

DIAKRISIS

YEARBOOK OF THEOLOGY AND PHILOSOPHY

Volume 4 (2021)

Finitude and Death



Diakrisis Yearbook of Theology and Philosophy is edited by
The Center of Dialogue between Theology and Philosophy,
Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania
(<http://cdtp.orth.ro>).

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ISSN (print) 2601-7261

ISSN-L 2601-7261

ISSN (online) 2601-7415

Cover image: KAZIMIR MALEVICH

Web: <http://diakrisis.orth.ro>

<http://journals.orth.ro/index.php/diakrisis/>

E-mail: diakrisis.yearbook@gmail.com

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E I K O N

BUCHAREST, 2021

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**FINITUDE
AND DEATH**

«*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of an unpublished lecture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 The recent discovery of this unpublished manuscript in the Augustin Dupré La Tour S.J. archives prompts me to make its first presentation to the academic world here.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 veut 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, cette 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 Antropology*, 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 Writtings 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

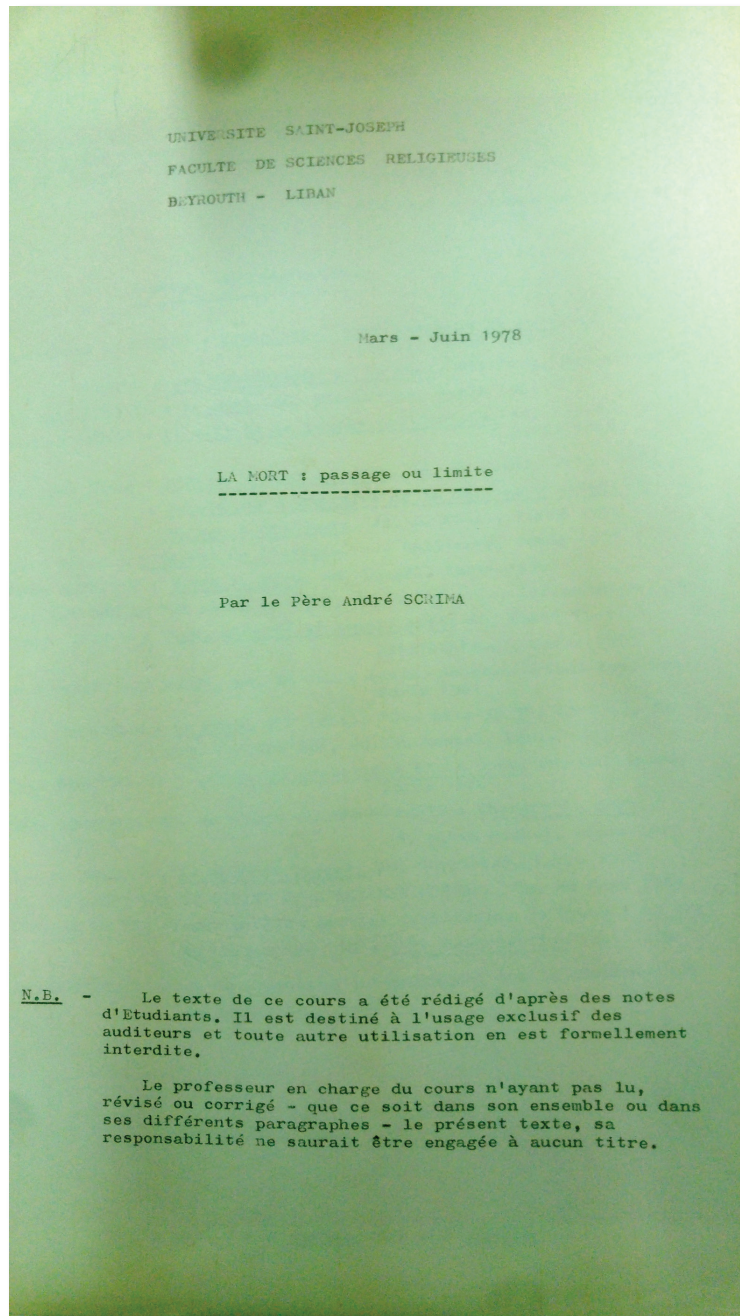


Fig. 1. Presentation page of André Scrima's MPL course in Beirut, first page of the transcript performed by his students

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- LUMIERE ET VIE (revue publiée par les Dominicains de Lyon) : La mort du Christ (no. 101) ; La Résurrection (no. 120)
- RESURREXIT. - Actes du Symposium international sur la résurrection de Jésus, Rome 1974

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

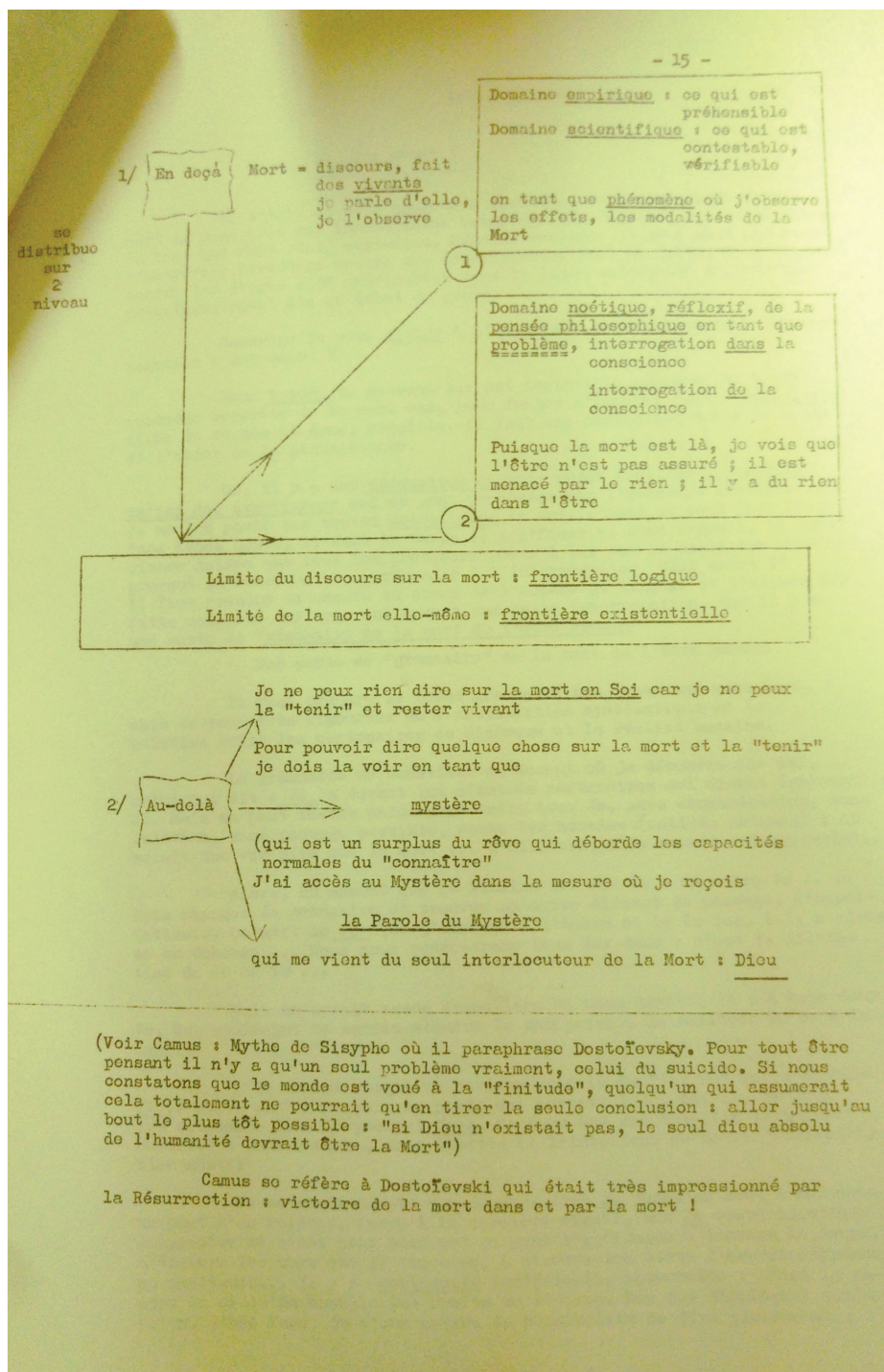


Fig. 4. Diagram performed by André Scrima
to facilitate understanding of the ideas set out in the MPL

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Memento mori as Repetition of Finitude: Death beyond Heidegger and Levinas

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Abstract

Exemplified especially by Heidegger and Levinas, the phenomenology of death expresses first, the impossibility of the death experience, second, the authenticity of *Dasein* starting from the horizon opened by the possibility of death, and third, the relevance of the death of the other to the discovery of one's own death. This article tries to take a step further, showing the link between the authenticity of *Dasein* and the desire for immortality manifested in this authenticity. By overturning Heidegger's theses and by affirming both the necessity of an authentication of death itself—in accord with Socrates's death example—and the legitimacy of the meditation on death, this text links the need for immortality, which is phenomenologically visible, with the Christian faith in the resurrection, which is visible only for theology.

Keywords: *memento mori*, Phenomenology of Death, Martin Heidegger, Emmanuel Levinas, Christian Revelation, Resurrection of Christ

The Threat of Forgotten Death

LIVING ONE'S EVERYDAY LIFE MEANS to forget death, an attitude only apparently similar to a phenomenological reduction that would effortlessly put into brackets the existence of the funeral event. It is a false reduction, because it does not seek to highlight the reduced phenomenon, as it happens with the Husserlian transcendental-phenomenological reduction. Intentionality avoids death and leads obsessively to life. We often live the equivalent of a life without death in this world, in existential ignorance, from which only suffering, as a finitude experienced in our own body or in our own soul, takes us out episodically. In the first instance, we lose our death, as we lose ourselves in the world. Without warnings of suffering, we are always too young to die.

Death does not concern us, said Epicurus, because as long as we exist there is no death, and when death comes, we no longer exist. To eliminate the fear of death that causes unhappiness, his materialism divided the entire human experience into a life without death and a death without life. When man does not forget death, he keeps it at a distance, at the greatest possible distance, that is, at the distance of the possible itself. This is a false distance, of course, because death can cover and suspend it in an instant. Heidegger teaches us that, from an existential point of view, "death must be grasped as the ownmost nonrelational, *certain* possibility not-to-be-bypassed."¹ But whenever it happens in the death of our neighbor, it shudders the order of life and occurs as a radical strangeness. Man had offered to death neither place nor time and had pushed it beyond the horizon of life; still death comes from nowhere and even announced, it comes from never, thus having the characteristics of nothingness. The nothingness of death has contradictory relations with the being, and no dialectical transition will undermine the radical difference between being and not being. The irreversibility of death is scandalous and unnatural.

Our own death is more than the artistic horizon of life that can give greatness to our acts and loves, and its discovery takes place with the death of our beloved. Any analogy between their death and my death remains imperfect, lost in the insurmountable fracture between being and non-being. The analogical *representation* of my death takes place on the firm ground of being still alive, so it does not really become an *experience* of my death. In fact, reducing death to an experience is a phenomenological impossibility², and it is not inappropriate to consider that we do not really experience our death in the death of the other: "We do not experience the dying of others in a genuine sense; we are at best always just 'there' too."³ "*No one can take the other's dying away from him.*"⁴

In the death of the loved one, we experience the horror of the decomposition of the remaining corpse, but also its absolute indifference that sometimes shows an unearthly serenity. Faced with their loss and definitive absence, we experience acute suffering and nonsense, if "death cannot be dominated by thought."⁵ Besides the ontological contradiction between being and nothing there is also the existential fact that it is not about death in general, but about one's own death.

¹ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, ed. Dennis J. Schmidt, trans. Joan Stambaugh, SUNY Series in Contemporary Continental Philosophy, (New York: State University of New York Press, 1996), 238 [258].

² Emmanuel Lévinas, *God, death, and time* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2000), 10.

³ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 222 [239].

⁴ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 223 [240].

⁵ Françoise Dastur, *Moartea: eseu despre finitudine* [Death: An Essay on Finitude], trans. Sabin Borș (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2006), 9.

This detail reveals the anxiety in the face of one's own death, an anxiety that transfers death from the abstract being—nothingness relationship to an existential horizon.

Death, such as it appears, concerns and frightens and causes anxiety in the death of an other, is an annihilation that does not find its place in the logic of being and nothingness. It is an annihilation that is a scandal and to which moral notions such as responsibility do not come to be simply added on.⁶

Because now, faced with the lost one, the threat of the unbeatable has become visible, along with the danger in front of which one can do nothing. "In death I am exposed to absolute violence, to murder in the night."⁷ Like any revelation, the revelation of death is made without our will. We can always return to oblivion—and it often happens after the labor of mourning—but the dark light of a troubling truth that we did not consider before now continues to flicker in our soul. We are in a war that we have not chosen and that we will surely lose, in the face of an unpredictable and transcendent enemy about which we know absolutely nothing. At the disposal of the imminence, man is "the shortest way between life and death."⁸ Born on the battlefield, without the hope of peace, we can only practice our lives in an armistice.

We can return to the entertainment and drunkenness of living or even invent a philosophy of laughter, following the discovery of death;⁹ but we cannot ignore forever the certainty of our own end, the fact that we are "toward death" (*Sein zum Tode*)¹⁰, that "The only future that is necessarily mine is my death."¹¹ Hegel's words—that the life of the Spirit must be truly gained precisely by dwelling in absolute rupture, enduring death and yet being preserved without destruction—are valid for a God-man, therefore inconsolable at this moment.¹² For in our case, in the death of our neighbor, a declaration of war was addressed to us, which does not disappear with its ignorance. The definitive absence of the other has revealed the inescapable presence of one's own end which, possibility and certainty alike, raises, between the instinctual desire of extinction and the anxiety of the future adjudicated by death, the decisive question on the meaning of one's own life. Recognized or not, this question engages the search for immortality.

⁶ Lévinas, *God, death, and time*, 78.

⁷ Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1979), 233.

⁸ Emil Cioran, *Amurgul gândurilor* [The Twilight of Thoughts] (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1991), 77.

⁹ See for such a philosophy Dastur, *Death: An Essay on Finitude*.

¹⁰ Being toward death is analyzed by Heidegger in *Being and Time*, chapters 46–53.

¹¹ Jean-Yves Lacoste, *Note sur le temps: Essai sur les raisons de la mémoire et de l'espérance* (Paris: PUF, 1990), chap. 12.

¹² See G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 19 (par. 32).

In Search of Immortality: Authenticity, Vanity, Love

We will interpret Heidegger by setting out from the idea that the authenticity that *Dasein* acquires starting from its own possibility coming from the future is precisely a form of *immortality*. The constant unfulfillment that defines the human being forbids its understanding as an integrity without rest. On this side of his death, man remains engaged in his future, self-projected “before-himself.” The existential concept of death shows that *Dasein* is a being-toward-death, thus open to this possibility:

First of all, we must characterize being-toward-death as a being toward a possibility, toward an eminent possibility of Da-sein itself. Being toward a possibility, that is, toward something possible, can mean to be out for something possible, as in taking care of its actualization.¹³

Heidegger says that actualization does not mean trying to actualize one’s own death by provoking it or by the constant thought of death. The latter, which interests us here, loses sight of the very possibility of death as such:

Brooding over death does not completely take away from it its character of possibility. It is always brooded over as something coming, but we weaken it by calculating how to have it at our disposal.¹⁴

But death is possibility of no longer being, “the possibility of the impossibility of existence in general”.¹⁵ In its light, man can be himself authentically, that is, he can try to actualize his life project, evading the “They” (*das Man*).

Heidegger does not link the authenticity of *Dasein* with immortality. Conditioned by the freedom that the consciousness of the possibility of death brings, the authenticity is to the measure of each man; it is his life project unaffected by the impersonal opinions that society conveys. But this freedom is not exercised in an absent context, it is not given *without a world*, without the possibility for another to recognize this authenticity. As Pascal had already written, vanity motivates our noblest and, we might add, most authentic acts. Although Heidegger excludes others from the work of my authenticity, as if it were only me and my death in question, the fame that — discreetly or visibly, excluded or insistently sought — accompanies the exercises of authenticity offers a first form of *immortality*. There is no sufficient

¹³ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 241 [261].

¹⁴ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 241 [261].

¹⁵ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 242 [262].

reason to consider authenticity as free from vanity. To be authentic means to be authentic for another consciousness, at least one, real or imagined, for a minimal gallery contemporary to me or imagined as posterity. Even just as a spectator, the other motivates the work of being myself. Escaping from the captivity of the "They," it is no less true that Dasein searches for another "They," delivering itself to a more intelligent posterity, to a loving or at least understanding otherness.

Or this self-giving means self-phenomenalization and bestows a form of my immortality in the consciousness of the other. By exercising his authenticity, man is not only caught in his magnificent freedom offered by the consciousness of death. The sphere of the ego explodes in search of a self-delivery to an otherness.

I am only if I am for someone. *Esse est percipi*, as Berkeley said, a principle that, reformulated, would now sound: to be authentic means to be perceived as authentic. "Relative immortality"¹⁶ is part of Dasein's existential project and has only one need: the other.

In order to measure our own authenticity from the perspective of the other's gaze, we will discuss only the maximum situation in which the other is the loved one. Certainly, the other does not change or interfere with the horizon opened by the possibility of my own death; but they constitute the necessary gallery in front of which I exercise my authenticity, even if the details of this exercise are unknown to them. However, it is not an exceptional fact that love captures death and changes the course of authenticity, transforming it into an authenticity of love. Putting your own life at stake to win the love of another is not uncommon, because love "is as strong as death" (Song of Songs 8: 6). Death gives authenticity to love, by certifying it; death takes on less radical forms at first, such as self-denial, advancement, love unconditioned by the reciprocity of the answer,¹⁷ but it can reach the ultimate sacrifice, giving love the immortality that, incomprehensibly, love seems to hold anyway. This sketch reveals the force with which death authenticates love, and the most eloquent example is that of the crucifixion of the Son of God out of love for men. Even if theology sees here a gift, through death, of the resurrection itself, philosophy can notice that the relationship between death and love, as announced in the Gospels, is at the same time one of authentication.

¹⁶ Peter Sloterdijk differentiates the "relative immortality" of moderns from both the immortality of the Egyptian pharaoh and the Christian immortality of all who believe. See Peter Sloterdijk, *Derrida, an Egyptian. On the Problem of the Jewish Pyramid*, trans. Wieland Hoban (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009), 66.

¹⁷ See the phenomenology of love in Jean-Luc Marion, *Le phénomène érotique* (Paris: Grasset, 2003); a comment can be found in Nicolae Turcan, *Apologia după sfârșitul metafizicii. Teologie și fenomenologie la Jean-Luc Marion* [Apology after the End of Metaphysics: Theology and Phenomenology in Jean-Luc Marion], (Bucharest: Eikon, 2016), 319–38.

The Meditation on Death and the Theology of the Resurrection

We should ask ourselves if there is an authenticity of death, and not just one of *Dasein*. According to Heidegger, the authentic existence becomes possible in the horizon opened by the possibility of one's own death. But is death itself devoid of relief and nobility, or in other words, can it be *anyway*? Isn't the authenticity of living also considering an authenticity of one's own death? Isn't something of the inaccessible possible still imagined by meditation, letting itself be caught in the work of authenticity? "The platonic doctrine of the superiority of philosophy over death"¹⁸ provides the answer, as follows from the example of Socrates: in *Phaido*, the pre-occupation with philosophy is a "training for dying,"¹⁹ as if the work of authenticity extended to include death. Not only does the horizon of death give authenticity to life, but also the life lived in the horizon of philosophy (or theology, we might add) gives authenticity to death. One could object that Socrates built his arguments already having in the background the belief in immortality, faith in the absence of which his arguments would be unconvincing. But how do the relative immortality of vanity, gained in the eyes of posterity—which may never take place for various reasons—and religious immortality differ phenomenologically? Both have to do with the invisible and—when the legitimacy of religious faith is not taken into account—with the illusion, even if posterity seems to have more justified chances of actualization, if we discuss only on the horizon of this world. But both have the power to project in the present, through the possibility of death, the free decision for the labor of authenticity. Therefore, Socrates prepares his *authentic* death by his philosophical life, doubled by the faith in a future life—although *Phaidon* does not separate them. Thinking of immortality as a basis, death itself gains authenticity through the nobility of its acceptance. We will therefore have to overturn Heidegger's view of the purest possibility and the refusal of the thought of death into an *imperfectly* actualized possibility through meditation. *Memento mori* is a way to give authenticity not only to life but also to one's own death.

It is not a novelty: the thought of death does not change the status of the possibility of death, but it realizes its inevitability and certainty. It is no less an *experience* of an absent phenomenon, an experience of absence. Although meditation on death does not offer death itself, we must concede that it still offers the only imaginable form of our own death. Imagining the ultimate loss of self, announced by the significant losses from our life

¹⁸ Paul Louis Landsberg, *The Experience of Death and the Moral Problem of Suicide*, trans. Edouard d'Arraille (London: Living Time Press, 2008), 36.

¹⁹ Plato, *Phaedo*, in *Complete Works*, trans. G.M.A. Grube, ed. John M. Cooper and D.S. Hutchinson (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997), 67 e.

or by asceticism, is close enough to death as to deliver us to an experience of anguish or reconciliation. We can make an analogy between the thought of death and death without claiming to annihilate the unknown and the strangeness of death itself. The more intensely one practices this experience of meditation on death, the closer this pure and certain possibility comes to consciousness, without canceling the ever-present distance between oneself and one's empirical death. The experience of dying through meditation on death can be an experience of debilitating life and its projects; but it can also be one of understanding one's own finitude, one of wisdom.

Meditation on one's own death offers an imagined phenomenon that, through the absolute incomprehension and absurdity it puts into play, contradicts life.

What the human person brings in the face of the possibility of death, beyond the achievements of authenticity, is also the feeling of its *impossibility* in the horizon of life. The death of the neighbor gives itself as a phenomenon on a stage, in the distance of intentionality. But the life that inhabits me with its richness forbids death until the last moment. My love for someone forbids death forever. A phenomenology of life, as Michel Henry built, insists on its distance from the phenomenology of intentionality and of the world.²⁰

From the perspective of such a phenomenology of life, the sentiment of its *de jure* impossibility accompanies the nonsense of death. And there is no need to contend with Henry the identity between our life and God's life in us. Even remaining on the horizon of non-religious life, the absurdity of death does not mean the removal of the attempt to find a solution. It is *as if* man were an immortal being, before a life accident that should not or could not annihilate life. In this *as if*—understood as the experience of the wholeness of life—man builds his religions²¹ and his forms of immortality. Once a “preparation for death”, philosophy, with a few notable exceptions, no longer has a grasp on the funeral phenomenon, always remaining *outside of it*. But rejecting the meditation on death means to disregard what man has always known, that *memento mori* leads to perfection, no matter how this perfection is understood: as the authenticity of *Dasein*, as wisdom, or as holiness.

The thought of death is a repetition of finitude, in order to open to infinity, be it just a desire for the absolute. Man's need for the absolute remains insatiable, abysmal and has a contiguity with death that must be taken into account. With death one can enter philosophy, but one can just as well get out of it, towards theology, understood as a religious life. The search for the

²⁰ See the first chapter about overturning phenomenology in Michel Henry, *Incarnation. Une philosophie de la chair* (Paris: Seuil, 2000), §1–§15.

²¹ In his book *Against Religion*, Christos Yannaras states that except for Christianity, which is revealed by God, other religions are creations of the religiosity of man, of the instinctive need to survive. Christos Yannaras, *Against Religion. The Alienation of the Ecclesial Event*, trans. Norman Russel (Brookline, Massachusetts: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2013), 1–20.

absolute can lead to the creation of gods more or less paradoxical, more or less close to the image of the revealed God.²² Theoretical answers, always deficient here, do not satisfy this search in front of death; only a perfect life could respond to such nonsense, and only a call from God could account for the desperate measure of our calls. Yet, the only plausible answer to the nonsense of death is faith in eternal life and resurrection, but it already belongs to revealed religion and theology.

Theology is the only one that can speak meaningfully about resurrection, it is "the only one that knows positively, and states equally, that death has no and is not the last word."²³ Its approach engages God's revelation and faith in what one cannot yet see. It responds to us through a leap into God, like a leap into the void, which transcends death, our world, and biological life alike. Theology teaches us that our form is the absolute, that our openness is the absolute. Faced with death, Christian revelation affirms the joy of being more than beings on the horizon of this world. Let's face it: it is not at all inappropriate with our deepest feelings, our need for immortality. Eternal life, brought by Christ through His resurrection, is to man more natural, less absurd, infinitely less strange than death. If death is transcendent to life, it is no less true that we can think of faith as transcendent to death. Faith "passes not only beyond but also on this side of death";²⁴ it makes the contact between life and life, between life here and eternal life, with death as the medium term. Through faith, the meditation on death no longer weakens, but rejoices in the light that comes from the afterlife. Eschatological hope not only weakens death, but defeats it to a certain extent, as much as a possibility given by faith can defeat the phenomenological certitude of death. We are still in the world, and if death is still here despite faith, this situation emphasizes the exceptional gravity of this life. Death offers the horizon of our authenticity and, through its transcendence, demands the opening to an eschatological future. Phenomenology and theology. Why should we be surprised? The need for immortality that accompanies us even in our daily acts, often loaded with an absolute unsuitable to them, accompanied by the thought of death and the belief in the resurrection of the Son of God offers a religious experience that transcends death. Of course, we are no longer in phenomenology. But the repetition of finitude represented by *memento mori* teaches us that the experience of absence has a say. Even if less rigorous than the word of philosophy, this word of faith offers an opening to the authenticity of death, an authenticity synonymous with overcoming it.

²² See, for example, the paradoxical God of E. Cioran, in Nicolae Turcan, "Cioran et le Dieu des paradoxes," trans. Mihaela-Gențiana Stănișor, *Alkemie. Revue semestrielle de littérature et philosophie*, no. 6 (2010).

²³ Lacoste, *Note sur le temps*, chap. 31.

²⁴ Mihail Turcan, "Ca și cum Dumnezeu nu ar exista. Despre transfigurarea prin credință la Pascal" [As if God did not exist. About transfiguration through faith in Pascal], *Tabor XV*, no. 1 (2021): 83.

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The Orthodox Church and the Transhumanist Ideas on Overcoming Death

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Abstract

For mankind, death is a great mystery. Throughout history, numerous opinions about death have been issued, in search of its cause, and many ways and means to defeat it have been attempted. Recent scientific developments have not stayed back from the challenge of studying biological life and attempting technological solutions to help people reach an advanced age that is not subject to decrepitude, and perhaps even to achieve immortality. This idea is also present in the transhumanist movement that aims to change human nature through technology and supports the possibility of obtaining a lifespan capable of far exceed the current one. In this text, we attempt to give a possible answer to this transhumanist challenge from an orthodox Christian point of view.

Keywords: transhumanism, Orthodox Christianity, immortality, death, life prolongation.

TO MANKIND, DEATH IS A great mystery. Throughout history, numerous opinions about death have been issued, in search of its cause, and many ways and means to defeat it have been attempted. Religion opens a door to this reality by generally supporting the idea of an immortal spirit. The multitudes of religions represent as many answers as possible to the question of death and to what happens to human beings after their passing. There are also legends that speak about the quest for eternal youth. Nevertheless, things did not remain strictly at the level of myth, but, in each epoch, proposals were made to succeed in prolonging life, or at least to allow humans to reach old age in good health. Recent scientific developments have not stayed back from the challenge of studying biological life and attempting technological solutions to help people reach an advanced age that is not

subject to decrepitude, and perhaps even to achieve immortality. This idea is also present in the transhumanist movement that aims to change human nature through technology and supports the possibility of obtaining a lifespan capable to far exceed the current one. It practically supports the idea of accomplishing an evolution controlled by man and not by nature:

Transhumanism is a way of thinking about the future that is based on the premise that the human species in its current form does not represent the end of our development but rather a comparatively early phase.¹

In order to fulfill this desideratum, scientific fields such as biotechnology, medicine, nanotechnologies, and informatics are used. Adherents of Transhumanism propose the use of the aforementioned fields both to improve the quality of life and to prolong it. However, some of them support the transition beyond the biological level and propose the transfer of consciousness to a computer.

In this context, the Church has a duty to analyze this way of thinking, in order to see what is acceptable from the point of view of the Revelation in these hypotheses proposed by various thinkers, especially since many are often mere illusions sold to people. These are dangerous because people pin their hopes of attaining immortality on science, often distorted, or even on pseudo-science, and not on Christ, who truly overcame the power of death.

In order to attempt a possible answer to this challenge, we will begin our approach from the Christian perspective on death and we will dwell on the possible ways proposed by the followers of Transhumanism for the “killing of death.”

Death: A Christian Orthodox Point of View

According to the teachings of faith, man was created by God in His image and given the possibility to become immortal. As a result of the ancestral sin, man subjected himself to suffering and death: “By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return” (Genesis 3:19). As a result of disobeying our forefathers, wickedness and death made their way into the world, a sign of man’s removal from God:

That is why neither corruption nor death are a punishment from God, but the consequence of our alienation from the source of life. They are not meant to last forever, but God turns their purpose into a means of healing the evil.²

¹ Nick Bostrom, *The transhumanist FAQ – A General introduction – Version 2.1.* (2003), accessed January 26, 2021, <https://nickbostrom.com/views/transhumanist.pdf>, 4.

² Dumitru Stăniloae, *Teologia dogmatică ortodoxă* [Orthodox Dogmatic Theology], Vol. 1, (Bucharest: EIBMBOR, 1978), 487.

God did not abandon His creation and upon the “fullness of time”, the second Person of the Holy Trinity took human form for the deliverance of man from the bondage of sin and death. This was accomplished by our Savior Jesus Christ through His incarnation, death, resurrection, and ascension to Heaven. The central point of Christianity is the Resurrection of Christ, the foundation of our own resurrection: “For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive” (I Corinthians 15:22). Man is called to resurrection and the world to transfiguration and union with God. At the same time, the teachings of faith show us that man has an immortal soul. Thus, even though everyone’s life has a beginning, it has no end, a truth revealed in the parable of the ruthless rich man and beggar Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31). Another fundamental aspect of Christian anthropology is that life is a gift from God. For this reason, killing is more than forbidden, Christians having an obligation to protect the lives of people regardless of age, gender or state of health. A long life is seen as a divine blessing: “He asked life of you; you gave it to him, length of days forever and ever.” (Psalm 21:4); “With long life I will satisfy him and show him my salvation” (Psalm 91:16). At the same time, however, the Holy Scripture often confronts us with the fragility of human life: “As for man, his days are like grass; he flourishes like a flower of the field; for the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place knows it no more.” (Psalm 103:15-16).

Regardless of the length of one’s life, death is a reality from which we cannot escape and for which we must prepare because we will appear before the righteous Judge. Saint Ambrose of Milan speaks of three types of death:

One is the death due to sin, concerning which it was written: “The soul which sins shall itself die.” [...] Another death is the mystical, when someone dies to sin and lives to God [...]. The third is the death by which we complete our life-span with its functions – I mean the separation of soul and body.³

He regards the first type as fearful, the second as good and “the third stands midway, for it seems good to the just and fearful to most men; although it gives release to all, it gives pleasure to few.”⁴ The Church thus urges for the uprooting of sin within ourselves and the living of a life in Christ, the only way to attain communion with God. We can speak of a present “full of grace” because the believer “has passed from death to life” (John 5:24). We are called to a state of righteousness in order to be prepared to give a good answer to the “right and fearful judgment”.

³ Saint Ambrose al Milanului, “Death as a good”, in *Seven Exegetical Works*, translated by Michael P. McHugh, (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2003), 71.

⁴ Saint Ambrose al Milanului, “Death as a good”, 71.

Transhumanism and Death

One of the fundamental ideas of this movement is to create a human being who has a long, above-average lifespan, and even to attain a form of immortality. It is claimed that this will be possible through technology. The issue is not merely theoretical, as there are certain companies that have made investments to fulfill this goal. Of course, this life is not intended as an extension of old age and suffering, but as a quality, active and healthy one:

The argument is not in favor of life-span extension *per se*. Adding extra years of sickness and debility at the end of life would be pointless. The argument is in favor of extending, as far as possible, the human *health-span*. By slowing or halting the aging process, the healthy human life span would be extended. Individuals would be able to remain healthy, vigorous, and productive at ages at which they would otherwise be dead.⁵

Basically, a form of “eternal youth” is pursued. For the time being however, from a technological point of view, this is not yet feasible, but there is hope that in the future this will be possible. Transhumanists propose several approaches, working hypotheses, starting from replacing aged organs to the transferring of the consciousness to a computer. The question is whether, from a Christian point of view, an extension of life through technology is compatible with the teachings of the faith. After all, isn’t this an idea synonymous with “playing God”?! Unlike Christianity, Transhumanism does not speak of the resurrection of the dead, nor of the existence of a life after death. But the idea of scanning the brain and transferring the result to a computer can be regarded as a secularized form of life after death. All hope of salvation from the tyranny of death is attributed to science and technology. Aging and death are considered defects:

I see in them a powerful symbol of our age – we have trivialized death to such an extent, making it into a fault which medicine will be able to repair, that we must address the issue of how desirable the opposite is: do we want to be immortal, or at least to live indefinitely?⁶

⁵ Nick Bostrom, “The Fable of Dragon-Tyrant”, accessed January 26, 2021, <https://www.nickbostrom.com/fable/dragon.pdf>, 11.

⁶ Laurent Alexandre, Jean-Michel Besnier, *Pot face roboții dragoste? 12 întrebări despre transumanism* [Do Robots make love? Understanding transhumanism in 12 questions], translation by Maria-Magdalena Coresciuc (București: Humanitas, 2019), 64.

In this idea we can observe a resemblance to Christian anthropology, namely that man was not created for suffering and death, but for eternal life. Of course, the means to overcome them are different. Transhumanism proposes human means and Christianity puts before us the work of God. The Orthodox Christian faith places great emphasis on man's dependence on God. The transhumanist movement sees man as an independent being and it does not take into account the relationship with the Creator. For this reason, man must also be in control of his own death. Thus, death is in contradiction with the creeds of this movement, which are individual freedom, freedom of choice and freedom of exceeding one's limits.⁷

These incompatibilities could lead us to think that the Church should oppose the means that would lead to a life longer than the usual one. The psalmist says that: "The years of our life are seventy, or even by reason of strength eighty; yet their span is but toil and trouble" (Psalm 90:10-11). These are indeed the ages that man can reach nowadays. Of course, there are exceptions "that prove the rule". As a principle however, the Church should not oppose the idea of slowing down aging and physical degradation. Without a doubt, what must be investigated is whether or not the employed methods contradict Christian morality and can lead to the destruction of human lives. The consequences they will have on society must be analyzed. If the method involves the oppression or destruction of human lives, Christians cannot accept the use of such means. But the Church, in its struggle for the defense of life at every stage, must accept all that does not deviate from the revealed truth.

An important fact worth mentioning is that no matter how advanced technology becomes, it will never be able to achieve the immortality that some transhumanists envision. Accidents, an illness, a disaster can always lead to death. Death remains a permanent presence, even if the lifespan is longer. At the same time, discernment towards the transhumanist discourse is necessary. Listening to and reading the works of the promoters of this movement can create the impression that such technologies will appear very soon. These discourses often ignore the particularly difficult scientific problems that need to be solved in order to succeed in such an endeavor. After all, one must not forget how hard and how long it takes to develop treatments for various diseases. An interesting theory circulating among transhumanists is that of scanning the brain and transferring the consciousness to a computer. This would result in a sort of "virtual immortality":

A more challenging but also ultimately feasible scenario will be to scan someone's brain to map the locations, interconnections, and contents of the somas, axons, dendrites, presynaptic vesicles,

⁷ See Todd W. Daly, "Diagnosing death in the Transhumanism and Christian Traditions", in Calvin Mercer and Tacy J. T Rohen, *Religion and transhumanism. The unknown future of human enhancement*, (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2015), 86.

cles, and other neural components. Its entire organization could then be recreated on a neural computer of sufficient capacity, including the contents of its memory.⁸

Beyond the obvious technological impediments, this “intriguing scenario” also raises a number of other problems. Can personal identity be reduced exclusively to the brain? Does the rest of the body not matter to the person? Through this process the desired immortality could not be achieved, because the scanning procedure can only create a copy. So, we speak of the digital replication of a human being. From a Christian point of view, there are objections to this idea. According to the teachings of faith, man is not solely reduced to his brain, but he is soul and body. As for the perspective of mind scanning, it is assumed that there is juxtaposition between the brain and the mind. The body is to some extent disregarded because it is important to copy the pattern of the brain which is then virtually recreated. A type of Gnosticism can be observed here, in which the virtual world takes precedence. In that digital environment, the copy will be able to carry on its “life”. In fact, such a perspective does not offer the much-desired immortality because the copy cannot be the original, and not even this copy that lives in the virtual world can be eternal. It will be confronted with the trials and risks associated with such an existence. A computer virus or hardware problems, for example, can lead to the destruction of that entity.

Conclusions

The search for immortality is a “continuous present” in human history. From the Christian point of view, Christ, the Son of God Incarnate, is the guarantor of eternal life. In today’s secularized world, the idea that science and technology will achieve endless life proliferated. The Church must heed these interpretations and give Christians answers to the questions posed by the supports of this school of thought. Nowadays, there is no technology able to contribute to a radical extension of life. If, however, such technological advancements ever appear, the Church will have to analyze the moral and spiritual implications of each of them. As a principle, there is no contradiction between Christianity and a long life. Nevertheless, biological life must not be idolized. There exist legitimate causes for man to give his life: “For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel’s will save it.” (Mark 8:35). What is important is the manner in which life is lived, regardless of its duration. For this reason, there are contradictions between the transhumanist perspective, concerned strictly with our earthly existence, and that of the Church, which invites man to an eternity spent in the presence of God.

⁸ Ray Kurzweil, *The Age of Spiritual Machines*, (New York: Viking, 1999), 92.

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VARIA

Witness through holiness of life. A quick look into the biography of a concept

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Abstract

“Witness through holiness of life” is a phrase often used in theological texts. This study analyses the origin of this concept and identifies a series of reference points in its intellectual biography in Romanian theology (with special emphasis on the developments brought about by mission theologians from Cluj-Napoca). The two final sections try to enlarge upon the reflection on the witness through the holiness of life by considering the phrase in a biblical and spiritual context.

Keywords: holiness of life, implicit mission, orthodox mission, mission theology, effective mission, missiology

“WITNESS THROUGH HOLINESS OF LIFE” is a phrase often used in theological texts. In this study we will analyse the origin of this concept and we will identify a series of reference points in its intellectual biography in Romanian theology (with special emphasis on the developments brought about by mission theologians from Cluj-Napoca); in the final section we will try to enlarge upon our reflection on the witness through the holiness of life by considering the phrase in a spiritual context.

Father Dumitru Stăniloae

The phrase “witness through holiness of life” begins its career in Romanian theology with the publication of a text in English by father Dumitru Stăniloae entitled *Witness Through “Holiness” of Life*. It originally appeared in 1978 but it gained notoriety once it was included in the volume *Martyria/Mission. The Witness of the Orthodox Churches Today* edited by father Ion Bria and pub-

lished in Geneva in 1980¹. The Romanian theologian begins his article with a surgically precise diagnosis of his contemporary society, acknowledging the partial failure of the Christian mission; at the same time, employing a statement by Frances Colte, a Melchite Catholic living in America, he highlights the potential the Orthodox Church has to accommodate the needs and pursuits of the western world.

Father Stăniloae's thinking is profoundly influenced by the ascetic writings and what he puts forward is that the whole Church should take ownership of its past failures:

The areas of human society that have become spiritually estranged from the Church and thus lost any understanding of Christian faith are very extensive. The degree to which they are spiritually removed or do not understand the faith varies from a sort of innocent misunderstanding – related to mental indifference – to open hostility. In respect of them the Church must ask itself what are the causes of such a situation and particularly whether among them there are not some whose origin lies in the Church's behaviour in the past. How can it change this behaviour and how, in each area, can it either end or reduce this estrangement?²

Speaking on "the outer mission" carried out among those who have no knowledge of Christianity he remarks that:

[...] the Church must ask why it is that in the second millennium it has not been able to win the hearts of such people, except in a fragmentary way or for short periods of time. One cannot fail to notice in these situations that people have hardened their hearts to Christianity in a way that non-Christians in the first millennium did not.³

The main element in father Stăniloae's approach is a critical solidarity with the way in which mission had been previously carried out and he proposes a careful analysis of both this and the constantly changing social context. The increasingly central role of technology and the relentless concern to satisfy material needs and pleasures has led to the drop in the interest for spirituality. But within this framework, father Dumitru Stăniloae identifies the return of religion in society under different guises: "astrology, witchcraft, eastern religions, Pentecostal glossolalia"⁴, and this is where the need

¹ Dumitru Stăniloae, "Witness through «Holiness» of Life", in Ion Bria (ed.), *Martyria/Mission. The Witness of the Orthodox Churches Today*, WCC, Geneva.

² Dumitru Stăniloae, "Witness Through «Holiness» of Life", 45.

³ Stăniloae, 45.

⁴ Stăniloae, 46.

to articulate a clearer message of the Eastern, Orthodox Christianity comes from, because it could provide the world with a robust answer.

Father Stăniloae has a critical view of the mission of the Church and states that it “cannot have great and lasting effect if it is done in an institutional way that seeks to enlarge the authoritarian power of the Church”⁵. Another possible failure regards the individualistic mission, one which combines will for power, pride, and personal views with the truth of the Gospel. Both missionary forms show the light of Christ in a manner contaminated by sin. In order to be able to avoid these potential failures, the Christian missionary must have certain qualities. Talking about them father Stăniloae drafts a portrait of the missionary who must himself be crucified, who must overcome the inventiveness of his personal reasoning and the arguments of his group, as well the thirst for power of his ecclesial institution. “Mission is effective only when the power of the Holy Spirit radiates from the one who preaches Christ. This power purifies him so that the Holy Spirit can shine unhindered through his word which will then be the pure and powerful confirmation of the Spirit that is in him”⁶.

The Christian mission was fully carried out by the saints and martyrs who relinquished their whole being in order to bear witness to Christ’s Truth by the power of His Spirit. Every church began with a saint or several saints who gave their lives “and not just the talent of their words, to make known to others the wholeness of the Christ” they had experienced: even though they were “supported by organizations and financial resources, there was in (their) preaching no mixture of personal, group or institutional pride”⁷. Saint Apostle Paul outlined the image of the effective missionary in just a few words: “And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God” (I Cor 2, 4-5). He himself embodied the type of missionary he suggested⁸.

For father Dumitru Stăniloae it is self-evident that only saints and martyrs are able to bring people to Christ. The values of Orthodoxy are reflected in the belief that holiness is possible, and in the fact that it sees the Church as a communion in Christ, not as an institution. These values are still alive today and they can be experienced chiefly in the Holy Liturgy and the Sacraments of the Church. For these values to become visible and for the Church to be truly missionary, it must fulfil three requirements:

1. It must “be open to the uncreated power of God”
2. It must believe that with the help of God’s power we may “live a life of sacrifice and holiness”

⁵ Stăniloae, 47.

⁶ Stăniloae, 47.

⁷ Stăniloae, 48.

⁸ Stăniloae, 48.

3. It must “fully actualize the character of the Church as communion”⁹.

The drastic conclusion of father Stăniloae is the following: “if we do not seek this experience of divine uncreated power, and through it holiness and the total gift of self, it is useless to hold conferences on mission and to develop bureaucratic plans for mission. We will continue to lose souls that the Church now has. [...] Orthodoxy must go beyond its theoretical anthropology to become, like a saint, involved in the specific human relationships found in the complicated circumstances of our daily lives”¹⁰. In this context, his brief text ends with a strikingly rational question: “According to the Holy Fathers the “wonderful deeds” of God that Christians must make known to the world are qualities of their holiness, which show the power of the Spirit of Christ. How can non-Christians receive our faith if they do not see that we are better than they are?”¹¹

This text of father Stăniloae has enjoyed an illustrious reception as it became an essential work of reference for all those interested in the topic of the witness through holiness of life¹² as an essential part of the Orthodox mission.

Father Ion Bria and the theologians from Cluj-Napoca

When talking about Romanian missionary theology and implicitly the topic of the witness through holiness of life, an indispensable reference is father Ion Bria, who in 1982 published a *Course of Orthodox Missionary Practice and Theology*¹³. In it father Bria identifies 12 requirements of the Church’s mission, one of which is “the quality of the Christians’ lives”¹⁴. Father Bria’s starting point is a simile from the Epistle to Diognetus¹⁵ (VI,

⁹ Stăniloae, 49.

¹⁰ Stăniloae, 50.

¹¹ Stăniloae, 51.

¹² See for example: Valer Bel, *Misiunea Bisericii în lumea contemporană 2, Exigențe* [The Mission of the Church in the Contemporary World 2. Exigences], (Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2002); Aurel Pavel, “Misiune prin sfințenia vieții în opera Părintelui Profesor Ion Bria” [Mission Through the Holiness of Life in the Work of Fr. Prof. Ion Bria], in *Relevanța operei Părintelui Profesor Ion Bria pentru viața bisericească și socială actuală. Direcții noi de cercetare în domeniul doctrinei, misiunii și unității Bisericii* [The Importance of the Work of Fr. Prof. Ion Bria for the Contemporary Social and Church Life], ed. Nicolae Moșoiu (Sibiu: Editura Universității Lucian Blaga, n.d.), 300–308; Cristian Sonea, *Paradigme misionare: de la Edinburgh la Sinodul din Creta* [Missionary Paradigms: from Edinburgh to the Synod of Crete], (Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2017).

¹³ Ion Bria, *Curs de Teologie și practică misionară ortodoxă* [Course of Orthodox Missionary Theology and Practice], (Geneva, 1982).

¹⁴ Bria, 52.

¹⁵ Clayton N. Jefford, ed., *The Epistle to Diognetus (with the Fragment of Quadratus): Introduction, Text and Commentary*, Oxford Apostolic Fathers (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2013), 147.

1): "what the soul is in the body, that is what Christians in the world". Christianity brings a new way of living, which has the power to revolutionize the old world. Father Bria identifies two main characteristics defining it:

1. This "new life" can only be lived in the communion of the Church, as members of the Body of Christ. The communion is realised and maintained by the Eucharist, as a joint action of the clergy and the believers.¹⁶

The Church exists only through the coordination and the harmony of the different members in a unique service (Rom. 12, 6; I Cor. 12, 4). The personal life of the Christian is influenced by and influences the life of the body. Each member can sense how the other lives and takes it upon himself to bear their burdens: "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ" (Gal. 6, 2). For God fashioned the body so "that there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another" (I Cor. 12, 25)¹⁷.

2. The faith of the Christians must be expressed in an authentic spirituality.

The essential element of Christian piety is not the way, the technique or the "how", but rather the substance and quality of this life: they are at the core of the Christian identity. Therefore, the credibility of spirituality stems from the quality of the person.¹⁸

What sets Christians apart is their spirituality, which to many may seem a "scandal" because it does not comply with the ethics of the majority or the society. They respect the body's spirituality with its own virtues: forgiving those who hate us, voluntary poverty, non-violence. However, by this "new way of life" Christians do not preach alienation from the social community in which they live. On the contrary, they are present in and solidary with the society they live in, fully aware that a little leaven will leaven the whole dough (Luke 13, 21)¹⁹.

Father Valer Bel structures his missionary theology through a dialogue with father Ion Bria's theology (although this may not be explicitly mentioned each time). In the second volume of his book "The Mission of the Church in the Contemporary World", dedicated to the mission's requirements, father Bel also identifies twelve distinctive elements of the mission,

¹⁶ Bria, *Curs de teologie și practică misionară ortodoxă* [Course of Orthodox Missionary Theology and Practice], 53.

¹⁷ Bria, 54.

¹⁸ Bria, 54.

¹⁹ Bria, 55.

one of which is “The Witness through Holiness of Life”²⁰. His reflection starts from the Saviour’s words in the Gospel of Matthew: “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven” (Mt. 5, 16). “A life lived in the spirit of the Gospel is one of the most important means of Christian mission, because through the personal meeting with God and through living in the divine love, Christians become the salt of the earth and the light of the world and they help people find the true meaning and fulfilment of their lives in Christ”²¹. The quality of the Christians’ lives is essential for an effective Christian mission. Christian life has three essential coordinates: a witnessing community, an authentic spirituality, and an eschatological expectation²². In such a context, the witness given by the saints is what makes the mission of the Church effective.

The mission is especially effective when the power of the Holy Spirit radiates from the person preaching Christ. This light shines unencumbered from his words, as a confirmation of the Holy Spirit’s action in and through him. This happens only when the one preaching embodies the truth of Christ in his own life [...]. The capacity of the missionary and of the priest depends not only on their theological and pedagogical qualities, but also on their personal holiness²³.

The topic of the witness through holiness of life is also among the interests of father Cristian Sonea, for whom the holiness of one’s life is also a requirement of the Christian mission²⁴. Within the context of an analysis of father Stăniloae’s vision of the witness through holiness of life, set in the wider framework of the great Romanian theologian’s thinking, father Sonea finds a forte of Orthodox Christianity: *the universally personalistic character of the saints’ witness*. More precisely, we can talk about a personalistic spirituality in which the action of God’s grace is emphasised, a spirituality that has a martyrial and ascetic dimension and one in which the Church is a real communion in Jesus Christ (the corrective aspect keeping in check the institutional dimension of the Church)²⁵.

The witness through holiness of life also concerns father Grigore Dinu Moș, when he writes about the “Spiritual Dimension of the Mission”²⁶. In

²⁰ Bel, *Misiunea Bisericii în lumea contemporană 2, Exigențe* [The Mission of the Church in the Contemporary World 2. Exigences], 181–96.

²¹ Bel, 181.

²² Bel, 186.

²³ Bel, 195–96.

²⁴ Sonea, *Paradigme misionare* [Missionary Paradigms], 101–14.

²⁵ Sonea, 105.

²⁶ Grigore Dinu Moș, “Dimensiunea duhovnicească a misiunii” [The Spiritual Dimension of Mission], in *Misiunea Bisericii în Sfânta Scriptură și în istorie* [The Mission of the Church in Bible and History], (Cluj-Napoca: Renașterea, 2006), 98–122.

this text (rich in references from the Philokalia and the writings of contemporary saints and spiritual fathers) he states that “the mission of each Christian begins with themselves, with them personally taking on the work of their salvation, by striving to sanctify their own life”²⁷ because “whoever has not acquired the Holy Spirit by means of a holy life, does not preach Christ, but themselves and their own state of passion, even if their words comply formally and intellectually with the Revelation”²⁸.

Such a mission is mainly implicit: “the only effective mission is the secretive, quiet one, operated when a holy life and prayer irradiate”²⁹ the lives of others.

The Paradigm of the witness through holiness found in the New Testament

The witness through holiness of life as an essential missionary dimension, or as a form in which word and image meet, is strongly supported by the New Testament. Jesus Christ, Son of God incarnate, is the Word of God, as it is stated in the well-known Prologue of the Gospel according to John: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made” (John 1, 1-3). At the same time, Saint Apostle Paul mentions another quality of the Son in his Epistle to the Colossians, namely that He is the Image of the Father: “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him” (Col. 1, 15-16). Man, “created in the image of the One who is the Word and the Image of the Father, is in his turn word and image, and for his witness to be authentic, the words must express the internal reality of the person speaking, they must be born out of an authentic experience of the reality being preached. If not, words remain mere words and never transcend their sounds (albeit articulated), remaining the plain superficial shells of a far-away reality”³⁰. Therefore, the effectiveness of preaching is also determined by the degree in which the person preaching the Word of God has succeeded in embodying the message of the Gospel in their own biography and thus in becoming a living image, an icon of their preaching.

²⁷ Moș, 100.

²⁸ Moș, 100.

²⁹ Moș, 101.

³⁰ Paul Siladi, *Cuvânt și imagine. Fundamente teoretice pentru o teologie a comunicării* [Word and Image. Theoretical Bases for a Theology of Communication], (Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2019), 486–87.

In the New Testament there are clear references to missionary work, impetuses to open, explicit mission. The best known of them are Christ's words at the end of the Gospel according to Matthew, the so-called "Great Commission": "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. Amen" (Mt. 28, 19-20).

Alongside such clear and open calls to engage in missionary work, we have a whole series of recommendations for what could be called an "implicit mission" or a witness through holiness of life. In the Gospel of John, the Lord says of Himself: "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life" (John 8, 12). Those who follow Him become bearers of light and shine a light in their turn: "You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lamp-stand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven" (Mt. 5, 14-16).

The model offered by Christ Himself is the one of a preacher whose words are fulfilled in Himself first of all: "learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls" (Mt. 11, 29). Both Saint Apostle Peter and Saint Apostle Paul talk about an implicit mission and about how simply observing the commandments irradiates a light all around: "that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world" (Philippians 2, 15). Saint Peter in his turn writes the following: "having your conduct honourable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation. Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether to the king as supreme, or to governors, as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good. For this is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men" (I Ptr. 2, 12-15).

Witness through holiness of life at the Ascetic Fathers

The overview of the topic of the witness through holiness of life must be completed with the brief mention of how it was understood by the ascetic fathers. The Christian calendar lists two main categories of saints: martyrs (mostly those of the first centuries) and monastics, ascetics. The courage

of the martyrs sacrificing their lives for Christ without any hesitation was probably the most powerful form of implicit mission in the early centuries. In his treaty, "Apologeticus", Tertullian unequivocally affirms that the blood of the martyrs is the seed of a new life³¹.

After the edict of 313, which gave the Christians the freedom to practice their faith, the monastic life begins to take shape as a form of perpetual martyrdom. The place of the martyrs of the first centuries is now taken by the Christian monastics and ascetics. The crucible of Eastern monasticism was the Egyptian desert and its influence was felt all over the world. The emblematic texts of the Egyptian monasticism are collected in the *Apophthegmata Patrum*³².

The commandment to go and engage in an active mission (Mt. 28, 19-20) comes into conflict with that to abandon the world, which established monastic life³³. The first to apophthegms of Abba Arsenius stress this very fact: "flee from men and you will be saved"³⁴ or "flee, be silent, pray always"³⁵. Abba Alonius says something along the same lines: "If a man does not say in his heart, in the world there is only myself and God, he will not gain peace"³⁶.

Saint Isaac the Syrian, one of the great solitary figures of Christianity, is even more radical with regard to the importance of seclusion and personal ascetic practice:

Love the ease of solitude rather than satisfying the hunger of the world and the converting of the multitude of heathen peoples from error unto adoring God. Let it be more excellent in thy eyes to detach thyself from the bonds of sin, than to detach the subdued unto liberty from those who subject their bodies. Prefer to make peace with thyself, in harmony with the trinity within thee: body, soul and spirit, rather than to appease those who are angry at thy teachings³⁷.

³¹ Q. Septimi Florentis Tertulliani Apologeticus, the text of Oehler annotated, translation by Alex. Souter with introduction by John E B Mayor, Cambridge University Press, 1917, at: https://www.tertullian.org/articles/mayor_apologeticum/mayor_apologeticum_07translation.htm

³² Benedicta Ward, *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers: The Alphabetical Collection* (Mowbrays, 1975).

³³ For further details see: Paul Siladi, "Missionary Theology in the *Apophthegmata Patrum*," in *Unitate și identitate. Ortodoxia românilor între comuniunea răsăriteană și dialogul cu Apusul* [Unity and Identity. Romanian Orthodoxy Between Eastern Communion and Dialog with the West], ed. Vasile Stanciu and Paul Siladi, vol. 1, 2 vols. (Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2019), 522–31.

³⁴ Arsenius 1 in Ward, *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, 9.

³⁵ Arsenius 2 in Ward, 9.

³⁶ Alonius 1 in Ward, 35.

³⁷ *Mystic Treatises by Isaac of Niniveh*, translated from Bedjan's Syriac text with an introduction and registers by A. J. Wesnick, published by the Royal Academy for Sciences, Amsterdam, 1923, 32.

The solitude of the ascetic fathers is neither cantankerous, morose, nor bitter, but rather operative. The cleared and best known words regarding inner peace belong to Saint Seraphim of Sarov:

Acquire the Spirit of peace and thousands around you will be saved. When a man enters into a peaceful state, he can give out from himself and also upon others light for the enlightenment of the mind³⁸.

The force the holiness has to irradiate is also described in the Synaxarion of the Church. An overview of the saints' biographies is enough to see how they became flames that shone light and peace around them. For instance, let us take a look at the saints commemorated on September 1, the first day of the church year. According to the Synaxarion two of these saints had a strong presence, effective by itself. The life of the first one, Saint Simeon Stylites the Elder, is marked by humility and ascetic efforts: "the most wondrous thing was that after he had fought so many spiritual battles and devoted himself to feats of the strictest abstinence, and after he had reached such high virtues and performed so many miracles, this man of God still saw himself as being beneath all men"³⁹. When he reached the apex of his spiritual life Saint Simeon "reposed in peace, while deep in prayer, at the age of 69 (in 459), having spread all around him the peace that reigned in his heart" after fifty years of ascetic labours⁴⁰.

Another saint commemorated by the Church on September 1 is Saint Meletius the Younger. His life has what we might call a classical trajectory, following the example found in the biography of Saint Anthony the Great. He seeks peace and discreetly takes refuge in deserted places, but precisely there, in the most ignored of spaces, his virtues shine and attract people. Saint Meletius the Younger's indirect mission is extremely effective even in that remote place: "There he thought to dwell in prayer away from people, but his virtues again attracted many visitors and the desert soon became a monastery"⁴¹.

Conclusions

These few examples amply show how the witness through holiness of life is an essential characteristic of the Christian, and especially of the Orthodox, mission. In the article we analysed at the beginning, father

³⁸ Moore, Lazarus, *Sfântul Serafim de Sarov. O biografie spirituală* [Saint Seraphim of Sarov. A Spiritual Biography], trans. Paul Bălan (București: Agapis, 2002), 39.

³⁹ Macarios Simonopetritul, *Sinaxarul. Viețile Sfinților* [Synaxarion. Life of the Saints.], vol. 1-Luna septembrie (București: Editura Sfântul Ioan Casian, n.d.), 34.

⁴⁰ Macarios Simonopetritul, 36.

⁴¹ Macarios Simonopetritul, 42.

Dumitru Stăniloae identifies something deeply rooted in Orthodox spirituality, something that manifested itself over all generations. We are left, however, with this question: If we are not holy, what can we do? Should we abandon our mission? Should we consider ourselves no longer compelled to answer this call addressed to each baptised Christian? The Paterikon provides us with a possible answer. Whereas Amma Syncletica (12) says that

It is dangerous for anyone to teach who has not first been trained in the “practical” life. For if someone who owns a ruined house receives guests there, he does them harm because of the dilapidation of his dwelling. It is the same in the case of someone who has not first built an interior dwelling; he causes loss to those who come. By words one may convert them to salvation, but by evil behaviour, one injures them⁴²,

Abba Poemen (25) offers a more realistic and heartening perspective: “man who teaches without doing what he teaches is like a spring which cleanses and gives drink to everyone, but it not able to purify itself”⁴³.

In other words, you could be of some help to others, even though you are not doing much for yourself, even though you do not practice what you preach. And this is so because Christ is the ultimate basis of all preaching and His words are eternally true.

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⁴² Syncletica 12, in Ward, *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, 233.

⁴³ Poemen 25 in Ward, *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, 179.

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Sacred Art

Between Tradition and Personal Expression: The Orthodox Icon and Artistical Transgressions of the Canon

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Abstract

The aim of this article is to present a personal reflection regarding the theoretical/philosophical relation between the generally accepted theological grounding of icon painting and other contemporary artistic endeavours to integrate the religious feeling – of Christian-Orthodox inspiration. This reflection is based on a mixture of ideas from different thought-frameworks which have as common ground the need for speculating on issues such as ‘tradition understanding’, ‘personal expression’, ‘art and religiousness’, exactly those key-themes that are constituting the fundamental threads of my argumentation. Hence, my appeal to authors like Lucian Blaga, Leonid Uspensky, Martin Heidegger, Paul Evdochimov, and Christos Yannaras. The point of departure for my study is the powerful and unavoidable conflict between the need for personal artistic interpretations of religious themes – expressed through contemporary artistic techniques and the application of contemporary metaphysical modelings – and the need for attaching oneself to an ‘authentic’ tradition of religious experience and to a community with deep roots in history. My all-round thesis is that this conflict cannot be, at least, clarified by choosing, from the artistic point of view, between two extremes: contemporary secular art on the one hand, and sacred, canonical art on the other hand, but by finding conceptual common pathways.

Keywords: tradition; face-image; person; contemporary art; transgression; music; body; dance.

Introduction

THIS PAPER IS A MEDITATION about the 'community' between the old, liturgical art, of the Orthodox icon and contemporary artistic manifestations spiritually rooted in the Orthodox belief, 'community' in the sense that both coexist in the contemporary cultural landscape and, at the same time, both are shaping our sensibility underlying this understanding of Christianity. For example, in Romania, I argue that, for a 'modern' believer, to pray in front of a traditionally conceived icon and to listen to an orthodox inspired composition such as Paul Constantinescu's *Easter Byzantine Oratorio* are both significant ways of experiencing the Orthodox Tradition, in its broad meaning. This fact is worth analysing through philosophical and theological frameworks because it reveals one of the most important inner tensions of the modern person: the conflict between, on the one hand, the need for sacredness, for cultural 'authentic' roots and for the immersion of oneself within a community of like-hearted thinkers and believers, and, on the other hand, the need for modernity, for creativeness, for openness towards new forms of expression and metaphysical ideas. It is a hard inner tension that is accurately represented by the, sometimes artificial, opposition between the liturgical art of the Orthodox icon, which usually is created after a well-theologically grounded canon, and 'just' religiously inspired art, such as modern musical compositions, paintings, literature, and even choreography. Usually, there are separately pursued, the place of the icon being inside a church, while the place of a modern Orthodox inspired painting being in a gallery, this spatial separation constituting, in fact, a symbol of the theoretical-theological separation between the two. What I propose in this paper is an endeavour to find a space of communication between these two separate fields of creation and expression with the aim of producing a dialogue (between these two types of *logos*). This space can be traced through important concepts from the philosophy of culture, hermeneutics and aesthetics: 'tradition', 'expression', 'transgression', 'person' and 'experience'. Hence, my use of ideas from thinkers such as Lucian Blaga, Martin Heidegger, and Christos Yannaras.

The Orthodox Icon and its Theological Grounding

The Metaphysical Meaning of 'Tradition'

The manner in which one operates with the concept of 'tradition', both in the field of hermeneutics/philosophy of culture and in the field of Christian-Orthodox theology, is the main ground for the phenomenon of transferability – of forms, ideas and styles – between the art of the icon and the

modern, religiously inspired, artistic manifestations. Tradition is seen as a fountainhead of vitality, which means that 'tradition' can be viewed not only as a rigid assemblage of old norms, practices and objects – needed to be outreached in order to fulfil current different needs and ways of life –, but as an energetic blowing which we breathe as a source of symbols and profundity. Hence, tradition is, at the same time, the root for prejudices, for stylistic predeterminations, for established cultural categories, and a springboard for change, for the generation of new styles and categories. This is the exact meaning which 'tradition' has in the Orthodox belief. It is a core-concept that theologically justifies practices for centuries, including the art of painting icons¹. This is how the Romanian philosopher and poet – who also studied theology and biology – Lucian Blaga beautifully described the understanding of 'tradition' in the Orthodox belief:

Our tradition is of a more invisible nature; it permits only a metaphorical or metaphysical formulation. Our tradition is more atemporal, it identifies with our creative stylistic potencies, unexhausted, "magnificent as in the beginning". Our tradition is our stylistic matrix, in a blessed state like our motherly ancestry. Sometimes smouldering, yet uninterruptedly lively, it manifests in time, although, measured from our ephemeral horizon, it is above time. Being creative, this tradition of ours has a 'music'² character, not a "museum-like" character. In the Occident tradition is a sign of age, mostly a burden; the departure from it means liberating revolution. Our tradition is ageless like the green leaf; as a stylistic matrix it is part of our unconscious logos. A separation from it would mean apostasy.³

The theological grounding for Christian-Orthodox iconography springs from the experience, reading and exemplarity of tradition and this fact is the reason why tradition is, at the same time, the strength and weakness of this understanding of Christianity. In the history of hermeneutics, Martin Heidegger (re)discovered the tradition of Occidental philosophy as the bearer of the original meaning and revelation of 'being'. Yet, in *Being and Time*, he makes the observation that tradition can also hide the true origins, it can throw them into oblivion, namely into non-reflective and cliché-like (pre)understanding⁴. Until recently, the Orthodox iconographical canon

¹ Leonid Uspensky, *The Theology of the Icon in The Orthodox Church* [in Romanian], introductory study and translation by Teodor Baconsky (Bucharest: Anastasia Publishing House, 1994), 92.

² From the Ancient 'muses'.

³ Lucian Blaga, *The Mioritical Space* [in Romanian], in *The Trilogy of Culture*, (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2011), 285; my English translation from Romanian.

⁴ Martin Heidegger, *Being and time* [in Romanian], translation and introductory study by Gabriel Liiceanu and Cătălin Cioabă (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2003), §6, 29-30.

was considered unquestionable regarding the practice of icon painting. It contains the ethical and technical prescriptions that constitute the basis for differentiating between *sacred art* – thought of as an embodiment of spirituality – and *religious art* – the secular, un-liturgical expression of religious themes⁵. Although this distinction is an essential theoretical difference that helped to preserve the distinctness of the icon tradition and partially safeguarded it from stylistic intrusions, it also kept it rigidly isolated from the fruitful contact with new forms of painting. If we assume the need for creative and vital participation, implication and modelling effect of the Orthodox belief into the world, then we are obliged to also accept the possibility of a ‘community’ and ‘communion’ between the world and sacred expression. In other words, if one conceives of ‘tradition’ as a still positive and deepening force in contemporary culture and society, then one is forced to bring into light linking paths between what comes from the past and the stance of the present. It is, necessarily, a biconditional relation and the deviation towards one extreme or the other is meant to produce misunderstanding, excessive reactions, extremism and, most important, a spiritual pauperisation. The extreme secular practice of contemporary art – that not only eliminates religious experience as a relevant inspiration for art, but it takes it as a subject for mockery, as a simple grand taboo – is the ‘transgressive art’ as defined and criticised by Anthony Julius in his 2002 book *Transgressions: The Offences of Art*. Hence, the iconographical canon for the Orthodox icon and the transgressive art are two extremes of artistic practice. The first is limited by rigid norms and has as its heart the idea of drawing from exemplary icons of the past and of devotion in front of the represented subject, while the latter is so ‘free’ that it loses its identity, its meaning, its expressive force, and has as its heart the attitude of unlimited ‘avant-gardism’ that, as now is certain, brings art at a dead end. This is the theoretical reason why the need for a more distant and balanced perspective is needed, why the comparative discussion of these two radically opposed practices is relevant. In the center of this opposition is the concept of ‘tradition’ and the key, at least, to disentangle the issue is the strive to trace the metaphysical assumptions about this concept.

Earthly life is determined by metamorphosis, by process, by continuous transformations, temporality itself being a consubstantial condition for life. Ivan Moody, an Orthodox priest and composer renowned for its research about contemporary musical creations inspired by Orthodox Christianity, argues that Tradition would be greatly enriched by the inclusion of paraliturgical realisations. He has a brief article suggestively entitled “Contemporary Art as Theophany” in which he claims that “Christian art” should be much

⁵ Michel Quenot, *The Icon: A Window Toward the Absolute* [in Romanian], translation, preface and notes by Pr. Dr. Vasile Răducă (Bucharest: The Encyclopedic Publishing House, 1993), 55.

wider than “liturgical art”: “I have, to be brutally honest, no time for the idea that we must wall ourselves off and live in a beautiful ghetto. That is not what Christianity is, and if that is the case, then Christian art must as a consequence be larger, wider, than the liturgical arts”⁶. Hence, this entwining of different domains of artistic practice is not unnatural or impermissible for a Christian artist, on the contrary, is what constitutes the flexible and lively part of Tradition. As Leonid Uspensky puts it: “Christianity absorbs from the surrounding world anything it can use as means of expression” and “People around the world who are hearing the call of the Church are bringing with them their culture, their particular national characteristics and their creative faculties. The Church is forming its sacred language by choosing from this lot of contributions everything that is more clean, more true and more expressive”⁷. This is the perspective about the past that suits contemporary hermeneutical methodologies, such as Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics, in which he advocates for the importance of accepting the dynamics between interpretation – which is always a strive from the ‘present’ of one particular person – and past ‘texts’ – literary texts, sacred texts, philosophical texts, the musical score or, by extension, the entire field of human products because they encapsulate meanings.

The Canon and the Image of Transcendence

In the 20th century there were important attempts at systematising and popularising the theology – and, implicitly, the metaphysics – behind the painting of icons. Leonid Uspensky’s books are classics in this regard. For a short exposition of the main threads of argumentation, I will have as background works by Uspensky, Pavel Florensky, Vladimir Lossky, Paul Evdochimov and Michel Quenot. Thereby, the main theoretical-theological ideas that are forming the essence of the canon are:

1. The artist should have *an ascetic way of living* because only by this outer and inner self-purification he could attempt to depict through painting the spiritual reality. This ‘cleansing’ permits a true vision of the world that goes beyond everyday factuality and material shapes.

2. The Christological grounding of the icon, of the visual representation in the Christian-Orthodox thinking, is the holy fact of Incarnation, which, unlike in the Old Testament, it demonstrates the *effective and efficacious presence* of God in the finite world through a Face-Image. This fact, historical and mysterious at the same time, permitted *the visualisation of transcendence*

⁶ Ivan Moody, “Contemporary Art as Theophany,” *Orthodox Arts Journal* (10 february, 2015), accessed at the adress: <https://www.orthodoxartsjournal.org/contemporary-art-theophany-2/>.

⁷ Uspensky, *The Theology of the Icon in The Orthodox Church*, 52–53; my English translation from Romanian.

through the hypostatic Person of Christ as God-Human: God was truly seen by man at a face-to-face encountering.

3. The Pneumatological grounding is complementary to the Christological one because it refers to the opposite process of the human being who is sanctified, the reverse and the aim of the Incarnation. Is *the eschatological dimension, the promise of Parousia*, of the Kingdom, which the icon can hint at, proclaim and confess through the reality of the Incarnation and of the Hagiographies, both handed over from centuries through the holy Tradition.

4. Hence, the authentic icon must be a vision of the concrete, material, sensible presence of the one represented, yet at the same time it must be a vision of sacredness, which means, paradoxically, *a vision of the invisible, of the transcendence that is emanated through the transfigured corporality of those depicted*. This is the reason why the style of Byzantine-Orthodox iconography is labelled *symbolical realism*, because it expresses both the physical nature of those painted and their sanctified nature. Thus, the icon is neither abstract, nor naturalistic, but a confessional revelation of faith and of the promise for delivery:

The icon is an image of a human truly blessed with a spirit wholly purified of sufferings. This is why his flesh is represented in an entirely different manner than the ordinary, meant to perish, flesh. The icon is the sober conveyance, without passion, of a certain spiritual reality. If holiness fully illuminates a man, in such a way that his spiritual and physical being is infused by prayer and, thus, it remains within the divine light, then the icon catches and keeps still in a visible manner this man who became a living icon towards true semblance with God. The icon does not represent sacredness, but indicates man's participation to the divine life.⁸

5. The face is the expressive center of an icon and, due to its theological charge, its essential purpose. The icon (re)presents a Person, a word that etymologically means 'the-fact-of-having-a-face', of facing the otherness. Christ is a Person, consubstantial with the other two of the Trinity, God and the Holy Spirit, and, thus, by his nature a *divine Person*, unlike human beings who, because they are created, they are *created persons*. Christ is invariably God by nature, while humans can become sanctified through the process of holy transfiguration. Man cannot have access to God's nature, but only to His manifestations, His energy.

6. Christ is, at the same time, True-God and True-Human, which symbolise the fact that he is the uncreated, invisible and fully spiritual Face-Image of the Father, and has his own humanly, physiognomic Face after

⁸ Uspensky, *The Theology of the Icon in The Orthodox Church*, 115; my English translation from Romanian.

his earthly mother. *Due to this hypostatically united double-nature (the dogma from Chalcedon) Christ can also be embodied through an icon.* The significant mention is that within a painted icon *one does not represent entirely his godly nature*, because it is contradictory with the sense of ‘transcendence’, *and, one does not paint entirely his human nature*, because it would be sheer naturalism and, so, an un-truly rendering. However, *what one tries to paint is the Person or the Hypostasis which unifies both natures:*

The icon does not represent either the nature, or the person. [...] When we represent our Lord we do represent neither his divineness, nor his humanity, but the Person who, in accordance with the dogma from Chalcedon, unites in Itself, in an unlimited manner – “unmixed and undivided” – both natures.”; and “This is God’s overflow of praise or God’s kenosis: He who cannot be accessible to the creature, He who cannot be either described, or depicted by any means, is The One who becomes accessible, describable and depictable, assuming a human body. Jesus Christ’s icon, the icon of the God-Human, is the visual expression of the dogma from Chalcedon: it truly represents the Person of God’s Son who became human, of the one who is co-being with the Father by his nature and co-being with us by his human being: “altogether like us, but without sin” – as the written words of the dogma are stating.⁹

7. In the iconic representation functions *a relation of participation, through semblance, to the archetype*. Even in the concept of an ‘image’ is presupposed the difference between a subject of representation and the image. The icon is not adored as idolatry (*latreia*), but only used as a foothold for worship (*proskunèsis*). As Uspensky writes, there is *a difference of nature and an identity of persons*¹⁰. This is the reason why keeping the historical truth about the physiognomic identity of those represented, as archetypes, through tradition, is a necessity, this chain being labelled by Pr. Ioan Bizău “iconic succession”¹¹.

These (re)presentations are embodiments that retain a power of transmitting a feeling of the transcendence, with the aim of inviting us to contemplate the beauty of this encountering and to surrender in front of the nostalgic promise of finding our original, spiritual, sanctuary. Lugian Blaga poetically describes this feeling near the presence of the transcendence in Byzantine art as ‘sophianic’:

⁹ Uspensky, *The Theology of the Icon in The Orthodox Church*, 83–84 & 104; my English translation from Romanian.

¹⁰ Uspensky, *The Theology of the Icon in The Orthodox Church*, 85.

¹¹ Ioan Bizău, “Incursions into the Theology and the Art of the Icon” [in Romanian], in *What is the Icon?*, edited by Leonid Uspensky, Boris Bobrinskoy, Stephan Bigam & Ioan Bizău, translated by Vasile Manea (Alba Iulia: Reîntregirea Publishing House, 2005), 106.

Generally, Byzantine art, much vigorously in painting, and, excepting the architecture, is sophianically oriented. How should we understand this general affirmation? In Byzantine art the figures are elementary stylised, rhythmically constructed, soaked into an air of magnificent simplicity and monotony. The figures are not sketched either by following their own lines of individuality, or by following their Platonical ideas, of embellished contours. Through their expressions, the figures are declaring themselves the bearers of transcendence; a reflexion of eternity has descended on them. As earthly figures, they are imbued by the Heaven dropped in them. They are crossed by a severe calm, from beyond this world. These creatures seemed touched by an invisible blessing, not so much due to the symbolical marks that surround them, as due to the manner itself in which they are rendered. The figures are neither naturalistically individualised, nor Platonically idealised, but sophianically transfigured. The creatures seemed to be forms of a transcendence that sprang inside them. The sophianically stylised creatures are manifesting a quietness of a supreme density, being free of any striving, remote from any volitional act; they somehow gain the praise from above and are only static, receptive forms, of reconciliation, of orderliness, and of the higher wisdom.¹²

Hence, the iconographical orthodox canon, though severe, it is filled with a kind of feeling from which the contemporary artist tends to be alienated. From a cultural point of view, this alienation is a great occasion for grief, yet it also is a great occasion for recontextualising the canon in relation with new forms of expression and new concepts.

The complexity of religious experience and the complexity of contemporaneity

Person and expressivity in the Orthodox inspired philosophy

The term 'person' comes from *prosopon*, which refers to the individual face-image of somebody¹³, and it is the source both for an important theological concept and for an important psychological concept, namely that of 'personality'. It is the notion that implies the fact of relatedness, the fact of ek-stasis, the openness towards an alterity and the unique dynamic of a face-to-face relationship. It is the notion that forms the basis for a 'personalist' understanding of humankind, which means the understanding of

¹² Blaga, *The Mioritical Space*, 219–220; my English translation from Romanian.

¹³ Cf. Christos Yannaras, *Person and Eros*, (Anastasia Publishing House, 2000), 21, for more details.

‘this individual’ in its own being. A type of thinking which proposes this concept in its core (The Hypostasis is a Person) and which grants every soul with significance, has by its nature conceptual flexibility for accepting ‘personal’ expressions.

The philosopher and theologian Christos Yannaras, in his volume *Person and Eros*, develops this notion within a network in which he weaves phenomenological, neo-Aristotelian, and Heideggerian methods and concepts with Christian-Orthodox ones, thus creating an ‘Orthodox derived metaphysics’. To actually *be* a person presupposes *to be in relation* with others. The ‘others’ can be either those which are in the world, or persons. Beings are manifesting, they appear *as* something, they show themselves – the etymology of ‘phenomenon’ as that which sparkles, that which is showing –, yet only in a *personal relation*, only in front/in the face of another one which turns its gaze towards them. *The most intimate personal relation that accomplishes this ontological structure is the interpersonal relation*¹⁴. The most important impulse towards another person, towards another ontologically similar to ourselves, yet very different in its ‘personal’ exhibitions and inner cosmos, is *eros*, love¹⁵. This is the reason why in the Orthodox faith, the notion of ‘truth’ does not refer to objective, intersubjective verifiable information, but is itself personified, it refers to a spiritual experience of a person, who ‘sees’ the immaterial reality, and the Person who eminently proved the validity of this type of truth was the Person of Christ: “Truth does not respond to the question *what?* but to the question *who* is he truth? He is a person that has a face. This is why the Church does not only *speak* about truth, but it also *shows it* through the image of Jesus Christ”¹⁶. It is an ‘ethical truth’ – from ‘*ethos*’ –, ostensive definable through a way of life. *This is the type of truth also emanated by the work of art because in art one is expressing the complexity of interpersonal relationships*. Art is the place where all uncertainties, needs, emotional intensities, difficult situations and profound crisis are expressed. Maybe sacred art is the purest type of art, yet it is also the most distant from human concrete life because by its nature it does not concern itself with concreteness. By representing ideals and models, the icon is a schema, is “elementary”, as Blaga wrote. However, human life is not elemental, and the person-to-person relation is a complicated mystery, as is the creation of a personal style in art:

Even though we distinguish the energy or human action from nature and nature from persons, we do not relate any synthesis to nature itself, which means we do not divide and break nature into persons and actions: persons and actions are neither “parts” or “components”, nor “accidents” of nature, but nature’s *mode*

¹⁴ Yannaras, *Person and Eros*, 34.

¹⁵ Yannaras, *Person and Eros*, p. 36.

¹⁶ Uspensky, *The Theology of the Icon in The Orthodox Church*, 59.

of existence. The bringing into personal fulfilment of every act “indivisibly” (*ameros*) and “unitarily” (*henoeidos*) synthesises the entire action of nature, in the same way the person synthesises the whole nature, is the existence of nature. The *how* of the willing act (or of the efficient act, or of the act of loving, or of any other act) naturally synthesises the *what* of the willing act; nature’s possibility of willing exists and it manifests itself only through the alterity of personal volition. Music, painting, sculpture are actions or efficient energies (creative) of human nature, yet they exist only as manifestations of personal alterity, as Mozart’s music, Van Gogh’s painting, Rodin’s sculpture etc. But anyway, it does not exist some other manner of manifestation or of determining the essence or the nature beside its active, working, ek-stasis in the fact of personal alterity.¹⁷

Paraliturgical creations of artists in different fields are examples of personal interpretations of the Tradition, and these types of creations, though not implied in the liturgical ritual, can be seen as an alterity to the consecrated creations, in which the icon is the most symbolically significant. These artists had tried a personalisation of the Christian-orthodox system of ideas and, thus, they had disseminated this spiritual framework within the limits of their craft, feelings, intentions, and originality. The concept of the ‘icon’, in this context, does not refer only to its narrow meaning – namely that of a painted or sculpted object realised after a specific technique –, but can be generalised in such a way as to correspond to its more speculative philosophical and theological meaning, which is that of an archetypal ‘face-image’, the face which cannot be seen with bodily eyes, the most comprehensive sense of ‘image’ as ‘(re)presentation’, as *bringing into presence through material means even that which is only spiritual, nonmaterial*. If we theoretically rethink the fundamental concepts of the canon through this metaphysically generalised perspective, then, by extension, we can indirectly view any type of human creation as an incarnation of the personal energy of man, and as a (re)presentation of God’s blessing that accompanies, fills and guides man’s creative inspiration. As Paul Evdochimov writes:

By being expressive, art can transmit varied contents. Free, it can still coincide with the icon – like a canvas by Rembrandt –, as it can also distance itself from any religious content; in the extreme case, it can move towards the pure fiction of a sign or it can become only an aesthetic object, an object of art for art’s sake, decoration; finally, it can change its nature and cease to be art.¹⁸

¹⁷ Yannaras, *Person and Eros*, 73–74; my English translation from Romanian.

¹⁸ Paul Evdochimov, *The Art of the Icon: A Theology of Beauty*, translated by Grigore Moga and Petru Moga (Bucharest: Meridiane Publishing House, 1992), 81; my English translation from Romanian.

Hence, art is a complex endeavour of expressing deep experiences and needs of humans, among which the religious feeling has an ancestral, privileged place. Secular culture, as religiously disengaged as it may seem, can still be interpreted, from a theological stance, as a mirror of God's 'image' because, necessarily, it must contain elements of theophany. Again, in Evdochimov's formulation: "If every man, made after God's image and semblance, is His living icon, then earthly culture is the icon of the heavenly Kingdom"¹⁹. This is a path on which sacred art and secular art can find points of osmosis and, thus, permit reciprocal influences.

Music and plastic art influenced by the Orthodox Tradition

Music has its place in the Church, yet is as (pre)determined by theological norms as icon painting. Thus, the same line of argument concerning 'tradition' and 'personal expression' can be followed in this case and, furthermore, another observation must be made: the historical assumption made when a rigid system of stylistic constraints is held is the isolation against influences from ideologies and movements of thought specific to every epoch. It is true that sacred art created in the Byzantine shadow was less altered in its forms by these socio-cultural interactions than in the Roman-Catholic lineage, for instance, yet it is only a difference of degree, itself determined by a special cultural, geopolitical and historical context. For instance, in Romania, after the consolidation as a modern national state in the middle of the nineteenth century, there were ample discussions about the necessity of culturally sustaining this achievement through the 'construction' of a national school of composition and a national church music. The 'national church music' had to be, quite paradoxically, at the same time an expression of modernity – because it was meant to argue for 'nationalism', a concept with specific modern connotations – and an expression of 'authenticity' – which means of 'pure', 'autochthonous', 'original' roots. For this purpose, even in the case of church music, education through Occidental techniques and principles became necessary: "The combination between Oriental melodicism and Occidental harmony would reflect, on the one hand, the Eastern roots and the aspirations of a modern European nation, and, on the other hand, the Orthodox character and the noble Latin descentance"²⁰. Hence, although maybe not in an easy, overtly, detectable manner, especially for an untrained ear, Orthodox church music was also influenced by the Occident through music education, as many

¹⁹ Evdochimov, *The Art of the Icon*, 66; my English translation from Romanian.

²⁰ Cf. Costin Moisil, "Constructing a National Church Music" [in Romanian], in *New Histories of Romanian Musics*, edited by Valentina Sandu-Dediu and Nicolae Gheorghită (Bucharest: The Musical Publishing House, 2020), 222; my English translation from Romanian.

icon painters were, actually, trained and, thus, influenced, in occidental techniques.

This brief yet important observation opens one up for accepting the idea that if sacred art was, more or less, influenced by 'external' techniques, principles and concepts, then, also, there must be works of art that contain influences of Orthodox spirituality, in their case this mark of the transcendence being integrated within a complex personal and artistical network. In Romanian music, there are such obvious cases where compositions have a direct relation with the Orthodox tradition, like Paul Constantinescu's 1943 *Easter Byzantine Oratorio* and 1947 *Christmas Byzantine Oratorio* – 'obvious' only in the sense that even the unprofessional musician can trace the Byzantine character, yet, on the other hand, the way Constantinescu conceived these works, as a combination of the Occidental 'oratorio' form and Byzantine contents, is not that obvious –, but there are uncanny situations in which the composer has a more difficult to grasp spiritual and intellectual vision, like Ștefan Niculescu:

If Ștefan Niculescu's theoretical system steams from three cardinal ideational sources, namely the relation between One and Multiple, the theory of musical syntax – with an accent on heterophony –, and the *coincidentia oppositorum* principle, his music has only one assumed spiritual root: the Christian-Orthodox faith. The sphericity, luminosity and clarity of Niculescu's music is due to an authentic religious tremor, which confers it ontological heaviness, sacredness and seriousness, characteristics that are manifesting at the musical level through personal compositional techniques: the clear formal cut, chained in *Ison I* (1971-73) and *Ison II* (1975-76) and in the *Third Symphony – Cantos* (1984), in which he partially flirts with the spectral technique; then, synchrony as an heterophonic form in *Synchrony* (1982), *Duplum II* (1986), *Synchrony II – Hommage à Enesco et Bartók* (1981); the unison as a soteriological compositional strategy in *Hétérophonies pour Montreux* (1986), *Invocatio* (1989), *Axion* (1992), and *Psalms* (1993); complex harmonical mixtures in the *Fourth Symphony – Deisis* (1993) and in the *Fifth Symphony – Litanies* (1995); and also his paradoxical infra-melodical chorales from *Sequentia* (1994) and *Undecimum* (1997-98). In this way, Ștefan Niculescu's music can be assimilated to a music of the lithosphere, with sonorous volcanos and cliffs that are configuring a tectonic of the soul, a petrified prayer floating between earth and sky, with an underlying, striking and redeeming psychic force, as is revealed in his last opus, *Commemoration – A Romanian Requiem* (2007), a twin echo of Krzysztof Penderecki's *Polish Requiem* (1984).²¹

²¹ Dan Dedi, "Romanian Compositional Contributions After 1960" [in Romanian], in *New Histories of Romanian Musics*, edited by Valentina Sandu-Dedi and Nicolae

As Ștefan Niculescu's compositions are pointing, there are unexpected ways in which musical techniques can combine themselves with religious feelings in order to produce something that is uncanonical both from music history's perspective and from sacred art's perspective. More than this, Niculescu's case is especially relevant because he is regarded – maybe surprisingly in the context of this article – as one of the avant-gardists of Romanian music. Usually, avant-gardism is understood as a type of attitude opposed to religiousness, the only manner of reference to religious themes being through critique, satire or even mockery. Yet, it is not always the case. The radically negative approach of religious experience is crucial to transgressive art – which, according to Anthony Julius, has as one of its major elements of identification the radical dismissal of the religious representation, or at least the subversive critique of the veracity and sacrality of these representations²² –, but is not a trait of every avant-gardist conception, and Niculescu's musical thinking is an eminent example for this distinction. Hence, this is the reason why in the title of the present paper I use the term 'transgressions', not because these contemporary creations, like Niculescu's, are 'transgressive' in Julius's full terms, but, because, in a smoother sense, they are an alterity and an alternative to extreme transgressive art while at the same time retaining the characteristic of 'transgression' in its etymological sense, namely as a crossing over the canon's borders; they overrun the established limits and, at the same time, they develop, reinterpret, deepen and integrate the canon within contemporary artistic means. The question, from the theological perspective, is whether or not these creations are inspired, are blessed with the filling of transcendence, are relatable to the liturgy and are, truly, a sign of God's presence in the world? Another question is whether to be truly a sign of God's presence in the world presupposes a definite, rigid and strictly controlled artistic style? It is, I argue, unrealistically in respect to human nature and to the beauty of human's capacity of creation to limit an artist's means of expression

Gheorghită (Bucharest: The Musical Publishing House, 2020), 359; my English translation from Romanian.

²² Cf. Anthony Julius, *Transgressions: The Offences of Art* [in Romanian], translated by Tatiana Șiperco (Bucharest: Vellant Publishing House, 2009), 75–76, the under-chapter in which Julius is describing the way transgressive artists had positioned themselves towards religious themes and representations from the history of Western art; it is true that Julius speaks mostly about plastic art and literature, music being an art form in which these direct, and sometimes even cruel, transgressive gestures are much more improbable, but the common idea of linking any type of 'true' avant-gardism with the transgressive attitude has been extended to all artistic domains because, in many cases, the fact of dismissing religious themes is seen as a dismissal of old and repressive taboos; hence, this link, though in some cases is justified – everything depending upon the subject matter and the way the issue is raised –, as for example in contemporary discussions about feminism and sexuality, in most cases is misunderstanding, intolerance, and scarcity of spirituality; it is a very, conceptually and culturally, delicate matter...

only to old, well defined and canonical accepted techniques, an affirmation which does not sustain that the 'new' is intrinsically good and what is labelled as 'obsolete' is intrinsically bad, but which proposes, as this entire study, a more nuanced, balanced, and, ultimately, correct understanding of this issues. Another example, from Greece, is the music made by Michael Adamis, who is determined in his compositional thinking by his faith, while applying modern and contemporary compositional principles:

In many senses, then Adamis's *oeuvre* is indeed "morphologically at the opposite pole from Western Art". Not only are its spiritual premises derived from the Eastern Christian tradition, but that very fact determines the way the music exists in time or, rather, out of time. There is no "development" of the kind found in the canon of Western art music. If one begins with the premise of the reordering of the cosmos made explicit by the Resurrection of Christ, the vanquishing of death, how can time, and therefore "development" of that time, have any meaning? The endless possibilities and simultaneities of Adamis's poly-metric, polyrhythmic, polymelodic technique may then be the only adequate response. Indeed, such a technique also reflects the basis of Orthodox anthropology as being the individual, man as an ontological hypostasis whose very distinctiveness is the image of God, in communion with his fellow Christians, his potential fulfilled in a way impossible in spiritual isolation. One might, then, view this as an analogue of the individuality of each human being, every one fully assumed and completed by the mystery of the Second Coming.²³

In music there are many other important examples, like Sofia Gubaidulina and Igor Stravinsky from Russia, Alfred Schnittke from Russia and Germany – considered one of the most important postmodern composers –, Sir John Kenneth Tavener from England, and Arvo Pärt from Estonia – one of the pioneers of musical minimalism –, all greatly inspired by Christian-Orthodox feeling and analysed by Ivan Moody in his book *Modernism and Orthodox Spirituality in Contemporary Music*.

Regarding painting, a significant case is the personality of Olga Greceanu, for two reasons: first of all, her art is of a personalised Neo-Byzantine style, and, secondly, she can be remarked both as *an important feminist figure and an important supporter of the Orthodox faith*. Olga Greceanu studied chemistry and plastic arts and wrote important treatises and essays about art and, specifically, about mural painting, proving a serious intellectual capacity and a significant mastering of her art's technique. Among her most impressive realisations are the mural assemblage of the Holy Synod's halls from

²³ Ivan Moody, *Modernism and Orthodox Spirituality in Contemporary Music* (ISOCM, Institute for Musicology of SASA, 2014), 43–44.

Bucharest and the mosaics of Monastery Antim's hallway from Bucharest, yet her portfolio includes many other works, in varied techniques beginning with mural painting and oil painting, until pastel or the painting of stained glass, inspired by religious themes and spread in many locations²⁴. The fact is that all these works are not subject to the 'canon', yet having withal a Byzantine stylistic genealogy. Her book, *Meditations on the Gospels*, is a reminder of her deep, sincere and essentialised relation with the Christian-Orthodox faith and, what is extraordinary in the literal and symbolical sense, this book is actually the collection of her own preaching, held in different places from Bucharest. A woman-preacher is something rare and is still a personal and 'feminist' gesture. Her advocacy for the recognition of women is explicit in the documented fact that she was one of the founders of the interwar association "Women Painters and Sculptors" (1916)²⁵ and in the writing of a book entitled *Unknown Women-Painters* – an especially contemporary study because only since twenty or thirty years ago this kind of research has visibility and impact. Hence, I interpret that Greceanu's case is another one of 'avant-gardism', of transgression, not in the destructive and easy sense, but in the deepening, complex sense, and in the literal sense of 'being ahead' her time.

Dance and the transfiguration of the body

Christian experience is integrally filling the human being, body and soul. Since his beginnings, the human is earth and spirit. Sufferings, joys, beliefs, nostalgies, are all belonging in the same degree to the body and to the soul. The Incarnation is the fact that promised the transfiguration of matter through the transfiguration of the human body, considered the jewel (*kosmos*) of matter. The icon is not abstract, exactly because it presents a physiognomy. The Person is the Face-Image. Dance is the art that elevates, educates and expresses the reality of our soul through the reality of our body. Corporality is valorised in Christianity, and, as such, dance's expressive force should be, simply put, used. As the postmodern choreographer Merce Cunningham said in an interview, a choreography cannot be abstract because the body cannot be abstract. The body has a definite shape and, hence, it is limited by this shape, exactly the philosophical status of the icon: neither fully symbolical, nor fully naturalised. The body simply *is*, and, moreover, it is always the body 'of someone'. The body, when is animated, lively, and, especially, in movement, *has uniqueness and infinitesimally identifies itself with the person*. This is why, through the expressive

²⁴ Cf. Adina Nanu's Preface for Olga Greceanu's book *Meditations on the Gospels* [in Romanian] (Bucharest: Sophia Publishing House, 2010), 7–8.

²⁵ Cf. Ioana Cristea and Aura Popescu, *Ladies of Romanian Fine Arts: who distinguished themselves between the two World Wars*, trilingual album (Bucharest: Independent Company "Official Monitor", 2004), 80.

gesture, the dancer conveys an aura of meaning. *In dance, the human body is metaphysical*, beyond mere physicality, similar with the way in which the body is transposed towards transcendence in the icon. *In dance it exists the possibility of embodying a theology through a relational act*, or, in other words, *our own organism can become the place of epiphany*:

God wants of His Epiphany to be perceived by the whole man. Palamas underlines the idea of human being's integrity in which "even the body has the experience of those that are godly". Beside the *kosmos noetos* (the intelligible world) Tradition puts *kosmos aisthetós* (the sensible world) – the whole domain of the mysteries, of the liturgy, of the icon, and of the experience of God. [...] According to Saint Maximus, the powers of the soul are opened through the *senses*. The soul hears, sees, feels, tastes. This is why are created organs for perception – the senses. The human is a totality, spiritual and sensible at the same time, in the service of the Incarnation. The accomplished senses are sensibly perceiving the Unsensible or, better said, Trans-sensible. Beauty appears as a sparkling of the mysterious depth of being, of this interiority that confesses the intimate bond between body and spirit.²⁶

For example, the Romanian choreographer Ioan Tugearu made a short dance piece inspired by a Greek prayer (interpreted by Simona Șomăcescu) and the body of the dancer was all expression, waving different feelings and intensities according to an inner narrative. This symbolic density of the movement is as powerfull as a painted image, or even more. Another example, though not linked with the Orthodox tradition – this type of choreographyc representation being, unfortunately, extremely rare –, yet compelling for the stunning effect a religiously driven choreography can produce, is the faimous dance-spectacle *Revelations* by Alvin Ailey, in which the technique of classic and modern dance is infused with specific afro-american religious feeling²⁷.

Conclusions

This essay-article was the development of a personal reflection about a critical contemporary topic: the relation between sacred art and modern artistical expressions. Although the central sacred artistic practice from which I begun is icon painting, during the text I exemplified and argued

²⁶ Evdochimov, *The Art of the Icon*, 30; my English translation from Romanian.

²⁷ For example the second scene from this spectacle danced upon a song entitled *Fix me Jesus*, is essentially like a moving icon; the scene is accesible for watching to the following youtube link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4CXk1mQVCgI>.

for modern and contemporary multi-artistical practices, such as music composition and choreography. The icon is, symbolically, a visualisation of the core-values and ideas of the Christian-Orthodox tradition, and any study who commits itself to deal with sacred Orthodox art should, thereby, start from the theology of the 'icon'. The Face-image, the transfiguration of the body, the elemental Byzantine style, the type of spirituality, and the entire aura of the icon is a pictural systematisation of the Orthodox grounding regarding religious experience. My text is specifically concentrated on this cultural tradition due to a personal interest I have in it, yet the general idea of finding a metaphysical, hence conceptual, common ground between sacred art and secular expressions of religious feelings is a crucial investigation with bearing on contemporary arduous cultural problems. In the Christian-Orthodox thinking, concepts such as 'tradition', 'face-image', 'person', 'relation', have great potential for opening a creative dialogue with contemporary philosophies and, from the opposite direction, contemporary artistical techniques and ideas can reveal new depths of religious experience.

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Beyond good and evil, Nietzsche is the atheist version of the Christian ascetic

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Abstract

Nietzsche is one of the most controversial and disputed philosophers, especially because of his association with Hitler and Nazism, but also through his upsetting philosophical decisions that deny the possibility of any morality centered on good and evil as absolute values in themselves. As for his association with Hitler, the sources prove that Nietzsche's philosophy has nothing to do with the justification or support of the nationalist-socialist dictatorship. In addition, any connoisseur of his work can easily see that Hitler does not fit at all with the description of the overman that Nietzsche conceptualizes and identifies with. As for morality, it seems to support a relativization of the values of good and evil until their dissolution, but a closer look can see that the morality of the masters accredited by Nietzsche is one of austerity, balance, respect, honor, dignity, of preferring loneliness to the amusement of the crowd. All these are values that even Christianity proposes. Lonely and incomprehensible, the master, Nietzsche lives a lifestyle similar to Christian ascetics. And just as the philosopher claims that the life of the masters should not be passed through the sieve of ordinary moral evaluations, who could judge in terms of "good" or "bad" the way the austere ones lived?

Keywords: Friedrich Nietzsche, Christian ascetic, overman, morality, values.

Introduction

OVERMAN NIETZSCHE WITH DEEP INTUITIONS and psychological inclinations argues that everything we think, do, the values we adhere to, the philosophy we conceive are nothing but the expression of our inner springs, our desires and failures, our defects or qualities. He gives birth to a philosophy which is the expression of his own frustrations, sufferings, failures, disappointments. Sick and suffering from an illness that seems

to be inherited from his father, Nietzsche has had severe migraines since childhood. Over time, he develops psychiatric disorders from the registry of depression, cognitive decline with dementia and stroke. Despite the widespread opinion that syphilis caused his neurological disease, the conclusions of some contemporary specialists who studied the case are that Nietzsche suffered from cerebral autosomal dominant arteriopathy with subcortical infarcts and leukoencephalopathy (CADASIL).¹ Nietzsche is aware that he will suffer a stroke and is proud that he led an ascetic life during these years, so he no longer needs religion or art, as he confesses in a letter to Malwida von Meysenbug in 1880.²

He is so intellectually appreciated that he is appointed professor at the University of Basel at only 25 years old. In his private life, however, he experiences failure, being rejected by the woman he loved. Lonely and incomprehensible, enduring devastating physical suffering, loss of consciousness, paralysis so that he could no longer speak, manifestations of deep mental slippage towards the end of life, Nietzsche sees the world in terms of his own failures and sufferings, as a hostile one. His cerebral torment is long-term and so intense that he comes to think that thinking means suffering, and suffering is thinking.³ That is why the only thing that can elevate humanity and give meaning to individual life is suffering. Only she is the one who can lead to extraordinary transformations and achievements and only small people run away from her. Through this statement, Nietzsche is closer to the Holy Fathers and Christian ascetics than he would have ever imagined and desired. John Chrysostom says that: "... he allowed the right to be ruled by suffering, so that you could see that even suffering he remained wise"⁴, and the Bible keeps telling us: "Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life..." (James 1: 12) and "...the one who stands firm to the end will be saved." (Matthew 10: 22)

Concerned with what he feels and what others think, Nietzsche studies people and is so fascinated by his discoveries that he comes to believe that psychology should be recognized as the queen of science "...for whose service and equipment the other sciences exist."⁵ His moral work is, rather than a philosophy, a psychological investigation of the man of genius, of the superman, of the self, for Nietzsche thinks of himself as a overman.

¹ Dimitri Hemelsoet, Koenraad Hemelsoet, Daniel Devreese, "The neurological illness of Friedrich Nietzsche", in *Acta neurologica Belgica* (Bruxelles: Acta Medica Belgica, 2008, 108), 9–16.

² Pierre Klossowski, *Nietzsche and the Vicious Circle*, trans. by Daniel W. Smith (London: The Athlone Press, 1997), 19.

³ Klossowski, *Nietzsche and the Vicious Circle*, 24.

⁴ Saint John Chrysostom, *Comment on Job* [in Romanian], trans. Laura Enache (Iași: Doxologia, 2012), 50.

⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil* (Planet PDF, online edition), 40.

The rest in his writings is art, literature, music. He is well known for his musical inclination, he composes *lieds*, pieces for piano, choir and orchestra, he is a very good philologist and connoisseur of great literary works, a very competent critic of literary and musical works. When you read his writings, in order to penetrate the thinking behind the words, you need a terrible effort to get over the countless metaphors, artistic flourishes, jester words and acid irony that abound in his philosophical works. In an opera such as *Thus Spoken Zarathustra* we find, like Michael Allen Gillespie said in the foreword of the book cited,⁶

...is a strenuous experience that requires a multitude of skills as well as great endurance. It is a book that contain philosophical speculation, poetic flights of fancy, prophetic utterance, wild satire, social commentary, and introspective self-examination.

But, above all, behind the mischievous and insulting words, you discover a Nietzsche with a soul so limp and large that it is deeply crushed by the desire to ensure that the world not only survives but progresses. With a terrible sense of history, Nietzsche leaves legacy his unshakable faith in man and humanity.

Contents

The morality he proposes, beyond good and evil, is the attempt to overcome traditional morality, any form of ethics, denying things in themselves the fact of being good or bad. It is not the facts that carry value, but the people. That is why Nietzsche speaks of a morality of masters and a morality of slaves. It challenges ethics to establish rules, principles because they cannot be applied equally to all people. People are not the same and therefore cannot be judged by the same canons. That is why he implicitly challenges the democracy that had been established in Europe and that established equality between people, that wanted and saw people in a uniform way and that, above all, allowed the "crowd" to represent a decision-making force. Dissatisfied that elites are no longer a force, at least not a decisional one, he concludes that democracy is the one that destroys the chance of the human species to evolve, to progress. Those who through their spirit and capacity can bring innovation, progress are the intellectual elites, the true aristocracy that can draw humanity to the highest heights as a species. And, if the elite does not dictate the course of the world, it does not rule, then people have no choice towards evolution. Hence the terrible tirade of slanderous and passionate addresses to the democratic system. He accepts diversity,

⁶ Stanley Rosen, *The Mask of Enlightenment: Nietzsche's Zarathustra* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), vii.

knows it exists, but does not consent to equal treatment for unequal people. Extremist in approaches as a teenager, he completely rejects any form of government that would allow such situations and identifies in democracy the source of this evil. The guilt, however, does not belong to the individual who believes himself equal in all respects with the most spiritualized like him, because he cannot understand more being limited by his own ignorance. The culprit is the system and his morality that make such a society possible. Nietzsche considers slavery, for example, a normal, beneficial form because the plebeians, as he calls it, only have to obey in order not to be allowed to make harmful mistakes for the elites.

But the citadel ruled by the sages is a much older utopia of Plato, whom he sees as an aristocrat corrupted by the mediocre rationality of Socrates. He even suspects Plato's teacher that he is really harming young people, attracting the condemnation of the city and death. The accusation he brings against Plato is not related to the philosophical state, but to the statue of a Supreme Good and an intelligible world, beyond our world, as a kind of God. Convinced evolutionist, Nietzsche does not believe in the immortality of the soul and the existence of another world, nor does he believe in the existence of the soul, explicitly mentioning that spirit and aristocratic intelligence are inherited from ancestors, therefore genetically. You don't become an aristocrat, you are born one.

His audacity to challenge the existence of good and evil in itself is not doubled by the audacity to challenge the existence of good and evil. These moral poles have different valences depending on the person who commits them. Thus, some are allowed to do whatever they feel, and they think they should do, namely masters, and others have the right to do only what their masters allow them to do, namely slaves. But the deeds of the masters are not good in the utilitarian sense. Not because they bring good consequences for others, for themselves, for as many people as possible. It is not the consequences that decide what is a good thing, but even the inner constitution of the master and the good taste of the one who acts. On the other hand, Nietzsche considers good everything that is done for the progress and evolution of mankind, and aristocrats work towards this. Only they have this orientation. Therefore, to judge with the same measure, rule, one and the same deed performed by different people, belonging to different castes by their very origin, is considered by Nietzsche a nonsense.

He classifies historical epochs according to their relation to morality, as proof that he is deeply concerned with understanding what has not worked and reconstructing it from the perspective of life:

It is from the perspective of life that Nietzsche weighs the uses and disadvantages of history in the untimely meditation of that title, for the sake of life that he reevaluates the value of truth

itself at the beginning of *Beyond Good and Evil*, and it is from this same perspective that Nietzsche determines the worth of competing moral systems in *On the Genealogy of Morals* and elsewhere.⁷

In prehistoric times, morality judged the value or non-value of an action by its consequences. This is in fact the pre-moral age of humanity. In the moral age, the value of an action is given by its causes, by its intentions, and thus the first step towards self-knowledge was made. Residing in intentions is, however, "...a prejudice, perhaps a prematurity or preliminariness..."⁸ According to Nietzsche, the period in which he lives, 1844-1900, is on the threshold of an ultra-moral era in which "...the decisive value of an action lies precisely in that which is NOT INTENTIONAL..."⁹, in other words, in our unconscious contents which determine us and from which we cannot evade. Contemporary psychological research on the unconscious seems to seem to agree with him in the sense that our deep content determines our actions and choices more than we might think.

In this perspective, aristocrats do not intentionally make progress for others, but through their very existence they generate it implicitly, unconsciously. In addition, what determines the world in a valuable way is not the instinct of conservation, which is only a consequence, a second-hand causality specific to slaves, but the instinct of will to power. The causality of the will to power is the only reality, it is the world. Classical morality, especially Christian morality, believes in the moral opposition of values, in the existence of good and evil itself as opposite values. But these are inventions meant to justify our own smallness and weakness, just words to reassure us that we have a clear conscience, says Nietzsche. The reason why people in general are compassionate, for example, is not a virtue of the soul, it is only the expression of our inclination towards cruelty, an inclination that we satisfy by leaning on the suffering, misfortune of another. Simple people, slaves, do not make gestures of generosity from the spiritual abundance they possess, they do not even understand the meaning of their gesture, they just conform to established rules and satisfy their vanity.

...morality in Europe at present is herding-animal morality... dwarfing of man to an absolutely gregarious animal (or as they call it, to a man of 'free society'), this brutalizing of man into a pigmy with equal rights and claims, is undoubtedly possible!¹⁰

⁷ Michael Frazer, "The compassion of Zarathustra: Nietzsche on sympathy and strength," *Review of Politics*, ed. Ruth M. (Cambridge University Press, 2006, 68, no. 1), 54.

⁸ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 55.

⁹ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 55.

¹⁰ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 139-144.

We can understand Nietzsche's panic at his own conclusions, and we can understand why he needed to believe in the possibility of an overman. The overman freed from the bondage of the tyranny of good and evil as values in themselves, as absolute and opposite values, can save humanity from its catastrophic decline. A misunderstood genius, unmatched by anyone else around him, Nietzsche was probably deeply marked by the attitudes of his contemporaries. And, because a genius accepts nothing below his value and condition, he prophesies the hope of an overman.

His fundamental belief is that society must be the foundation that allows the elite to rise to its mission, namely a higher existence. We do not have to take into account and care for most of them, but for the few, chosen ones, who can carry the many in history. The morality of slaves is that of people who look with suspicion and envy at the virtues of the powerful, who do not know respect. It is one of the utilities in which only those meant to make the burden of existence easier through compassion are valued, patience, modesty, kindness, solidarity. They allow slaves to benefit, but they also allow them to steal the natural strength and health from their masters.¹¹ Slaves see in the good one easy to fool, so a fool. And they need to fool their masters, to get their appreciation. But they forget who they really are, and that vanity determines them, that is why they come to believe that they really are good. This vanity is an atavism, in Nietzsche's opinion, it comes from ancestral genes, so it cannot be avoided.

By contrast, the aristocratic morality of the masters despises cowards, fearfals, the petty who care only about strict utility, those who humble themselves, flatter and lie. Moral qualifications must be applied to people, then to deeds. The aristocrat respects the strong man, master of himself, who knows how to endure suffering and who is harsh with himself. Proud and self-confident, hostile to altruism, the overman knows how to carry his cross, detests mercy and vanity that belong only to slaves. The one who knows his value does not need confirmations, praises, the tumult of the crowd. The overman is lonely because he is different from others, he is isolated, and the deep suffering that resides in understanding the world and things is what ennobles him. Elites, being chosen and lonely people, are rarely perpetuated by their descendants. The loss, the failure of superior people in aspects related to everyday pragmatism is a rule because the preoccupation of the overman is beyond the direct utility specific to many. Just as the man who comes out of Plato's cave and sees the sunlight loses the tests in competition with those bound in the cave. Those who did not come to the surface are wrong about the shadows on the wall but are more skilled and experienced in handling them even if the shadows are a mistake. To explain who the aristocrats are, Nietzsche, a philologist, finds the origin of the word "noble" connected with Greek εσθλος (esthlos) used by the Megarian poet

¹¹ Frazer, "The compassion of Zarathustra," 65.

Theognis, and that meant “the one that is exists,” “the real one,” “the one who is the truth,” “the one that is truthful,” “the good one.” But the term was originally attributed, says Nietzsche, to blond-haired conquerors. If the aristocrats are the good ones, it is clear that the plebeians, the slaves are the bad ones. In order to etymologically justify this aspect, he says that “malus” in Latin, which means evil, was a term attributed, in fact, to the pre-Aryans, those with black hair, the aborigines who lived in Italy before the Aryans conquerors with blond hair. Hence the association of the noble, good, pure with the blond Aryans who conquer, which the Hitlerite later speculates.¹²

Nietzsche himself refers to the holiness of aristocrats:

The highest instinct for purity places him who is affected with it in the most extraordinary and dangerous isolation, as a saint: for it is just holiness — the highest spiritualization of the instinct in question... The pity of the saint is pity for the FILTH of the human, all-too-human.¹³

True compassion, behold, belongs to the highest spirits.¹⁴ But, the aristocrat does not come to aid the unfortunates because of pity. Mercy is the practice of the slave who wants to obtain the appreciation of others. It comes from the power that flows from his spirit, from the consciousness of an abundance of power that he wants to give himself. Aristocrats are selfish because he who aspires to high goals sees in others either means or brakes. But they are authentic, they recognize the value when they see it and respect it. And, if they manage to reach the top, they can show their kindness to others. Until then, he plays a comedy in front of others in order to resist. In fact, the origin of the term “good” does not even lie in the altruism of the common people, says Nietzsche, they are only those who have been shown goodness. The origin of good is in those who felt that they were doing well what they were doing and that they were good, namely the powerful, the aristocrats, the enlightened minds. The three hundred faces which Nietzsche advises the aristocrats to wear for deceive, mimicking the virtue of the crowd, are meant to enable them to endure the suffering of this world alone. In Christian asceticism, we encounter a similar advice addressed to Christian ascetics by Evagrius Ponticus: “Sometimes it is necessary to pretend that you do not know, because those who spy on you are not able to understand you.”¹⁵ But the true virtues to which Nietzsche urges them to be part of are: boldness, understanding, affection, loneliness.

¹² Friedrich Nietzsche, *The genealogy of morals*, trans. by Horace B. Samuel (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1887), 8–9.

¹³ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 280–281.

¹⁴ Frazer, “The compassion of Zarathustra”, 64.

¹⁵ Evagrius Ponticus, *The practical treaty. The Gnostic* [in Romanian], trans. Cristian Bădiliță, Polirom, Iași, 2003

Conclusion

Despite the fact that Nietzsche says about the meaning of the ascetic ideal for saints that it is a pretext for hibernation, their peace in nothingness and forms of madness, sees in asceticism the great conservative and affirmative forces of life. But not in the asceticism of priests, but in that of elites. The words that define the ascetic ideal are: poverty, humility, chastity, and philosophy, says Nietzsche, would have been impossible in a world without an ascetic cloak. But philosophy, adhering to the ascetic ideal, makes the same mistake as religion: it considers the Truth as a kind of God. For Nietzsche, the truth is only that kind of error without which the human species could not live. The contradiction, however, is not between true and false, but between the “abbreviations of signs” (words) and the “signs” themselves.¹⁶

In the world in which Nietzsche lived, as he experienced it every day, depression was, in his opinion, a frequent and natural consequence. Which seems to be the case today. And the methods derived from the asceticism of priests, in the author’s opinion, were intended to diminishing depression, unhappiness, and emotional excesses: stoically enduring suffering, guilt, hope for a better world and a good reward for good deeds, compassion, mutual help, love of the other one, diligence as occupational therapy etc.¹⁷ But, Nietzsche denies that these mechanisms work, believing that instead of healing them, they made them even worse. Moreover, these are an illusion, an error, because there is no God and no other world. Therefore, the asceticism of priests does not achieve its goal. But neither is it necessary because, in Nietzsche’s opinion, elites do not flee from unhappiness and suffering, but are perfected by them. Suffering ennobles, does not heal. Hence the accusation in slanderous terms brought against Christianity of having destroyed for centuries the chance of mankind to evolve, to spiritual exaltation and inventiveness, to have destroyed the health of the soul. Christianity has created the illusion that we must feel guilty and must heal, when in fact we must accept our unhappiness as our only chance for a better, evolving future. True creation is born from suffering, it requires sacrifice. As for guilt, the elites have nothing to justify to anyone. They know their way is right.

Nietzsche, however, makes an incredible confession in this regard: the ascetic ideal was embraced by all, either by religion or by philosophy, because it gave meaning to human existence. Everyone’s despair comes from the fact that, when questioned, they could not find a purpose in life. The ascetic ideal filled this void. That way, each of us could want something, no matter what. The will is thus saved. It is better to want nothingness than to want nothing. Why is the will so important that Nietzsche accepts the

¹⁶ Klossowski, *Nietzsche and the Vicious Circle*, 44.

¹⁷ Nietzsche, *The genealogy of morals*, 94–178.

ascetic ideal, with all its errors, only because it is the only means by which the will is saved? Because the will is fundamental to human existence, and the will of power is the supreme value of life. The chosen spirits have a great Will of power, and this will is the one that ensures the evolution of the human species. He embraces the ascetic ideal only because it protects the will and, through it, our chance for progress. We see how the author, striving to put aside what he thinks is wrong, but keeping what he considers to be correct, concludes that the life of the authentic people, of the aristocrats, must be lived with asceticism: with the assumption of own suffering, with its acceptance, in poverty because the overman does not care about the worldly things, in isolation because the crowd cannot understand you and the noise of the crowd disturbs you from high goals. In all his deeply psychological explanations and interpretations, it is clear that he relates to himself and justifies himself to himself. He, Nietzsche, is an aristocrat, a genius misunderstood by many, innocent and innovative, aware of his own truth, who does not need to account to the crowd, which accepts and values his suffering, depression.

In the context of this discussion, however, it is less important why Nietzsche adheres to ascetic values. Through the philosophy he developed and the way he lived, he gets closer to Christian ascetics more than he would have liked. His association with Christian ascetics would have been vehemently rejected by the author. But his will does not disturb our perception. Even his separation from God when he declares that the God is dead is only an effect of his complex philosophy. We, living, experimenting, learning, are no longer identical with the one I was yesterday. Likewise, the statement that "God is dead" only opens the soul to its multiple identities, being only a disposition that refers to a certain moment. Died that identity of mine that perceived God in a certain way to make place for another face of the multiple identities we can have. The eternal return makes it possible for everyone to be anyone from the past.¹⁸ Maybe that's why he identified himself with Christ before he died. Although disappointed by people as he knew them, Nietzsche loves the human species so much that he seeks, through his philosophy, a way to ensure his survival, his progress. Christian ascetics nurture the same love but manifest it through prayer. I will make a short description of the master, of the one with the Will to Power, of Nietzsche's aristocrat in order to be able to notice who else we can identify in these words.

The master is wise, isolated, suffers deeply, does not mix with the people, has a supreme goal, has respect, a kind of piety in the face of value and self-imposed things, is one who understands, who has feelings and affection in the human sense, he knows how to be patient, he has purity of soul, spirituality, he does not act utilitarian and in the sense of his own

¹⁸ Klossowski, *Nietzsche and the Vicious Circle*, 57.

advantage, he is harsh in the sense of sober and serious, he is not inclined towards fun, knows fear, but vanquishes it, sees the abyss, but with pride, with eagle's eyes, does not leave personal responsibilities on the shoulders of others, so he has a sense of responsibility and, through this, courage, but not the courage in front of witnesses, but the hermit and eagle courage, is strong spiritually because he carries on his shoulders the whole human universe, but soft, emotionally fragile, open heart, he knows when to be silent and when to speak, is honest, does not expect glory or praise from anyone, is modest, does not claim merits, is selfish, but in the sense that he only takes into account personal values, he has kindness, has noble, supreme goals. We can recognize in this brief description a way of life specific to Christian ascetics.

Christian asceticism is the process of purification and enlightenment, through the action of divine grace and personal spiritual efforts. Asceticism, as a way of life, presupposes austerity and abstinence from whatever is worldly. But in the literature, it is pointed out that profane asceticism, without the purpose of perfection in God, can lead to self-deification, to the pride of the Self, to isolation and depression. Nietzsche lives this phenomenon. In fact, he is an ascetic who has lost his God and, in his absence, deifies himself and, through himself, the Man. Asceticism is not, however, a practice specific only to Christian monks or philosophers. It was an ideal and a practice of life in all the great religions of all times, but also for emperors. A telling example from the 4th century is the pagan emperor Julian, a fierce persecutor of Christians. About him, Ammianus Marcellinus tells that he slept on the ground only spreading a bedding, and sometimes he did not sleep at all, he had a strict sexual abstinence regime:

...he imposed on himself a rigid temperance, and maintained it as if he had been living under the obligation of the sumptuary laws...Julian now forbade pheasants, or sausages, or even sow's udder to be served up to him, contenting himself with the cheap and ordinary food of the common soldiers.¹⁹

Ammianus noted that he followed the example of Alexander, who strove not to be weakened by passions,

...having placed a brazen shell on the ground beneath him, used to hold a silver ball in his hand, which he kept stretched outside his bed, so that when sleep pervading his whole body had relaxed the rigour of his muscles, the rattling of the ball falling might banish slumber from his eyes.²⁰

¹⁹ Ammianus Marcellinus, *Roman History*, ed. by Henry G. Bohn, online ed. (London: 1862), 88–89.

²⁰ Marcellinus, *Roman History*, 89.

Evagrius Ponticus says:

A soul has acquired to be free of passions when it is not tempted by passion, not only in the face of things, but remains indifferent even in the face of their remembrance... The one who is accomplished do not restrains himself and the one without passions do not endure because the endure (is needed) to the one who have passions and the restraint to the one who is troubled... The one who has built up the virtues in himself and is soaked in them no longer remembers the law, nor the commandments, nor the punishment, but says and acts them all as his perfect condition dictates him.²¹

In other words, the one who has reached such a spiritual level has no law, no constraint or self-constraint, is not accountable and is not punished because, internalizing the virtues and the law to such an extent that he identifies himself with them, he becomes the law, becomes the virtue. We recognize in this way of being the Nietzsche's master. The virtues of which Evagrius speaks are wisdom, temperance, love, restraint, manhood (courage), patience, and, above all, justice. We met them above in the description that Nietzsche's philosophy gives to the overman.

The aspect that kept Nietzsche alive, conscious and intellectually active, was his will. In these conditions, how somebody cannot think that the source of life is the will? And because the Will to power did not fit into the same book with God, Nietzsche chose to be original, innovative. Beyond that, however, the man he values and glorifies follows the beaten path of asceticism.

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²¹ Evagrius Ponticus, *The practical treaty. The Gnostic*, 26.

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Frauenseele und weiblicher Geist

Philosophische Prolegomena zu einer neuen (Frauen)Kultur
in den Alice Voinescu und Constantin Noica's
Rundfunkvorträgen der Zwischenkriegszeit

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Abstract

Female Soul and Feminine Spirit. Philosophical Prolegomena to a New (Women) Culture in the Interwar Radio Lectures Alice Voinescu's and Constantin Noica's. The new founded Romanian Radio (1927) invited since 1930 the most important personalities of the Romanian culture to speak in the frame of different radio conferences. Two of these personalities were the philosophers Alice Voinescu (1885-1961) and Constantin Noica (1909-1987). Although they represent two different philosophical orientations (Alice Voinescu as post metaphysical thinker and Constantin Noica as philosopher, who tries, like Heidegger in the German culture, to rebuild metaphysics), the two interwar Romanian thinkers meet each other in some philosophical topics. One of these is the critical manner, how they are thinking about the movement of the emancipation of women in the 20th century. Both of them agree that the female soul and the feminine spirit have not to lose their specific features in the tendency to become active in the frame of the public sphere. In their critical thinking, Alice Voinescu and Constantin Noica meet the philosophical ideas of German philosophers like Georg Simmel and Martin Heidegger.

Keywords: Interwar Romanian Philosophy, Philosophy Radio Lectures, Feminism, Feminine Culture, Alice Voinescu, Constantin Noica.

Alice Voinescu und Constantin Noica: eine zurückhaltende philosophische Begegnung

DER RUMÄNISCHE RUNDFUNK, DER AM 22. DEZEMBER 1927 ALS *Societatea de Difuziune Radiotelefonică din România* gegründet wurde, bot dem rumänischen Publikum zwischen der beiden Weltkriegen an, die Gedanken

den wichtigsten Vertretern der rumänischen Kultur kennenzulernen, indem diese periodisch eingeladen wurden, im Rahmen verschiedener Radiosendungen wie „Universitatea Radio“ (*Die Rundfunkuniversität*), „Ora Tineretului“ (*Die Stunde der Jugend*), „Ora femeii“ (*Die Stunde der Frau*) usw., zu sprechen. Unter diesen Persönlichkeiten befanden sich auch ältere oder besonders jüngere Vertreter der rumänischen Philosophie. Insbesondere aktiv im Rahmen der kulturellen Radiosendungen des Rumänischen Rundfunks waren zwei der wichtigsten Denker des 20. Jahrhunderts in Rumänien: Alice Voinescu (1885-1961) und Constantin Noica (1909-1987).

Alice Voinescu studierte Philosophie in Bukarest, Paris, Leipzig und Marburg und gehörte zu dem Kreis der Schüler der neukantianischer Philosophen Hermann Cohen und Paul Natorp. Sie promovierte in Paris bei Lucien Lévy-Bruhl (1857-1939) mit einer Dissertation über den von ihr gut bekannten Neokantianismus der Marburger Schule. Sie war die erste Rumänin überhaupt, die im Bereich der Philosophie promovierte (Sorbonne 1913)¹. Darüber hinaus gehörte sie zu dem Kreis der Persönlichkeiten der rumänischen Kultur, die während ihres Lebens am meisten an den Debatten der europäischen kulturellen Zwischenkriegszeitöffentlichkeit teilnahmen. Sie wurde in diesem Sinne jährlich an den Versammlungen der europäischen Intellektuellen in Pontigny (*les décades de Pontigny*) zusammen mit Schriftstellern wie André Gide, Roger Martin du Gard, André Maurois, Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, André Malraux, Paul Valéry oder philosophischen Denkern wie Jean-Paul Sartre, Raymond Aron, Gaston Bachelard, Nikolaj Berdiaew, Vladimir Jankélévitch usw. eingeladen².

Constantin Noica gehörte zu dem Kreis der Schüler des Lebensphilosophen Nae Ionescu (1890-1940). Er studierte in Bukarest und Paris und während seines Aufenthalts in Berlin als Referent für Philosophie im Rahmen des Rumänisch-Deutschen Instituts (1940-1944) hörte er in Freiburg die Vorlesungen Martin Heideggers.

Obwohl es zwischen den beiden einen grossen Alterunterschied gab (Constantin Noica war 24 Jahre jünger als Alice Voinescu), werden sie zu dem kulturellen antikommunistischen Widerstand nach dem zweiten Weltkrieg zusammen gehören. Alice Voinescu wurde im Jahre 1948 aus dem Bukarester Königskonservatorium, wo sie Ästhetik und Theatergeschichte unterrichtete, ausgeschlossen, danach in 1951 eineinhalb Jahre verhaftet, um später in einem ostrumänischen Dorf (Costești) bis 1954 verbannt zu sein. Seinerseits wurde Constantin Noica zwischen 1949-1958 in der wala-

¹ Die Dissertation von Alice Voinescu wurde nur 86 Jahre nach ihrer Verteidigung aus dem Französischen ins Rumänische übersetzt. Siehe Alice Voinescu, *Kant și Școala de la Marburg* [Kant und die Marburger Schule], rum. Üb. und Einführung von Nestor Ignat (București: Editura Eminescu, 1999).

² Siehe Heinrich J. Dingeldein, „Alice Steriade Voinescu – Gemeinschaft der Gedanken“, *Marburger Uni-Journal*, Nr. 32 (April 2009): 47-48.

chischen Provinzstadt Câmpulung-Muscel verbannt und dannach zwischen 1958-1964 verhaftet.

Die beiden lernten sich persönlich anlässlich eines Vortrags kennen, den Noica am 24. Februar 1940 im Rahmen der Freien Universität in Bukarest hielt. Die gegenseitigen Eindrücke der beiden waren nicht besonders günstig. In ihrem berühmten *Tagebuch*, das nur posthum im Jahre 1997 veröffentlicht werden konnte, erzählt Alice Voinescu, wie beeindruckt sie wurde von der Diskrepanz zwischen dem sanften Ausdruck des Philosophen und seinem Kulturfanatismus, der in seinen Augen *farouche* leuchtete³.

In seinem *Philosophischen Tagebuch*, das 1944 im Verlag Publicom in Bukarest erschien, schreibt Constantin Noica, daß er im Denken von Alice Voinescu, deren Name als A.V. abkürzt wird, manchmal Akzente der Mittelmäßigkeit entdeckt. Der Grund dafür findet Noica darin, daß die Bukarester Philosophin als Professorin zu viel Kontakt zu mittelmäßigen Menschen gehabt habe⁴. Darüber hinaus wirft Noica der Alice Voinescu vor, daß sie Gefahr läuft, ihr Geist von der Seele, d.h. von Güte und Tränen, erstickt zu werden⁵.

Trotz dieser zurückhaltenden gegeseitigen Haltung, hatten die beiden philosophischen Denker Vieles gemeinsam. Vor allem vereinte sie ihre radikale Option für Kultur, Geist und freies Denken. Trotz der Besonderheit von jedem von ihnen, die vielleicht eine blaße Nuance von seelischer Mittelmäßigkeit oder geistlichem Fanatismus beinhalten kann, begegneten sich den beiden schon vor der kommunistischen Repression in zahlreichen philosophischen Pointen. Das *Tagebuch* von Alice Voinescu offenbart

³ Alice Voinescu, *Jurnal* [Tagebuch], Auflage von Maria Ana Murnu, Vorwort von Alexandru Paleologu (Iași: Polirom, 2013), 2 Bände, hier: Bd. 1, 227-228: „Ieri seară, conferința lui Noica. Mi-a plăcut mult: structură solidă, convingere și poezie. Sf. Augustinondoyantdevie. Am simțit toată primejdia pentru suflete mai neclare; le poate da libertăți de care nu știu să se folosească sau se folosească sau se folosesc rău. Un tic la gură, mușcă tot timpul buzele; m-a izbit expresia, cu totul deosebită de expresia lui foarte blindă. Cum vorbea, lucea ceva *farouche* în ochi și mușcătura buzelor m-a frapat. Fizionomia era cu totul schimbată. Am înțeles ce spunea Dupront: e fanatic. Dar acest fanatism îmi pare totuși suprapus. Din natură e un reflectat. Cine poate decide despre natura unui om?”

⁴ Constantin Noica, *Jurnal filosofic* [Philosophisches Tagebuch], 2. Auflage (București: Humanitas, 1990), 71: „Mă gândesc la A.V. De ce are uneori ecouri de mediocritate uneori? Poate pentru că a comunicat prea mult cu oamenii mediocri. I s-au pus întrebări mediocre și a trebuit să le răspundă. Calitatea se păstrează numai prin întrebări de calitate, sau măcar de sinceritate. Ceea ce macină spiritul sunt întrebările grosolane. Nimeni nu rezistă: cade în profesorat”.

⁵ Noica, 104-105: „Acum înțeleg ce e cu A.V.: e un spirit sufocat de suflet. Întâlnesc pe viu tensiunea aceasta a filosofiei contemporane dintre spirit și suflet. Unul din cele mai mari spirite pe care le-am cunoscut, iată-l infectat de bunătate, de lacrimi, de suflet. Iată-l gata să consimtă societăților de binefacere. Cine nu simte tot ce e aspru, egoist, crud în spirit, nu trăiește la nivelul lui. Oamenii mari nu sunt buni – iată adevărul. Nu spun că sunt răi, căci s-ar diminua atunci la fel de mult. Dar nu sunt buni. Căci nu sunt pentru ceilalți. Sunt pentru spiritul din ei”.

unendlich mehr Geist als Noica ahnte, während Constantin Noica sich mit seelischen Problemen wie Frauenkultur und dem weiblichen Geist manchmal beschäftigte.

Ein Begegnungspunkt der beiden Philosophen ist z.B. die kritische Rezeption von Martin Heidegger. Wenn Noica dem Autor des *Sein und Zeit*, im Geiste des moralphilosophischen Denkens von Alice Voinescu den Mangel an einer Ethik vorwirft⁶, entdeckt die Schülerin von Hermann Cohen und Paul Natorp im Heideggers Hauptwerk ein riesiger Teufelskreis. Im Zeitalter des nachmetaphysischen Denkens bemühe sich der Freiburger Philosoph, die Kategorie „Sein“ unbedingt ontologisch zu machen. Als Schülerin der Marburger neukantianischen Schule sieht Alice Voinescu in dem heideggerschen Unternehmen ein Affront gegen das Beweisen Kants, daß die Metaphysik als Wissenschaft nicht möglich sei. Es handle sich in diesem Sinne um einen unerlaubten Übergang von *Sein/On* als Kategorie zu der ontologischen Wirklichkeit⁷. Als postmetaphysische Philosophin im Sinne des kritischen kantianischen Denkens wäre wahrscheinlich Alice Voinescu, falls sie bis spät in den 80-er Jahren gelebt hätte, unangenehm beeindruckt von dem Versuch ihres jüngeren Kollegen, die Ontologie wieder aufzubauen⁸.

Letztendlich hat die Zurückhaltung in der Begegnung dieser zwei wichtigen Vertreter der rumänischer Philosophie nicht mit einer persönlicher Abneigung oder mit einer politischen oder kulturellen Distanzierung zu tun. Im Gegenteil dazu scheint es, daß jenseits aller zurückhaltenden gegenseitigen Rezipierung eine kulturelle und persönliche Sympatie bestanden zu haben. Es handelt sich eher darum, daß die beiden zu zwei verschiedenen philosophischen Welten gehörten. Das Denken Alice Voinescus ist überzeugt und dezidiert nachmetaphysisch, während Constantin Noica gibt

⁶ Constantin Noica, *Jurnal de idei* [Gedenktagebuch], (Bucureşti: Humanitas, 1991).

⁷ Alice Voinescu, *Jurnal*, Bd. 1, 391: „Dragul meu, citii acum Heidegger: *Sein und Zeit* – simt că mi se învântește în cap ca o obsesie *Sein* scris în 10 000 de accepții! Poate că m-am prostiut eu, dar asemenea pisălogeală mi se pare „apă în puiă” și cum ai spune tu: onanism intelectual! Repet: poate sunt eu impermeabilă la asemenea probleme metafizice, dar mai lesne cred că neamțul ăsta vrea să adâncească ceea ce nu are o a treia dimensiune! Categoria *Sein* el vrea cu tot dinadinsul să o facă ontologică. Săracul Kant! De ce s-a mai căznit el să arate că asemenea speculații sunt întoarcere stearpă într-un cerc! Aveam tot timpul impresia că văd un câine care se învântește să-și prindă coada. Degeaba le-a demonstrat Kant că metafizica nu e posibilă ca știință, ei îi dau înainte. Bergson? El urmărește devenirea. Heidegger, din câte văzui, urmărește sensul lui *Sein*. Îl preocupă ce e anterior ființelor existente. *Das Sein am Seienden*. Oare să fie cercetarea platonice? Dar Platon vorbește parcă de toate ideile ca de *On*, adică *Sein* e tocmai atributul ideii, adică însuși caracterul gândirii pure. Nu înseamnă asta că *Ontos* – *On* e de natură ideală, nu reală chiar dacă nu e obiect de cercetare științifică, filosofică? H. face din categorie realitate existențială. Voi încerca mâine să citesc. E greu fiindcă e chinuit și mai ales fiindcă bate apa în puiă, nu poate ieși nimic din neant, doar când escamotează ceva”.

⁸ Constantin Noica, *Devenirea într-o ființă* [Das ins Sein Werden], Bd. 2: *Tratat de ontologie* [Abhandlung der Ontologie], (Bucureşti: Ed. Științifică și Enciclopedică, 1981).

nicht wie Martin Heidegger oder Lucian Blaga in der rumänischen Kultur die Hoffnung auf, die Metaphysik wieder ins Leben zu rufen. Unter diesem Gesichtspunkt gehört Alice Voinescu bedingungslos zu der philosophischen Postmoderne, trotz ihres christlich geprägten ethischen Ansatzes. Im Gegenteil erweist sich der kalt vernünftige Constantin Noica letzten Endes als Nostalgiker oder wenigstens als ein philosophischer Vertreter eines europäischen Donquijotismus im 20. Jahrhunderts.

Frauenkultur zwischen Seele und Geist. Das Verstehen der Frau und ihren kulturellen und philosophischen Beitrag in den Rundfunkvorträgen von Alice Voinescu (1933-1943) und Constantin Noica (1936-1943)

Trotz aller gegenseitigen Vorbehalte und jeder philosophischen Orientierungsunterschiede treffen sich die beiden Zwischenkriegszeitendenker einerseits in der Pflege einer authentischen Argumentationskultur und andererseits in der Sorge für die kulturelle Bildung ihrer Schüler und Diszipel in einem von dem totalitären Regime erstickten Rumänien. Beide Philosophen waren in verschiedenen Zeitaltern von einem Kreis von treuen Jüngern umgeben - Alice Voinescu von ihren Konservatoriumstudierenden in den 50-er Jahren und Constantin Noica von seinen Diszipeln in Păltiniș in den 70-er und 80-er Jahren.

Auf eine unerwartete Weise bindet aber die beide elitären Geister die Sorge, ihre Gedanken der philosophisch uneingeweihten Öffentlichkeit zu vermitteln. Alice Voinescu und Constantin Noica waren zwei der aktivsten kulturellen Vorträger beim Radio in der rumänischen Zwischenkriegszeit. Zwischen 1933 und 1943 hielt Alice Voinescu über 26 Vorträge im Rumänischen Rundfunk⁹. Seinerseits hielt Constantin Noica 24 Radiovorträge in dem Zeitraum zwischen dem 14. Oktober 1936 und 25. November 1943¹⁰. Viele dieser Vorträge der beiden Philosophen wurden im Rahmen der Radiosendung Universitatea Radio (*Die Rundfunkuniversität*) gehalten, die vom Soziologieprofessor Dimitrie Gusti, dem Präsidenten des Aufsichtsrates des Rumänischen Rundfunks, am 3. März 1930 initiiert wurde. Diese Sendung, die am längsten laufende Radiosendung in der

⁹Doina Mândru, „O încercare de terapie sufletească la radio“ [Ein Versuch der seelischen Therapeutik im Rundfunk], in Alice Voinescu, *Din cauzele crizei sufletești de azi. Conferințe la Radio: 1933-1943* [Zu den Gründen der heutigen seelischen Krise. Rundfunkvorträge: 1933-1943], (București: Casa Radio, 2016), 5-8.

¹⁰ Andrei Dimitriu, „Constantin Noica la Radio“ [Constantin Noica im Rundfunk], in Constantin Noica, *21 de conferințe radiofonice: 1936-1943* [21 Rundfunkvorträge: 1936-1943], (București: Humanitas, 2000), 5-9.

Geschichte des Rumänischen Rundfunks gewesen ist, wurde täglich von Montag bis Freitag von 19 bis 20 Uhr ausgestrahlt. Die Sendung am Freitag Abend wurde im allgemeinen der Philosophie und der Theologie gewidmet.

Alice Voinescus Radiovorträge haben im allgemeinen einen ethischen, ästhetischen, pädagogischen oder psychologischen Inhalt. Sie berichtet zum Beispiel am 19. November 1934 über den ersten Kongress von Sozialethik, der im selben Jahr in Budapest stattfand, und kümmert sich um die moralische Bildung und die Erziehung der jungen Generation und insbesondere der Frau im Kontext einer männlich geprägten Gesellschaft. Gleichzeitig spricht sie am Radio über die Werke wichtiger kulturellen Persönlichkeiten wie Paul Claudel (am 27. September 1933), Nicolae Grigorescu (28 Juni 1934), Hans Christian Andersen (am 5. August 1941) oder Goethe - in ihrer Vortrag „Faust, un mare neliniștit“ (*Faust, ein großer Rastloser*) am 13. Oktober 1942.

Constantin Noica beugt sich hauptsächlich auf existenzialistische, bzw. kultur- und religionsphilosophische Fragen. In diesem Sinne trägt Noica über das Thema der Auferstehung in der Literatur und Philosophie am 20. April 1938 oder über die religiöse Ekstase am 26. Dezember 1941 vor, aber auch über die „Organisierung des Schmerzens“ (am 21. Juli 1940) oder die „Gründe der Langeweile“ (am 24. September 1938). Philosophen wie Descartes oder Kant, widmet er gleichermaßen besondere Aufmerksamkeit.

Ein weiterer Punkt, in dem Alice Voinescu und Constantin Noica sich überraschenderweise treffen, ist die Betrachtung des Themas der Bedingtheit der Frau in der gegenwärtigen kulturellen, aber auch sozialen und politischen Welt. Wenn ein solches Thema im Fall Alice Voinescus als Frau und Denkerin, die sich für ethische, soziale, pädagogische und psychologische Fragen interessiert, im großen Masse zu erwarten ist, überrascht die Beschäftigung Noicas mit einer solchen Problematik.

Am 29. Oktober 1938 hält der Bukarester Philosoph im Rahmen der schon erwähnten Radiosendung „Universitatea Radio“ (*Die Rundfunkuniversität*) den Vortrag „Spiritul feminin – factor de progres“ (*Der weibliche Geists Fortschrittsfaktor*). Von Anfang an, situiert sich Noica auf eine frauengünstige Position, in dem er dezidiert gegen die patriarchalische These protestiert, „daß die Frauen der höchsten Kultur nicht würdig seien“¹¹. Die richtige Frage betreffe nicht die unbestreitbaren „Rechte des weiblichen Geistes“¹² oder die gesetzliche Gleichheit der Frauen und Männer, sondern die, ob die Frauen etwas Neues in der heutigen Gesellschaft wirklich bringen, bzw. ob der Frauengeist eine „neue Kultur versprechen“¹³ kann. Constantin

¹¹ Constantin Noica, „Spiritul feminin – factor de progres“, [Der weibliche Geist als Fortschrittsfaktor], in *21 de conferințe radiofonice: 1936-1943* [21 Rundfunkvorträge: 1936-1943], 79-85, hier: 79.

¹² Noica, 79.

¹³ Noica, 79.

Noica beantwortet diese Fragen anhand eines Rückgriffs auf eine Studie des deutschen Philosophen und Soziologen Georg Simmel (1858-1918) mit dem Titel „Weibliche Kultur“¹⁴, die zuerst 1902 veröffentlicht wurde.

In dieser Schrift unterscheidet Simmel zwischen dem männlichen Geist, der eine *objektive* Kultur schafft, nämlich die Kultur, so wie sie traditionellerweise verstanden wird, und dem weiblichen Geist, dem der deutsche Philosoph zugesteht, fähig zu sein, eine eigene Kultur zu schaffen, die aber die männliche Objektivität nicht erreichen kann. Der Grund dafür habe mit dem Spezifikum des Frauengeistes zu tun, der nicht sosehr analytisch und objektiv ist, sondern subjektiv und „von dem Ganzen bestimmt“¹⁵. Deswegen reduziert Simmel die Grenzen einer weiblichen Kultur „auf die beiden Gebiete weiblicher Leistungen (...), die im großen Stile kulturschöpferisch sind oder dafür gelten: das Haus und der Einfluß der Frauen auf die Männer“¹⁶. Das ist aber keine Kultur im eigentlichen Sinne des Wortes. Wenn Kultur hauptsächlich Ausdruck der Objektivität ist, dann kann der weibliche Geist nach Simmel gar keine neue Kultur anbieten.

Constantin Noica stimmt Georg Simmels Anschauung bis zu einem Punkt zu: der männliche und der weibliche Geist unterscheiden sich so wie der deutsche Philosoph beschreibt. Es kann auch sein, daß „Simmel vielleicht recht hat“¹⁷ und der weibliche Geist nicht eine neue Kultur als solche anbieten kann. Trotzdem betont der rumänische Philosoph, daß der Frauengeist imstande sein kann und muss, zur Schöpfung eines neuen Menschentyps beizutragen¹⁸. Es sei unmöglich, daß der männliche und der weibliche Geist sich nicht „in einigen Bestrebungen begegnen und für das Erreichen einiger Ideale zusammenarbeiten“¹⁹. Im Unterschied zu unserem überwiegend von der Objektivität des männlichen Geistes bestimmten Kultur könnte der Frauengeist ungeahnte Kulturformen ins Leben rufen, die von der Vollständigkeit seines integrativen Spezifikums bezeichnet werden. Die gegenwärtige Welt braucht diesen integrativen Beitrag, den insbesondere der weiblichen Geist leisten kann. In diesem Sinne betont Constantin Noica, daß die Bedeutung des Konzepten „Mensch“ nicht auf die des Wortes „Mann“ reduziert werden kann. Die Vorherrschaft

¹⁴ Georg Simmel, *Weibliche Kultur*, in *Gesamtausgabe*, Band 7: *Aufsätze und Abhandlungen 1901-1908*, herausgegeben von Rüdiger Kramme und Angelika Rammstedt, (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, Otthein), 64-83. Der Text wurde in dem Sammelband Georg Simmel, *Philosophische Kultur*, Philosophisch-soziologische Bücherei, Band XXVII, (Leipzig: Werner Klinkhardt, 1911) 278-319. Rumänische Übersetzung: Georg Simmel, *Cultura filozofică*, rum. Üb. von Nicolae Stoian und Magdalena Popescu-Marin (Bucureşti: Editura Humanitas, 1999).

¹⁵ Noica, *Spiritul feminin – factor de progres*, 80-81.

¹⁶ Georg Simmel, „Weibliche Kultur“, in *Philosophische Kultur*, [Philosophisch-soziologische Bücherei, Band XXVII], (Leipzig: Werner Klinkhardt, 1911), 306.

¹⁷ Noica, *Spiritul feminin – factor de progres*, 83.

¹⁸ Noica, 83-84.

¹⁹ Noica, 84.

der männlichen Eigenschaften habe nach Constantin Noica zu einer komplexen geistigen Pathologie geführt: „zu einer verrückten Spezialisierung in der Ordnung der Zivilisation; zu der Tyrannei der angeblich objektiven Werte in der Kultur; zum Verlust der Persönlichkeit in der Moral“²⁰. Das Endergebnis dieses pathologischen Zustands war die Entpersonalisierung der modernen Welt, die von dem unbeseelten Ding in Besitz genommen wurde und zur Entartung des menschlichen Daseins zu einem leblosen Automat führte²¹.

Die Schlußfolgerungen, die Noica am Ende seines Vortrags zieht, entfernen ihn sensibel von Simmels Anschauung und nähert ihn dem späteren antitechnologischen Diskurs Heideggers an. Der Tyrannei der technischen Objektivität setzt der Bukarester Philosoph die Bildung des heutigen Menschen entgegen, die durch das Einwirken des Frauengeistes in unserer Welt eintreten kann. Darin bestehe die Mission des weiblichen Geistes in der Gegenwart und als solche sei sie eine wahre Wohltat für unsere entfremdete Welt²².

Noicas Betonung der Bildungsfunktion des weiblichen Geistes trifft völlig den viel entfalteteren Diskurs Alice Voinescus über die Frau und ihre kulturelle und gesellschaftlich-politische Rolle in einer Welt, die sie auch als entfremdet beschreibt. Die Schülerin von Hermann Cohen, Paul Natorp und Lucien Lévi-Bruhl macht von dem Thema der Rolle der Frau in der gegenwärtigen Welt einen der Schwerpunkte ihres philosophischen Denkens. Als philosophierende Frau beschäftigt sie sich mit zahlreichen Aspekten der weiblichen Bedingtheit im 20. Jahrhundert von der Erziehung der Frau²³ und der typischen Frauenarbeit²⁴ zu ihrer Präsenz in der Öffentlichkeit²⁵.

²⁰ Noica, 84.

²¹ Noica, 84.

²² Noica, 85.

²³ Alice Voinescu, „Orientări în educația femeii“ [Orientierungen in der Ausbildung der Frau], in *Din cauzele crizei sufletești de azi. Conferințe la Radio: 1933-1943* [Zu den Gründen der heutigen seelischen Krise. Rundfunkvorträge: 1933-1943], 34-39 (die nächsten Titeln und Seiten beziehen sich auf denselben Sammelband); Alice Voinescu, „Sentimentul pudoarei“ [Das Gefühl der Schande], 67-72; Alice Voinescu, „Alegerea unei cariere pentru fete“ [Die Werdegangsauswahl für die Mädchen], 73-79; Alice Voinescu, „Cuvânt către tineretul feminin“ [Rede an die weibliche Jugend], 119-122; Alice Voinescu, „Cuvânt către femei“ [Rede an die Frauen], 123-126.

²⁴ Alice Voinescu, „Din psihologia femeii de azi. Femeia și munca“ [Zur Psychologie der heutigen Frau. Die Frau und die Arbeit], 60-66; Alice Voinescu, „Rolul femeilor intelectuale în familie și în gospodărie“ [Die Rolle der intellektuellen Frauen in der Familie und in dem Haushalt], 87-92; Alice Voinescu, „Rolul de azi al asistentei“ [Die heutige Rolle der Sozialassistentin], 139-142.

²⁵ Alice Voinescu, „Femeia în funcțiunile statului“ [Die Frau in den Staatsämtern], 80-88; Alice Voinescu, „Femeile în apărarea țării“ [Die Frauen in der verteidigung des Landes], 93-98.

Der repräsentativste Vortrag in dieser Serie ist „Din psihologia femeii de azi. Femeia și munca“ (Zur Psychologie der heutigen Frau. Die Frau und die Arbeit), den sie am 17. Juli 1935, drei Jahre vor dem oben vorgestellten Vortrag Constantin Noicas, im Rahmen derselben Radiosendung „Universitatea Radio“ hielt. In dieser Rede der Bukarester Konservatoriumsprofessorin werden dieselben Gedanken getroffen, die drei Jahre später in den Text Noicas vorkommen werden. Obwohl Alice Voinescu sich nicht namentlich auf Georg Simmel bezieht, stimmt sie im Grunde genommen wie seinen jüngeren Bukarester Kollegen mit den Feststellungen des deutschen Philosophen überein. Genauso wie Georg Simmel dreißig Jahren vorher, findet sie heraus, wie unangemessen und unreflektiert die Emanzipationsversuche der sich noch am Anfang befindenden Frauenbewegung sind. Alice Voinescu identifiziert zwei Hauptmerkmale des Zwischenkriegszeitfeminismus.

Einerseits handelt es sich um einen stürmischen, fast gewaltsamen Drang, aus der Passivität der Zustimmung herauszukommen. Dieser Drang stimmt aber nicht mit der weiblichen Sensibilität überein, sondern ist eher typisch männlich. Es handelt sich auf diese Weise um die Entfremdung der Frau von sich selbst durch eine Art von Vermännlichung²⁶.

Andererseits beobachtet die rumänischen Philosophin die Bedürfnis der modernen Frau, aus ihrer eigentlichen Subjektivität herauszugehen. Die Konsequenzen dieses zweiten Drangs, der als „schwer und schmerzhaft“²⁷ von der Frauenseele empfunden wird, sind erstens eine sehr fremde Gedankenunnachgiebigkeit und zweitens eine genauso fremde Bedürfnis nach Objektivität²⁸. Beide sind aber keine Charakteristika des weiblichen Geistes, sondern des männlichen.

Trotz dieser scharfer Kritik, in der Alice Voinescu mit Georg Simmel und dem späteren Constantin Noica übereinstimmt, lehnt die Bukarester Denkerin nicht die Emanziationstendenzen der gegengärtigen Frauen ab. Die Überwindung der traditionellen weiblichen Passivität und der Reduzierung der Frauenseele auf Subjektivität muß stattfinden, aber nicht auf eine jede Weise, um den Preis der Entfremdung der Frau von ihrer eigenen Natur. Das Ziel der Frauenemanzipation müsste nicht das Erreichen eines Aktivismus und einer Objektivität männlicher Art sein, sondern die Verwirklichung einer originellen Synthese in Eintracht mit dem weiblichen Geist, die Alice Voinescu „sentimentale Objektivität“²⁹ nennt.

Auf diese Weise wird sich die Frau ihre Mission in der heutigen Welt erfüllen, ohne damit auf ihr Spezifikum verzichten zu müssen. Darüber

²⁶ Alice Voinescu, „Din psihologia femeii de azi. Femeia și munca“ [Zur Psychologie der heutigen Frau. Die Frau und die Arbeit], 60-66, hier: 61-62.

²⁷ Voinescu, 63.

²⁸ Voinescu, 63-64.

²⁹ Voinescu, 66.

hinaus wird eine solche neue Frauenkultur wesentlich dazu beitragen, die von sich selbst entfremdete Welt zu humanisieren und ihr wieder eine Seele zu geben. In diesem Fazit sind sich die beiden Philosophen Alice Voinescu und Constantin Noica eins.

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