

«*La mort: passage ou limite ?*»
Introductory note on the methodology
of an unpublished lecture
offered by André Scrima
at the Saint-Joseph University in Beirut (1978)

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Abstract

The proposal for an extremely original lecture – *La mort: passage or limit?* – will be developed in the classroom of the Faculty of Religious Studies, in the academic year 1978, at Saint Joseph University, Beirut. This course was transcribed by students of the Department of Religious Studies in Beirut in 1978. The recent discovery of this unpublished manuscript in the Augustin Dupré La Tour S.J. archives prompts me to make its first presentation to the academic world here. The Orthodox monk, from Romanian origins, André Scrima basically suggested that the theme of death should develop into various elements of reflection related to the comparative study of religions and modern thought in comparison to the Christian faith. Therefore, if the theme of death arises in a historiographical context related to the study of the History of Religions, the history of reflection on death in Western philosophical thought also plays its interpretative part. Finally, with respect to the two perspectives a third one is instilled: the problem of death for man from the point of view of Christian anthropology. The article also aims to contextualize the conceptual diagrams with which André Scrima works in his exposition on death through two parameters: the limit of the discourse on death – *frontière logique* – and the limit of death for itself – *frontière existentielle*. The subject is divided by Scrima into two conceptual diagrams: a. *en deçà* – death both as a subject within a discourse, of an observed fact, and as part of a noetic, reflexive exposition and questioning within consciousness and by our consciousness; b. *au-delà* – death as a mystery: the non-talking of death in itself; the invention of a “grammar” of the death of the human being.

Keywords: interreligious studies, history of religions, philosophy of religions, comparative studies, phenomenology, death studies, André Scrima, Middle East.

INTRODUCTORY NOTE.¹ THE MANUSCRIPT I am about to present here belongs to the *Augustin Dupré La Tour S.J. Archive*, at the *Résidence des Pères Jésuites* in Beirut.² It is a transcript of a course that Father André Scrima gave between 6 March and 29 May 1978, at the Faculty of Religious Sciences, *Saint Joseph* University in Beirut. The full name of the manuscript is: “Death: passage or limit? Elements of Reflection proposed by the comparative study of religions and modern thought, in the face of the Christian faith [*La mort: passage ou limite? Eléments de Réflexion proposé par l’étude compare des religions et la pensée moderne, face à la foi chrétienne*]”³, listing 51 pages. While I was on a research mission in Beirut in February 2020, one of the fathers in charge of the archive, granted me the immense courtesy of entering and setting out to search for various manuscripts belonging to Father André Scrima, who taught many courses in Lebanon during the civil war there. I was very fortunate in that, after almost an hour of searching, I found myself in front of a box containing almost all the transcripts of Scrima’s Lebanese courses. They are all manuscripts that Scrima never wished, thought or reasoned to publish, but rather to present himself as one who reflects on a proposed theme, in a courtly atmosphere filled with extremely curious students of different backgrounds, ethnicities and faiths, mainly Muslim and Christian.

Returning to the subject of the type of document, it is a transcript produced by the students, in a form never revised by the lecturer, never

¹ This article, one of the first publications that I intend to devote to the courses offered by Scrima in Lebanon, was the result of a mission to Beirut, therefore, had the benefit of various funding provided by the following institutions: Spandugino Foundation (Bucharest), “Agentia de Credite si Burse de Studiu”, “Accademia di Romania”, Rome; “1 Decembrie 1918” University, Alba-Iulia, Dep. Doctoral Studies, Faculty of Theology.

² The *Résidence des Pères Jésuites* in Beirut is the place where many scholar priests of the *Societatis Jesu* spend their last days, greatly gratifying visitors, mostly researchers or volunteers in humanitarian missions. In the building, there is still the famous Centre for Islamic-Christian Studies (CEDRAC), founded by Fr. Samir Khalil Samir S.J. and other Jesuits. The first surprise was to see his name among those who were already in the building, and then to see how available he was to spend hours talking together. It was the shadowy presence that mediated access to his colleague and collaborator’s archive during the years of the most stifling university atmosphere in Beirut. Pr. Samir knew and met Fr. Scrima during the years of the civil war in Lebanon and quickly understood how valuable any help would have been to me. I would never have written these lines if I had not felt that I wanted to reward, even in a small way, the efforts of those who helped me enormously during my time in Beirut: my colleague Alexandru Tofan, my colleagues and friends from Cluj, Ruxandra Cesereanu and prof. Corin Braga, Laura Ilea, the very efficient Houda Kassatly and the welcoming Abouna Youseff Abdallah (Deir-el-Harf), to the generous Emma and Basil Khoury, Rizk and Tony Khoury, to the Jesuit Fathers of the *Résidence des Pères Jésuites*, Beirut, to my friends Mirella Pintilie Jaber, Moufak and Gabi Aliwi, last but not least, Fr. Zacharias Zacharou, St. John the Baptist Monastery in Essex, Mrs. Lavinia Spandonide (Spandugino Foundation), Pr. conf. habil. Jan Nicolae, and the staff of the doctoral office of the University “1 Decembrie 1918”, Alba-Iulia.

³ From now on, I will use [MPL] abbreviation for the unpublished manuscript *La mort: passage ou limite*.

intended to be published. However, it is important to point out that the manuscript is conceptually perfectly coherent, without any syncope or omissions. I think that the lecturer's oral exposition was perfectly edited by the students, most likely equipped with a tape recorder. So far, I have not found any recordings of the manuscript, but the acuity and coherence of the text induces the idea of a perfect transcription. Another clarification should be made: many of the texts relating to the courses held by Scrima in Beirut are to be found also in the André Scrima Archive, at the New Europe College, Bucharest. Among these texts there is correspondingly a manuscript, with the same title *La mort: passage ou limite?*⁴, but only 2 typewritten pages in 3 copies and 13 personal notes by Scrima, most likely related to the course we are dealing with. At a later stage, I also propose to supplement the Beirut manuscript with the one in the A. Scrima archive, at the NEC, Bucharest, as I propose to publish an edition of it.

“An inexhaustible subject... [*un thème inépuisable...*]” As for the structure of the course, it comprises six lectures accompanied by a short presentation and here I will only name their titles⁵: “What to say; 2. Who dies? 3. Itinerary in absence; 4. The null point; 5. A nothing of oblivion; 6. The “empty Grave”.⁶ All these major points are well explained from a methodological point of view by Scrima: it is first of all a matter of signalling, of positioning, of creating a space for reflection in the systematic knowledge of the subject of death. It is not at all a treatise on Thanatology and not even a treatise on death from the point of view of the history of ideas, but rather a reflection on it, a personal and sensitive, existential involvement, a willingness of the being to open itself to a subject that concerns *au-delà*, to grasp the reverberations in the being in comparison with such a subject. It is therefore a type of hermeneutics that does not leave out being as a whole, holistically, where the comparative history of religions creates the theoretical framework for a reflexive departure from the subject. Rather ironically, Scrima recalls André Malraux's saying: “Where there is the tomb, there is Religion [*là où il y a le tombeau, il y a la Religion*]”, because he is aware of the fact that death can never be just a cultural topic or in the history of thought. “The grave [*le tombeau*]” reflects an infinite semantics if we consider the diachronic dimension of its evaluation of funerary practices, but equally the place that generates, perhaps for the first time in human history, a reflection of its mystery. And this is the direction Scrima is pointing in,

⁴ *La mort: passage ou limite?* Course structure and bibliography (Faculté de Sciences Religieuses. Université Saint-Joseph; Beirut), 2 pages typescript (3 copies) and 13 pages handwritten notes, March – May 1978, CNP 1.1 - CNP1.23, at the NEC, see the index written by prof. Anca Manolescu.

⁵ I will attach an annex the facsimile images of their presentation and the analytical bibliography of the course.

⁶ 1. Que dire?; 2. Qui meurt?; 3. Itinéraire dans l'absence; 4. Le point nul; 5. Un rien d'oubli; 6. Le “Tombeau vide”.

[...] where there is the tomb in the History of Man, there is a certain relationship with the dead... and this relationship is not indifferent: on the contrary, it is the most meaningful source since it signifies a space called the urn (the funerary urn where the ashes are deposited according to certain religions that practise incineration).⁷

Reflection is therefore directed towards the signs that surround, delimit, close or open the tomb space, even though times and spaces have a thousand-year history, but all of them point to a single mark, a single frontier: the door to transcendence. How else could one explain the effort to build or construct sophisticated tomb sites, to leave the marks that are often found on sites where there are funerary artefacts, as well as ritualistic signs that even detect ashes, if not to signal a passage between the world and the other world, into the afterlife? They are signs of a conception that indicates a reflection on death and transcendence. Therefore, this is the hermeneutic prevalence, the interpretative horizon with which Scrima operates.

As for the nuances of Scrima's hermeneutics used in the MPL, one immediately notices that everything is centred on language, spanning from paradoxes such as the discourse on death being made by a living person, death as the absolute absence of words, by inference one brings into play the sense and absence of sense in language arising from the question of death. This is as far as "What can be said [*que dire*]?" is concerned. Moreover, death being observed and the observer is always located outside of it. In this case, destiny encloses death, but it is also the destination of human life that is directed towards death, and this is the hermeneutic aperture for the question of "Who is dying [*qui meurt*]?" "Western thought", understood as the centre of knowledge that is disseminated in schools, institutions tout court, languages, means of communication, the entire organisation of events and customs, socio-political ideologies and technological culture in the European and American contexts, determine an extremely precise context in which illness, death and the entire Western thanatological institution is placed. Clearly, Scrima outlines an itinerary of the thanatological phenomenon in Western thought, where he investigates and tries to construct a variety of hermeneutic approaches that converge in a metaphor: "the itinerary in absence [*l'itinéraire dans l'absence*]."⁸

Another type of hermeneutic approach he uses is the death perspective, the passage of death into the divine, transcendental world, from the perspective of the comparative history of religions. It is a question of

⁷ "[...] là où il y a le tombeau dans l'Histoire de l'Homme, il y a un certain rapport avec le mort... et, ce rapport, n'est pas indifférent : il est, au contraire, la source la plus lourde de sens puisqu'elle signifie un espace qui s'appelle l'urne (l'urne funéraire où l'on dépose les cendres selon certaines religions pratiquant l'incinération)", MPL, folio 2.

⁸ MPL, folio 8.

placing the signs of revelation⁹ where there is a religious, spiritual, mystical questioning. Death seen from *l'en-deça* (from the spaces where we find ourselves) and from its *au-delà*, “that dead point [*le point nul*]”, where there is no consistency: the self that cannot be subjected to the experience of death and, at the same time, speak about it. However, due to the comparative history of religions, a representation of the world of the afterlife exists and is combined in innumerable semantic connotations and takes on an infinitely relevant symbolic language, Scrima states.¹⁰ To conclude with the description of the structure of the ms. MPL, I add the last two directions of reading carried out by Scrima: “a touch of oblivion [*un rien d’oubli*]”, a point from which it explains the way in which the forgetfulness of death is organised by “scientific civilisation”. There is a clear, radical, decisive separation regarding Scrima’s position in the confrontation of the legitimisation of reflection on the question of death: both philosophical and religious thought. Despite the efforts of the fields that include technology and science within this type of reflection, the probability of these fields being able to understand the phenomenon of death is very low. In fact, it would be a cognitive and empirical development of both fields to organise the forgetfulness of death, transforming everything into a thanatological plane.¹¹ As a brief digression, Scrima also began to speak in the 1970s about euthanasia, i.e. assisted death, or the programming of death by somehow involving people’s conscience. This is to say, with just one example, that he was more than forty years ahead of the discourse on the recognition of the issue of euthanasia in various European laws. Of course, this is a subject I will address when the entire manuscript is published. In the end, “the empty grave [*le tombeau vide*]”, the question of Resurrection, death seriously considered by God, to the point of Incarnating and Crucifying Himself, of dying and rising again to indicate the ontological condition of the New Adam.

“Dealt with... [*Mis au point...*]” Scrima initiates the course with a premise concerning the justification for choosing such a subject. It is a matter of placing the argument within an epistemological framework, that is, of reflecting a systematised content, or at least attempts to do so, so that the argument of death can be understood in its very *raison d’être*.¹² He then begins to present reasoning that leads back to such an epistemology in the

⁹ Various notes on the importance of the concept of *Revelation* with which Scrima deals can also be found in Daniela Dumbravă, “Revelation according André Scrima”, in *La storia delle religioni e la sfida dei pluralismi*, ed. Renata Salvarani, Marianna Ferrara, (Brescia: Morcelliana, *Quaderno di Studi e Materiali di Storia delle Religioni* nr. 18. Supplemento al n. 83 (1/2017) di *Studi e Materiali di Storia delle Religioni*, 2017): 568-580 [In Italian].

¹⁰ MPL, folio 8.

¹¹ MPL, folio 9.

¹² MPL, folio 9-10.

argument, pointing out that it is first of all a matter of the fact that death is an incontestable fact and starts from an enormous heritage that enucleates the human spirit that recalls both knowledge and non-existence

[...] It is also undeniable that as an objective reality, the reality of death is the one that 'strikes' (in all senses of the word) the knowing mind and, if it wants to be consistent with itself and worthy of its *raison d'être*, sooner or later the mind cannot evade the problem of death (as a problem of knowledge) within its systematic reflection effort... It is part of the human being's space and poses a problem for him... It is inscribed, It is inscribed not only in the biological substratum of our existence (the body, the material) but in everything that carries meaning for the whole being... It is inscribed in nature, language, the higher effort of knowledge - religion, art, creation - and so it is there! It would suffer already so that, as a knowing subject, I would endeavour to recognise it, the enigmatic death and try to decipher it...¹³

Thus, what Scrima says seems easy enough to understand: from a lack of systematic explanation of death *per se*, knowledge involves a representation of human thought as such, when it comes to death. Therefore, even what is recognised as superior efforts of thought and knowledge, all converge towards the main points of human reflection: in religion, in art, in creation, and the only assignment of an observer and thinker would be to recognise the enigmatic signs of death and to decode them, describe them in such a way that a systematic content about death results. Another facet in justifying such an argument as worthy of attention, would be that death is the only reality that can be presented as suitable: a reality to totally challenge "me". In fighting life, there is always a struggle that exists within "me", the reality that makes me the subject of knowledge, but also the subject of my own states of uncertainty, an ambivalence that is entirely healthy. This ambivalence is entirely healthy. This struggle within "me" is beneficial and, perhaps, the only one that prompts me to think seriously about death, about my own death. Thus, suddenly, "I find myself" inside a fundamental problem that profoundly touches "my existential" level and that of "my

¹³ "Il est aussi incontestable qu'en tant que réalité objective la réalité de la mort est celle que « frappe » (dans tous les sens de terme) l'esprit connaissant et, s'il vout être conséquent avec lui-même et digne de sa raison d'être, tôt ou tard, l'esprit ne peut pas éluder le problème de la mort (en tant que problème de connaissance) à l'intérieur de son effort de pensée systématique... Elle fait partie de l'espace de l'être humain et lui pose un problème... Elle s'inscrit, non seulement dans le substrat biologique de notre existence (le corps, le matériel) mais dans tout ce qui porte le sens pour l'être entier... Elle s'inscrit dans la nature, le langage, l'effort supérieur de connaissance – la religion, l'art, la création et donc elle est là ! Cela souffrirait déjà pour que, en tant que sujet connaissant, je m'applique à la reconnaître, cote mort énigmatique et à essayer de la déchiffrer...", MPL, folio 10.

conscience". Moreover, as a living being, considering life, one must realise that its absolute negation is death. Consequently, "I cannot go" beyond this type of problem; something stronger urges me to consider it.¹⁴

A third motivation for tackling the subject of death would be that of its permanent relevance, and Scrima recalls that even at the time of his lectures in Beirut, the subject and research on death enjoyed immense attention and an endless bibliography. Scrima, very often used the first person, a specific element for an oral, reflective and self-reflective exposition. Moreover, in the 1970s, Beirut was the dramatic scene of a civil war, of massacres carried out by both radical Islamists and Christians. No one spared death by thinking of the other, if the reasons for war imposed it. Probably, reflections on death come to a religious studies department for this reason too. The phenomenon of death, by our vision of the world, of a unifying spirit, is now also an indicator of civilisation, and consequently becomes a subject of concern to us, and the profound nature of our axiological system fits into it, Scrima states.¹⁵

Ultimately, there is also mention of the problem of finitude, understood precisely in the phenomenological sense: everything is finite in its very essence, Scrima considering it to be the absolute characteristic of everything that is. Insofar as everything has a form, which represents a limit, finitude is also arranged as a trace of a limit in its own faculty of knowing, the end. This is followed by an analogy with civilisations, which are also nascent, in progress, and consequently bearers of anomalies, absurdity and disregard for limits.¹⁶ The most concrete example was before his eyes: the massacres of peoples, the destruction of natural resources, the dumping down of moral or spiritual values. These are examples of going beyond the limits, just to point out that the limits of a dynamic in the absurd at the level of society, of a civilisation, must be there; the signalling of these limits should reside within everyone who forms it.

"Logical boundary – existential boundary [frontière logique – frontière existentielle.]" The question of language subjected directly to the person becomes a way of expressing that the being, insofar as it can assume expressions that derive from the thought object, can establish a direct relationship – subject and object on which it reflects - thus becoming a *cheminement de la pensée*. The way of thinking about the subject of death, not only leads back to such an explanatory and/or analytical conceptual construction, but at the same time, manifests itself as a vehicle that connects the subject reflecting on death and death itself, creating an appropriate relationship. Scrima explains this through an "invincible paradox: every word about death is a

¹⁴ MPL, folio 11.

¹⁵ MPL, folio 11.

¹⁶ MPL, folio 11.

word of the living... We have to face an obstacle which is: that which does not tell me anything... death takes away my word [invincible paradoxe: toute parole sur la mort est un parole de vivant... On bute contre un obstacle qui est: ce qui ne me dit rien... la mort m'enlève la parole]."¹⁷ To explain Scrima's thought in simpler terms, he states that even reflection on death, as an object on which being reflects, leads to an adaptation of being and, by inference, a determination in the way of thinking and speech

The object speaks to me, makes a sign to me, aspires to make a place for itself in my being through my reflection, my language... I take it back, I beg it, I follow it until I 'catch' it... For example, there is an unknown star: I observe it, it signals me through an anomaly in the movement of another star... I set myself in motion to discover it (telescope, mathematical calculation, astronomy)... There is in me, if I am a musician, a melody, a hint of music that rises, that vows to take its place in my language... I will play the piano... I'll put the notes on the clipboard... there is adequacy between subject and object and... suddenly, I have a musical piece. Examples of subject-object adequacy can be multiplied.¹⁸

To follow Scrima's logic, however, the argument of death involves a frontier: the subject always remains alive, but the object does not provide a content; practically, death, as an object observed by being, says nothing, it does not have a message for being: it says nothing of its mystery, of its reason for being, or of non-being. Death is not a star; it does not offer an epistemic framework that encloses the subject in the cognitive act. There is, then, a logical frontier, which mirrors the subject of death as an allogical (nothing is intended to edify you in the matter) or even more, absurd element. The being finds itself in one of the firmest limits and is tormented; it comes out of it by returning to reflect again on life. Not only that, but death is everywhere, it is omnipresent, it offers no meaning and is the most obvious limitation of life. This discourse, in some ways, harks back to the *Lebensphilosophie*, the phenomenological and existentialist approach, fully embraced also by the Carmelite mystic Edith Stein, Husserl's pupil, famous for her conversion from the Mosaic religion to Catholic Christianity. There

¹⁷ MPL, folio 13.

¹⁸ "L'objet voute me parler, me fait signe, aspire à se faire un place dans l'être à travers ma pensée, mon langage... Je le reprend, je le supplie, je le poursuis à la trace jusqu'à ce que je l'« attrape »... Par exemple, il y a un étoile inconnue: je l'observe, elle me fait signe à travers une anomalie du mouvement d'une autre étoile... Je me mets en mouvement pour la découvrir (télescope, calcul mathématique, astronomie)... Il y a en moi, si je suis musicien une mélodie, un soupçon de musique qui monte, qui voute se faire place dans mon langage... je me mets au piano... je transcris cela sur la porte... il y a adéquation entre sujet et objet et... soudainement, j'ai un morceau musical. On peut multiplier les exemples d'adéquation entre sujet et objet.", MPL, folio 13.

is a theological essay on finitude and death, which will be highlighted in the MPL edition in preparation, and which may help us to better understand the thinking of the Orthodox monk Scrima, at Saint Joseph's University in Beirut.

However, as far as the philosophical and scientific discourse on death is concerned, to bring the subject back towards a systematic and coherent discourse, one must existentially situate oneself towards death. The existentialist frontier shows the limitation of a clear separation between the limited living space and the ultimate uncertainty in the face of death. Although one does not know when one dies, the certainty is that it nevertheless arrives: "[...] it is always she who finds us and embraces the dead [... *c'est toujours elle qui nous trouve et nous étreint la morte*]." ¹⁹ After all, who doesn't remember the famous scene in Ingmar Bergman's film *The Seventh Seal*, derived from the play *Träsmålning* (1955), where the Swedish director brings Death and the protagonist, Antonius, face to face, the latter inviting the Lady in Black to play a game of chess? Fictionally, the scenario of death coming prepared to take his soul, makes it postponed, but it should be noted that this scenario is born from an allegory that inspires the director, a fresco in the church



of Täby, which belonged to the painter Albertus Pictor (1480-1490), *Jak spelar tik matt* [Allegory of Death, the one who gives checkmate to the human being, 1480, see infra], which denotes that the imminence of death has a meaning that extends beyond fiction, in a continuous plan.

"... death evokes in me its only qualified counterpart: God [...*la mort m'évoque son seul partenaire qualifié : Dieu*]". We note in the same manuscript the tendency to summarize in a diagram ²⁰ the information that Scrima considered while he was giving the lectures and that I described

¹⁹ MPL, folio 14.

²⁰ See fig. 4 in the annex to this article.

in extenso. The arrangement of the discourse on death remains between two limits, as mentioned earlier: a limit corresponding to the logical frontier, what Scrima calls *en deça*: the limits of the empirical approach, the limits of the scientific field and also of the area in which death is seen as a phenomenon while it is observed at the levels of its effects and modes of manifestation; there is also the noetic, spontaneous reflection, through which one indicates a kind of questioning of the problem of death within human consciousness as well as on the part of personal consciousness. This would be the first level, supported by a second level, delimited by the existentialist frontier, everything that is *au-delà*: questioning the limits of death in itself, where there is no other interlocutor besides God and the mystery of death. Obviously, between *en deça* and *au-delà*, the limits are always on the discourse without a transcendent plane, but Scrima's great hermeneutic opening is precisely that of constructing a grammar of the death of the human being in the framework of an experience that goes beyond the human condition between its two facets: that of the individual and that of the person.

The most difficult part of the MPL course follows, if you think about what Scrima calls '*la grammaire de la mort de l'être Humaine*'. First and foremost, we need to understand what Scrima means by grammar, and he warns us: this is not a metaphor! It is a systematic articulation of the relationship between the participants in the discourse on death (the subject) and human reality (the object); moreover, he explains that it is a question of an adequate relationship between the subject and the object, that is, between the being aware of being limited and the totality of the experiences that are arranged in an infinite dimension, if one thinks of human existence tout court. Thus, the grammar of the human being enjoys a **(a)** space relating to language (to its language, of the subject) and a **(b)** space of the concretised facts that, between them **(a and b)** construct this grammar. Scrima encloses to the idea of language the adaptation of the self and of the experiences that are arranged in a dimension without limits, in order to be able to answer the question: *Qui meurt?*

Secondly, he begins an extremely interesting discourse, namely that of the cognition of the "I" with another "I", with a "You" and, finally, with an "I" that can also be a "We". This part of his exposition is a kind of distribution of probabilistic thought (combinations of the relationship between I-I; I-Thou, I-Him, I-We etc.), which will have to be explained elsewhere, but the sense of such reasoning is to enter into the merit of the relationship between **a** and **b** (see below) and to indicate that within our finitude there is an infinite door (insofar as it is transcendent), an infinite totality of openings that constitute a perfect coherence, both in language and in facts, between the subject and the object on which death is reflected. What follows is a narrow discourse on the distinction between the quantitative aspect of the

human being (subject), as an individual, and the qualitative aspect of the human being, as a person (still a subject, but distinct from the individual!).

In fact, Scrima's distinction is not made because of the personalist current of the 1920s and 1930s, but based on a type of *personalism* where

[...] To enclose the human being in this single structure of 'I' and 'You' and to make it the last definition of being is, once again, to make the person fall, through personalism, into a kind of formed space that deviates from an absolute in itself: this is what brought about the end of the personalistic doctrine.²¹

These distinctions made by Scrima in his exposition should be explored in greater depth, because it is not easy to follow him all the time. His distinctions between the individual and the person²² are just as difficult to understand, because the expositive part on the individual does not come with very developed considerations. He chooses the example of the individual's reaction to death by showing the case of the infant, who does not come to an awareness of death (let alone being frightened by it) because his consciousness has not reached such a maturity that he can fully understand it. Moreover, Scrima also offers the example of the individual who is part of an archaic society, tribe or clan, who, despite ritualistic and propitiatory gestures, is based on a perception of death based on the cult of the ancestors (an attitude that adheres above all to what exists in their unconscious), since they are not in total possession of their destiny. It remains paradigmatic why the individual in an archaic society is not regarded as a person.

His exposition continues with a hermeneutic directed at the ways of thinking about death in the various registers of the history of philosophical thought – from the pre-Socratics to the Stoic thinkers – his position being that all Western philosophical thought is imprinted by Greek thought, an idea that is also widely shared in the academic world and beyond. Moreover, given the chronology, he considers that only Stoicism is imprinted with Christian ideas on the question of death, so that it represents a parallel source, beyond the Christian circles it merits investigation. A crucial idea

²¹ “[...] Renfermer l'être humain dans cette seule structure de Je et du Tu on en faisant la dernière définition de l'être, c'est, de nouveau, faire tomber la personne à travers le personnalisme dans une sorte d'espace formé qui dévient un absolu en soi : c'est cela qui a entraîné la fin de la doctrine personnaliste.” MPL, folio 19.

²² Although the issue needs to be explored in more detail, I think we can refer to a consideration of the *person* Edith Stein operates with, namely that of the eternal being: “[...] seul celui qui possède réellement l'être et qui est l'être suprême peut le lui donner. Mais l'être souverain est nécessairement une personne. Cette personne ne serait pas l'être souverain si quelque chose se soustrayait à sa puissance d'être, à savoir s'il y avait de l'être ou du non-être indépendamment d'elle.», Stein Edith, Gelber L, “Finite Being and Eternal Being”, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, *Les Études philosophiques* 3, Juillet/Septembre 1956): 409. [In French]

emerges from Scrima's reflections on the question of death, namely the consciousness in Greek thought of a soteriological level, which stems from the idea of a time that is not only linear but also cyclical, change being part of *mythos* and *logos* and a source for discussing the immortality of the soul. To be able to summarise the Christian perspective on death as Scrima attempts to do within these lectures, I believe that the key point is his effort to restore, in modern conceptual language, the sense of death as understood within Christian revelation. Even more so, as I read and reread the MPL manuscript, I realised that the historical-religious or history of Western thought approaches, which he encloses, represent a clear conceptual delimitation from what would be the sense of death seen as *une affaire de Dieu* (Christian).

Scrima uses within his exposition with various nuances due to the various background understanding of Christianity through its historical stages – the view on death in the Middle Ages, in the Renaissance period, in the period of the advent of Protestantism, and so on. In the true sense of the word, Scrima is also structuring the topic of death according to its diachronic meaning, which makes the publication of the MPL as soon as possible even more desirable. It is also important to consider the fact that André Scrima's exposition lends itself to being compressed into exactly what it was at the time: a lecturer in front of students with a heterogeneous historical-religious background. Thus, it is important to point out that despite his theological training, despite his existentialist approach – arriving at a congruent position between subject and object through a language that starts from a position that implies both sides – MPL's predominant style is aulic, academic and with a multifaceted hermeneutic openness. We could also think of it as an invitation to think in a multiple dimension about the question of death, where each of the students had the freedom to choose and consider the best on the subject. The freedom of the other in front of André Scrima's infinitely open hermeneutics seems to me to be quite evident and, likely, was the key to understanding the students' adherence to his courses.

What would Scrima have answered for himself on the question of death, in summary? There is among his notes on apophatic anthropology a consideration of his that I would like to quote here:

[...] Life and death, eternity and time, the transcendent and the immanent are compounded in a rhythm of their ineffable unity.²³

²³ André Scrima, *Apophatic Anthropology*, ed. V. Alexandrescu (Bucharest: Humanitas Publisher, 2005), 241. [In Romaninan]. It should be noted that the text was written between 1951 and 1952 and was only published in 2005 by Vlad Alexandrescu. It is an unfinished manuscript accompanied by various personal notes written by Scrima, most likely before he left Romania on 28 November 1956. In 2005, the manuscript and the notes were published, i.e. post mortem.

When I took the liberty of going back to the 1950s, while André Scrima was writing his thesis in theology, entitled *Apophatic Anthropology*, it must be said that this occurred after he had written and dissertated another thesis in philosophy, entitled *Logos și dialectică la Platon*.²⁴ Thus, his theological training is supported by a philosophical education; not only that, but he also had a training as a logician and mathematician, given the effort to complete four years of study in mathematics, to then become the assistant of a personage such as Anton Dumitriu, Professor of Logic at the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Bucharest, in the 1940s.²⁵

His intellectual formation, thinking about his scientific and theological path to becoming a monk, reminds me of Edith Stein, who had an almost similar path at the same time. Although different from each other, both offered phenomenological reflections on the question of finite being and eternal being, of course in a very different exposition. One need only recall Stein's peculiar focus on the phenomenological method and her ideas on temporality, finitude, infinity, and eternity.²⁶ In itself, Scrima's oral exposition does not require a comparative analysis with other texts or with a similar oral exposition, even though we are talking about the thought of Edith Stein, with whom Scrima has considerable affinities by virtue of the *Zeitgeist* of his time. So why look at the two of them closely? The answer is because their thought becomes hermeneutic insofar as their own monastic experiences are part of this hermeneutic, hence, they are assimilated to everything that becomes "the object" of their reflection.

Moreover, that transcendental horizon of which they often speak denotes the utmost responsibility²⁷ for their language and for the ways in which they share it with others, becoming a hospitable hermeneutic. Taking on

²⁴ Vlad Alexandrescu (introductory remarks), A. Scrima, *Apophatic Anthropology*, 6.

²⁵ Several works describing part of André Scrima's bio-bibliography have recently been published and I will briefly mention them in the chronological order: Ioan Alexandru Tofan, *The inner being. André Scrima and the physionomy of spiritual experience*, Bucharest: Humanitas, 2019) [In Romanian]; Daniela Dumbravă, Bogdan Tătaru Cazaban, *André Scrima. Expérience spirituelle et langage théologique. Actes du colloque de Roma, 29-30 octobre 2008* (Rome: *Orientalia Christiana Analecta* 306, Pontificio Istituto Orientale, 2019) [In French, English and Italian]; "An Intellectual of the Church : Remembering Father André Scrima (1925-2000)", ed. Bogdan Tătaru Cazaban, *The Review of Ecumenical Studies* 3 (Sibiu: Centre for the Ecumenical Studies, 2020), [In German, English and French]; Daniela Dumbravă, "André Scrima: Enfolding into the Word" *Steaua* 6 (Cluj: Journal of the Writings Unit, 2020), 5-9 [In Romanian]; Bogdan Tătaru Cazaban, "Last Gospel. A guide", *Steaua* 6 (2020), 9-10 [In Romanian]; Ioan Alexandru Tofan, *André Scrima, a Christian gentleman. Biographical portret*, (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2021), [In Romanian], etc. I will provide an analytical and comprehensive bibliography of André Scrima's Lebanese courses in the MPL edition, currently in preparation.

²⁶ Stein Edith, Gelber L, "Finite Being and Eternal Being", 405-422.

²⁷ "Si une unité d'expérience devient réelle en moi, alors je suis celui à donner l'être et cette unité devient réelle par l'être qui m'est donné." Edith Stein, L. Gelber, "Finite Being and Eternal Being", 409.

the hermeneutics of an object on which one reflects means being part of it, and to be involved one must be at the cognitive and existential height to be able to investigate it with the utmost accuracy. The infinite horizon of hermeneutics reflects the infinite experience within oneself and, on some sides, in theological language, this experience is called holiness, whereas in the terms used in phenomenology, precisely those of Edith Stein: *eternal being*.

In conclusion, it is important to point out the fact that, here, I have set out to assume an expository framework. Firstly, because the presentation of the MPL manuscript is taking place for the first time. Secondly, because generally speaking, André Scrima's lectures in Lebanon have only been published in Romanian, without direct access to the original transcriptions, in French, so that it strengthens the idea of taking on a project of putting on the net the digitised documents relating to these transcriptions that come both from the *Dupré La Tour S.J. Archive* and from the *De Menil Foundation*, Texas, which have subsequently arrived in the *A. Scrima Collection*, at New Europe College. In addition to the need to digitize these documents, it seems to me that taking on the edition of the MPL as soon as possible is a project that underlies the tout court presentation of the manuscript in this scholarly journal. The edition of the MPL will be accompanied by an extensive analytical apparatus and a historical-religious framework. The present exposition of the MPL relies above all on Scrima's style, which is extremely controlled and orderly despite its oral and aulic character. It also dwells on the conceptual nodes that Scrima himself emphasises. Finally, the article briefly refers to the analogy of Scrima's thought with that of Edith Stein on eternal being and death, given the affinity between their phenomenological approach and their monastic sensibility.

Annex

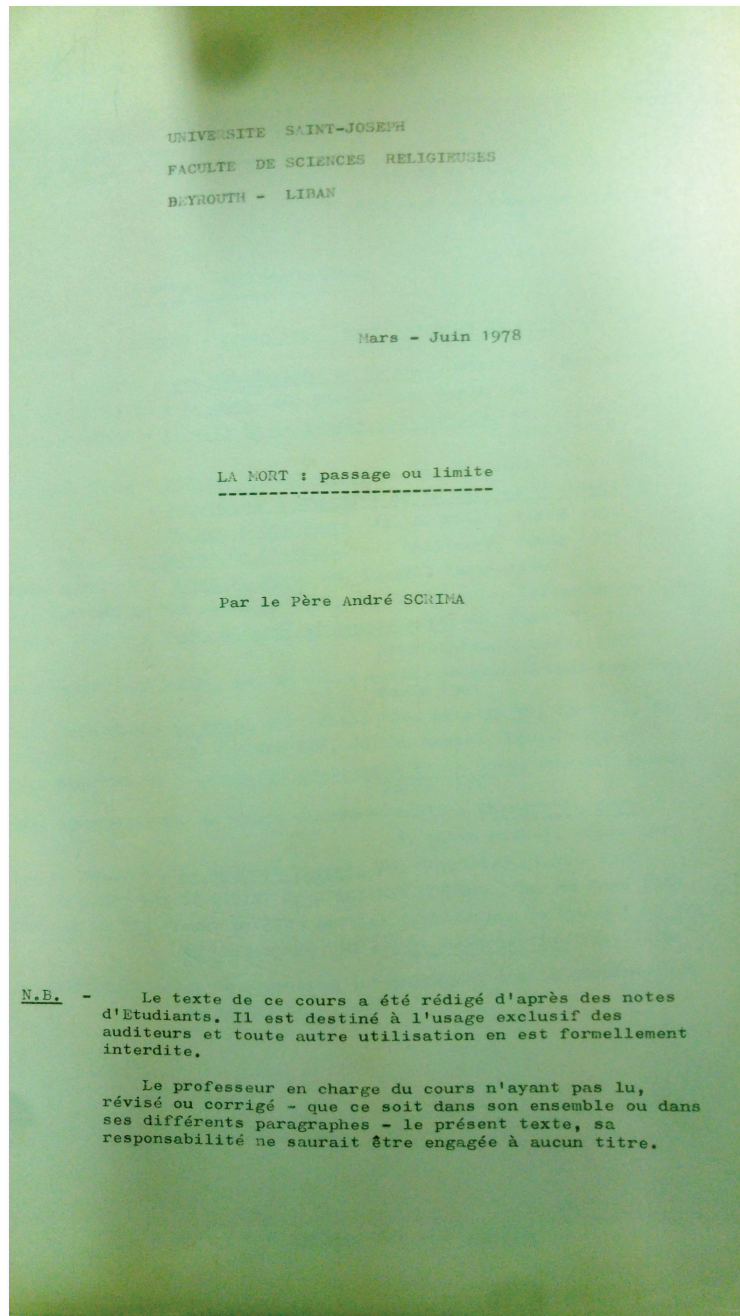


Fig. 1. Presentation page of André Scrima's MPL course in Beirut, first page of the transcript performed by his students

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Fig. 2. MPL course bibliography sheet

LA MORT : passage ou limite ?

Eléments de réflexion proposés par l' "étude comparée des religions et la pensée moderne, face à la foi chrétienne."

1. Que dire ? - Le paradoxe invincible : tout discours sur la mort est le fait des vivants... La mort comme absence absolue de la parole. Sens et non-sens d'un langage "devant la mort"
2. Qui meurt ? - La mort, événement qui arrive toujours "aux autres". Le "Je vis", seule affirmation souveraine d'un "moi" périssable. Situer la mort dans la destinée de l'homme et la destinée de l'homme dans la mort.
3. Itinéraire dans l'absence. - La pensée occidentale et la mort. Evolution et tourments. Les grands axes de l'interrogation.
4. Le point nul. - Force et faiblesse de la mort. Le "passage de la mort" : la mort et le divin. La mort comme "expérience" et les questions de l'au-delà. Perspectives ouvertes par l'étude comparée des religions.
5. Un rien d'oubli... - Organiser l'oubli de la mort. La civilisation scientifique : "pleins pouvoirs (de) (sur) la vie" et les ruses de la mort.
6. Le "Tombeau vide". - La Résurrection : la mort prise au sérieux par Dieu. Le Christ, parole de Vivant.

Fig. 3. MPL course outline

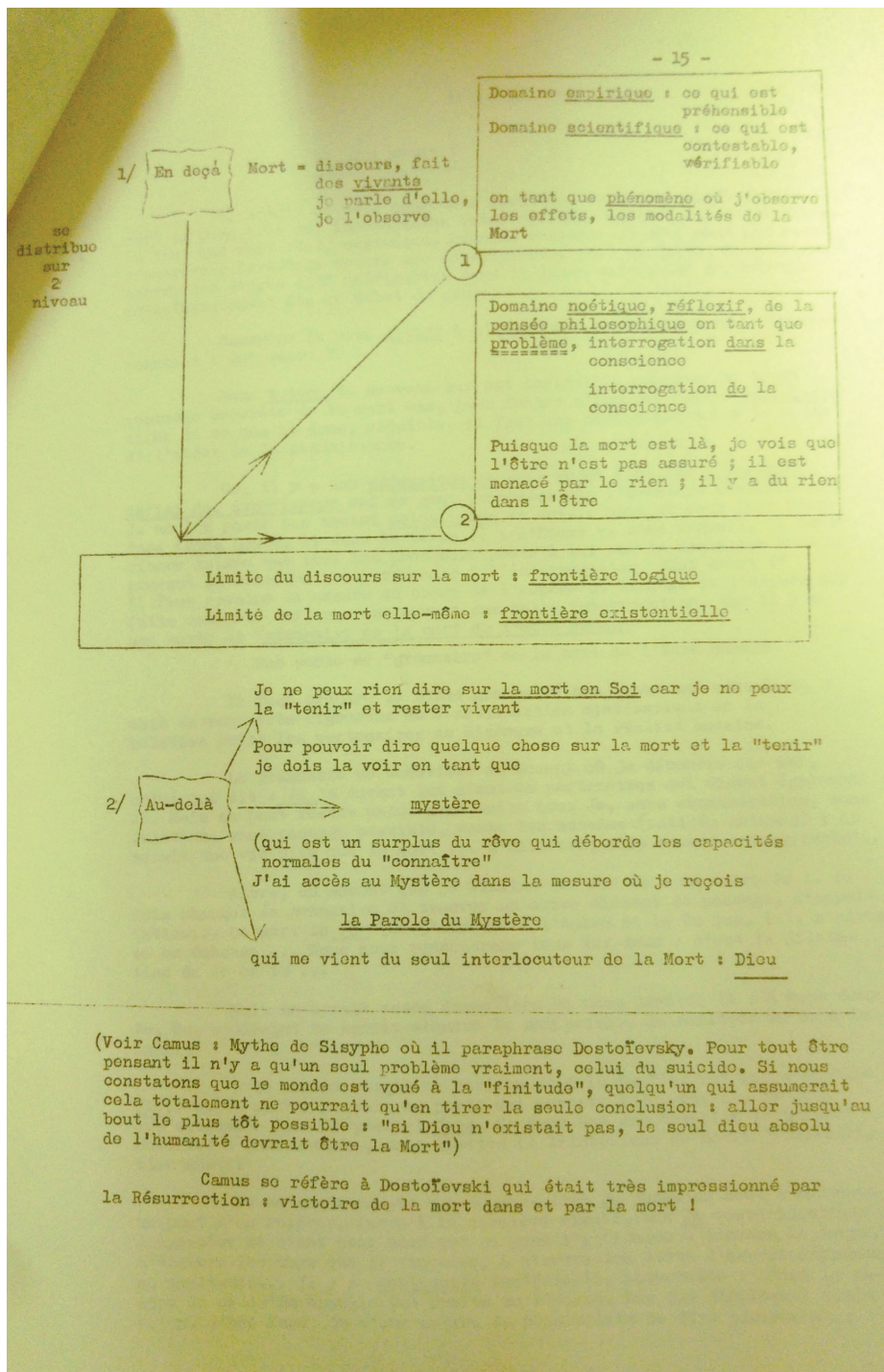


Fig. 4. Diagram performed by André Scrima
to facilitate understanding of the ideas set out in the MPL

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