the One who truly is* (...), so theology is the true ontology. [...] Ontology simply represents our search for stability and permanence” (Zizioulas, 55). „It is therefore not true to say that there is no ontology in the theology and life of the Church [...], *that* God is: we may really know is. It does not represent an absence of knowledge, and we do not require any negative theology to communicate this” (Zizioulas, 56).

<sup>7</sup> Jaroslav Pelikan, *Christianity and Classical Culture. The Metamorphosis of Natural Theology in the Christian Encounter with Hellenism* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1993), 42.

<sup>8</sup> Pelikan, 200-214.

However, from the very beginning, the Eastern fathers identified the nihilist potential of an „apophatic epistemology”<sup>9</sup> interpreted in a distorted manner, either by suggesting that there is negation or privation in God (by separating the One from the Being or the Being from the divine energies), or by considering any human attempt to know Him and to interact with Him completely useless<sup>10</sup> (deconstructing the finite intelligible analogies of the isomorphic structures that mediate contemplation) and by hiding the infinitely affirmative meaning of the apophatic negation. Perhaps one of the best known statements in Eastern theology is that God is unknowable in His being, but knowable in His works, in relation with the created beings. On the other hand, it must be emphasized that there cannot be a discontinuity between the Divine Being and His works or His energies, as these cannot subsist in themselves, but only in the Being. Because they subsist in the Being, the divine energies don’t belong to an inferior ontological level of the Being, or, to put it differently, they are not degraded manifestations of God. Through His works, God manifests Himself freely, unconditioned by anything, always in a way that is consistent with Himself, not opposed, not indifferent, not arbitrary, not diminished in relation to who He Is. For Gregory of Nyssa, nothing can remain in existence when separated from the being (Gr. Nyss., Ref. 34-35, Jaeger 2:325-26), as it would be “a violation both of natural theology and of divine revelation, to implicate the divine *ousia* in any nonexistence, either a nonexistence out of which it had come or a nonexistence into which it would pass through corruption and transiency (Gr. Nyss., Eun. 3.7.51, Jaeger, 2:233). For in some ways the most fundamental metaphysical presupposition of all about God was this: God always is that which the God now existing is; God does not become altered by taking something from another source; God always maintains self-identity (Gr. Nyss., Eun. 1.592, Jaeger, 1:196-97)”.<sup>11</sup>

So, within the framework set by the apophatic thinking of the Cappadocian Fathers, the negative theology of Saint Dionysius the Areopagite culminates – apparently due to a neo-platonic influence – with the long string of negations from the last chapter of his *Mystical Theology*: divinity

is not soul, or mind, or endowed with the faculty of imagination, conjecture, reason [...], and has no power, and is not power or light, and does not live, and is not life; nor is It personal essence, or eternity, or time; nor can It be grasped by the understanding since It is not knowledge or truth; nor is It kingship or wisdom; nor is It one, nor is It unity, nor is It Godhead or Godness; nor is It a Spirit, as we understand the term, since It

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<sup>9</sup> Pelikan, 54-55.

<sup>10</sup> Pelikan, 202.

<sup>11</sup> *Apud* Pelikan, 208-209.

is not Sonship or Fatherhood; nor is It any other thing such as we or any other being can have knowledge of; nor does It belong to the category of non-existence or to that of existence; nor do existent beings know It as it actually is, nor does It know them as they actually are; nor can the reason attain to It to name It or to know It; nor is it darkness, nor is It light, or error, or truth; nor can any affirmation or negation apply to it; for while applying affirmations or negations to those orders of being that come next to It, we apply not unto It either affirmation or negation, inasmuch as It transcends all affirmation by being the perfect and unique Cause of all things, and transcends all negation by the pre-eminence of Its simple and absolute nature-free from every limitation and beyond them all.<sup>12</sup>

In my view, the meaning of the apophatic negation can be grasped at the confluence of three specific supra-intelligible terms<sup>13</sup>: the alterity, the transcendence and the excess (the infinity). In order to correctly understand Saint Dionysius the Areopagite's apophatism, the three terms must be regarded in ontological solidarity. Out of the three terms, the last one – expressing the excess, the maximality, the absolute infinity – is the one that indicates the fact that God's alterity and transcendence are not privative in relation with the creation, on the contrary, any privation, any ontological negation are excluded. If we separate the infinitely affirmative meaning of the excess or the maximality from His alterity and transcendence, the latter remain either negative or suspended (in contemplation) between affirmation and negation, becoming thus impossible to discern the Dionysian apophatism from the neo-platonic one (which separates the One from the Being) or from the Buddhist nirvanic vacuum.

Radical alterity is usually expressed through negative prefixes (nonbeing, inexistent<sup>14</sup>, unreachable, incomprehensible), through a negative clause "it is not" or through a negative antinomy: "neither..., nor...". That is why, according to a classical assertion, negative theology shows us not what God is, but what God is not, or rather the fact that He is different from all created things and all human concepts. In the quotation above, Saint Dionysius the

<sup>12</sup> Dionysius the Areopagites, *On the Divine Names* and *The Mystical Theology*, trans. C. E. Rolt, (1920, repr., Whitefish: Kessinger Publishing, 1997), 200-201. Dionisie Pseudo-Areopagitul, *On the Divine names. The Mystical Theology* [in Romanian], trans. Cicerone Iordăchescu and Theofil Simenschy (Iași: Institutul European, 1993), 154. In most cases, I preferred this translation from ancient Greek as it is more terminologically consistent, more precise conceptually speaking and better articulated from a dogmatic point of view than Dumitru Stăniloae's translation or a more recent one, by Marilena Vlad (Dionisie Areopagitul, *On the Divine Names. The Mystical Theology* [in Romanian], bilingual edition, trans. Marilena Vlad, [Iași: Polirom, 2018]).

<sup>13</sup> They could also be called *supra-concepts*.

<sup>14</sup> Hilarion Alfeyev, *Le mystère de la foi. Introduction à la théologie dogmatique orthodoxe*, trans. Michel Evdokimov (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 2001), 38.

Areopagite points towards this particular meaning of negation, in relation with the idea of alterity, by saying that God is not Godhead or Goodness or Spirit “as we understand the term”, so the negation concerns our limited capacity of understanding, not the reality of God Himself. The negation refers to the terms of the human knowledge and language, “which only fit the descriptions of reality in the created world, but not the descriptions of divine being, consequently, the verbs ‘to be’ and ‘to exist’ that come from them also do not fit descriptions of God’s being and existence.”<sup>15</sup> Similarly, father Dumitru Stăniloae comments:

all are negated, not because they cannot be found in Him, but because they are not the way we think they are. Negations are in fact above all affirmations we can think of. We cannot say God is not all these, we only deny the form or the degree to which we may know them, we negate our own finitude, the limited character of our understanding.<sup>16</sup>

It is worth noting that although they have negative prefixes, some of the concepts used to describe God, have in fact an ontologically affirmative meaning. To mention just a few, words such as unbounded, uncircumscribed, infinite are strictly formally speaking negative (infinite is something that is not finite) because, *ab initio*, the intelligible terms of reference for human thinking are built in relation with finite realities. On the other hand, it is important to specify that in terms of content or meaning, language can indicate, can point towards supra-intelligible realities that cannot be otherwise encompassed in any concept.<sup>17</sup>

God’s transcendence is referred to by Dionysius the Areopagite either by using the negation with the meaning of “going beyond” (a position we will later find at Saint Maximus the Confessor, Saint John Damascus and Saint Gregory of Palama), or by using the prefix *ὑπέρο* translated in Latin with *supra*, for example *ὑπερούσιος*, above being, super-being. In the first prayer-sentence from chapter I of *The Mystical Theology*, in which he explains what the divine darkness is, Dionysius uses the prefix *ὑπέρο*, ten times. He talks about “that topmost height of mystic lore which exceedeth light and more than exceedeth knowledge, where the simple, absolute, and unchangeable mysteries of heavenly Truth lie hidden in the dazzling

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<sup>15</sup> Hilarion Alfeyev, *Orthodox Christianity*, vol. 2, *Doctrine and Teaching of the Orthodox Church*, trans. Andrew Smith (New York: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2012), 137.

<sup>16</sup> Dumitru Stăniloae, “Notes to the Mystical Theology”, 256, note 274.

<sup>17</sup> How human language expresses supra-intelligible realities is a different matter which does not constitute the subject of this paper. I will simply state here that the embodied Logos spoke a human language and that the human being expresses himself intentionally and dynamically, not only pointing towards certain realities, but also expressing himself, as a whole, including that which surpasses him and perhaps, that which surpasses him is precisely what defines his humanity at the highest level.

obscurity of the secret Silence, outshining all brilliance with the intensity of their darkness, and surcharging our blinded intellects with the utterly impalpable and invisible fairness of glories which exceed all beauty!"<sup>18</sup>) It has been said that there is a certain ambiguity of the prefix *supra* or *super*. For instance, "super-luminous"<sup>19</sup> means both extremely, excessively luminous, and "beyond what is just luminous" and this second meaning is thought to be closer to Dionysius' thinking, in the view of some commentators.<sup>20</sup> In my view however, this cannot be accurate. On the contrary, "super-luminous" first means infinite excess of light, and precisely due to this excess, due to the absence of any privation, limits or negation in God, He is entirely different and above everything that is created and limited. At first glance, this suggests an affirmative continuity between God and His creation, which would diminish God, by returning to a cataphatism limited to the human being (in which God is only "more/a maximum" in relation with the world and determined by the world)<sup>21</sup>, but in fact, besides giving reality and consistency to the world and the divine Revelation (by analogy), this affirmative continuity is doubled by a radical discontinuity: the gap between the uncreated and the created, between God (in Whom there is only affirmation and ontological plenitude) and the world (marked by finitude, by limit, by negation, by being created out of nothing). Because there is no negation in God, there remains a gap between Him and His creation that cannot be crossed through any form of potential infinite (temporal) or actual determined infinite (eonic). Created beings cannot cross this gap, only God can through His uncreated energies that raise human beings to see His infinite light. In this sense, when considering the homonymy of the infinite, we can say God is above infinity, if we refer to the created infinite of the eonic angels or to any form of determined infinity or any infinity that the created mind can conceive. In a way, one can even say it is above the uncreated infinity of the divine energies – but only when looking from down up, from the creatures that partake in them, due to the infinite distance the energies have already travelled from the Divine being towards creatures. Still, it would be a nonsense to say that God is above His own absolute, infinite Being and a serious contemplative error to see any ontological discontinuity between the Divine being and the uncreated energies that spring from Him, as the energies do not subsist in themselves, but have their foundation in the Divine Being, from whom they cannot separate as they cross the gap between the uncreated and the created.

<sup>18</sup> Dionysius the Areopagites, *On the Divine Names*, 191.

<sup>19</sup> In the English translation, "super-luminous" (or "supra-luminous") is translated with "exceedeth light", which shows that the author of the translation followed a similar line of interpretation.

<sup>20</sup> Ștefan Afloroaei, *Afterword* to Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagites, *On the Divine Names. The Mystical Theology* [in Romanian], trans. Iordăchescu & Simenschy, 171 (footnote).

<sup>21</sup> Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Orthodox Asceticism and Mysticism* [in Romanian], vol. 2 (Sibiu: Deisis, 1993), 67.

So, let us see now if we can find this infinitely affirmative dimension of apophatism in Dionysius' writings. Even in the above quoted text, the affirmative meaning of the prefix ὑπέρ seems evident to me in the sentence: "surcharging (ὑπέρπληροῦντα) our blinded intellects with the utterly impalpable and invisible fairness of glories which exceed all beauty". This "surcharging" cannot have a privative or a negative meaning and cannot indicate a neutral or arbitrary transcendence, but rather an infinite, excessively affirmative meaning. Also, in the 5th letter to Deacon Dorotheus, in which Saint Dionysius talks about the divine darkness, the affirmative meaning of excess of the apophatic negation is possibly even more evident. God is "invisible indeed, on account of the surpassing brightness, and unapproachable on account of the excess of the superessential stream of light".<sup>22</sup>

In chapter II of *The Mystical Theology*, Saint Dionysius encourages us to be "as men who, carving a statue out of marble, remove all the impediments that hinder the clear perceptive of the latent image and by this mere removal display the hidden statue itself in its hidden beauty".<sup>23</sup> We notice here the affirmative finality of the apophatic negation, which is ultimately a supra-intelligible affirmation, given not by the works of one's mind in affirming or denying something, but through the presence of the uncreated light in those with a pure heart.

As Saint Dionysius notes in the last paragraph of *The Mystical Theology*,

nor can any affirmation or negation apply to divinity; for while applying affirmations or negations to those orders of being that come next to It, we apply not unto It either affirmation or negation, inasmuch as It transcends all affirmation by being the perfect and unique Cause of all things, and transcends all negation by the pre-eminence of Its simple and absolute nature-free from every limitation and beyond them all.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Dionysius the Areopagites, *The works of Dionysius the Areopagite*, trans. John Parker (Aeterna Press, 2015), 99. Romanian translation: St Dionysius the Areopagites, *Letters* [in Romanian], trans. Vasile Răducă and Gheorghe Drăgulin, (Bucharest: ALL, 1994), 54.

<sup>23</sup> Dionysius the Areopagites, *On the Divine Names*, 195.

<sup>24</sup> Dionysius the Areopagites, 201. In Romanian translation, in his introductory study, Cicerone Iordăchescu translates this final phrase in a way that confirms my position: "We neither affirm, nor do we negate the divinity, as One that transcends any affirmation, being the perfect and unique cause of all things and transcends any negation through the sublime character of His simple and absolute nature – without any limitation and above all things" (Dionisie Pseudo-Areopagitul, *On the Divine Names* [in Romanian], trans. Iordăchescu & Simenschy, 19). Marilena Vlad's translation also includes the idea of the supra-affirmative preeminence of the divine foundation: "the unitary and perfect cause of all things is above any attribution, while the pre-eminence of the One Who is detached from all things and beyond all things is above any deletion" (Dionisie Areopagitul, *On the Divine Names* [in Romanian], trans. Marilena Vlad, 261).

A significant thing here is that the string of apophatic negations from the last chapter of *The Mystical Theology* ends with the affirmation that God is the cause of all things.<sup>25</sup> The absolute foundation is unquestionable, God as the supra-intelligible cause of all intelligible things cannot be denied. On the contrary, it is more obvious when contrasted by all the analogies and determinations of the finite mind and of the finite world. Moreover, in Dionysius the Areopagite's view, the affirmative understanding of God as the universal cause for everything is determining for the whole contemplative ascent of the transcendence through negation:

we mount upwards (so far as our feet can tread that ordered path), advancing through the Negation and Transcendence of all things and through a conception of an Universal Cause, towards That Which is beyond all things.<sup>26</sup>

Another paragraph that confirms the affirmative meaning of apophatic negation can be found in chapter II, 10 of the *Divine names*. Divinity is seen as "an Abundance in those Beings that lack, and a Super-Abundance in those that abound"<sup>27</sup>). In fact, when we encounter the word *abundance* or *super-abundance* in the text, we cannot attach any privative meaning to it, any limit or any negation. Speaking of the embodiment of the Son, in the 4th letter to Gaius, he shows that Christ took

substance, above men and after men, from the substance of men. And it is nothing less, the ever Superessential, super-full of super-essentiality, disregards the excess of this, and having come truly into substance, took substance above substance, and above man works things of man.<sup>28</sup>

Also, in the 9th letter, paragraph 5 to Titus the Hierarch, talking about the "drunkenness" of God, he explains that it ought to be imagined as

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<sup>25</sup> In chapter IV and V, as indicated by the titles, Dionysius shows that God, as the cause of all intelligible things cannot be an intelligible thing. In other words, He *Is* in a supra-intelligible way. It is perhaps interesting to note here that Derrida thinks Dionysius' apophatism is not "deconstructionist" enough, as by introducing the idea of cause here, he brings affirmation back into the discourse about God. For a recent theological discussion on apophatism in Derrida and Marion, see Nicolae Turcan, *Apology after the End of Metaphysics: Theology and Phenomenology in Jean-Luc Marion* [in Romanian, with an English Summary] (București: Eikon, 2016), 189-210.

<sup>26</sup> Dionysius the Areopagites, *On the Divine Names*, 152.

<sup>27</sup> Dionysius the Areopagites, 78. Marilena Vlad's translation is more precise here: ("full, in things that need, superfull in things full") (Dionisie Areopagitul, *On the Divine Names* [in Romanian], trans. Marilena Vlad, 85.)

<sup>28</sup> Dionysius the Areopagites, *The works of Dionysius the Areopagite*, 99. In regard to this, Saint Maximus the Confessor uses the expression "The super-Being is super-full of super-existence" (my translation). (St. Maxim the Confessor, *Ambigua* [in Romanian], trans. Dumitru Stăniloae, [Bucharest: Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiunea a Bisericii Ortodoxe, 2006], 79, 5a).

“anything else beyond the super-full immeasurableness of all good things pre-existing in Him as Cause”<sup>29</sup>; He is beyond everything that can be understood, but although transcendent and “dwelling outside and beyond the whole”, He “a super-full hyperbole of every immeasurableness of them all”<sup>30</sup>).

Perhaps the most significant text can be found in the 4th chapter, 3 from the *Divine Names* where Saint Dionysius talks about the divine good attributed in a transcendent manner to the divine essence: “in It alone Not-Being is an excess of Being, and Lifelessness an excess of Life and Its Mindless state is an excess of Wisdom”<sup>31</sup>). The apophatic negation is perfectly compatible and solidary with the excess of affirmation, it expresses the excess of affirmation.

Also, in another instance, Saint Dionysius insists that

while it possesses all the positive attributes of the universe (being the universal Cause), yet in a stricter sense It does not possess them, since It transcends them all, wherefore there is no contradiction between affirming and denying that It has them inasmuch as It precedes and surpasses all deprivation, being beyond all positive and negative distinctions.<sup>32</sup>

Although Dionysius the Areopagite is considered to be the teacher of apophatism par excellence, father Dumitru Stăniloae notices that he often combines the apophatic and the cataphatic knowledge, and he surpasses both of them in the contemplation of the uncircumscribed Light; in this experience of seeing the supra-intelligible One, he uses affirmative and negative intellectual terms in order to express and communicate, without actually reducing it to them<sup>33</sup>, but making them transparent.<sup>34</sup>

Although, on one hand, Dionysius states that negations are more suitable than affirmations when referring to God, on the other hand, he notes that He is to a greater extent above negations than affirmations. This should be interpreted this way: in Himself, God is the most positive reality there is. But His supreme positivity is above all our affirmations. And this is another reason we should not give up speaking about God in affirmative terms.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Dionysius the Areopagites, *The works of Dionysius the Areopagite*, 119.

<sup>30</sup> Dionysius the Areopagites, *Letters* [in Romanian], 86.

<sup>31</sup> Dionysius the Areopagites, *On the Divine Names*, 89. I prefer the translation of the other two terms referring to life and wisdom with “excess of life” and “excess of wisdom” (ὑπερέχοθσα and ὑπεραίουσα) as it is more coherent dogmatically that way and the phrase is more symmetrical. In fact, Marilena Vlad prefers to translate ὑπεραίουσα with “excess”.

<sup>32</sup> Dionysius the Areopagites, *On the Divine Names*, 193.

<sup>33</sup> Dumitru Stăniloae, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology* [in Romanian], vol. 1, 4th ed. (Bucharest: Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune Ortodoxă, 2010), 133-134.

<sup>34</sup> Stăniloae, 129.

<sup>35</sup> Stăniloae, 137.

Recently, Daniel Jugrin proved that in the writings of the Areopagite there is a crucial difference – which is validated semantically and contextually in most cases – between ἄγνοια (ignorance or absence of knowledge) and ἀγνώσια (not knowing in the sense of going beyond knowledge), which corresponds to the distinction between σκότος (darkness as lack of light) and γνόφος (darkness as the super-fullness of light).<sup>36</sup> A negative concept conceals a positive one, that is the highest form of knowledge<sup>37</sup>, which culminates in the union (ἔνωσις) with God. When reaching this stage, human language becomes logophatic, springing from the power and inspiration of God the Word Himself<sup>38</sup>, unifying and, at the same time, exceeding both cataphatic and apophatic knowledge.

Perhaps a similar interpretation can be found in Charles Stang's thorough study, *Apophasis and Pseudonymity in the Dionysius the Areopagite*. Ἀγνώσια involves „a superabundant knowledge”, and not lack of knowledge.<sup>39</sup> Also, ὑπερούσιος

does not suggest that God somehow lacks the quality he graciously gives to creation, but rather that God so superabundantly is that one does better to confess that he is *not* (*meaning not in our imperfect, limited way*) and thereby draw nearer to that divine superabundance.<sup>40</sup>

God „is so superabundantly good that the notion of good no longer has full purchase”<sup>41</sup>, this of course, without suggesting the presence of anything evil in Him, not even the possibility of evil: negation.

In conclusion, unlike other types of negation, such as logical negation (the analytical negation in a contradiction), ontological negation (which can be found in the limit and the internal constitution of the finite being), the Hegelian negation (the dialectical negation of determinations followed by their speculative preservation and cumulation) or intentional ontic negation (which concerns the annihilation of the being), apophatic negation has an essentially affirmative meaning in Dionysius the Areopagite's teachings, as well as in those of other Eastern fathers.<sup>42</sup> The affirmative meaning of

<sup>36</sup> Daniel Jugrin, “Agnosia: The Apophatic Experience of God in Dionysius the Areopagite”, *Teologia*, no. 2 (2016): 109.

<sup>37</sup> Jugrin, 109.

<sup>38</sup> Jugrin, 106-107.

<sup>39</sup> Charles M. Stang, *Apophasis and Pseudonymity in the Dionysius the Areopagite: „No Longer I”* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 139.

<sup>40</sup> Stang, 124. Emphasis added.

<sup>41</sup> Stang, 129.

<sup>42</sup> In short, Saint Maximus the Confessor, continuing this line of thought, affirms the non-determination of God's absolute Infinity, as well as the ontological solidarity between the One and the Infinite. Saint John of Damascus insists on the absence of any privation in God and considers that the positive attributes of the divinity are more appropriate than the negative ones. Also, Saint Gregory Palamas shows that the positive attributes *per-se* may

the apophatic negation becomes most visible at the convergence of three concepts or three supra-intelligible terms that must be understood in an ontological solidarity: the alterity (the difference), the transcendence (going beyond) and the infinity of the divinity in relation with the created being. Out of the three terms, the last one indicates the excess of being, the excess of attributes, maximality, plenitude, super-fullness and overabundance and shows that God's transcendence and alterity in relation with the created being does not involve any privations. On the contrary, it excludes any limit and scarcity, any negation. The uncreated is uncircumscribed and has a purely affirmative character. The apophatic negation does not indicate only going beyond any negative and positive determinations – which are both separately and all together improper to the divine, but also the absence of determination itself, that is the non-determination of the uncircumscribed, the unlimited affirmation, the absolutely infinite Being. Cataphatic knowledge is thus insufficient, not because it's affirmative, but precisely because it's not affirmative enough. It is not the affirmative dimension of knowledge that is improper, but the limited character of the affirmations.

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only rightfully be given to God, and whatever needs to be known apophatically about God is in fact the limited and imperfect reflexion of His attributes in the created minds. Those who cannot see God's infinite Light through their faith fall from the light of the natural knowledge as well, warns Saint Gregory Palamas. According to the interpretations of father Dumitru Staniloae and those of Paul Evdokimov, all the negative attributes of God point towards His overabundant positive reality. Finally, Father Sophrony Sakharov emphasizes the realism of the divine attributes, especially in the sinaite revelation: *I am Who I am*. He points out that apophatism may be understood as a kind of philosophical agnosticism and reminds us of the fact that in the Holy Scripture there are no references to God as darkness, but only to God as light.

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# Factuality and the Beyond of God: Attempt at an Inversion of Meillassoux’s Speculative Materialism

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## Abstract

This article stages the confrontation of two approaches to thinking the absolute. On the one hand, it discusses Quentin Meillassoux’s speculative materialism. In suggesting that there is no ultimate ground of being and that only contingency is necessary, Meillassoux takes the notion of the irreducible character of the absolute to its extreme and aporetic consequences. By contrast, I will outline an alternative account of the absolute. Like Meillassoux, I will suggest that the question of the absolute is intrinsically linked to the question of factuality. Yet, in this case, factuality leads to the notion of the beyond of God as the ground of being, inscribing into being the dynamic of a continuous inner transcendence.

**Keywords:** factuality, transcendence, philosophy of existence, the absolute, Quentin Meillassoux, speculative materialism

## Introduction

**B**ETWEEN THEOLOGICAL CONCERNS AND RECENT attempts at developing a “speculative realist” or “speculative materialist” philosophy there are significant and unexpected affinities. For the latter reject any claim to either the primacy of the human or the existence of a specific human capacity (e.g. reason, language, the body) and maintain that being is in no way determined by finite subjectivity. As a result, theoretical accounts of being no longer have subjectivity as either their object, origin or end. Here subjectivity is replaced by an absolute that is self-sufficient and corresponds, at least formally, to the God of the metaphysical tradition, be it that of the Greek eternal cosmos or the creator God of monotheism.

Among the new speculative thinkers, it is Quentin Meillassoux who has carried out the most sustained discussion of the question of God. Especially relevant here is his 2006 essay *After Finitude* (the English edition appeared in 2008),<sup>1</sup> as well as his unpublished doctoral thesis from 1997, *L'inexistence divine*, of which *After Finitude* is an expanded version. Meillassoux's work is driven by two powerful motives, one negative, the other positive — *against* a certain Kantian and post-Kantian tradition's dichotomy between reason and faith; *for* an ontological approach that removes human subjectivity from the center of being in order to regain access to the absolute dimension of being. The former he refers to as "fideism," the latter has as its methodological starting point what he calls the "principle of factuality" (*principe de factualité*), which is concerned with the existential aspect of beings, their "that-it-is," or "thatness."<sup>2</sup>

Even if Meillassoux deals with the question of the absolute, this does not mean that he develops a positive concept of God. To the contrary, and as Christopher Watkin's *Difficult Atheism*<sup>3</sup> contends, Meillassoux pursues a "post-theological" thinking without God, that is, a thinking of radical immanence and cosmic indifference to which even a coming God would have to bow.<sup>4</sup>

While agreeing with Meillassoux about the significance of factuality and sharing his criticism of postmodern fideism (though for different reasons), this article will open up a direction diametrically opposed to the one of Meillassoux. It begins with a sympathetic outline of Meillassoux's critique of the Kantian and post-Kantian tradition. Afterwards, it subjects Meillassoux's account of the absolute to a critique that demonstrates its actual failure. It concludes with an outline whose account abandons both ontotheology<sup>5</sup> and postmodern apophatic

<sup>1</sup> Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude. An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*, trans. Ray Brassier (London: Continuum, 2008).

<sup>2</sup> Ray Brassier, the English translator of Meillassoux's *Après la finitude*, renders "factualité" as "factuality" to, in the former's words, "mark its distinction clearly from the ordinary meaning of the French 'factuel' ('factual' in English)." See Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, 133, note 6. Yet this decision sometimes generates more confusion than clarity, especially where Brassier translates "*principe de factualité*" as "principle of factuality" (see *ibid.*, 73 and 75). Following *Après la finitude*'s German translator Roland Frommel's decision to translate "factualité" as "Faktualität," I here use the term "factuality" when referring to Meillassoux's "factualité," as well as in the context of my own considerations.

<sup>3</sup> Christopher Watkin, *Difficult Atheism. Post-Theological Thinking in Alain Badiou, Jean-Luc Nancy and Quentin Meillassoux* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011).

<sup>4</sup> See Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, 115-116.

<sup>5</sup> That is, any conception that makes God an entity, even the supreme entity. As is well known, the term "ontotheology" gained strong influence through Heidegger. However, in referring to it, I do not mean to follow Heidegger's analysis of ontotheology in every detail.

notions of God. In this context, it is important to emphasize that God is both beyond being at the same time as God is present in being, making finite beings reach beyond themselves towards the absolute dimension of themselves.

## **Kantian and post-Kantian thinking and its critique**

Both Meillassoux's approach and this article's own account are meant to get past forms of thought generally recognized as "Kantian" and "post-Kantian." To simplify, one might say that these forms of thought are united by the claim that all we can say about being is strictly limited by the realm of subjective experience. According to this idea, beings are what they are, and can be identified as such only inasmuch as there is human access to them. As a result, the chief theoretical question is of an epistemological character and concerns the precise structure of this access.

In Meillassoux's terms, such an approach is characteristic of what he calls "correlationism," whose basic principle is that "to be is to be a correlate"<sup>6</sup> of human's access to being. Kantian thinking is, in Meillassoux's words, a form of "weak correlationism"<sup>7</sup> inasmuch as that which is beyond subjective experience, the thing-in-itself, "is unknowable" at the same time as "it is thinkable."<sup>8</sup> One result of this conception is that "the necessity [the absolute] affirms is only a necessity *for us*."<sup>9</sup> In effect, then, the Kantian absolute cannot be said to consist of a reality that is its own cause because its reason for existence is not contained within itself, but is instead inextricably bound to human existence.

The "most rigorous, as well as most contemporary"<sup>10</sup> form of correlationism — what Meillassoux calls "strong correlationism" — is post-Kantian, and its most "emblematic representatives"<sup>11</sup> are Heidegger and Wittgenstein. Strong correlationism "prohibit[s] all relation between thought and the absolute," maintaining "not only that it is illegitimate to claim that we can *know* the in-itself, but also that it is illegitimate to claim that we can at least *think* it."<sup>12</sup> All we can know and think is restricted to the realms of either finite appearing (Heidegger) or language (Wittgenstein).

In this sense, strong correlationism proves itself incapable of according absolute status to the correlation itself and is thus opposed to the abso-

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<sup>6</sup> Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, 28.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

lute idealism of Hegel, as well as those authors who, like Nietzsche and Deleuze, assign the correlation a vitalist but nevertheless absolute meaning. By extending Meillassoux's terminology, one might characterize these forms as belonging to the field of "absolute correlationism." For absolute correlationism, all that is is the correlate of something: "anything that is totally a-subjective cannot be."<sup>13</sup>

Unlike absolute correlationism, strong correlationism argues that the correlation between being and humans' access to that being rests on what is merely factual and, thus, that which is utterly contingent. In this sense, being could also be entirely different if different factual conditions obtain in which humans' access to being were also different. But because current factual conditions prevent access to this being, we can neither know nor think the nature of this different being. At the same time, however, we cannot entirely rule out the possibility of such a being since it is not the being itself that has been deemed impossible; instead, it is the current state of factual conditions as well as humans' limited access to being that is determinative. In Meillassoux's words: "it is unthinkable that the unthinkable be impossible;"<sup>14</sup> that is, "I cannot think the unthinkable, but I can think that it is not impossible for the impossible to be."<sup>15</sup> Since we can only give an account of our own factual being, we cannot exclude the possibility that there is, or was another being, and that, someday, it will replace our own being.

## The weaknesses of postmodern fideism

There are several aspects of Meillassoux's critique of post-Kantian, in fact, postmodern thinking that one might find compelling. To mention only two noteworthy examples, Meillassoux claims that "the destruction of the metaphysical rationalization of Christian theology has resulted in a generalized becoming-religious of thought, viz., in a *fideism of any belief whatsoever*,"<sup>16</sup> and that one of the results of this is the contemporary resurgence of forms of religious extremism inextricably linked to the self-relativizing of modern reason. To quote Meillassoux: "religious belief [or rather, its distortion] is considered to be beyond the reach of rational refutation ... because it seems ... to be conceptually illegitimate to undertake such a refutation."<sup>17</sup> As a result, postmodern fideism not only leaves room for the return of a deformed religious dogmatism but also for the many forms of profane absolutes that today take the form of esotericism, political ideology or consumer culture. For "modern man," Meillassoux writes, "all belief systems

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 44.

are equally legitimate in matters of veracity.”<sup>18</sup> An additional consequence is that political decisions and social life increasingly become the subject of moralization rather than rational debate, a development that is opposed to the rational ethos of modernity itself. To turn again to Meillassoux’s remarks on religious extremism: “the condemnation of fanaticism is carried out solely in the name of its practical (ethico-political) consequences, never in the name of the ultimate falsity of its contents.”<sup>19</sup>

Although Meillassoux acknowledges the role played by the destruction of Christian classical metaphysics within postmodern relativism, however, he by no means sanctions the former’s restitution. In claiming that there is no ultimate ground to ensure that things are what they are, he also argues that “we must uncover an absolute necessity that does not reinstate any form of absolutely necessary entity.”<sup>20</sup> Here Meillassoux’s work demonstrates its opposition to both irrational world-views, as well as what is commonly termed “ontotheology,” that is, the notion “that *at least one* entity is absolutely necessary.”<sup>21</sup> To each, Meillassoux opposes what he calls the “principle of unreason,” which holds that “there is no reason for anything to be or to remain the way it is.”<sup>22</sup> Against the idols of fideism and the God of ontotheology, Meillassoux’s work affirms a thought in which there is no final foundation.

It is important to underline the absolute nature of the claim that there exists nothing necessary or that all that remains necessary is the contingency of everything, including the laws of nature. Meillassoux’s thought may proceed through scenes dominated by the Kantian and post-Kantian traditions. Yet, in challenging a key aspect of Western philosophy, namely the question of an ultimate reality that provides consistency to an otherwise transient, ephemeral being, his critique of metaphysics shows itself to be far more fundamental than that of his postmodern predecessors.

In Heidegger’s wake, postmodern thought rejected the ontotheological interpretation of the ground or *arché*, that is, the notion that there exists an entity that is both universal and primal, the most high and the ultimate.<sup>23</sup> Despite this critique, however, postmodern thought did not upset the ground in itself; instead, it let the ground remain bare and condemned thought to circle endlessly around this emptiness. Again, postmodern thinking of God in the wake of Emmanuel Levinas and Jacques Derrida saw in this empty ground the prospect of the “wholly Other,” a God “beyond

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 60.

<sup>23</sup> See Martin Heidegger, “The Ontotheological Constitution of Metaphysics,” in Martin Heidegger, *Identity and Difference*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), 61.

being."<sup>24</sup> In doing so, it transformed the weak correlationist God of Kantian *Vernunftglaube* into an even weaker God, the God of postmodern apophysis.

To provide the proper context within which postmodern accounts of God develop, it is perhaps instructive to recall that, for Kant, nature no longer owes its structure of appearing to God, but to transcendental subjectivity. As God is transformed into what William Desmond calls an "*as if* God,"<sup>25</sup> this rational hypothesis that is the idea of God serves to satisfy the need of reason for a complete account of the world at the same time as it guarantees the auspicious character of the moral order. Once Kant's noumenal sphere (or, in Meillassoux's account, the thinkable but unknowable sphere of weak correlationism) is contested and the transcendental is replaced by the merely factual, the Kantian God turns into the inaccessible, postmetaphysical God, who provides finitude with well-intentioned ethical meaning without incurring any ontological liabilities. Meillassoux's principle of unreason also abolishes this "haunting specter of 'perhaps,'"<sup>26</sup> as John D. Caputo aptly calls it.

Yet, even if one agrees with certain aspects of Meillassoux's critique, one need not following him in maintaining that modern thought did not develop an appropriate understanding of the speculative power of reason (one need only think of German Idealism). Neither is one to consent to him that the truth of reason lies in a nothingness on which it is not-founded, so to speak. Quite to the contrary, being held prisoner by its own "*etsi deus non daretur*," modern thought is insufficient in that, so far, it has not been able to give an appropriate account of God after ontotheology. More precisely, it has not yet advanced a notion of God that both establishes God as the ultimate principle of being at the same time as it overcomes the ontotheological understanding of God as absolute substance, that is, as the seamless intertwining of being, representation and logos.

## The principle of factuality in Meillassoux

From the brief account of the opposition to postmodern fideism already sketched, two basic questions can now be identified. First, there is the question of Meillassoux: How can it be demonstrated that there is no God — neither the ontotheological God nor the God beyond being — and that all grounds are necessarily empty? Second, the question of this approach: How an account of God be given if this God is neither the ontotheological nor the postmodern God? Both questions ask about the absolute. And while

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<sup>24</sup> Authors such as, for example, John D. Caputo, Richard Kearney, and Merold Westphal come to mind.

<sup>25</sup> William Desmond, *God and the Between* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 98.

<sup>26</sup> John D. Caputo, *The Insistence of God. A Theology of Perhaps* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 5.

the relation to the absolute is self-evident in the second question, it is no less certain in the case of the first. For there the absolute is to be conceived in terms of that which would allow us to categorically reject God without adopting a dogmatist position ourselves, that is, without creating a substitute ground.<sup>27</sup>

In taking up Meillassoux's terms, it will be important to bear in mind the following two points. First, because Meillassoux's notion of the absolute does not coincide with the notion of God, the absolute is characterized, instead, as "a being whose *severance* ... and whose separateness from thought is such that it presents itself to us as non-relative to us, and hence as capable of existing whether we exist or not."<sup>28</sup> Second, Meillassoux differentiates between the absolute proper, or in his words, the "primary absolute," that is, the factuality of being, and a "derivative absolute," that is, the absolute as a specific character of being that makes it independent of the correlation.<sup>29</sup>

Meillassoux's argument begins with the following question: how can we think that which is beyond the correlation, beyond the possibility of any human access to being?<sup>30</sup> Tellingly, Meillassoux takes up the problem of life after death.<sup>31</sup> From a dogmatic point of view, the answer is clear: for the convinced theist, there is most certainly life after death; for the convinced atheist, there is no life after death. The various forms of correlation provide similarly instructive points of differentiation: for absolute correlationism, death cannot exist because there is only life, whether it be the life of spirit or of matter; for weak correlationism, life after death is only an idea, that is, something that is real only on account of some subjective commitment; for strong correlationism, though we cannot either know or think life after death, we cannot thereby conclude that such a thing is impossible.

Meillassoux's work identifies strong correlationism as its chief opponent. Yet, one observes a certain way in which the two positions are actually entangled with each other. Once strong correlationists admit that what is beyond the correlation is not impossible, they must then, against their own intentions, also regard it as a *real* possibility, as a pos-

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<sup>27</sup> Watkin appropriately calls the implementation of a substitute ground (preferably Humanity, or Reason) "parasitic atheism." See Watkin, *Difficult Atheism*, 17-18. See also Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, 51: "We accept the disqualification of every argument intended to establish the absolute necessity of an entity – thus the absolute we seek cannot be dogmatic."

<sup>28</sup> Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, 28.

<sup>29</sup> See *ibid.*, 30.

<sup>30</sup> In a language that is markedly phenomenological, Meillassoux refers to the derivative absolute also as "the givenness of a being anterior to givenness [that is, givenness to someone]." *Ibid.*, 14. "Anterior" has no temporal, but rather a constitutive meaning. That is, it refers to the way in which beings come into being.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 54-59.

sibility beyond the correlation. If they did not, then strong correlationism could not be distinguished from either weak or absolute correlationism. For strong correlationism, “what is not impossible” is neither an idea or a regulative principle of reason, as it is for weak correlationism, nor does it originate in the absolute life of the correlation, as is the case for absolute correlationism. It is, instead, both unknowable and unthinkable, and this very negation — in which one denies the capacity for knowing or thinking that which is beyond the human — has the effect of setting the impossible free and transforming it into something that can really be the case.

What, then, makes the reality of the real possibility, given that it is beyond both knowing and thinking? According to Meillassoux, it is simple factuality or “thatness.” Because there exists the possibility of life after death (as well as of everything else beyond our existence), *as possibility* it is independent of the correlation. It is, in fact, independent of the correlation in exactly the same way as our own existence and the existence of our world are independent of our access to them. Both had once assumed the form of possibilities themselves, and it was neither thought nor knowledge that brought them into existence. Each is also characterized by the possibility that it will either someday cease to exist or simply pass from one form of existence to another. At its most basic level, being is characterized by a form of factuality anterior to the correlation, a “thatness” in which inheres the possibility that this or that may be the case. In what is likely *After Finitude’s* central insight, Meillassoux characterizes the “principle of factuality” (*principe de factualité*) in the following terms: “it is not the correlation, but the facticity of the correlation that constitutes the absolute,”<sup>32</sup> the absolute proper, that is.

From the absolute that is facticity, or rather, factuality,<sup>33</sup> Meillassoux deduces the characteristics of the derivative absolute (that is, of being independent of the correlation). In strong correlationism, the facticity of the correlation is contingent. By contrast, for Meillassoux, facticity is the absolute, yet, this does not eliminate contingency. Rather, contingency now is the fundamental and irreducible characteristic of being. That is, all beings are thoroughly contingent. But of course, the constancy of contingency also has its negative side. The factual possibility that this or that might be the case cannot be separated from the factual possibility that this or that might not be the case. Or as Meillassoux writes: “we do not maintain that a determinate entity exists, but that it is absolutely necessary that every entity might not exist.”<sup>34</sup> This form of contingency eventuates in what Meillassoux

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<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

<sup>33</sup> “Factuality” indicates the absolute character of facticity, “viz., that the facticity of every thing cannot be thought as a fact.” *Ibid.*, 79.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.

calls the “principle of unreason,”<sup>35</sup> the second fundamental principle of Meillassoux’s ontology — the negative of the principle of factuality. “There is no reason for anything to be or to remain the way it is,” Meillassoux writes, “everything must, without reason, be able not to be and/or be able to be other than it is.”<sup>36</sup> As a result, being is characterized by a fundamental “capacity-to-be-other-without-reason.”<sup>37</sup>

According to Meillassoux, these principles do not simply apply to many different kinds of objects, but also, to follow St. Paul here, to the form of the world as such, its natural laws, as well as to its laws of thought. There are, however, two exceptions, two invariants. First, factuality itself. Because Meillassoux considers it absolute, “it is not just another fact in the world” “which might not be the case.”<sup>38</sup> It is thus not contingent but necessary. Second, the principle of non-contradiction.

According to Meillassoux, the principle of non-contradiction must remain valid. Without it the proposition that everything is contingent, that is, that being is characterized by the capacity-to-be-other, would itself be invalidated because what is contradictory cannot become. Meillassoux illustrates the point in the following thought experiment:

Let us suppose that a contradictory entity existed – what could possibly happen to it? Could it lapse into non-being? But it is contradictory, so that even if it happened not to be, it would still continue to be even in not-being, since this would be in conformity with its paradoxical ‘essence’ ... Consequently, if this entity existed, it would be impossible for it simply to cease to exist – unperturbed, it would incorporate the fact of not existing into its being. Thus, as an instance of a *really* contradictory being, this entity would be *perfectly eternal*.<sup>39</sup>

Meillassoux makes the above point within the larger context of his discussion of Hegel. In Hegel, the principle of non-contradiction is suspended on the way to creating an absolutely necessary entity. The result, in Meillassoux’s words, is that “the Supreme Being could only be the being that remains in itself even as it passes into its other, the entity that contains contradiction within itself as a moment of its own development.”<sup>40</sup> Contingency, by contrast, or the capacity-to-be-other, presupposes a path to otherness that is fundamentally open. This is, indeed, the minimum requirement of becoming: If everything is already the case, there can be no becoming.

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 60.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 60.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 73.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 70.

## Deficiencies: The problem of becoming

Because the notion of becoming is so central to Meillassoux's ontology, any inconsistencies within that notion throw into question the whole of his enterprise. Indeed, one might go so far as to say that Meillassoux's work stands or falls with the notion of becoming.

Let us continue focusing, then, on the question of becoming to better understand the precise character accorded to it in Meillassoux's work. We can speak of becoming only, when there is continuous transition rather than sudden change. Continuous transition means that beings, while becoming, are both identical as well as different at various points in time. On the one hand, what is becoming must be identical, for otherwise one could not say that it is becoming. What is succeeding it, that is, "the different," would just be something else. On the other hand, what is becoming must be different from what it previously was. Otherwise, it would not make sense to speak of becoming. Without difference, everything would just remain the same. Time itself is organized by the intertwining of identity and difference. Moments follow one another in sequence, but they do so continuously. They refer to an ever present now that itself alters with every moment, and yet, it is constantly there.

Meillassoux, rejecting the notion of becoming as continuity through change, advances instead a conception of becoming as sudden change. One result of this allows for the possibility that, in an example obviously borrowed from Hume, all at once "the impact of two billiard-balls does not conform to the laws that govern our universe but results rather in both balls flying off into the air, or fusing together, or turning into two immaculate but rather grumpy mares."<sup>41</sup>

In a lecture from 2008, entitled "Time Without Becoming," Meillassoux is explicit about the fact that his concept of change is meant to break with the traditional notion of becoming. There Meillassoux discusses a notion of "Hyper-chaos" he identifies with his own project and which must be contrasted with our everyday conception of chaos. "By chaos," he begins, "we usually mean disorder, randomness, the eternal becoming of everything. But these properties are not properties of Hyper-Chaos," he continues, "its contingency is so radical that even becoming, disorder, or randomness can be destroyed, and replaced by order, determinism, and fixity."<sup>42</sup>

But how is one to understand this kind of becoming? The first point that might be mentioned is that even the sudden unbecoming of becoming Meillassoux describes is itself in need of a continuous temporal framework.

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 97.

<sup>42</sup> Quentin Meillassoux, *Time Without Becoming*, ed. Anna Longo (United Kingdom: Mimesis International, 2014), 25.

Lacking time, it would be impossible to say that becoming even takes place. Regardless of whether one speaks of becoming, unbecoming, or simple being, nothing can happen without the constant but fluid now of time. In its absence, everything would collapse into so many isolated moments without past and future, moments thrown back onto themselves and incapable of the kind of change the notion of becoming requires.<sup>43</sup>

To these questions, however, one might reply, with Christopher Watkin, that Meillassoux's approach does not intend to provide a positive account of the world as it is.<sup>44</sup> Instead, it is an account of being as it could be inasmuch as radical contingency holds that nothing can prevent it from being so. "The matter of philosophy," Meillassoux notes, "is not being or becoming, representation or reality, but a very special possibility, which is not a formal possible, but a real and dense possible, which I call the 'peut-être,' the 'may-be.' In French, I would say: 'l'affaire de la philosophie n'est pas l'être, mais le peut-être.'"<sup>45</sup> Yet even if we admit the importance of the may-be quality of being, it nevertheless appears necessary to provide an account of what it is "to be" in order to understand this "may-be." Otherwise one leaves oneself open to the charge of a kind of second-order *Seinsvergessenheit* (forgetfulness of being). How then, one might ask, can one understand this "may-be" without first understanding "to be"?

In approaching the question of what it is "to be," Meillassoux turns to the principle of non-contradiction. According to Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, this means that "It is impossible for the same thing to belong and not to belong at the same time to the same thing and in the same respect" (Met. IV.3, 1005b19-20). One immediately notices how crucial here is the question of time, and that Meillassoux's approach is incomplete. For although one learns from the principle of non-contradiction that the same thing cannot be itself and its opposite at one and the same time, this rule no more provides the basis for accounting for its being than does it make that non-contradictory thing a thing proper.

By contrast, a thing's being might be provided for by accounting for that identity which persists as it undergoes the becoming-other of becoming. But to think identity in this way is contrary to Meillassoux's purposes when he refers to the principle of non-contradiction. To do so would lead him back to problems he rejects, like those of essence or sufficient reason for instance. For him, the principle of non-contradiction is only applied in order to demonstrate that there is difference and that being is filled with possibility.

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<sup>43</sup> As Graham Harman notes: „In my view, since he [Meillassoux] is saying that everything is absolutely contingent, what he's really doubting is that there's any relationality at all." Graham Harman, "Speculative Realism: presentation by Graham Harman," *Collapse III, Speculative Realism (Annex to Collapse II)* (2007), 385-386.

<sup>44</sup> Watkin, *Difficult Atheism*, 144.

<sup>45</sup> Meillassoux, *Time Without Becoming*, 27.

Yet if all one can say about “to be” is that it is defined by its capacity-to-be-other, then one falls into a bottomless pit of possibility in which one will never see the light of the actual and the real. Apart from the fact that the idols of religious extremism are not very likely to be impressed by this aporetic rationalism, it can be observed that the will to conceive of the absolute as radically inconsistent ultimately makes thought itself inconsistent.

## Factuality and the absoluteness of God

The question arises whether factuality cannot also be understood differently from Meillassoux’s account. And if so, how is one to reconcile factuality and the absolute? How is one to account for becoming and change while maintaining a rigorous and yet flexible conception of being? In approaching these questions, the below provides only the most schematic outline.

To begin, let me first note that factuality is not here understood as identical with God. Instead, factuality or *thatness*, is conceived as the absolute aspect of finite beings that originate in God and can therefore serve as point of reference for developing an appropriate notion of God. While allying oneself with Meillassoux’s anti-anthropological aims, one may nevertheless maintain some semblance of a “human factor” within ontology in order to use it as the speculative tool that, in overcoming itself (one may think here of another “dialectic of the ladder”), also leads one to God.

It will be necessary to bear in mind the following three essential aspects to thinking God: the notion of relative necessity, the notion of becoming-as-realization, and the notion of God as both transcendent (beyond the reach of finite being) and immanent (the existential reason of what beings are among other beings).

1. The relation between God and factuality is perhaps best understood by returning to the question of why there is something rather than nothing. Against the claims of ontotheology, one might argue that the question’s answer needs not have recourse to an ultimate, even all-encompassing, entity. Instead, there is something rather than nothing because there is existence, that “there is” that is irreducible to any entity whatsoever. If this is true, then it follows that “there is,” or existence, “is” in such a way that it is beyond both conceptual definitions, as well as any other form of representation. This does not, however, mean that existence, or what was above called “factuality,” is here negative. Indeed, being beyond representation thereby testifies to the absolute character of existence.

One can agree with Meillassoux that factuality is the absolute and that finite being is contingent. However, it is important to prevent beings from losing their ontological consistency, as is the case with Meillassoux.

Therefore, one might understand them as contingent in the sense that their existence is independent of themselves since they do not ultimately bring themselves into being. Yet, insofar as they exist, they are necessary in at least a relative way on account of existence or factuality itself.

In order to better understand this point, it will be instructive to once again return to the question of time. In accord with the principle of non-contradiction, one might claim that beings are relatively necessary at a certain time: Insofar as they exist, they cannot not exist at the same time.<sup>46</sup> One might further claim that what has once existed cannot be undone. Though a certain being or entity may perish, this in no way changes the fact that the entity once was. In this sense, the entity achieves a definite and irrevocable "place in being." According to Meillassoux, however, one need not accept these claims because, sometime in the future, it may happen that this thing never existed. But such an argument immediately shows itself to be aporetic: the future nothingness of an entity, the entity's never-having-existed, would destroy its present capacity to become this nothingness. It will always have been nothing. We can therefore rightfully claim that, if factuality is the absolute, also finite beings partake in the absolute. Factuality, or existence, is the absolute dimension of finite beings.

2. As noted, the question of the absolute dimension of finite beings is related to the question of their ontological consistency. How to understand this consistency? Let me introduce at this point what one might call the "existential content" (*existenzieller Gehalt*). The term is supposed to designate the absolute aspect of every being insofar as it exists, more formally, as it is characterized by that-it-is. It describes what is inexhaustible, whether by human access or by any other form of relationship, even if it is the relationship that an entity maintains to itself. The existential content, therefore, is not "something," it has no objective meaning. Rather, it is at the threshold of being-something. It is what we must presuppose, retrospectively, if we want to understand that there is "something," and that, because of its factuality, it has an absolute dimension. This is precisely why it is not "nothing" either. For even if it is not something, retrospectively, we can say that it has been constitutive for what "something" is in itself and for others. That is, the existential content is not arbitrary. In a sense, it is specific, or definite, in that it is specifiable. Its reality is in the possibilities that it creates — possibilities of finite beings that they realize for themselves and with and against others,

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<sup>46</sup> See Béla Weissmahr, "Welterfahrung und Gotteserkenntnis. Gibt es eine tragfähige Form des kontingenz-(kosmologischen) Argumentes?", in *Um Möglichkeit oder Unmöglichkeit natürlicher Gotteserkenntnis heute*, ed. Klaus Kremer (Leiden: Brill, 1985), 43-44. I follow Weissmahr's distinction between "*bedingter Notwendigkeit*" and "*unbedingter Notwendigkeit*" (conditioned, or relative, necessity and absolute necessity). See Béla Weissmahr, *Philosophische Gotteslehre* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1983), 64-66.

but never *fully* realize. For that would be beyond their actual being, or the “realm of whatness,” that is binding for them.

The existential content introduces us to the actual dynamics of finite being. At the basis of what seems to be the fate of finite becoming, that is, emergence and decay, there is another becoming. By contrast to Meillassoux’s notion of becoming, however, it is not characterized by disintegration, but rather by what one may call a “synthesis of overcoming.” It is movement that constantly surpasses itself, and in doing so, it lets beings be in time. This is so because the existential content is what, on the one hand, grounds beings and allows them to be “something,” while on the other, it is inexhaustible to them. Yet, the existential content is what beings refer to while they are what they are. It is what they are pursuing while they are what they are. One might claim, then, that because of the existential content, every being is reaching for itself, and that means that it reaches beyond itself (that is, that what it is in time) towards the absolute dimension of itself. There could be no finite being without this ongoing movement of transcendence.

3. Both the existential content and the dynamics of absolute becoming in finite becoming give us access to the notion of God. It still holds that no one can know “what God is.” Rather, we must recognize God from what God creates or to choose a more technical term, from what God makes both possible and real; from what God brings into being. First, God brings into being the ultimate reality of finite being, which is the existential content.

The existential content has a double-meaning. First, it is inherent to finite being. Yet in being inherent to finite being, in a second and stronger sense, it is inherent to God. One might summarize this in saying that the existential content is the work of God as well as it is the way in which God works in finite being. Or, the existential content is a reality made by God in which God manifests Godself in time and through what is not God.

This double-aspect of the existential content of inhering both to the finite and to the absolute allows to distinguish several aspects of God. There is a similarity of this approach to the reasoning about God by way of eminence (*via eminentiae*). In contrast to the scholastic account, however, it does not distinguish properties, but rather functions of God. From the dynamics or movement of finite being it deduces God who makes this movement possible; who is at the heart of this movement, which can in no way exhaust God.

Let me just mention the main aspects. As noted, the existential content is the absolute dimension of every finite being insofar as it is based in the absolute that makes finite being possible, and that is God. The first aspect of God results from the fact that every finite being is oriented towards its own existential content. It seeks its own absolute that is based in God. In accordance with a classical notion of God, from this perspective, God is both the origin and the aim of finite being, even if not directly, but rather mediated by the existential content.

God's teleological function for finite being implies several other aspects, three of which one might pick out. First, finite beings cannot exhaust the existential content, that is, they cannot fully realize it in time, they cannot be absolute. Nonetheless, every existential content is real. It exists through God. Therefore, finite beings cannot fully realize their own absolute dimension. Yet, this does not mean that they are fragmentary, as it might seem from an exclusively finite perspective. Rather, they are always already saved by means of the existential content, and that is ultimately they are saved by God.

Second, if God saves, God also gives to each its own. This is so because there is not only the existential content, but also its realization. One might return to the problem of life after death here that was already discussed.

No one can say what comes after death and, despite our fear of death, it doesn't matter. Ultimately, there is only absolute life or rather, absolute being. Yet absolute being is related to finite being in that it is — or while being — beyond finite being. Every finite being consists of a specific phase of being in which it realizes its own existential content. From a finite perspective, this phase is open, unforeseeable, and inexhaustible — until the final moment, when it becomes clear what all beings were meant to be. From the perspective of the existential content, however, all phases are already completed. They are gathered in eternity, in absolute time.

There seems to be a certain determinism here that might remind one of mythical eternal recurrence. But absolute time is not the ultimate dimension of being. Rather, it is the penultimate dimension. In absolute time, everything is gathered as what it has been and could be again. This condition is terrible in every way. If it became reality, it would mean the recurrence of everything ad nauseam. Pleasure, enjoyment and lust would reappear and be lost again. Loss, pain and guilt would reappear and solidify. Absolute affirmation, Nietzsche's *amor fati*, could not do anything here, where the negativity of finitude is absolutely perpetuated. To put it in biblical terms: absolute time is pure and unmitigated judgement. In absolute time, everything is completely there, and yet it is not fulfilled. "There is no one just, not one" (Rom. 3:10), that is, no one (and nothing) is intact and whole. It carries the stigma of time, of finitude. The verdict is on everything.

Third, however, since absolute time is only a reflection of absolute existence, it is always already overcome by the latter. At its origin (that is, anterior to finitude and determination), every existential content is without damage. While orienting themselves towards the existential content, finite beings are seeking this state of integrity. Yet they cannot reach it in finite time. They could not even reach it in absolute time, because also absolute time is related to what beings are, that is, to their objective form. Therefore, it is negative.

At this point, a further change of perspective is appropriate: Integrity can only approach beings from the beyond of both their origin and their

ultimate future. This beyond of both origin and future is the actual place of God or even, this is God insofar as God is related to finite being;<sup>47</sup> insofar as God makes being both possible as well as real; insofar as God, quite literally, brings existence into being. Being could not be without existence; and existence — factuality — would be empty without being, that is, if it was not related to specific entities. The intertwining of both is installed by God.

Again, one might say, with T. S. Eliot, that “in my beginning is my end” (*Four Quartets, East Coker I*: 1). Yet, the mythical circle is broken by the excessive power of restitution that approaches finite being from transcendence for as long as it exists. To use again the language of the Bible: When God creates God also makes sure that there will be redemption. That is, God takes care that finitude is not the ultimate structure of being. Rather, being has an origin that is beyond being itself, and it has an end that is beyond being itself. The circle of the beyond completes finite being. Yet, it also ensures that finite being will never be closed within itself, so that it is left to its own devices, to the disintegration and fragmentation of time. There will always be an opening leading out of the course of things and towards a wholeness that releases all things from themselves.

Neither the notion of Hyper-chaos nor the spectral God of withdrawal can free this world from the many powers of bondage that are rightly called idols. Truth and deliverance lie in the excessive, self-transcending movement of being, and the task of thinking is to find ways to follow it more closely.

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<sup>47</sup> One might recall that, in Judaism, one of the names of God is *HaMakom* (The Place).

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# “Moral interiority” and self-realization: The essential relationship between God and human being in Edith Stein’s thought

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## Abstract

The ethics perspective which I shall focus on in this chapter is necessarily founded on Stein’s investigations about the human spiritual dimension, in which her phenomenological and metaphysical-theological research are synthesized. Stein describes the human being as “essentially spiritual”, namely intellect and will. In fact, he can comprehend reality in its “meaning” (*Sinn*) and act freely in it. The ethical consequences of Stein’s anthropological reflections will be explained through what we shall call “moral interiority”. Following Augustine, Stein perceives the original consciousness of oneself (interiority) as “an inner place, not a place” (*interiore loco, non loco*), where to start explaining intellectual knowledge, and most of all free acting and consequently ethics. Action is not just expressed outwards, and is first of all self-actuation – acting and being are mutually implied. The direction of moral actions is thus already present in the ‘essence’ (*Wesen*) of each individual and this essence, thanks to the creative ‘essentiality’ (*Wesenheiten*), is *ab eterno* in the *Logos*. In view of this complex theological node, the purpose of this essay is to show how we can say, with Stein, that Christ incarnates the only possible ethics.

**Keywords:** Edith Stein, phenomenological anthropology, essence, meaning, *Logos*, interiority, ethic.

## 1. The human spiritual dimension

### 1.1 Essentiality, essence and actual-real being

MY INVESTIGATION STARTS FROM THE study of a particularly delicate topic, to which Stein has devoted much time and energy: the issue of *essence*. It is a fundamental and much articulated topic, a crossover between phe-

nomenology and scholastic philosophy, both of which were the object of study by Edith Stein throughout her life. The purpose of Husserl's phenomenology is the «return to essence», an issue that dates back to Greek philosophy and is an important part of all Christian tradition. Edith Stein perceives such continuity in the Greek term εἶδος used by Husserl himself and synthetically elaborates the problem, providing an original and personal interpretation<sup>1</sup>. In *Finite and Eternal Being*, Stein specifically focuses on it, albeit avoiding the term idea (εἶδος) - which from Plato onwards generated conflicts and ambiguities - and prefers to use the German term *Wesenheit*<sup>2</sup>. The starting point is always the life of the ego as it emerges from a phenomenological study. The *experiential units* (*Erlebniseinheiten*), resulting from the transcendental reduction, are a flow of *Erlebnisse* which manifest continuously one after the other, but they have a stable foundation, which according to Stein consists of *essentialities* (*Wesenheiten*). She writes:

Unless essentialities (*wesenheit*) were realized in the life of the Ego, this latter world be a chaotic maze in which no formal structure whatever could be distinguished. It is the essentialities which impart to the life of the ego unity and multiplicity, organic articulate structure and order, meaning and intelligibility. *Sense (der Sinn) and intelligibility*: actually we are face to face here with the primordial source of all sense and intelligibility. For what is sense (Sinn) (λογος)? What does this word signify? We are unable to define or explain it because it is itself the ultimate ground (*Grund*) or reason of all definitions and explications. All human speech rests on the certainty that words have a meaning, and every explanation and argument rests on the conviction that all our questioning and reasoning arrives in the end at an ultimate intelligible reason or ground.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Edmund Husserl, *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und einer phänomenologischen Philosophie*, «Husserliana» III/1, Karl Schuman (Hrsg.) (Den Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 1976). In this work, Husserl speaks about "*Wesenswissenschaft*". Differently from *Logische Untersuchungen*, to avoid misunderstandings, he does not use any more the term "idea", but rather the German word "Wesen" or the greek one "eidos": «Vielleicht nicht ganz so schlimm hinsichtlich beirrender Vieldeutigkeiten steht es mit den Ausdrücken I d e e und I d e a l, aber im ganzen doch schlimm genug, wie mir die häufigen Mißdeutungen meiner "Logischen Untersuchungen" empfindlich genug gemacht haben. Zu einer Änderung der Terminologie bestimmt mich auch das Bedürfnis, den höchst wichtigen K a n t i s c h e n B e g r i f f d e r I d e e von dem allgemeinen Begriffe des (formalen oder materialen) Wesens reinlich geschieden zu erhalten. Ich benutze daher als Fremdwort das terminologisch unverbrauchte E i d o s, als deutsches Wort das mit ungefährlichen, gelegentlich allerdings ärgerlichen Äquivokationen behaftete "W e s e n"». (ibid., p. 6). Cf. Angela Ales Bello, *Introduzione a Edith Stein, La ricerca della verità. Dalla fenomenologia alla filosofia cristiana*, a cura di Angela Ales Bello (Roma: Città Nuova Editrice, 1993), 14.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Edith Stein, *Finite and Eternal Being*, (Washington: Institute of Carmelite Studies, 2002), 65; differently from this translation, I will use the term "essence" for *Wesen* and "essentiality" for *Wesenheit*.

This ultimate ground is the sense [*der Sinn*], intelligible in itself and through itself. *Meaning and understanding belong together*. Meaning is what can be understood, and understanding is the grasping of meaning (*Sinnerfassen*). To understand (*verstehen*) what is intelligible (*Verstehbare*) is the precise nature or being of the human spirit (*eigentlichste Sein des Geistes*) which for this reason is also called *intellectus*<sup>3</sup>.

So the human’s intellectual-spiritual dimension does not create a meaning (*Logos*) for what is real, but, on the contrary, it grasps meaning in the reality, which is therefore intelligible for it. Here Stein reclaims the Christian metaphysical tradition and the classic distinction between *ratio* and *intellectus*. The first one is a logical or rational connection procedure, while the second is «resting in the understanding of the ultimate meaning»<sup>4</sup>. Thus, the essentialities play a key role: simple, independent of time and change, they represent the ultimate meaning, the intelligible itself. They are not real-actual, but without them the real world would not be. The becoming real, in fact, is understandable to us only because, thanks to its *essence* (*Wesen*), it participates in the immutability of the essentialities. Essentialities are neither *concepts*<sup>5</sup>, the result of abstraction, nor essences. Human beings cannot know the pure simplicity of essentialities, but can grasp it when, by giving a name to things, they know them. Through names, in fact, their essence is manifested. And the essence is the mediate place between essentiality and the real-actual world<sup>6</sup>.

According to what we have learned so far about essentialities, it appears certain that their essential being (*wesenhaftes Sein*) is the only kind of being they possess. On the other hand as far as the essences are concerned they may possess an additional actuality in their respective objects, and a relationship to those objects whose *quid* they determine is already implied in their pre-actual being. This duality in the being of the essences corresponds to the mediating function which they exercise with respect to the essentialities, on the one hand, and the “real-actual world”, on the other<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 65. In the footnote 3, the philosopher specifies the difference between *intellectus* and *ratio*.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 65.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Ibid., 66: «The danger of mistaking the essence of a *concept* is even greater. We form concepts by bringing into relief certain characteristic marks of an object. We thus have a certain amount of freedom in the formation of concepts. Essentialities, on the other hand, are not formed by us but rather *found discovered*».

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Ibid., 79-80. Here, Stein’s metaphysical research is correlated with theological perspective: before of the original pity, the human being knew things in their essence and he could give them an appropriate name. The Biblical reference is Gn. 2, 19.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 84.

According to a first definition, following Thomas Aquinas and also Husserl's investigations, essence «[...] is *that which determines the "quid" or "what" of the object* (το τι ἐν εἰηαι). An "essence-less" (*Wesen-los*) object is therefore inconceivable; without a essence it would no longer be an object, but only the empty form of an object»<sup>8</sup>. A rielaboration of this classic issue is fundamental to study a human spiritual dimension. The «double being» of essence – Stein writes – corresponding to the «mediate place [...] between essentialities and the "actual-real world"» can be better understood through the distinction between "full *quid*" and "essential (pure) *quid*". The latter represents the essential possibility (*Wesensmöglichkeit*) which is immutable and at the same time can only be expressed in the actual-real being. The full *quid* can be caught, however, considering the whole becoming process to which every temporal reality is subject to. Stein uses joy as an example:

*The essence and the essential quid (Wesens was) of this (my) joy is actual as a whole at every moment of the joy's (actual-real) duration. [...] There is no doubt that the essence of this (my) joy is actual only as long as the joy itself is actual (full quid). Prior to the actuality, the essence of my joy has no being in the "real world [...]. Nevertheless, it cannot be said that the essence of my joy is not prior to this actuality. Since we are able to grasp its essential quid independent of its actualisation in its object*<sup>9</sup>.

Essence thus depends on essentiality, through its essential *quid* – what in Medieval tradition was referred to as "universal" –, but also on the object it needs to complete itself through the full *quid*<sup>10</sup>. According to Stein, a discourse on essentialities is to be intended as a reinterpretation of Plato's world of ideas and the universals of Scholasticism, opening the way to a comparison with the classic doctrine of *exemplarism*, from which Stein elaborates her own "version" of it<sup>11</sup>.

## 1.2 *Essence and singularity*

We have said that the human spirit can grasp the meaning of the real only through essence, as essence participates in the simplicity of the essentialities. We must now ask ourselves if these essentialities are "copies" of real entities.

Stein's ontology describes the reality of the world as independent of the spiritual-intellectual subject (realism). However, the reality can assume a

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 70-71.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 82-83.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Ibid., 84 footnote 43: Stein comments the husserlian *Wesensanschauung* (E. Husserl, *Ideen I*, pp. 8 ss.). She argues that Husserl have not considered this double nature of *Wesen*.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Letterio Mauro, «*In principio era il senso*». *L'ordine del mondo in Edith Stein*, in «*Minima metaphisica*», *Il divino e l'ordine del mondo*, a cura di M. Marassi e R. Radice (Milano: Vita e Pensiero, 2015).

meaning when it is known by the spiritual subject<sup>12</sup>. This is possible thanks to the essence of known things and to the essence of the knowing spirit. This perspective remains faithful to the noetic-noematic description proposed by phenomenology and it is enriched by the adhesion to Christian metaphysics. The universal according to Stein coincides with the essential *quid* – as discussed above – which is neither mere name, nor mere concept. It is not an arbitrary result of abstraction, but it can be “found” in objects, even independent of their being actual-real. The human being, in fact, knows things «as such» because he can “find” in them their own meaning thanks to his spiritual being, which is individually connotated. The material world is thus intentionally grasped and understood according to a specific “scale of values”. It is not rational *knowing (ratio)*, but *thinking*, the work of intellect (*intellectus*)<sup>13</sup>. The known world is independent of the knower, but the latter, operating intentionally on the world, “provides meaning”. The human knowing process cannot however be described as autonomous, because to receive the essence in the meaning of things is not the same as to perceive it in its purity and simplicity, namely in its essentialities; the human being does not see things as they are themselves but he can understand their meaning<sup>14</sup>. These observations lead to the recognition of an eternal foundation outside time, and belonging to the field of essentiality. The Greek expression *tò ti en einai* can be translated as “to be that which was” in its essence. «Whatever essentiality is immutably what it *was*», writes Stein. «Said more precisely, the difference between present, past, and future is suspended here. Whatever is essentially does not enter into existence; it *is*, not as from moment to moment wrested from the naught, it is not temporal. But because it is independent of time, it *is* also in every instant»<sup>15</sup>. It is apparent how Stein adheres to tradition which, through Plato, Augustine and Thomas<sup>16</sup>, deals with the topic of the exemplarism, avoiding hypostatization and so duplicity between archetype and things. The archetype (or essentiality) is not something different from real-actual being: it is its most authentic actuation, it is what it ought (was destined) to be<sup>17</sup>. Later, this gnoseological and ontological argument will assume a moral meaning.

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<sup>12</sup> Cf. Stein 2002, 85-90.

<sup>13</sup> This difference is typical of Christian metaphysical thought (for instance Thomas Aquinas, Bonaventure and Nicholas of Cusa) and it is shared by Stein. Then, in the contemporary philosophy the theme is studied also by Heidegger, which he uses the terms *Wissen* and *Denken*. Cf. Giuseppe Barzaghi, *Lo sguardo di Dio. Saggi di teologia anagogica* (Siena: Edizione Cantagalli, 2003), 96 e ss.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Stein 2002, 70-71.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 93.

<sup>16</sup> Stein refers to Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones disputatae de Potentia*, q. 3, a. 5 and *Quaestiones disputatae de Veritate*, q. 3, a. 1 corp.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Stein 2002, 303-304.

## 2. Theory of being [Seinslehre]

### 2.1 Essence, existence, creation

As we have shown, the topic of essences and essentialities leads Stein to refuse the “dualistic” interpretation of Plato’s doctrine of ideas<sup>18</sup>. To clarify this point and avoid such criticism – which Aristotle made to Plato - is no easy task. However, Stein repeatedly emphasizes that she is not sure Aristotle correctly understood his Master. Ideas are not things, but they are truer than every entity (μαλλον οητα):

[...] the ideas cannot be anything but “true”. - she writes - [...] Ideas are what they are, and they are manifest to the divine spirit. [...] ideas are nothing but the divine spirit itself, which as such is completely manifest or intelligible to itself.<sup>19</sup>

Here it is clear that the Stein’s philosophical perspective is related to the Revelation. In this light, in fact, Stein’s elaboration of the problem of *essence* is particularly interesting. This theme is not merely used in a gnoseological context to explain the dynamism of the human knowledge, but constitutes the ontological framework within which it is possible to comprehend Stein’s anthropological and moral perspective. The question about the “meaning of the reality” is the framework within which the doctrine of the *Wesenheiten* should be placed. It is not enough to describe how it is possible to know something - the question becomes “why that thing is” and “what is its origin”. From here, the philosophical necessity to encompass the issue of analogy, between human beings and their Principle. Plato’s ideas remain an important reference point. However, the idea of creation was still foreign to Plato. Stein’s metaphysics, on the contrary, does discuss the problem of unity-multiplicity within the context of creationism<sup>20</sup>. The philosophical reason behind drawing from the Holy Scriptures is also in the metaphysical question which Heidegger brought to the attention of his contemporaries: “why being and not nothing?”<sup>21</sup>. However, Stein’s answer is completely different from Heidegger’s. In fact a phenomenological investigation on

<sup>18</sup> Like Thomas, Stein is thoroughly convinced that there are real intelligible structure and Plato’s doctrine of ideas was in this perspective. Cf. *ibid.*, chap. IV, § 4, 3.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 306.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 308: «the attempt to harmonize the simplicity of the divine being with the manifold of the ideas bears the marks of the reason illumined by faith, a reason which – impelled by the words of revealed truth – seeks to grasp mysteries which defy and confound all human concepts».

<sup>21</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 325-331. «We can conceptually conceive of the nothing, but it is not a “structure” [*Gebilde*]. It is without content and thus without an essence. It cannot even be called an empty form, but merely the annulment, negation, or crossing out of an empty form, namely, of the form of a something. The nothing evinces the incapability of thought to generate by itself “something that does not rest on an already given reality».

the Ego leads her to seek perspectives of meanings capable to explain its origin. The actual life of the pure Ego flows from one lived experience to the other and it cannot be independent, she writes. It needs a foundation<sup>22</sup>. Thus it is through a phenomenological analysis that Stein recognizes the Eternal Being, the Creator, as the measure of being of each and every Ego. So, Husserl’s discourse on essence is synthetically connected to that on existence and to the question about origin. In this context, Stein’s doctrine of essentiality [*Wesenheiten*] provides a philosophical contribution to the theological problem of Creation.

## *2.2 From essence to existence*

Among the different meanings of *ens*, which Stein analyzes in detail from the Aristotelian and Thomistic traditions<sup>23</sup>, the most important one is that used to indicate “something which *is*”. We thus reach the question of existence (*Existenz*)<sup>24</sup>. The need for completeness in Stein’s investigation on being allows her to point out the mutual dependence between essential dimension and existential dimension. The essential *quid* of every thing *is* before the real-actual being<sup>25</sup>, but such *quid* can be determined only in synthesis with the real being (from potency to act)<sup>26</sup>. An investigation on existence cannot thus be avoided. The main purpose of research is, in fact, to reach an understanding of the world of experience in its real multiplicity. According to Stein, the need to understand this fullness of being starts from the experience of the real, but it refers back to essentialities, which, as we have seen, are not an arbitrary result of abstraction. Stein writes: «Being is one, and all that which is shares in it. Its *full meaning* corresponds to the fullness of all existents. And when we speak of *being*, we *mean* this total fullness. No finite intellect, however, is ever capable of enclosing this fullness in the unity of a fulfilled apperception. To approximate the apperception of this fullness is the infinite task and goal of human knowledge»<sup>27</sup>. Using the *analogy of proportionality* (*analogia proportionis*)<sup>28</sup> – like Thomas – “being” can be said analogically, albeit different. We shall not here discuss in detail Stein’s arguments on analogy, but this perspective allows us to understand a nodal point. Stein reflects on the passage from the Bible in which God says “I

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<sup>22</sup> Cf. E. Stein, *Potenz und Akt: Studien zu einer Philosophie des Seins*, ESGA 10, (Freiburg in Breisgau: Verlag Herder, 2005), 14: «Es ist für das fließende Leben etwas da, was ihm “zu Grunde liegt”, was es trägt – eine *Substanz*».

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Stein 2002, chap. IV, §2, 11.

<sup>24</sup> Cfr., *ibid.*, 354.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 325-331.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 333.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 332.

<sup>28</sup> Cf., *ibid.*, 335: here Stein distinguishes between aristotelic *analogia entis* and thomistic *analogia proportionis*.

am who I am”<sup>29</sup>. The very name of God, “I am”, expresses His total fullness of being with no need of further attributes. It allows us to understand that unity beyond time in which there is no difference between name, meaning and reality. The name of God is fullness of meaning, and can be expressed only as a verb: “I am” (*sum*). «God’s “I am” is an eternally living presence, without beginning and without end, without any voids and without any darkness»<sup>30</sup>. For analogy the human spiritual being has the possibility to define himself as “I”. Only a human being, in fact, can think himself as a single individual and can describe himself using such word, which however needs to be specified through a number of predicates and becomes in time. The word “I” in this case is a sign of conscious and spiritual life, albeit not coinciding with the real fullness of its being. The life of the I is in fact present in every moment, but it is “filled” with contents which differ from moment to moment, forming a multiplicity of becoming lived experiences. «And thus we see that while the being of the I is separated from divine being by an infinite distance, it nevertheless – owing to the fact that it is an I, i.e., a person – bears a closer resemblance to divine being than anything else that lies within the reach of our experience»<sup>31</sup>.

### 3. “Moral interiority”

#### 3.1 *The human spirit as self-knowledge*

How can we interpret this analogical relationship? We would like to focus on what we shall call “moral interiority”, having its apex in Christ. In fact, the augustinian issue of interiority seems to be the best way to describe man’s capability to access his inner self and know it. Such inward “opening” is what characterizes the spiritual dimension of human beings<sup>32</sup> and seems to be their *maior similitudo* with the Creator. If the human soul is spirit according to its most intimate essence, it is by looking at its spiritual determination that we can discover its analogy with God, pure Spirit<sup>33</sup>. The human being, as we have said, is spiritual because is capable of comprehending reality and of knowing himself (memory)<sup>34</sup>, and he can act freely (will). The phenomenological investigation is enriched with Augustine’s description of the spirit (*mens* in Latin) as memory, intellect and will. Phenomenology

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Es 3, 14.

<sup>30</sup> Stein 2002, 344.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 344.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Edith Stein, *Der Aufbau der menschlichen Person. Vorlesungen zur philosophischen Anthropologie*, ESGA 14 (Freiburg im Breisgau, Verlag Herder, 2010), 78: «Wir sagen dafür auch: eine *freie geistige Person*. Person sein heißt, ein freies und geistiges Wesen sein. Daß der Mensch Person ist, das unterscheidet ihn von allen Naturwesen».

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Stein 2002, 460.

<sup>34</sup> Cf., *ibid.*, 362.

defines spiritual life as an “*intentional* movement” by which the subject looks at an object<sup>35</sup> and considers it according to a specific meaning content (*Sinnesgehalt*)<sup>36</sup>, through the essentialities. According to Stein, this human spiritual knowledge is toward the external world and then it is toward the inner world. So thanks to his spiritual being, man can look also inwards - *in interioritate* – and know himself. It is not psychic consciousness (reflective), but rather spiritual self-knowledge; it is a pre-reflective “original consciousness”. Stein writes:

We shall confine our inquiry to the inner world of the ego. And this means in the present context not only the conscious ego-life – the present ego-life of past and future, to the extent that they are accessible by reaching backward and forward in memory and anticipation (i.e., the unity of the *stream of experiences* [*Erlebnisstrom*]) – but also that which is not immediately conscious, that out of which conscious life arise<sup>37</sup>.

This access that the human spirit has to its own interiority is not always actual and is of the same nature as Husserl’s *internal perception*. It is completely different from the consciousness that accompanies the pure Ego<sup>38</sup> - it is not always immediately present and is pre-reflective: stored in memory, it forms a collection of experiences allowing for “self-knowledge”<sup>39</sup>. This spiritual self-knowledge capacity – i.e. interiority – is however limited, as it is not totally clear to oneself. Indeed the spiritual soul is characterized by interior light and darkness, similar to «a lighted surface over a dark abyss»<sup>40</sup>.

### 3.2 *The human spirit as will*

The spiritual life, as we have seen, is intellectual knowledge through essence and essentialities, it is self-knowledge, namely interiority, and finally it is free will<sup>41</sup>. Thanks to the latter, the subject can be defined as

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<sup>35</sup> Cf. Edith Stein, *Beiträge zur philosophischen Begründung der Psychologie und der Geisteswissenschaften*, ESGA 6 (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2010), cit., 64 ss.

<sup>36</sup> In the phenomenological description, the spiritual capacity to grasp intentionally an object it’s thanks to the “motivation”. Cf. Stein 2002, chap. IV, §3, 20 e §4, 8.

<sup>37</sup> Stein 2002, 388.

<sup>38</sup> About “interior perception” see Stein 2002, 374-376.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 500-501.

<sup>40</sup> Stein 2002, 365.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 372: «The realm of spiritual life is the authentic realm of freedom. Here the I can be genuinely creative out of the depth of its own self. What we call *free acts* – a firm resolve, the voluntary inception and execution of some action, the explicit turning toward a “rising” thought, the conscious termination of a succession of ideas as well as all questioning, demanding, granting, promising, commanding, obeying- are deeds” of the I, manifold in their meaning and inner structure, but uniform in one respect. In all of these deeds the I determines the content or direction of its own being [...]. This does not mean, of course, that

a “person”<sup>42</sup>. He can freely choose how to act and thus pronounce his *fiat*. This ethics issue, about appetitive faculty<sup>43</sup>, is discussed by Stein in her anthropological description, which we can define as phenomenological-metaphysical. According to Stein, this faculty is oriented towards good. The desire for good which is characteristic of the spiritual dimension is explained starting from the thomistic discussion on transcendentals, especially the transcendental *bonum*. Willing the good implies knowledge; what is willed is known, and therefore true<sup>44</sup>. *Bonum* and *verum* are closely related and – like in Thomism – they impart perfection to the existent (*ens*)<sup>45</sup>. As we have seen, the spirit can understand reality because it grasp its essence, and thus essentiality. We are back to the topic of archetypes, to be understood not as something different from the real-actual being, but rather as the existent in its actualization: “the existent as it should be”<sup>46</sup>. The cognitive faculty (intellect) and the appetitive faculty (will) are seen in their mutual determination and the classic theory of transcendentals is integrated with the contemporary moral “value theory”. Stein writes: «[...] which we call *value* belongs to the realm of essential being. It is pre-designed from eternity not only what an existent (*ens*) is, considered in itself, but also what significance, i.e., what value, attaches to it in the total context of all existents»<sup>47</sup>. Here, we can see clearly the metaphysical origin of Stein’s moral perspective, which we have tried to discuss synthetically with her anthropological investigation about the human spiritual dimension. The question behind Stein’s work – the meaning of being – is not disconnected from her reflection on moral acting. The human being, thanks to his appetitive faculty, tends to improvement and his acting is part of his being: «The effects (i.e., the resultant quid of the efficacious activity), however, depend on *what the existents are*»<sup>48</sup>. The human beings, as real-actual existent, are subject to becoming and, acting freely, can tend to the realization of what they are essentially. Unlike the pure Act, in them being and acting do not coincide, but there are potentialities *in interioritate* which can be realized in

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in these deeds the I becomes [...] the creator of its own self. The I has *received* the freedom of self-determination as a gift».

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Stein 2002, 366-367.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Angela Ales Bello, *Edith Stein: lo spirito umano in cammino verso la santità*, in AA. VV., *Edith Stein. Lo spirito e la santità*, a cura di Michele D’Ambra, (Roma: Edizioni OCD, 2007), 15: «Il regno dello spirito è il regno degli atti liberi, quegli atti caratterizzati dal fiat, che implicano una decisione e una presa di posizione. Si entra nella sfera del volere e dell’agire, lontana da ogni determinismo, nella quale si può “agire” o “tralasciare”, ed è qui che si innesta la vita etica e la scelta morale».

<sup>44</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 312.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Q. de Veritate*, cit., q. 21, a. 1 e a. 3.

<sup>46</sup> About this theme, Stein describes the difference between human being and angelic creature. Cf. Stein 2002, chap. VII, §5.

<sup>47</sup> Stein 2002, 316.

<sup>48</sup> Stein 2002, 316.

time<sup>49</sup>. In this sense, we have use the word “moral interiority” to indicate the person as capable of seeing and realizing what he is essentially. Only as free to “create” his life can the subject be defined as a *person*. This freedom of self-determination is however a *gift* that man has received and that can be developed in any freely chosen direction.

#### 4. Deus Trinitas as the apex of moral love

We have seen that man is an actual-real person: his essence can be freely actuated in existence, in a temporal process. However, what is actuated in such process is since eternity. We have finally explained this apparent contradiction. With Stein, we can say that the *meaning*, completed through this becoming process, is fully contained in the *Logos*, beginning and origin of this fullness of meaning. No contingent entity can exist outside the absolute and eternal Being – it would be a logical contradiction. The temporal becoming of the real being, and therefore of human existence, is based upon what Stein called “the realm of meaning”<sup>50</sup> to which every meaningful unit belongs. These units, however, receive meaning as a *gift* in the creative act, that is not temporal. Since in God being and acting coincide, there is no beginning in the creation act. It cannot be conceived with the temporal categories which characterize human production. Created beings are called into existence in time, but they *are* in their meaningfulness since eternity, according to their essentiality. From this point of view, Stein interprets the first verse of the Prologue to St. John’s Gospel as “in the beginning was the meaning (*Im Anfang war der Sinn*)<sup>51</sup>”. And then: “through him all things came into being”<sup>52</sup>. The generation of the Word through the Father expresses His real-actual being. In fact, *Logos* is a real person. However, His existing is not separated from His essential being, since in Him there is no beginning. This generating act, which is eternal and *in* God Himself, already contains the whole creation; there is no before or after. The archetype problem, again. How can we solve it? What role should this topic play in the moral perspective we have outlined? This passage of the Scriptures, says Stein, prompts us to return to Augustine’s theory of ideas as “creative essentialities in the spirit of God”.

How is the *con-stare* of things, their *subsisting* or *being alive* in the *Logos*, to be understood? It has been pointed out that it cannot be understood as their actual being. [...].The name *Logos* seems to indicate that what is meant might be the *essential being* of things,

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<sup>49</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 376.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 150.

<sup>51</sup> *Der Sinn* is often translated as “meaningful existence” (cf. Stein 2002, 106).

<sup>52</sup> Cf. John 1, 1-18.

that the meaning of things (which we have previously characterized as “not-become” [*ungerworden*]) might have its habitat in the divine *Logos*. That which from eternity subsists a component part [Glieder] of the divine plan of Creation is “imparted” to things as their meaning and is actualized in them<sup>53</sup>.

The creative essentialities are in Him, because “through him all things came into being”. The interpretation of the above passages, however, should not lead us to posit that essentialities in the *Logos* are previous to their realization *hic et nunc*. Essentialities are in fact already real-actual in Him, *ab eterno*. In this sense, they are defined by Stein “creative archetypes”. She writes: «the being of the finite in the eternal carries a twofold meaning: 1) a being-encompassed of all finite things by the divine spirit and 2) a causal being-founded on all finite things in the divine essence»<sup>54</sup>. These considerations lead to the problem of *individuation*, which we cannot examine here – it would carry us beyond the topic of “moral interiority”. However, we would like to note that, if the individual essence has a twofold aspect – essential *quid* and full *quid* – it could be a good starting point to try and solve the apparent contradiction between unity and multiplicity. Essence is the *quid* of each actual-real entity (full *quid*), and at the same time is contained in the *Logos* since, participating in essentiality, is in the *Logos* as not other from Him, and at the same time with its specific individual being. According to Stein, from this point, it is possible to enter the mystery of the twofold Revelation of the *Logos*: in the incarnate Word and in the created world<sup>55</sup>. The Word, i.e. Christ, becomes therefore the only possible archetype, for each acting which is already being. He is the *medium* who solves the seeming contradiction between One and many. If the creative archetype is the actual-real being “as it should be”, since it is its origin and thus its most authentic being (1) and if such archetype is present since eternity in the *Logos* made flesh in Christ (2) then the “model” of each acting can only be the living God made human. No ethical argument is therefore possible outside the *imitatio Christi* as a moral model. What we have called “moral interiority” is the way individuals try to realize at best their essential *quid*. This is possible only through self-actualization, thanks to the love which originates in the Word made human. What can be realized morally, is in the individual’s interiority – what Augustine called the place of eternal truths – what can be realized morally. The path to impart perfection to oneself – the natural pining for good characteristic of appetitive faculty – is in free human action, preceded by knowledge and expressed with love. This ethics perspective, metaphysically and theologically founded, finds its explanation in the mystery of the Trinity. Only with the Trinity as a model

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 116 (my translation).

<sup>55</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, chap. III, §12.

can we understand ethical life as the realization of love, says Stein<sup>56</sup>. Indeed, the relation between a finite “I” and a finite “you” can only be imperfect, since in the “we” there is an irresolvable difference of essential and existential. It is not so in the Trinity, three People linked by a perfect identity of essence. The “we”, in the Trinity, is relation between People and at the same time full unity<sup>57</sup>. Here, the relation is a total love gift, where the I gives itself totally to the you in the act through which the Father generates the Son and breathes with Him the Holy Spirit. It is a mutual gift of a single eternal infinite essence between Divine People. Stein writes: «This essence and being the Father gives from eternity to the Son by generating him, and from this gift proceeds, as the fruit of mutual love, the Holy Spirit»<sup>58</sup>.

To conclude we can say that thanks to the fact that he is a spiritual creature and can open himself to himself<sup>59</sup>, man can intellectually grasp the meaning of reality and act in it. Following Augustine, Stein perceives this original consciousness of oneself (interiority) as “an inner place, not a place” (“interiore loco, non loco”), the starting point for an explanation of intellectual knowledge, but especially the free acting and consequently ethics and, consequently, ethics.

Action is not just expressed outwards: it is first of all self-actuation. Acting and being are mutually implied. The direction of moral actions – as will of perfection – is thus already present in the essence of each individual and this essence, thanks to the creative essentiality, is *ab eterno* in the *Logos*.

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<sup>56</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, chap. IV, §4, 5.

<sup>57</sup> The Holy Trinity is full spirit, namely total gift of love. For analogy, the human spiritual dimension’s capacity to give itself. Cf. *ibid.*, chap. VII, §2.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 351.

<sup>59</sup> Stein refers to thomistic theory of *analogia proportionis*.

- — —. *Ontology, Metaphysics and Life in Edith Stein*. In *Contemplating Edith Stein*, edited by J.A. Berkman, 271-282. Indiana: University of Notre Dame, 2006.
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## Theo-Phenomenology of Love in Fr. Dumitru Stăniloae's Thought

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### Abstract

In reading Father Dumitru Stăniloae, it is obvious that love and divine-human communion have a prominent role in his theology. This text aims to approach this topic from a phenomenological point of view: it analyzes the implicit reductions working in Stăniloae's texts, the presence of the intentionality, the role of the ego and its limits, as well as the problem of the reciprocity of love (raised by Jean-Luc Marion). We will try to argue not only that there are phenomenological influences in Stăniloae's understanding of love, but also that such a topic requires a phenomenology that synthesizes the phenomenology of the world (Husserl and Heidegger) and the phenomenology of life (M. Henry). Because love, in its perfection, is a gift of the Holy Spirit, both types of phenomenology must be complemented with a dialogical and paradoxical one, a theo-phenomenology of love, where the Given can be invisible, living, eternally saturated, and never reducible to an object or to a concept.

**Keywords:** Dumitru Stăniloae, Jean-Luc Marion, love, erotic reduction, theological counter-reduction, reciprocity of love, spiritual life, phenomenology

**A** PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF LOVE from the perspective of Father Dumitru Stăniloae should start with the assumption that Romanian theologians are familiar with this philosophical line of thought. Stăniloae understands, indeed, the terminology of phenomenology and was influenced by this philosophical line of thought – whether by Heidegger's existentialism or by Biswanger's phenomenological psychology, just to name a few examples. The emphasis he places on experience, on living the life of God – an emphasis that is “the very impetus of his thought”<sup>1</sup> – was, on the

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<sup>1</sup> The opinion of Louth, “Review Essay: The Orthodox Dogmatic Theology of Dumitru Staniloae,” *Modern Theology* 13/2 (April 1997), 261; *apud* Silviu Eugen Rogobete, *An ontology of love: Subject and Supreme Personal Reality in the theological thought of Fr. Dumitru Stăniloae* [in Romanian], trans. Anca Dumitraşcu and Adrian Guiu (Iaşi: Polirom, 2001), 27.

one hand, a result of his dialogue with the Tradition of the Church and, on the other hand, a result of his permanent dialogue with certain existentialist concepts.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, the presence of phenomenological ideas and terms in his writings is not by accident.

Phenomenology is a philosophical method and, at the same time, a philosophy that aims to study the phenomena that take place in the intentional consciousness, as well as the way in which they appear and are formed. Father Stăniloae believes that the *phenomenological* question about love can be divided into three main directions, according to the structure of consciousness: the direction of the transcendental *ego*, of the one who asks; the direction of intentionality, that Husserl calls “noetic”; and the direction of the phenomenon that is actually present in the consciousness, one that Husserl calls “noematic.” To start with it due to its methodological importance, intentionality is, according to Husserl, the characteristic of consciousness of always being the consciousness of something, of always being oriented towards something. Intentionality gives the phenomenon as a result of certain phenomenological reductions; it is the noetic dimension of consciousness and an act that encompasses multiple attitudes: perception, recollection, anticipation, retention, protention, etc. The second direction, called noematic, refers to the contents of intentional consciousness – in our case, to the actual phenomenon of love. The appearance of love in consciousness is all the clearer that it applies transcendental-phenomenological reduction to obtain the object itself, “in flesh and bone,” the pure phenomenon, by eliminating all theoretical assumptions. Thirdly, love is not offered only as a phenomenon, but, also according to Husserl, as an “original impression”<sup>3</sup> of the *ego*, which is affected by it as much as it is affected by suffering or by joy. After a distinction made by Michel Henry, who used this as a starting point to construct a phenomenology of life, the self-affection of love is now opposed to the exteriority of intentionality as a fundamental experience of life rather than of thought.<sup>4</sup>

Using the theology of Father Stăniloae as a starting point, we will try to answer questions such as: How does love appear to the consciousness of the faithful man? What is the relation between love and the intentionality of consciousness? What does it mean to experience love and to what extent does its affection and self-affection change the phenomenological understanding of Husserl’s transcendental *ego*? Which type of phenomenology is more suitable for a meaningful discussion about the phenomenon of Christian love? We will try to argue that love is present in all three phenomenological

<sup>2</sup> Rogobete, *An ontology of love*, 121.

<sup>3</sup> Edmund Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy. First Book: General Introduction to a Pure Phenomenology* [in Romanian], trans. Christian Ferencz-Flatz (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2011), 280-281.

<sup>4</sup> See especially part I of Michel Henry, *Incarnation. A Philosophy of the Flesh* [in Romanian], trans. Ioan I. Ică jr (Sibiu: Deisis, 2003), §§ 3, 7–10.

dimensions: it is a noematic object, referred to by intentionality; it is intentionality itself; and it is also part of the definition of the *ego*, modifying it, affecting it, transforming it into a person who is now in communion with God and with his brethren.

## I. Intentionality and reduction

### *Infinite intentionality as love and counter-intentionality*

Husserl defines intentionality as a “peculiarity that consciousness has of being consciousness of something, of carrying in its qualities of *cogito*, its *cogitatum* within itself”.<sup>5</sup> Stăniloae keeps the intentional structure of consciousness and uses it to define man as a person, understood both as a substantial self and as an orientation towards others, as intentionality:

One might argue that the person lives simultaneously on two levels: in itself and in relation, or in its relations with others. [...] But a subject enclosed in total singularity is inconceivable. The subject must refer to something. This paradox is specific to him: he is an irrepressible self and he refers to something.<sup>6</sup>

This phenomenological definition refers to human in a rather existential manner, with Heideggerian influences, placing man as a person within certain inter-personal relations. Intentionality is a “fundamental structure”<sup>7</sup> of man, a sort of *existential* (in Heidegger’s terms). In line with his mystical anthropology, Stăniloae extends the meaning of the concept of intentionality with a new attribute: infinity. Thus, in *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology I*, he provides a similar definition of man, a definition that also lists, apart from rationality, “the infinite intentionality oriented towards the other,” “unlimited love” and “boundless freedom.”<sup>8</sup>

What is the relationship between love and this infinite intentionality? More than a phenomenon offered by intentionality, love is to Stăniloae intentionality itself, through which it seeks communion with the other, which may be God or man. As Stăniloae puts it, “intentionality by communion is

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<sup>5</sup> Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian meditations* [in Romanian], trans. Aurelian Crăițuțu (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1994), 64, § 14.

<sup>6</sup> Dumitru Stăniloae, “God is love,” *Ortodoxia* XXIII/3 (1997), 366–402; *apud* Rogobete, *An ontology of love*, 98.

<sup>7</sup> Dumitru Stăniloae, *Jesus Christ or Man’s Restoration* [in Romanian], second edition (Craiova: Omniscope, 1993), 76. Calinic Berger describes it as an “existential experience,” in Calinic Berger, *Towards a theological gnoseology: The Synthesis of Fr. Dumitru Stăniloae* [in Romanian], trans. Nectarie Dărăban (Sibiu: Deisis, 2014), 417.

<sup>8</sup> Dumitru Stăniloae, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology* [in Romanian], vol. I, second ed. (Bucharest: Institutul Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, 1996), 356.

love,"<sup>9</sup> because man has an innate "intentionality towards communion"<sup>10</sup> as the meaning of his existence, which is at the same time "a characteristic of the state of love"<sup>11</sup> that manifests itself in spite of the ancestral sin. We must keep in mind, therefore, this synonymy between intentionality and love, which is present in the definition of man.

Viewing man as a person who is fundamentally in communion with others, Stăniloae highlights the intersubjective character of the intentionality of love, which can no longer be analysed only unilaterally, from one person to another, but also vice versa. The reciprocity of love, a subject that we will tackle later on, forces us to understand intentionality in both of its meanings: the person who loves is also affected by the love or by the refusal of the other. Therefore, the infinite intentionality of love is supported by a "counter-intentionality"<sup>12</sup> that man experiences within the communion of love.

While he does not use the term "counter-intentionality," Stăniloae nevertheless understands intentionality towards communion in the same way, being closer to the phenomenology of Marion than to that of Husserl. Love not only refers to the other, to represent him as a noematic object of the intentional consciousness and to conclude, through analogy and empathy, that he is also a human being who has the same intentional acts; love as intentionality experiences the counter-intentionality of the other, as a response or as a refusal, as a fulfilment of communion or as failure to do so.

### *Erotic reduction and theological counter-reduction*

Through transcendental-phenomenological reduction, Husserl brackets the existence of the phenomenon that offers itself to intentional consciousness to have access to the pure phenomenon, devoid of any presupposition, exactly as it offers itself, starting from itself, "in flesh and bone."<sup>13</sup> "Back to the things themselves," one of the principles of phenomenology, insists on this very aspect. As long as it remains solely a pure act of consciousness, one might analyse the modes in which the phenomenon appears and develops itself, according to its noematic content on the one hand, and to the noetic acts through which consciousness relates to it – perception, recollection, anticipation etc. – on the other. At this point, the phenomenological attitude dissociates itself from common perception, which takes the existence of all phenomena for granted: common perception is not capable of seeing phenomena in their transcendental purity within intentional consciousness.

<sup>9</sup> Stăniloae, *Jesus Christ or Man's Restoration*, 125.

<sup>10</sup> Stăniloae, 122.

<sup>11</sup> Stăniloae, 76.

<sup>12</sup> The term "counter-intentionality" is present in Henry, *Incarnation*, 157, § 18.

<sup>13</sup> See Husserl, *Cartesian meditations*, 50–51, § 8.

Heidegger will later understand this reduction as a reduction to being, questioning himself about the being of the entity that appears in the phenomenological attitude<sup>14</sup>, whereas Marion will propose a third reduction, the reduction to givenness, which, in his opinion, precedes phenomenalization, adding a principle that sheds light on reduction itself: "As much reduction, as much givenness."<sup>15</sup> This means that, inasmuch as the phenomenological attitude of bracketing phenomena is more coherent and more radical, the phenomenological perspective can better observe the appearing phenomena, as well as their mode of appearing. The advantage of Marion's reduction lies within the emphasis placed on the possibility of perceiving phenomena offered without intuition, phenomena that are not necessarily objects (as in Husserl's case), or entities (as in Heidegger's case); this is where we can classify religious phenomena, phenomena such as events, and what interests us in particular, the phenomenon of love<sup>16</sup>.

In discussing the phenomenon of love, Marion would propose an "erotic reduction," meant to point out the primordially of love compared to the metaphysical perspective on being and to emphasize "a love without being."<sup>17</sup> Where Descartes used to prove, through methodic doubt, the certainty of the ego's existence by using the famous formula *Cogito, ergo sum*, "I think, therefore I am," Marion replied by highlighting its lack of existential relevance, inspired by the book of Ecclesiastes: the certainty of one's own existence cannot answer the question: "What good is it?" In other words, mere existence, even validated by a rational effort, cannot pass the test of futility. Only love can pass this test, only love knows how to protect existence against nothingness.<sup>18</sup>

What kind of reduction does Father Stăniloae use when he tackles the subject of love? We will try to prove that (1) he is in agreement with Marion's erotic reduction, in which love plays a crucial role compared to mere existence, because only love can give meaning to existence<sup>19</sup>; and that (2) he practices a *theological counter-reduction*, without eliminating from his reasoning a certain kind of metaphysics which had already been adopted in Orthodox theology ever since the Patristic Period. This does not involve annihilating the primordially of love compared to being or overturning

<sup>14</sup> See Martin Heidegger, *Being and time* [in Romanian], trans. Gabriel Liiceanu and Cătălin Cioabă (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2002), §§ 1–4.

<sup>15</sup> Jean-Luc Marion, *De surcroît: études sur les phénomènes saturés* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2001), 20; Jean-Luc Marion, *Étant donné. Essai d'une phénoménologie de la donation* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1997), 24.

<sup>16</sup> Marion made a phenomenological analysis of love in Jean-Luc Marion, *Le phénomène érotique* (Paris: Grasset, 2003). A theological analysis of the Marion's thought can be found in Nicolae Turcan, *Apology after the end of metaphysics: Theology and phenomenology in Jean-Luc Marion* [in Romanian] (Bucharest: Eikon, 2016).

<sup>17</sup> Marion, *Le phénomène érotique*, 16.

<sup>18</sup> Marion, 51.

<sup>19</sup> See especially Stăniloae, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology* [in Romanian], vol. I, 190–194; cf. Rogobete, *An ontology of love*, 87.

Marion's erotic reduction; on the contrary, it involves taking upon oneself a form of intentionality which can give access to the phenomenon of religious love: more specifically, the intentionality of faith. Stăniloae understands faith and love as being unseparated: "Faith in Christ is love for Christ."<sup>20</sup>

Firstly, the reduction to love, practiced by Stăniloae, appears, as in the case of Marion, in the context of the discussion about Descartes' *cogito*, having the same meaning as for the French phenomenologist. To the apodictic certainty of the existence of the thinking *ego*, Stăniloae opposes the certification of love, using the formula *Amo, ergo sum*, "I love, therefore I am."<sup>21</sup> According to a commentator<sup>22</sup>, this adage has the advantage of encompassing the Cartesian one as well, extending mere existence to a relational ontology, without which one cannot understand love.

Secondly, we stated that Stăniloae practices a theological counter-reduction, which poses problems from a strictly phenomenological point of view. If we take into account that the purpose of Husserl's transcendental-phenomenological reduction was to eliminate any theoretical assumption, to get to the pure phenomenon, to the object itself, then wouldn't counter-reduction imply not respecting this principle and insidiously introducing a fundamental assumption, even if it were the assumption of faith? To ensure phenomenological rigor, Husserl asked for all statements that had not been obtained by way of the phenomenological method to be removed.<sup>23</sup> Naturally, faith was targeted by phenomenological reduction and this led to a form of methodological atheism, as was the case with Heidegger's reduction to entity. For Marion, faith could be discussed as a phenomenon with its own ways of appearing, because the third reduction, his reduction to givenness, made the appearance of these religious phenomena possible. Phenomenology, however, still had its limits, because it could only pretend to describe the Revelation as a possibility, not as an actuality.<sup>24</sup>

Given that Father Stăniloae does not make a rigorous distinction between the two disciplines, phenomenology and theology, we should ask ourselves: in his thought, is the presence of faith an assumption that must be eliminated or rather a condition of possibility so that the phenomenon of Christian love can appear as correctly as possible? In the context of a discussion about transcendence, Stăniloae mentions the need for the "aprioric element of faith,"<sup>25</sup> which leads to the idea that, in the case of religious phenomena, as in the

<sup>20</sup> Dumitru Stăniloae, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology* [in Romanian], vol. II, second edition (Bucharest: Institutul Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, 1997), 242.

<sup>21</sup> See the study "Man and God," [in Romanian], in Dumitru Stăniloae, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology Studies* [in Romanian] (Craiova: Mitropolia Olteniei, 1990), 157–307.

<sup>22</sup> Rogobete, *An ontology of love*, 245.

<sup>23</sup> See Edmund Husserl, *Logical Investigations* [in Romanian], vol 2, part 1, trans. Bogdan Olaru and Christian Ferencz-Flatz (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2009), 34, § 7.

<sup>24</sup> Jean-Luc Marion, *Étant donné*, 372–373.

<sup>25</sup> Stăniloae, *Jesus Christ or Man's restoration*, 57.

case of liturgical life, speaking in the absence of faith does not mean seeing better, but rather seeing nothing. Methodological atheism can be justified for a non-religious phenomenology, but it remains blind to the phenomena available in Christian life. Consequently, a theological counter-reduction is more than necessary to be able to discuss, even phenomenologically, about the appearance of religious phenomena<sup>26</sup> – in our case, about the phenomenon of love. For Stăniloae, the reduction of love, similar to that of Marion, and theological counter-reduction are complementary, similar to the way in which love and faith are inseparable.

## II. The phenomenon of love

### *From intra-Trinitarian love to deification (theosis)*

The phenomenon of love in the thought of Father Dumitru Stăniloae is of particular interest in this context due to its phenomenological relevance. Intra-Trinitarian love, the love that God has for people and the love they have for God, as well as the love that people have for each other are the baselines of an analysis that has already been performed.<sup>27</sup> Due to a lack of space, we will only focus on what might be of interest to phenomenology, but, once again, with the following precaution: Can we still be talking about phenomenology in all these cases? Isn't it rather a blasphemy to talk about the love in the Holy Trinity in phenomenological terms, for instance?

When describing the perfect love of the Holy Trinity, Father Stăniloae surprisingly uses the term *consciousness*. The perfect and infinite I–Thou love between the Father and the Son is amplified by the love of the Holy Spirit, who brings “a new kind of love,” which amplifies the first. As Stăniloae emphasizes, the joy of love is a product of the consciousness of the Other's infinity, not of an empty infinity.

The joy of love is given not by infinity itself, but rather by its representation in another person than oneself. Where there is no consciousness, there is no joy. But real joy is received from another consciousness that pays attention to it.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> For an extended discussion on theological counter-reduction, see Nicolae Turcan, “How does the truth appear? From phenomenological reduction to theological counter-reduction,” *Studia Universitatis Babeş-Bolyai Theologia Orthodoxa* 63, no. 2 (2018), doi: 10.24193/subbto.2018.2.09, 146–149.

<sup>27</sup> See Berger, *Towards a theological gnoseology*; Jürgen Henkel, *Godmanhood and the Ethics of Love in Father Dumitru Stăniloae's book Orthodox spirituality. Ascetics and mystics* [in Romanian], trans. Ioan I. Ică jr (Sibiu: Deisis, 2003); Sandu Frunză, *The religious experience in Dumitru Stăniloae's thought: A relational ethics* [in Romanian], second ed. (Bucharest: Eikon, 2016).

<sup>28</sup> Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Holy Trinity: In the beginning there was love* [in Romanian] (Bucharest: Institutul Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, 1993), 64.

We can notice here what Michel Henry would call an “arch-phenomenology” of the Holy Trinity, in which the “appearance” of the Persons is life, love, and infinite joy, not just noematic content destined for an objectifying phenomenology. The presence of the consciousness of love is crucial, but it is an analogous description, which starts from human love: “Love is based on the consciousness of another person.”<sup>29</sup> Love is conditioned, according to Stăniloae, by its own consciousness, and “it sees my love in my consciousness.”<sup>30</sup> In this example, consciousness loses its quality of constituting pole, exposing itself to visibility. It reveals the love that it has for the other and the other can see it. In other words, *the loving consciousness becomes a phenomenon for my consciousness as well*, a fact that is impossible within the paradigm of Husserl’s phenomenology.

At this level, however, any attempt of arch-phenomenology ends fairly quickly with *perichoresis*. Even though the term *consciousness* alludes to some sort of interiority, within the Holy Trinity, interiority is a complete mutual co-interiority, a perichoresis of each consciousness.

In the perfect unity of the Trinity, in the consciousness of each subject, the consciousness of the two other subjects must be perfectly encompassed and transparent, along with the subjects themselves.<sup>31</sup>

We might assume that, if each of the three Persons has its own consciousness, then there are also three modes of appearing towards the others. However, we should think of such a hypothesis antinomically, together with its opposite. Within this arch-phenomenology, each consciousness is “perfectly encompassed and transparent,”<sup>32</sup> along with the Persons to which they belong.<sup>33</sup> To paraphrase Hegel, “arch-phenomenology” does not pass, but has already passed into theology, because this has already become about the perfect communion of being and love between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

As far as God’s love for man is concerned, it has a phenomenological structure that seems easier to accept: God is manifested outside of Himself through His uncreated energies, which originate in His being, but which are transmitted voluntarily by the Persons of the Trinity. The distinction made by Saint Gregory Palamas between the unknowable being and the energies that are transmitted to man is a distinction that we may call phenomenological, as the phenomenon, namely that which appears, is represented by the uncreated energies and makes present the unapparent and the invisible of the divine being. Love is one of God’s uncreated energies and man responds to it.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Stăniloae, 66.

<sup>30</sup> Stăniloae, 66.

<sup>31</sup> Stăniloae, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, vol. 1, 294.

<sup>32</sup> Stăniloae, 294.

<sup>33</sup> Stăniloae, 300.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Henkel, *Godmanhood and the Ethics of Love*, 175.

Man's response is deification, a theandric process in which man cooperates with the grace of God to attain the likeness of God, which reaches the ultimate peaks of love, uniting with Him and seeing the uncreated light. What makes this entire apophatic ascent possible is the cooperation between man's will, which possesses, as we have seen, an "intentionality towards love," an infinite intentionality<sup>35</sup>, and the work of the Holy Spirit. Grace is present in each step, intensifying as man becomes free of his passions and ascends towards the vision of the uncreated light.

In phenomenological terms, we might say that love knows here a new mode of appearing, namely *appearing through the grace of the Holy Spirit*. What appears in this spiritual endeavour, for example the vision of the uncreated light, no longer has to do with mundane life, which is why the conditions of possibility of this appearance are not natural; rather, they belong to the Holy Spirit. In philosophical terms, the transcendental, which ensures conditions of possibility for knowledge, becomes the same as the transcendent, uniting with man unequivocally.

From a phenomenological point of view, the phenomenon of love is unified: the mode of appearing in the world (love as a phenomenon, albeit saturated) and the mode of appearing of life (love as an experience that affects the person) are united through the work of the Holy Spirit in an ecstatic and self-sacrificing love, both for God and for our brethren.

### *Divine reciprocity*

Is reciprocity a condition of love? Marion argued that it is not. The phenomenon of *eros* is highlighted in Marion's works by the "advance," which is the decision of the one who loves to love regardless or not he will be loved back.<sup>36</sup> Within such a decision, reciprocity is certainly not a condition. Marion eliminates reciprocity because, as in the case of the gift, if it were a condition for love, then love – as the gift – would become a simple economic exchange, based on the quantities given and received.

To Stăniloae, reciprocity is an important trait of love and he mentions it often in his writings. Certainly, there is also the possibility of non-love, as far as people are concerned, which is due to their limited nature, bodies and freedom.<sup>37</sup> Love manifests itself to freedom, to a person who is fundamentally free. Therefore, the declaration of love is a risk, as the other can choose to refuse love. Reciprocity is not a condition of love for Stăniloae either, but it certainly is its *fulfilment*. Unrequited love is still love, but a kind of love in which self-sacrifice becomes permanent, leaving no room for joy.

Nevertheless, there is one kind of love whose reciprocity is guaranteed: the love of God – both the one within the Holy Trinity, which exudes rec-

<sup>35</sup> Stăniloae, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, vol. 1, 356 (emphasis added).

<sup>36</sup> Marion, *Le phénomène érotique*, 125.

<sup>37</sup> Stăniloae, *The Holy Trinity*, 48.

iprocity, and the one He has for man. It appears that the absence of reciprocity is man's privilege: only he, based on his freedom, can refuse love, regardless of whether it is divine or human.

Marion gave an example from the Gospel, namely love for one's enemies, to emphasize the absence of the condition of reciprocity in love. Not only will enemies not respond with love, but they might even respond with hatred, possibly until the end. Although, from a phenomenological point of view, his response increases the purity of the phenomenon of love, whose visibility and givenness become as clear as ever – similar to the way in which the Lord forgave those who crucified Him –, it is no less true that he who loves his enemies will still enjoy a kind of reciprocity – divine reciprocity. Stăniloae's early Christology emphasized the I-Thou character, theorized by Martin Buber, but his late Christology contains a ternary scheme, I-Thou-He. What is important is that this ternary scheme justifies the urge to a form of reciprocity which cannot be conceived only horizontally.<sup>38</sup>

Through faith in God, the absence of reciprocity from the other can be substituted with divine reciprocity, by the ever-present response of His endless love. God is a continuous reciprocity of love, whereas non-reciprocity only has to do with man's freedom. God finds joy in man's response. His dialogue with man takes place through the rationality of creation, but also through the Holy Spirit, through whom God's love is given unto us, which man fulfills through reciprocity, answering to divine love with love, whose "effect is the eternal deification of man, in the Kingdom of Heaven."<sup>39</sup> He who taught us to love those who hate us strengthens us with His love, helps us with His grace. He is true reciprocity in any form of love. Therefore, the erotic phenomenon read through the eyes of Stăniloae's theology still knows reciprocity among its conditions, even though it is only a divine reciprocity.

### III. The ego and the auto-affection of love. Intersubjectivity and interpersonality

In the fifth meditation of his *Cartesian meditations*<sup>40</sup>, Husserl failed to understand intersubjectivity due to the pole of the constituting ego, which is incapable of seeing the other in his otherness. His attempt to resort to analogy and empathy keeps the other – noematic content in the field of my intentional consciousness – to a certain distance that is never truly overcome. The other would always be reduced to *ego cogito*, an inheritance of Descartes' subject that Husserl never really overcame.

<sup>38</sup> Rogobete, *An ontology of love*, 201.

<sup>39</sup> Stăniloae, *The Holy Trinity*, 95.

<sup>40</sup> Husserl, *Cartesian meditations*.

There is a phenomenological genealogy of the Cartesian subject, in which one may observe the attempts to overcome it, along with overcoming onto-theological metaphysics: Husserl transforms it into transcendental *ego*, Heidegger into *Dasein*, Levinas into *ethical alterity*, and Marion into *l'adonné* (the gifted one). *L'adonné* is the one who receives himself from the other, who does not possess him, a movement that can be observed in the phenomenology of love. Marion overturns phenomenological intentionality into counter-intentionality and experience into counter-experience.<sup>41</sup> It is probable that Marion's theologically inspired *adonné* comes close to the way in which Stăniloae understands the person.

Stăniloae uses the term of divine "intersubjectivity" or divine "interpersonality"<sup>42</sup> when analysing the relations between the Persons of the Holy Trinity<sup>43</sup>, though with an original meaning: there is no object in front of the divine Subjects/Persons, because none of them is objectified in their relation of communion, remaining a Subject/a Person. Just as Stăniloae sees a balance between person and nature, he also extends it to the relation between person and communion: the person never appears outside of communion.

The fundamental trait of the person who loves is the renunciation of the egotistical self in order to give himself to the other. Through the love that unites without confounding, each person is more concerned with the other than with himself<sup>44</sup>, in a kenotic attitude<sup>45</sup>, in which he is leaving aside his egotistical self and focusing towards the loved one. Self-renunciation takes the form of renunciation to egotistical passions, man's only adequate response to the love of God, who chose to die to save mankind<sup>46</sup>. The Passion and the Crucifixion of the Son make God's great love for us visible, along with His great power that lies within this love. To Christ's kenotic descent, out of love, man responds with the kenosis of self-renunciation<sup>47</sup>, attempting to obey the loving will of the Father as Christ did. Sacrifice is a condition of possibility for communion, taking the form of self-renunciation for the other, of "self-abandonment out of love for the other."<sup>48</sup> Kenosis fulfills the relationality of the person.

Such a renunciation and self-donation must not be perceived as self-diminution, but rather as a form of enrichment. Self-donation out of love leads

<sup>41</sup> Marion, *Étant donné*, 426–430, 521–522.

<sup>42</sup> Jean-Yves Lacoste also proposes the term "interpersonality" as a response to the impasse of Husserl's intersubjectivity. Jean-Yves Lacoste, *Time: A Theological Phenomenology* [in Romanian], trans. Maria Cornelia Ică jr (Sibiu: Deisis, 2005), 65.

<sup>43</sup> Stăniloae, *The Holy Trinity*, 45.

<sup>44</sup> See Stăniloae, 51.

<sup>45</sup> For more information about the kenosis of love in the thought of Father Stăniloae, see Maciej Bielawski, *The Philokalic Vision of the World in the Theology of Dumitru Stăniloae* [in Romanian], translation and foreword by Ioan I. Ică jr (Sibiu: Deisis, 1998), 188–194.

<sup>46</sup> Stăniloae, *The Holy Trinity*, 51.

<sup>47</sup> Stăniloae, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, vol. 2, 118.

<sup>48</sup> Stăniloae, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, vol. 2, 91–92.

to the enrichment of the self, the spiritual growth of each person inasmuch as he unites with God.<sup>49</sup>

In the case of Marion's *adonné* no *a priori* of the autarkic metaphysical subject was active anymore.<sup>50</sup> *L'adonné* was a recipient of saturated phenomena (which astonish, which overflow concepts) and was himself a saturated phenomenon, who received himself from the relation, as in anti-essentialist existentialism. Stăniloae's understanding of the person is much more balanced, because the person is always in a relation of communion, but without separating from his own being. In addition, compared to an *adonné* who is inflexible towards anything *a priori*, the person has an attitude which is active not only hermeneutically and not only at the level of receptivity, even though, on the highest stage of mystical vision it is only receptive. Governed by a theological counter-reduction to faith and love – which is also its transcendental, together with (paradoxically) the gift of the Holy Spirit – the ascetic involvement of the person is required. Even if grace is a free gift of God and the grace of love in deification is no exception, the human person cooperates ceaselessly with God's will, through his fight against passions and through striving for virtues. Self-sacrifice, kenosis, *askesis*, *orthodoxy* etc. become conditions of possibility for the unification with God, which, paradoxically, does not annihilate the free character of the gift of the Holy Spirit, nor the importance of His work.

While it is true that love is also intentionality, it cannot be resumed to this: the counter-intentionality of the other is opposed to my intentionality. Even more so than intentionality, love is self-affection, life, an experience of self-enrichment and deification through the work of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, love unites the phenomenology of the world with the phenomenology of life.

## Closing remarks: theo-phenomenology or the mode of appearing “through the Holy Spirit”

“How does love *appear*, therefore?” is the phenomenological question. For Father Dumitru Stăniloae, it appears as the ultimate meaning and fulfilment of creation, as an ascent of man, through deification, to the likeness of God. Love is a phenomenon, a form of intentionality and renewal of the person or, according to the terminology of phenomenology, noematic content, noetic intentionality and transcendental and living ego, called towards deification. We may consider the phenomenon of love a saturated phenomenon, which exceeds any preliminary or constituted concept of the

<sup>49</sup> Dumitru Stăniloae, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, vol. 3, second edition (Bucharest: Institutul Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, 1997), 125.

<sup>50</sup> Marion, *Étant donné*, 521–522.

intellect, responding to an infinite interior search, because man was created in the image of God. The endless intentionality of love determines a participative gnoseology, which involves the person in a spiritual life, in an ascent towards deification. In the light of assumed love, the transcendental ego of phenomenology becomes a renewed person, a deified man. The grace of the Holy Spirit changes his transcendental structures to lift him up to the communion of love of the Holy Trinity, a basis and final goal of any form of love. Man remains active and receptive, striving to the best of his ability to respond to God's love with self-sacrificing love. Reciprocity, though not a condition of love, is nonetheless its fulfilment, the response expected by God and by our brethren. For Stăniloae, no form of love is truly fulfilled outside of the communion with God.

As inadequate as phenomenology may seem in discussing a theologian of experience such as Father Dumitru Stăniloae, the subject of love forces it to overcome itself. From a methodologically atheist phenomenology, open towards the world (Husserl and Heidegger), to a phenomenology of love, understood as a phenomenology of the fulfilment of life and of the meaning of man – the phenomenology of love reveals itself as a synthesis of two major phenomenological directions, similar to the two fundamental modes of appearing that Michel Henry talked about: the one of the world and the one of life. Love appears in both ways and, even more so, makes a connection between them, accomplishing a synthesis that gives meaning. A third mode of appearing might surprise us: the one “through the Holy Spirit,” which opens up phenomenology towards theology. This new mode of appearing, which can be seen in Stăniloae's works when he refers to love as a gift of the Spirit, does not revoke the appearances of the phenomenology of the world or the gifts of the phenomenology of life, but gives them the unity and the meaning that they were missing, transfigures them, and opens them up towards the ecstasy of eschatological future. The phenomenology of theological love unifies phenomenology into a *theo-phenomenology*. For this, the givenness of love by the grace of God has to do with invisibility, with life, and cannot be reduced to an object, to a phenomenon, or to a concept. From the arch-phenomenology of the intra-Trinitarian love – which was at the same time an arch-ontology and arch-metaphysics – to the phenomenology of the kenotic sacrifice of the transcendental ego who became a person, the path is long. But love is one of those experiences who can still navigate it, either by resorting to concepts, in its cataphatic attitude, or by overcoming conceptual knowledge, in the apophatic experience of uniting with God. Stăniloae teaches us that the boundaries between disciplines are limited and that through all of them we can hear God's calling to dialogue, to sacrifice, to a communion of love, and, therefore, to deification.

*Translated by Paul Cenușe*

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**VARIA**



# The Relationship of the Old Testament Prophets with Civil Authorities from the perspective of Human Rights: The Case of Naboth's Vineyard (1 Kgs 21: 1-16)

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## Abstract

The present study aims to analyze from a different point of view the already established message, the theological message behind the episode "Naboth's Vineyard". For this, we propose to look strictly from the perspective of Old Testament culture, the relationship between the prophet of God and the representative of civil authority, insisting on the particularity of human rights (as they were left by God in the Torah). We pay close attention to whether they are widely respected, and if not, we try to identify the moment when their violation occurs and the synchronic reasons behind the delegitimization actions of the concept. The case of Naboth's vineyard is taken as a case study, in which we highlight the corrupt games of the corrupt king Ahab, which facilitated the dispossession of the parental legacy and finally the murder of the grape grower Nabot. At the same time, we strengthen the indisputable need of the prophet, who is stepping forward, ready to face the cost of life, corruption and monarchical immorality, in order to rebalance the social balance of Israel.

**Keywords:** Naboth's Vineyard, Civil Authorities, Prophets, Human Rights, Mission

## Introduction

THE GUARANTOR OF THE ORTHODOXY of the prophet's message in Israel was his very calling, a missionary reality that legitimized him as the Messenger of God<sup>1</sup> (*Malak Yahwe*) to publicly declare the will of YHWH

<sup>1</sup> The noun מַלְאָכִים (usually translated by the Sender) has a wide range of meanings in Hebrew, its semantic field also includes the meaning of "sons of God" (*bēnê (ha) ʾēlōhîm*) referring in particular to heavenly creatures, not to genealogical relationships (Gen 6: 2;

reflected by His law (Mal 2: 5-7). Once he felt that the Lord commanded him to utter a divine message, the prophet had to convey to the people the intention of God (Amos 3: 8), whether they wished or not to obey. Some prophets like Moses, Jeremiah, or Jonah tried to escape the mission entrusted<sup>2</sup>, motivating their person to be totally inadequate for such a work, delaying decision-making, amid their subjective fears.

However, the prophet would finally listen to the command of the Lord, and begin his introductory speech (*captatio benevolentiae*<sup>3</sup>) like: אֲנִי הֵן יְהוָה (so speaks the Lord) informing the people about the divine plan of the world<sup>4</sup>. Later, the exile prophets presented themselves to their audience, with the

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Job 1: 6; Ps 29: 1; 82: 1; 89: 6-7). Other terms, such as those of *mēšārētim* or *sār*, refer to the functions of dispatches or commanders (Josh 5: 14; Ps 103: 21). However, the interpretation of ministry by the meanings of the word *mal,āk*, meaning “messenger, sent, soil”, is the most common throughout the Old Testament. The noun, *mal,āk* translated into LXX through *aggelos* (“angel”), can target both heavenly and human beings. In this sense, there are some mysterious texts in which the exact identity of the subject is left in a cone of shadow (Judg 2: 1; Mal 3: 1). Only the Latin text of the Vulgate makes this distinction clear, using the term *angelus*, for the heavenly messenger, and for the earthly messenger, the word *nuntius*. This messenger of the Lord, in the present case, the prophet (2Chr 36: 15-16; Isa 44: 26; Hag 1: 13) is, according to Mal 3: 1 the herald of the coming of the Lord (כִּבְיָאֵל). He is also the messenger of YHWH (מַלְאָכֵי) acting as His interpreter, declaring what is right (Job 33: 23). To be seen David Noel Freedman, *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 1 (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 462; Francis Brown, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1907), 521.

<sup>2</sup> The mission of the prophet chosen by God comprises an ethical pedagogy applied to the people through the prophet, who has not only a passive role in the course of events (a role that relates to his personal relationship with YHWH), but also an active missionary (the prophet is the man sent among men in view of the realization of the divine plan - Gen 18: 19). The fulfillment of the divine mission of the prophet is to facilitate the blessing of God on all, the prophet pedagogically initiates a nation, to walk in the path of righteousness, to later know God. Therefore, the abandonment of the mission meant the abandonment of the ethical dimension of the call to the prophetic ministry and implicitly the endangering of the salvation of a whole nation. To be seen Cosmin Luran, *Missio Israelis: O Lectură Misionară a Vechiului Testament* (Alba Iulia: Editura Reîntregirea, 2017), 297-301.

<sup>3</sup> Any honest preacher will have to acknowledge that homiletic failure is due to him for various reasons, whether he manages the *inventio* or *captatio benevolentiae* wrongfully, or the public expectations were too great, hence the emphasis on minuses and reluctance assimilation of the nonverbal message. Through a confession built on an unbeatable rhetoric (with a *captatio benevolentiae* directed at the people, making special reference to the Jewish heritage and divine election for the mission among the Gentiles), the Prophet Moses is able to expose the revealed message of YHWH, posing as the sole ruler of the chosen people. Thus Moses, through his stature as a preacher and catechist, also contributes decisively to the permanent formation of the members of his community. See Monica J.Harris, Robert Rosenthal, “No more Teacher’s dirty looks: Effects of Teacher Nonverbal Behavior on student outcomes”, in *Applications of Nonverbal Communication*, eds. Ronald E.Riggio, Robert S.Feldman (London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers, 2005), 159; U. Kellermann, “ἀπολογέομαι *apologeomai* defend oneself”, in *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 1, eds. Horst Balz, Gerhard Schneider (Edinburgh: T.&T. Clark, 1990), 137; Charles H.Dodd, *La predicazione apostolica e il suo sviluppo* (Brescia: Paideia Editrice, 1978), 36.

<sup>4</sup> Geoffrey Wigoder, *Enciclopedia Iudaismului* (București: Hasefer, 2016), 537.

introductory phrase: *koh amar Yahwe*, “so speaks the Lord”; or with the formula: *vaiehi devar Yahwe elai* meaning “it was the word of the Lord to me” (Jer 1: 9; 2: 7 etc). The expression *devar Yahwe* meaning “the word of the Lord”, revealed to His prophets, counting over 900 occurrences in the Bible<sup>5</sup>.

There is indeed a wide range of ways in which God has been in contact with His people to constantly instruct them to attain holiness, a *sine qua non* condition of salvation: through His law (Deut 4: 36) through direct communication (Isa 8: 11), through dreams (Ps 16: 11), through suffering (Prov 3: 11), but especially through the prophets (Jer 7: 28; 25: 13; 32: 33; Zech 3: 2). Moses was the prophet in excellence who constantly taught the people about the requirements of the Law of Yahweh. The book of Deuteronomy, in particular, for the prophetic action of teaching the Torah, uses the verb in the form of Piel rbd (רַבַּד) which can have two meanings: teaching the law and transmitting the law<sup>6</sup>. This would mean that the Prophet Moses, when teaching the Law, would only transmit it further orally into the living consciousness of the people, without the involvement of a well-systematized educational act (Deut 4: 44; 5: 27 etc.). The goal was to establish monotheism in Israel and to enlighten other people, because a law as straight as that in Israel was clearly not of human inspiration, the perfecting of the Law drawing the respect of the inhabitants of the Ancient East<sup>7</sup> (Deut 4: 5-6).

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<sup>5</sup> Petre Semen, *Introducere în Teologia Profeților Scriitori* (Iași: Doxologia, 2010), 21.

<sup>6</sup> We see how St. Paul, for example, updates this Jewish motive on the occasion of the Lord's Supper discourse (1Cor 11). He borrows this specialty of Jewish education, being a good connoisseur of the Law. Speaking of the Eucharist tradition, he states that the whole teaching has been received (Εγὼ γὰρ παρέλαβον ἀπὸ τοῦ κυρίου – 11: 23) from God, and that he alone handed it over to the Christians of Corinth (ὁ καὶ παρέδωκα ὑμῖν). The Greek terms *paralambanō* and *paradidōmi* were technical terms in Jewish culture, used to emphasize the teaching of an important tradition related to customs, rituals, or parenetic teachings. The Greek philosophers used these terms to define the process of teaching their doctrinal teachings, but for the Apostle Paul, the teaching of this tradition with which he identified himself perennially meant the continuation of the Last Supper, “the night He was sold”, 23b) until this cultic moment of the Eucharistic celebration. So, it focuses on the death of Jesus on the grounds of the “Pascal Lamb”. The indicative aortic verb *parélabon* with *paralambanō* root can be understood, when it comes in close connection with tradition, in the sense of “taking something together”; “obtain”; or simply “get”. In Greek literature *paralambanō* is found in a personal way, meaning “to accept; to receive someone” (Herodotus, Plato), but also in an objective way, meaning “to take control, control” (Aristofan, Plutarch). Instead, in the Jewish thinking, *paralambanō*'s emphasis is on teaching the Law and its means of interpretation, because both *qibbel* (take, receive) and *māsar* (to be taught) are found almost always in connection with its teaching learning the Jewish tradition. To be seen James D.G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: William B.Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 189; A. Kretzer, „*paralambanō* zu sich nehmen, annehmen; hinzuziehen; übernehmen”, in *Exegetisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*, band III, hrsg. Horst Balz und Gerhard Schneider (Stuttgart: Verlag W.Kohlhammer, 1983), 68-69; Hans Conzelmann, *Der erste Brief an die Korinther*, (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1981), 238-239; Richard A.Horsley, *1 Corinthians* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 160.

<sup>7</sup> Cătălin Vatamanu, *Educația la poporul ales* (Iași: Doxologia, 2011), 216-222.

By enhancing the imminent catastrophe, the prophets considered themselves the messengers of a divine warning<sup>8</sup>, interpreting the international geopolitics of the time, from the perspective of a God Who is teaching pedagogically in the history of the people of Israel<sup>9</sup>. Through prophetic speech, the faithful in Israel were reminded of the obligations solemnly assumed on Sinai in the form of the Covenant, their vocation, aiming at the direction of the Israeli lifestyle, which, by denying the requirements of the Covenant, practiced idolatry, defamation and crime, to YHWH. The sermon of the prophet was to determine the Israelite who repudiated the law through his improper conduct to resume the way of knowing God, because YHWH, through his prophet, the prophet, wants to prove to him that he has not forgotten his covenant, and that God through His messengers started looking for the lost man<sup>10</sup>. The Prophet was thus sent, during the period of great moral crisis, to overcome slippages and remind the people, which is the will of God to be followed<sup>11</sup>. The confession of the prophet was fully assumed, courageous, he presenting God's message of condemnation, often with the price of life. Jeremiah the prophet calls his disciple, Baruh, the son of Neriah, and commands him to write in a book all YHWH's threats regarding the future of the Jews (Jer 43: 4), and to make it public because he was imprisoned by the commandment the idolatrous king, paying with the price of his liberty, the daring to face the king<sup>12</sup>. Finally, because he deplored the apostasy of Israel, he is condemned to death by stoning<sup>13</sup>. Other prophets suffered an equally cruel fate for their confession: Isaiah, because he is fighting against King Manasseh, is sentenced to death by sawing; Amos is subjected to the martyrdom of the strike with the sword and dies the martyrdom being killed by the sword; Miheiah is thrown into the abyss by King Joram, and receives the crown of martyrdom; Daniel is beheaded by the Emperor Atticus, crowning

<sup>8</sup> The prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel, often informed the people of the close punishment of God, but the Israelites benefited from their condition of a chosen people, and allowed themselves to live in all kinds of passions, thus self-excommunicating themselves under the divine promise (Jer 6: 14; Ezekiel 13: 10). So these defeatists have forgotten the requirements of their covenant with YHWH, drawing the wrath of God upon them because of the acts of social inequality (Isa 1: 15-17; Jer 5: 28; Amos 5: 7-12; Mic 3: 1), religious syncretism (Isa 1: 10-17; Jer 6: 20; Hos 6: 6; Amos 5: 21-27), foreign policies (Isa 30: 1-5; 31: 1-3, Jer 2; Ezek 16: 26; Hos 5: 13; 7: 11) - signs that the people have denied their Master, violating the nature of the Alliance (*berîth*). See E. Johnson, "ānaph; 'aph'", in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. 1, eds. G.Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren (Grand Rapids: William B.Eerdmans Publishing, 1974), 357.

<sup>9</sup> Geoffrey Wigoder, *Enciclopedia Iudaismului*, 537.

<sup>10</sup> André Neher, *L'essence du prophétisme* (Paris: Calman-Lévy Editeur, 1972), 94.

<sup>11</sup> Petre Semen, *Introducere în Teologia Profeților Scriitori*, 7-10.

<sup>12</sup> Ioan Gură de Aur, *Despre obscuritatea profețiilor*, trad. de Radu Mustață (București: EIBMBOR, 2013), 80-82.

<sup>13</sup> Vasile Porfirogenetul, *Minologhion*, coll. PG 117, 432B-C.

the confession of monotheism in a profoundly idolatrous society<sup>14</sup> etc. Some scholars say that the inauguration experiences of Moses and Gideon become normative for the later prophetic call, and the key structure is this: the encounter with divinity; the introductory word; sending; objection; encouraging; the sign<sup>15</sup>. God is preoccupied with the restoration of the dignity of His people, who had been deprived of liberty and oppressed in many ways by the Egyptians, and is using His servant Moses to restore the right to liberty and dignity to the people of Israel (Exod 3: 10). The land of Canaan, which God will give as an inheritance, becomes the topos where Israel will have full liberty to exercise its right to holiness<sup>16</sup>; so that, in God's plan, human rights only have their meaning when they lead man to holiness, to God's knowledge.

## **The relationship of the prophet with the royal authorities of Israel from the point of view of human rights**

The history of the people of God is closely dependent on the reception of the Law, and through its fulfillment Israel remained in the field of God's knowledge. The obedience to the law was not only seen as a way of blessing Yahweh, but as a genuine response to the grace of deliverance from the Egyptian bondage (Exod 20: 1-17). But Israel proves to be a bankrupt people in obedience to the law, that is why God allows sufferings in His people for the pedagogical purpose of corrupting the slippages<sup>17</sup> (Lev 26; Deut 28; Josh 23: 14-16; Dan 9). The monarchical institution was bound to remain faithful to the law of God, both to keep the state of Israel under the graces of divinity, but also to sustain the cultic office, the daily sacrifices for sins, that the people should advance on the path of holiness. In this sce-

<sup>14</sup> Spiridon Bilalis, *Martirii Ortodoxiei: Teologia Martiriului*, trad. de Ciprian-Ioan Staicu (București: Editura Christiana, 2016), 37.

<sup>15</sup> Normann Habel, "The Form and Significance of the Call Narratives," *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 2 (1965): 297-323; G.Y. Glazov, *The Bridling of the Tongue and the Opening of the Mouth in Biblical Prophecy* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 69-86.

<sup>16</sup> The text of Deut 4 becomes paradigmatic in view of the moral framework of exercising the right to holiness, where the apodictic connection between the Covenant and the Law, by evoking the past in a didactic way, prepares the way to the fulfillment of the announced goal. The fulfillment of the Law of God depends on the success of the Jews to take possession of the Land of Canaan, because the Law is based on the Covenant on which the relationship of the people with YHWH was based. Israel's call is to become a peculiar people, a holy people of God, who will be distinguished from his idolatrous and immoral neighbors, especially through his moral and spiritual relationship with his God, established by His righteous law. To be seen Peter C. Craigie, *Deuteronomul*, trad. de Daniela Rusu (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Logos, 2008), 147-149.

<sup>17</sup> J.D. Douglas, N. Hillyer, D.R.W. Wood, *New Bible Dictionary*, (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1996), 1423.

nario, the king owed his people to remain faithful to God, for the embrace of idolatry would be an attempt at the very religious, social and political stability of the nation.

Also, the king ought to know the law as one who was instrumental in judgment in the people, for his ability to judge as the disputes arising, according to Yahweh's demands, depended on the restoration of the dignity of the afflicted- the rights of the common Israeli, King. This judgment exercised by competent forums did not have the ultimate purpose of condemning, but rather straightening<sup>18</sup>, just as David requires judgment from God (Ps 25: 1); which means that the judgment restores the balance of the community<sup>19</sup>. In the history of Israel, the king was the one invested with the judging of social behaviors (2 Sam 14: 1-20; 15: 1-6; 2 Par 19: 5-7; Ps 71: 1-2<sup>20</sup>), in all other situations, the Jews they were redressing their deprecations to YHWY - the last judge on the matter<sup>21</sup>. The derivatives of the verb dealing with the right judgment (צָדַק) are the following: (Hiph'il, Qal, Pi'el, Niph'al, Hithpa'el). *Hiph'il* is his synonym for righteousness and his basic meaning is the accentuation of innocence, justice; in both cases man is declared to be right because of his deeds (Job 27: 5; Isa 53: 11, Dan 12: 3). Therefore, *hiph'il* represents the restoration of the community or of relations from the perspective of the Covenant, thus embodying an ethical dimension. *Qal* translates into "being just" in civic or legal logic, or in both directions. *Pi'el* counts five instances (Jer 3: 11; 16: 51-52, Job 32: 2) all demonstrating the real existence of righteousness. *Niph'al* is only found in (Dan 8: 14), meaning without a doubt the action by which the order, action made by God

<sup>18</sup> All the derivatives of this etimon derive their roots from the Hebrew noun *tedaka* translated by the Greek *dikē*, which is a superior element of the cosmos, springing from God and underlying human relationships. The first reference of the Greek term is that it is right to fulfill the law; in the second plan, to maintain righteousness or order to obtain righteousness; and on the third level, the one to punish, to declare the sentence. See H. Seebass, "Justicia", in *Diccionario Teológico del Nuevo Testamento*, vol. 2, eds. Lothar Coenen, Erich Beyreuther (Salamanca: Ediciones Sigueme, 1990), 404; Alfred E. Tuggy, *Lexico Grieco-Español del Nuevo Testamento* (El Paso: Editorial Mundo Hispano, 1996), 245; Cătălin Varga, „Δικαιοσύνη în limbajul biblic. O scurtă incursiune filologică, exegetică și teologică,” *Teologie și Viață* 9-12 (2014): 133-135.

<sup>19</sup> W.F. Lofthouse, "The Righteousness of God," *The Expository Times*, 50 (1939): 341-345.

<sup>20</sup> Cătălin Varga, „Teologia și Exegeza episodului *Schimbarea la Față* (varianta lucanică),” *Altarul Banatului* 7-9 (2013): 84.

<sup>21</sup> Henri Cazelles, „A Propos de quelques textes difficiles relatifs à la justice de Dieu dans l'Ancien Testament,” *Revue biblique* 2 (1951): 169. As the King of the chosen people, YHWH is the one who governs history, intervening in the turning points (Josh 1: 9; 2: 24) through his prophets and messengers (Isa 1: 18; 40: 4-5; Jer 6: 16-19; 15: 19; Ezek 33: 2-20; 37: 9; Mal 3: 1). As a Judge (Ps 95: 10-13), YHWH inspired the writings of the old covenant of the responsibility of distributing a social justice, equivalent to the pathology of the deed. See also Leo G. Perdue, *The Blackwell Companion to the Hebrew Bible* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), 243; Aubrey Johnson, *Sacral Kingship in Ancient Israel* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1967), 6-7; Gerhard Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, vol.1, (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1975), 372; Edmond Jacob, *Théologie de L'Ancien Testament* (Paris: Delachaux&Niestle, 1955), 75-82.

Himself, is restored. Finally, *hithpa'el* (Gen 44: 16) is synonymous with the *pi'el* case showing the fulfillment of justice from ethical and legal perspective<sup>22</sup>. In accordance with the verbs above, the noun *sedeq*, *sedāqāh* (justice, justice) also has the same meaning<sup>23</sup>. Therefore, the action of “justice” or “straightening” in the exercise of the king’s judicial function in Israel is concentrated in terms of: objects, man and God; taking decisive value in the iconomia of our deeds. Thus, the man who is directed, or the man who is granted and at the same time asserts the right to holiness, is the one who obeys the law (Lev 19: 36<sup>24</sup>), is the one who fulfills the Covenant, because the notions of conscience, worship, justice, social relations, nationality - all of this is included in this concept<sup>25</sup>.

More than any king of Israel was obliged to know the law of YHWH, in order to guide people with justice, to the will of God. The indebted to instruct the king in knowledge of the Law, were the Levites: “When will ascend the throne of his kingdom, you have to write for himself book of this law in the book<sup>26</sup> that is the priests the Levites, and be it at him and he read it all the days of his life that he may learn to fear the Lord his God, and to force him to do all the words of this law and all these decisions” (Deut 17: 18-19). Israelite was bound to know from childhood Torah (Deuteronomy 11: 18-19), the more the king, the king assured them that the Levite instruction necessary to always remember that although he was the supreme authority in Israel, yet he had to study the word of the Lord in order to lead the people righteously, for the Torah was basically the constitution of ancient Israel, which the king was obliged to know and fulfill<sup>27</sup>. The exact meaning of words is difficult to establish because of the ambivalence of the expression (הַפְּרוֹתָהּ הַיְנִשְׁמֵ-תָא)

<sup>22</sup> R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Bruce K. Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), 947-949; Martin H. Manser, Alister E. McGrath, Donald J. Wiseman, *Zondervan Dictionary of Bible Themes* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1999); James Swanson, *A Dictionary of Biblical Language. Hebrew Old Testament* (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, 2001).

<sup>23</sup> James Hardy Ropes, „Righteousness and The Righteousness of God in the Old Testament and in St.Paul”, *Journal of Biblical Literature* 2 (1903): 215.

<sup>24</sup> Norman H. Snaith, *The Distinctive Ideas of the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1946), 73; C.H. Dodd, *The Bible and the Greeks* (London: Hodder&Stoughton, 1954), 44-45.

<sup>25</sup> Scholar S.Lynnonett, on the other hand, comes with an important contribution, showing that the Greek *dikaioσynē* is a translation of the Hebrew word *ṭedaká*, which means the work of God through which the salvation of man is accomplished or established. See Stanislaw Lynnonett, „La soteriologie paulienne”, in *Introduction à la Bible*, vol. 2, (Bilbao: Desclée de Brouwer), 840.

<sup>26</sup> The literal form of the formula (מִפְּרֹתָהּ מִיְּהוֹשֵׁפָה יִגְדֹּלְמֶה) may suggest „before [the Levite priests]” or “from the copy of [the Law] before the [Levites]”; or simply “in the presence of the Levites”. To be seen Francis Brown, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1907), 818.

<sup>27</sup> Cristinel Iatan, “Serving the priests (kōhānīm) in ancient Israel and its implications. The sons of Aaron, the priests whose hands were sanctified for the service of the priesthood (*Nm.*

תִּשְׁבֹּרָה): “this second law” in the book of Deuteronomy. This word *mesni* in Hebrew, which can be translated as “repeating, double, second, repetition”, is used in the Old Testament, in four instances. First, the term refers to the second position, referring both to the second row priest (2Kgs 23: 4; Jer 52: 24) and to the inferior rank (Gen 41: 43). Secondly, the term is also used to describe the second function in exercising and establishing power (1 Sam 23: 17; Neh 11: 9; Esth 10: 3; Zeph 1: 10). Third, *mesni* is also used to describe a blessed work, a reward, a return to privileges (Exod 16: 5; Deut 15: 18; Isa 61: 7; Zech 9: 12). Finally, it may also involve a transcript, a copy of an original<sup>28</sup> (Deut 17: 18; Josh 8: 32; Ezra 1: 10). It is obvious that in this case, תִּשְׁבֹּרָה refers to the copy of the law, but we can not know for sure whether strict reference is made to the legislation on the status and duty of the King (vv. 14-17) or the legislative part of the book of Deuteronomy, especially in chap. 12-26. Another issue is whether it refers to the original Sinai document, the so-called Book of the Covenant<sup>29</sup> (Exod 24: 7). Beyond all these exegetical difficulties, kingdom in Israel was the form of leading a constitutional monarchy, structured according to the teachings of the law of God (Torah). The written law was the guide of any king of the ancient world, say the rabbis, the King being obliged to study and implement it both at the personal and community level<sup>30</sup>. That is why we think that this seemingly crux interpretum of Deut 17: 18 refers not only to pieces of independent texts of the Deliberative Law, but to the entire Law (Torah), which the future king of Israel is studying in its entirety from childhood, under the careful guidance of representatives of pre-Exile institutionalized education, according to the latest archaeological findings<sup>31</sup>.

But when the pre-Exile king of Israel intentionally forgot his attributions and his subordination to the Torah, the prophet-the man sent by God, with the exact purpose of defeating the royal slippings, came to the ramp. The profound ethical message of the prophets, besides the blame of sinners and the portrayal of divine love through the promise of deliverance<sup>32</sup>; has a different dimension, the prophetic message also brings into question the observance of some elementary rights violated by the corruption of civil authority (for example, Nabot’s case). However, for a cultural and contextual understanding of the paradigm, it is important to underline that in the ethical thinking of ancient Israel, moral obligations are not defined in terms of total

3, 3)”, in *Via lui Nabot: Naboth’s Vineyard. Studia Theologica Recentiora*, eds. Octavian Gordon, Alexandru Mihăilă (Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2012), 98-99.

<sup>28</sup> Charles F. Jean, Jacob Hoftijzer, *Dictionnaire des inscriptions sémitiques de l’Ouest* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1965), 313.

<sup>29</sup> Peter C. Craigie, *Deuteronomul*, 290.

<sup>30</sup> Jeffrey H. Tigay, *Deuteronomy* (Jerusalem: The Jewish Publication Society, 1996), 168.

<sup>31</sup> André Lemaire, *Les écoles et la formation de la Bible dans l’ancien Israël* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1981), 8-15.

<sup>32</sup> Geoffrey Wigoder, *Enciclopedia Iudaismului*, 537.

obedience to Yahweh's will. The Old Testament ethics, although based on the commandments of God (the Torah), does not, however, imply obedience to external authority, so as to annul the postulate of the natural law and virtues in their various forms. Yahwe claimed morality from His people, not because He commanded this, but because the ethical prescriptions of the Law were good for the sound development of the Jewish society<sup>33</sup>. Ethics did not suppress freedom, the Israelite was free to practice ethics, but this freedom did not absolve him of responsibility for the deeds committed. The very first word in the Decalogue refers to the theme of liberty, says Origen, when God reminds the Jew that he has freed him from the bondage of Egypt to live a moral life, a life full of holiness<sup>34</sup>, in the promised land. The Prophet sent by God had the duty to remind the King that the denial of man's dignity, created in the image of God to be permanently sanctified, was equal to the atonement of God's supreme monarch<sup>35</sup> (Jer 28: 1-2).

There is a law of International Law, to which all peoples have subscribed (Amos 1: 3 – 2: 3<sup>36</sup>), a universal law applicable to the need to respect human dignity. When the Israelites promoted a purely human model of the king, disobeying the norms of international law and the revelation pattern commanded by Yahweh in Deut 17, then they all fell into error in disregarding the divine will. When the monarchic function is deviated from its natural course, and the King is no longer just a simple representative of the people and a servant obedient to the Torah<sup>37</sup>, but claiming the last authority, entering into a flagrant conflict of interest with Yahwe, then the prophet remains the only solution resolving the crisis. His mission and the repentance of the king and the people will depend on the condemnation of Israel's deliverance from the wrath of God.

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<sup>33</sup> John Barton, *Ethics in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 12-13.

<sup>34</sup> Origen, *Omiliii la cartea leşirii*, VI, trad. de T.Bodogae, Nicolae Neaga și Zorica Lațcu, (București: EIBMBOR, 1981), 80-81.

<sup>35</sup> Silviu Tatu, *Dumnezeu a vorbit în vechime prin profeți. Studii în Vechiul Testament* (Oradea: Editura Metanoia, 2007), 139.

<sup>36</sup> We observe from the Prophet Amos' indictment that the minimum international human rights to be respected at all costs were aimed in particular at the dignity of slaves, poor, prisoners of war, pregnant women, deceased or workers. These oracles of the Prophet Amos are examples of peculiarities; they refer to the war-consuming reprehensible deeds in all varieties of atrocities: irrational cruelty (1: 3. 11. 13); the purchase and sale of war lords (1: 6. 9); profanation of the deceased (2: 1). Oracle references refer not only to crimes committed against the Jews, but Israel itself is judged by the same iniquities (2: 6-16). Therefore, the violation of the international law regarding wartime behavior of both heathen and chosen people, who became dubiously guilty, was violated because, unlike the others, Israel had revealed a clear law of the war from which it did not have He may abdicate (Deut 20). To be seen John H. Walton, Victor H. Matthews, Mark W. Chavalas, *Comentariu cultural-istoric al Vechiului Testament*, trad. de Silviu Tatu, Luca Crețan, (Oradea: Editura Casa Cărții, 2016), 822-823; James D.G. Dunn, John W. Rogerson, *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003), 691.

<sup>37</sup> Silviu Tatu, *Dumnezeu a vorbit în vechime prin profeți*, 77.

## The case of Elijah the prophet and king idolatrous Ahab: Nabot's life and a flagrant violation of the right to property (1Kgs 21, 1-16<sup>38</sup>)

The right to property was of divine origin (Deut 15: 12-14; 24: 19), and the alienation of the parents' inheritance was also prohibited by the law of God<sup>39</sup> (Lev 25: 23-28, Num 36: 7). Here are the two divine rights of the Israelite Nabot, violated by the greed of King Ahab, through rapt and use of power. We can say that Naboth's right to life (Exod 21: 16; Deut 24: 7) was canceled by Queen Jezebel, educated in the spirit of absolutist thinking of the Phoenician culture<sup>40</sup>, giving orders to commit horrible murder, with the purpose of depriving the innocent Nabot of wealth (1Kgs 21: 13-14). Ahab does not seem to be the first attempt of this kind, some of the biblical ones, also due to the sudden death of his two sons (*Ohozia and Ioram*), successors to the throne of Israel (2Kgs 1; 2Kgs 9). Moreover, there is no note in the royal chronicles about the funerals of these two kings, who traditionally had to enjoy all the royal honors in their early death<sup>41</sup>; fact that further strengthens our predictions.

The humanitarian spirit of Deuteronomy provided for the slave released under the yoke of his master in the seventh year (Exod 21: 2) the right to property, so that he had a house of his own and a piece of land for his subsistence, so as to they do not again get into slavery<sup>42</sup>. Under certain circumstances, the servant could choose to remain in his master's life (*'ebed 'olām*) or free himself, this being the equivalent of the previous six years of work<sup>43</sup>. This provision, which favored the right to property for the slave of Israel, was part of the Jubilee and Sabatic laws (Exod 21: 2-6; 23: 10-12; Lev 25; Deut 15; 1-18), symbolizing the return of the Jews from the Babylonian exile, Israel thus becoming the slave (*ebaday*) liberated of Yahweh (Lev 25: 42).

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<sup>38</sup> The Historical-Critical Research Division of the Old Testament questions the paternity of this chapter, precisely because of the inappropriate appearance of a social problem such as that of Nabot's vineyard, in a narrative context where only topics such as conspiracy, rebellion, prophetic intervention, etc. For more details see Emanuel Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible, Qumran, Septuagint* (Leiden: E.J.Brill, 2015), 8; Steven L.McKenzie, *The Trouble with Kings: The Composition of the Book of Kings in the Deuteronomistic History* (Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1991), 67; Jerome T.Walsh, „Methods and Meanings: Multiple Studies of 1 Kings 21,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 2 (1992): 193-211; Marc Shoffren, „Educational Approaches to Naboth's Vineyard (1 Kings 21),” *Journal of Progressive Judaism* 13 (1999), 7.

<sup>39</sup> John F.Walvoord, Roy B.Zuck, *Comentariu al Vechiului Testament*, trad. de Octavian Verlan, Constantin Leontiu, (Arad: Editura Multimedia, 2010), 529.

<sup>40</sup> Paul R.House, *1, 2 Kings* (Nashville: Broadman&Holman Publishers, 1995), 232; Richard D. Nelson, *First and Second Kings* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1973), 120.

<sup>41</sup> Viorel-Cristian Popa, “Considerații exegetice contextuale la 3 Regi 16, 34,” *Studii Teologice* 3 (2017): 95.

<sup>42</sup> Karl Fredreich Keil, Friedrich Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament: Pentateuch* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2006), 372.

<sup>43</sup> Peter C.Craigie, *Deuteronomul*, 270-271.

This logic of liberation will, through exodus, form Jewish thinking for a long time<sup>44</sup>. But not only that, but the jubilee year affirms the fundamental unity of creation through the celebration of the Sabbath year, in which both man and earth were called to enter Sabbath rest (Lev 25: 2-7). It also had an absolute necessity, allowed the earth to rest and refresh without people starving, since Yahweh was committed to feeding his people. The Sabatic Year was also essential for reforming the Jewish relationship with Yahweh, scholar R.S. Kawashima sees this year's jubilee, a primary source of cosmic ritual purification, for the symbolic jubilee atone for the socio-economic pollution, thus restructuring the sacerdotal relationship between earth and man<sup>45</sup>. Also, the Sabbath year had a prophylactic function of divine inspiration: if the Canaanites were exterminated from their lands due to the moral pollution of the area (ebr. *tm'*) the same danger awaits Israel if it is compromised with idolatry (Lev 26: 32-45) - here comes the indispensability of the jubilee, which has the moral aim of purifying Israel from all its sins, which could attract upon it the horrors of "the universal law of occupation"<sup>46</sup> (a reality that can no longer be postponed during the activity of the prophet Jeremiah - 2Chr 36: 21).

From the evening of Yom Kypur, at the meeting point between the two different calendars (Spring Nisan and Autumn Tishri<sup>47</sup>), the law of the jubilee year, was so conceived that every Jew or alien, bond or free, would resume his life on an equal basis<sup>48</sup>. They applied unanimously these legal provisions, they would have encouraged the decency of the inhabitants of Israel, because no one could ever have accumulated excessive wealth or the opposite, no one would ever have been condemned to poverty and slavery forever<sup>49</sup>. The main provision of the jubilee code was the

<sup>44</sup> Richard H.Lowery, *Sabbath and Jubilee* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2000), 29; R.Kinsler, Gloria Kinsler, *The Biblical Jubilee and the Struggle for Life* (Maryknoll: Orbis Press, 1999), 6.

<sup>45</sup> Robert S.Kawashima, „The Jubilee Year and the Return of Cosmic Purity“, *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 3 (2003): 372; Laura Kelly Fanucci, „Release from the Slavery of Debt: The Jubilee Year for Ancient Israel and the Modern Global Economy“, *Obsculta* 1 (2014): 5-6.

<sup>46</sup> Robert S.Kawashima, „The Jubilee Year and the Return of Cosmic Purity“, 385-386.

<sup>47</sup> Baruch A.Levine, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Leviticus* (Philadelphia/Jerusalem: The Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 171; Morales, L. Michael, *Who Shall Ascend the Mountain of the Lord? A Biblical Theology of the Book of Leviticus* (Leicester: IVP Academic Press, 2015), 35-38.

<sup>48</sup> The celebration of Jubilee through its eminently ethical character was to prepare the people for the coming of the great and last Jubilee, that is, the age of the Savior, the One who will give man's perfect liberty, eschatologically (Luke 4: 16-30). To be seen R.B. Sloan, *The Favorable Year of the Lord. A Study of the Jubiliary Theology in the Gospel of Luke* (Texas: Scholar Press Austin, 1977), 24; Roland de Vaux, *Les Institutions de l'Ancient Testament*, vol. 1, (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1958), 264-265.

<sup>49</sup> Geoffrey Wigoder, *Enciclopedia Iudaismului*, 369; Fred Skolnik, Michael Berenbaum, *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol. 11, (Farmington Hills: Keter Publishing House, 2007), 308. In fact, researcher A.Schenker says, if we study the laws of the slaves of the Torah from the perspective of the vocabulary, the historical context, the compositional history and the literary, theological and ethical particularities; we will notice that the provisions of the Jubilee Year (Lev 25: 39-55) faithfully follow the previously stated perspectives (Exod 21: 1-11; Deut 15:

return of the entire property to the original owner, in accordance with the territorial distribution provided by Moses. If, because of the debt, a Jew was forced to sell his property, it was not considered definitively alienated, but only temporary, until the jubilee year when it returned to the true owner<sup>50</sup> (Lev 25: 25-28). Then all debts were canceled (though Lowery researcher, says that the entire debt was totally canceled only in the 49<sup>th</sup> year in the Sabatic Year) and gives the right to dignity to the person concerned<sup>51</sup>. In this context, it is easy to understand the fraud by King Ahab by illegitimate cancellation of Nabot's right to property, all the more so since Ahab did not want to return it to the injured, his own life in the jubilee year. In this context, it is easy to understand the fraud by King Ahab by illegitimate cancellation of Nabot's right to property, all the more so since Ahab did not want to return it to the injured, his own life in the jubilee year.

Nabot's refusal to dispose of his good also comes amid the legislation on buildings but also on the basis of the clear prohibition, since the time of Moses, that one should sell his parental inheritance<sup>52</sup> (Lev 25: 23-28; Num 36: 7). First,

1-18). See A.Schenker, „The Biblical Legislation on the Release of Slaves: The Road from Exodus to Leviticus”, *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 1 (1998), 23-41.

<sup>50</sup> The Hebrew noun “*ebed*” used both the servant and the slave, but also denotes two different types of slaves. There is a clan of slaves, which has come to the slave of their master because of the inability to pay his debts to him; and another category of slaves, either born in this condition or coming from the prey of war - they could be sold and bought with very few rights. The Jewish law limits this last form of slavery, the most precarious, strictly non-Israelic (Lev 25: 44), while slavery arising from debts has been strictly provisional until the person in question paid with his own freedom, duty towards its creditor. On the basis of the Jubilee Year convention of Lev 25: 39-41, those who enjoyed the unconditional right to freedom and the removal of all debt in the jubilee year were only the slaves due to the debt, that is to say, the people of Israel. Unlike them, however, the non-Jewish slave, especially the Canaanite, could not enjoy release in the year of the jubilee, but he was the property of the Jewish master all his life (Lev 25: 44-46). But this does not mean that he does not enjoy a series of legal rights and ritual privileges: his master could not kill him; if the slave was circumcised, he could enjoy the same ritualistic provisions of Pessah; he could regain his freedom if there was someone to redeem him in cash, but if the slave suffered physical harm because of his master, he was automatically declared free; it was forbidden to return a fugitive slave to his master (Deut 23: 16). The Christian church, since the fourth century, forbids the Jews to hold slaves from Christians, and Jews will be the first to abolish slavery long before Christians. Although some scholars (Falk, Andersen), based on the prophetic texts of Jeremiah (34: 9. 16-17), say that in fact many Jews did not respect the release of slaves in the jubilee year, which attracted the wrath of God on the people. To be seen Gregory C. Chirichigno, *Debt-Slavery in Israel and the Ancient Near East* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 145-147; Nathan Andersen, „Slave Systems of the Old Testament and the American South: A Study in Contrasts”, *Studia Antiqua* 1 (2003): 57-59; Ze'ev W. Falk, *Hebrew Law in Biblical Times* (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 2001), 87.

<sup>51</sup> Robert North, *The Sociology of the Biblical Jubilee* (Rome: The Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1954), 2; Richard H. Lowery, *Sabbath and Jubilee*, 68-69.

<sup>52</sup> The great Jewish historian, Joseph Flavius, says Nabot came from a wealthy family, and his life was certainly inherited from his parents. Ahab's deed of illegally disposing of his fatherly inheritance produced such indignation in God's eyes that Yahweh sent his

Nabot's refusal to do business with his parental inheritance proves him to be a true believer of Yahweh who obeys the divine commandment. Nabot's refusal raises some questions about the right of a citizen to refuse royal offers; but the present context carries a profound religious implication, precisely therefore, in the context of the Torah, King Ahab had no right to issue such an offer<sup>53</sup>.

There is, however, in the history of Israel a case of selling the parental property to the king (2 Sam 24: 24), but the gesture is done by a scumbag, on which the mosaic ban has no effect. The preservation of wealth (נַחֲלָה) *nahālā* meant to every covenant of the Covenant, not just an act of piety to the memory of the parents, but also a religious duty<sup>54</sup>. The Hebrew noun *nahālā* denotes only what is to be passed on from one generation to the next, only by the law of inheritance (Gen 31: 14), which is in fact an ancient right of permanent incidence. The theological idea behind *nahālā* is that Yahweh is the Only Owner of the whole earth (Ps 47: 4) and He divides the land of His people according to His own good<sup>55</sup> (Deut 32: 8). That is why the Israelites have no right in the process of alienating the earth, for they are not their true masters, but Yahweh. Its derivative, the Hebrew noun *yerushah* in Num 36: 7 means "land, earth", and the verb *yarash* means "to possess" (Deut 3: 20). In just a few instances, just the one here, refers to patrimonial possessions in the sense of direct inheritance<sup>56</sup> (Gen 15: 3-4; 21: 10). Thus, Ahab's request contravened the Law of God, and the king's embezzlement was rather an insult to the Only Owner - Yahwe.

By the intervention of Queen Jezebel, the victim is murdered on the back of a simulacrum: Nabot was accused of blaspheming God and the king. The Mosaic law forbade such behavior (Exod 22: 28), but did not claim the death penalty for the blasphemer, and yet, Ahab and the civil authorities compromised, they decided without any legal basis, the death penalty for Nabot. The contribution of civil authorities or city leaders to the use of crime can not be overlooked, precisely because of the importance of public opinion in the history of Jewish culture<sup>57</sup>. In its essence, the confrontation between

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prophet to warn the wicked king of his imminent death. To be seen William Whiston, *The Works of Josephus: The Antiquities of the Jews*, VIII. 13. 8. (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1987), 158. Newer scholars, instead, propose the episode of Nabot's vineyard, an example of confrontation between the rich and the poor, between the subsistence and the lush one; making it clear that this character, named Nabot, would have been a humble peasant who would live his life from one day to the next. To be seen A.Rofé, "The Vineyard of Naboth: The Origin and Message of the Story", *Vetus Testamentum* 1 (1988), 89.

<sup>53</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *1 and 2 Kings* (Georgia: Smyth and Helwys Publishing, 2000), 258.

<sup>54</sup> H.D.M. Spence, Joseph S.Exell, *1 Kings: Exposition and homiletics* (London: Funk&Wagnalls Company, 1909), 507.

<sup>55</sup> R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Bruce K. Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, 569.

<sup>56</sup> Jacob Milgrom, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Numbers* (Philadelphia/Jerusalem: The Jewish Publication Society, 2003), 298.

<sup>57</sup> Ksenafu Akulli, "More than just Naboth's Vineyard. Reflections on the Implications of the Community on Exploitation and Corruption in the Context of I Kings 21", *KAIROS – Evangelical Journal of Theology* 2 (2011): 294.

Naboth and Ahab bears the mark of oppression by invoking the false witness (a role played by the city's chieftains). We are given the powerful and influential narrative, which cancels the rights of the weaker than himself, all with the corrupt authority's patronage. We have to do with the abuse of royal power, because more and more in the history of mankind, power corrupts and authority becomes subjective in the exercise of its function. From a legal perspective, we face a case of political oppression against the weakest, where the corrupt<sup>58</sup> community involvement speaks out; that is why we can call this transaction as illegal<sup>59</sup>. Undoubtedly, we are witnessing a case of secularization of human rights - an Old Church institutional reality, within which the supreme human values, decreed by the Law of Yahweh, become relativized<sup>60</sup>.

Due to the death of the innocent Nabot, Ahab comes into possession of the vineyard, not by a legal basis, since there is no one, but by traditional use<sup>61</sup> (2 Sam 16: 4). The greed was great, and due to the location of the vineyard, in the Jezreel region (*Tel 'Ein Yizre'el*), near the Ghilboa Mountains, open to the very fertile valley of the Jezreel, famous for its agricultural and grazing conditions<sup>62</sup>. These reprehensible acts of Israel's civilian authority of those times, led by the most corrupt king in Israel's history, were severely fined by the prophet Elijah, mandated by God to bring to King Ahab the message of his near death<sup>63</sup>. Unfortunately, the victim can not return his right to property, nor is the act of rewarding the innocent possible. Any attempt to correct the situation is doomed to failure, so for Ahab and his home there is only the certainty of the punishment of God, the only One who can intervene into salvation<sup>64</sup>.

The direct confrontation between the apostate king Ahab and the prophet Yahweh, Elijah (vv. 17-20), sets the basis for a prophecy on the end of Ahab's

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<sup>58</sup>The Latin *corrumpo* from which the verb "corrupts" originates, means in the first place "to ruin, to deteriorate, to rot"; but transferred to the moral area, corruption is the vice of the immoral who is in the seat of political, economic or professional power, exploits his position through decision makers or influence, in favor of an illicit personal profit. Generally this is at the expense of the one who is socially dependent on him. It is exactly the situation between the corrupt king Ahab and his subject, the injured winegrower Nabot, who pays the price of his life, the illegal action of the king. To be seen Mitropolitul Bartolomeu, *Corupția Spirituală. Texte Social-Teologice* (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Eikon, 2011), 77-78.

<sup>59</sup> Ksenafu Akulli, "More than just Naboth's Vineyard", 296-297.

<sup>60</sup> Jean-Marie Lustiger, "L'Église, la Révolution et les Droits de L'Homme", in *1789 La Commémoration*, eds. Maurice Agulhon, Jean-Denis Bredin (Paris: Gallimard, 2000), 130-173.

<sup>61</sup> James E. Smith, *The Books of History* (Joplin: College Press Publishing Company, 1995), 185.

<sup>62</sup> Nadav Na'aman, "Pharonic Lands in the Jezreel Valley in the Late Bronze Age. Appendix: The Ancient Name of the Jezreel Valley", in *Canaan in the Second Millennium B.C.E.: Collected Essays*, vol. 2, (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns Publishers, 2005), 239; Jennie Ebeling, Norma Franklin, Ian Cipin, "Jezreel Revealed in Laser Scans: A Preliminary Report of the 2012 Survey Season," *Near Eastern Archaeology*, 4 (2012): 232-239.

<sup>63</sup> David S. Dockery, *Holman Concise Bible Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman&Holman Publishers, 1998), 144.

<sup>64</sup> Renato Poggioli, "Naboth's Vineyard or the Pastoral view of the Social Order," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 1 (1963): p. 8.

life. We have no reason to doubt its fulfillment, because Ahab died in war, and his son Joram was killed exactly at the place of Naboth's vineyard (2Kgs 9: 22-26), in order to be fulfilled with precision the smaller details of the prophecy brought against the house of Ahab<sup>65</sup> (1Kgs 21: 21-22). In the case of the death of the son of Ahab, killed exactly at the place of Naboth's vineyard, the principle of the Talion's Law, meant to restore the posterior dignity of the injured, applies in this case. The mating of the house of Ahab comes as the punishment of God for the iniquities committed by Jezebel, who killed the prophets of God. The Lord's revenge, presented in 2Kgs 9: 26a, brings with it blood of blood and life for life. The verb used here for revenge, the Hebrew *nqm*, is synonymous with those in 2Kgs 9: 7-10a, and most of its *nqm* occurrences indicate YHWH as the subject of coercive action. In particular, we identify it with the same ideological content in Isaiah's prophecies (1: 2; 34: 8; 35: 4; 47: 3; 59: 17; 61: 2; 63: 4) and Jeremiah's also (8: 15; 10: 50; 15: 51) of the TM text<sup>66</sup>.

Therefore, we find in the episode of Nabot's vineyard, a whole series of violations of basic rights by the corrupt civil authority of Israel: the violation of the right to property (Lev 25; Deut 15: 12-15; 24: 19); equal representation before the courts of law (Deut 19), non-discrimination (Exod 20: 10; Lev 16: 29; 17: 8; 19: 33-34; Deut 10: 19; 24: 19; 1Chr 29: 15; Ps 94: 5-6; 146: 9; Jer 7: 6), and not in the latter, we identify in the act of King Ahab the violation of two commandments in the Decalogue<sup>67</sup>: "*Thou shall not bear false testimony against their neighbor*" (ס: רמֵשׁ לַעֲרֹב הַנֶּעֱצֵת אֵל) and "*Thou shall not lust for their neighbor's house*" (דָּרֵעַר יִבֵּד מִקֶּחַת אֹרֵל).

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<sup>65</sup> James A. Montgomery, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Books of Kings* (New York: Scribner's Sons Publishing, 1951), 330-334.

<sup>66</sup> H.G.L. Peels, *The Vengeance of God: The Meaning of NQM and the Function of the NQM-Texts in the Context of Divine Revelation in the Old Testament* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995); Patrick T. Cronauer, *The Stories about Naboth the Jezreelite: A Source, Composition and Redaction Investigation of 1 Kings 21 and Passages in 2 Kings 9* (New York: T&T Clark, 2005), 46-47.

<sup>67</sup> We have rendered these two commandments in the Decalogue in our own translation, because the Romanian Bible translations, through the option of the conjunctive mode ("*Do not Confess Straightly ...*"), lose sight of the imperfect qal of the Hebrew verb *lō ʾā ʾānē(h)* which in Romanian corresponds to the future indicative mode, that is why it translates correctly according to the context, by the formula "*you will not ...*". Also, the translation of the Septuagint also faithfully preserves the original of the Hebrew text, using the verb *οὐ ψευδομαρτυροῦσιν* which is indicative in the future, and must be translated into Romanian by the phrase "*you will not ...*". To be seen Christo H. J. Van der Merwe, Jackie A. Naude, Jan H. Kroeze, *A biblical Hebrew Reference Grammar* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 72; Barbara Friberg, Timothy Friberg, Neva F. Miller, *Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 265; William Holladay, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2000), 224; Timothy Crow, Silviu Tatu, *Ebraica Biblică* (Oradea: Editura Cartea Creștină, 2001), 97-101; Emilian Cornițescu, Dumitru Abrudan, *Limba Ebraică Biblică* (București: EIBMBOR, 2002), 87: "*The imperfect shows us an unfulfilled state, something vague, and it usually translates to the simple future, and in other cases, the context is also expressed by the present or the future compound. Since time is unclear in Hebrew, context and some syntactic rules are used to specify verbal action in time*".

## Conclusions

The mission of the prophet in the Old Testament was to bring the people closer to the requirements of the law of God, so that Israel could continue to benefit from divine protection. Every time Israel slipped on the slope of idolatry, Yahweh sent his servant to warn the people to return to true worship. He also transmitted the punishment fixed by Yahweh for the one who did not want to repent of his immoral deeds. There is a wide range of ways in which God has been in contact with His people to constantly instruct them to attain holiness, a *sine qua non* condition of salvation: by His law through direct communication, dreams, suffering, but especially through His prophets.

A special case in this scenario is the king of Israel, the top representative of civilian authority. The monarchical institution was bound to remain faithful to the law of God, both to keep the state of Israel under the graces of divinity, but also to sustain the cultic office, the daily sacrifices for sins, that the people should advance on the path of holiness. In this scenario, the king owed his people to remain faithful to God, for the embrace of idolatry would be an attempt at the very religious, social and political stability of the nation. But the kings of Israel, except for very few of them, proved to be inclined to idolatry, leaving God by their way of life, and indirectly endeavoring to the welfare of the kingdom. In order to correct his conduct, God prepared the prophet, to go and apostrophe to the irresponsible king, which attracted by his idolatrous behavior, divine wrath on his house, and the people over whom the king was anointed. Most of the time, the prophet's life was put in threat in order to accomplish his mission, which is why we have some cases of prophetic reticence, but in the end God's man assumes the paradigm of the hero who contributes decisively to the purification of the nation he belongs to. The civil authority, in most cases, due to the increase of corruption and sliding on the suicidal slope, rejected the message of the prophet, considering it to be a waste, and above all, he was persecuting the Messenger of the Lord, furthering the wrath of God upon him and Israel in general.

Such a paradigmatic case is also the prophet Elijah, who has suffered much from King Ahab and his wife Jezebel, for his courage to confront him directly and publicly with the king. Because Ahab blatantly assailed the grace of the vine grower Nabot, violating a series of human rights, clearly specified in the Law, prophet Elijah prophesies to him and his house, death - as a punishment from God for wrongdoing. The episode of Nabot's episode is an eloquent example of the Old Testament, which points out how the relationship between the prophet and corrupt civil authority should be conducted. God does not allow any fracture of concession from this relationship - the prophet is obliged to fine-tune the moral slippages of idolatrous

and corrupt royalty. This is in fact the supremacy of the prophet and the nothingness of the king who repudiates Yahweh of his people, risking with it the very political and economic stability of the kingdom over which he is unworthy.

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## Divine Intra-Trinitarian Love, a Model for the Christian Marital Love

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### Abstract

In recent years, there has been a worldwide increase in young people's interest in sexuality to the detriment of love, which is now frequently read as physical desire. Cultural and socio-economic changes have led to teenagers' becoming sexually active at increasingly younger ages, and studies have shown that more and more teenagers in Romania, similar to all European countries, begin their sex lives before marriage, which leads to the growth of not only the number of one's sexual partners and of sexually transmitted diseases, but also of so-called "unwanted" pregnancies. What this paper aims to do is to promote love as the core value of Christianity and family unity. Love is the main goal of human life and the means to acknowledge the divine spark in others. Love is also essential to the foundation of the Christian family. Created in God's image, man and woman constantly strive to resemble their primordial model, particularly with respect to love. Moreover, God, in His unity of tri-personal communion, is a role model for the Christian family who perfectly mirrors it, while Christ mediates the communion between the Holy Trinity and the members of the family. Love is the supreme gift that spouses can share, a gift that can contribute to their spiritual growth and that can keep the two together for life.

**Keywords:** Holy Trinity, divine, love, Christian family, unity, model

LOVE IS THE CORE VALUE of Christianity. It is out of His perfect love that God created the world, saved it, and constantly cares for it and sanctifies it. It is in this divine intra-trinitarian love that lies the source of the human being's love for the other. The one who loves truly holds the beloved as an ideal in life and loves them unconditionally, with their good and less good parts, in the hope of being able to change the "darkness" into peaks of love and good living. Love is the one that opens the heart's eye which better sees the secret heart of the other, while the other also discovers the secret heart of the person whom they love and who loves them in return, as they

grow closer. The mutual knowledge of the two people is presupposed by this relationship of true love: "As I know him, through love, perhaps better than he knows himself, so he, through the love by which he gets closer to me, can know me better than I know myself."<sup>1</sup>

It is through divine love that the entire creation was brought into existence; that is why the source and finality of all things is God, and He is love: "Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love." (1 John 4:7-8)<sup>2</sup> In one of his homilies, St. John Chrysostom describes Christ's absolute love of people:

I am a father for you (says Christ) and a brother, a bridegroom and a home, a nurse and a dressing, a root and a cornerstone. Whatever you want, I am for you. My desire is that you have no need whatsoever. I shall serve you; for I came not to be served, but to serve. I am a friend and a member and a head, a brother and a sister and a mother. I am everything for you. Just stay in communion with me. I have been poor for you and a wanderer for you, on the cross and in the tomb for you.<sup>3</sup>

Christ can thus become any family member and offer his support, according to the person's emotional and/or spiritual needs.

The foundation of the family is marital love, which is also the aim of the family. Through love the husband and wife are joined in body and soul, and thus the primordial unity of man takes place. The link between divine intra-trinitarian love and the love within the Christian family is the direct result of the Sacrament of Marriage, which is nothing but "an event in which the truth of [the Church's] life is manifested and realized, and a reality in which our fragmented nature is transfigured into an image of trinitarian community."<sup>4</sup>

Father Dumitru Stăniloae shows that God, in His unity of tri-personal communion, is a role model for the Christian family:

In Orthodoxy God is a tri-personal being, i.e. a tight intimacy between three selves, a life shared between three subjects. Neither is the unity torn, nor do the persons merge. There are

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<sup>1</sup> Dumitru Belu, *On Love* [in Romanian], apud Fr. Ioan C. Teșu, *From the Hell of Passions to the Heaven of Virtues* [in Romanian] (București: Editura Christiana, 2000), 155, footnote 474 (my translation).

<sup>2</sup> This and all subsequent Bible quotations will be taken from the King James Bible, available online: <https://www.biblegateway.com/versions/King-James-Version-KJV-Bible/> [22.11.2018].

<sup>3</sup> Fr. John Chryssavgis, *Love, Marriage and Sexuality*, 2005, online: <http://www.orthodoxa.org/GB/orthodoxy/society/love.htm> [22.11.2018].

<sup>4</sup> Christos Yannaras, *The Freedom of Morality* (New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1984), 157.

neither isolated and selfish individuals, nor a mass in which the persons are stifled. But there is family unity; in family there is one heart, one thought, one will. [...] In God there is an ideal family life, full of love: it is not without a purpose that one person serves as Father and another as Son.<sup>5</sup>

Similarly, this model is mirrored at the level of the human family, with the spouses and their marital love, followed then by the fruit thereof (i.e. the offspring), who are joined together in “tight intimacy”.

A communion is thus created between the Persons of the Holy Trinity and the members of the family, and it mediated by Christ:

One of the first consequences of comparing marriage to the Holy Trinity, “as structure of supreme love”, is that it presents itself as a “small kingdom”, a *microbasilea*. The *Trinitarian ecclesia* is mirrored in the *domestic ecclesia*. What makes the face of Trinity become the face of marriage is a certain influence of the divine Persons in the spouses’ lives and, above all, the presence and intervention of the Son-person. The passing from divine communion to human communion is done through Christ, consubstantial with the Father and the Holy Spirit in respect to His divinity, and consubstantial with us in respect to His unity.<sup>6</sup>

Man and woman are created in God’s image and likeness (Genesis 1:27 – “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.”); they are endowed with the capacity for mutual love and communion. This love between spouses emerges from the all-embracing love of the Holy Trinity and it is thanks to it that the two can move forward in true life: “A full life is one with love. God is the source of life because in the Trinity lies the source of love. Whoever has love in Him, as a normal relationship with another, also has life.”<sup>7</sup>

It is due to this divine image they have that human beings continuously strive to resemble their model, i.e. God. As such, both man and woman are capable of sharing love, first within the family, and then outside of it, towards other people. Love is what unites the two spouses and helps them rejoice in each other. In a similar way, there is a tight connection between kindness and love within the Holy Trinity:

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<sup>5</sup> Fr. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Orthodoxy and Romanian identity* [in Romanian] (Bucharest: Albatros, 1998), 58 (my translation).

<sup>6</sup> Fr. Ilie Moldovan, *Love, the Sacrament of Marriage. The Theology of Love* [in Romanian], vol. 1 (Alba Iulia: Reîntregirea, 1996), 18-19 (my translation).

<sup>7</sup> Fr. Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Immortal Image of God*, apud Fr. Vasile Gavrilă, *Marriage – Life in God’s Kingdom* [in Romanian] (Bucharest: Ed. Fundația „Tradiția Românească”, 2004), 23 (my translation).

This is the mutual kindness or love of one Person towards another. This kindness is related to their actual existence. The Father cannot exist and cannot rejoice in it unless it is an existence lovingly given to the Son. And the Son cannot exist unless accompanied by the joy of receiving His existence from the Father, who gives it out of unlimited love, in accordance with His own existence. And the Holy Spirit lives the fullness of its existence by rejoicing in the joy of the Father in the Son and vice versa.<sup>8</sup>

Marital love is a natural feeling for the spouses, a decision and a commitment to a common life path, as well as a gift from God received during the great Sacrament of Marriage. This family love must be cultivated and supported through continuous effort. It presupposes delicacy, responsibility and respect; through it each one meets the other halfway. In the family unity, man and woman offer themselves to each other in the perspective of God's image in the other. The love between the two is an iconic image of the love of God, as St. John Climacus shows: "Blessed is the person who has obtained such love and yearning for God as a mad lover has for his beloved generating fire by fire, eros by eros, passion by passion, desire by desire."<sup>9</sup>

Moreover, Father John Chryssavgis claims that the relationship between the spouses must become an icon of trinitarian love:

Unless marital love opens the couple up beyond themselves, unless the relationship of the two in marriage reflects the communion of the Trinity, unless the love of the couple extends them in one way or another, then marital love is reduced from a sacred icon to a mere idol.<sup>10</sup>

Love is the main goal of human life; it is what makes us constantly strive to become better people and it is also what helps us acknowledge the spark of divinity in others. Human beings are created by God

to love and to look at one another. The experience of love is heaven and life; the absence of love is hell and death. [...] Love shatters the chains of loneliness; it tears down the walls of selfishness. [...] We are never more powerful than when through love we are vulnerable. Love casts out fear; it is stronger than death. To say to someone: "I love you!" is to make a metaphysical statement; it is like saying: "You will never die!" [...] To

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<sup>8</sup> Fr. Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Immortal Image of God* [in Romanian], vol. II (Bucharest: Cristal, 1995) 11 (my translation).

<sup>9</sup> St. John Climacus, apud Chryssavgis, *Love, Marriage and Sexuality*.

<sup>10</sup> Chryssavgis.

gaze into another person's eyes with love is to see the soul of the entire world, it is to see the very image of God.<sup>11</sup>

Furthermore, love is crucial to the foundation of the Christian family. As the unity and life communion between husband and wife, the family was established on the model of intra-trinitarian love. There is a very close connection between the mutual love of spouses and the love God bestows on them and on all people. If the family is on the path to Christian perfection, then family love will be implicitly directed towards God, where it will meet His love for the spouses. In this loving communion, marital love will grow stronger because it will continuously be nourished by its source, which is divine love.

There is no source of true love other than God; thus, where there is such love, God is also present and manifests Himself. Whoever lives in love dwells in God, while the persons who dwell in pure love have the mystical feeling of being embraced by God, although He is present there and His love works in that place as well... Love is the medium which brings people and God together.<sup>12</sup>

Through the Sacrament of Marriage the holy gift is bestowed on the family that receives an ecclesiastical way of life so that the loving relationship and mutual knowledge between the spouses is no longer natural but built on the model of the Holy Trinity:

The relationship and knowledge of the partners becomes an ecclesial event, realized not only through nature but also through the Church. It is an experience of participation in the communion of the saints: the man encounters and knows the woman, and the woman the man, not simply within the natural relationships and sexual love of the family, but in the context of those relationships which constitute the Church as an image of her trinitarian prototype.<sup>13</sup>

The marital relationship becomes a loving perichoretic relationship, similar to the perichoretic life model of the Holy Trinity.

John Breck shows that it is precisely through its gift of procreation that the family stays connected to God's love: "Blessed in the Church, [the family] serves the Church, continuing through procreation God's work of creation, reflecting God's eternal love for the Church, and through it for the whole world, and testifying to marital love, which guides and accompanies

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Fr. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Orthodoxy and Romanian Identity* [in Romanian], apud Fr. Tiberiu Gh. Dârlea, *Marriage and Mystical Life* [in Romanian] (Bucharest: Lumina, 1995), 61 (my translation).

<sup>13</sup> Yannaras, *The Freedom of Morality*, 161.

the spouses on the path of eternal life.”<sup>14</sup> Aiming for salvation and eternal life, family love is a kind of love that actually responds to God’s inner love, which is its source. According to John the Apostle, “God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him. [...] We love him, because he first loved us.” (1 John 4:16, 19)

Through their love the spouses do not move away from God, but on the contrary, they get closer to Him and His love, as St. Gregory the Theologian argues: “Joined as a single body and soul, they live through their mutual love, as marriage does not move them away from God but brings them closer to Him because God Himself is the One who draws us to it.”<sup>15</sup> In a similar way, Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite writes: “Love, be it godly, angelic, spiritual or physical, is a unifying power which manifests a communion.”<sup>16</sup>

In the Christian family the spouses form a unity with God, as Father Alexander Schmemmann explains: “In a Christian marriage, in fact, three are married; and the united loyalty of the two towards the third, who is God, keeps the two in an active unity with each other as well as with God.”<sup>17</sup>

The feeling of love, supported by the divine blessing of Marriage, is what mystically unites the spouses, as St. Cyril of Alexandria states:

It is of little import if the husband is not joined in body and soul with his lawful partner. For, once and for all they have become one body and somehow one soul, being bound by love and united by God’s law in good understanding.<sup>18</sup>

Love is a life-giving force, the foundation of family, while the family is the seal of love, “the sacrament of love”, as defined by St. John Chrysostom. Within the family love is the spouses’ source of physical and spiritual energy, through which isolation is annihilated and a complete sharing of life and existence is accomplished. Love becomes the way in which human beings enrich their souls; in love there is no fear, for “[h]e that feareth is not made perfect in love.” (1 John 4:18)

Through love husband and wife share their gifts and offer each other the best and noblest parts of their hearts, thus creating a circuit of love and giving through which they both grow spiritually. Discussing the love-giving relation, Fr. Dumitru Stăniloae says:

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<sup>14</sup> John Breck, *The Sacred Gift of Life* [in Romanian] (Cluj-Napoca: Patmos, 2003), 79 (my translation).

<sup>15</sup> St. Gregory the Theologian, *Praise of Virginity* [in Romanian], apud Breck, 83, footnote 20 (my translation).

<sup>16</sup> Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, *On the Divine Names* [in Romanian], apud Georges Habra, *Love and Sensuality* [in Romanian] (Bucharest: Anastasia, 1994), 80 (my translation).

<sup>17</sup> Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World – Sacraments and Orthodoxy* (New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2004), 90.

<sup>18</sup> Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on Malachi* [in Romanian], apud Habra, *Love and Sensuality*, 85 (my translation).

The two love each other because they complete each other, because they are not the same as each other. "Love does not take place between similarly sounding souls, but between harmonious ones", says Schiller. Love is a change of being, a mutual completeness. Love enriches each other because it receives and gives continuously, while hatred makes one poor because it neither gives nor receives anything... Marriage means at the same time love and help, joy of the other and his patience. For all this is the divine gift bestowed on the two people who are getting married. Love unites the amazement in the face of the other's mystery and the patience to bear the other's inabilities and the help offered to the other to overcome them. In love they both become strong.<sup>19</sup>

It is only through love that one can enter the other's inner world, the mysteries of the other's inner universe:

starting from the actual person, love moves further into their inner world, sensing all the richness of values that are on hold or tending to be accomplished [...]. In other words, love transposes us to the privileged situation in which one can see the deeper reality, beyond the appearance of the other's empirical person, to know not only the values that are to be realized but also the latent ones – which helps us in the highest degree to get the person's true image.<sup>20</sup>

Love makes the spouses more beautiful, better and nobler.

Love reveals to our soul a previously inexperienced happiness; it communicates great excitement, an incomparable joy. It is as if it gives wings to our soul because, when we love someone, we begin loving everyone and everything is filled with light for us, everything gets a new appearance and begins to shine. In love lies the seed and the enormous power of transformation which makes everything reaching our senses be perceived 'poetically', as we love everything around us, we rejoice in everything and we are open to everything surrounding us. And the beloved dwells at the core of this our mood, as if it were from them that thousands upon thousands of rays spread around joy and light and seal with beauty the beloved's face. When the feeling of love begins to take root in their hearts, even the coldest and roughest of people become kinder and gentler and experience a joy they have never felt before. Although externally the person we love may appear common to others, for us, s/he is unique, incom-

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<sup>19</sup> Fr. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, vol. 3 (Bucharest: Ed. Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, 1997), 122 (my translation).

<sup>20</sup> Dumitru I. Belu, *On Love* [in Romanian] (Craiova: Omniscope, 1997), 38 (my translation).

parable and irreplaceable. It is an 'idealisation' of the beloved, and this idealisation is due to the feeling of love which makes us see the beloved as kinder and more beautiful than do others, who are not attached to her/him by the same feelings as ours.<sup>21</sup>

In the light of love the spouses go beyond the person's external appearance, which may sometimes be imperfect, and reach the ideal part where lies the image of God in man.

The law of love makes the other's soul a mirror in which, in fact, they both see themselves. They both discover themselves as beautiful in both body and soul. They see each other, read the depths of each other's heart and recognize themselves in a double hypostasis – as lovers in love.<sup>22</sup>

According to Pseudo-Dionysus the Areopagite, love is ecstatic, i.e. it overflows one's own ego towards the ones it is addressed, so that those in love no longer belong to themselves but to those whom they love. Therefore, only love can lie at the foundation of family, a feeling which belongs to the sacrament that touches the lives of the spouses.

In this sense, St. John Chrysostom declares:

You do understand how important this sacrament is then, don't you? For, the virgin, living in isolation and having never seen her husband, wants him and loves him since the very first day as if he were her own body. In turn, the man prefers since the very first day the one he has never seen and never spoken with to all his friends and his own parents. On their behalf, the parents dispossessed of their wealth for other reasons are irritated, troubled and often drag those who dispossessed them to court; yet in marriage, they give their daughter together with a rich dowry to a man they often have never seen or known and they are happy to do this and do not think themselves robbed but, seeing their daughter gone, they forget the life spent together, they are neither sad nor offended, but grateful and think it worthy of their aspirations that their daughter should leave them while taking with her a large amount of money.<sup>23</sup>

Blessed and sanctified through the Sacrament of Marriage, love is the supreme gift that spouses share; it is what intermediates the noblest inner-

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<sup>21</sup> V. V. Zenkovsky, *Conversations with the Young about Sexuality* (Bucharest: Ed. Bizantină, 1998), 35-36 (my translation).

<sup>22</sup> Fr. Ioan C. Teșu, *From the Hell of Passions to the Heaven of Virtues* (Bucharest: Ed. Christiana, 2000), 157 (my translation).

<sup>23</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homily on choosing a wife*, apud Habra, *Love and Sensuality*, 88 (my translation).

most gifts that husband and wife offer each other, which contribute to their spiritual enrichment. Ultimately, it is also what keeps the spouses together until death takes them apart.

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# Jesus Christus im Hinduismus. Wie Ram Mohan Roy Jesus in den Hinduismus des 19. Jahrhunderts einbringt

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## Abstract

For many Europeans, the reception of Jesus by a polytheistic religion is a difficult thing to understand. One of these religions, Hinduism, looks at Christ in a particular way. From the end of the 18th century, the Christian message became an intense concern of many Hindu teachers who would adopt many Christian perceptions without a concrete conversion to Christianity. The first and most important personality among them was Ram Mohan Roy, the spiritual father of modern India. First of all, the present paper aims to bring to light some aspects of the religious evolution of the great Bengalian intellectual, such as his evolution within Unitarianism. Secondly, the research will focus on the reception of Jesus in his work, trying to systematize the main directions of the thought of the first Hindu author who dedicated a work to the second person of the Holy Trinity.

**Keywords:** Jesus, India, Hinduism, Unitarian, Ram Mohan Roy

## Einleitung

DASS ES AUCH AUSSERHALB DES Christentums eine Rezeption Jesu gibt, erscheint für viele europäische Christen kaum vorstellbar. Umso mehr wird die Aufmerksamkeit geweckt, wenn es um eine Aufnahme Jesus im Rahmen einer polytheistischen Religion, beispielsweise des Hinduismus, geht. Trotz der Schwierigkeit der Europäer, sich eine außerchristliche Rezeption Jesu vorzustellen, ist der Hinduismus als nicht-christliche Religion diejenige, in der Jesus und seine Lehre am meisten rezipiert wurden. Schon vor der Kolonialzeit gab es Kontakte von Menschen aus dem indischen Subkontinent mit der Lehre Jesu, die wir aber aufgrund der mangelnden Quellen in der Wissenschaft kaum darstellen können. Mit dem Beginn des Kolonialismus

fängt daher die erste Phase für die konkrete Aufnahme dieses Kontaktes an. Zwischen dem 16. und 18. Jahrhundert entstanden diese Kontakte nur durch Missionare oder waren das Ergebnis einer Bekehrung eines Hindus zum Christentum. Anfang des 19. Jahrhunderts entwickelten sich Tendenzen unter den Gelehrten des Hinduismus, Jesus und seine Gebote wahrzunehmen, ohne Christ zu werden. Unter all denen, die sich mit Jesus beschäftigten, gab es eine herausstechende Persönlichkeit, Raja Ram Mohan Roy, der nicht nur seinen persönlichen Kreis beeinflusste, sondern viele Generationen nach ihm und auch als *Vater des modernen Indiens*<sup>1</sup> betrachtet wird.

Ziel dieses vorliegenden Artikels ist es, darzustellen, wie die in der Forschungsliteratur dargestellte Rezeption Jesu bei Roham Moy mit dessen biographischem Hintergrund, insbesondere dem Einfluss des Hinduismus, verflochten ist.

## Kontextualisierung

Die ersten Begegnungen von Hindus mit der Botschaft Jesu sollen, laut der Legende, als Folge des Wirkens des Apostels Thomas in Indien im Jahre 52 n. Chr. stattgefunden haben. Die umstrittene Theorie, dass der Apostel Thomas auf dem indischen Subkontinent missionierte, ist bis heute fragwürdig und kann sich noch immer nicht auf valide historische Daten stützen<sup>2</sup>. Die erste christliche Siedlungsgemeinschaft, die historisch nachgewiesen werden konnte, besteht aus den sogenannten *St. Thomas Christians*<sup>3</sup>, auch als *Marthoma Nazranikal* bekannt, die erst im 6. Jahrhundert nach Indien kamen<sup>4</sup>.

Anfang des 16. Jahrhunderts fanden die ersten Begegnungen der indischen Bevölkerung mit dem europäischen Christentum statt, also in einer Zeit, in der Christus von den Kolonialherren verstärkt bekannt gemacht wurde<sup>5</sup>. Einer der ersten und bedeutendsten Missionare des 16. Jahrhunderts war Francisc Xavier<sup>6</sup>. Er erreichte Indien im Jahre 1542 und war ein Pionier der christlichen Mission im südostasiatischen Kontext<sup>7</sup>. Ein anderer pro-

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Dermot Killingley, *Rammohun Roy in Hindu and Christian Tradition. The Teape Lectures 1900* (Newcastle upon Tyne, 1993). Siehe auch: Kavalam Madhava Panikkar, *A Survey of Indian History*, 3. Aufl. ed. (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1956).

<sup>2</sup> Für eine detaillierte Darstellung dieser Problematik siehe die Monographie: George Nedungatt, *Quest for Historical Thomas Apostle of India, a Re-Reading of the Evidence* (Bengalore, 2008).

<sup>3</sup> Die haben sich als „Thomas Christen“ genannt, als sie Kolonialismus trafen und diesen Begriff sollte als eine Zeiche der Identität sein. Siehe: Dr. Meledath Kurian Thomas, *The Way of St. Thomas - a Brief History of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church* (The Malankara Orthodox Church Publications, 2012).

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Navakatesh J. Thomas, *Die Syrisch-Orthodoxe Kirche der Südindischen Thomas-Christen*, (Würzburg, 1967); Andrade, N.J., *The journey of Christianity to India in late antiquity: networks and the movement of culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Sandy Bharat, *Christ across the Ganges, Hindu Responses to Jesus* (Washington, 2007).

<sup>6</sup> Cf. P. Rayanna, S. J., *St. Francis Xavier and his Shrine* (Goa, 1982).

<sup>7</sup> Er zerstörte viele Hindu Tempel und religiöse Praktiken, wollte die arme Leute aus dem brahminischen Mentilität befreien und war überzeugt, dass Hindus keine Ahnung

minenter europäischer Missionar, der im Umgang mit den Hindus jedoch anders vorging als Xavier, war Robert de Nobili<sup>8</sup>. Während Xavier mit den unteren gesellschaftlichen Klassen arbeitete, zu denen z.B. die Kastenlosen und Unberührbaren gehörten, konzentrierte sich de Nobili mehr auf die oberen Klassen, vor allen auf die Brahmanen<sup>9</sup>.

Hinsichtlich dieser Zeit kann man nicht von einer Rezeption Jesu im Hinduismus sprechen, sondern nur über die Bekehrung zu Jesus nach den europäischen Vorstellungen.

Erst gegen Ende des 18. Jahrhunderts mit dem Beginn des Hindu-Christlichen Dialogs<sup>10</sup> und dann Anfang des 19. Jahrhunderts mit der Gründung der Brahma-Samaj-Organisation<sup>11</sup> begann eine neue Ära, die mit der Niederlassung der Briten zusammenfällt. Jesus Christus wurde von vielen indisch-hinduistischen Gelehrten nach ihren eigenen Vorstellungen wahrgenommen. Diese unterschied sich von der europäischen Tradition insbesondere dadurch, dass sie Jesus inklusiv in die eigenen hinduistischen Lehren integrierte und damit dem Anspruch der Exklusivität der europäischen Tradition entgegentrat<sup>12</sup>. Im Laufe des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts gab es Hindu-Gelehrte, die sowohl mit den islamischen als auch mit christlichen Werten in Kontakt gekommen waren. Jesus Christus hat für diese Gelehrten viele verschiedene Facetten: Er wird als *Führer zu Frieden und Glück* bei Mohan Roy bezeichnet, als der *Große Advaitin* bei Sri Ramakrishna, als *Neo-Advaitin* für Vivekananda, oder sogar als *der ideale Satyagrahi* bei Mahatma Gandhi, um nur die wichtigsten Gelehrten dieser Zeit zu nennen<sup>13</sup>.

Die letzte große Phase für die Recherche der Jesus-Rezeption gab es am Anfang der zweiten Hälfte des 20. Jahrhunderts, als Stanley J. Samartha<sup>14</sup>, M. M. Thomas<sup>15</sup> und Otto Wolff<sup>16</sup> ihre Aufmerksamkeit auf diese Thematik richteten.

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haben, war für sie selbst gut oder schlecht ist. Siehe Sita Ram Goel, *History of Hindu-Christian Encounters Ad 304 to 1996* (India: Voice of India, 1989), 11.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Peter R. Bachmann, *Roberto Nobili 1577-1656, Ein Missionsgeschichtlicher Beitrag zum Christlichen Dialog mit Hinduismus* (Roma: Institutum Historicum S.I., 1972), ab S. 32.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. *Preaching Wisdom to the Wise, Three Treatises by Roberto de Nobili, S. J., Missionary, Scholar and Saint in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century India*, Translated and Introduced by Anand Amaladass, S. J. and S. 22 Francis, S. S. 2. X. Clooney, S. J., Satya Nilayam Publications, Chennai, 2005, 3.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. B. Ziegenbalg, *Thirty Four Conferences between the Danish Missionaries and Malabarian Brahmans (or Heathen Priests) in the East Indies*, trans. I B, 8.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Kopf David, *The Brahma Samaj and the Shaping of the Modern Indian Mind* (Princeton Univ. Press, 1979).

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Madathilparampil Mamen Thomas, *Christus Im Neuen Indien - Reform-Hinduismus Und Christentum*, 44.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Clement Valluvassery, *Christus Im Kontext Und Kontext in Christus, Chalcedon Und Indische Christologie Bei Raimon Panikkar Und Samuel Rayan* (Lit Verlag, 2001), 83-142.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Stanley J. Samartha, *Hindus Vor Dem Universalen Christus - Beiträge Zu Einer Christologie in Indien* (Stuttgart: Evang. Verl.-Werk, 1970).

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Madathilparampil Mamen Thomas, *Christus Im Neuen Indien - Reform-Hinduismus Und Christentum* (Göttingen Vandenhoeck u. Ruprecht, 1989).

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Otto Wolff, *Christus Unter Den Hindus* (Gütersloh: Mohn, 65).

## Biographische Einheiten des Lebens Mohan Roys<sup>17</sup>

Im Folgenden konzentriert sich diese Arbeit auf den Beitrag des ersten Hindu-Intellektuellen, der sich intensiv mit Jesus beschäftigte, nämlich Ram Mohan Roy (1773-1833). Er war vor allem die Gründerfigur des modernen indischen Nationalstaates, *the father of modern India*<sup>18</sup>. Er ist bekannt für die Verflechtung von westlichem Wissen und für die Entstehung des indischen Nationalismus. Er war unter anderem ein sozialer und religiöser Reformator, Bildungsaktivist, wegweisender Journalist und Bengali-Prosaist. Ram Mohan interessierte sich ebenso für viele Aspekte der modernen südasiatischen Geschichte<sup>19</sup>. Er plädierte das ganze Leben für Freiheit der Presse, Verfassungsreform, Freihandel und moderne Bildung für alle. In England traf er einflussreiche Theologen, wie den Bischof von Salisbury, Thomas Burgess, William Scoresby, ein evangelikaler anglikanischer Geistlicher, und den Baptisten John Foster, die alle versuchten, ihn zum Christentum zu bekehren<sup>20</sup>.

Er wurde ursprünglich in eine gläubige hinduistische Familie geboren, besuchte eine islamische Schule, arbeitete im britischen Kolonialdienst und hatte in diesem Zusammenhang die Möglichkeit, das Christentum in seiner protestantischen Form kennenzulernen. Er beschäftigte sich mit mehreren religiösen Systemen und hatte vor, den Hinduismus zu reformieren, weil er der Meinung war, dass der Hinduismus eine abergläubische Religion sei<sup>21</sup>.

Er schenkte verschiedenen christlichen Themen Beachtung, nebenbei lernte er Latein, Griechisch und Hebräisch, um direkten Zugang zu den Urtexten des Christentums zu haben. Besonders wichtig fand er im Neuen Testament die Bergpredigt, die seiner Meinung nach etwas Neues und Herrliches in die Welt brachte, und die in seinen Augen nicht nur im Rahmen des Christentums wahrgenommen werden sollte, sondern im Rahmen aller religiösen Systeme der Welt. Die zwei wichtigsten Inspirationsquellen von Mohan Roy waren die *Upanishaden* und die moralischen Themen von Jesus<sup>22</sup>.

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<sup>17</sup> Der Name ist in verschiedenen Varianten gefunden, wie z.B.: Rammohan Roy (Ray), Ram Mohan (Mohun) Ray oder Ramamohana Raya. In der englischen Literatur finden man die Variante Rammohun.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Lynn Zastoupil, *Rammohun Roy and the Making of Victorian Britain* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Panikkar, *A Survey of Indian History*, 2.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Panikkar, *A Survey of Indian History*, Asia Publishing House, Bombay, 1956.

<sup>20</sup> In Großbritannien wurde er von King William eingeladen, kam im direkten Kontakt mit der königlichen Familie, nahm an der Eröffnung des London Bridge teil, besuchte verschiedene Institutionen und war immer auf der ersten Seiten der großen Zeitungen. L, Z, 2-4.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Bernward H. Wileke, „Das Jesusbild Im Hinduismus,“ in *Jesus in Den Weltreligionen*, ed. Fritz Köster Heinrich Fries, Franz Wolfinger (St. Otilien: EOS Verlag Erzabtei, 1981), 78.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Robert Boyd, *An Introduction to Indian Christian Theology* (Madras: Christian Lit. Soc, 1975), 19.

Er war nicht nur der einflussreichste sozio-religiöse Reformers des indischen Subkontinents, sondern auch der Gründer der indischen Renaissance. Sowohl die Europäer als auch die Inder haben erkannt, dass er eine wichtige Figur der indischen Geistesgeschichte war<sup>23</sup>.

## Rezeption des Christentums bei Mohan Roy

Ram Mohan Roys Wahrnehmung von Jesus muss in sehr strenger Verbindung mit der Tendenz der britischen Elite aus seiner Zeit betrachtet werden: Er war vor allem ein Anti-Trinitarier und er war der Überzeugung, dass Unitarismus der richtige Weg sei. Diese Perspektive richtete sich einerseits mehr oder weniger gegen seine eigene Hindu-Tradition. Andererseits führte sie dazu, dass er in den Augen seiner Landsleute als ein christlicher Theologe angesehen wurde. Ein erster Grund für seine unitaristische Perspektive ist die kulturelle Welle der 70er und 80er Jahre des 17. Jahrhunderts, die den Unitarismus in der einflussreichen britischen Elite verbreitet hat<sup>24</sup>, denn Roy wurde sehr gut von dieser Elite während seiner Reise nach Großbritannien empfangen, was eine große Rolle für seine Entwicklung spielen sollte<sup>25</sup>. Ein anderer Grund für seine unitaristische Perspektive war die Bildung im Rahmen einer islamischen Schule, in der immer von der Existenz eines einzigen Gottes die Rede war<sup>26</sup>. Wie bereits erwähnt, begann seine Beschäftigung mit der Lehre Jesu schon zuvor, indem er durch das Lernen der klassischen Sprachen Hebräisch, Griechisch und Latein sein Verständnis der Botschaft der Evangelien vertiefte. Im Jahre 1820 veröffentlichte er seinen bekannten Beitrag zu Jesus, *The Precepts of Jesus, the guide to Peace and Happiness*<sup>27</sup>, der sehr schnell sowohl in Europa als auch in Amerika bekannt wurde. Das Buch beeinflusste stark seine Reputation und war der Ansatzpunkt für die Debatte mit den christlichen Missionaren<sup>28</sup>.

Er interessierte sich kaum für die geschichtlichen Aspekte des Lebens Jesu, sondern für ihn war die Lehre der wichtigste Aspekt. Vor allem übernimmt er die Bergpredigt als einen zentralen Punkt und versucht, diese mit rationalen Argumenten zu analysieren<sup>29</sup>. Ram Mohan Roy stellte jedoch

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<sup>23</sup> Cf. Zastoupil, *Rammohun Roy and the Making of Victorian Britain*, 1-8.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 9

<sup>25</sup> Für die ganze Debatte siehe Zastoupil, *Rammohun Roy and the Making of Victorian Britain*, Kap. 2.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Thomas, *Christus Im Neuen Indien - Reform-Hinduismus Und Christentum*, 13

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Rammohun Roy, *The Precepts of Jesus, the Guide to Peace and Happiness [Microform]: Extracted from the Books of the New Testament Ascribed to the Four Evangelists, to Which Are Added, the First, Second, and Final Appeal to the Christian Public in Reply to the Observations of Dr. Marshman of Serampore* (Boston: Christian Register Office, 1828).

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Zastoupil, *Rammohun Roy and the Making of Victorian Britain*, 24-27.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Wileke, „Das Jesusbild Im Hinduismus“, 78.

auch viele Aspekte aus den Evangelien in Frage, beispielsweise die Wunder Jesu, die er als Mythen versteht, die die Christen als überholt betrachten sollten<sup>30</sup>. Das steht eindeutig in Verbindung mit seinem Widerstreben gegen den hinduistischen Polytheismus.

Jesus ist für Ram Mohan Roy *der größte Lehrer der Menschheit, größer als die Propheten, ein Bote Gottes*, aber nicht selbst ein Gott<sup>31</sup>. Er war sehr stark von der Lehre Jesu geprägt und sagte über ihn, dass nie ein Mensch so aufrichtig den Willen Gottes verkündet habe. Er war ebenso der Meinung, dass Jesus im Dienste Gottes und für ihn am Kreuze gestorben sei und er sah ihn als ein Vorbild für die Menschheit<sup>32</sup>.

## Das Verständnis Jesu bei Ram Mohan Roy

Nach dieser generellen Übersicht über die Persönlichkeit und die Entwicklung seiner Perspektive soll im Folgenden die konkrete Wahrnehmung Jesu durch die Mohan-Roy-Interpretation dargestellt werden.

Hierbei kommt vor allem der Aspekt *des abhängigen Sohns* zum Tragen. Für Roy konnte Jesus kein Gott sein, weil in seinem Verständnis ein Gott nicht mit der Materie gleichwertig sein könne. Gott ist der einzige Schöpfer, aber Jesus ist zur Schöpfung geworden und das bedeutet gleichzeitig, dass er Teil der materiellen Welt geworden ist. Allerdings glaubte er trotz seiner Ablehnung der Lehre von der Göttlichkeit Jesu an dessen Auferstehung<sup>33</sup>. Roy glaubte an die Idee der natürlichen Unterordnung des Sohnes gegenüber dem Vater und ebenso, dass Jesus lediglich mit Macht von Gott delegiert gewesen war. Er baute diese Idee mit folgenden Argumenten auf: a. Der Sohn ist vom Vater abhängig und ist sein Untertan<sup>34</sup>; b. Der Sohn hat seinen Willen dem Vater unterworfen und ist somit in moralischer Einheit mit dem Vater und nicht in der Identität des Seins<sup>35</sup>; c. Er ist der Vermittler und der Messias als Erstgeborener aller Schöpfungen<sup>36</sup>. Zweitens richtete Ram Mohan Roy seine Aufmerksamkeit eher auf die *Einheit des Willens*, anstatt auf die *Identität des Seins*. Er meinte, dass die in bestimmten johanneischen Texten enthaltene Einheit Christi mit dem Vater nur eine beständige Übereinstimmung von Willen und Design ist, wie sie unter seinen Aposteln bestand, und nicht die Identität des Seins. Roy akzeptierte z.B. die Lehre von der jungfräulichen Empfängnis, aber nur bis zu dem Punkt,

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Wolff, *Christus Unter Den Hindus*, 10.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Boyd, *An Introduction to Indian Christian Theology*, 19.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Wolff, *Christus Unter Den Hindus*.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Thomas, *Christus Im Neuen Indien - Reform-Hinduismus Und Christentum*, 2.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Boyd, *An Introduction to Indian Christian Theology*, 22.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Samartha, *Hindus Vor Dem Universalen Christus - Beiträge Zu Einer Christologie in Indien*, 45.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Boyd, *An Introduction to Indian Christian Theology*, 23.

an dem der Heilige Geist eine Rolle in der Empfängnis spielt. Würde man den Heiligen Geist einbeziehen, so würde dies laut Roy bedeuten, dass die Gottheit Verkehr mit einer menschlichen Frau hat<sup>37</sup>. Roy stimmt nicht mit der monistischen Lehre überein, dass Vater und Sohn ein und derselbe sind, auch nicht mit der Formulierung von Nicäa als ein Wesen in drei Personen, aber er akzeptiert die moralische Einheit. Alle seine Meinungen untermauerte er durch viele biblische Abschnitte von Johannes oder Paulus, wie z.B. I Korintherbrief 15: 24-28.

Drittens ist anzumerken, dass er den Aspekt des *Erstgeborenen der Schöpfung* problemlos akzeptiert. Er hat kein Problem mit der Präexistenz Jesu bei Gott und dass er vor Beginn der Schöpfung geboren ist, weil in der Tat die Bibel selbst an mehreren Stellen behauptet, dass der Sohn selbst den Engeln im Himmel übergeordnet war. Er erwähnte in diesem Kontext die Bibelpassage Johannes 5:26 und Kol. 1:5. Er akzeptierte also Jesus als Messias, aber er meinte auch: *He like Adam lived with God before his coming into his world...and afterwards was sent to the world in the body of Jesus, for effecting human salvation... this does not preclude us from rejecting the idea of a two-fold nature of god and man*<sup>38</sup>. Hier wird klar, dass für Roy der Kontakt mit der Welt den Verlust des göttlichen Attributs bedeutet.

Weiterhin schnitt er auch die für ihn problematische Frage nach dem Werk *Christi* an. Roy war nicht mit der Idee des stellvertretenden Leidens und des Opfertods einverstanden und positionierte sich gegen die Lehre der zwei Naturen Jesu, weil dies wiederum dessen göttliche Natur behaupten würde. Im Grunde genommen konnte Ram Mohan Roy das Sterben Jesu an Stelle eines Anderen nicht akzeptieren. Er hat das als etwas wahrgenommen, das der Gerechtigkeit Gottes zuwiderläuft. Für ihn war das Sterben Gottes ein Dogma, welches er selbst nicht akzeptieren konnte. Aus seiner Perspektive ist der Plan der Erlösung sehr einfach, nämlich der Aufforderung Jesu zu folgen, wie sie in Lukas 10, 27-28 steht<sup>39</sup>.

Den Geboten Jesu zu folgen, bedeutete für ihn das beste und einzige Mittel, um die Vergebung der Sünden, die Gunst Gottes und die Kraft zu erlangen, unsere Leidenschaften zu überwinden und seine Gebote zu befolgen. Die Botschaft Jesu ernst zu nehmen, ist also, laut Roy, der beste Weg, an Jesus zu glauben.

Einer der letzten Gesichtspunkte aus seinen Werken ist mit *der Gottheit* verbunden. Aufgrund seiner Entwicklung in einer Gesellschaft, in der das Praktizieren einer Religion wie dem Hinduismus sehr wichtig war, spielten für ihn die Dogmen der Kirche kaum eine Rolle<sup>40</sup>. Roy fühlte sich von der

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Wolff, *Christus Unter Den Hindus*, 12-15.

<sup>38</sup> Der Text wurde aus dem folgenden Buch übernommen: Boyd, *An Introduction to Indian Christian Theology*, 24.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Thomas, *Christus Im Neuen Indien - Reform-Hinduismus Und Christentum*, 22.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Samartha, *Hindus Vor Dem Universalen Christus - Beiträge Zu Einer Christologie in Indien*, 48.

christlichen Ethik hingezogen, aber er war nicht im Stande, dem Konzept der allgegenwärtigen Gottheit, die von einer Frau geboren wurde oder sein Blut für andere Personen gab, zu folgen<sup>41</sup>. Weiterhin lehnte er auch die Trinitätslehre und Inkarnation ab. Alle diese christlichen Perspektiven waren für ihn als hinduistischen Reformator unvorstellbar. Da er die Trinitätslehre der Missionare in der Bibel nicht finden konnte, war er der Meinung, dass Jesus nicht Gott sei. Er argumentierte damit, dass es nur einen einzigen absoluten Gott gibt, ähnlich wie im Islam, und gab dafür als Argument die Bibelstelle, wo Jesus sagt „*Mein Vater ist größer als ich*“<sup>42</sup>. Mohan Roy übernahm also eine arianische Stellung aufgrund seines monistischen Hintergrunds, seiner islamischen Ausbildung und des Kontakts mit dem westlichen Utilitarismus<sup>43</sup>.

## Schluss

Das Jesus-Verständnis für Ram Mohan Roy ist nicht nur als reine Neugierde, sondern eine leidenschaftliche Beschäftigung mit dem Stifter des Christentums und seinen Geboten zu verstehen. Wie schon erwähnt, lernte er Griechisch, Latein und Hebräisch, um sich mit den Originaltexten der Bibel auseinandersetzen zu können. Seine theologische Haltung in seiner Auseinandersetzung mit Jesus zeigt klar, dass er von der hinduistischen Vorstellungen stark geprägt war. Als Beispiel hierfür lässt sich das Argument anführen, dass für ihn ein Schöpfer nie ein Geschöpf werden kann.

Sein Versuch, Jesus zu verstehen, war nicht auf die dogmatische Basis des Christentums gegründet, sondern auf eigene Lektüre der Bibel und natürlich auf seine eigene Gottes-Erfahrungen und -Vorstellungen. Dazu noch war er ebenso von seiner muslimischen Ausbildung geprägt, weil er im Rahmen seiner islamischen Schule erst mit den monotheistischen Ideen im Kontakt kam. Den Koran las er täglich in der Schule. Diese Beschäftigung mit dem Koran war für ihn bestimmt der Schlüssel, die monotheistischen Ideen des Christentums zu verstehen.

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<sup>41</sup> Cf. Boyd, *An Introduction to Indian Christian Theology*, 23.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Johannes 14:28

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Boyd, *An Introduction to Indian Christian Theology*, 25.

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