

2. NAMING AND THINKING GOD IN ORTHODOXY

Abstract

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



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

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

Naming God in the light of Orthodox Theology and Spirituality

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Dynamics of Thinking God

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

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

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

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

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

Concrete Forms of Naming and Thinking God in Orthodoxy ***Reading the Holy Scripture***

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Praying, Naming and Thinking God

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Confessing God in our times

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

Conclusions

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

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

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