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KNOWLEDGE OF GOD IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

ROOTS

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EDITORIAL

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The Dynamic Perspectives of the Knowledge of God in the Old Testament

The Dynamic Perspectives of the Knowledge of God in the Old Testament

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In the Old Testament, the knowledge of God is a central concept with a complex dimension embracing theological, moral and cultic aspects. It is in this context that the prophet Hosea, one of the small but theologically important prophets, uses the expressions "da'at Elohim" and "da'at YHWH" to describe the relationship between God and his people. These rare and deeply significant expressions reveal a unique perspective on divine knowledge within Old Testament religion.

First, the expression "da'at Elohim", which occurs twice in the Book of Hosea (4:1-6 and 6:6) and the Proverbs of Solomon 2:5, is particularly rare in the Old Testament. This rarity raises questions about the specificity of the divine names used and their associated meanings. The term "Elohim", generally used to designate "God" in a broader sense, occurs in various contexts but is rarely used as a direct object of the verb *yad* („to know"). In most cases where "Elohim" is used in this structure, it refers to the foreign deities of the pagan peoples. On the other hand, the expression "da'at YHWH" is even less common, occurring only three times in the book of Hosea (2:22; 5:4; 6:3). This rarity raises the question of whether the difference in the use of the divine names – "Elohim" and "YHWH" – indicates a difference in the meanings attributed to divine knowledge or whether these expressions, although similar, may have distinct connotations.

To understand this subtlety, it is essential to consider the concept of "knowledge" in the context of Old Testament religion. Knowledge of God is not merely an accumulation of theoretical or intellectual information but involves a deep and personal relationship with the Divine. W. Eichordt, a leading biblical scholar, offers a definition which captures the essence of this concept: knowledge of God is the acceptance of the revealed divine essence and the assumption of the divine will in a proper spiritual

existence, a life which is permeated and determined by the epiphanic divine reality (*Theologie des Alten Testament* 1948, 178). This perspective emphasises that the knowledge of God in the Old Testament is inseparable from divine revelation and the covenant relationship between God and his people. It is not mere intellectual knowledge, but one that transforms the life of the believer, determining his behaviour and guiding his existence.

As far as theological debates about the nature of this knowledge are concerned, there are two main perspectives. One group of theologians, represented by J. Wellhausen, K. Marti, J. Pedersen, G. Ostborn and A. Weiser, holds that the knowledge of YHWH is primarily a priestly knowledge of the Torah, which belongs to priests and religious leaders. They are responsible for teaching the people this knowledge, preserving and transmitting the sum of cultic-ritual processes. In this view, the knowledge of God is closely linked to the observance of the law and the fulfilment of religious rituals, which maintain the covenant between God and Israel.

Theologians such as W. Reis, M. Novack and R. Bultmann, on the other hand, argue that knowledge of Elohim has a universal moral dimension, being associated with virtues such as *emet* ("truth") and *hesed* ("loyalty"). In this sense, knowledge of Elohim is not only a recognition of divine authority but also implies a deep moral commitment, which includes respect for truth and loyalty. The prophet Hosea emphasises that these virtues are fundamental to covenant-keeping, while their absence leads to a serious breach of covenant obligations.

It is important to note that, in the moral context of the virtues, the knowledge of Elohim is to be understood dynamically, not as an objective and theoretical knowledge, but as a unification with the object to be known. Hosea thus suggests that this knowledge is more than mere intellectual understanding; it is a transformative experience that unites man with God through creation. Thus knowledge of Elohim becomes a comprehensive process that goes beyond knowledge of YHWH to include a cosmological dimension – recognising and uniting with God through his creation. In this framework, knowledge of YHWH is often described as a comprehensive religious concept, which also includes "da'at Elohim" – knowledge of divine works and sacred knowledge. The two expressions, "da'at Elohim" and "da'at YHWH", are complementary, each bringing a distinct nuance to the relationship between God and the believer. They also reflect a deep theological thought that is close to that of patristic thought, which emphasises the incarnation of the law and its integration into the life of the

believer. In essence, Hosea promotes the idea that knowledge of God is not simply a matter of intellectual understanding or formal observance of the law, but a life lived in communion with God. Divine knowledge, defined by *emet* and *hesed*, becomes a means of access to eternal life, protecting the believer from sin and death. This knowledge is not merely an accumulation of knowledge, but a profound transformation of the being, which is achieved through a living relationship with God.

Thus, the knowledge of God in the Old Testament cannot be reduced to a simple set of beliefs or rules but is a dynamic, living reality that involves the whole existence of the believer. It is a call to a deep and personal relationship with God, a relationship that is characterised by truth, loyalty and love – essential virtues of the covenant between God and Israel. This knowledge is ultimately a path to eternal life, a life in communion with the Creator, lived in the revealed light of the divine will.

The present volume is the proceedings of the conference entitled "Knowledge of God in Old Testament" held on October 24-26, 2023, at the Faculty of Orthodox Theology, "Babeș-Bolyai" University of Cluj-Napoca, under the auspices of the *ROOTS (Romanian Orthodox Old Testament Studies)* project which aims to highlight the Eastern interpretation of the Holy Scriptures and to enhance how this type of understanding of the revealed message is materialised in the Romanian environment. In this volume, we have proposed highlighting how God makes himself known to man in the revealed text, gradually revealing himself to achieve the *telos of* creation: "likeness".

ORTHODOX EXEGESIS

"Israel Wilderness School" – Pattern for Discipleship in the Old Testament (God's continual Revelation of Himself to Man, for Pedagogical and Restorative Purposes)

Abstract

The study explores the concept of discipleship in the Old Testament, highlighting how divine revelation continues to be a pedagogical and therapeutic process. At the centre of this process is the relationship between God and man, beginning with Adam and continuing with the patriarchs, prophets, and the people of Israel, culminating in the Christ disciple's model. It is emphasised that the whole of revelation provides a complete model for discipleship, to guide humanity towards divine communion. The study also analyses the educational structures in Jewish society, in which the family, the royal court and scribal schools play essential roles. It discusses the biblical terminology specific to discipleship and the relationship between learning and the divine will, concluding that true religious education is about accumulating knowledge and living by God's will so that man can re-enter into a relationship with the supreme Teacher.

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Keywords

Discipleship, Divine pedagogy, Spiritual education, Restoration, Tradition

Introduction

The discovery of God realised and transmitted to us through Holy Scripture is an act springing from the perfect communion/ *koinonia*, the Holy Trinity, and meant to teach us our entrance into this kind of being. "Without the Revelation of the

true and living God, there would be neither theology, nor Christian spirituality, for Christian theology, as a speech about God, is based on the revelation made in God the Word Who made Himself known to the world on many occasions and in many ways, and finally shared Himself with the world in the fullest form, becoming Himself man (cf. Heb 1:1)" (Daniel 2009, 85). Revelation, in its entirety, offers us the most extensive/comprehensive pattern for discipleship because it is a continual revelation of God to man for pedagogical and therapeutic purposes. Its development to the culmination of Christ puts before us the stages of the progression of this pattern beginning with the God – Adam relationship, moving on to God – Patriarchs, God – Prophets, God – His people, and then culminating in Christ – His disciples; Church – the new people, the new Israel; but also in the unfolding of eternity through which, as the Fathers say, we grow from grace to grace, "the most godly" being called "to introduce the lowest to the mysteries and to be guides to draw near to God in illumination and communion" (St. Dionysius the Areopagite 1996, 21).

Even the Trinity itself can be seen as an educational pattern: "The monarchy of the Father (the only source of the Godhead) and the oneness of being are the ontological support of love as the unifying force, and the Trinity of Persons is the irreducible ontological support of diversity and mutual self-giving, of love as self-giving to another" (Daniel 2009, 85-6). The Son "can do nothing of Himself unless He sees the Father doing it; for whatever He does, the Son does in like manner" (Jn 5:19), and the Holy Spirit works so that Christ may be incarnate in us (Gal 4:19), or these are sufficient arguments for understanding the Trinity as an educational pattern. The teacher-disciple relationship presupposes dedication and the fulfilment of the will, according to the Trinitarian pattern in which "The being, life, and work of the three divine Persons are common, but each of them possesses the one being in its way and participates in or performs the common work according to its irreducible specificity, according to His 'personality'" (Daniel 2009, 88).

In what follows, we will try to capture some Old Testament educational models and highlight their pedagogical function for today.

The meaning and terminology of discipleship in the Old Testament

The vocabulary specific to educational and discipleship issues is varied in the Old Testament (Crenshaw 1998, 205-19), with the verb *lamad* (Kohlenberger, Swanson 1998, 883-4) holding a central position among these terms, with the following

meanings*: to teach* (Dt 4:1; 4:10; 6:1; 20:18; Jdg 3:2; 2 Chron 17:7; Job 21:22; Jer 9:20), *to learn* (Dt 5:1; Prv 30:3; Jer 12:16), *to prepare for battle/ war* (2 Sam 22:35; 1 Chron 5:18). From this verb is derived the form *limmud* (Kohlenberger, Swanson 1998, 884), translated once as *disciple* (Is 8:16), and once as *one who is taught* (Is 50:4). Also, from the verb *lamad* derives the noun *talmid – disciple,* used only in 1 Chron 25:8, even though we can identify several persons in the Old Testament who fit this profile. Nor is the Greek equivalent *μαθητής* used in the LXX. Another important concept in the proposed thematic context is *yasar* (Kohlenberger, Swanson 1998, 713) which means *to instruct* (Dt 4:36; 8:5; Prv 19:8; Jer 46:28), *to strike/ punish* (Lv 26:18; Dt 22:18; Hos 10:10), *to punish* (Ps 117), the Greek equivalent being *paideia* (Kittel 1964-1976, 415-60), which Philo and Josephus Flavius use when referring to Israel's time in the wilderness. The use of the verb *lamad* and its derivatives always expresses an awareness of the relationship between learning and the revealed will of God (Kittel 1964-1976, 450) which must be translated into action.

In Jewish society, the first educational environment was the family (Lv 19:3; Dt 4:9-10; 6:7; 11:18-19; Prv 1:8-9; 6:20-23; 22:15; 29:17), as in the Christian environment (Abrudan, Cornițescu 2002, 116), and which preceded any experience in the school or synagogue. Within the family, children were initiated in writing and reading to have early access to the content of the Law and the holy writings. Every home was a veritable school in which parents also held a teaching function or responsibility (Jacobs, Grossman 1906-1910, 570; Hacohen 2005, 11). The *parent-child* model of learning was based on the fifth commandment (Ex 20:12; Dt 5:16) – which introduces parental authority as the pattern of all human authority – religious, educational, civil (Durham 1987, 290) –, a model expressed in a developed form in Dt 6:4-7. In this way, the family was the model for all educational structures in the two Testaments, but also in the later Jewish tradition, and one can think, for example, of the title of the tractate in the Mishna entitled *Pirke Avot – The Teachings of the Parents*, from which one can intuit the importance of the parent-child model in rabbinic training. This model inspires trust, authority and respect. After the family, the Old Testament mentions two other structures with an educational function: the royal court (Prv 1:1; Eccl 1:1) and the scribal schools (Jer 8:8-9; Prv 25:1).

The attention which the Old Testament gives to the condition of the disciple or apprentice, the child, denotes consideration for this initial stage of life experience before which innumerable possibilities of development and fruitfulness open (Jacobs,

Grossman, 1906-1910, 570). The necessity for the realization of a religious education appears explicitly formulated in Deuteronomy: "Only take care, and keep your soul diligently, lest you forget the things that your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. Make them known to your children and your children's children how on the day that you stood before the Lord your God at Horeb, the Lord said to me, 'Gather the people to me, that I may let them hear my words, so that they may learn to fear me all the days that they live on the earth, and that they may teach their children so.'" (Dt 4:9-10 – ESV; cf. 6:4-7).

Education in the Jewish tradition

Jewish thought on religious education starts from the fundamental principle that the laws and all religious knowledge are not to be learned merely mechanically but are to be appropriated in such a way that the young person or disciple realizes the imperiousness of harmonizing his whole existence with them (Dt 4:9; 6:7; 31:12-13) (Jacobs, Grossman, 1906-1910, 570). The laws are not merely to be assimilated into memory, but fulfilled (Hacohen 2005, 162-78), made to become deeds pleasing to God: "Be careful to obey all these words that I command you..." (Dt 12:28). The title of disciple implies, in this sense, the rational acceptance and assumption in one's personal life of the ideas and practices of the teacher (Douglas, Tenney 1987, 273). Subsequently, in the context of synagogal educational structures, where the true teacher was not the rabbi but the Torah (Weder 1996, 205), the apprentice was called upon to receive its content both rationally and to put it into action. And this from the conviction of the presence of the Lawgiver in his Law, an idea that is also characteristic of patristic literature: "The Lord is hidden in his commandments. And those who seek him find him according to the measure of their fulfilment." (St. Mark the Ascetic 2005, 232); "The Word of God, hidden in his ten commandments, becomes bodily in us, descending with us in our moral activity, then again raising us through knowledge, exalting us until we ascend to the highest of all the commandments, which says: The Lord your God is one Lord" (St. Maximus the Confessor 2005, 290).

Thus, in the time of Johanan ben Zakkai, in the academy at Jamnia and similar educational structures in Caesarea and elsewhere, religious education involved the teaching of a Bible verse each day, the text is subsequently explained to the disciples concerning their daily life experience (Jacobs, Grossman, 1906-1910, 570), so that the teaching always had immediate applicability.

According to rabbinic tradition, there are four types of disciples (Crenshaw 1998, 8): 1) those who learn quickly and forget quickly; 2) those who learn slowly and forget slowly; 3) those who learn quickly and forget slowly; 4) those who learn slowly and forget quickly *(Pirke Avot* 5,13). There are also four typologies into which those who sit around the sages fit: 1) a sponge, which absorbs everything; 2) a bellows/ trough, which lets out everything that goes in; 3) a strainer, which lets out wine and retains the yeast; and 4) a sieve, which lets out what is of poor quality and retains what is good (*Pirke Avot* 5,18). The proper age for learning is youth, for then the words of the Torah are assimilated and become part of the blood, thus becoming the very life of man (*Avot of Rabbi Natan* 24). Divergences between the school of Shammai and the school of Hillel also existed concerning learning: Shammai limited access to learning only to the gifted, from chosen families, or the wealthy, whereas Hillel taught that all boys should benefit from learning (Crenshaw 1998, 9).

Elementary training included *Shema* (Dt 6:4-9), *Tefillah*, the Scriptures and the most important prayers (*Amidah, Shemone Esre*). The first five years of study were reserved for the Scriptures, then at the age of 10 years the study of the Mishnah, and at the age of 15 years the study of the teachings that form the basis of the Talmud (*Pirke Avot* 5,21). The study was exclusively oral, consisting of Midrash, Halakhot and Haggadot, i.e. exegetical interpretation of the Scriptures, legislative and homiletical texts. The stated purpose was to preserve and transmit the teachings of the past, not to discover new elements (Crenshaw 1998,10).

In Alexandrian Judaism, education was not only religiously specific but also included other cultural levels in the learning process. Philo regarded secular education as important and encouraged its practice, but it is particularly noteworthy that for the Sabbath he insisted on the necessity of Torah study. The highest level of knowledge for him was philosophy and wisdom, above actual knowledge. He recognized the dynamic interaction between God and man, and that learning came in response to a natural urge of the human being, in close connection with spiritual progress. In this sense, Philo also held that ultimate truth remained inaccessible to the human intellect, to be known only through the discovery of God (Crenshaw 1998, 11-3), for true knowledge is realized only in God, and this *in* is attained by faith and humility. For him, the model par excellence was the patriarch Abraham.

A Failed Lesson (Gen 2:16-17) and a Quest with Victory (Gen 6:8)

The first element or didactic principle appears at the very beginning of the Creation, by receiving the commandment that prevented access to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, so-called, says St. John Chrysostom, "because it was to be the occasion of breaking or keeping the commandment" (St. John Chrysostom 1987, 185). The commandment appears to us as the first counsel to which Adam shows himself disobedient, receiving rather "the pernicious counsel, breaking the law given by God and making the commandment a reproach" (St. John Chrysostom 1987, 181) and, thus, leaving the pattern of education-faith with God, leaving the personal level of his discipleship to God. Consuming the fruit of the tree of knowledge did not bring Adam knowledge, but it is darkening, because the act of education was accomplished in his communion with God, who had already endowed him with wisdom and prophetic grace (St. John Chrysostom 1987, 184-5), seen in the naming of all living creatures (Gen 2:19-20) and the expression of the prophecy concerning the woman (Gen 2:23-24). To learn, then, is a necessity generated by the fall, it is to seek discipleship.

The answer to this failed lesson is provided by the model of Noah, an episode that records a continuous quest for victory, concisely expressed by the biblical text: "But Noah found grace in the sight of the Lord God" (Gen 6:8), and at the end of the cleansing through the flood, Noah will receive the first laws after the fall (Gen 9:1-7), and with him God will make the first covenant (Gen 9:9-11). These two lessons allow us to conclude that the act of education is not only about acquiring knowledge but also about reconnecting one's existence with the true Teacher *(Menahoth* 99a) who, in the Old Testament, is God Himself, while in the New Testament the model of the teacher will be Christ.

The teacher-disciple model in the Old Testament

We can fix the beginnings of the concept of *discipleship* in the sphere of the divine call that constantly follows the same pattern: the *initiative of God – the response of man*, a paradigm that constitutes the core of the biblical concept of covenant (Wilkins, 1996, "Disciple, Discipleship") manifested in the repeated promise: *I will be your God, and you shall be my people...* (Gen 17:7; Jer 7:23; 24:7; 30:22; 31:1; Ezk 36:28; 37:23). The first call of this type can be identified immediately after the moment of the fall

(St. John Chrysostom 1987, 191-2): "Adam, where are you?" (Gen 3:9), as God's initiative that awaits to this day the response of each one.

Through steadfast faith and obedience to God's will (culminating in Gen 12:1-3 and Gen 22:2- 3), Abraham is a striking example of the Old Testament concept of *discipleship*: obedience and hearing, followed by doing God's will. Another example is Solomon whom we read of as having an obedient heart (*lev shomea*, 1 Kgs 3:9), described as a wise and discerning heart (*lev hakham venavon*, 1 Kgs 3:12). Incidentally, in the Old Testament, all *discipleship-type* relationships followed a pattern in which teachers and disciples alike listened to God's word and trusted God. Three main criteria or implications of the concept of discipleship are commonly identified, namely: first, a *call* is necessary, and following it to become a disciple; second, the beginning of this discipleship involves a *total break with the past*; finally, third, discipleship involves a lifelong relationship (Weder 1996, 207).

We distinguish two levels of the concept of *discipleship* in the Old Testament: the *national* level, which concerns the relationship between God and His people, and the *personal* level, either between God and each Israelite (e.g. Joshua, Caleb, David, Hezekiah, Josiah) or in an inter-human relationship of the *teacher-disciple* relationship that we can see in the case of Moses and Joshua, Elijah and Elisha, Jeremiah and Baruch.

The people of Israel are the subjects of divine education, whom God has chosen to fulfil his will. To some extent, if this responsibility belongs to everyone, it derives from the collective responsibility as a member of the chosen people (Kittel 1964-1976, 455). The national level of discipleship is more important because, in the discourse of the prophets, the horizon of divine pedagogy broadens, embracing all the nations of the earth. But whatever the breadth of addressability, the pattern remains the same.

From the register of inter-human relations, we would invoke, first of all, the case of Moses who entered the Tabernacle, at first in the tent of meeting outside the camp (Ex 33:7), and of his young servant, Joshua, who "did not leave the Tabernacle" (Ex 33:11) even after Moses had gone, remaining, after the model of the teacher (Ex 34:28), in the place of the dwelling-place of the glory of God (cf. Dt 31:14-15) (Jacob 1955, 63-6). Joshua lingered in the Tabernacle, and this may be seen as a sign of the trust he enjoyed, being left to guard it (Stuart 2007, 698). He even seems to be given a mediatorial role between God and the people, though not to the same extent as Moses, whom he served (Ashby 1997, 134).

For Josephus Flavius, Joshua is indeed the *μαθητής* of Moses (Josephus Flavius 2002, 134), Elijah has a *θεράπων* ("servant, servant") but later Elisha is the *μαθητὴς καὶ διάκονος* for Elijah (Josephus Flavius 2002, 508, 569), and Baruh is called the *μαθητής* of Jeremiah (Josephus Flavius 2002, 569). The term *μαθητής* is the same term used in the New Testament to designate the Savior's disciples. Moses prepared Joshua to take over the leadership of the people of Israel (Dt 31:7-8), Elijah called Elisha as a disciple to anoint him a prophet in his place (1 Kgs 19:16), and Jeremiah had Baruch as his scribe, who, learning from him, can be considered his disciple (Jer 36:2-8). The disciple was to be inseparable from his teacher (Sir 6:34), and even to live in the same house with him (Sir 6:36). The condition of the apprentice, even in ancient Greek culture, went beyond that of a scholar in that it was not limited to the accumulation of a certain amount of information, but envisaged a close relationship between the apprentice and his teacher involving the assumption of the latter's principles and way of life (Kittel 1964-1976, 433).

Starting from the fact that the actual term "disciple" *(talmid)* can be found only once in the Old Testament, some specialists believe that the concept it expresses is also absent from the Old Testament rescript (Kittel 1964-1976, 434). From this perspective, the relationship between Moses and Joshua is not understood as one of discipleship because Joshua is called a *mesareth,* i.e. Moses' servant (Ex 24:13). In the same way, the prophets are said not to have had disciples, but Elisha, Gehazi and Baruh would have been only the three prophets' closest servants. Elijah's servant is not named at the beginning, but only designated as *naar* (1 Kg 18:43; LXX: *paidarion*), and from 2 Kgs 3:11 (Plutarch 1970a, 284-304; Plutarch 1970b: 70-97) one might infer that Elisha was performing for Elijah services specific to the status of a servant (Kittel 1964-1976, 415-60). But this approach does not consider the fact that *discipleship also includes a dimension of service*, whereby the disciple can express his gratitude for the dedication with which the teacher offers his knowledge.

"Wilderness School" – Pattern for Discipleship

After leaving Egypt, the Old Testament record records several moments of evident discontent with the harsh conditions of life in the wilderness (Ex 15:22-26; 16:2-30; 17:1-7; Nm 11:1-35). Preoccupied with constantly comparing their material well-being in Egypt with the hardships of the present, they were not thankful for the gift of freedom and the divine protection of the promise. Quarrelling, discontent and

idolatrous acts (e.g. Ex 32) can be identified throughout their post-exodus journey. Israel's recalcitrant attitude of Israel towards God and his elect is a constant throughout the Old Testament rescript, the corpus of historical writings bearing witness to the fact that the chosen people did not fulfil their duties towards God, their life and existence being marked by sin and rebellion (Brueggemann 2009, 39) against which prophetic preaching was vehemently pronounced. We will, however, write about the pattern of the prophetic school in another study. In the Pentateuch, this lack of gratitude will reach its climax in Numbers 13-14, where the moment that prompted the forty-year wandering in the wilderness is recorded as a "fitting punishment [of Israel] for the great sacrilege" (Philo of Alexandria 2003, 104). The episode is integrated into the thematic whole of the "wilderness training" (Chirilă 2002, 46), marked by the promise of the land (Budd 1984, 164): Israel will not now enter the rest of Canaan (Clement the Alexandrian 1982, 138), but God will raise up a new generation (Ex 32:10; Nm 14:12), raised in faith. Thus, God's mercy and justice will be manifested simultaneously: sinners will be left alive but will not be received into the promised land (Spence-Jones 2004, 173).

This time in the wilderness can also be seen, however, as not necessarily punitive, but educative (Sanders 1955), in the Jewish tradition as a time of *paideia* (Thiessen 2009: 369). This divine pedagogy is folded into the *parent-child* educational model: "Know then in your heart that, as a man disciplines (*yasar*/ *παιδεύω*) his son, the Lord your God disciplines (*yasar*/ *παιδεύω*) you." (Dt 8:5). Once we corroborate this text with Dt 32:10: "He found him in a desert land, and in the howling waste of the wilderness; he encircled him, he cared for him (LXX: *naibevrn)*, he kept him as the apple of his eye", it becomes clear that Deuteronomy portrays the time in the wilderness as a time necessary for the education, for the growth of the people in the faith (Thiessen 2009: 370). The idea is also found in Philo: God has devised a new way for the Israelites to build up their souls, by being taught (*παιδεύω*), through signs and tokens of his power, to fear him and in the future to cease to be impatient when things do not go according to their will, but to endure suffering and evil with fortitude, in expectation of future blessings (*De VitaMosis* 1,199 – *The Works of Philo* 1993, 477-8). He interprets Solomon's words in the same sense (Thiessen 2009: 373): "My son, do not despise the Lord's discipline or be weary of his reproof (*παιδεύω*), for the Lord reproves him whom he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights." (Prv 3:11-12), concluding that this sometimes-severe discipleship brings man closer to God because there is no closer relationship than that between father and son (Thiessen 2009: 372-3).

Josephus Flavius agrees with this understaning of wandering in the wilderness in the light of the paternal attitude that God manifests towards his people (Josephus Flavius 2002: 311). All the marvellous acts performed by God in the wilderness have a profound educative aspect, they are credible signs to emphasize the reality and efficacy of the divine providence (Chirilă 2002, 46).

The period of wandering in the wilderness is marked by several essential elements in the religious experience of Israel, beginning with the giving of the Law (Ex 20), then continuing with the revelation of the ordinances for the making of the Holy Tent (Ex 25-40), which delimit the sacred space amid the people, and then all the legislative-cultic prescriptions concerning priests, sacrifices, feasts, constantly emphasizing the need for their incarnation. Thus, the pattern of the central act of guidance in the Old Testament remains this *wilderness school*, a necessary path to enter the promised land, but also, from an eschatological perspective, a re-entry into the Canaan of saving counsel with God.

In our contemporary world, there are obvious signs of wandering. To get out of this state we must look into the treasury of the patristic educational pattern and learn the edifying teachings, as St. John Carpathian, for example, expresses: "The righteous of Scripture, proclaimed more for one of the other virtues, are not commended by those for lacking in the other parts of virtue – as, for example, Joseph for meekness, Job for patience and manhood, Daniel for prudence, and the parents of the blessed Susanna for righteousness – but as some who distinguished themselves in that part of virtue by which they opposed the wickedness of the enemies of the adversaries. For with the weapon of temperance, Joseph stopped the arrow which the demons of fornication threw against him through the Egyptian woman, but by the strength of manhood he also by the fortitude of his manhood showed his brothers also in a perfect manner the unmindfulness of evil, and again by the virtue of his wisdom he interpreted [Pharaoh's] dreams, and by righteousness he governed Egypt, working always what was required at the proper time by every virtue." (St. John Carpathian 2007, 28)

This model of reading, this type of communion has been constantly presented to us by Daniel, Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church, in his writings, but especially in promoting the memory of his teacher Dumitru Stăniloae. He also shows us that the incarnation of the commandment begins with the reading/meditation of the Scriptures, with "a profound reaing and understanding of the Holy Scriptures" (Daniel 2009, 89), a fact also emphasized by St. John Carpathian: "Whoever is

obstinate in meditating on the divine Scriptures for the sake of mere literary teaching (*logomatheias*), is giving occasion for the thought of vain glory to enter himself. But whoever diligently practices the teaching of the words of God, that he may know and do the will of God, draws within himself the power of the Holy Spirit, who gives him strength, transforms words into deeds, and makes him a knower of the unwritten words and of the most divine mysteries of God" (John the Carpathian 2007, 41-2), an act by which we truly live in the sphere of the "school of the Resurrection", the school of the desert being perfected by Christ through the overcoming of temptation: "After forty days of fasting, Jesus was hungry, but material food cannot be more important for him than the will of God, for his food is first and foremost the Father's will and the fulfilment of his work. Jesus' fasting signifies His freedom from the sensible, the mastery of the person over the necessity or automatism of nature, and the priority He gives to personal communion with God" (Daniel 2009, 163).

The *wilderness school* teaches us how to feed on the Word, to return "to the founding Word that arises from the depths of silence", to "the Word that is the beginning of the world" (Alves 2007, 23-4), and how to come to the true gratitude of the Word.

Conclusion

The conclusions of the study emphasize that *wilderness school* [1] represents a profound pattern of discipleship and spiritual formation in the Old Testament, playing a central role in divine pedagogy. The relationship between God and man manifested in calling, obedience and the fulfilment of the divine will, is a repetitive pattern that begins with Adam and develops through figures such as Abraham, Moses and the prophets. These relationships not only exemplify discipleship but also serve as the foundation for subsequent religious and moral education, culminating in Christ and the Church. Biblical education is thus seen as a process of spiritual restoration, involving the return of man to his original communion with God. The study area reaffirms the importance of these ancient witness models for the formation of faith and contemporary Christian life, emphasizing the value of continuity and the transmission of tradition within the family and community.

Note

[1] In the international biblical literature our concept of „wilderness school" is referred to as „wilderness training". We believe that our option is more appropriate to the historical context in which the wilderness wandering of the chosen people took place.

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Knowledge of God
– as an inner human experience

Abstract

From the Old Testament perspective, wisdom is not man's ultimate destination, but it is the way "by which" we can reach God. Travelling through life with wisdom, man finds his true theological destination by dwelling in the mystery of the revealed word. Thus, "Wisdom has built her house" (Prv 9:1), living spiritually in people who discover in the mystery of the spoken word the redemptive work of Christ in the intimacy of humanity that he came to redeem from sin. This interiority, understood as the dwelling of the Word of God in the human heart, in its spiritual abode, is interpreted by Holy Scripture, patristic and philocalic literature, as well as by the liturgical prayer of the Church as an incarnation of the Word in us, which we understand it as a food of doxological words and the communion of Eucharistic Christ, Divine Body and Blood, Liturgy of God with us in the Church of His Glory, which is His ecclesial Body.

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Knowledge as the experience of the human encounter with the divine

God's wisdom predates the world: "The Lord by wisdom founded the earth; by understanding he established the heavens." (Prv 3:19 – ESV); "O Lord, how manifold are your works! In wisdom have you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures" (Ps 104:24); "To him who by understanding made the heavens, for his steadfast love endures forever" (Ps 136:5); "The Lord possessed me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of old. Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth" (Prv 8:22-23). Starting from this theological affirmation of the eternity of

Wisdom, as a good connoisseur of the Hebrew Scriptures, St. John the Apostle developed in the prologue of his Gospel the theological assertion about the Wisdom who has made her dwelling among men and Who hypostasized in our horizontal history through the Incarnation (Jn 1:14) of the Son of God from St. John the Baptist, is the Wisdom of God. Virgin Mary has added to the exodus about the eternity of the Logos another aspect of His identity – that He is the eternal Light of God: "The Word was the true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world" (Jn 1:9).

In the fifth exhortative discourse on the value of wisdom, the author of Proverbs highlights the preaching power of God through the word that comes from Him, as a power that annihilates evil. The power of wisdom in everyday life comes from its eternal existence, from God, by whom all things were created and by whom all things are held in divine guardianship. Therefore, the holy author emphasises the divine origin of wisdom, to show that it is from this that man's trust in the working of heavenly blessings in his own life is nourished. "The Lord" is the source of all blessings, and this truth is emphatically expressed by the syntactical positioning of the divine Name in the first position in Prv 8:22: Ps 26:1-2; Ps 96:1; Ps 98:1-2.9. He is not only the root of all good things, but the very fruit of all good things, like the fruit of the "Tree of Life", alluded to in Prv 8:19: "My fruit is better than gold, even fine gold, and my yield than choice silver."

From the Old Testament perspective, wisdom is not man's ultimate destination, but it is only the way "by which" we can reach God. This is why in some rabbinic commentaries, such as the Jerusalemite Targum, the first word of Scripture, *b'reshith*, is read and interpreted as *b'kokhmah*, "through/into wisdom", precisely to highlights its intimacy with the deity and the original power that brought everything from non-being to being. St. John clearly states that the beginning of all is the Son of God: "All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made" (Jn 1:3), because he is Wisdom (Lk 11:49). The new creation of the creation of creation is accomplished by the same God, for, says St. Paul to the Colossians, "He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities – all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him, all things hold together" (Col 1:13-17). He who "established (*yasod*) the world by his

wisdom" (Jer 10,12), "fixes himself" in our historical time, incarnates himself, dwells in it as a man.

This whole theological presentation in sapiential language is about what wisdom is about God, as an attribute of His and a characteristic of His actions, from which the other perspective, of its relation to people, derives. Just as there is an iconomy of creation, there is a divine iconomy of wisdom's presence in humanity, as divine prerogative and power. Endowed with limited powers – for God gives to one man five talents, to another two, to another one, "to each according to his ability", says Christ the Lord (Mt 25:15) – people are endowed with the priceless power of wisdom if they desire it and seek to acquire it in life. Interwoven with the power of the word revealed in the holy Scriptures, wisdom, treasured and worn in the sight of man, becomes an ornament: a crown of the mind, earrings of humble obedience, a necklace of the head and a basis for holy thoughts, a bracelet of good works (Prv 1:9). No jewel made by man of the most costly, fine and shining earthly materials can equal the beauty of wisdom, our true wealth.

As a divine gift and as a reward for the efforts to seek it, man receives through wisdom "the fear of the Lord" and "the knowledge of God": "My son, if you receive my words and treasure up my commandments with you, making your ear attentive to wisdom and inclining your heart to understanding; yes, if you call out for insight and raise your voice for understanding, if you seek it like silver and search for it as for hidden treasures, then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God. For the Lord gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding; he stores up sound wisdom for the upright; he is a shield to those who walk in integrity, guarding the paths of justice and watching over the way of his saints. Then you will understand righteousness and justice and equity, every good path; for wisdom will come into your heart, and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul; discretion will watch over you, understanding will guard you, delivering you from the way of evil, from men of perverted speech." (Prv 2:1-12).

If jewels illuminate and beautify man's face, wisdom illuminates his secret place, his soul and mind, so that, says the holy author, "evil men do not understand justice, but those who seek the Lord understand it completely" (Prv 28:5), and "the wisdom of a prudent man is to understand his way" (Prv 14:8). Moreover, "good understanding is the fruit of grace" (Prv 13:15). Moreover, the Parables are "to know wisdom and instruction, to understand words of insight, 3 to receive instruction in wise dealing, in

righteousness, justice, and equity" (Prv 1:2-3). Hence the author's repeated exhortation: "Hear, O sons, a father's instruction, and be attentive, that you may gain insight", as in Prv 4:1. Wisdom, confirmed by true knowledge and confession, places us in a relationship with God. It is the mark of man's fidelity to his Creator, the sign of obedience, holy fear and parental obedience.

Wisdom calls for and brings about God's mercy, it fills the spiritual and material interiors of our lives with goodness. Contemplating the perfection of creation, we believe that "when you open your hand, they are filled with good things" (Ps 104:28). God, "who satisfies you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's" (Ps 103:5), and this renewal of life is experienced fully, doxologically and eucharistically, in the Liturgy of the Church: "We shall be satisfied with the goodness of your house", says the psalmist (Ps 65:4).

Hunger for God and feeding on words – signs of messianic times

Without physically feeding on any payment for the public exercise of the prophetic act, God's chosen, and inspired people often speak of the fulfilment of their calling as an act of divine fulfilment, and of the revelation of God as food offered to the whole world for the inner transformation of man. For example, the calls to prophecy of Isaiah, Jeremiah or Jezekiel refer to an act of divine fulfilment in Is 6:7; Jer 1:9; Ezk 3:3. Feeding on God's word brings blessing to the mouth, understood as the sweetness of honey: "How sweet are your words to my tongue, more than honey in my mouth!" (The Lord's judgments "sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb" (Ps 19:10).

In Old Testament biblical narratives, famine is often seen as a divine curse and abundant food as a blessing. The acquisition of food is therefore necessary for any community, as a biological sustenance, but also as a primary condition for the perpetuation of religious, cultural and national values. This is why holy people have emphasized the value of nourishment from the word of wisdom that comes from God. If without food one can endure a time of holy fasting, this fasting cannot exist without nourishment and nourishment from the word of God.

Interpreted theologically, history reveals to us mysterious meanings of God's work with us. What we understand as a time of political persecution, drought and famine are, in reality, a sign of the withdrawal of divine blessing and the coercive manifestation of "the rod of men and the stripes of the sons of men" because of disobedience (2Kgs 7:14), as Isaiah reinforces: "For behold, the Lord God of hosts is taking away from Jerusalem

and from Judah support and supply, all support of bread, and all support of water" (Is 3:1). In a difficult historical context, after a long and intense period of extermination of the YHWH priests, the prophet Amos announces that there will be similar episodes in "those days", characterised by the absence of the Voice, the pedagogical silence of God: "Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord God, in which I will send a famine on the earth, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord" (Am 8:11) (Vatamanu 2014, 40-54). This is the most painful famine and the most bitter thirst, seen as signs preceding the divine judgment, as opposed to the fruitfulness of the earth and the flowing of the grape in the valleys as a blessing after this judgment (Joel 4:18).

In "those days", "disaster comes upon disaster; rumor follows rumor. They seek a vision from the prophet, while the law perishes from the priest and counsel from the elders" (Ezk 7:26), "the seers shall be disgraced, and the diviners put to shame; they shall all cover their lips, for there is no answer from God" (Mi 3:7). When "we do not see our signs; there is no longer any prophet, and there is none among us who knows how long" (Ps 74:9), in the strongest silence of our unbelief, of idolatry to our passions, there will be a cry of hope to God. The ancients show us that it will be so: in his despair "Saul asked the Lord, but the Lord answered him neither in a dream, nor by Urim, nor by the prophets" (1Sam 28:6), and Jeroboam sent his wife to ask the prophet Ahijah about the health of Abijah his son (1Kg 14:1-3). This alienation of man is presented by Christ the Lord as starvation and lack, as an exit from the self that is prostrated by the father and an entrance into the selfish self of the passions, as in a "far country" (Lk 15:13), where the sinful man "squandered his wealth" and "spent everything" (Lk 15:13-14). There, the prodigal son "wanted to fill his belly with the carob which the pigs ate, but no one gave it to him" (v. 17-19). "But when he came to himself, he said, How many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son." In the *parable of the unmerciful rich man and poor Lazarus*, the torments of hell are understood as a bitter thirst in the tormenting fire (Lk 16:24).

The rehearing of God's words in His holy place (Is 2:2-4) restores joy and hope of redemption to all humanity: "Who will believe what we have heard?" asks the prophet rhetorically (Is 53:1). Revelation among the chosen people becomes a beacon for all peoples, who will "flow" there, the holy mountain of the Lord being a spiritual

convergence pole of all peoples who will discover the Teaching/Law: "It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be lifted up above the hills; and all the nations shall flow to it, and many peoples shall come, and say: "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths." For out of Zion shall go the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations, and shall decide disputes for many peoples; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore." (Is 2:2-4, Mi 4:1-2).

In those days, the knowledge of the glory of the Lord will spread over the earth as water covers the bottom of the sea: "They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea" (Is 11:9) and "the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the bosom of the sea" (Heb 2:14). As the whole earth (*adamah*) is filled with the knowledge of God, so man (*adam*) is filled with the Law of the Lord, which thus becomes within him, the mysterious source of his revelatory experiences. The prophet Jeremiah speaks to us of this inner knowledge of God as a distinctive sign of the Messianic age, of Christ's dwelling in the most intimate midst of our humanity (as the Hebrew text Is 7:14 also states): "Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the Lord. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people" (Jer 31:31-33).

This interiority understood as the dwelling of the Word of God in the human heart, in its spiritual dwelling place of great mystery, is understood by Holy Scripture, patristic and philocalic literature, as well as by the liturgical prayer of the Church as an incarnation of the Word in us, which we understand as nourishment of doxological words and the co-incarnation of the Eucharistic Word, the divine Body and Blood, the Liturgy of the togetherness of God's service with us in the Church of His Glory, which is His ecclesial Body.

The liturgical experience of the knowledge of God culminates in the Eucharistic communion of Christ and fellowship with His Ecclesial Body

What we read in Holy Scripture as revealed truth, the Church has always affirmed: creation is the work "very good" (Gen 1:31) of God, it is full of life (Gen 9:2-3) for man's nourishment, and the "bondage of wickedness" brought about by the disobedience of the forefathers (Rom 8:21) is removed by the Incarnation of the Word (Jn 1:14), so that God may be "all in all" (1 Cor 15:28). The whole of creation is a synthesis of the divine and the human, the sensible and the intelligible, directed towards the revelation of God in the Eschaton.

The first commandment given by God to man, before being a prohibition to eat, is an invitation to feed "from every tree in heaven" (Gen 2:16-17). The power of God's word is transformed into a blessing to eat, in Gen 1:29, where food is God's first gift to man: "And God said, "Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food." In a theological key, the idea reappears in Prv 9:5, where Wisdom calls man to eat of His bread. God's prophetic invitation: "Come, eat your bread with gladness and drink your wine with a good heart!" (Eccl 9:7), awaits man's faithful and hopeful response. This sapiential image is interpreted Christologically in the The Catechetical Homily of St. John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople on the Holy and Radiant Day of the All-glorious and Saving Resurrection of Christ our God: "If any is pious and loveth God, let him take delight in this goodly and splendid festival. If any is a dutiful servant, let him enter, rejoicing, into the joy of his Lord. If any hath labored in fasting, let him now receive his payment. If any hath worked from the first hour, let him receive today his just reward. If any hath come after the third hour, let him celebrate, giving thanks. If any hath arrived after the sixth hour, let him not be in doubt, for he will in nowise be penalized. If any fail to come even by the ninth hour, let him approach doubting naught, fearing naught. And if any arriveth even at the very eleventh hour, let him not be daunted by his tardiness, for the Maşter, being generous, will receive the last even as He doth the first. He giveth rest unto the one who cometh at the eleventh hour even as the one who hath labored from the first hour: He is merciful to the latter and He careth for the former; to one He giveth, and on the other He bestoweth freely; He accepteth the labors and welcometh the intention; He honoreth the deed and praiseth the intent. Wherefore, enter ye all into the joy of your Lord. Ye who were first and ye who came afterward, receive your recompense. Rich and poor, dance with each other; ye who have abstained

and ye who were remiss, honor the day. Ye who fasted and ye who neglected to fast, be glad today. The table is laden: take delight therein, all of you. The calf is fattened: let no one depart hungry, let all enjoy the banquet of faith, let all enjoy the riches of goodness." (*Slujba Învierii* 2000, 45-6) The Mass on Resurrection night is par excellence, a festive Supper of the Risen Christ with all people, regardless of their ascetic needs.

Christ's Resurrection is the meaning of history. Through it, the manna, the "bread from heaven" sent to the chosen people in the wilderness of Sinai, is no longer the simple bread that man needs for his body, but is truly the word that comes from the mouth of God: "And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord" (Dt 8:3). The Word-bread places man in a much higher, meta-historical experience of his daily nourishment with the Truth and Life – Christ, the incarnate Son of God.

In addition to the many prophetic texts introducing divine oracles, which refer to "the word of the Lord which was *in the* prophet...", others present the revelation of God as an inner act of man (Vatamanu 2022: 13-23). This interiority is in the Old Law only foreshadowing and anticipation, since the Incarnation of the Son of God makes it possible for the Word to dwell in people.

Starting from the Jewish understanding of God's dwelling among Israel (Ex 17:7; 29:45; 33:5; Lv 15:31; Nm 35:34), Pauline theology affirms the communion between man and God as inwardness: "shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor 4:6); God sent "the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, Abba! Father!" (Gal 4:6). Other texts refer to a transformation of our lives, as St Paul says: "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Gal 2:20) and the renewal of our image through Christ (Gal 4:19). Speaking in another epistle about Christ's mysterious dwelling in him, St. In another epistle, the Apostle Paul says that this experience opens the way for him to understand his own life as a participation in the resurrection in this life: "Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends

on faith – that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you." (Phil 3:8-14).

The model of the saint is replicated in the liturgical and mystagogical framework of the Church by every human seeker of deification through the work of the grace of the Holy Spirit. The encounters of our social experience are always characterised by our being situated *opposite* one another, in a closeness that we so easily delimit by what differentiates us rather than by what brings us together or unites us: age, sex, cultural and religious identity, social and economic status, etc. In the Church, however, although we come as communal persons, the orientation of our senses is no longer horizontal but vertical towards God. Thus, by entering the Church, we suspend for a holy time our quality of temporary inhabitants of the geographical social space, and we cling to Heaven, we anticipate communion with the Mother of God and with the saints who pray to God. Our heavenly convergence transforms our mundane framework of immediate reality into a divine matrix, a laboratory of salvation. "The liturgy has, conceptually – says Petre Vintilescu – an ecclesiological or community mission. The idea in which it was instituted and established is expressly dominated by the aim of bringing about on the earth of the present age the Kingdom of God, in which all His children are gathered, united in a life of peace and brotherly love, under the breath of the same Spirit of His Christ." (Vintilescu 1946, 4-5).

However, the theology of our approaches and departures from God has nothing to do with the spatiality and contingency of immediate realities, but with the experience of *being* with God, as a state of human re-finding in the One who is God the Man, Jesus Christ. And continuing the revealed biblical tradition, means the revelation of God in us and our transformation into the human medium of prophetic manifestation. St. Gregory of Nyssa (*On Death*, in *PG* 46AB) speaks at length about this mystical collaboration of the divine with the human, who, starting from certain concepts and premises of Stoic philosophy, emphasized the relationship between the macrocosm and the microcosm as a unity realised according to the perfect model of the mystery of

the Trinitarian Godhead, and that in this the spiritual nature of man does not lose its qualities, is not destroyed by the power of divine immanence, but is even enhanced by it, towards the deification of the human being through grace. The same Church Father argues that the harmony of "opposites" is not artificial, since matter shares in the power of the Holy Spirit. And this participation of matter in spirit is seen by St. Gregory as an intimate, ontological condition that causes the movement of man's soul towards God (Telea 2009, 165).

Certainly, the liturgical life of the Church expresses in the spirit of prayer the intimacy of the human with the divine, made possible by the Incarnation of the Son of God, as a life nourished from within by the Eucharist, the Body and Blood of Christ the Lord. Therefore, to exemplify the theological affirmation of the interiority of the Word in us, we will refer in what follows to the prayers of the Eucharistic canon, in the hymnology of which the Fathers of the Church have placed as essential the mystery of nourishing our humble being with that which truly brings power, authority and life: Christ.

The interiority of Christ's indwelling in our humble humanity is made possible by the Mother of God's holy willingness to receive the Son of God to be born of her.

The grain of wheat, which sacrifices itself to become more than another grain and grain, in the earth and from the earth, for itself, but, departing from the earth and uniting itself with water and fire becomes bread for the food of men, is the image of the Eucharistic Christ, as we liturgically affirm in Canticle 1 of the *Canon of Preparation for Holy Communion*: "O blessed Bride of God, O good land which produced the unplowed Corn which saves the world, grant that I may be saved by eating it." (Liturghier 2000, 306).

The virginal womb of the Mother of God, warmed not by any passionate impulse of the flesh, but by the very fire of the Holy Spirit, bakes the seed of divinity with humanity. Like bread in the oven, "Truly, Mother of God, in your womb the divine Bread of Life was baked, keeping your innocent womb unharmed. For this we praise you as our nourisher for ever and ever" (8th Odi) (Liturghier 2000, 311).

Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God, the Holy Bread offered by God the Father to humanity through the work of the Holy Spirit, is not revealed in the whirlwind of fire (Ex 3:14; Is 6:4,6; Ezk 1:4,13,27 etc.), but in the warmth tempered for us by the gentleness of the Incarnation of the Virgin, in the steaming bread placed in peace on the table for holy communion. Therefore, we pray: "O all-holy Lady, Altar of the Bread of

Life, which for mercy's sake came down from on high and gave new life to the world, make even me, who am unworthy, worthy now with fear to eat it and live" (3rd Odi) (Liturghier 2000, 307). We wish to partake of this holy supper "with faith and love": "May Thy holy Body be for me the bread of eternal life, O gracious Lord, and may Thy precious Blood…" (Odi 1) (Liturghier 2000, 306).

The invitation to come together is made by the One who offers Himself as food, Eucharistic Sacrifice and Holy Giver: "The Lord is good. O taste and see! For of old He became like us for us, and once offered Himself as a sacrifice to His Father and is perpetually slain, sanctifying communicants" (9th Odi) (Liturghier 2000, 311).

By this peaceful sitting at table we wish that the Eucharistic food set before us, the Bread and Wine, the Body and Blood of Christ, maybe for our deliverance from sins and not for our condemnation: "Thy holy Body be for me the bread of eternal life, O gracious Lord, and may Thy precious Blood be a remedy for my many forms of sickness" (Odi 1) (Liturghier 2000, 306); "As Thou didst foretell, O Christ, let it be to Thy wicked servant. Abide in me as Thou didst promise; for lo, I am eating Thy divine Body and drinking Thy Blood" (Odi 5) (Liturghier 2000, 308); "Disdain me not to receive now, O Christ, the Bread which is Thy Body and Thy divine Blood, and to partake, O Lord, of Thy most pure and dread Mysteries, wretched as I am, and may it not be to me for judgment, but for eternal and immortal life" (6th Odi, Kontakion) (Liturghier 2000, 309).

In this Eucharistic Supper we are all recapitulated, which is why we pray that God's all-merciful goodwill and forgiveness towards those of old may also be towards us, as we confess in the "Second Prayer" of the Eucharistic Canon, of St. John Chrysostom: "O Lord my God, I know that I am not worthy or sufficient that Thou shouldest come under the roof of the house of my soul, for all is desolate and fallen, and Thou hast not with me a place fit to lay Thy head. But as from the highest heaven Thou didst humble Thyself for our sake, so now conform Thyself to my humility. And as Thou didst consent to lie in a cave and in a manger of dumb beasts, so also consent to lie in the manger of my unspiritual soul and to enter my defiled body. And as Thou didst not disdain to enter and dine with sinners in the house of Simon the Leper, so consent also to enter the house of my humble soul which is leprous and sinful. And as Thou didst not reject the woman, who was a harlot and a sinner like me, when she approached and touched Thee, so also be compassionate with me, a sinner, as I approach and touch Thee, and let the live coal of Thy most holy Body and precious Blood be for the sanctification and

enlightenment and strengthening of my humble soul and body, for a relief from the burden of my many sins, for a protection from all diabolical practices, for a restraint and a check on my evil and wicked way of life, for the mortification of passions, for the keeping of Thy commandments, for an increase of Thy divine grace, and for the advancement of Thy Kingdom. For it is not insolently that I draw near to Thee, O Christ my God, but as taking courage from Thy unspeakable goodness, and that I may not by long abstaining from Thy communion become a prey to the spiritual wolf. Therefore, I pray Thee, O Lord, Who alone art holy, sanctify my soul and body, my mind and heart, my emotions and affections, and wholly renew me. Root the fear of Thee in my members, and make Thy sanctification indelible in me. Be also my helper and defender, guide my life in peace, and make me worthy to stand on Thy right hand with Thy Saints: through the prayers and intercessions of Thy immaculate Mother, of Thy ministering Angels, of the immaculate Powers and of all the Saints who have ever been pleasing to Thee. Amen." (Liturghier 2000, 321-3). Recollected in Christ, we believe and pray to God that "all of us who partake of one bread and one cup may be united to one another through the sharing of the same Holy Spirit" (Liturghier 2000, 234).

This liturgical experience of Eucharistic communion is placed by the Church Fathers of the Church in the foreground of our spiritual life, as the beginning of the new life. In this regard, St. Stephen the Elder says: "Thus man is born again, and for him begins an entirely new life, which cannot continue without food; but we need food that is suited to the nature of life, and this food is the Body and Blood of the Lord, who said, 'My body is true food, and my blood is true drink' (Jn 6:55). He who begins his new life should begin with these things, for we must eat them when we take our first steps on the path of new life. It is said that the first food given to the baby influences its later physical development and establishes its later food needs. What should the life of the repentant be like? Let it be a life in Christ Jesus our Lord. What should be his most pressing need? The need for union with Christ. He should hasten, in the first movement of the new life, to taste of the Body and Blood of the Saviour, to lay the foundation of his life and to develop a burning need to be permanently in union with Him through this tasting" (St. Theophan the Recluse 1999, 199). The same Church Father points out that the sweetness of nourishment with Christ then works as a continuous call to communion, understood by man as a continual hunger and thirst for God: "He who partakes of the sweetness of this heavenly Hand will always be hungrier and thirstier to taste again of the Lord's Supper" (St. Theophan the Recluse 1999, 199). However, St. Theophylact

of Ohrid assures us, "let us know that Christ leaves no one hungry, but wants all to partake of his gifts, especially those who *have been with him three days* (cf. Mk 8:2), that is, those who have been baptised" (St. Theophylact of Ohrid 1998, 218). And wishing to show how important it is to be freed from the bondage of the senses and to experience the spiritual, St. Theophylact exhorts us: "So take the seven loaves, that is, the most spiritual words, for the number seven is a sign of the Spirit – and the Spirit is the One who accomplishes all things – and in this number our life and this age are accomplished. And those who are enlightened eat and are satisfied and remain and are superfluous, for not all the divine meanings can be grasped by all the Christian people. At the first miracle, of the five loaves, twelve baskets were left over, for there were five thousand, that is, they served the five senses, and therefore they could not comprehend many, but with a few they were satisfied, and therefore many were also superfluous. And here are seven baskets and few crumbs, for there were four thousand, that is, they were trained in the four good works, and therefore as strong men they ate much and left little. For only the most spiritual and deepest they could not contain, for this shows the seven baskets" (St. Theophylact of Ohrid 1998, 218).

"Therefore, we eat the most holy food of Holy Communion and drink from the holy chalice, so that we may commune with the very Body and Blood of Christ, which He took upon Himself from the womb of the Virgin. Thus, strictly speaking, we become one with Him who became incarnate and was deified, with Him who died and rose for us – says St. Nicholas Cabasila." (St. Nicholas Cabasila 2009, 26-7) By receiving the Risen Christ in the Eucharist, man no longer dies to sin, since the Life of Christ is communicated to the one who receives it, as the Saviour entrusts to us: "Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day" (Jn 6:54). Commenting on these words, St. Cyril of Alexandria says: "But it is a sure sign that the Son is properly and truly the Bread of life: that he has made those who partake of him and are united in a certain way with him, through communion with him, stronger than the bonds of death" (St. Cyril of Alexandria 2000, 396). St. Theophylact points out that precisely "because all had been killed, the Lord raised us up through Himself", entrusting us with this first metaphor of the bread which, embracing all the grains of wheat in a single kneading of the dough baked by the fire of God, embraces each one of us in this holy and saving work: Christ "is bread, because we believe that the dough of human kneading was baked by the fire of God" (St. Theophylact of Ohrid 2009,174).

Remaining in the hermeneutics of the same chapter of the Gospel of John, St. Theophylact of Ohrid, comments on the text "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst" (Jn 6:35), shows that hunger and thirst are removed by feeding on the word of God: And the bread of life is the Lord. Not of this ordinary life, but of the life that has been changed and is not cut off by death. And "he that believeth" in this "bread" "shall not hunger", nor hunger to hear the word of God, nor thirst for thoughtful thirst" (St. Theophylact of Ohrid 2009, 174).

Conclusions

In the Old Testament, knowledge of God is often presented in language specific to the act of feeding, and wisdom is presented to us as the fruit and fruitfulness of man's faith, righteousness and holiness. The abundance of food is a sign of divine mercy, always in texts of an eschatological nature, as deliverance from death and removal of the curse of human sin and disobedience.

Wisdom, by taking up its abode in the soul of man, transforms man into the medium of revelation, the elect receiving the knowledge of God through holy fear of the divine commandments, laws and judgments. Their observance means "inclining the ear" to wisdom, "inclining" the heart to right thinking, foresight, good contemplation, and "straightening" the voice (Prv 2:1-3). As the wellspring of knowledge and foresight, God gives man wisdom, together with fear and knowledge of the Lord. The author of *the parables* assures us that when "wisdom will come into your heart, and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul; discretion will watch over you, understanding will guard you, delivering you from the way of evil, from men of perverted speech" (Prv 2:10-12).

The placing of the knowledge of God at the centre of our lives, understood as the dwelling of the Word of God in the heart, soul and mind of man, is interpreted by the Church Fathers in a Eucharistic key, as the nourishment of doxological words and the sharing of the divine Word. To this theological expression is added the prayer of the Church, which hymnographically affirms the Incarnation of the Son of God from the Blessed Virgin Mary as the foundation of the incarnation of the Word in us, which makes possible our humble communion with the Eucharistic Word, the Body and Blood of Christ, the theophanic celebration of the unity and discovery of the knowledge of God in the ecclesial body of Christ – the Church.

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Yahweh – the Typology of the Divine Relational in the Theological Horizon of the Old Testament

Abstract

The Old Testament summarises not only a large segment of the history of humanity but also the configuration of the relationship between man and divinity. The religious phenomenology of the general spectrum of humanity reveals to us the fact that the experience of the sacred created the premises for a projection of this experience expressed under a cultic, doctrinal, and mystical aspect. Upon an objective survey of the religious field of humanity, where the differentiation criteria stand out as obvious, we can notice the fact that the Old Testament outlines a particular architecture of the relationship between Yahweh and man, namely based on God's intention to enter a relational revelation with humanity, especially with the Jewish people. Our study explores this relational typology of the divine as it is highlighted throughout history and the theological developments in the Old Testament.

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Yahweh, Israel, Relation, Person, Anthropomorphism.

The limits of rational knowledge are marked by the limits of language and empirical experiences. Beyond this limit, where language points at that "hereafter" of the sense of the divine, there is the distance or the proximity of intuitive or mystical feeling. The ineffable of the divine being is not apprehended using empirical instruments (language, senses, reason) that operate at this level. It is essential that the human construction of the relationship with the divinity, at least in the Old Testament, be always based on the act of discovering and making God's Self accessible to man. The relationship is initiated, made possible and materialised by God.

Revelation and Historicity: The Transition from Abstraction to Personalization of the Divine

The study of religions during the 19th-21st centuries was focused on man, in the sense that the religious fact gravitated around man, his relationship and attitude towards God (regardless of how it was perceived theologically and culturally), towards the world and concerning himself. This approach does not correspond to the biblical religious phenomenology, according to which God is the generating point of all configurations involving man, and the universe itself. The Old Testament lays a mark on history with a radical reinterpretation of the divine: overcoming abstraction and the limits of the plurality of gods towards a new revelatory condition: a personal God who communicates, who initiates through creation a relational, concrete, religious, spiritual experience with man, thereby entering a covenant relationship with the latter.

Although Christian theology operates with two terms borrowed from the philosophical field, namely immanent and transcendent concerning the divine nature, this does not create a confusion of understanding. God is immanent in the sense that He is present within the horizon of this world and not outside it, which does not imply His identification with the materiality of the world. God is transcendent because there is a discontinuity of being between Him and man, the created universe implicitly.

In ancient religions, somewhat contemporary with the Old Testament, such as the Greek, or the Indian, but especially the Mesopotamian, there was a tendency to subsume all the gods and their functions and to concentrate them on one supreme god. Thus, for example, Enlil was the supreme god: Shamash, the Sun god, was his eyes, Ishtar his hands, Ea his feet. We can decipher a unique divinity, a kind of monotheism composed of adjacent elements (gods). *Elohim*, one of the hypostases of the Divine in the Old Testament (Gen 1:1) refers to the monotheistic idea, of a single God who synthesizes all the powers, and the functions of the ancient multidimensional pantheon, in a fusion and concentration of all divine attributes (Muffs 2009, 3).

God is thus thought of as the all-encompassing divinity, synthesizing all in His omnipotence. He constantly appeared in multiple and ever-changing roles that met the needs of the Jewish people, in order not to be frozen and turned into the dumb idols that He despised. God is received and adored as a polyvalent personality that confirms his uniqueness (Ex 20:2-6), mirroring his multiple facets to man.

Here as well, there is a stringent need for clarifications, since there are tendencies to consider which stress that borrowing the configuration of the divine from the

religions present in Sumer, Babylonia, and Assyria led to the formation of the Israelite perspective on God. This assumption is completely erroneous and constitutes a historically unfounded idea.

It is true that religion itself, as well as all religions are dynamic realities, each with its version of thought, doctrine and cultic life. Religions have always interacted, because in their social component, alongside the theological one, they cannot stand in isolation (Smith 2001). As Yochanan Muffs points out, the Israelite way of relating to other religions was one of creative absorption (Muffs 2009, 9).

But despite the roots of Abraham and the other Israelite patriarchs in the Near East, Abraham's calling by Yahweh produced a revolutionary exodus that still reverberates today in the world under a religious aspect: "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you." (Gen 12:1). This rooting of Abraham in the religious culture of the Near East and his sudden break from it are symbols telling of Israel's ambivalent relationship with its environment: a willingness to borrow external forms, on the one hand, and an almost total rejection of content their spiritual, on the other hand. As mentioned above, Yahweh completely forbids the worship of idols (Ex 20:2-6).

„Do not follow other gods, the gods of the peoples around you" (Dt 6:14). It is believed that the main characteristic of idolatry is the multitude of gods, but this assumption is blatantly wrong. Idolatry is the cultic act of worshipping some gods, designed by the human mind, but which in their mythological-religious versions are in total dependence on the Reality that transcends them. The gods are subject to destiny or cosmic law (*moira*), like the ancient Greek gods, natural impulses, magical powers, and time, which leads Yehezkel Kaufmann to call this realm, which the gods are subject to, the "meta divine sphere" (Kaufmann 1960, 21-59). In most polytheistic religions, there is a realm of natural reality that is distinct from the world of the gods. In the more sophisticated forms of pagan religion, this natural sphere is not just a mere collection of gods. Quite the contrary; it is conceived as a universal order, governed by its laws. This natural order can be understood in two ways: as a spiritual reality, which is the source of all things, and which manifests itself in the world through natural processes; as a material reality that is subject to physical laws and that can be studied through science. The first view leads to a form of mysticism, which sees nature as a manifestation of divinity. The second view leads to a form of science that sees nature as a system governed

by objective laws. Both views are impersonal because they do not conceive of the *meta divine* as a person. Personal gods are seen as mere personifications of natural processes.

Thus, the articulation of biblical Judaism on the world religious scene produced one of the greatest rational-religious revolutions. Judaism became the religious expression of a radically new theology that decoupled divinity from any material or metamaterial dependence. Yahweh is the divinity that is not subject to the rhythm of the universe, but it is He who creates the universe out of nothing by His own will and He is doing it with complete freedom. Yahweh establishes the laws of the universe according to which it unfolds (Ps 19), free from any determination.

In its essence, the Old Testament biblical process is a concerted dynamic that moves away from an impersonal, abstract, magical, mechanical configuration of the divine, proposing a reinterpretation of the divine as a personal God, initiator of a dialogic experience within the historical framework of the Israelite people. The universe is stripped of its sacred, magical character, it is desacralized, demythologized, its reality not being denied, but becoming the stage where Yahweh projects his revelation of Himself in communication with man, as well as the sphere in which man is called to exercise his becoming spiritual by observing the divine will. The desacralization of the cosmos is initiated by Judaism and perfected by Christianity (Cuțaru 2016, 14).

The change brought about by the new vision of the world is given by the fact that Yahweh concentrates the sacred within Himself. Nature remains transparent to the creative and pronating work of Yahweh, but it has a created character, unlike the philosophy of the pre-existence of matter in the religion of the ancient Greeks, receiving a secondary, auxiliary status to Yahweh. Monism and pantheism as philosophical hermeneutics used to explain the existence of the world are fairly outdated altogether.

We can conclude therefore that the religion of Israel makes the transition from the *archaic sacred*, characteristic of the pagan cultures that preceded the emergence and spread of Judaism, Christianity and Islam in the Middle East and Europe, to the *monotheistic sacred.* And this transition highlights a new way of understanding God as a Person. The rethinking of this configuration is both rich in significance and highly complex, carried out in several directions: the transition from magic to religion under the aspect of cultic organization, from a systematic regulation with supernatural beings – gods – to a concretization of the dialogical and personal relationship with the Divinity. In a radical shift in the understanding of the sacred that takes place across the

globe between 800 and 200 BC, in what Karl Jaspers calls *the axial age* (Wittrock 2004, 51-85; Peet 2019, 63-98; Joas 2012, 9-29).

The earlier religious concept of cosmological monism undergoes a gradual restructuring, evolving into a dualistic framework that distinguishes between "this" world and a transcendent reality perceived as existing "above" it. Historical religions, in ways vying with each other, embrace dualism and a rejection of the world, manifesting as a departure from the empirical world. This reorientation takes place through adherence to religious laws, by means of sheer involvement in sacramental systems.

As these religions emerge, religious concern shifts from the present world to the world to come, marking the first appearance of salvation as a central concern in religious thinking (Szerszynski 2005, 17-18).

In this phase of Western religious history, the foundations are laid for some key ideas that will characterize the subsequent ordinations of the sacred. First, the break between the immanent sacred order and the idea of a transcendent foundation or source for all reality opens for the first time the possibility of a philosophical thought about Being. This possibility is because, within the archaic sacred, religious plurality was easily accommodated. Conversely, in a context where there is only one transcendent foundation, other religions are deviations from the truth, i.e. heresies. Second, with divinity progressively decoupled from the world of empirical phenomena, nature begins to emerge as a separate principle of its own. This separation is due to the withdrawal of divinity from the world.

As a result, nature begins to be seen more and more as something that humans can and must master, that is, be shaped in a systematic, technological way. Third, with the monotheistic sacred, with its sharper separation between human beings and divinity and with a clearer sense of the empirical human individual, the idea of society as a self-organized association of human beings with their projects and opinions. This idea is because, in the sacred monotheistic framework, people are considered equal before God (Szerszynski 2005, 18).

The Components of the Relational Dimension of Yahweh according to the Old Testament Theology

In the preceding section of the present study, we considered the radical revolution which the religion of the people of Israel accomplished, namely the personalization of the Ultimate Reality and the condensation in It of omnipotence. Since He is a per-

son (Lossky 1974, 111-23; Endean 2005, 223-38; Koterski 2004, 203-24), Yahweh is a relational deity who initiates an interpersonal relationship with man, himself through divine creation being the imago Dei. And this is the peculiarity in the horizon of ancient religious pluralism. Unlike biblical Israel, pagan religions lack a consistent and intimate relationship between a god and an entire human community. This relationship is not based on a simple favour or patronage, but on a mutual agreement, sealed by a covenant and an oath ("Behold, I make My covenant with you, with your descendants", Gen 9:9; "will make the covenant Between Me and between you and your descendants, from generation to generation, let it be an eternal covenant" Gen 17:7). It is mediated by prophets, who act as mediators for both divine love and divine wrath. This unique combination of elements sets biblical Israel apart from other ancient religions.

In paganism, a particular god might grant favours to a particular king, but ordinary individuals are excluded from this divine intimacy. Furthermore, these relationships are fragile and unpredictable, with no guarantee of continuity for future generations. Divine interactions are subject to the same inherent instability that pervades human relationships and the cosmos itself. In Mesopotamian thought, for example, everything except human laws is subject to this inconsistent flux.

In Israel, the relationship between Yahweh and man is structured by covenant and law. It is not a relationship between the deity and the patriarch, but in this relationship every Israelite in the community is involved. Although comprehensive in a broad sense, the relationship remains a personal one because it involves a commitment to everyone. It is important to note that the norms of the Torah are formulated in the second person singular, a fact that implies the interpersonal relationship between Yahweh-man (Walzer 2006).

Man as man now becomes the centre of a permanent divine interest. This condition makes him responsible. Conformity with the divine will, social justice congruent with the divine law established in the interpersonal relationship, implies a moral behaviour of Israel, the cultic contribution being somewhat secondary: "to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter— when you see the naked, to clothe them, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?" (Is 58:5-7).

Yahweh's character, and implicitly the relational character, finds its true expression in *love*. Love is the catalyst of communication, of dialogue. Yahweh is not an

Absolute that exists by itself and for itself, but a god that emerges from itself creatively projecting another *You*. Yahweh is made concrete as a personal identity and entity by engaging in a relationship with man. Love cannot be contained by the boundaries of the self, in a selfish sense, but needs to be expressed, articulated, materialized. Man, created as a person with self-awareness, freedom, and will, becomes a partner of this divine love, and in the experience of the Old Testament, this love and responsibility of Yahweh towards man is clearly expressed in the biblical prophecies, at the centre of which is the concern divine to man.

The ancient gods could not overcome their fateful condition, they were not concerned with man, but with their selfish condition fuelled by the worship of men. Instead, Yahweh in all the narratives of the Old Testament is concerned with man, he initiates a covenant with him that was aimed at regulating the social and religious conduct of the Israelite people. *Yahweh addresses man as a dialogue partner, called to the freedom of conformity to the divine will.* In Israelite logic, it is not man who must seek Yahweh, but He constantly seeks man. To this end, we can affirm that the communication of the divine will through the prophecies outlined a permanent institution of dialogue between Yahweh and the Israelite people. Prophecy is not mantic, it is not a magical act, it is not carried out based on the consumption of hallucinogenic substances as the oracles of ancient Rome did, and it is not suggested symbolically. Prophecy thus becomes the bridge of conversation, of dialogue that allows the intimate encounter between the divine Person and his human counterpart to take place.

Yahweh opened a way for man to dialogue with him, to reveal His will to him in an intelligible language accessible to man. And man could receive the divine message: "The Lord said to Moses" (Ex 3:7), "The Lord said to Aaron" (Ex 18:1), "The Lord said to me" (Ezk 23:36). The structure of the dialogue between Yahweh and man not only respects the direction from Him to humanity, but also implies the reverse of this direction: "And the Lord heard your words, as you spoke to me, and the Lord said to me" (Deut 5,28). Also, this personal dialogue cannot take place under any condition. Man must qualify himself spiritually and morally to be the recipient of the Lord's word: "For is there any man who will hear the voice of the living God speaking out of the midst of the fire, as we have heard, and live?" (Deut 5,26).

Love is only possible in freedom. As two attributes of the relational or personal Deity, love and freedom are mutually involved. Communication and relationship with another person are defined in the understanding of freedom. Man is called to free-

dom ("you were called to freedom", Gal 5:13). The whole of the Holy Scripture hails the freedom of relation, the cooperative freedom of dialogue as an integral part of the relationship of conformity and communion with God.

Yahweh's relationship with the people of Israel, like any real interpersonal relationship, is free and structured, with clearly defined mutual responsibilities. Failure to meet these conditions of conformity brings wrath and disappointment from the deity. Here is the key to interpersonal freedom: Yahweh created man with all the necessary conditions to actualize his purpose in this life. Based on freedom, the Israelite people may or may not conform to divine standards. In the case of non-conformity, Yahweh is angry with the sinners. God gets angry with Israel and rebukes them through His prophets – but the people of Israel also get angry when God doesn't seem to keep His part of the relational covenant (Ps 44).

God's adoption of Israel is an illustration of His *human* character in the sense of making it accessible to be understood and received. This covenant relationship is based on love and commitment, just like a human relationship. Yahweh's adoption of man cannot be revoked. Despite the unfaithfulness of the chosen people in certain historical circumstances, Yahweh remains consistent with the covenant through the voice of the prophets.

Another identifying mark of Yahweh as relational deity is *His nam*e. "I am who I am." (Ex 3:14) calls Himself: "I am the God of your father [Yahweh], the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob"." (Ex 3:6); "I am the Lord. I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob as God Almighty,[a] but by my name the Lord [b] I did not make myself fully known to them." (Ex 6:2-3). One of the fundamental and essential features of biblical revelation is that God is not nameless: he has a personal name by which he can and must be invoked. A personal name is both a marker of personal identity and a concealment of the person's true reality (Clines 1980, 323).

A game of revealing and enveloping, in that it specifies his identity in the relationship, but remains unfathomable in his being. At the back of the Israelite mind, the name was given a profound meaning: it was a mark of personal identity, but it also suggested the character of the person concerned, as well as his expression. Knowing a person's name creates the possibility of a dialogic relationship.

The origin and meaning of the divine name Yahweh (Yahweh) have been the subject of wide debate in biblical scholarship. The name is most likely related to the verbal root *hwy* or *hwh*, meaning „to be" (de Vaux 1970, 59).

The name Yahweh had an eminently sacred character, being forbidden to be pronounced by the Israelites, but it was reserved for the priest only once a year when he entered the Holy of Holies.

It is noteworthy that in the Old Testament worldview, the divine attributes that are identified with God and yet exhibit some degree of independent identity (Lammert 2009, 195) – often called hypostases – play a much more important role than we are used to thinking. Charles Gieschen, in his work *Angelomorphic Christology: Antecedents and Early Evidence*, contrasts the typical Western way of seeing attributes as abstract concepts with the biblical (Eastern) way of seeing these attributes as tangible forms. He states that textual analysis supports the claim that it is legitimate to refer to the poses as aspects of God possessing varying degrees of distinct personality. It is essential to emphasize that contemporary modes of conceptualization often hesitate to assign a level of personhood to these divine attributes. However, the evidence derived from the biblical text guides us towards understanding a worldview rooted more in tangible forms than in abstract notions. Accordingly, in this worldview, the Name, Glory, Wisdom, Word, Spirit, and Power are not primarily abstract concepts but are tangible realities with visible forms (Gieschen 1998, 122).

It could be stated, in support of our argument, that they are concrete ways of evidence of the personal and relational dimension of Yahweh (Byrne 2009, 334-49).

The anthropomorphic representation of Yahweh is another mark of His relational dimension. It should be noted that the anthropomorphic representation of God was unacceptable to the ancient philosophers, considering it completely unjustified, even immoral, the image and attribution of human qualities to the Absolute, in what we could call, with the rigour of the terms used, the "humanization" of God. In this projection of theological construction, the direction is from man to God, but on the previous foundation of divine revelation communicated to man.

In theological context, anthropomorphism denotes a conceptual framework in which God is understood in terms of attributes that are exclusively human, such as the capacity for discriminating judgment, the exercise of responsible decision-making and choice, and the ability to pursue long-term goals. A deity characterized by these qualities is adequately articulated using personal pronouns and transitive verbs, using expressions such as "possess", "loves", "judges", "promises", "forgives" and analogous terms. This manner of using language suggests a form of *psychic anthropomorphism*. Also, reading the books of the Old Testament, we can pick up another form of physical

anthropomorphism: the "face", "hand", "arm", "back", and "finger" of Yahweh. According to this approach, Jewish and Christian theologians of the first centuries accepted both *psychic* (feelings, feelings) and *somatic* (face, hand, foot) anthropomorphism as a basic principle of their faith (Howell 2014, 1-59; Smith 2016).

E. LaB. Cherbonnier (1962, 187-8) mentions that the God presented in the Bible shares a level of anthropomorphism comparable to the deities of the ancient Greek and Roman pantheon. The biblical God shows more affinities with these Olympian figures than with the Absolute of ancient Greek philosophy. The distinction between Yahweh and Zeus, for example, is not a logical or formal one, but rather a factual and existential one. The prophets do not criticize the pagan deities for their anthropomorphism, but for their real inability to emerge as all-powerful beings interested in the human condition, unable to explain the origin and purpose of human life, and unable to transcend the limits of their existence under the fateful empire of destiny or cosmic law (*moira, dharma*, etc.). Their character is formal.

A prevailing view suggests that the anthropomorphism found in the Bible is a mere rhetorical device, a symbolic representation of the hidden and wholly other God, which escapes all attempts at description. Several well-known passages are routinely cited to support the claim that the Bible transcends anthropomorphism. However, contemporary scholars, by situating these passages in their contextual framework and thus recovering their original meaning, challenge such an interpretation. Hosea 11:9 serves as an illustrative example: "I am God almighty and not man: I am the Holy One in your midst". Judging it at face value, this passage contrasts God with humanity, repudiating anthropomorphism. However, contextual analysis establishes otherwise. Hosea, as one of the boldest anthropomorphic authors in the Bible, ascribes to God Himself the emotions and feelings of a husband whose wife has been unfaithful. The contrast between God and humanity is about their respective approaches to the situation. Instead of responding to Israel's unbelief with punitive measures, as is usually expected of men, God refrains from any retribution. He shows mercy and forgiveness to change the heart of Israel.

Over time, alongside the process of diversifying the interreligious relations and with the interaction with the philosophies of the time, mostly based on the reality of the incarnation of the Son of God, biblical theology, in the variations of the interpretation of the biblical text, adapted the old anthropomorphic hermeneutics to some of the requirements of philosophy, given the fact that the Fathers The Churches were schooled,

in the first instance, in the philosophical directions contemporary to them: God is a person, a Trinity of Persons – the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit – but each divine Person is devoid of any somatic, physical content.

Conclusions

Yahweh's self-revelation within the historicity of the Israelite people produced a radical re-signification of the understanding of the divine. For the first time in the religious history of humanity, God communicates Himself as a person and initiates a historical dialogue with man. For all these reasons, the religious coordinates of the Old Testament confirm the transition from the impersonal to the personal, from the archaic sacred to the monotheistic sacred, and from mythology to a logical and theological systematization of the relational divine.

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"Imitatio Dei" – the Old Testament Way of Knowing God

Abstract

Created in the image and likeness of God, man has as his ultimate reference the divine model, being called by his very nature to reflect the character and attributes of his Creator. Man as "imago Dei" is called to "imitatio Dei". His call to holiness is at the same time a call to imitate God, a call to become like God. Even if in his transcendence God remains unknowable by his being, man can know him by the way God reveals himself through his works in the world. Imitation of God therefore enables man to move beyond speculative, abstract knowledge to a true form of knowledge which presupposes a recognition of God from His works in the world.

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Imitation, Mercy, Knowledge, Holiness, Likeness

Introduction

The concept of "imitatio Dei" generated a very intense debate among biblical scholars in the first half of the last century. Unexpectedly, the intensity of this debate has not been lost over time, but has, on the contrary, increased and continues to this day. Thus, although the scholarly world seemed to have assumed that the concept was of major hermeneutical importance for the understanding of the moral character of the Old Testament, in recent times more and more voices have emerged that challenge this claim and try to downplay it. After the efforts of M. Buber (1948, 66-77) who initiated the project, other scholars of the same stature followed, such as J. Hempel (1965), W. Eichrodt (1967, 373) or E. Otto (1991, 3-37), who strengthened it and took it further. They were followed in our day by E. Davies (1999, 99-115) and J. Barton (2003, 15-31),

who have enhanced the "old project", highlighting new and very important aspects of the concept of "imitatio Dei" for Old Testament morality.

Contrary to general opinion, however, there have also been voices that have bucked the "trend", either denying the importance of the concept in defining the moral character of the Old Testament, as C. Rode does (2001, 65-76), or restricting or limiting it, as W. Hudson does (2007, 1-25). These studies, and C. Rode's in particular, revived the debate, prompting J. Barton to respond in his valuable work on Old Testament ethics.

In our Orthodox theology, the topic is addressed by G. Mantzaridis in his work on moral theology, which is limited to a biblical and patristic foundation of the concept of "imitatio Dei" and then shifts the focus to the concept of "imitatio Christi" in which it practically extends and reveals the mysteries of the former. For Mantzaridis, "man, although he cannot know God by his being, can know and imitate his works" (2006, 217). The biblical basis he uses is, of course, the making of man in the image and likeness of God (Acts 1:26), to which he associates the call to holiness that God himself makes to man: "Be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy" (Lv 19:2 – ESV). On their basis, "the imitation of God must have the character of integral relationship to Him" (Mantzaridis 2006, 216).

So, God wants His nature to be reflected in man, His character and attributes can serve as a model and paradigm for man that can make the "imago Dei" become a call to "imitatio Dei".

Man is the image and likeness of God

Man, according to A. Lacoque, is "like the Elohim", being created according to the celestial model which takes him out of the sphere of the visible and makes God "the ultimate reference of the human being stretched towards the Other [...] everything in him is a call to enter into communion with the divine model" (Lacoque, Ricoeur 2002, 2).

According to the divine pattern, man is crowned with glory and honour (Ps 8:6), destined to rise to the full likeness of God. Psalm 8, a text commonly recognized as paraphrasing the theme of man's creation from Genesis 1:26-27, paradoxically reveals how man is likened to God in a context that emphasizes the clear distinction between God and his most precious creation, man. Of course, when we speak of the imitation of God, we must consider what M. Buber considers to be the central paradox of Judaism –

In fact of the Old Testament – which reveals God both as unique and immeasurable in His transcendence, but also as the One who comes to man with a character that can be imitated by His creature.

At. Negoiță also uses Psalm 8, which he regards as "the oldest commentary on the expression *in our image and likeness*" (Negoiță 92-93), to argue that man's likeness to God lies mainly in his moral attributes.

Thus, we can understand, as most commentators do, that the imitation of God, or rather of His attributes, is based on making man in the image and likeness of God. The fact that man is created in the image of God becomes in the Old Testament conception an incentive to imitate God, the notion being understood not only because of the creative act but also as a call for man to become like God (Davies 1999, 111).

In the tradition of the Eastern Church, for the Church Fathers, the imitation of God reveals its mysteries in the imitation of Christ, who is not only an imitator of the Father, but an image (icon) of the unseen God (Col 1:15) (Mantzaridis 2006, 218). "By the revelation of the Word of God in the person of Christ as true God and true man we have not only the revelation or unveiling of the divine ethos but also the revelation of the perfect human ethos," (Mantzaridis 2006, 220) and by this "it is shown that the divinized body of the Lord Christ is the leaven of our human nature" (Popa 2018, 225).

Relationship of filiation between God and man

If we pursue to the same hermeneutical approach, such as that used by Augustine, for whom the New Testament is hidden in the Old and the Old Testament opens in the New, we can go further in understanding the concept of "imitatio Dei" based on the observation of the relationship of filiation between God and man. Children naturally follow their parents, in whose care they find themselves and entrust their lives, imitating their character and attributes. Often in the Old Testament, God acts towards his people as a parent who cares for, rebukes or forgives his children (Dt 14:1; 32:2), and the prophet Jeremiah warns his fellow countrymen like mindless children for having strayed from the knowledge of God: "And all this is only because my people are without mind and do not know me; they are children of no understanding, and have no understanding; they are skilled only in evil, and do not know good" (Jer 4:22).

The prophet Hosea expresses himself in the same vein, emphasizing the fatherly love and boundless love that God shows to His people: "Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk; I took them up by their arms, but they did not know that I healed

them. I led them with cords of kindness, with the bands of love, and I became to them as one who eases the yoke on their jaws, and I bent down to them and fed them." (Hos 11:3-4). Divine fatherhood is also highlighted by the Psalmist in the context of invoking God's boundless mercy towards his children: "As a father shows compassion to his children, so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear him." (Ps 102:13). Here, "the motivation for observing the law is not fear of punishment, but the desire to conform to God's will" (Lacoque, Ricoeur 2002, 96). The prophet Isaiah specifically calls God "our Father" who has the task of redeeming us: "You, O Lord, are our Father, our Saviour" (Is 63:16), and then the prophet invokes the Creator quality of the heavenly Father: "But now, O Lord, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand." (Is 64:7). Man is called to entrust himself to God, who not only gives life and protects his sons, but, like a potter, shapes the character of his sons by his care. G. Mantzaridis points out that: "If the imitation attempted by the believer does not resemble the imitation attempted by the child, who entrusts himself completely to his father, then it is not authentic and does not bear fruit. Through absolute entrustment to God, man makes himself the recipient of his grace and a sharer in his ethos or conduct" (Mantzaridis 2006, 218). Divine fatherhood is reflected in God's love for his children, from whom he expects them to respond in the same spirit of their love, thus imitating his loving character.

Imitating God is a human vocation

The making of man in the image of God indicates that imitating God is part of the human vocation. The anthropomorphisms attributed to God, or in other words, the way the Old Testament describes God's presence and work with all his attributes in human terms, make it easier for biblical man to imitate him. This attitude, however, does not imply an imitation of a humanized image of God, but that of a personal God who comes to man and is present in his life. The description of God in explicitly personal terms, E. Davies points out, paved the way for the understanding that both the character and actions of God can be reflected in human behaviour (Davies 1999, 110). Man is called to strive to imitate God, but at the same time to be fully aware of the gulf that separates him from Him in the plane of holiness.

However, the reference text that is generally used to present the notion of "imitatio Dei" in the Old Testament is that of Lv 19:2: "Be holy, as I the Lord your God am holy", which is a true *leitmotif* of the Code of Holiness (Lev 17-26). The text of

Leviticus 19:2, like all the other similar texts recorded in the Leviticus (11:44; 20:7, 26; 21:8), represents a true call addressed both to the chosen people as a whole and to each member of it, to behave in a manner reflecting God's character. Yahweh – W. Zimmerli points out – comes to His people desiring that His nature be reflected in their nature, the closeness between God's gift and His command being unmistakable (Zimmerli 2000, 142).

For E. Davies, at first glance, it seems that this commandment represents a utopian, abstract ideal, but from the verses that follow in chapter 19 the "holiness" spoken of here was intensely practised. It involves the fulfilment of specific social obligations, such as sons' respect for their parents (Lv 19:3), generosity to the poor (Lv 19:9-10), compassion to the sick (Lv 19:14), integrity in legal proceedings (Lv 19:19), or honesty in commercial transactions (Lv 19:35-36) (Davies 1999, 103).

Thus, we can see that this call to holiness cannot be limited only to cultic duties, such as observance of the Sabbath or rituals of purification but concerns the entire moral behaviour that must be guided by this commandment in daily life (Zimmerli 2000, 102).

J. Milgrom himself, who insists so much on the distinction between the holiness of God and the holiness of men, emphasizing the separation implied using the term *qadosh*, recognizes that in Leviticus 19 holiness, described in positive terms, implies the imitation of God as a life well pleasing to the Lord (Milgrom 2000, 1396-8). Moreover, J. Milgrom points out that holiness involves not only "a separation from" (as is the case with separation from other peoples), but also „a separation to", by which he means the imitation/ emulation of the divine character which means living a life by the divine will (Milgrom 2000, 1604).

Man imitates God through mercy and knowledge

To live according to the divine will is to conform to the law by keeping the commandments. However, as we see in the prophet Hosea, man is called to "tend towards" God, to come to the knowledge of God through mercy (hesed), an expression of the selfless, loving fulfilment of the commandments: "For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings." (Hos 6:6). With the help of mercy, man imitates God or makes himself like God, mercy thus becoming for him a way of knowing God, his profound, merciful and merciful character. But this knowledge also has the gift of transforming man profoundly from within, sanctifying

him in the true sense of the word. Imitation of God implies a continuous advancement on the path of knowing God while sanctifying one's personal life. We can therefore say that mercy enables man to reach the hidden God (Is 45:15), working and keeping his deeds in secret without falling into the hypocritical side of cultic formalism. If we bear in mind the repetitive nature of the Hebrew language, to which the Old Testament authors often resort to reinforcing an idea, we see in the text of Hosea 6:6 that "mercy" (*hesed*) corresponds to "knowledge of God" (*da`at Elohim*), just as "sacrifice" corresponds to "burnt offering". God does not reject sacrifice, but the formal act that does not spring from the merciful heart of a man who shows his love for God, first, through mercy and love for others. Only in this way can he receive the reward of the knowledge of God, living and working in His image.

For most commentators, old and new, the knowledge of God of which Hosea speaks is not "speculative knowledge" but a form of "religious recognition" that leads to obedience to His will, to the observance of His law: "Hear the word of the Lord, O children of Israel, for the Lord has a controversy with the inhabitants of the land. There is no faithfulness or steadfast love, and no knowledge of God in the land; there is swearing, lying, murder, stealing, and committing adultery; they break all bounds, and bloodshed follows bloodshed." (Hos 4:1-2). Although we fully agree with this interpretation, we must admit, like Rev. Ioan Chirilă, that this knowledge of God is also presented to us "as a gateway to true life and eternal life" (Chirilă, 1999, 147). The distinction between the "knowledge of the Lord" (*da'at Yahweh*) (Hos 2:22) and the "knowledge of God" (*da'at Elohim*) (Hos 4:2; 6:6) with which Hosea operates can also open the prospect of "knowing God" "from His works, from the fruit of the manifestation of His energies, which would lead to the totality of divine attributes" (Chirilă, 1999, 148).

"Although God loves (`*hb*) Israel, when He speaks of their response He demands knowledge (`*yd*), even though we would expect love to demand love" (Brown, Fizmeyer, Murphy 2009, 35): "And I will betroth you to me forever. I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love and in mercy. I will betroth you to me in faithfulness. And you shall know the Lord" (Hos 2:21-22). God's betrothal/ union with His chosen people is to know God, which is achieved by following the divine example of faithfulness (*emet*) and merciful love (*hesed*). Love demands faithfulness and fidelity to God and is expressed in the fulfilment of the commandments.

The knowledge of God claimed by the "formula of recognition" so often used by the prophet Ezekiel ("They shall know that I am the Lord") is essentially about keeping

the commandments, indicating that without conforming to divine norms one cannot remain in a living relationship with God, whose presence is revealed by His very name: "And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I deal with you for my name's sake, not according to your evil ways, nor according to your corrupt deeds, O house of Israel, declares the Lord God." (Ezk 20:44). Based on his freedom, man is called to fulfil the commandments (Lacoque, Ricoeur 2002, 103) and thereby prove his love for God: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might." (Dt 6:5). This love conditional on keeping the commandments, following the way of the Lord and serving Him (Dt 10:12; 11:22) cannot, in W. Zimmerli's opinion, equate man's love with God's love for Israel. Love follows the Lord's call in the paths He traces, Israel's response being a response to God's initiative (Zimmerli 2000, 144). In contrast to Deuteronomy 10:16, where the people are exhorted to circumcise their hearts, enlivening their covenant with God with their inner dedication, Deuteronomy 30:6 promises that it is God Himself who will circumcise their hearts, an act that transcends human initiative, foreshadowing the work of grace flowing from God's boundless love: "And the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live." (Dt 30:6). Under their election, the people are called to respond to the love that God has already shown to their fathers and to follow them faithfully after the pattern of His love (Rosenzweig 1981, 210, Lacoque, Ricoeur 2002, 114): "For He loved your fathers and chose you, their descendants." (Dt 4:37) Moreover, the prophet Amos is very clear about Israel's choice and responsibility about the other peoples: "I have known you alone of all the nations of the earth" (Am 3:2).

The knowledge of God therefore includes an intense aspect of personal recognition based on the love with which man is called to respond to God's love for him. God knows you by your heart, by His love, demanding that you use this to acknowledge Him. Hosea 4:1-2 and 6:6 invite us to imitate God, to know/recognize Him from His merciful acts, full of love. Moreover, "every form of loyalty, kindness, love or mercy (translation options for *hesed*) is ultimately rooted in God's loyalty, kindness, love and mercy" (Sakenfeld 1992, 5387). Through such attributes, the image portraying God as the Shepherd Father of His chosen people, whose behaviour can be highlighted by the term *hesed*, is also outlined (Eichrodt 1967, 235).

The *hesed* invoked by the prophet Hosea is and remains, par excellence, an attitude specific to divinity, yet he does not hesitate to ask it of Israel. Hosea's appeal to

the image of marriage or the relationship between parent and children enables him to generate a context of intimacy through which he manages to reverse the natural relationship between God and his people (Sakenfeld 1992, 5387). Thus, Israel is called to behave towards others as God behaves towards him, and this behaviour must be based on a free and voluntary commitment, springing from pure love for his fellow human beings. Just as God, rich in mercy, pours out his gifts to a weak and powerless Israel, so too Israel must be towards the vulnerable and helpless in his midst, surrounding them with his care. This care must be freely assumed and tested by each Israelite, through an active concern for the current needs of the whole community: "He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" (Mi 6:8).

Hesed appears as a summary term for the fulfilment of the provisions of the Act. From this perspective, K. D. Sakenfeld states that "hesed represents the entire Decalogue in a single word" (Sakenfeld 1992, 5387). For the prophet Micah, as for the prophet Hosea, such observance of the Decalogue, in the deep spirit of the covenant relationship, involves not only what God comands, but especially what God desires and imperatively demands of His people (Sakenfeld 1992, 5387). God shows *hesed* to those who, out of love for him, keep his commandments: "I show steadfast love (*hesed*) to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments." (Ex 20:6; Dt 5:10). The Psalmist also paraphrases, in poetic form, the Lord's words spoken in the context of the utterance of the Ten Commandments: "But the steadfast love (*hesed*) of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him, and his righteousness to children's children, to those who keep his covenant and remember to do his commandments. The Lord has established his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom rules over all." (Ps 103:17-19).

God does not condition, but rather He is conditioned by the response of His people, by their steadfastness in covenant relationship. God is conditioned by the covenant made with Israel, to which, not infrequently, he is obliged to show *hesed* (Eichrodt 1975, 232-3), the term automatically implying divine forgiveness (Ex 34:6). Forgiveness springs from God's firm commitment to his covenant with Israel, without which it is not possible to restore and continue the relationship with his people. "For individuals as well as for the whole community – says K.D. Sakenfeld – God's forgiveness, as an act of *hesed* that continues the divine-human relationship, is fundamental and underlies all other manifestations of *hesed*" (Sakenfeld 1992, 5387). Not infrequently, the Psalmist

asks God to pardon him, implicitly invoking his forgiveness: "Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions." (Ps 51:1-2). Divine forgiveness is understood as an act freely offered and a gift from God, and his mercy can be invoked continually: "The Lord will fulfill his purpose for me; your steadfast love, O Lord, endures forever. Do not forsake the work of your hands." (Ps 138:8). Manifested as *hesed*, divine forgiveness can go beyond the borders of Israel and embrace all people, as is the case with the Ninevites, who repent for their sins (Jonah 3:10). God's mercy is highlighted by contrasting it with the wrath of Jonah, who cannot understand how God can forgive even such an unworthy people associated with unbelief: "And should not I pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle?" (Jonah 4:11). The saintly author does not wish merely to point out human weaknesses concerning the long-suffering and great divine mercy, but, aware of man's limitations, he also wishes to call upon him to follow the divine example by imitating his deeds. As Maimonides pointed out, "God is what he does" and so man can become like God when he imitates him according to his works in the world.

The justice of the Lord – a model for human justice

God demands "behaviour that will stand the test in real life" (Zimmerli 2000, 139). It is not by chance that the term *hesed* is often accompanied, as we have seen from previous biblical texts, by *sedaqa* (righteousness), which calls for appropriate behaviour according to the order willed by God. The term *sedaqa* should not be confused with justice in the legal sense or righteous retribution, because *sedaqa* (justice) in the Old Testament can be understood neither as a norm nor as an absolute ideal (Krauss 1992, 154). "Justice is not a norm, but a relationship" (Krauss 1992, 154) that must be preserved and cultivated within the covenant relationship. The character of each person is shaped in the community to which he or she must show full responsibility (Zimmerli 2000, 138). *Sedaqa* (righteousness) reflects this reality very well on the level of concrete personal life. In the context of Israel, God's chosen people, *sedaqa* constitutes for man the standard to be followed not only for his relationship with God but also for his relationship with his fellow human beings (von Rad 1962, 370). *Sedaqa* covers a broad field of social, ethical and religious behaviour, implying appropriate conduct in all areas of life that opens the concrete possibility for man to truly know God, making himself practically like Him: "He judged the cause of the poor and needy; then

it was well. Is not this to know me? declares the Lord" (Jer 22:16). Israel is often called upon by the prophets (Jer 22:3; Is 16:5) or by the psalmist (Ps 72:1-2) to do judgment and justice like the Lord, to judge the world according to the measure of God's mercy (Rabbi Akiba). In other words, by his actions, by his behaviour towards his fellow men, man is called to find himself in the logic of divine behaviour, summed up so beautifully in the words of the psalmist: "He loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of the steadfast love of the Lord" (Ps 33:5).

Human justice has its source in the justice of Yahweh, who becomes the source and model, the divine nature being projected through *sedaqa* onto the life of the community: "But let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the Lord" (Jer. 9:24). It is not by chance that man, humbly seeking righteousness by fulfilling the deeds of the Law, finds himself on the path of true knowledge of God: "Seek the Lord, all you humble of the land, who do his just commands; seek righteousness; seek humility; perhaps you may be hidden on the day of the anger of the Lord." (Zeph. 2:3).

Conclusions

Imitation of God involves continual advancement on the path of knowing Him while sanctifying one's personal life. By walking in the way of the Lord, the believer has the possibility of reaching the hidden God (Is 45:15), working and keeping his deeds secret, without falling into the hypocritical side of cultic formalism. Man is called to humbly seek righteousness by fulfilling the deeds of the Law, to find himself on the path of true knowledge of God. The knowledge of God also includes an intense aspect of personal recognition based on the love with which man is called to respond to God's love for him. God knows you according to your heart through His love, demanding that you use this to know/recognize Him. Hosea 4:1-2 and 6:6, but also the other prophets (Jer 9:24; 22:15; Ezk 20:44; Am 5:5; Mi 6:8; Zeph. 2:3, etc.) invite us to know/recognize God by imitating His merciful, loving acts.

Note

This article is a revised version of chapter 7 of my book entitled *Credința și formele ei de manifestare în Vechiul Testament*. Craiova: Mitropolia Olteniei, 2023.

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The preparation for the incarnation of God in iconography: the fresco painting "Tree of Jesse"

Abstract

The study explores the intricate iconographic composition of "The Tree of Jesse," an important subject in Orthodox Christian art, depicting the genealogy of Jesus Christ. The fresco visually narrates the preparation for the Messiah's arrival, showcasing the lineage of Christ, Old Testament prophets, and prefigurative scenes that highlight the connection between the Old and New Testaments. Originating in the 12th century, "The Tree of Jesse" became widespread in Orthodox mural programs, with notable examples across the Balkans and Eastern Europe. The study also examines the inclusion of Hellenic philosophers and the Queen of Sheba in these compositions, symbolising the broader divine revelation beyond Israel. Their presence reflects the theological concept that wisdom and prophecies from pagan sources also anticipated Christ's coming. The iconography serves as a liturgical tool, intertwining biblical and philosophical traditions to emphasise the universal scope of salvation history.

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Keywords

Iconography, Tree of Jesse, Orthodox Church, Hellenic Philosophers, Messianic Prophecies

Introduction

Icon painting brings together the gospel of salvation and the image of salvation (Стоядинов [Stoyadinov] 2009, 2) and this fully applies to the fresco painting that will be discussed – "The Tree of Jesse" [1]. Every dogma finds expression in the icon painting, and through this scene, the entire preparation for the coming of the

long-awaited Messiah is presented – In Israel and in the rest of the pagan world, which is not deprived of God's providence and care. The whole composition is crowned by Christ, because "all things were created by him, and for him" (Col 1:16, KJV). The horizontal and vertical lines of images of the prophets, prefigurations, and pagans, who reveal the long preparation of the fallen world for the coming of the Living God, are gathered in the image of Christ.

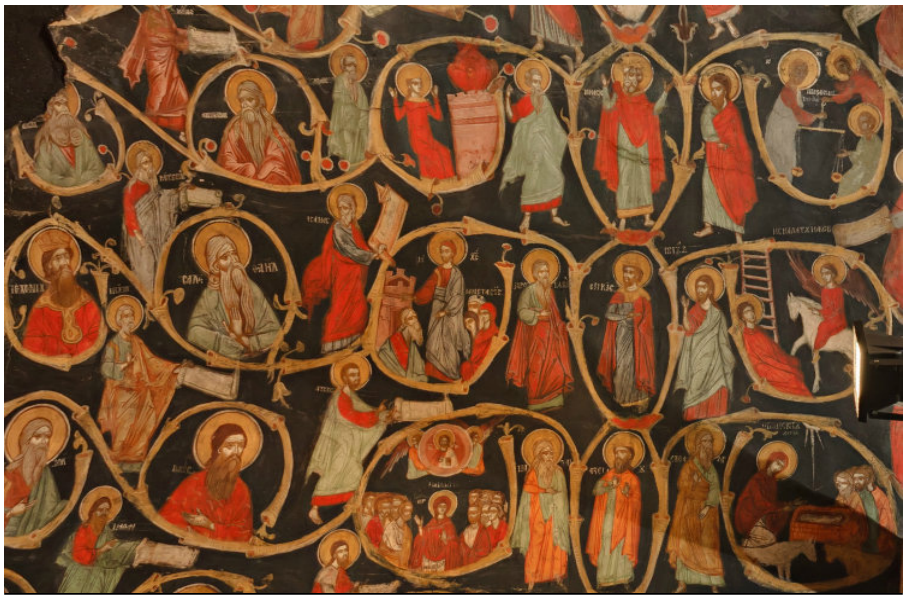
Christ is the hermeneutical key that discovers the meaning of this long journey from Eden to Bethlehem.

"The Tree of Jesse" (or "The Vine of Jesse") is a complex iconographic composition depicting the ancestors of the Lord Jesus Christ in the flesh, prophets, Old Testament types and their fulfilment (New Testament scenes), Hellenic wise men (sages). The model is directly related to the liturgical life of the Church, depicts the dogmatic teaching about the incarnation of God and the idea of revelation among Israel and the Gentiles before the coming of the Savior. The composition is a visual expression of the unity between the two covenants, clearly expressed in the worship of the Church.

According to researches, the wall painting in the Studenica Monastery (Serbia), dating from the forties of the twelfth century, is considered one of the earliest examples in the Balkans (Серафимова [Serafimova] 2012, 5-6). In the period from the 13th to the 17th century, the "The Tree of Jesse" became a widespread theme in the mural program of Orthodox churches. Samples from this period are found in the monastery "Holy Trinity" in Sopočani, Serbia (ca. 1265); the Church "St. Achilles" in Arile, Serbia (1296); Žiča Monastery, Serbia (1310-1313); the Monastery of Visoki Dečani in Kosovo (1348-1350); the Monastery "St. Mother of God Mavriotissa" (*Μονή Παναγίας Μαυριώτισσας*) in Kastoria (1259–1265); the Church "St. Sophia" in Trebizond (now Trabzon) (1260-1270); the Church "St. Apostles" in Thessaloniki [2] (after 1315); the Church "St. Peter and Paul" in V. Tarnovo (end of the 15th century); in the Athos Monasteries – the Great Lavra (1536) and Dohiar (1568); the refectory (dining room) of the Bachkovo Monastery (1623), Kučevište Monastery "St. Archangels Michael and Gabriel" in North Macedonia (1630-1631), the Church of the Nativity of Christ in Arbanasi (1681) [3]. Numerous samples of the composition are preserved in the Moldavian Monasteries – Humor (1530-1535), Suceava (1532-1534), Moldovița (1537), Voroneț (1547) and Sucevița (ca. 1600) (see more Taylor 1980/1981, 130).

Suzy Dufrenne, in her article dedicated to the iconographic program of Byzantine churches from the 13th century, points out that at the time when the Sopočani

Monastery was painted, images from the Old Testament entered to enrich the narthexes (Dufrenne 1967, 43 – cited by Taylor 1980/1981, 165). Just as the Old Testament prophets foretold the incarnation and redemptive suffering of the Savior, so the narthex and side galleries of the temple stand *before* and lead *to the place* where the sacrament of the Eucharist is performed (see also Taylor 1980/1981, 166). As architecturally the narthex and galleries lead to the nave and altar, so do the frescoes of these parts are an introduction to salvation.



Tree of Jesse (detail). The image is cited by: Прашков, Любен. Църквата „Рождество Христово" в Арбанаси. С., 1979, с. 111, ил. 94. [Lyuben Prashkov, The Church of the Nativity in Arbanasi (Sofia, 1979), 111, ill. 94].

The main text from the Scriptures, from which the composition "The Tree of Jesse" originates, is Isaiah's prophecy – "And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots" (Is 11:1, KJV). The image can also be connected with other texts in the Scriptures that relate the Messiah to the Jesse (David) family and texts from the hymnography. In the Revelation, the Lord Jesus Christ is called "the root and seed of David" (Rev 22:16), and the prophecy of Isaiah is also quoted by the Apostle Paul: "The root of Jesse will exist" (Rom 15:12). The main

New Testament texts with which the composition is connected are the two genealogies of the Lord Jesus Christ in the Gospels (Mt 1:1-17; Lk 3:23-38).

The pericope from the book of Isaiah (11:1-10) is one of the paroimias for the Nativity of Christ. The first Christological interpretations of this prophecy of Isaiah were found in the "Dialog with Trypho" by St. Justin Martyr (Св. Иустин Философ и мученик [St. Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 86,87,126] 1892 (1995), 274-7, 335-7) and "Against Heresies" and "Proof of the Apostolic Preaching" by St. Irenaeus of Lyons (St. Irenaeus. Against Heresies 533 and 3.17 – cited by Ladouceur 2006, 39). The liturgical texts express the same interpretation of the prophecy – the Holy Virgin is the branch, and the rod and flower is Christ (irmos of the fourth ode of the 1st canon of the Nativity of Christ, 5 ode of the 1st canon of the Nativity of the Virgin).

According to several researchers, the iconography of the "Tree of Jesse" originated in the West. The first examples of the depiction of the Savior's genealogy could be found as a miniature in the frontal gospels to the text of Mt 1:1 (Codex Aureus of Lorsch, 810) (Квиливидзе [Kvilividze] 2007, 269) and in a miniature in the Gospel of King Vratislav of 1085-1086 (University Library Prague, Cod. XIV, 1085) (Серафимова [Serafimova] 2012, 5), in which the scene is placed on the same page as the miniature of the prophet Ezekiel's vision of the closed doors [4]. Despite numerous studies, it is still debatable where and when this pattern originated but it is a fact that around the 12th century "The Tree of Jesse" already appears in manuscripts and from the 13th century in wall paintings (see more in Taylor 1980/1981, 125-176; Серафимова [Serafimova] 2012, 5; McVey 2009, 18).

In his extensive study of the "Tree of Jesse", Michael Taylor points to eighteen examples – one on the facade of the cathedral in Orvieto from 1262-1264 (Italy), the others in Serbia, Greece, Romania and North Macedonia – sharing common iconographic characteristics, which may lead to the conclusion of the existence of a compositional archetype that appeared ca. 1262–1264 (Taylor 1980/1981, 125). According to Michael Taylor, this archetype had two lines of evolution – western and eastern, with the eastern being richer and more developed (Taylor 1980/1981, 125-76).

In Orthodox iconography, the image of the "The Tree of Jessee" has been known since the 13th century (Серафимова [Serafimova] 2012, 5). Some art critics determine the existence of two variants of the scene in Byzantine art. The basis of one is the genealogy according to Matthew, and in these cases, the pattern is defined as the "Genealogy of Christ" and is considered separately from the "The Tree of Jesse" [5].

In the other version, the ancestors of Christ are depicted, and there are images of prophets, scenes from the Old Testament (mostly with prefigurative characters – Balaam with the star/donkey, the burning bush, Gideon's fleece, etc.) and the New Testament's scenes, corresponding to the theme of the incarnation, birth and atoning sacrifice of Christ. The composition can include ancient philosophers, poets, sybill with scrolls. Both versions present the genealogy of Christ – one is more accurate compared to Matthew's genealogy, and the other is more extended, presenting, along with the kings and prophets, the types and the history before the incarnation. The main vertical of the Tree, which originates from Jesse in all compositions, consists of Old Testament kings, at the top are the figures of the Holy Mother of God and the King of Kings – Christ. This is how the royal ancestry (Серафимова [Serafimova] 2012, 4; McVey 2009, 19) of the "flower from the Jesse root" is visualized (irmos, 4 ode of the 1st canon of the Nativity of Christ).

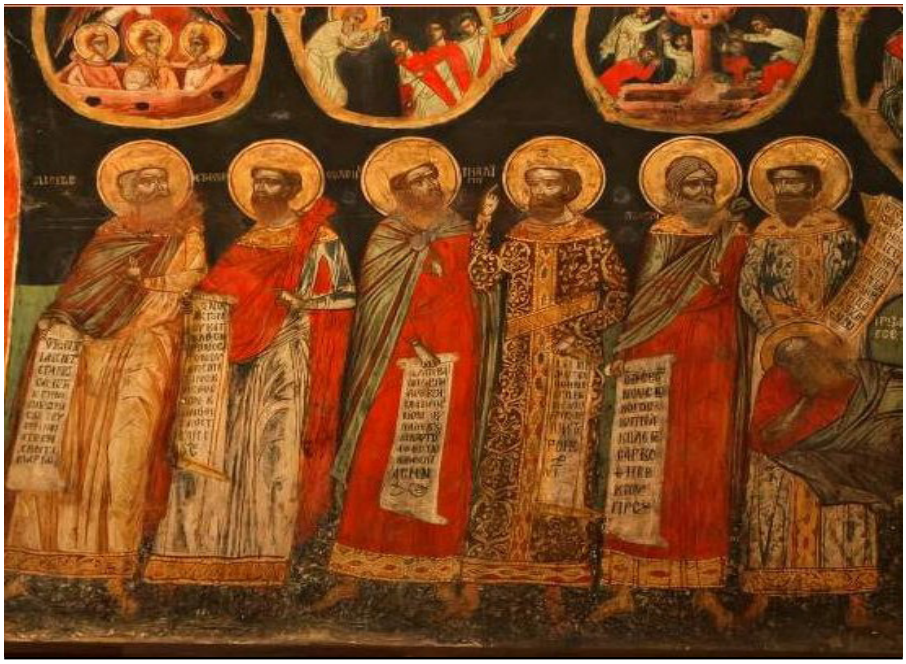
The iconography of the "Tree of Jesse" is a whole, made up of two thematic circles: Christ's ancestors in flesh (single figures) and biblical events that are interpreted prefiguratively [6], or as fulfilled messianic prophecies (mainly New Testament scenes such as the Nativity of Christ, descent into hell, etc.). This second thematic circle differs in the samples, although the prefigures are broadly the same, and in some cases have been replaced by similar ones (such as the replacement of the miracle of Gideon's fleece with Moses and the burning bush – both events are prefigures of Theotokos).

The image has an indisputable liturgical basis and must be interpreted in a liturgical context – the mentioned main texts from the Scriptures are part of the liturgy for the Nativity of Christ (Is 11) and the Sunday before the Nativity of Christ [7]. The more extensive examples of the "Tree of Jesse" are based on a combination of texts from the Scriptures, all of which are typologically interpreted in the Church's worship, and liturgical texts dedicated to the incarnation of God, and hence to the Theotokos, as a "ladder" by which God descends into the world. For this reason, a large part of the prefigurative images in the composition are of the Holy Virgin (the fleece, Jacob's ladder, the burning bush, etc.) [8] and point to the incarnation of God.

The images of the Hellenic philosophers and the Queen of Sheba in the composition "Tree of Jesse"

At the base of the composition in Arbanasi are pictured 12 Greek sages and philosophers [9] – Cleomides, Aris, Solon, Diogenes, Pythagoras, Socrates, Homer,

Aristotle, Galen [10], Sibylla, Plato, Plutarch. They are located on both sides of Jesse, six on each side. They hold scrolls with prophecies and, unlike the wall painting in the refectory of the Bachkovo Monastery (1623), they are painted with halos [11]. "Some of the names belong to very famous historical figures of antiquity, others present distorted forms of names that can hardly be positively identified" (Дуйчев [Duychev] 1978, 14). The presence of the philosophers and the Sibyl is a common element of the paintings of the "Tree of Jesse" (Orvieto, Sucevița, Suceava, Kučevište Monastery, the Great Lavra, etc.).



Hellenic philosophers (Tree of Jesse, detail. Jesse's left side.). The image is cited by: Прашков, Любен. Църквата „Рождество Христово" в Арбанаси. С., 1979, с. 111, ил. 95. [Lyuben Prashkov, The Church of the Nativity in Arbanasi (Sofia, 1979), 111, ill. 95]

The first pagans who appear in the frescoes of the churches are Balaam and Sibyl. One of the earliest images is considered to be that in the church of "St. Achilles" in Arile, Serbia (1296) (Војводић [Vojvodić] 2005; see also Серафимова [Serafimova] 2012, 16), followed by the images of Hellenic sages (Plato, Sibyl [12] and Plutarch) in the Church of "Theotokos Levishka" (Prizren, Kosovo) from 1310 [13]. Until the fall

of Constantinople (1453), Hellenic philosophers were not so often present in frescoes, except for the two examples mentioned above. But in the late Middle Ages, they already became a common part of the "Tree of Jesse" – either as part of the medallions or painted on the side without scrolls (in Sucevița and Suceava, 14 Hellenic sages are depicted in the "Three of Jesse" scene, in Orvieto – 11, in the Great Lavra, the refectory of the Bachkovo Monastery and Arbanasi – 12) (Серафимова [Serafimova] 2012, 17; Taylor 1980/1981, 136). In his Painter's Manual (*Erminia*) Dionysius of Fourna, after the description of the holy forefathers according to the genealogy and other forefathers, righteous men and women of the Old Testament, also indicates a description of the images of the Hellenic philosophers and their quotes about the incarnation of God (Ерминия [Erminia] 1993, 88-9).

What is the purpose of painting the Hellenic philosophers in a scene showing the genealogy of the Lord Jesus Christ?

Icon painting is not an end in itself, it is part of the liturgical life of the Church and through it, theological ideas are conveyed in images.

First, the place of the patriating of Hellenic philosophers must be clarified: in the case from Arbanasi, the philosophers are under the "Tree", outside the "branches". The purpose of the composition is to show the prophecies, types and ancestors in flesh of Christ, therefore the presence of the philosophers under the other images [14] has a connection with the expectation of the Messiah and shows that the pagan nations are not deprived of God's revelation. This is an idea deeply rooted in Orthodox theology and liturgy. One of the paroimias for the Nativity of Christ (Nm 24:2-3.5-9.17-19) is dedicated to the pagan soothsayer Balaam, who, by God's instruction, pronounced a blessing over Israel instead of a curse. Another example from the worship showing the revelation among the Gentiles is the healing of the Syrian noble Naaman (2 Kg 5:9-14) – paroimia for Epiphany. Gentiles before Christ are not rejected, but it is assumed that they also receive a revelation that leads to Christ. As Viorel Guliciuc notes in his article devoted to the images of the philosophers in the monastery of Voroneț (Romania), the philosophers and the Sibyl are "the only representatives of the pagan pre-Christian world, who enjoyed the honour of being represented in the outdoor Byzantine painting, together with the prophets and the kings of the Old Testament (Moses, Solomon, David) as portraits/icons of peoples who have not been in Church, but would like to be in it, and wise individuals that have predicted Christ's living Church. Thus, they

have prepared the intellectual world of their time for the arrival and acceptance of the Messiah" (Guliciuc 2013, 171).

In his extensive study of the "Tree of Jesse" archetype, M. Taylor notes that the Hellenic sages are included because they foretold various events related to Christ. In Voroneț, "Plato holds a scroll which reads (roughly translated): "Christ is born of Mary. I believe in Him" (Taylor 1980/1981, 136). Taylor defines as the original source of the scrolls the writing "The Prophecies of the Seven Sages" – created probably before 560. In general, the sentences in the scrolls of the Hellenes, depicted in the "Tree of Jesse", proclaim the "trinitarian nature of God, the incarnation of the Logos and the immaculate Virgin" (see Taylor 1980/1981, 136).

The positioning of the philosophers under the Tree in a horizontal line could also convey the idea of linear and non-linear history, horizontal and vertical. Philosophers are representatives of human time and human linear history, prophets, kings and prefigurative events are located vertically, which can be perceived as a visual expression of non-linear history and time, the history of salvation and the incarnation of God. Such is the understanding of liturgical time, which is beyond our linear human understanding of time. The placement under the ancestors in flesh of the Lord Jesus Christ shows the fruitlessness of human wisdom to lead to Christ, as the Apostle Paul says "For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe." (1 Cor 1:21).

There is complete agreement among the researchers of the "Tree of Jesse" about the influence of apocryphal texts on the depictions of the Hellenic philosophers and especially the scrolls with texts they hold. In her studies devoted to the images of Hellenic sages in Russian Church painting [15] in the 16th-17th century, N.A. Kazakova focuses her attention on the apocryphal work "Prophecies of the Hellenic Sages" (Казакова [Kazakova] 1961, 358-68). I. Franco, the researcher who published the text of the Apocrypha, expressed the opinion that the "Prophecies of the Hellenic Sages" represent a compilation of Byzantine sources [16], "Palæi", "Sayings of Hermes Trismegistus", "Words of Aphroditianae" and the legend "On the twelve Sibyls" (Франко [Franco]1899, 35 – cited by Казакова [Kazakova] 1961, 358). Later researchers (Щеголев [Shchegolev]1890-1899, 89-93) noted the presence of the Apocrypha in the articles of the Chronograph [17] and in a number of collections in the 16th-17th century.

Chapter 82 of the Chronograph, entitled "On the Hellenic Sages" begins with a brief introduction that clarifies the point of view of the compilers of the text, namely that

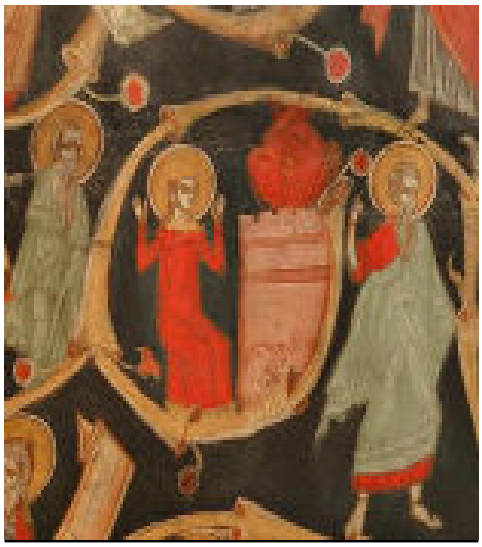
the Hellenic sages also prophesied about God: The Hellenic sages prophesied before the prophets, and God gave them a partial touch of the truth (Казакова [Kazakova] 1961, 359). Then the names of thirteen Hellenic sages are listed, among which are Thucydides, Aristotle, Plato, etc. and the three wise men (the Magi) who came to ador the Christ Child. Their sentences are dedicated to the Trinity and the incarnate Christ (Казакова [Kazakova] 1961, 359). In the transcript of the Chronograph of Guria Tushin (a book writer from the Cyril-Belozer Monastery, ГПБ, №1468) are listed 19 Hellenic sages, among them Homer, Plutarch, Euripides. The three wise men (Magi) are not mentioned, but Joshua son of Sirach and the pagan soothsayer Balaam appear. As N.A. Kazakova notes Tushin's transcript is distinguished by the Chronograph not only by the wise men listed but also by the ideological emphasis in their prophecies. If in the chronographic transcript, the sentences are mainly dedicated to the Trinity and the incarnation of God, here the theme of the incarnation is emphasized more (Казакова [Kazakova] 1961, 360).

Another person who appears in the fresco painting "Tree of Jesse", also a representative of the pagan world, is the Queen of Sheba. At first glance, the presence of this image in the fresco is surprising and strange, but the explanation is found in the tradition of the Church.

According to the story of 1 Kgs 10:1-10 and 2 Chron 9:1-12, the Queen of Sheba, hearing about Solomon's wisdom, went to Jerusalem with incense, gold and precious stones "to prove him with hard questions" (1 Kgs 10:1-3). She is also mentioned in the New Testament as the "queen of the south" (Mt 12:42; Lk 11:31). Number of traditions and legends have been preserved [18] about the meeting between the Queen of Sheba and King Solomon. In Arabic legends, she is known as Bilkis (*The Queen of Sheba*, 2000; D.A.H. / П.Н. Савска царица [D.A.H. / П.Н. The Queen of Sheba] 2007, 1204). Flavius Josephus in "Jewish Antiquities" calls her "queen of Egypt and Ethiopia" (Josephus Flavius, *Jewish Antiquities* VIII,6,2), mentions her name – Nicaule (Josephus Flavius, *Jewish Antiquities* VIII,6,2), and dedicates a chapter of his history to the meeting (Josephus Flavius, *Jewish Antiquities* VIII,6).

In church tradition, the Queen of Sheba is a type of the pagan nations who enter the Church and of the Magi (also pagans) (Brueggemann, 138) who worship the Christ Child. In the interpretations, the narrative from 1 Kgs 10 and 2 Chron 9 connects with Is 60, Song of Songs and the references to the "queen of the south" in Mt 12:42. This is how a complete symbolic interpretation of the Queen of Sheba is formed, which also

becomes an occasion for her to be included among the personalities portrayed in the fresco painting "Tree of Jesse".



Queen of Sheba (a detail from "The tree of Jesse"). The image is cited by: Прашков, Любен. Църквата „Рождество Христово" в Арбанаси. С., 1979, с. 111, ил. 94. [Lyuben Prashkov, The Church of the Nativity in Arbanasi (Sofia, 1979), 111, ill. 94]

St Gregory of Nyssa in his interpretation of the book Song of Songs (3:9-4) calls the Queen of Sheba "queen of the Ethiopians" (святитель Григорий Нисский. Изъяснение Песни песней Соломона. Беседа 7 [Saint Gregory of Nyssa, *Exposition of the Song of Solomon. Lecture 7: Interpretation of Song. 3:9-4*]1861, 173) and refers to her visit as a foreshadowing of the entrance of the Gentiles into the Church after "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men" (Tit 2:11) (St. Gregory of Nyssa, *Exposition of the Song of Solomon. Lecture 7: Interpretation of Song. 3:9-4*]1861, 176). Origen connects the queen of the south from the words of the Savior in Mt 12:42 with the Queen of Sheba and the book Song of Songs. "From the ends of the earth comes the southern queen, the Church, and condemns the people of this generation, i.e. the Jews...she comes from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon,

not He who is glorified in the Old Testament, but He who in the Gospel is more than Solomon." [19] In interpreting Mt 12:42 emphasizes "And this is this queen of Sheba (Sheba), about whom we read in the scrolls of Kings and Chronicles; she, regardless of the difficulties, left her people and kingdom and came to Judea to listen to the wisdom of Solomon, and brought him many gifts. After all, under the names of Nineveh and the Queen of Sheba, the faith of the Gentiles is secretly preferred to the faith of the Israelite people" (Иероним Стридонский [Jerom of Stridon] 1903, 113). According to the Blessed Theodoret, Queen of Sheba, is a type of all well-intentioned and honest pagans who justify themselves without the law (Бл. Θедорит, Толкование на 3 книгу Царствъ [Theodoret of Cyrus, Commentary on 3 Kings] – cited by Глаголев, 54) in the words of the apostle in Rom 2:14-15.

The image of the Queen of Sheba and her meeting with King Solomon is also mentioned in the Apocrypha works, and in some cases she is identified with the Sibyl. Prophecies related to the cross of Christ are also attributed to the queen.

One of the first identifications of the Queen of Sheba with Sibyl belongs to the Byzantine historian and geographer Pausanias (5th century). In Book X of his description of Hellas, in the section devoted to Phocis, he says that after the prophetess Demos "... among the Jews who inhabit northern Palestine, there lived a prophetess named Savva." They say that her father was Berosus, and her mother was Erymantha. Some consider her a Babylonian, and others call her "an Egyptian Sibyl." (Павсаний, Описание Эллады. Книга X, 12:5 [Pausanius. Description of Hellas. Book X, 12:5]). A clear identification of the Queen of Sheba with Sibyl in Byzantine literature is also found in the chronicle of monk George (842-887) – "And the Queen of Sheba, whom the Greeks call Sibyl, heard his name (Solomon's), came in Jerusalem to test him with riddles..." (Chronicle of George the Monk (Chronicle of George Amartola)] 2000, 129). From the writings of the monk George, the identification passes to the "Synopsis historion" of Georgios Cedrenos (also known as "A concise history of the world") (Baert 2004, 217-8).

In the widespread medieval Apocryphas, the identification of the queen with the Sibyl has already been accepted.

The reason why the Queen of Sheba is present in the composition "The Tree of Jesse" is her interpretation as a type of the Gentiles who enter the Church. A probable influence on the appearance of the image, which does not contradict the above opinion, but is influenced by it, is the identification of the Queen of Sheba with the Sibyl.

As Taylor notes, the images of the three youths in the fiery furnace (Dn 3:15ff.) and the Queen of Sheba (1 Kgs 10:1ff.) are the two images that are often present in the samples of the East, but are not meet in Orvieto, but both images share the conceptual framework already established in the Orvieto scenes (Taylor 1980/1981, 134).

Following the arrangement of the images of the individual persons and scenes, both in the sample in Arbanasi and in the other mentioned samples, we can conclude that the composition develops vertically and shows God's providence for the divine incarnation being prepared. The central vertical axis of the "Tree" is the royal line, in which kings from David to the King of Kings – Christ are painted. On either side of the central line are pictured prefigures or their fulfilment – this is the most visible part of the composition and shows God's providence, which prepares mankind for the coming of the Messiah through real historical events that point to future ones. The following verticals are mainly the prophets who transmitted God's words and predicted various events of the Savior's earthly life. The most peripheral vertical line depicts the forefathers, most of those are included in the genealogies of the two evangelists, Matthew and Luke.

"The Tree of Jesse" in Arbanasi follows the supposed archetype in the prefigurative scenes and the depiction of the Hellenic sages. It is interesting that in this example, at the base of the "Tree" mostly ancestors are painted, with prophets depicted between the branches of the tree (vine) appearing in ascending order between them. In the scene in Arbanasi, the last line is entirely with apostles located on both sides of Christ and represents a kind of counterpoint to the first horizontal lines.

Some examples from the Old Testament personalities and types in the composition "The Tree of Jesse"

The Three Youths in the Fiery Furnace – the pericope is one of the Holy Saturday paroimia, together with the song of the three youths (Dn 3:1-56, Dn 3:57-88 – the song of the youths). The iconographic pattern is presented even in early Christian art. According to the interpretations, the Angel of the Lord, who appears in the fiery furnace, is the second Person of the Holy Trinity. The furnace is sung in the hymnography as prefiguring the womb of the Holy Virgin, which contains the divine fire, but remains untouched: the fertile furnace prefigured the Virgin, like the divine fire, without burning the womb (irmos on the seventh ode of the first canon of the Nativity of the Theotokos) [20].

Moses and the burning bush – this scene is also situated on the first line. Through the miracle of the burning but not burned bush (Ex 3), Moses was called by God to lead his people out of Egyptian slavery. In Exodus 3:14 God is first revealed as the Eternal. The miracle with the bush foreshadows the Holy Mother of God – just as the bush burns, but remains undamaged by the fire, so does the Holy Mother of God remain Virgin: "The shadow of the law passed when Grace came. As the bush burned, yet was not consumed, so the Virgin gave birth, yet remained a virgin. The Righteous Sun has risen instead of a pillar of flame! Instead of Moses, Christ the salvation of our souls." (dogmatikon, 2 tone). The prophecy about the burning bush (Ex 3:1-8) is one of the paroimias for the Annunciation.

The Angel of the Lord appears to Balaam with the donkey – as in the scenes mentioned above, this one is also on the first line. The Angel of the Lord appearing and speaking to the donkey occurs on Balaam's way from Mesopotamia to the lands of the Moabite king Balak (Nm 22).

The image of Valaam is one of the persistent images in the "Tree of Jesse" – it is present in the samples from Sopoćani, Arile, Dechani, Moracha, the Great Lavra (Sveta Gora), the Moldavian monasteries (Suceava, Voroneț, Sucevița).

The reason why Balaam is depicted in the composition (with the donkey or with the star) is the prophecy he utters about the "star of Jacob" and its interpretation in the Church's worship as a type of the wise men (the Magi) who bring gifts to the Child and the conversion of the pagans nations, which will follow after the coming of Christ. Images of Balaam are present even in early Christian art – in wall paintings in the catacombs and in reliefs on sarcophagi, where two types of images are found – Balaam with the star (catacombs of Peter and Marcelina in Rome, from the second half of the 3rd and the first half of the 4th centuries), and the appearance of the Angel of the Lord to Balaam (Via Latina catacombs from the 4th century).

Notes

[1] The image in the Church of the Nativity of Christ in Arbanasi village (7 km northern from Veliko Tarnovo) will be used as an example. The fresco is located in the north wall of the narthex. The narthex also served as a women's ward during time.

[2] The fresco is dated after 1315, badly damaged. It follows quite closely the genealogy of the Matthew gospel. From the prefigurative scenes characteristic of the composition, the vision of Ezekiel, the star of Jacob, the stone cut not by human hands, the anointing of David, the fleece of Gideon, and the receiving of the law from Moses are depicted.

The New Testament scenes are the Nativity of Christ, Meeting of the Lord and Christ's Truth and Justice. In the Middle Ages, the church was the catholicon of a monastery dedicated to the Theotokos and the scene was painted among scenes depicting images of the Virgin Mary. See more: Дионисопулос [Dionysopoulos] 1990, 62-70).

[3] The dating of the scene in Arbanasi is by Мутафов [Mutafov] 2010, 15. For the specified samples, see more: Квиливидзе [Kvilividze] 2007, item 16, 269; Серафимова [Serafimova] 2012, 5-6; Taylor 1980/1981, 125; Мутафов [Mutafov] 2010, 15-19.

[4] Ezk 43:27; 44:1-4 – paroimia for all the feasts of the Mother of God, incl. for the Entrance of the Most Holy Theotokos in the Temple. In the hymnography, it is interpreted as a type of the perpetual virginity of the Mother of God.

[5] The example from the church "St. Peter and Paul" (15th century) in Veliko Tarnovo belongs to this type – see Пенкова [Penkova] 2007, 507-30.

[6] This confirms the liturgical element at the heart of the composition since all depicted Old Testament scenes participate as paroimias or are interpreted in the tradition as types of the incarnation of God.

[7] The liturgical gospel on the Sunday before the Nativity of Christ is the genealogy according to Matthew (Mt 1:1-25).

[8] Suzy Dufrenne, examining the samples in Sopočani and Arile, connects them with the Sunday of the holy forefathers – a liturgical prelude to the Nativity of Christ (Dufrenne 1967, 43 – cited by Taylor 1980/1981, 165). Nikos Dionysopoulos cites S. Dufrenne and connects the image with the Sunday before Nativity of Christ when Mt1:1-25 is read (Дионисопулос [Dionysopoulos] 1990, 69). McVey, in his study of exterior frescoes in Moldavian monasteries, associates the "Tree of Jesse" with the third week of the Great Lent, which ends with the Sunday of the Holy Cross. According to him, the tree in the mural symbolizes the tree of life, which bears Christ as opposed to the Cross. The Lenten Triod speaks of the Cross and of the life found in the birth and crucifixion of Christ (McVey 2009, 20).

[9] The names of the Hellenic sages and philosophers are indicated according to the research of E. Mutafov (Мутафов [Mutafov] 2010, 16), in which he presents an identification, different from what was spread according to the research of Prof. Duychev (Дуйчев [Duychev] 1978).

[10] The famous physician is rarely present in the composition. Except from Arbanasi and Bachkovo, it is also painted in the fresco in the Kučevište Monastery – Серафимова [Serafimova] 2012, 12.

[11] Philosophers are also depicted with nimbus in the Kučevište monastery in North Macedonia, (see (Серафимова [Serafimova] 2012, 8), but unlike the scene in Arbanasi, they are included in the branch of the vine, while in "Nativity of Christ" Church in

Arbanasi they are under the tree, outside the branches. The presence of nimbus in the images of the Hellenic philosophers in no way indicates their recognition as saints of the Church. The inscription indicates belonging to the saints, and nowhere are the philosophers signed as saints. The nimbus is a symbol indicating enlightenment. It began to be used late in Christian iconography under the influence of ancient art, where it was a common attribute of emperors. More about nimbus see: Cvetković 2015, 287-99.

[12] Signed as "Sibyl Queen of Ethiopia" – Дуйчев [Duychev] 1978, 30.

[13] At the end of his research, E. Mutafov presents a list of the images of the Hellenic philosophers in chronological order and with their location (Метафов, 17-18).

[14] In the sample from the Bachkovo Monastery, the philosophers are painted in the "branches", but again they are on the line of Jesse. In the samples from Moldova, they are placed vertically on both sides of the "tree". Thus, in all cases, they are on the periphery of the main line of the tree, thus guiding the interpretation of their images.

[15] The earliest depictions of the Hellenic sages and the Sibyl in Russia are found in the gallery of the Annunciation Church in Kremal. The gallery was painted for the first time in 1564, and then in 1648 and partially in 1667. For more on the depictions of the Hellenic sages in Russia, see Казакова [Kazakova] 1961, 365-7.

[16] For the Byzantine manuscripts and transcripts of works dedicated to the Hellenic sages and their prophecies, see Мутафов [Mutafov] 2010, 16-17.

[17] Chronograph or chronographic works are chronicle works that are a compilation of the historical books of the Old Testament, translated Greek chronicles (George Amartolus, John Malala, etc.) and other historical works (e.g. the "The Jewish War" by Flavius Josephus). They are widespread in Russia and partly in Bulgaria (e.g. Bulgarian chronograph, 10th century – Горина [Gorina] 2005; Вилкул [Vilkul] 2007, 56).

[18] According to Ethiopian legends (Kebre Negast – "The Glory of Kings"), the Queen of Sheba was the ruler of Ethiopia and gave birth to a son from Solomon who became the founder of the Ethiopian dynasty.

[19] Origen wrote an interpretation of the Song of Songs in ten books, but only two discourses, translated by Jerome in Latin, have come down to us. Probably because they were issued in the collected works of Jerome, very often noted in the literature as interpretations of Jerome (*Works of Blessed Jerome* 1906, 137-174 – cited by Glagolev 1987, 54).

[20] See also irmos from 8 ode of the first canon of the Nativity.

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The theological message of the opening vision of Isaiah 6

Abstract

The main objective of our present study is to underline the theological feature of Isaiah's first vision (Is 6). In the first part, the author presents some isagogic directions concerning The Book of Isaiah and its early vision. In the second part of our study, the vision from Is 6 is analysed more theologically, covering topics such as angelology, eschatology, divine glory and the prophet's ministry. The author suggests that the earthly world and the heavenly one should be viewed in a more connected way, even as a unity (this being possible only from a liturgical perspective). Is 6:9-13 contains not only the announcement of God's justice but also the promise of recompense; in Is 6, the glory of God is closely connected to the Temple from Jerusalem and the Temple emptied by the glory of God, the punishment of Israel is envisaged. Even thou God's punishment was imminent, and the prophet Isaiah was sent to "make the heart of this people dull" (Is 6:10) he never ceases to urge the people of Israel to repentance. The study concludes by highlighting the perennial character of Isaiah's revealed words. All four gospels of the New Testament connect Jesus's saying by referring at least once to Is 6:9 (Mt 13:14; Mk 4:12; Lk 8:10; Jn 12:40). This verse is also used by Paul the Apostle regarding the Jews from Rome (Acts 28:25-26). Having studied both Romanian and Western literature, the author's interpretation is characterised by historical, literary and symbolic perspectives; the goal being spiritual enrichment from the presented text.

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Introduction

The book that can bear his name is the only writing we have from the prophet Isaiah (Popescu-Mălăiești 1926, 273). Looking at its contents, most exegetes distinguish two main parts (Bădiliță et al. 2011, 13). The first part (chs. 1-39) contains some words addressed to contemporaries, and the second part (chs. 40-66) is mainly about the salvation of the righteous. Between both prophetic parts are inserted four chapters (36-39) of historical character, of which the first two (36 and 37) form the conclusion of the first part, while the following (38 and 39) serve as an introduction to the second part (Prelipceanu et al. 2003, 197-8).

At the beginning of the book, there is a "tripartite introduction" (Tarnavschi 1928, 385) (Is 1:1-6:13) which indicates the contents of both parts. The first discourse, though probably not the one Isaiah began with, is marked by an ominous character. Because the people do not return to God (Is 1:2-10) and to no avail continue to practice a rigid ritual without consistency (Is 1:11-20), they will undergo a harsh judgment (Is 1:21-31). Dating from the reign of Jehoatam, the second discourse implies some consolation (Is 2:1-5, 30). The Jews are called to share with the Gentiles in the kingdom of the Messiah (Is 2:1-5). But because of their sins, they will be punished. However, to show that not all the people are to be wiped out before God, Isaiah speaks of the Lord's Branch, the remnant of Zion who will contribute to the rebirth of the people. The parable of the unruly vine (Is 5:1-7) is then introduced, reflecting the sinful state of the people. The last part of the introduction contains the vision of Isaiah's call to the prophetic mission (Is 6:1-13) which shows that he is invested to exercise this role by God himself (Tarnavschi 1928, 389).

We will not insist on a synthetic outline of the two parts but rather try to outline some important theological themes found in the book of Isaiah. This prophet is marked by the mystery, the transcendence of God. Therefore, predominantly, the divine name he uses is "the Holy One of Israel" – the holy, the unseen, the incomprehensible but also "of Israel" as One who enters in a relationship with people. The knowledge of God is facilitated by a series of metaphors referring to him: in some places, the prophet speaks of God as a Father (Is 1:2; 30:9; 63:16; 64:8), in others as a Teacher (Is 2:3) and in others he compares him to a Vine-Grower (Is 5:1-7) (Bădiliță et al. 2011, 18).

All the prophets speak of the fact that people's sins attract God's punishment (Bădiliță et al. 2011, 19). In Isaiah this discourse also implies a social dimension. The relationship between people is very important. This is the starting point for

many of Isaiah's accusations against his fellow countrymen. He often accuses them of plundering, of oppressing the defenceless, of bribery (Is 1:23; 5:23; 10:1-2; 33:15), of accumulating unjust wealth (Is 5:8), of pride or fornication. Kings are reproached for putting their trust in great powers instead of trusting God completely. Faith is therefore the only way out in the eyes of the prophet. Without showing it, the people bring their punishment. This will gradually manifest itself from famine, poverty, incapable kings and idolaters, lack of offspring, and finally the conquest of enemies (Is 7:18-25; 8:1-10; 9:7-20; 5:25-29; 17:1-6) (Bădiliță et al. 2011, 19).

Messages of salvation and messianic prophecies abound in the book of Isaiah. He prophesies that a remnant of Israel will be saved and that God will establish a universal kingdom of holiness and peace (Is 6-12). He "is not content with merely announcing this order, but also points to its promoter, the Messiah, Emmanuel, the Son of the Virgin, from the stem of Jesse, the father of David" (Todoran 2009, 406). In Isaiah, the royal character through whom God will act appears for the first time. When he goes out to meet Ahaz (Is 7) to assure him that God will rule over the Kingdom of Judah, he tells him to ask for a sign. God is the one who wants to give him a sign, only he doesn't ask for it. But the sign is given by the prophet: the birth of the child with the symbolic name Immanuel ("God is with us") is the sign of God's saving work. At first, this name was linked to King Jezekiel, the descendant of Ahaz, but it was concluded that "he is too small for such a great prophecy". Therefore, "the expectation began to be for that king whose presence would truly signify 'God is with us'" (Bădiliță et al. 2011, 20). In the second part of the writing, Isaiah outlines the Messiah's role as teacher and intercessor for all mankind. Chapter 53 is very suggestive in this regard (Todoran 2009, 406) but in addition to this, Isaiah mentions the Messiah and the Messianic period in 17 other places.

Suggestively, other themes that can be developed from the book of the prophet Isaiah can be related to worship, the unity of Yahweh, substitution (Ebed Yahweh – the one who sacrifices himself for all), messianic peace, God's love, justice and holiness, the superiority of the moral law over sacrificial rituals, the transcendence of God or the universality of salvation (Todoran 2009, 398-406).

The prophet's life experience, the tumultuous period in which he lived, and his assumption of the mission of conveying the message of God gave birth to the most beloved, appreciated and most frequently quoted Old Testament book, both in the New Testament and in the writings of the Holy Fathers (Bauer 2013, 9). From its contents, we

can see that this great prophet lived a pure life and conveyed divine truths from a very intimate experience he had with God. At the same time, he did not stay away from the problems of society. He got involved in social life to keep his fellow countrymen from both moral and political mistakes. His prophecies have spanned hundreds of years and have been fulfilled in such a way that he seems to have been an eyewitness to the events described. The most outstanding of these relate to the Messianic period. It is impressive how this great prophet described in detail some moments in the life of the Saviour. This led the St. Jerome to say that Isaiah is an evangelist and apostle rather than a prophet (Bauer 2013, 9).

Specificity of the inaugural vision in Isaiah 6

This chapter of the book of Isaiah contains a sublime vision in which God, like a king sitting on a throne, reveals himself to the prophet and sends him among the people to proclaim his will and plan for the Kingdom of Judah. Many exegetes assume that it was in this solemn setting that the call (Semen 1991, 121-2) or his inauguration into prophetic activity took place (Barnes 1851, 136). On this point, there is a question that has greatly troubled exegetes: what is the reason why the prophet does not begin his writing with the moment of his call? And to answer this question it is necessary to consider the unified structure of the first six chapters.

Chapters 1, 2 and 6 begin with a delineation in time of when they were written. These three chapters thus represent three introductory moments in the book of the prophet. Popescu-Mălăiești compares these three moments to the gates of an imposing building. A majestic building has several gates through which one can enter its premises. This is also the case with the prophecy of Isaiah, which stands out as the most beautiful and imposing prophetic writing. It has three different entrances. The first is that of chapter 1 in which the prophet's attention is turned to the past of the people, their present state and their future. Because of their sins, Isaiah foretells punishments from God and very little instils in their feelings of hope in God's mercy. The second introductory part begins in chapter 2 and extends into chapter 5. Throughout, the main tone is the promise of the future. The prophet shows that there will be a small part of the people, a "remnant", who will live in God's light. Through the parable in chapter 5, however, he reminds his people of their sinful state and that the time of judgment is inherent in this state. In chapter 6, after these preparatory entries, Isaiah takes the reader before the divine throne to hear from God that the state in which the people find

themselves is not pleasing in his sight and that they will suffer for their sins (Popescu-Mălăiești 1926, 727).

It is believed that Isaiah did not begin his writing with this inaugural vision because, at first, he did not want to share it with the people. Such a vision marks the whole being, it is etched deeply in both mind and soul and no words can be found to describe what happened. Perhaps Isaiah wanted to keep this vision in his heart. And he may even have thought that sharing it with the people would lessen the impression it left on his whole being. Therefore, he began his moralistic speech without relating this vision, without telling the people that God had invested him with the prophetic office. But when he began to speak, many of his listeners remained indifferent and cold to his message. They probably wondered who he was and what he was entitled to speak on behalf of God. Isaiah felt that his speech lacked authority and consistency. He alone took on the task of a prophet, asked to be sent among the people (Is 6:8) and here he fails to awaken their conscience. He felt the need to remove any trace of doubt and provide an answer to the questions relating his call to the mission of the prophet (Popescu-Mălăiești 1926, 727). By this Isaiah shows them that he is not speaking from himself, and people receive his exhortations as they would receive them from the mouth of God (Barnes 1851, 136).

Unlike Moses, Jeremiah or Jezekiel, who resisted the call to this mission, Isaiah volunteered to tell God: "Here am I, send me!" (Is 6:8). And he had reasons for volunteering for this job: he loved his nation; he wanted to awaken consciences and save people from God's punishment (Popescu-Mălăiești 1926, 728). All this led Isaiah not to keep this vision to himself, but to share it with others. Although only 13 verses long, chapter 6 is very rich in content. Therefore, to understand what the prophet Isaiah wanted to convey, it is necessary to outline a theological perspective that resonates with the patristic literature (Bauer 2013, 11).

The theological dimension of Isaiah's vision

God reveals himself to the prophet Isaiah wonderfully and mysteriously. Essentially, His holiness and glory are incomprehensible, and no man can see Him and live. But to be perceived, He appears before the prophet in a veiled, anthropomorphic form. This form does not entirely cover His holiness. He is holy and all who enter his presence must be holy, that is, cleansed from sin. From the Isaianic vision, it is prominently evident that He is the Lord of the whole universe, the One who rules the heavenly

hosts and governs human beings; therefore, He must be served. Those who are aware of their sinfulness and confess their faults can receive forgiveness (Is 6:5), but those who repeatedly reject His commandments will have their hearts hardened (remain steadfast in their sinful will) so that God's judgment may be fulfilled (Is 6:10) (Smith 2007, 183).

The prophet Isaiah's inaugural vision contains a host of theological implications. Among them we recall that man is called to praise God with the angelic hosts; to enter into the proximity of God's holiness requires repentance and awareness of creaturehood; God is to be served like a king; the message of God is to be conveyed regardless of its content or severity; the need to harden people's hearts because of their sins; the offering of a ray of hope in a speech announcing the destruction of cities and the desolation of the land. Isaiah's responsibility was not pleasant or easy, but fear and personal preference are lost when a man has the privilege of witnessing God's glory (Smith 2007, 183).

Anghelology

Various studies on angelology have sought to assert either that angels are superior to man or that humans are, from some perspective, superior to angels. If God is often likened to a king, he must inevitably have some servants on his throne to carry out his commands. These servants are the angels. To be able to sit on the throne of God's glory, they must be "creatures superior to men" (Cohen 2014, 107). Their close relationship with God, their ability to chant incessantly, their eagerness to fulfil certain tasks they are given, and the fact that they are not prone to fall into sin are just some of the characteristics that make angels hierarchically superior to humans. Because of these, they remain a hard-to-reach model for humans (Pleșu 2015, 32).

At the same time, there are some opinions according to which one can speak of a "super-angelicity of man" (Pleșu 2015, 36). "The angel is only a servant, a servant of God and of man, whereas man is also a master" (Stăniloae 2010, 447) since he was placed in this rung after he was created. Man is the "crown of creation", the one who sums up in himself both the unseen and the seen world. Through his soul, he has access to "the incorporeal angelic, whereas to the angel the experience of the body remains foreign, even if, if need be, he can temporarily put on a body" (Pleșu 2015, 32).

From a theological point of view, although it is not wrong to make such comparisons, it is much more important to emphasise the solidarity between the seen and unseen world. After all, "man and angels are together workers in the likeness of

God" (Chirilă 2002, 105-8). Often angels are sent by God with certain tasks to support people. Man is also called to follow the way of life of the angels and, by practising the virtues, to reach their level: "Once the Spirit has abode in him, [man is] worthy to be a prophet, an apostle, an angel, though he is earth and ashes" (Calist și Ignatie Xanthopol 1979, 220-1).

More than solidarity and mutual support, we need to talk about unity between the two worlds. In liturgical worship, this unity is highlighted. In the Holy Mass, people join the angels in the act of worshipping God, and the angels are invisibly present with them.

The Isaianic vision puts before us both how man should relate to the holy angels and the contribution of the holy angels in bringing men closer to God. "Hearing the angels' exclamation, 'Holy, holy, holy, Lord Sabaoth', the prophet felt an urgent need to participate with them in the glorification of God [...]. Isaiah realised that the exclamation of the angels must be the exclamation of the glorification of the divinity by the whole creature" (Semen 1991, 124). He saw, however, that he could not offer praise to God like the seraphim because his lips were unclean. The fact that one of the seraphim takes that coal with the tongs from the altar and touches it to the prophet's lips to forgive his sins highlights the role of the angels in supporting people on the path of salvation.

Through the song that Isaiah hears, the seraphim not only glorifies the Creator of all but also reveals the Triune God. Because they use the title Lord in the singular and repeat "Holy" three times, it can be inferred that they are referring to the one Being of God. "Holy, Holy, Holy" indicates the mystery of the Holy Trinity, and the appellation "Lord of hosts" indicates the unity of the divine being (Theodoret of Cyr 2004, 49). Like them, at every Holy Mass, people also offer praise to God in the Trinity. The words of the seraphim are spoken near the moment of the Preface. The faithful sing this hymn received from the seraphim to share in the praise that God receives from the hosts of those above the world (St. Cyril of Jerusalem 2003, 361).

In one of his homilies to the seraphim, St. John Chrysostom emphasizes the unity between seraphim and humans in the Church by saying: "Up doxologize the armies of angels, downstairs, in the churches, people, in chorus, imitate the doxology of angels. Up the Seraphim sing the Trisagion loudly, downstairs the crowds of people send the same song upwards; a common feast of heavenly and earthly is drawn up: one prayer of thanksgiving, one joy, one joyful chorus. The Lord's unholy sacrament

prepared this, the Holy Spirit united the two choirs, and with the Father's good will this harmony of sounds was born" (St. John Chrysostom 2007, 132).

Thus, Isaiah's vision is both how believers should relate to holy angels in general and seraphim in particular (St. Dionysius the Areopagite 1996, 23), and a clear proof that angels come to man's aid in the way of salvation. People should seek to join the angels in the work of worshipping God. "The Herald Hymn", "As the King..." or the "Seraphic Hymn" of the Holy Mass are manifestations of the desire of human beings to join the heavenly host. In turn, angels help humans in their struggle with sin. They guide people towards God and want them to be near the throne of glory. The seen world and the unseen world do not repel each other; they are complementary.

Eschatology and hope

Eschatology refers to "the last events". For the Israelites, eschatology was primarily about the end of the Jewish nation and the world in general, and only then about the end of each person. The prophets were keen to emphasise that Israel was the chosen people and that God's justice, and truth were to be manifested on earth. Thus, the eschatological perspective is first concerned with some expectations of great things to unfold in the future. It is about a time when the divine will be established on earth.

The time when God will judge the world is referred to in the prophetic writings as the "Day of the Lord". It can be understood in two senses: on the one hand, as the time when God will manifest his power over creation in a punitive form, and on the other, as the time of salvation of the righteous. According to the Israelites, the "Day of the Lord" meant disaster and punishment only for the enemies. The prophet Amos, however, contradicts this conception for the first time by showing that this day may also dawn upon the chosen people (Am 3:2).

For the prophet Isaiah, the "Day of the Lord" means terror and calamity both for the kingdoms of Judah and Israel (Is 2:12) and for the other nations (Is 14:25). But in addition to this, several distinctive features can be found in his eschatological discourse. For the most part, his predictions announce a harsh judgment, a sentence marked by destruction and distress. In such a context, the prophet also finds a way to insert a ray of hope into his speech. One of the most eloquent examples of this is found in Is 1:21-26. In this text, God punishes Jerusalem to cleanse it of sin (Evans 1986, 139-40). Another example is Is 6:9-13. God is determined to bring punishment, to destroy the cities and to drive out of the land of Canaan all those whom he had once brought out of danger

and guided. Because of sins, "my people" (Is 3:7) have become "this people" (Is 6:9). Isaiah announces that God's punishment will be very harsh, but he does not forget to add a small ray of hope at the end. Like a cut tree that at some point gives birth to a shoot from its trunk, the chosen people will not be annihilated. That 'holy shoot' will remain, a small 'remnant' through which the chosen people will endure. Other examples can be found to show that in Isaiah's predictions, there is a sense of hope and optimism about the restoration of the people after their punishment (Evans 1986, 140).

Many exegetes believe that verses 12 and 13 of Is 6 were added later. In addition, it is considered that the last sentence of verse 13 was also added later since it is only because of it that the chapter ends on a positive note. However, if we place these verses in the context of the content of Isaiah's writing, we see that they belong, from the beginning to the place where they are now written.

Paradoxically, instead of asking the prophet to call the people to repentance, God asks him to harden their hearts so that they will not turn to Him (Is 6:9-10). From the content of his writing, however, we see that Isaiah also conveyed messages of repentance. For example, Is 30:15 offers the opportunity for repentance and forgiveness: "Thus says the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel: 'If you turn and are at peace, you will be delivered; peace and hope are your salvation'. But you would not listen". This is also evident from Is 31:6: "Turn to Him from whom the deep divides you, O children of Israel!" (St. Paisius the Aghiorite 2000, 20).

Thus, Isaiah's writing can be seen on the one hand as an announcement of punishment and on the other as an exhortation to repentance. When Isaiah was called to his prophetic mission (Is 6), he heard that God had decided to punish the people. It is not wrong to note that from that message he also learned that a "remnant" of the people would remain, made up of righteous people who remained faithful to God's law. He glimpsed that God would judge the people very harshly but also that he would not annihilate them. One day, he will be able to be restored because of that "remnant" that remained (Evans 1986, 143-6). Placed in connection with other similar texts, the text of Is 6:12-13 finds its place in this context with great ease. Isaiah did not resist the divine command. He warned his countrymen that God would punish them, but he also offered a glimmer of hope. Indeed, the "Day of the Lord" will come, and all sinners will be punished. A small "remnant" of Israel will remain, but wickedness and sin will be removed. Through punishment, God wants evil to be extirpated and people to come to realize how important it is to remain in communion with Heavenly Father.

Other theological themes

The glory of God is a visible manifestation of God's presence (Preuss 1995, 169; Fishbane 2002, 125). Throughout the history of the Chosen People, the glory of God has been associated with theophanies, God's proneness, and God's judgment (Freedman et al. 2000, 507; see Botterweck, Ringgren, Fabry 1999, 27-9). In the Pentateuch, God's glory is represented by that cloud-shrouded consuming fire on Mount Sinai (Ex 24:16-17). In the image of the cloud and the fire, God's glory led the Israelites through the wilderness (Ex 13:21), was manifested at the sanctification of the Tabernacle (Ex 40:34-38) and at the sanctification of Solomon's Temple (1 Kgs 8:10-11; 2 Par 7:1-3). God also showed his glory by his mercy towards Israel in the episode of their exit from Egypt (Ex 14:4) and by offering them manna in the wilderness (Ex 16:7). When the people rebel against God, his glory is shown to punish them (Nm 16:42-50) (Freedman et al. 2000, 507).

It is important to remember how the divine glory was manifested in the Pentateuch because, in the book of the prophet Isaiah, we also find many similarities with the first five books of Holy Scripture in this regard. In Isaiah's prophecy the divine glory is found in the theophany (Is 6:3) and manifests itself as judgment on sinners among the chosen people (Is 2:10), but also on the Gentiles (Is 10:16-17). In Is 6:3 it is shown for the first time in the prophetic writings that the glory of God is closely linked to the Temple in Jerusalem (Preuss 1995, 169). God appears to the prophet in that holy place, seated on the throne of glory surrounded by seraphim singing "Holy, holy, holy Lord Sabaoth, all the earth is full of his glory". The whole of creation is full of God's glory so that it can manifest itself in both a prone and a judgmental or punitive manner.

In the Isaianic view, God's glory is manifested following the message of punishment that God conveys. At the beginning of the vision, Isaiah sees the whole Temple being filled with the shining robe of the Lord Sabaoth. "The radiance of the light that spreads from the divine garments and from the distinguishing marks of their masterful power can appear either as healing light or as frightening radiance. These phenomena can fill with light in both the divine and the mundane spheres. In Is 6 this aspect of filling, of healing filling, is linked to the overwhelming with glory. This radiance, which springs from the temple, is the symbol of the divine presence on earth" (Bultz 2016, 53). If God's glory is in the Temple, the land is blessed and full of plenty.

God appeared to the prophet in a bright atmosphere, but soon "the temple was filled with smoke" (Is 6:4). This smoke represents God's wrath and his determination

to punish the people. This will take the form of the desolation of the land and the destruction of the cities. The filling of the Temple with smoke means that the divine glory has withdrawn from the midst of the chosen people. God is no longer accessible to the people, nor does he want to be, which is why he will ask the prophet to harden the hearts of his people (Is 6:10). "As long as the heart of the people is hardened, the land and the cities with their inhabitants will be destroyed as a divine punishment. The prosperity and the abundance of the land will be lost. This means that divine glory (*kabod*) will no longer be seen in the land" (Bultz 2016, 54).

It can thus be seen that the manner of the manifestation of God's glory in Isaiah is not unusual. From the earliest books of Holy Scripture, one can find events in which divine glory has appeared either as a reason for blessing or punishment. In the opening vision, Isaiah sees God's glory shining forth and, through it, observes how great the difference is between his creaturely state and the holiness of the Creator. Sensing His presence in the Temple, the prophet sees how important it is for Him to be among the people. But God comes to reveal his will to punish the people, so after Isaiah sees him sitting on the throne and sees the seraphim flying around him, he witnesses a grim process. The temple fills with smoke. This smoke signifies the withdrawal of God's glory not only from the place of worship but also from among the people. Through this process of transition, i.e. the appearance of glory and its withdrawal, God shows the prophet Isaiah that the people will be punished.

Sending the prophet on a mission – hardening hearts. One of the greatest challenges that Is 6 opens is Isaiah's command from God to harden the hearts of those who will listen to him (Is 6:10). Most prophetic speeches involve encouraging and exhorting people to repentance, not hardening hearts against God. Some critics believe that God never told Isaiah to harden the hearts of the people. Instead, this command holds. King Ahaz rejects Isaiah's message (Is 7:11-12). Perhaps remembering the vision in which he was inaugurated into prophetic activity, the prophet realizes that it is God who has commanded this and that this is the reason he failed to persuade King Ahaz, which is why Judah suffered greatly in the Syro-Ephraimite war (Smith 2007, 184).

A view that questions whether God commanded this diminishes the credibility of the prophet. Did Isaiah not hear what God told him? How would a prophet allow himself to invent that God had appeared to him in glory, forgiven his sins, and commanded him to harden his heart if it had not happened? Because of the difficulty

of understanding the text, various explanations have been used. However, a detailed analysis will clarify what the hardening of the hearts of the chosen people meant.

When Pharaoh brought the chosen people out of Egypt, he hardened his own heart, and later God himself hardened it (cf. Ex 7:3; 9:12; 11:10). A few years later, God sent an evil spirit upon the sinners of Shechem (Jdg 9:23), but also the disobedient King Saul (1 Sam 18:10; 19:9). Micah sees God (1 Kgs 22:19-23) asking a spirit to soften Ahab's heart so that he may go to meet his end at Ramoth-Gilead. Looking at these passages, one sees that the mission Isaiah received to harden hearts in the time of Ahaz is not a command unheard of in Holy Scripture (Smith 2007, 184).

This command does not restrict Isaiah's message to this fact alone, nor does it undermine his right to call for repentance (Is 28:15; 30:15; 31:6), nor does it destroy the prophet's hope (Is 8:16-18). God does not forbid him to ask the people to have faith in him (Is 7:9; 12:2; 26:3; 30:15; 31:1-3), he only tells Isaiah that his message will harden hearts. From time to time, Isaiah observes how God closes the ears of some of his fellow believers (Is 29:9-14) but at the same time allows some to respond positively to his commands (Hezekiah, Is 36-37). Unfortunately, too many people have stubbornly refused to listen to God (Is 42:18-20; 44:18). All this shows us that both God's determination to harden people's hearts and the idea that people have closed their ears and eyes (Fishbane 2002, 126), are not foreign to Isaiah's theology. The message that Isaiah conveys only confirms the hardening of those who already disobey and do not follow God's commands. Thus, it is appropriate to consider God's command to make the people obey but not understand (Is 6:9-10) as a plan of His relating to the different stages of Isaiah's work but particularly valid for people who were no longer willing to keep His commandments (Smith 2007, 185).

Instead of conclusions:
The New Testament reception of the theophanic episode

In the New Testament, the book of the prophet Isaiah is often quoted (Bauer 2013, 9). Many of his words appear on the lips of the Saviour or the Apostles. His prophecies, in which events that have not yet happened are described in detail, are fulfilled during the work of the Saviour. From Is 6, verse 9 has been received: "Go and say to this people, 'By hearing you will hear and not understand, and by forgetting you will forget and not see.'" These words are found five times in the New Testament. The Synoptic Gospels (Mt 13:14; Mk 4:12; Lk 8:10) place this verse in the context in which the Apostles ask

the Saviour to explain a parable. The Saviour speaks these words about his listeners. The words of the prophet Isaiah were fulfilled in that He speaks to the people in parables. If He had not spoken in this way, the people would not have listened to any word but rather would have turned away. But by this way of preaching, they were captivated and understood His teachings. If these teachings have not reached their souls and have not been taken up, it is because they are possessed by the spirit of wickedness and are worthy of punishment (Popescu-Mălăiești 1926, 24).

In the Gospel of John (Jn 12:40), the Saviour recalls the words of the prophet Isaiah in the form of an observation. Although they were witnesses of his miracles and signs, they still refused to believe in him: "for Christ had raised Lazarus and they were trying to kill him, he was casting out demons and they said he had demons, he was leading them to the Father, and they called him a deceiver" (St. John Chrysostom 2013, 133). The people's hearts were hardened, their eyes were glued shut and their ears closed before all the miracles performed by the Saviour. In the Acts of the Apostles, these words are addressed by St Paul to the Jews in Rome (Acts 28:25-26). After arriving in the capital of the Empire, the Apostle Paul preaches the Saviour to the Romans. Some accept his teaching, while others do not. Because of this, a great conflict arises and, seeing this, Saint Paul addresses them with the words of the prophet Isaiah (St. John Chrysostom 2013,133; St. Basil the Great 2009, 216).

The reason why this text has been so quoted in the New Testament is because of its perennial nature. In Isaiah's time, God was not incarnate, but people strayed so far from His commandments that they became entrenched in evil. Because of this, God decides that from then on they will remain in this state, only to punish them later. In the New Testament, the same attitude is seen during the work of the Saviour. This time, God is incarnate and comes in closest proximity to people; he performs miracles before them and shows them by parables what the law of love and the kingdom of heaven entail. But they refuse to listen to his teaching, close their eyes to the miracles and harden their hearts rather than open them to the law of love.

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Jesus Christ – The Perfect Exegete of the Holy Scriptures. A few Observations about the Way the Saviour Quoted, Explained and Fulfilled the Old Testament

Abstract

The life and activity of the Savior are closely related to the Holy Scriptures. By reading the Gospels, we constantly find Jesus Christ referring to the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms. Sometimes the Savior quotes passages from the Old Testament, while other times He briefly refers to certain events or individuals from the past to support His statements. In this study, we aim to analyse how Jesus Christ related to the Old Testament as an exegete. Using *textual criticism*, this research paper will succinctly demonstrate how Jesus Christ quotes, interprets, and applies the Old Testament in His public ministry. In essence, our work represents an attempt to (re)construct the image of Jesus Christ as an exegete of the Old Testament, with the hope of providing to both lay believers and professional theologians a useful and worthy model to quote, interpret, and apply the words of the Scripture.

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Jesus Christ, Holy Scripture, Exegesis, Method, Old Testament

Introduction

The life and work of the Saviour are inextricably linked to the Holy Scriptures. In His public activity, Jesus Christ frequently referred to different scenes and persons from the Old Testament to support the teachings or statements He was making to His listeners (Mt 9:13; Hos 6:6; Mk 10:7; Gen 2:24; Jn 8:17; Dt 17:6; Dt 8:3; Mt 4:4, etc.). He was deeply familiar with the Holy Scriptures and utilised them with great dexterity.

Indeed, the Saviour Himself affirmed on one occasion that His entire ministry was driven by a desire to fulfil the Scriptures (Mk 14:49).

Using textual criticism, this paper attempts to determine how Jesus Christ utilised the Holy Scriptures. Specifically, in the first part of the study, we will focus on how the Saviour rendered certain passages from the Old Testament in His public discourse, seeking to find out to what extent they follow the Hebrew Bible or Septuagint. Also, about how Jesus Christ used to quote from the Old Testament, we will try to see whether the quotations that the Saviour reproduced in different contexts are identical to the source texts or whether they are merely paraphrases.

In the second part of this study, we will look briefly at some of the exegetical procedures that Jesus used in interpreting the Old Testament, to see whether the way He dealt with the Scriptures was commonplace for the Jews or, on the contrary, innovative.

Having clarified these issues, in the last part of the paper we will analyse the alignment between the deeds of Jesus Christ and the prescriptions outlined in the Old Testament. He said: "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them" (Mt 5:17). Despite this, the Pharisees constantly accused the Saviour of breaking the Law and disobeying the Scriptures, as may be shown, for example, in the dispute between Him and the Pharisees over the Sabbath.

By analysing, one by one, all these elements of how Jesus Christ quoted, explained and fulfilled the Old Testament, we hope, in the end, to present in this work a portrait of the Saviour as the perfect exegete of Holy Scripture, so that, following his example, we may approach these Scriptures in the manner appropriate to find the Word of God.

Jesus Christ quotes from the Old Testament

In Judaism, at the time of the Saviour, the Scriptures were usually kept in the synagogue in the form of scrolls (Lk 4:15-19; Heb 10:7) [1]. Except for a few passages in Aramaic, they were written in Hebrew, the language of worship of the Jews. Even so, in the 3rd century B.C., the Septuagint (the translation of the Holy Scriptures into Greek, first only the Torah, then the other books) appeared among the Jews and became increasingly authoritative, especially in the Jewish diaspora [2].

Although most exegetes seem to agree that Jesus and his disciples used the Septuagint, in our opinion things are not so clear-cut. Probably, indeed, both Christ and his disciples knew Greek to some extent (we have in mind here, on the one hand,

the dialog between Jesus and Pilate, which, if it took place, was most probably in Latin or Greek [3], and on the other hand, the fact that the oldest manuscripts of the Gospels are preserved in Greek), but they certainly did not use this language in their daily life, but Aramaic. Proof of this are the Aramaisms that have survived in the New Testament to this day, including the Greek version: *Rabbuni* (Mk 10:51; Jn 20:16), *Abba* (Mk 14:36), *Talitha koumi* (Mk 5:41), *Eli Eli lema sabachthani?* (Mk 15:34), *Chephas* (Jn 1:42; 1 Cor 1:12; 3:22), *Gabbatha* (Jn 19:13), *Golgotha* (Mt 27:33; Mk 15:22) etc. (Vild 2013, 97-108).

In this context, one of the questions that arise about the Saviour is whether, when quoting from Scripture, He used the Greek text (Septuagint) or the Hebrew text.

Jesus Christ and the Septuagint

Analysing the passages where the Saviour refers to various fragments of the *Old Testament* [4], at first glance it seems quite clear that He used the Septuagint and not the Hebrew text. This can be proved by comparing the source texts with the text reproduced by Jesus, as can be seen in the following two examples:

Deut 8,3 // Mt 4,4

BYZ	*Οὐκ ἐπ᾽ ἄρτῳ μόνῳ ζήσεται ὁ ἄνθρωπος, ἀλλ᾽ ἐπὶ παντὶ ῥήματι ἐκπορευομένῳ διὰ στόματος θεοῦ (Mt 4,4)*
LXX	*οὐκ ἐπ᾽ ἄρτῳ μόνῳ ζήσεται ὁ ἄνθρωπος ἀλλ᾽ ἐπὶ παντὶ ῥήματι τῷ ἐκπορευομένῳ διὰ στόματος θεοῦ ζήσεται ὁ ἄνθρωπο (Deut 8,3)*
WTT	לֹ֣א עַל־הַלֶּ֤חֶם לְבַדּוֹ֙ יִחְיֶ֣ה הָאָדָ֔ם כִּ֖י עַל־כָּל־מוֹצָ֣א פִֽי־יְהוָ֑ה יִחְיֶ֖ה הָאָדָֽם

As can be seen in this first case, the Septuagint text says that *man feeds on every **word** that proceeds out of the mouth of God*, just as we find in the New Testament, in the Saviour's discourse, in BYZ or NA[28]. In the Hebrew tradition, on the other hand, this verse appears slightly different, namely: *man feeds on everything **that proceeds out** of the mouth of God*.

Analyzing the above texts, we notice that the Hebrew version does not use the term *ῥῆμα* (= word), as found in the Greek version, being replaced by the construction **מוֹצָא** (= *that proceeds from*).

In addition to this main difference, a detailed comparison of the two text versions reveals other possible differences of nuance, such as the fact that the

Hebrew uses the proper name (יהוה) for God, while the Greek uses the term *Θεός*, which has a much broader meaning, being used for deities in general.

Also, in Greek the verb *ζάω* strictly refers to living (biologically), while in Hebrew the verb חָיָה has a broader meaning, including *to exist, to become or to have*.

Last but not least, Rev. Prof. Eugen Pentiuc says that the term אָדָם in Hebrew is impossible one to translate into any other language, including Greek or Latin. This term designates in Hebrew "that hypostasis of human nature which includes in itself, as a potential, both human genders (male and female), as the whole of humanity, as a totality of human individuals" (Pentiuc 2016, 27), having, therefore, a lexical range different from that of the term *ἄνθρωπος*, present in the Greek version.

So, comparing the text versions presented above, we cannot say that the Greek source and the Hebrew source are identical. However, since any translation brings with it a certain interpretation, we will say that, naturally, there are certain differences of nuance between the two textual versions, the languages themselves being different. Therefore, we do not insist on these details but rather note only the main difference between the two sources of the verse under analysis, namely the presence/absence in the text of the term *ῥῆμα* / מוֹצָא, from which we also come to the partial conclusion that, when quoting from the Old Testament, Christ used the Septuagint.

Mc 7, 6-7 // Is 29,13

BYZ	*Οὗτος ὁ λαὸς τοῖς χείλεσίν με τιμᾷ, ἡ δὲ καρδία αὐτῶν πόρρω ἀπέχει ἀπ' ἐμοῦ: μάτην δὲ σέβονταί με, διδάσκοντες διδασκαλίας ἐντάλματα ἀνθρώπων (Mc 7,7-8)*
LXX	*ὁ λαὸς οὗτος τοῖς χείλεσιν αὐτῶν τιμῶσίν με ἡ δὲ καρδία αὐτῶν πόρρω ἀπέχει ἀπ' ἐμοῦ μάτην δὲ σέβονταί με διδάσκοντες ἐντάλματα ἀνθρώπων καὶ διδασκαλίας (Is 29,13)*
WTT	כִּי נִגַּשׁ הָעָם הַזֶּה בְּפִיו וּבִשְׂפָתָיו כִּבְּדוּנִי וְלִבּוֹ רִחַק מִמֶּנִּי וַתְּהִי יִרְאָתָם אֹתִי מִצְוַת אֲנָשִׁים מְלֻמָּדָה

Another example where it seems that the Saviour follows the Greek text and not the Hebrew is Is 29:13 || Mk 7:6b-7. This text is introduced by the Saviour with the formula: "Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written"; a construction which indicates quite clearly the Saviour's intention to quote something from the Old Testament:

WTT: "These people come near to Me with their mouth and honor Me with their lips, but their hearts are far from Me$^{\alpha}$. The respect for Me that [this people] have is only a human commandment, learned by heart$^{\beta}$".

LXX: "This people honor Me only with their lips, but their heart is far from Meα. In vain do they honor Me; their teachings are merely human rules$^{\beta}$".

In this case we note that the Hebrew text is more developed in the first part of the quotation than the Greek text (in section α), and in its second part (section β), the Hebrew expression is slightly changed compared to the Septuagint. Despite these differences, the main idea of the fragment does not change but is the same. However, comparing these two variants with the Saviour's quotation from the New Testament, and given the details highlighted here, we are once again left with the impression that Jesus followed the Greek text, not the Hebrew, in his teaching.

Jesus Christ and the Hebrew text

In parallel with this first hypothesis, which claims that Jesus Christ followed the Septuagint tradition when quoting from the Old Testament, there are also arguments to the contrary, namely that when referring to events or fragments of the Old Testament, the Saviour used the Hebrew tradition as a source. This seems quite obvious, moreover, if we bear in mind that when He spoke of the Holy Scriptures on his way to Emmaus, the Saviour referred to their traditional division according to Jewish tradition (*TaNaK* – Lk 24:27), which we do not find in the Septuagint.

Another element that leads us to believe that Jesus Christ used the Hebrew text as a source for his Old Testament quotations is the fact that more than 1300 *Qetiv-Qere* structures are still preserved in it today [5]. These are small spelling mistakes, which the editors probably made inadvertently, but which the Jews retain in the text, having great respect for the Sacred Writings exactly as they were written. And if the Jews today are so conservative about the sources, the more we can believe that they were so in the Saviour's time, especially in the context of the bitter struggle between Greek and Jewish culture at that time [6].

However, there are occasions when it appears that Jesus does not faithfully follow either the Septuagint or the Hebrew Bible, but rather uses a text of His own, probably inspired by the oral Jewish culture around Him. This can be seen, for example, in *Mark* 12:30 and *Matthew* 22:37, with *Deuteronomy* 6:5, as follows:

Deut 6,5 || Mc 12,30 (Mt 22,37)

BYZ	*καὶ ἀγαπήσεις κύριον τὸν θεόν σου ἐξ ὅλης τῆς καρδίας σου, καὶ ἐξ ὅλης τῆς ψυχῆς σου, καὶ ἐξ ὅλης τῆς διανοίας σου, καὶ ἐξ ὅλης τῆς ἰσχύος σου (Mc 12,30)*
LXX	*καὶ ἀγαπήσεις κύριον τὸν θεόν σου ἐξ ὅλης τῆς καρδίας σου καὶ ἐξ ὅλης τῆς ψυχῆς σου καὶ ἐξ ὅλης τῆς δυνάμεώς σου (Deut 6,5)*
WTT	וְאָהַבְתָּ֗ אֵת֙ יְהוָ֣ה אֱלֹהֶ֔יךָ בְּכָל־לְבָבְךָ֖ וּבְכָל־נַפְשְׁךָ֑ וּבְכָל־מְאֹדֶֽךָ׃

In this example we see that, in comparison with the LXX and the WTT, the text spoken by the Saviour has a small addition, namely that man is bound to love God, not only with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his strength, but also with all his mind (*καὶ ἐξ ὅλης τῆς διανοίας σου*). This detail proves that the Saviour (or the redactor of the Gospel) enjoyed a certain freedom in interpreting Scripture.

Following Mark, Matthew probably also used targums [7] when he wrote the Gospel, especially since the Hebrew text was not very well fixed in written form at that time (Voineag 2020, 179) [8]. However, this is not exceptional in the New Testament, but can even be found in the Saviour's own right, in the Crucifixion scene, where Jesus himself utters an Aramaic Targum in Psalm 21 (see Ps 21:1 // Mk 15:34; Mt 27:46) [9]. So, the Saviour and the disciples must have been accustomed at that time to the Hebrew text or at least to the Aramaic Targums of the Hebrew text.

One possible explanation: *ipsissima verba* and *ipsissima vox*

Although the Old Testament quotations present in the New Testament seem to follow the Septuagint in most cases, as evidenced by the fragments we have presented above, this does not automatically imply that the Saviour or His disciples did indeed use the Greek text. To explain this fact we will further differentiate between *ipsissima verba* and *ipsissima vox*.

In contemporary biblical hermeneutics the question has been raised whether the Saviour's dialogues with His contemporaries, as we have them today in the New Testament (e.g. Jn 3:1-15; 4:7-30), are exact renderings of Christ's **words** (*ipsissima verba*), written by the hagiographers under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, or did they merely render the Saviour's **voice** (*ipssima vox*); that is, the Saviour's words as they heard them and as each remembered them, then matching Jesus' quotations with the biblical sources they had at hand when they wrote the Gospels.

Given the fact that Christ spoke to His disciples in Aramaic, but His words in the Gospels are rendered in Greek, we believe that their editors, when writing their *memoirs* about Christ [10], assumed the role of both *exegetes* of the Saviour and *teachers*. In this context, in (re)constructing the Lord's words and the quotations he invoked, the editors of the Gospels must have had in mind simultaneously both the Saviour's direct discourse and the Old Testament variants that circulated them; whether Hebrew text, Greek text or even Targums, which were also used in the Synagogue at the time (Safrai 1990, 187-93).

Just as the Evangelist Matthew was placed in the position of an exegete of Scripture when he quoted from Isaiah 7:14, having to choose the best translation from all the possible variants to render as faithfully as possible the mystery of the Lord's birth, which was foretold by the prophets, he was certainly placed in the same position when he wrote down Christ's words in Greek in the Gospel. Thus, in the case of the New Testament, the Hagiographer is the interpreter of Christ who renders His words both by revelation and by his capacities. From this point of view, with regarding the places in which the Savior quoted from the Old Testament, we believe that they are truly His words, rendered through the intermediary of the writers, just as we, in other respects, in the Romanian versions of the Holy Scriptures, have the words of Christ, but in our language, and not in the original. And we do not consider this at all wrong, but on the contrary, an opening towards the original.

So, in terms of the sources used by Jesus Christ to quote from the Old Testament, we are left with the idea that he may have used the Septuagint, the Hebrew text, or even a combination of the two. In any case, the Saviour's quotations are not very rigid, stuck in *Textkritik*, but rather we find a certain elasticity, evidenced by the use of Targums in certain cases, later used by the editors of the New Testament.

Jesus Christ explains the Old Testament

The New Testament says that no one has ever seen God, and the only one who can explain Him (*ἐξηγέομαι*) is the One who is in the bosom of the Father, Jesus Christ (Jn 1:18).

Throughout the New Testament, Jesus Christ appears several times as the exegete. In Luke 8:11, the Saviour explains to His disciples a parable that He had spoken; on the way to Emmaus, we see Jesus Christ explaining passages from the Old Testament to His disciples (Lk 24:27).

When referring to Old Testament passages, Jesus often introduces them with various specific formulas, such as "you have heard that it was said to those of old..." (Mt 5:21) or "as it is written...".

Regarding the *method of interpretation*, we have noted that the Saviour used the *gezerah shawah* procedure (*Pontifical Biblical Commission* 2020, 109), as we can see, for example, in Mark 2:25 [11]. This procedure was somewhat known among the Jews at the time. In short, it is based on the idea that all the Holy Scriptures speak of the same God, so to have a clearer vision of Him we can combine various passages of Scripture, as in a puzzle, building a complex picture.

In His discourse, the Saviour quoted and referred to passages from fourteen books of the Old Testament [12]. He mentioned Abraham (Jn 8:56), Jacob and Isaac (Mt 8:11), David (Mt 12:1-3), Solomon (Mt 6:29), Elijah (Mt 17:11), Elisha (Mt 4:27), Zechariah (Lk 11:49-51), whom He understood as historical persons. He also recalled the circumcision (Jn 7:22), the manna received in the wilderness (Jn 6:31), David's eating of *the bread of the Presence* (Mt 12:3-4), the persecution of the prophets (Mt 5:11-12), the story of Lot's wife (Lk 17:32), the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Mt 10:14-15); all this, events that are part of Israel's history. He also appealed in His public discourse to the making of Adam and Eve (Mt 19:4-5), Cain and Abel (Lk 11:50-52) or the flood (Mt 24:37-39), events that are part of Israel's pre-history. Thus, surely, Christ accepted the authority of the Sacred Writings as an organic whole, without raising issues of textual criticism.

Moreover, in His ministry, the Saviour also referred to the Book of Daniel, which at that time had not yet been fully accepted in Judaism, as had Deutero-Isaiah (Mt 24:15; 8:16-17; Jn 12:39) [13]. Thus, Christ dealt with Scripture naturally and holistically, without getting bogged down in technicalities such as source, author or date of writing. In His dialogue with the Samaritan woman, Jesus made no comparison between the Jewish and the Samaritan Pentateuch, or between the Decalogue used by the Jews and that used by the Samaritans, but simply spoke to the woman based on the Law in general and based on factual reality in particular.

Another exegetical procedure used by the Saviour is called *qol va-homer*. According to this principle, the exegesis of a particular passage or event in Scripture must be developed from the simple to the complex, as we also find in Hillel's rules. We find this type of discourse in Matthew 7:11 and Luke 11:13 (see Longenecker 1999, 68; France 2002, 127), but also in John 10:34-36, where the Saviour interprets from the

simple to the complex passage from the Old Testament about gods in the context of Psalm 81.

Concerning the direction of investigation of the Sacred Scriptures, the Saviour interpreted the Old Testament texts in a Christocentric sense, clearly affirming that the Scriptures speak about Him and that He came into the world to fulfill them (Lk 4:21; Mt 11:10; Mk 9:12; Lk 21:21). In this regard, the question is, what mean the words: "search the Scriptures and see that they speak about M(m)e" (Jn 5:39)? Was Christ referring to Him personally as the Messiah, or was He referring in general to the fact that the Scriptures speak about us; about each individual reader of Scripture?

The simplest answer to this question is found by reading Tyconius' first rule of interpretation (see St. Augustine 1886, 569), which says that the whole of Scripture has Jesus Christ at its centre, with the caveat that some passages refer to Christ (head of the Church) and other passages refer to the Church (Body of Christ). So, it sometimes refers to Him personally, and sometimes to us, but never separated from Christ, but in relationship with Him, to know and find Him.

Jesus Christ fulfils the Old Testament

The Saviour said that heaven and earth will pass away (*παρέρχομαι*), but not one letter of the Scriptures will pass away without being fulfilled (Mt 5:18). So, for Jesus Christ, the Sacred Writings were inspired by God, anticipating the events that were to be fulfilled in His time.

From an early age, Christ was accustomed to the temple. This is evidenced by the Gospel of Luke, which states that, at the age of twelve [14], he was in the temple sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions (Lk 2:46). However, an examination of the life and public activities of the Saviour reveals a certain ambiguity with regard to His stance on the Law. For example, the Law of Moses prohibits the consumption of blood, yet Jesus exhorted His disciples at the Last Supper to drink His Blood. The Law of Moses also stipulates that a man must honour his parents. Despite this, Jesus states that anyone who does not hate his parents is not worthy to follow Him. The Pharisees accused the Saviour of failing to adhere to the traditions and practices of his elders (Mt 15:2). Jesus was frequently criticised for not adhering to the Sabbath, for associating with sinners, and even for performing miracles with the assistance of demons. Consequently, the question arises as to whether Jesus complied with the Law of Moses and the Holy Scriptures. So, the questions that arises

in these circumstances are: Did Jesus keep the Law of Moses? Did Jesus respect the Holy Scriptures?

Given the multitude of Pharisee accusations and the large number of controversial scenes concerning Jesus Christ and the Law of Moses, we will not be able to analyse every single case in this paper, but by choosing a few representative situations for this discussion, we hope that it will be enough to create a pertinent opinion on how Jesus Christ fulfilled (or not) the Holy Scriptures.

Jesus Christ and the honouring of parents

In Luke 14:26, Jesus says that "if anyone comes to Me and does not hate (*μισέω*) father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters – yes, even their own life – such a person cannot be My disciple". This may seem rather strange at first glance, especially since itis written in the Decalogue that man is bound to honour his parents (כָּבַד – Ex 20:11). A comparison of the Saviour's statement with the Decalogue reveals a potential for conflict between the two positions. Given this, historical evidence indicates that no reproach has ever been levelled at the Saviour for urging people to hate their parents. Indeed, if He had done so, it would have been widely noted and condemned.

The Saviour's statement *Εἴ τις ἔρχεται πρός με καὶ οὐ μισεῖ τὸν πατέρα ἑαυτοῦ καὶτὴν μητέρα, οὐ δύναται εἶναί μου μαθητής'* can only be understood by reading this text in Aramaic, because in Greek the verb *μισέω* mean *to hate*, but in Peshitta appears the verb ܣܢܐ/ ܫܢܐ, which means *to love someone in second place*, as we find in Gen 29:31 or Rom 9:13, where Jacob loved Rachel, and he hated Leah, when, in fact, it is clear that he did not hate her, she still remained in his house, but he only loved her second.

So, in this case, the solution is quite simple knowing that Jesus and the disciples spoke Aramaic. Although in Greek and Latin it may appear that Jesus preached hatred of the parents, in the original there is no question of Jesus Christ preaching in Israel any other teaching than that left to the people by Moses. This fact is proved by the observation that no one ever reproached the Saviour for breaking the fifth commandment of the Decalogue or for preaching its violation. On the contrary, looking at the episode of the Wedding in Cana of Galilee and the episode on Golgotha, it is obvious that Jesus loved, obeyed and cared for the Virgin Mary, his mother according to His human nature.

Jesus Christ and the Sabbath day

For the Jews, the Sabbath is very important. If we look at the biblical version of the creation of the world, we see that God Himself rested after creation (Gen 2:2), and if we read the Decalogue of Moses, we see that the observance of the Sabbath was law for the Jews. In these circumstances, the fact that the Saviour did not always observe the Sabbath rest at certain times scandalised the Jews around Him. For this reason, some of them accused Jesus of not observing the Law of Moses and of causing a disturbance (Meier 2004, 561-81; Weiss 1991: 311-21).

In the Old Testament it is written that Saturday is a day of rest (Ex 20:8-11; Dt 5:12-15) for the whole creation; both for man and the earth (Lev 25:2), i.e. for all of nature. Also, according to the Law, those who disobeyed this custom could even pay with their lives (Nm 15:32-36). However, it seems that throughout history there were quite a few times when the Israelites did not observe the Sabbath (e.g. Neh 13:15-22), and moreover, if we read the Jewish writings, we find exceptions to the Sabbath rest rule. Specifically, the priests could break the Sabbath to bake the showbread (Lev 24:1-8), and people in general could break the Sabbath to save or heal their neighbour (Sab 14:3). Under these circumstances, we can say that the Sabbath was certainly important for the Jews, but that it was not an absurd law, but as the Saviour says: Sabbath is for man, and not man for Sabbath (Mk 2:27).

In relation to Jesus Christ and the observance of the Sabbath, He was accused of allowing the disciples to gather grain on the Sabbath (Mt 12:1-8) and of healing the sick on this day (Mt 12:9-14; Lk 13:10-17; 14:1-6; Jn 5:1-18; 9:1-41) [15]; actions which disobeyed the Holy Scriptures and the Law of Moses.

In the face of these accusations, the Saviour reminds the Pharisees that David, when he was hungry, ate the showbread on the Sabbath, breaking the Sabbath. Jesus also reminds the Pharisees that priests were exempt from the Sabbath law when they prepared the showbread. So the Saviour's actions on the Sabbath were not an extraordinary violation of the Law, but rather a didactic challenge that the Saviour puts before the Jews, to show them once again, using their standard, that the Law of Moses is not an idol and that salvation does not magically come by observing formal provisions, but that the Old Testament and the Law of Moses are only a support for man to approach God in a personal way and to (re)know Him, because the living God is the ultimate instance that brings us redemption, personally, and not a set of rules.

This point is emphasized by the Saviour when he quotes Hosea, saying "I desire love, not sacrifice" (Hos 6:6; Mt 9:13), and when he says that man must first be reconciled to his brother, and only then offer the sacrifice at the altar (Mt 5:23-24); thus clearly underlining that the law is for man, and not man for the Law.

Finally, Jesus' likening Himself to the priests in disregarding the Sabbath rest suggests to the world that He had come into the world to make an offering for us before God (Heb 9), to redeem us from the bondage of sin. From this point of view, the Saviour presented Himself to the world as the priest of creation through His actions on the Sabbath, His disciples participating both in the slaying of the Lamb and in the breaking of the showbread (In 6:35).

Looking at all these things, we see that Jesus did not overthrow the Law of Moses when He did not keep the Sabbath, but on the contrary, He used an exception to emphasize that He knows the Law and keeps it even at the level of exceptions, on the one hand, and on the other hand, by doing so, He recovers the primary rationale of the Sabbath, emphasizing that the purpose of rest is to serve man and to be of benefit to him, not to restrict him.

Conclusions

That Jesus Christ knew and used the Holy Scriptures is a fact. This can be seen in the public life of the Saviour, where not infrequently He quoted from the Old Testament, referred to events or persons in Israel's history, interpreted the Law before the crowds and lived according to it amid the chosen people.

With regard to how the Saviour quoted the Scriptures, by analysing the internal evidence of the biblical text, we have shown that it is not very clear whether Jesus Christ used the Septuagint or the Hebrew text. However, in the light of the points we have made in our paper, the most plausible possibility remains that Jesus used the Hebrew text, whether in written or oral form, which was the text that the Jews used at that time in Israel. He read the Holy Scriptures in a unified, holistic and elastic way, even using Targums at certain points, as the editors of the New Testament probably did when they wrote The Holy Text.

Regarding the way of interpreting the Old Testament, we have shown that the Saviour made use of the exegetical procedures of the time, namely *gezerah shawah and qol wa-homer*. One particularity that Jesus brought to the interpretation of the

Holy Scriptures is that He always related them to Himself, pointing out that all the Holy Scriptures are Christocentric in character and speak of Him.

On the question of how the Saviour respected the Old Testament and lived according to the Law of Moses, we have pointed out that there are quite a few controversial passages in the New Testament. We have analysed two of them to show that He did not break the Law, but knew it, including what the exceptions meant. Besides, by the way He referred to the Holy Scriptures, He showed the disciples that the Law of Moses is not to be an idol that traps man in rigid ritualism, but it calls man to freedom and eternal Life, and is ultimately a natural opening to our relationship with God.

Notes

[1] In Luke 4 we see that in the synagogue in Nazareth there was a scroll of the prophecy of Isaiah from which the Saviour read, and we can believe that there were other scrolls there. Being hand-written and raw materials being quite expensive at that time, it was very rare for someone to have all the holy scrolls in their library. They often circulated individually between communities.

[2] G. Archer and G.C. Archer Chirichigno states that there are 340 Old Testament quotations in the New Testament, of which 33 are from the Masoretic text and the rest from the Septuagint. See Archer and Chirichigno 2005, 25-32.

[3] Latin was the official language used by the army. Merchants and local administration in the cities generally used Greek. For the languages spoken by the Jews in the time of the Saviour, see Dalman 1922.

[4] The concept of the Old Testament is absent from Judaism because the New Testament is not recognised. St. Paul, in the Epistle to the Hebrews, distinguishes between the New Covenant, which was promised to the people from of old times by God (Jer 33:11), and which was fulfilled in the time of the Saviour, on the one hand, and the Old Covenant between YHWH and Israel, on the other hand. In this sense, for Christians, the holy writings up to Christ remained under the title of the Old Testament (or the First Testament, as some authors call it; according to Heb 9:15), and the holy writings from the time of Christ and after Christ remained under the title of the New Testament. This division of the Bible is a Christian development, accepted by the Jews only formally, in academic or inter-religious dialog, but not cultically accepted.

[5] In contrast to *Qetiv-Qere* structures, in the rabbinic tradition we find the concept of *Tiqqun soferim*. According to this concept, the rabbis have sometimes altered the Holy Scriptures to save God's honor in the world, so that, for example in 3 Kgs 21:12-13,

instead of saying that *Naboth cursed God*, as the text states, they say that *Naboth blessed God*.

[6] A comparable phenomenon is observed in the New Testament, specifically in the Apocalypse. This text contains a considerable number of *solecisms*, or writing mistakes, which have been preserved in the original manuscript without correction. This practice is motivated by a combination of factors, including respect for the individuals responsible for transmitting these texts and the recognition that the original manuscripts may have been influenced by a variety of factors, including the context in which they were created. Furthermore, we have faith that God, if He so wishes, can reveal Himself through any mechanism, including apparent mistakes. This is evidenced by the case of Balaam, in which the Lord spoke to the people through the mouth of a pagan. In regard to the relationship between the Hebrew Text and the Septuagint, it can be stated that the Jews rejected the Greek text, on the grounds that it introduces modifications to Jewish culture through the incorporation of Greek and Egyptian elements, the Septuagint being translated in Alexandria. Furthermore, an examination of the Old Testament manuscripts discovered at Qumran reveals the absence of any variants of the Septuagint. The primacy of the Hebrew text within the Judeo-Christian community is also evidenced by the fact that in Origen's Hexapla/ Octapla, the Hebrew text was positioned on the first column. In turn, St. Augustine argues for the primacy of the Hebrew Text over the Greek. See Augustinus, *De Civitate Dei*, XVIII, 43 – Kaiser 1975, 16.

[7] Targumim are Aramaic paraphrases of the Hebrew text. Sometimes they are quite different from the Hebrew source. For example, in Gen 1:1, the *Neophyte targumim* reads:

מלקדמין בחכמה ברא {ד}ייי שכלל ית שמיא וית ארעא

which translates: *From the beginning, with wisdom, the Son* (ברא) *fulfilled/ made* (שכלל) *the heavens and the earth*. So, as can be seen, these translations/paraphrases may be more or less faithful to the source text. Moreover, 2 Kgs 18:26 makes a clear distinction between Hebrew and Aramaic, as they are two distinct languages that do not completely overlap.

[8] The existing literature also posits the hypothesis that the Old Testament canon used by Christians was not necessarily aligned with that used by Jews. See Sundberg Jr. 1968, 143-55. It is also noteworthy that the concept of canon did not emerge until the time of St. Athanasius, as can be observed in *Festal Letter 39th*. For further insight, see McDonald 1995, 20.

[9] The words pronounced by the Savior on the cross are not an exact quotation from the Psalms. Rather, they are most likely a paraphrase (Targum) because, as evidenced in the Peshitta, He employs the Aramaic verb שבק, rather than the Hebrew term עזב, which is found in Psalm 21. Furthermore, even in the Greek version, there are

discussions on this construction because Matthew uses the variant *Ἠλί, Ἠλί, λεμὰ σαβαχθανί*, while Mark prefers *Ἐλωΐ, Ἐλωΐ, λαμὰ σαβαχθανί*. The Codex Bezae and the Byzantine text both preserved the two distinct constructions, whereas the Codex Alexandrinus and the Western variants led to the standardisation of the two variants.

[10] St. Justin Martyr and Philosopher calls the Gospels *ἀπομνημονεύματα τῶν αποστολων*. See Justin Martyr, *Apologia I,* 67, 3 – Hill 2004, 345.

[11] For example, Luke 4:18-19, composed of Is 61:1 and Is 58:6. See Longenecker 1975, 69; Guelich 2002, 121; Bock 1994, 404.

[12] Mk 10:6-8 – reference to Acts; Lk 18:20 – reference to Revelation; Lk 10:26-28 – reference to Deuteronomy; Mk 2:25 – reference to 1 Kgs; Mt 12:42 – reference to 1 Kgs; Mk 12:10 – reference to Psalms; Mt 13:13-14 – reference to Isaiah; Mt 24:15 – reference to Daniel; Mt 9:13 – reference to Hosea; Mt 12:40 – reference to Jonah; Mt 26:31 – reference to Zechariah; Mt 11:10 – reference to Malachi.

[13] The first Leningrad edition of the Old Testament does not contain the book of Daniel.

[14] In medieval and modern Judaism, around the age of twelve, children are considered religiously mature and welcomed as active members of the community in a ceremony called a *Bar Mitzvah*. This practice did not exist in the time of the Savior.

[15] To these miracles performed on the Sabbath must be added the healing of Peter's mother-in-law, which took place after Jesus and the disciples had left the synagogue (Mk 1:29-31).

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Christ, the Image of the Invisible God, the Proscenium of Old and New Testament. Perspectives of Knowing God from Colossians

Abstract

Christ is the visible representation of the unseeable God. Although this statement emphasises Christ's relationship with the Father, it is Christ who reveals God to the world. The text in Hebrews reinforces this same concept. Christ is "the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being" (1:3), and thus only His Son can make Him known (Col 1:18). In 1 Cor 15:49 and 2 Cor 4:4, the Apostle Paul employs the term *εἰκών* to portray the resurrected and exalted One, in whom, analogous to the eschatological Adam, all humanity is recapitulated. The risen One, however, is the image of the unseen God of eternity. In light of the statements in Colossians 1:13-14, it becomes evident that there is a dynamic relationship between the experience of redemption and the statements about the One through whom God accomplished the act of redemption. Although the initial section of the hymn is centred on Christ's role in creation, the Christological statements can be interpreted from a perspective of redemption. It is only through His blood (Col 1:14-20) that the Redeemer, who is the image of the unseen God, can effect redemption.

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Introduction

In patristic theology, the acquisition of knowledge about God is contingent upon the experience of deification. Consequently, knowledge of God represents an intrinsic aspiration of rational existence. The search for God is correctly perceived as a reciprocal

process, whereby God reveals Himself of His own volition. This revelation represents the sole means of acquiring knowledge of the divine. When God communicates an immeasurable truth to created rational beings, it is done in a manner that is consistent with the nature of the being for whom it is intended. However, an essential element of knowing God is that it is contingent and transformative for the human being. This study will concentrate on the concept of the "image of the invisible God" (Col 1:15), which is described as "an image above all images" (Casarella 2023, 19). The term εἰκών is a biblical concept that is found within the pages of the Holy Scriptures. The concept of the image of God is a central tenet of the Old and New Testaments. It is discussed in Genesis in the context of God's creation of man in his image and likeness, in Colossians in the definition of Christ and connection with the moral renewal, and in John when he speaks of the complete restoration of the image of Christ at the return of the risen Lord. Man, shaped by God to become the image of the invisible God and in whom the Holy Spirit restores the image of God, will be fully conformed to the image of Jesus Christ (Henry 1999, 540-1).

In his writings, the Apostle Paul employs the term "mystery" to describe God's self-revelation. In the Epistle to the Romans, the Apostle Paul elucidates God's plan of salvation for the entire world. He concludes the section comprising chapters 9–11 with a doxology or hymn of praise to God (11:36-39). This hymn of praise is representative of the language used in the works of Isaiah and Job (Keesmaat 2014, 560-2). The Apostle Paul grapples with the challenge of understanding God's ways and conveying them to humanity through a profound expression of astonishment at the sheer complexity of grasping the divine nature or the "mind of the Lord." In the Epistle to the Colossians, this "mystery" of God's self-knowledge is revealed to the Apostle through divine revelation (1:24-29). The Apostle elucidates this "mystery" through the Christological hymn, with liturgical overtones, of Colossians 1:15-20 (Sumney 2023, 466). The initial expression of this hymn is associated with the concept of divine knowledge. Christ is the image of the invisible God. The objective of this study is to examine this Pauline expression to gain insight into how Christ reveals the nature of God.

Context of the Christological hymn

Colossians 1:13-14 builds upon the preceding verses, enumerating further reasons for gratitude to God for His grace in the lives of the Colossian believers. The description of the reality of God's work in their lives is presented, commencing with

1:13, and including the Apostle Paul and those who were with him. This is illustrated by the shift from the second-person plural (1:12) to the first-person plural (v. 13) in the passage. Furthermore, the primary focus of God's work is centred on Christ, which serves to pave the way for the Christ hymn (1:15-20).

The verb *ῥύομαι* is found in the terminology of the LXX, in the context of the exodus of God's people from Egyptian bondage (Ex 6:6; 14:30). From a temporal perspective, the exodus from Egyptian bondage precedes the inheritance of God's people. However, it is integral to the larger economic narrative of God's kingdom. The exodus marks the transition from bondage to the presence of God, the imparting of the law, the establishment of the covenant, and finally, the living of life in the presence of God. The Colossians text places particular emphasis on the fact that God has once again removed his people from the dominion of darkness, which He brought into being, and displaced them into the reality of His kingdom, which is that of the Son of His love. In Col 4:11, the term "the kingdom of God" is employed, as is the case in most references in Pauline literature (Rom 14:17; 1 Cor 6:9-10; 15:50; Gal 5:21). Additionally, the concept of Col 1:13 is referenced in 1 Cor 15:24.

The light (1:12) and the kingdom of the Son (1:13) are in opposition to the dominion of darkness (1:13). In the kingdom of the Son, believers undergo a process of redemption, which is defined as the act of liberating someone or something from a state of bondage or suffering. Although the term *ἀπολύτρωσις* is only used once in the LXX, the derived verbs emphasize the divine act of liberation from Egyptian bondage (Dt 7:8; 9:26; 13:5; 15:15; 24:18). Nevertheless, authentic liberation is bestowed by Christ, not merely from Egyptian bondage, but moreover from the fundamental bondage of sin itself, which is the root cause of all bondage.

The term "kingdom of the Son" likewise evinces an echo of the Davidic covenant. The text of 2 Sam 7:12-18 is especially illuminating in this regard. David articulates his aspiration to build up a house or temple for the Lord. Nevertheless, divine intervention through the prophet Nathan establishes the terms of the covenant that God Himself makes with David in this context. David is not the one who will construct a house for the Lord; rather, it will be his descendant who will do so. God will provide him with eternal strength and guidance, thereby establishing a paternal relationship between them. In conclusion, David poses a question regarding the fulfillment of God's promise. "What is my house of love?" The history of the Old and New Testaments identifies the Davidic son with Jesus Christ. The terms of the Davidic covenant are fulfilled in two

ways: first, through the eternal kingdom that the Son receives, and second, through the establishment of the true temple, which is His Body. Following the Law of Atonement (Lev 16), the only day when the High Priest could enter the Holy of Holies with the blood of atonement, Christ, as the High Priest, "entered once and for all into the Holy of Holies with His blood, finding us eternal redemption" (Heb 9:11). This is evidenced by the fact that the High Priest was permitted to enter the Holy of Holies only on the Day of Atonement, and that Christ, as the High Priest, entered the Holy of Holies with His blood.

Given that the concept of "forgiveness of sins" is situated about "redemption," this phrase elucidates how believers undergo a process of liberation from bondage and are ushered into the presence of God in the present moment. The concept of forgiveness is reiterated in Col 2:13, where the term *παράπτωμα* is employed. This term specifically denotes a "mistake," as opposed to *ἁμαρτία*, which denotes "sin" (1:14). The term is employed within the context of the Apostle Paul's polemical engagement with the philosophical tenets prevalent in Colossae. The truth about God's redemptive work and its effect, the forgiveness of sins, must have encouraged the Colossian believers to cease giving in to rhetoric that spoke to them about the necessity of their forgiveness in other ways and not through Christ.

The phrase *τὴν ἄφεσιν τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν* may also be interpreted in the context of baptism, as reported by Mark (Mc 1:11). The concept of forgiveness of sins is presented by Luke in Acts 2:38, within the same baptismal context. In Romans 6:1-11, the metaphor of transition from death to life is employed, situated within the context of baptism. The explicit reference in Colossians 2:12 to the act of baptism, in conjunction with the unambiguous baptismal references recorded in 1:13-14, serves to remind the recipients of the significance of transforming their spiritual status.

Christological Hymn – structure

In terms of both composition and content, the hymn in Col 1:15-20 represents the fundamental text [1]. This provides the foundation for addressing the heretical teachings that were prevalent in Colossae at the time (Hegermann 1961, 89-93; Burger 1975, 3-52, Deichgräber 1967, 143-55; Zeilinger 1974, 179-205; Stettler 2000, 84-177; Gordley 2007, 170-270).

The Christological anthem begins in Col 1:15, where an intentional shift in stylistic approach is observed until Col 1:14 (Maisch 2003, 32-40). The pericope of

Col 1:3-14 is distinguished by stylistic characteristics that are consistent with those observed throughout the epistle. These include participles, a minimal presence of infinitives, an increase in the number of synonyms, a high frequency of genitival constructions, and repetitions. It should be noted, however, that these features are absent from Col 1,15-20 (Ludwig 1974, 32-56). In Colossians 1:15-20, these stylistic features are notably absent.

Moreover, there are noteworthy linguistic peculiarities. The following terms are attested in the New Testament as *ἅπαχ λεγόμενα: ὁρατός* (seen [1,16]), *πρωτεύω* (first [1,18]), and *εἰρηνοποιέω* (making peace [1,20]) (Lohse 1971, 85). The terms *θρόνοι* and *ἀρχαὶ*, as referenced in 1:16, are absent from the Pauline epistles. The Holy Apostle Paul only refers to the blood of Jesus Christ when corroborating the expression with the traditional material of the early epistles (cf. Rom 3:25; 1 Cor 10:16; 11:25.27). Moreover, the phrase *τοῦ αἵματος τοῦ σταυροῦ αὐτοῦ* (1:20) is absent from all other extant texts of the Pauline corpus (Schnelle 1998, 291).

The division of the hymn into two stanzas is indicated by the expression *ὅς ἐστιν* in verses 15 and 18b. Furthermore, the phrase *πρωτότοκος πάσης κτίσεως* („the firstborn of all creation") in verse 15 is analogous to the expression *πρωτότοκος ἐκ τῶν νεκρῶν* (the firstborn from the dead) in verse 18b. The two relative sentences are followed by the causal *ὅτι* (verses 16 and 19). Verse 17 and 18a are linked to *καὶ αὐτός*, v. 20, through *καὶ δι› αὐτοῦ*.

A chiastic structure of type A-B-C-B'-A' can be observed, wherein a thematic movement is evident, progressing from the cosmological focus of the initial stanza to the soteriological focus of the subsequent one. The logic of the presence of the central parts is of great importance. Firstly, B provides a summary of the first stanza (A), and secondly, B' offers a predictive summary of the last stanza (A'). The assertion contained within the central segment (C) represents a synthesis of the two preceding stanzas (Pizzuto 2006, 203-5).

A. The supremacy of Christ in creation (cosmological focus): "all – have been created in, through and for Christ" – 15-16
  B. Body of the Universe: "Christ is before all" – 17a
    C: Christ – the Creator and Savior Logos of the world: "all in Christ are hold together" – 17b
  B'. The Body of Christ: "Christ is the Head of the Body, the Church" – 18a
A'. Christ's supremacy in redemption (soteriological focus): "all – reconciled

through and for Christ" – 18b-20.

The division of the hymn into two stanzas is determined by a combination of grammatical and content-related factors. The initial stanza is centred upon the cosmological import of Christ's actions, whereas the subsequent stanza is characterized by its soteriological dimension. The genitive *τῆς ἐκκλησίας*, when joined to *ἡ κεφαλὴ τοῦ σώματος* in v. 18, serves to outline the structure of the text, as it introduces the soteriological-ecclesiological dimension as an anticipatory conclusion. Furthermore, this interpretative element aligns with the understanding of the Church as the Body of Christ, as elucidated by the Apostle Paul in Col 1:24 (*τοῦ σώματος αὐτοῦ, ὅ ἐστιν ἡ ἐκκλησία*).

An important interpretative element is found in the double prepositional phrase *διὰ τῶν αἵτινων τῶν σταυροῦ* (v. 20). The reference to the Sacrifice of the Savior on the Cross is understood as a "paradox" in the hymnological text by the Holy Apostle Paul. This is because it serves to unite the cosmic dimension of Christ's saving work with that of the Cross, respectively the historical dimension (Sumney 2008, 79).

The hymnological content evinces a parallel with Hellenistic Judaism, specifically with the sapiential Christological dimension. In his writings, St. Apostle Paul employs the Christian hymn, which likely originated in Asia Minor, as a foundational element in his argument for a church where hymnology plays a significant role (cf. Col 3:16) (Lohse 1971, 41-61; Thurén 2000, 159-160).

In Colossians 1:15-20, the Apostle Paul presents seven characteristics of Christ, thereby expressing the full revelation of God in Christ and the knowledge of Him. He is *ἀρχή*: (1) *εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ*, (2) *πρωτότοκος πάσης κτίσεως*, (3) *ἐν αὐτῷ ἐκτίσθη τὰ πάντα, and ἐν αὐτῷ συνέστηκεν*, (4) *ἡ κεφαλὴ τοῦ σώματος τῆς ἐκκλησίας*, (5) *πρωτότοκος ἐκ τῶν νεκρῶν*, (6) *ἐν αὐτῷ εὐδόκησεν πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα κατοικῆσαι*, (7) *δι' αὐτοῦ ἀποκαταλλάξαι τὰ πάντα εἰς αὐτόν*.

The following section will focus on the initial characteristic, as it represents the primary focus of our investigation. The remaining characteristics will be addressed concisely after this section.

Christ – *εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ἀοράτου*

In verse 15 of Colossians 1, the relative pronoun *ὅς* is used in continuation of the relative pronouns in verses 13ff. In verse 1:13, the phrase *ὃς ἐρρύσατο*" is employed to refer to the Father. In verse 14, the phrase *ᾧ ἔχομεν* is understood to refer to the Son

(*τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ υἱοῦ*), which can be interpreted as a reference to the Kingdom of the Son. The following verses address the subject of Christ, elucidating His position and significance.

In Christ, through Him and for Him, everything was created; He is *εἰκὼν* and *πρωτότοκος πάσης κτίσεως* of God. As the mediator of creation, He stands on God's side and as Lord over creation. In Him the whole universe has life, he holds the world together and is the Head of the cosmic Body (v. 18). When we speak of the world, we must speak of Christ's role in the world; he assigns to all the powers their place and guarantees their order. Cosmology is entirely under the sign of Christology.

In the words of Karavidopoulos, the Christological hymn in verses 15-20 represents the foundation of the Apostle Paul's theological discourse and refutation of the heretical teachings espoused by the Colossian heretics (Karavidopoulos 2011, 433). Christ is superior to all creatures, including angels. As the head of the Church, which is His body, He is sovereign overall. Those who are members of the body of Christ have already been redeemed from the authority of worldly powers, have already been forgiven their sins through the shedding of Christ's blood, and are therefore immune to the influence of heretical teachings that are nothing more than "vain deceit." The Apostle Paul frequently reiterates these interpretations of the hymn throughout the remainder of the epistle (Gese 2020, 39). In verse 15, Christ is described as *εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ἀοράτου* and *πρωτότοκος πάσης κτίσεως*. It is noteworthy that the characterization of Christ as *εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ* is a relatively uncommon occurrence in Paul's writings. This concept is fundamental to Paul's Christology, as it elucidates the revelation of the image of God in the person of Christ (Luz, 1998, 201).

Christ is initially described as *εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ἀοράτου* (Michaelis 1954, 369-71). The concept of an invisible God is a recurring theme in various religious traditions (Muller, 2022, 159). The word *εἰκών* (Botterweck 1974-2006, 3:12; Wolff 1974, 159-66; Spicq 1994, 1:412-29) has a long history both in the early Greek and Hellenistic world and in the Old Testament, which we cannot trace in detail in this brief hermeneutical digression. In general terms only, we will refer to the perceptions of the age, to ascertain what perceptions of the image exist as background to the characterisation of Christ as *εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ἀοράτου* in our verse.

If, for modern logic, the existence of a visible image of an invisible thing is a contradiction in terms (Karavidopoulos 2011, 434), for the archaic and Hellenistic era,

the relationship between image and prototype was understood and had a completely different meaning. In the early Greek world, the word *εἰκών* was understood and had a different meaning. *Εἰκών* was useful mainly in the field of art, but from Plato onwards it was used in philosophical terminology. Thus, according to Platonic cosmology, *εἰκών* denoted the representation of the idea in the sensible material world, since between the visible image and the mental prototype there was believed to be a great distance. In contrast to Plato (Kleinknecht 1976, 2:386; Silva 2014, 102), for example, who understands the cosmos as an image, a perceptible copy of an intelligible god, in Col 1:15 the same person is called "the image of God", who opposes the cosmos because the world was created by him. According to Barth, this interpretation, together with the use of the term "image" in a cosmological context, may recall the thought of Philo. In his view, *logos* is the immediate image of God, and transmitted by logos, the cosmos is the image of God (Barth 2008, 248). In this way, the difference between Creator and creation is preserved rather than actually denied.

In the Hellenistic age, *εἰκών* acquires greater ontological weight, since the prototype is sens sensorially present in its image. Thus, the prevailing view is that the image is a projection and manifestation of the essence of the original, it is a true and living representation. This character of the concept of the icon, namely that it reveals and presents the essence of the original, is found especially in the texts of Hellenistic Judaism. Philo's Logos, for example, is ultimately called *εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ*, because it reveals God to people (Philo, *Περί φυγής* 101). Likewise, the heavenly man in the Gnostic texts is also characterised as *εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ* (*Corpus Hermeticum* 7,5). Barth considers that there is yet another possibility of interpretation without the need to introduce into the hymn the Platonic tradition through Philo and without the need to speculate on the essence and meaning of the term "image" when used as the title of Christ (Barth 2008, 248).

What we are mainly interested in here is the investigation of the question of where the characterisation of Christ as *εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ* in verse 15 comes from. According to Karavidopoulos, hypothesis that the closest parallels with this verse are what is said in Plato's Timaeus about the sensible world as an image of the intelligible. Many accept that here Christ is called the image of God by analogy and in contrast with the first Adam, who was created *κατ› εικόνα καί καθ› όμοίωσιν* of God (Gen 1:26). The characterisation of the image is justified, according to this view, for the eschatological Adam, who became man to restore the transgression of the first Adam (Karavidopoulos 2011, 434).

Karavidopoulos, however, considers it more probable that the meaning of verse 15 is to be found in the Hellenistic conception emphasised earlier that the icon reveals the original hidden within it. This version of the icon is also found in Hellenistic Judaism. *In Σοφία Σολομώντος* 7,25-20, Wisdom is called *ἀπόροια τῆς τοῦ παντοντοκράτορος δόξης εἰλικρινής, ἀπαύγασμα ἐστιν φωτὸς ἀιδίου. . . καὶ εἰκὼν τῆς ἀγαθότητος αὐτοῦ*. Moreover, the view that the Christology of the New Testament and even of Paul borrows expressions and formulations from the wisdom teaching of Hellenistic Judaism has been held by many scholars (Karavidopoulos 2011, 435). So, the invisible God reveals himself fully and completely to people in the person of Jesus Christ, who is his *εἰκών*.

Müller asserts that there are only a few instances within the OT tradition where it is mentioned that individuals can see God. According to Ex 24:9-11, apart from Moses and Aaron, these instances are limited to Nadab and Abihu and seventy elders of Israel. However, it is unclear whether they saw God or what was beneath His feet. Exodus 33:18-20 is illustrative of this point. Although Moses speaks to God "face to face" (33:11), this is immediately corrected in verse 20. Moses is permitted to see "the glory of God," but not God "face to face," for "no man shall live who sees me" (1 Kgs 19:11-13) Consequently, the experience of beholding the glory of the Lord (Nm 14:22) is not a straightforward visual encounter. Rather, it is an encounter with the divine presence (cf. the parallelism between revealing and seeing in Is 52:10). In the Psalms, the act of seeing God may serve as a metaphor for the assurance of his proximity (Ps 16:15; 62:3 LXX). In contrast, Job's lament in 23:8f indicates a lack of certainty regarding God's nearness. In 42:5, Job confesses that his eyes have seen God, which also refers to the experience of God's sovereignty (Müller 2022, 160).

Müller observed that there are only a few instances in the New Testament where God's invisibility is referenced. John 1:18 affirms that no one has ever seen God and that the only begotten has proclaimed and interpreted him. Hebrews 11:27 refers to Moses, who relied on God "as if he had seen him". Romans 1:20 speaks of God's invisible nature, which can be recognised in his works. As different as these passages may be, together they address a relational aspect: God cannot be seen, but he can nevertheless be proclaimed, recognised and can be invoked. In 1Tim 1:17, on the other hand, *ἀόρατος* is understood as an attribute: God is imperishable and invisible; the combination of *ἄφθαρτος* and *ἀόρατος* indicates a specifically Hellenistic horizon of thought (Müller 2022, 162).

Furthermore, as Müller proposes, wisdom and logos are frequently regarded as being synonymous. In Plato, the perceptible world is regarded as an image of God. In contrast, in Philo, the divine Logos is seen as occupying this position, with the perceptible world representing a concrete manifestation of preconceived ideas within the divine Logos. In this context, the Logos may be understood as the expression of divine reason, situated on the side of God. The perceptible world, in turn, is understood as a creation emerging from this divine source. In contrast to this view, however, Philo maintains that the concept of creation preserves the distinction between the Creator and the Logos, on the one hand, and that which is created, on the other(Müller 2022, 16; Schweizer 1997, 58-60; Wolter 1993, 76).

The concept of Christ as the "image of God" (Müller 2022, 163) emphasises the idea of proximity to God rather than distance. Similarly, the concept of God as an agent is also evident in verse 13, and the term *εἰκών* also has a dynamic emphasis. Colossians 1:15 does not seek to elucidate the nature of God or the universe, but rather to make a statement about Christ (Gnilka 1980, 61). However, this statement is made in a way that also determines Christ's relationship to the cosmos as God's eikōn. Despite the proximity to Philonian statements and a comparable scope of thought, a direct dependence on a specific passage in Philo cannot be substantiated. The Apostle Paul would later reiterate this same teaching in his epistle, employing the phrase *εν αύτω κατοικεί πάν τό πλήρωμα τής θεότητος σωματικώς* (2:9).

Christ – *πρωτότοκος πάσης κτίσεως*

The second description of Christ in Colossians 1:15-20 is that of the *πρωτότοκος πάσης κτίσεως*. Psalm 88:27 (LXX), in reference to the firstborn, does not perceive this as a temporal priority, but rather as a matter of divine sovereignty. From a temporal perspective, it would be the first in all creation, as Arianism argued in the fourth century. In his commentary on Colossians 1:16, St. Athanasius demonstrated that an Arianist interpretation would fail to take into account the immediate context of the text. In his epistles, the Apostle Paul asserts that all were constructed upon, through, and for the Son of God. In Revelation 1:17, Christ Himself makes the declaration, *ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ πρῶτος*.

Psalm 88 (LXX) reiterates the theme of God's faithfulness to the Davidic covenant, a concept also present in 2 Samuel 7. The ascension of the Messiah, as depicted in Psalm 88:27, was intended to bolster the conviction of God's people in His

fidelity, assuring them that He would bestow redemption not only upon the land but also upon the entire world. In Exodus 12, the role of the firstborn of the Jewish family was related to the redemption of the entire family, as well as the dignity received in this context (Ex 1:2-15; Dt 21:17). In the context of the New Testament, Christ is understood to possess both a redemptive right for all of his brothers (Heb 2:11-15) and to act as the paschal lamb, whose blood atones for the sins of the world (Jn 1:29). Therefore, it can be argued that it is through Christ as the Firstborn that the entire edifice becomes potentially redeemable [2].

In his writings, St. Athanasius elucidates the distinction between the terms "one-born" and "firstborn," emphasizing that: "One begotten, as it was said, is for the birth of the Father; and the firstborn, for the descent to the edification and because it makes many men brethren," [3] concluding that: "the expression 'Firstborn' has the creation united with it as its cause. This is what Paul added, saying, 'That in him were all built' [Col 1:16]. But if all creatures were created in him, he is none other than creatures, and is not a creature, but the Creator of creatures." [4]

"So he was not called 'the firstborn' because he is of the Father, but because in him the creation was made. And as before creation was the Son himself, by whom the creation was made, so before he was called 'the firstborn of all creation,'" was the Very Word to God, and God was the Word." (St. Athanasius, *Three Words Against the Aryans* II,63) [5].

St. Athanasius makes two important clarifications in this context. The Apostle Paul did not say, "firstborn among other creatures," but "of all creation," to show that he was none other than all creation; neither should the "firstborn of all," that he should not be reckoned to bear any body other than ours, but "among many brethren" (Rm 8:29), for the likeness of the flesh.

"He was thus designated "the firstborn among several brethren" about the kinship of the body, and "the firstborn from the dead" in recognition of the fact that out of him and after him is the resurrection from the dead. He was also identified as "the firstborn of all creation" in light of the Father's love for humanity, which manifested not only in the creation of all things in the Word but also in the very creation itself, about which the Apostle wrote that "awaits the revelation of the sons of God." Therefore, upon liberation, the Lord will assume the role of the Firstborn, along with all those who have been established. This indicates that he will be the first to remain after those who follow

him, anchored by the Word as a foundation" (St. Athanasius, *Three Words Against the Aryans* II,63).

Rev. Prof. D. Stăniloae posits that Saint Athanasius imbues the expression "firstborn of all edification" with a novel significance, one that resonates with the meaning of the expression "firstborn of the dead." He elucidates that the Son is "the firstborn of all creation" not merely because in Him all things were created, but also because through Him or in Him, after the incarnation and resurrection, they will all emerge from the bondage of decomposition and death, becoming all eternal sons of God, in the Son who became their brother (Saint Athanasius, Three Words Against the Aryans II,63).

Christ – *ἐν αὐτῷ ἐκτίσθη τὰ πάντα*

The third statement about Christ pertains to His relationship with the entire creation, as evidenced by the phrase "in him were created all things" (*ἐν αὐτῷ ἐκτίσθη τὰ πάντα*). This concept is highlighted in 1:16. The assertion is made on two occasions that all were constructed through and in Him. This purpose encompasses both the spiritual realm and the physical universe, uniting those in heaven and the unseen with those on earth and seen. Although Paul the Apostle emphasizes these concepts in a doxological context, he does not neglect to mention that the unseen are represented by the hierarchy of heavenly powers. Thrones, lords, beginners, and masters. The return to the polemical context on the hierarchy of the heavenly powers (2:10.15) gave rise to the interpretation that the Apostle Paul would prepare from the Christological statements a critique of the excessive emphasis placed by the Colossians on the role of these powers (Lincoln 2000, 598; Aletti 1993, 100).

We encounter the four heavenly powers in late Jewish literature in 2 Enoch 20-22; în 2 Mac 3:24: "The high Master of spirits and of all powers," 1 Enoch 61:10, T. Levi 3. In the context of creation, the ontological one, we speak of the hierarchy of heavenly powers, but v. 20 brings a new nuance: they are part of all those who need reconciliation, and in 2:15 there are heavenly powers defeated by Christ, left without any power over believers.

Additionally, Col 1:16 delineates the eschatological perspective, indicating that Christ is the purpose of creation (Rev 1:8; 1:18; 2:8; 21:6). In the context of redemption, this Christological statement is articulated in 1:20, after the anthem, through the concept of reconciliation.

Col 1:17 represents a synthesis of the preceding two verses. The phrase: Christ *ἐστιν πρὸ πάντων* is a synthesis of the preceding verses. He has no temporal origin; rather, He exists from eternity to eternity. The pre-existence of Christ is an eternal reality. Nevertheless, all of these entities are a part of the created order, and it is through Him that they are held together. The verb συνίστημι introduces the concept of harmony and unbroken belonging. Christ is the Proniator of the entire universe, the One who, in a caring and benevolent manner, places all things in their proper order and context. In his pre-existence, Christ is responsible for the creation of all things. In his role as the Logos, Christ serves to unify the created beings. In Christ, the purpose, fulfillment, and perfection of all creation are realized (cf. Sir 43:26).

Christ – *ἡ κεφαλὴ τοῦ σώματος τῆς ἐκκλησίας*

In verse 18, the hymn begins to increasingly focus on the redemptive aspect. The presentation of Christ, Head of the Body (*ἡ κεφαλὴ τοῦ σώματος*), of the Church (*τῆς ἐκκλησίας*), serves to underscore the authority of Christ over the Church. In 1:24, the image of the body of Christ the Church (*ἡ ἐκκλησία*), is resumed. In Colossians 2:10, the Apostle Paul asserts that Christ has authority over all forms of rule and dominion. Nevertheless, in Col 4:15-16, the designation "church" (*ἐκκλησία*) is limited to its local, sense, as applied to the church (*ἐκκλησία*) in the house of Nimfas and the church (*ἐκκλησία*) of the Laodiceans. The meaning conveyed in Col 1:18 places emphasis on the singular authority that exists within the universal Church (1 Cor 12:13). This authority is none other than Christ himself. The function of this reality is exemplified in Col 2:19. To maintain a close connection with the Head (*τὴν κεφαλήν*), which represents the source of guidance and direction for the entire body (*τὸ σῶμα*). The ecclesiastical mode of existence, which is based on the authority of Christ, is designed to facilitate spiritual growth and maturity.

Christ – *πρωτότοκος ἐκ τῶν νεκρῶν*

In the New Testament, Christ is referred to as "The Beginning, the Firstborn from the Dead" (*ἀρχή, πρωτότοκος ἐκ τῶν νεκρῶν*). This designation underscores the significance of Christ's role in the new creation. Accordingly, the term *ἀρχή* is polysemous, denoting both temporal origin and authority or sovereignty. In the new creation, He is *ἀρχή* in that He rose from the dead, thus being *πρωτότοκος ἐκ τῶν νεκρῶν* (Rom 8:29; 1 Cor 15:20.23). His resurrection from the dead signifies His triumph over

death (Heb 2:14; 1 Jn 3:8). If we accept that Christ has supremacy in the new creation, then the repetition of 1.18c serves to reinforce and reiterate this conviction for the recipients: *ἵνα γένηται ἐν πᾶσιν αὐτὸς πρωτεύων* (1:18c). The eternal Logos (Jn 1:1), which "became flesh" (1:14) and "humbled himself" (Phil 2:8), has now been "exalted" by God and "given a name above every name": *κύριος* (Phil 2:11). The name *κύριος* is emphasized in the thanksgiving of Col 1:3, in 2.6, where the entire apostolic tradition is summarized, and in the parenetic part of the epistle (3.18.20.22.23.24; 4.7.17).

Jürgen Roloff draws a parallel between the text of Revelation and the concept of „the Firstborn from the Dead", positing that the phrase refers not only to the event of the resurrection but also to the contemporary understanding of Jesus Christ within the churches. In consequence of the resurrection, Jesus Christ has advanced as the Firstborn from the kingdom of death (of darkness – Col 1:13). Consequently, God's new creation has already become a reality in Him (Rom 8:29; Col 1:15). Those who belong to Him are promised that they will walk with Him and through Him from death to life. In Revelation 1:5, the evangelist John alludes to a concept that was already familiar to the churches of Asia Minor. In his view, Christ is the Firstborn from the dead, as well as the Head of the body of the Church (Col 1:18). He posits that, because of this intimate bond with her Lord, the Church is already situated within the reality of the resurrection (Roloff 1993, 24-5).

Christ – *ἐν αὐτῷ εὐδόκησεν πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα*

The oneness of Christ in the economy of God is underscored by the following Christological statements made in the hymn. Firstly, in Christ, the fullness of deity was pleased to dwell. The use of the term "God" in translations is justified in this context by reference to Colossians 2:9 – *ἐν αὐτῷ εὐδόκησεν πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα κατοικῆσαι*. The expression *πᾶν τᾰ πλήρωμα* can be understood to signify the deification of the body of Christ. This is to say that the risen Christ is God, in all his divine fullness. The doctrine of the incarnation asserts that God dwells in Christ. Consequently, all created entities, whether in heaven or on earth, must find their purpose in this divine presence.

Christ – *δι' αὐτοῦ ἀποκαταλλάξαι τὰ πάντα εἰς αὐτόν*

The initial section of verse 20 presents a rationale that supports the overarching assertion made in verse 1.19. God intended to reconcile all things through and in Christ. The verb *ἀποκαταλλάσσω* is only found in verses 20 and 22 (and

Eph 2:16). The comparison with 1:16 is readily apparent. Just as Christ is the agent and rationale behind creation, so too is He the agent and rationale behind reconciliation.

The concept of reconciliation is elucidated by the apostle Paul through the act of making peace, which is defined in his writings as *εἰρηνοποιέω*. The enmity that encompassed the entire creation (*τὰ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, τὰ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς*) is resolved in the historical event of His Sacrifice. The phrase *διὰ τοῦ αἵματος τοῦ σταυροῦ αὐτοῦ* places particular emphasis on the significance of the act of sacrifice, as well as the Cross, which is identified therein with the body of Christ that is offered as a sacrifice. In conclusion, it can be stated that the two verbs, reconciliation and peace-making, elucidate the meaning of redemption. The ultimate emphasis, about all that exists in the celestial and terrestrial realms, serves to remind the recipients that none of the entities or phenomena within the created order can be of greater significance than Christ within the divine economy.

In light of these observations, it can be posited that the Old Testament echo of the entire hymn may be the Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur. The entrance of the high priest into the holy of holies – the place in which the glory of God dwelt when Moses erected the Tent of Meeting – the offering of the blood of the sacrifice by which sins were cleansed: these may constitute landmarks in the creation of a theology existing in Colossians. This theology would have emphasised the need to relate to what God Himself had revealed as the way of entering into His presence once the Israelites had come out of Egyptian bondage, bringing them into the promised land where they were to receive their inheritance.

Paul's emphasis is on the reality that the Colossian believers have the same experience of God as those of old. However, he also asserts that the promised One has already come, as evidenced by the construction of the new temple, which is the body of Christ. Furthermore, Paul claims that the One who was promised has already made reconciliation through the blood of His Cross. This reconciliation is not only for men but also for all things in heaven and on earth. Finally, Paul states that this promised One has already brought redemption. The new people are no longer to subjugate the entire promised land; rather, believers are called to disseminate the Gospel to all humanity, as each individual requires growth, maturity, and fulfillment in Christ. In this manner, it can be asserted that they are progressing in the pursuit of eternal knowledge of God.

Conclusion

The truth expressed in Colossians 1:15 regarding the relationship between the Father, the unseen God, and the Son has implications for humanity. As imperfect beings, humans require the perfect image of Christ to fulfil the destiny of the earthly Adam, which is to adopt the image of the heavenly Adam (cf. 1 Cor 15:49). The dynamic relationship that characterizes the union of the two images in the divine plan (cf. Rom 8:29; Eph 1:3-14) is evident in the life of the Christian. Through the mystery of baptism (Rom 6:3-6; Col 3:10), the Christian becomes one with Christ and is thus the son of God (1 Jn 3:2). Furthermore, the Christian is transformed from glory to glory in the image of the Son, the firstborn among many brethren (2 Cor 3:18; Rom 8:29). The ultimate consequence of this uninterrupted metamorphosis is the resurrection, which endows the Christian with the status of being permanently invested with the likeness of the celestial Adam (1 Cor 15:49). This entails the formation of "the body of our humility after the body of his glory" (Phil 3:21).

Notes

[1] A recent study that combats categorisation as the hymn of the text of Col 1,15-20, based on the latest research of form criticism is of Edsall & Strawbridge 2015: 290-311. In the authors' understanding, the ancient definition of the hymn (*ὕμνος*) demonstrates that "Christological hymns" (Phil 2:6-11 and Col 1:15-20) do not meet those criteria.

[2] Regarding the Paschal-redeeming meaning of the expression firstborn, St. Justin the Martyr and the Philosopher, explains: "So the name *Israel* means a man *who overcomes a power*. For *isra* means a man who *wins,* and *he* means *power.* This was also prophesied by the mystery of the struggle that Jacob had waged with him who appeared to him in the accomplishment of the father's will, and who, by being the first-born Son of all creatures, was God. And this would be done by Christ also when he was to be a man. [...] His name was anciently Israel. By this name he called the blessed Jacob, blessing him by his name, and thereby preaching that all who come through him to the Father are the blessed Israel (St. Justin Martyr and the Philosopher, *Dialogue with the Jew Tryphon* 125, PG 6, 765D-768A.768C). A development of the meaning approached by St. Justin, see in Sullivan 2004, 52-55, 99-101.

[3] *ἵνα Μονογενὴς μὲν διὰ τὴν ἐκ Πα τρὸς γέννησιν, ὥσπερ εἴρηται, πρωτότοκος δὲ διὰ τὴν εἰς τὴν κτίσιν συγκατάβασιν, καὶ τὴν τῶν πολ λῶν ἀδελφοποίησιν* (St. Athanasius, *Oratio II contra Arianos* 62, PG 26, 280A).

[4] *τὸ δὲ, πρωτότο κος, συμπεπλεγμένην ἔχει πάλιν τὴν τῆς κτίσεως αἰτίαν, ἣν ἐπήγαγεν ὁ Παῦλος λέγων· Ὅτι ἐν αὐτῷ ἐκτίσθη τὰ πάντα. Εἰ δὲ πάντα τὰ κτίσματα ἐν αὐτῷ*

ἐκτίσθη, ἄλλος ἐστὶ τῶν κτισμάτων, καὶ κτίσμα μὲν οὐκ ἔστι, κτίστης δὲ τῶν κτισμάτων (St. Athanasius, *Oratio II contra Arianos* 62, PG 26, 280B).

[5] *Οὐ διὰ τὸ ἐκ Πατρὸς ἄρα πρωτότοκος ἐκλήθη, ἀλλὰ διὰ τὸ ἐν αὐτῷ γεγενῆσθαι τὴν κτίσιν. Καὶ ὥσπερ πρὸ τῆς κτίσεως ἦν αὐτὸς ὁ Υἱὸς, δι' οὗ γέ γονεν ἡ κτίσις· οὕτω καὶ πρὸ τοῦ κληθ ῆναι πρωτότοκος πάσης τῆς κτίσεως, ἦν οὐδὲν ἧττον αὐ τὸς ὁ Λόγος πρὸς τὸν Θεὸν, καὶ Θεὸς ἦν ὁ Λόγος*. (St. Athanasius, *Oratio II v. Arianos* 63, PG 26, 280B-C). Rev. Prof. D. Stăniloae observed in this context that "The Holy Apostle Paul calls Christ not only "the firstborn from the dead" (Col 1:18), but also "The firstborn of all building up" (Col 1:15). The meaning of the first expression was explained by saying that He is the firstborn from the dead because He became a man. The meaning of the second is now shown, saying that the Son in the same capacity is the beginning of all. But Saint Athanasius adds another nuance to further exalt the Son to creation. He called himself "The firstborn of all creation" only after the world was created in him. This means that He is independent of creation. Only by ascertaining that in him God created, when he benevolently created, all the building up, could it be said that he is the "firstborn" of all creation, to show that apart from him it could not be brought into existence. The world is dependent in its existence on Him, but He is not dependent on it." (St. Athanasius, *Three Words Against the Aryans* II,63).

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The Teachings of Tobit to his son Tobias

Abstract

The main purpose of the Book of Tobit is to promote faithfulness to the Law and authentic family values. Although it is a narrative, its purpose is educational, and it can thus be perceived as part of a long tradition of academic literature. The same can be said of a much later text, from a different cultural context: *The Teachings of Neagoe Basarab to His Son Theodosius*. Tob 4 contains a section of direct teaching within the Book of Tobit. In the present paper, I will compare it with the second part of *The Teachings*. Special emphasis is given to Tob 4:3-4 which presents Tobias' filial duties towards Anna, his mother. Based on my comparison, the fathers in both works, Tobit and Neagoe Basarab, demonstrate diligence by being committed to their roles and responsibilities as fathers, urging their sons Tobias and Theodosius to remain faithful to ancestral traditions.

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Introduction

In the third chapter of *The Teachings of Neagoe Basarab to his son Theodosius*, titled in the original Slavonic: "Letter of Neagoe the Voivode to the bones of his mother Neaga and his sons Peter and John and his daughter Angelina. A word of humility", the pious voivode of Wallachia (1512-1521) praises his mother in imitation of the Byzantine Emperor Leo VI the Philosopher, who also, in a similar speech, transmitted in a unique manuscript, praised his father, Emperor Basil I the Macedonian (Wright III 2008, 25-6). The ruler Neagoe Basarab owed his theological culture to a great contemporary of his, "a man of soul and full of all goodness", namely St. Nephon, former Patriarch of Constantinople (1486-1488 and 1496-1498) and Metropolitan of Wallachia (1498-1505):

"And blessed Nephon strengthened him with his teachings, that he might grow and exalt himself in all good deeds and rise in good fortune and be pleasing in the sight of God and men, how afterwards, with the prayer of his holiness, he might fulfil both" *(Life of Nephon*) (Mihăilă 1971, 80-1). Also, Neagoe Basarab's marriage to Milița Despina [1], daughter of the despot of Serbia, Iovan Brancovici, and granddaughter of St. Maxim Brancovici, a well-known scholar of the time, metropolitan of Wallachia (1505-1508), later metropolitan of Belgrade and Srem (until 1516), and facilitated by kinship ties that brought together in a kingly pair traditions of three countries: Byzantine Empire, Serbia and Wallachia, respectively of three Orthodox dynasties: the Cantacuzin, Brancovici and Basarab.

Among the sources of inspiration for the first monument of Romanian literature, specialists cite the biblical sources (Old and New Testament) but also fragments from the works of Saints John Chrysostom, Athanasius the Great, John Climacus, Ephrem the Syrian and other Eastern Fathers (*The Teachings of Neagoe Basarab* 2010, 403, n. 4). *The teachings of Neagoe Basarab to his son Theodosius* are part of a long tradition whose origins go back to pre-Christian antiquity. The many quotations from the Holy Scripture prove the author's theological depth, wide reading and literary mastery. This paper aims to evaluate the possible influence of the Book of Tobit on chapter III of the second part of the second part of the *Teachings*.

Father and Mother teaching their sons in Ancient Israel

The responsibility of parents to teach their children is a prominent theme in Old Testament wisdom literature. Jesus the son of Sirach writes: "He who teaches his son will make his enemies envious and will glory in him in the presence of friends. The father may die, and yet he is not dead, for he has left behind him one like himself." (Sir 30:3-4 – RSV; cf. Ps 13:24; 19:18; 22:15; 23:13-14; 29:15,17; Sir 7:23-24; 30:1-13) Proverbs of Solomon and other wise Israelites counsel the young to heed parental teaching: "My son, do not forget my teaching, but let your heart keep my commandments, for length of days and years of life and peace they will add to you." (Prv 3:1-2 – ESV; cf. Prv 1:8-9; 2:1-5; 4:1-13, 20-22; 5:1-2; 7:1-4; 13:1; 19:27; 23:22-25).

Judeo-Christian literature records numerous examples of wise teachers speaking through the father's voice. In some cases, especially in texts that have been classified as sapiential, the *father* (the presumed author of the text) is the sage who gives instructions to his *son* or *sons* (disciples, readers), which he addresses in the singular or

plural (Proverbs, Ecclesiastes / Qohelet, Wisdom of Jesus son of Sirach / Ecclesiasticus). In other writings (*Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, Testament of Job*, *I Enoch*) the father speaking to his sons occupies a central place in the narrative (Wright III 2008, 25-6). The Second Temple period texts in which the author assumes the father's role, stand in a dependent relationship to a literary tradition preserved in the older texts of Old Testament wisdom literature. The Book of Proverbs, possibly the creation of Israelite didactic literature par excellence, presents the transmission of wisdom from father (and sometimes mother) to son [2]. Subjects however varied – social conduct, wealth and vices, family life, etc. – are all conveyed as parental advice to the beloved son (Wright III 2008, 26). An Israelite youth would benefit greatly from his instruction in the parental home, and the sage's adoption of this role indicates the crucial importance of that institution as a place of instruction (see King and Stage 1994, 199-212).

So strong is the authority of the teachings that develop out of family life that they continue to function as a motivation for discipleship even when the instruction has been codified literally and housed in *scriptures* (Fontaine 1990, 159). In Ancient Israel, education developed out of a desire for order and continuity. To combat the powerful and seductive temptation of chaos in its various forms, societal or personal, the older and more experienced strove to guide the younger generation not to fall into the inherent traps of everyday life. The aim of this education was moral formation and character building. Later authors would extol the cardinal virtues of Hellenistic philosophy: temperance (*σωφροσύνη*), prudence (*φρόνηση*), justice (*δικαιοσύνη*), and manliness (*ἀνδρεία*, Sol 8:7; cf. 4:1; 5:3; 4 Macc 1:3-4) [3].

Text versions of the Book of Tobit

The text of the Book of Tobit constitutes an intermediary stage between the didactic and historical writings of the Old Testament (Miller 1940/41, 7) [4]. Reading the Book of Tobit with its parallels in the Book of the Pharaoh leads the reader into a world of *midrashic delight* (Jacobs 2014, 232) [5]. A considerable number of commonalities between the Wisdom of Jesus the son of Sirach and the Book of Tobit have been pointed out in the literature, specifically in the section containing the version of the extended counsels (Tob 4:3-19) [6]. Uncertainty about the genre and purpose of the Book of Tobit would have contributed to its different placement either in the group of sapiential or historical books (Delcor 1989, 474) [7].

Codex Sinaiticus (4t^{h} century), discovered by Constantine von Tischendorf in the monastery of St. Catherine of Mount Sinai and largely preserved at the British Library in London, contains the textual form known as G^{n}. *Codex Vaticanus* (4th century), discovered and preserved in the Apostolic Library in the Vatican, contains the textual form called G^{I}. *Codex Alexandrinus* (^{5}th century), preserved in the British Library in London, is textually close to *Codex Vaticanus*. In the Greek manuscript of Ferrara (106), written in cursive script around 1334 and preserved in the Biblioteca Municipale of Ferrara, the section between Tob 6,8 and Tob 13,8 corresponds to the textual form G^{nI}. Greek Manuscript 319, dated 1021 and preserved at Mount Athos, contains Tob 3,6-6,16, and is textually close to *Codex Sinaiticus* (Zappella 2012, 31).

Codex Vaticanus groups the Book of Tobit among the sapiential writings, while *Codex Sinaiticus* joins it with the historical writings. Most likely this grouping was determined by the extensive collection of moral and religious counsels in Tob 4 in the version of the codicil preserved at the Vatican, which belongs to the G^{I} group of textual recensions. Since the collection of instructions in the Sinaitic codex is shorter, Tob 2-12 cannot be considered a sapiential narrative. In the placement of the Book of Tobit in the mentioned codexes, *Codex Sinaiticus* is the preferred text for analysis, as it is closer to the original Hebrew version *(Urtext)* of the Book of Tobit. The codex mentioned is the long Greek recension with the shorter version of the fourth chapter because it omits some of the sapiential instructions. The G review^{n} has two textual gaps, namely Tob 4:7-19b and Tob 13:6-10b (Macatangay 2011, 47).

The chiastic structure of the Book of Tobit

Within the chiastic structure of the Book of Tobit, Tobit's words of instruction (4:1-21) parallel the eponymous character's song of praise (13:1-14:1a). The wedding of Tobit and Sarah is at the centre of the narrative, and the account of Tobit's suffering and end of life frames this scene as well as the inner frames of the narrative (Macatangay 2016, 52). In the exposition, the narrator speaking in the first person, singular, portrays the devotion and diligence of Tobit's righteousness in fulfilling his duty to bury his countrymen who died because of the tragic persecutions initiated by the Assyrian king (Tob 1:17-18). The last scene captures the death and burial of Tobit and Hannah's parents and their son Tobias (14:13-15). Marriage and the covered tomb represent two sides of the same coin: successive, parallel or cyclical alternations of life.

The Sufferings of Tobit and Sarah (1:1-3:17)
A^{I} . The teachings of Tobit (4:1-21)
B^{I} : Search for a travelling companion for Tobit (5:1-6:1)
C^{I} : Journey to Ecbatana (6,2-7,9a)
D: Marriage in Ecbatana (7:9b-10:13)
C^{II} : Journey to Nineveh (Tob 11:1-18)
B^{II} : The parting of Tobit from his travelling companion (12:1-22)
A^{II} : Song of praise of Tobit (13:1-14:1a)
Epilogue: Tobit's Testament and Death (Tob 14,1b-15)

The didactic and poetic character of the Book of Tobit is supported by the presence of three literary forms within it: a sapiential discourse (4:3-21), a hymn dedicated to Jerusalem (13:9-18) and a testamentary word spoken on his deathbed (14:3-11) (Machiela and Perrin 2014, 116). The narrative framework (Tob 4,1-2.20) that includes Tobit's counsel (Tob 4,3-19) presents interesting peculiarities. Tobit's thoughts turn first to the material well-being of his son (Tob 4:1- 2), and then, soon enough, to the spiritual well-being of Tobit (Tob 4:3-19) (Moore 1996, 163). In addition to the ten talents kept by a fiend from Rhages of Media, there are other *talents* hidden in the very words of the father. Tobit's teachings will be the most precious fortune he will bequeath to his son and future generations.

But a careful reading of Tobit's word of instruction (Tob 4) reveals a paradox caused by the dissonance between the rules of wisdom and Tobit's unhappy life so far. The father promises his son: "Mercy delivers you from death and does not let you go down into darkness" (Tob 4:10). From the autobiographical data given in the first chapter of the book, we learn that the faithfulness of the main character was unquestionable and that it often went beyond the prescriptions of the Mosaic Law. However, Tobit faced many trials in life which caused him continuous suffering. Tob 4 could also be called "old Tobit's parting word" because it is preceded by the eponymous character's prayer asking God to be released from the burden of suffering and to be placed in the eternal resting place (Tob 3:2-6). Merten Rabenau argues that, although the speech in Tob 4 was not placed immediately before the epilogue (Tobit's testament and account of his death), the author made skilful use of this stylistic device to endow Tobit's words with a special dignity and authority as the "sum of a very famous life" *(Summe eines hochberuhmten Lebens)* (Rabenau 1994, 28).

In the following, we set out the chiastic structure of the teachings of the Tobit law according to the German biblical scholar Paul Deselaers (Deselaers 1982, 380-92; Macatangay 2011, 689).

A^{I}. Introductory instructions	- 4:5a: "Remember the Lord our God all your days, my son, and refuse to sin or to transgress his commandments." (RSV)
B^{I} . Four parallel instructions on practicing justice	- 4:5b: "Live uprightly all the days of your life, and do not walk in the ways of wrongdoing." (RSV) - 4:7a: "Give alms from your possessions to all who live uprightly, and do not let your eye begrudge the gift when you make it." (RSV) - 4:8: "If you have many possessions, make your gift from them in proportion; if few, do not be afraid to give according to the little you have." (RSV) - 4:9,11: "So you will be laying up a good treasure for yourself against the day of necessity... and for all who practice it charity is an excellent offering in the presence of the Most High." (RSV)
C^{I}. Two parallel instructions on inbreeding	- 4:12: "Beware, my son, of all immorality. First of all take a wife from among the descendants of your fathers and do not marry a foreign woman, who is not of your father's tribe; for we are the sons of the prophets." (RSV)
C^{II}. Two parallel instructions on loving your neighbor	- 4:13: "So now, my son, love your brethren, and in your heart do not disdain your brethren and the sons and daughters of your people by refusing to take a wife for yourself from among them. For in pride there is ruin and great confusion..." (RSV)

B^{II}. Four parallel instructions on education	- 4:14b: "Watch yourself, my son, in everything you do, and be disciplined in all your conduct." (RSV) - 4,16a: "Give of your bread to the hungry, and of your clothing to the naked." (RSV) - 4:16b: "Give all your surplus to charity, and do not let your eye begrudge the gift when you made it." (RSV) - 4,19: "Bless the Lord God on every occasion; ask him that your ways may be made straight and that all your paths and plans may prosper..." (RSV)
A^{II}. Final instructions	- 4:19: "So, my son, remember my commands, and do not let them be blotted out of your mind." (RSV)

Father's advice

After old Tobit had instructed young Tobias by his example, he now teaches him by word. In teaching his son, Tobit follows the example of his grandmother Deborah (Tob 1:8). This series of teachings bears similarities to sections of other books of Old Testament wisdom literature, particularly the Wisdom of Jesus the son of Sirach, a book contemporary with the Book of Tobit [8].

Tobit's advice (4:3-20) is conveyed in the form of a testamentary discourse, reminiscent of the farewell words addressed to future generations by biblical patriarchs and other prominent figures in Israel's history (cf. Jacob – Gen 49; Moses – Dt 33; David – 1 Kgs 2:1-3). This shows that the author was keen to portray Tobit as a patriarch of his family and an important personality in the Jewish Diaspora (Ego 2021, 176).

The contents of these counsels include provisions concerning the burial of fathers and honouring the mother (4:3b-4c), almsgiving (*ἐλεημοσύνη*, 4:6b-11), warning against fornication and the commandment of inbreeding (4:12-13), the punctual payment of labourers (4:14a-c), the offering at the graves of the righteous (4:17), the exhortations to seek useful counsel (4:18), and the command to praise God and ask his guidance in the right way (4:19). Between these counsels are placed general prescriptions:

- daily remembrance of God and his commandments (4:5-6): "Remember the Lord our God all your days, my son, and refuse to sin or to transgress his commandments. Live uprightly all the days of your life, and do not walk in the

ways of wrongdoing. For if you do what is true, your ways will prosper through your deeds." (RSV)
- the cause-and-effect relationship between doing good deeds and the final reward: "for to you also shall be rewarded, if you serve God."
- care for your conduct in daily life (4:14d): "Watch yourself, my son, in everything you do, and be disciplined in all your conduct." (RSV)
- observance of the *golden rule*: "And what you hate, do not do to anyone." (4,15a – RSV)
- the permanent remembrance of the commandments, "Tobit 4:19 So, my son, remember my commands, and do not let them be blotted out of your mind." (4.19f-g – RSV)
- the connection between the fear of God and doing good works (4:20).

These dispositions may be grouped as follows: looking to the past (4:3-6, 18-19); openness to the present in dialogue with all creatures (4:7-11) and blessing the Lord in all circumstances (4:18); looking to the future for a bride (4:12-13) (Župarić 2020, 444, n. 17).

The key terms *ἀλήθεια* (*truth*), *δικαιοσύνη* (*righteousness*) and *ἐλεημοσύνη* (*mercy*) are mentioned in Tob 4:5b.6.7 anticipate the deposition sequence. Tobit advises his son to conduct himself by these ethical requirements so that his labours may be crowned with success (Tob 4,5b.6). While the statements about *ἀλήθεια* and *δικαιοσύνη* are limited to general imperatives, the topic of *ἐλεημοσύνη* is treated in detail (Rautenberg 2015, 66). Incidentally, almsgiving – caring for the poor – stands out as an important practice of Jewish piety in the Old Testament (Dt 15:10-11; Lv 19:9-10; Ps 112:9; Prv 14:21, 31; Is 58:6-8) [9]. Mercy is an important *educational* cornerstone for Tobit, being the attitude of compassion and love through which the hero of the book recognizes in other creatures who, like himself, are on a pilgrimage (cf. Tob 1:6-8) on the roads of this world [10].

Beate Ego analyses the father-son relationship in the Book of Tobit and notes that it certainly knows numerous other examples in parallel biblical traditions, such as the encounter between Joseph and his father Jacob (Gen 46:29-30). Nevertheless, Tobit's narrative remains remarkable because it skillfully interweaves the emotional aspect with other motifs, forming an integral whole (Ego 2013, 85).

Honouring the mother

3[b] Bury me with honour;
3[c] Honor your mother;
3[d] and do not leave it as many days as you have;
3[e] do to her what pleases her, and in nothing grieve her spirit;
4[a] Remember, my son (*μνήσθητι, παιδίον*);
4[b] that she endured many dangers for you when you were in her womb;
4[c] And when she dies, you shall bury her with me in the same tomb. (Tob 4,3-4) [11]

a. O my mother, and the sweetness of my heart, and the handmaid of my God, Neago;
b. how much you have had for me, for you have been with me a long time, day and night;
c. and yet not only day and night but all the days and all the hours of the day and all the hours of the night you have been pregnant and burdened with my body;
d. until the time when God commanded you to give birth to me.
(Teachings of Neagoe Basarab, III) [12]

The first provision of Tobit's law concerns the proper burial of parents [13]. Tobit believes in the imminence of his death (Tob 3,6). His piety and zeal for the fulfilment of religious duties are marked by the avoidance of Gentile food, the celebration of feasts prescribed by the Law of Moses, the deeds of almsgiving, and the provision of proper burials for deported countrymen (Tob 1:11, 16-18; 2:1-9) [14].

It is not surprising that Tobit asks his son to give him a proper burial. The five references to burial reinforce the importance of this duty in the narrative. This gesture recalls the testamentary requirement of the patriarch Jacob to his sons (Gen 49:29-32; cf. Gen 25:9; 35:29)[15] to bury him in the same tomb where his parents are buried (Macatangay 2011, 37) and to provide both him and his wife with proper burials after they are buried (cf. 4 Mac 16:11). At the end of every apocryphal testament attributed to the patriarchs of the people of Israel there is a record of the burial of the parents accomplished by the sons, e.g., "After he had made these recommendations to his sons Reuben died. They laid him in a coffin until they brought him out of Egypt and buried him at Hebron in the cave where his father was." *(TestRub* 7:1-2).

Patriarch Joseph commanded his sons, "Take with you Asheneth your mother from the hippodrome and bury her beside Rahilah my mother" *(TestIos* 20:3) [16].

Tobit continues his word by exhorting Tobias to care for Hannah, his mother. In Tob 4:3c the general imperative is formulated: *τίμα την μητέρα σον* (*honour your mother*), which recalls the fifth commandment of the Decalogue (Ex 20:12 = Dt 5:16). And after the mother has died, the son must provide her with a proper burial as befitting a mother. Later in his journey, Tobias learns from his relative Azariah (the angel Raphael) that he is to marry Sarah (Tob 6:11-13), whose seven previous grooms had each died in turn on their wedding night (Tob 6:14), and on this occasion Tobias expresses his concern that if he were to die, no one would give his parents a proper burial (Tob 6:15). Above all duties, Tobias is concerned not about his death, but about fulfilling his filial obligation, as his father had previously instructed him (Macatangay 2016, 49).

As long as his mother is alive, Tobias must put into practice the five verbs that the father uses in his advice: honour her, do not forsake her, do what is pleasing to her, do not grieve her, and remember her (cf. Prv 23:22b: "do not despise your mother when she has grown old"). [17] In these recommendations we note the alternation of verbs in the imperative ("to [+ verb]" and vetitive (prohibitive: "not to [+ verb]") modes (Rabenau 1994, 36).

In the absence of his father Tobit, the son Tobias is to honour his mother in old age with compassion, care, and obedience (*πάσας τὰς ἡμέρας τῆς ζωῆς σου*, "all the days of your life"), and when she dies, Tobias is to bury her properly with his father in the same tomb (*ἐν ἑνὶ τάφῳ*) [18]. This provision is in keeping with Tobit's conduct, for he cared for the widows by offering the third tenth for their maintenance (Tob 1:8). The great honour that the son is duty-bound to offer to the mother is justified by the hardships the mother endured in childbirth. Tobit draws attention to Anna's maternal role in the past (pregnancy) and in the present (old age). He makes no mention of the pains of childbirth (cf. Is 13:8; Jer 13:21); nor of the death of women in childbirth, as was the case with the matriarch Rachel (cf. Gen 35:16-19) and Phinehas' wife (1 Sam 4:19-21). In contrast, the father Tobit tells his son Tobias "that many perils (*ὅτι πολλοὺς κινδύνους*) she [= mother] endured for you at the time when you were in her womb (*ἐν τῇ κοιλίᾳ*)" (Tob 4:4) (Murray 2023, 96). The term *κίνδυνος* sums up all the dangers associated with the mother's pregnancy, including the hardships and

pain endured (Rabenau 1994, 37). However, during pregnancy, a particularly close relationship is established between mother and child.

Widows without rights, along with orphans and strangers, were entrusted to the special care of the community (Ex 20:12 = Dt 5:16; Ex 22:21; Lv 19:3; Dt 10:18; 24:17-22; Is 1:17; Jer 22:3). God himself was their protector (Ex 22:21-23; Ps 68:6; 146:9) [19]. Widows also enjoyed special respect in the cultures of other peoples of the ancient Near East. The sage Ani, whose teaching was widespread in early Middle Kingdom Egypt, warns his disciple: "Give twice as much bread to your mother and ask her how she is doing. She has had many hardships with you... After your months (of childbirth), after you were born, she carried you again on her lap, and for three years was her breast in your mouth. And she did not grumble at your filthiness, she did not grumble and say, *What shall I do (now)?* She took you to school when you learned writing and every day she came (to school) with bread and beer from her house. ... When you are a young man when you get a wife, and when you have your own house, then turn your eye (of your mind) to the way your mother bore you and how she brought you up in all things. May she not rebuke (blame) you, and may she not lift her hands to the god, and may he not hear her cry." (*Wisdom of Ani*) (*Gândirea egipteană antică în texte* 1974, 145)

Jewish wisdom speaks to us through Jesus, the son of Sirach, teaching us, "With all your heart honour your father, and do not forget the birth pangs of your mother. Remember that through your parents you were born; and what can you give back to them that equals their gift to you?" (Sir 7:27-28; cf. Prv 6:20; 10:1; 15:20; 19:26; 20:20; 30:17; Sir 3:1-16). The author of the eulogy dedicated to the mother of the seven young men of Jerusalem (Solomonia) [20] martyred by King Antiochus IV Epiphanes (2 Mac 7) writes in the same vein: "In what manner might I express the emotions of parents who love their children? We impress upon the character of a small child a wondrous likeness both of mind and of form. Especially is this true of mothers, who because of their birthpangs have a deeper sympathy toward their offspring than do the fathers. Considering that mothers are the weaker sex and give birth to many, they are more devoted to their children. The mother of the seven boys, more than any other mother, loved her children. In seven pregnancies she had implanted in herself tender love toward them, and because of the many pains she suffered with each of them she had sympathy for them." (4 Mac 15:4-7) [21].

Ross Shepard Kraemer, exploring epigraphic and papyrological evidence from the Jewish Diaspora in late antiquity – a few centuries later after the writing of the

Book of Tobit – notes that Jewish women, like their Greek and Roman sisters, put their lives at risk every time they gave birth, although maternal mortality is impossible to determine with precision (Kraemer 2009, 5960). The same author mentions a poignant epitaph dating from the mid-2nd to late 1st century BC from Leontopolis, Egypt: "This is the tomb of Arsinoe, the traveller. Stop and weep for her, unhappy in all things, whose fate was hard and terrible. For I was deprived of my mother when I was a young child [perhaps when my mother was giving birth to another child (?)], and when the flower of my youth prepared me for a bridegroom, my father married me to Phabeis, and Fate brought me to the end of my life when I bore my first child. I lived a few years, but a great grace blossomed in the beauty of my soul. This tomb hides in its bosom my chaste body, but my soul has flown to the holy ones. Lament for Arsinoe. In the year 25, Mechir 2." *(CPJ/CIJ* 1510; *JIGRE* 33) (Kraemer 2004, 122)

Tobit's book also delights with particularly sensitive and moving images. Both parents, Hannah and Tobit, consider Tobias "the light of [their] eyes" (*τὸ φῶς τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν μου*, Tob 10:5; 11:14) and "the rod of [their] hands" (*ἡ ράβδος τῆς χειρὸς ἡμῶν*, Tob 5:18). Extremely touching is the way the author describes the mother's anguish over the longing of her son who has gone far away. Almost without hope, Hannah every day searched the way by which her son had gone, and at night she wept and could not sleep (Tob 10:7; 11:5). Expressions of a similar sensitivity are also found in the prayer dedicated to his mother by Neagoe Basarab:

Hannah, Tobias's mother – "And his wife said to him, The lad has perished; his long delay proves it. Then she began to mourn for him, and said, Am I not distressed, my child, that I let you go, you who are the light of my eyes? (*τὸ φῶς τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν μου*)!" (Tob 10:4-5 – RSV) "Then he saw his son and embraced him, and he wept and said, Blessed art thou, O God, and blessed is thy name for ever, and blessed are all thy holy angels" (Tob 11:14 – REV)

Neaga (Neagoe Basarab's mother) – "For I was brighter than the rays of the sun before your eyes, and you never had *before your eyes* a *brighter light* than I, nor your heart had any other treasure dearer to you than I. Therefore, O my mother, your heart and your eyes, until your death, could never be satisfied with me and the sight of me. And then it did not befall me to be with thee, that thine eyes might be satisfied with me, and that I, thy son, might take pardon and blessing from thee. And not only because I did not have wholehearted love for you, I did not come to be with you at your death, that your heart might be sweet to me since even in your lifetime you were not satisfied

with my love, but even at your death your heart was still burning with longing and pity for me, and your eyes were not satisfied with the sight of me." (*Teachings of Neagoe Basarab* 2010, 155)

Information about the personality of Neaga, the mother of the ruler of Wallachia, is sketchy and uncertain. We do not know if she had any other children besides Neagoe Basarab. Neaga's death occurred in circumstances that were very difficult for the ruling house, a fact that deeply affected the ruler, as is clear from his own words.

The first passage of Tobit's counsel concludes in a chiastic manner with the command to bury Tobias's mother Anna (Tob 4:3b // Tob 4:4c), including the climactic statement *ἐν ἑνὶ τάφῳ* ("in the same grave", Tob 4:4c). Here we find the high esteem of the conjugal bond continuing even after death (Oeming 2011, 553), and the commandment to honour the mother remains particularly significant. Sons must be prudent when their parents reach old age: "O son, help your father in his old age, and do not grieve him as long as he lives; even if he is lacking in understanding, show forbearance; in all your strength do not despise him." (Sir 3:12-13).

Possible thematic parallels

There is a curious similarity between the structure of Tob 4 and the plan of the second part of *Neagoe Basarab's Teachings to his son Theodosius*, but not exactly easy to support with a solid argument. The eulogy dedicated to Neaga, the mother of the Romanian ruler, contained in the sixth word, corresponds with Tob 4:3-4. Also in the same words, the members of the ruling family and the courtiers are exhorted to worship Jesus Christ and to remember his mercies (cf. Tob 4:5-6). The seventh word deals at length with the theme of works of mercy (cf. Tob 4:6-11). The following words develop the themes touched on in Tob 4:12-15: divine retribution, moral conduct, attitude towards subjects, including the reward due to each one. The echo of the golden rule of Tob 4:15a resounds at the end of the thirteenth word in the form of the warning about the measure of God's justice at the Last Judgment. Immediately in the next word the author presents the good manners that Theodosius and the courtiers must observe when they sit at the table. In the same vein, Tobit is warned about the harmful effects of wine (Tob 4:15b). The 21st word takes up the series of teachings on mercy (cf. Tob 4:16-7). The 24th word develops the quintessentially sapiential theme of the perpetual application of good counsel (Tob 4:18), here specifically against the sin of envy and revenge. The last words agree with Tob 4:19 in the presence of prayers

and doxologies. In the future, a more careful study of these parallels could, I believe, provide an answer to the question that motivated the present research concerning a model of the structure of the recommendations of Tob 4 for the second part of the *Teachings of Neagoe Basarab to his son Theodosius*, as well as the history of the reception of the literary motifs present in these writings and a possible reconstruction of their route from the models whose origins are lost in the mists of antiquity to the form in which they have been valorised in the tradition of the Orthodox Church.

Conclusions

The main purpose of the author of the Book of Tobit is to promote fidelity to the Law and authentic family values. Although in the Diaspora the institution of the family is preserved in a hidden and modest life, it becomes the hope for the future resurrection of the nation of Israel. This can be realized through the education of children. There is no activity more beautiful or more noble than the father's concern to guide his son in the ways of the Lord (cf. Phil 18:19). Like Tobit, Neagoe Basarab would be content only if his son surpassed him by becoming a better disciple than his father in the school of the Wisdom: "The Holy Scripture says: Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be still wiser; teach a righteous man and he will increase in learning (Prv 9:9)" *(Teachings of Neagoe Basarab* 2010, 145) [22]

Notes

[1] The royal face of Despina Miliţa [Elena] (1487-1554) enjoyed a special reception in contemporary Romanian literature as a model of a devoted wife, daughter-in-law, mother (of six children) and a devoted Lady in the service of the country (*His Majesty Neagoe Basarab* 2012).

[2] For an analysis of the numerous Old Testament texts concerning those responsible for upbringing in the family, which include father and mother, and sometimes also the nanny, see Vatamanu 2023, 253-66.

[3] James Crenshaw points to the cultivation in ancient Egypt and Israel of four other virtues: *silence, eloquence, timeliness* and *modesty.* Silence implies control over anger, lust, greed and envy. Eloquence enables the wise to persuade their listeners and communicate effectively, while restraint involves an awareness of the right time to speak, valuing non-speech as a powerful form of communication. Modesty indicates the humility that stems from the knowledge that the mysteries of life will never fully divulge themselves to truth seekers (Crenshaw 1998, 71-2).

[4] Although the Book of Tobit is primarily a historical narrative, many biblical scholars believe that because of certain passages (especially Tob 4:3-19) it would rather be classified as part of the wisdom literature.

[5] Its character of pedagogical model is in the line of exegetical literature of the Midrashic type (Stancovici 2012: 24-5).

[6] For example, the acts of mercy prescribed by Tobit (Tob 4:7-11) are found in Sir 3:30-4:10; 7:34-38, etc. On the similarities present between the Book of Tobit and the *Apocrypha of Genesis*, discovered at Qumran, see Jacobs 2018, 10; Machiela and Perrin 2014, 111-32.

[7] A recently published study aims to determine the boundaries that demarcate the fictional elements from the authentic historical events mentioned in the Book of Tobit (Chrostowski 2023, 313-28). The Book of Tobit, written from a considerable temporal perspective, concerning the events described (3rd-2nd century BC), portrays them in the manner of a parable of faithfulness to God in the conditions of the first Israelite diaspora, whose origins were outlined in Tobit.

[8] The close thematic links between the Book of Tobit and the Wisdom of Jesus the son of Sirach (Ecclesiasticus) are eloquently illustrated in the contributions contained in the volume: *Intertextual Studies in Ben Sira and Tobit* (2005), and particularly for Tob 4 in the study: Di Lella 2014: 171-85. Alexander A. Di Lella has been a proponent of adopting a literary approach to the two books. Both anaghinoscomena (deuterocanonical) books were composed probably within a century of each other, around 200 BC.

[9] The insufficiency of the space allotted will not allow us to deal at length with the three important themes (*ἀλήθεια, δικαιοσύνη* şi *ἐλεημοσύνη*) in this study. On the relationship of the Hebrew term חֶסֶד (*hesed*) and its Greek counterpart *ἐλεημοσύνη* in the Book of Tobit, cf. Deselaers 1982, 348-58. Marten Rabenau argues more convincingly by appealing to the Hebrew text of ben Sirah that in the Book of Tobit, *ἐλεημοσύνη* corresponds to the Hebrew צְדָקָה (*ṣedăqâ*), and *ἐλεημοσύνη* corresponds to the Hebrew צֶדֶק (*ṣedeq*) (Rabenau 1994, 128-34; Otzen 2002, 357).

[10] We fulfil the deeds of mercy not when we have more and give to those who have less, but when we recognize our fellow human beings as equals and promote solidarity in the common participation in one condition of pilgrims on the roads of the world: "The stranger who sojourns with you shall be to you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God" (Lev 19:34). The gift that I give to another is not an act of generosity, but a duty that flows from the fact that I recognize the other as a son of God and therefore my brother, with the same rights and duties that I have: "I say to you, truly," the Lord Jesus Christ will say

to us at the Last Judgment, "as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me" (Mt 25:34 – RSV).

[11] *Sinaiticus: Θάψον με καλῶς· καὶ τίμα τὴν μητέρα σου καὶ μὴ ἐγκαταλίπῃς αὐτὴν πάσας τὰς ἡμέρας τῆς ζωῆς αὐτῆς καὶ ποίει τὸ ἀρεστὸν ἐνώπιον αὐτῆς καὶ μὴ λυπήσῃς τὸ πνεῦμα αὐτῆς ἐν παντὶ πράγματι. μνήσθητι αὐτῆς, παιδίον, ὅτι κινδύνους πολλοὺς ἑώρακεν ἐπὶ σοὶ ἐν τῇ κοιλίᾳ αὐτῆς· καὶ ὅταν ἀποθάνῃ, θάψον αὐτὴν παρ᾽ ἐμοὶ ἐν ἑνὶ τάφῳ*. (Littman 2008, 10). The *Vulgate* text differs considerably from the Greek versions: *Audi, fili mi, verba oris mei, et ea in corde tuo quasi fundamentum construe. Cum acceperit Deus animam meam, corpus meum sepeli: et honorem habebis matri tuae omnibus diebus vitae ejus.* "Listen, my son, to my words and keep them in your heart as a foundation. When the Lord takes my soul, bury my body, and honor your mother all the days of her life." (Tob 4:2-3) (Fitzmyer 2003, 167). The textual subdivisions of the quoted excerpt are according to Ego 2013, 96.

[12] "The book of Neagoe Voivode to the Bishop Macarius and other abbots and hieromonks and priests and all the clergy, when they buried the second time, in the Monastery of Arges, the bones of his mother, Lady Neaga, and his sons, Peter Voivode and John Voivode, and Lady Angelina. With words and teachings of humility" [The Sixth Word]).

[13] *Vaticanus* renders *θάψον με*, while *Sinaiticus* reads *θάψον με καλῶς* by adding to the provision the adverb which has the meaning: *well*, *beautiful*, *fitting*. According to Littman, proper burial means burial *properly*, *with due rites* (Littman 2008, 87).

[14] These facts of Tobit reflect the religious atmosphere of the Jewish Diaspora communities, attested in other contemporary Jewish writings: the Prophet Daniel avoided eating the food prepared at King Nebuchadnezzar's table (Dan 1:8, 14-15); in her prayer, Queen Esther states that she did not eat at Haman's table (LXX Est 4:17x). Likewise, the heroine Judith while spending time in the camp of the Assyrian general Holofernes, ate only of the food she brought with her (Idt 10:5; 12:2-4,9,19). These are, of course, practices characteristic of the Second Temple period, when the Book of Tobit was composed (Dimant 2017, 196, n. 21).

[15] In the case of the patriarch Jacob, the command to be buried in the cave of Machpelah (Gen 49:29-32) is the last word addressed to his sons. In the case of Tobit, however, the burial requirements are even found at the very beginning of his recommendations.

[16] The passages from the Apocrypha mentioned follow the translation: *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* 2001. For a detailed exposition on the duty of sons to bury their fathers while encompassing several Jewish sources, see Balla 2003, 95-7 (*Providing a funeral*).

[17] Tobit shows sensitivity to Anna's potential needs. However, beyond the advice given to Tobit not to cause sorrow or pain to the mother, the book presents an irony, for Tobit has already caused distress to Ana. First, he falsely accused her of stealing the animal (*ὁ ἔριφος*, Tobit 2:13) she had received as payment earned from the cloth trade. Tobit again caused her distress by sending Tobias to retrieve the silver kept with his friend Gabael of Rhages of Media. When Hannah expresses her wish that Tobias remains at home (Tob 5:18-21), Tobit rejects her request. At the same time, Tobit's assurance deriving from his deep trust in God and the guardian angel becomes evident, even if this is not explicitly shown. The emotional scenes reach their climax with the reunion of Tobit and his parents, a moment full of tears, joy and hugs.

[18] This provision will be taken up again in the testamentary word in the epilogue of the book when old Tobit is on his deathbed giving his last instructions to his son (Tob 14:10). Here we find the high esteem of the conjugal bond even after death. In this way, family cohesion is strengthened and the Jewish tradition handed down during life is preserved in Diaspora conditions (cf. Tob 3:10; 5:1; 6:15; 10) (Niebuhr 1987, 205).

[19] Widows in Ancient Israel are referred to in the triadic formula "the stranger and the orphan and the widow" (e.g. Dt 14:29), one of the preferred modes of expression of biblical authors, a fact noted by its frequent use. The formula in its dyadic form (widows and orphans only) preceded the Israelites' settlement in Canaan, as it is found in ancient Near Eastern literature. The dyad even finds its way into the New Testament in the famous dictum about pure and undefiled holiness in Jas 1:27 (Mark 1999, 501).

[20] In the calendar of the Orthodox Church, the seven Maccabean martyrs, their mother Solomonia and the teacher Eleazar are celebrated on August 1.

[21] See also Solomon's lament for her sons in the next chapter, "Alas for my children, some unmarried, others married and without offspring. I shall not see your children or have the happiness of being called grandmother. Alas, I who had so many and beautiful children am a widow and alone, with many sorrows. Nor when I die, shall I have any of my sons to bury me.." (4 Mac 16:9-11). Romanian translation of these passages: *Septuagint III* (2005).

[22] "Teaching of that Neagoe Voivode to his son Theodosius and other lords, to all. The Assize to the Patriarchs, to the Bishops, to the boyars and the abbots, to the rich and the poor. Pronouncement and confession for the fear and love of God" [Slovo 5]).

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BOOK REVIEWS

The Living God in the Pentateuch

Rev. Maxim (Iuliu-Marius) Morariu

Elena Onețiu, *Dumnezeul cel viu în Pentateuh. Exegeza unui concept*
[The Living God in the Pentateuch. The exegesis of a concept]
(Cluj-Napoca: Cluj University Press, 2024), 332 p.

Elena Onețiu is a young scholar who has already published valuable titles in her research field [1] fact that made her referred several times. With the publication of the book entitled: *Dumnezeul cel viu în Pentateuh. Exegeza unui concept (The Living God in the Pentateuch. Exegesis of a concept),* at Cluj University Press in 2024, she comes to fulfil a complex profile of a theologian specialized in the Old Testament studies, but having in the same time an inter-disciplinary background.

Having as a basis the doctorate thesis of the author, the book is forwarded by Rev. Prof. PhD. Ioan Chirilă (p. 11-20), one of the most notorious names in the field of the Biblical Studies from the Romanian space, the presents a topic that has not been previously investigated in the theological scholarship, in an attractive form and a complex way. After taking into attention aspects like the methodological ones (like: the actual stage of the research or the motivation of the demarche), the structure of the research, the evolution of the key concept or the literature used, he underlines the multiple values of the investigation. Among other, he insists on the fact that:

"A first positive aspect of the work is that the author carries out a rigorous exegetical analysis, starting from the semantic study of the relevant terms in Hebrew and reaching the theological interpretation of the texts. Thus, the reader can follow, in detail, how the expression the *living God* appears in certain key passages in the Pentateuch and what are the deep meanings that the characterization of God as living acquires here - meanings related to His relationship with the chosen people, of His attributes as Savior and Creator, covenant, etc. Another positive aspect is the double perspective, Western and Eastern, from which the author approaches the subject. In addition to the Western academic bibliography used, an important place is occupied by the references to the writings of the Holy Fathers, which complement and deepen the understanding of the analysed texts. This combination gives an added interpretive value. Last but not

least, the theological synthesis carried out in the final chapter of the volume points out the essential ideas derived from the previous analysis. The author correlates them with the theology of life from the Old Testament, showing the connection between the expression the *living God* and the understanding of life in the Old Testament vision." (p. 19).

Segmented into four big chapters and accompanied by a rich bibliographical list (p. 295-331), the book realizes, as the author of the foreword shows, a complex exegesis with inter-disciplinary value. After an introductory part where Elena Oneţiu (p. 27-44) presents the actual stage of the research, addresses the methodological question, speaks about the objectives of the research, and other practical aspects, in the first chapter she emphasizes the terminological al delimitations of the expression „The Living God" (p. 45-72). Here, she provides an investigation of the use of verb „to live" (p. 450) and its use in the Old Testament (p. 51-72).

Later in the second chapter, the same expression is followed during the Pentateuch (p. 73-148). There the author deals with aspects like „listening God`s voice and remaining alive" (p. 75-123), from the book of Deuteronomy, 4, 33, or with aspects like the one from Deuteronomy 5, 26, which summarizes the Sinai Revelation and the answer of Israel people. (p. 124-48). The third chapter of the research is dedicated to an important topic, namely the oath on Jahwe's name (p. 149-230). Following a methodology already developed in the previous thematic unities, Elena presents the perspective of Numbers 14:21 and 14:28 (p. 149-94), or Deuteronomy 32:40 (p. 195-230).

The last part of the book (p. 231-290) is dedicated to the dynamics of the relationships between the key topic of „the living God" and the way how the theology of life is encountered in the Old Testament. Elena Oneţiu manages there that, thorough the exegesis of passages like the ones from Exodus 20:13 or Deuteronomy 5:17, presented in parallel and in connexion with the Old Testament to invite to analysis, debate and investigation (p. 231-247). In the same time, due to the presentation of topics like the Providence and Salvation (p. 248-256), or the „Word of God" (p. 278-290), she points on aspects that have also relevance in the understanding of the New Testament.

By bringing into attention a topic that has not been approached until now in the Romanian Biblical scholarship, but also due to the fact that realizes a complex investigation and a corelation between the exegesis and the theological approach. For this reason, Elena Oneţiu's book, deserves both to be read, analysed and discussed and may constitute the departing point for future other investigations.

Note

[1] Ioan Chirilă, Stelian Pașca-Tușa, Elena Onețiu, „Reconstitution of Melchizedek's History In Rabbinic and Christian Traditions," *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies* 16.48 (2017): 3-15.

Stelian Pașca-Tușa, Paula Bud, Elena Onețiu, „The Mystery of alterity reflected in Christian Teachings (Învățături Hristianicești, 1700)," *Philobiblon* 25.2 (2020): 305-319.

Dan Benţa, Paula Bud, Elena Platon, Stelian Pașca-Tușa, Elena Oneţiu, Alin Mihăilă, Felix Floca, „Challenges in Proofing the Cyrillic Mcvro Resources-Equability Between the Technical Component and the Role of the Researcher." *Philobiblon* 25.2 (2020): 337-53.

Elena Onețiu, „Înstrăinarea de Dumnezeu și deschiderea spre El. Conștiința autosuficienței umane," *Altarul Banatului* 27.7-9 (2016): 70-81.

Elena Onețiu, „Direct Communication and Communication Through Social Networks in the 21st Century. An Attempt to Reconciliate the Relationship Between Them," *Studia Universitatis Babes-Bolyai-Theologia Orthodoxa* 61.2 (2016): 143-64.

In Honorem Rev. Prof. Ioan Chirilă, PhD (III)

Cătălin-Emanuel Ștefan

Stelian Pașca-Tușa și Bogdan Șopterean, eds.,
In honorem Pr. prof. univ. dr. Ioan Chirilă.
Volum aniversar la împlinirea vârstei de 60 de ani
– mesaje de binecuvântare, evocări și studii
(Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2024), 564 p.

This volume concludes the series of studies dedicated to Rev. Prof. Ioan Chirilă. The first volume brought together the studies that the fifty PhD students dedicated to the father professor, the second the studies of Romanian professors of biblical studies in the country and abroad, and this final volume contains messages of blessing and evocation of some personalities, as well as the studies of the colleagues from the Faculty of Orthodox Theology in Cluj-Napoca. Together, this volume presents a sum of thoughts, wishes and feelings of many people who love and appreciate Prof. Chirilă. Therefore, their segmentation into three volumes is practical.

In previous issues, we looked at the first two volumes of the homage. Now it's time to focus on the final one. It differs technically from the other two. The volume comprises four distinct sections. The inaugural section presents his biography, work, and research, as well as books, articles, and specialised studies. A notable aspect of this section is how it emphasises the balance Rev. Ioan Chirilă maintained between his academic work and pastoral commitments.

In the next section, we find the messages of blessing and congratulations from twelve Romanian Orthodox Bishops. It is worth noting that these include messages from two bishops who have since passed away, namely Gurie Georgiu, Bishop of Deva and Hunedoara, and Vasile Flueraș, Vice Bishop of the Archdiocese of Vad, Feleac and Cluj. The messages in this section go beyond simple birthday greetings, they are a recognition of the essential role that Rev. Chirilă has played in Church and academic life.

The next section, entitled *Evocations*, brings together the contributions of university professors, clergy and former students, each of whom pays a unique trib-

ute based on their personal experiences and their relationship with Rev. Ioan Chirilă. Each evocation outlines distinct aspects of his personality, from his profound erudition and remarkable pedagogical ability to his kindness, sense of humour and openness to dialogue. This is perhaps the most personal section of the volume, providing readers with an intimate insight into the man behind the personality honoured.

The last section of the volume is dedicated to specialised studies and academic contributions that address a variety of topics relevant to contemporary Orthodox theology. These studies are a continuation of the theological dialogue that Rev. Ioan Chirilă cultivated throughout his career. A particularly important aspect of this section is the thematic diversity of the studies, which reflect Rev. Ioan Chirilă's varied academic interests. From biblical exegesis to dogmatics or philology, the studies included are representative of the broad spectrum of Orthodox theology. The studies in this section are not only rigorous theological analyses but also reflections of how theology can respond to the current challenges of society. They also bear witness to the fact that Rev. Ioan Chirilă has brought a particular vitality to contemporary theology and has contributed to the formation of a new generation of theologians capable of addressing the complex problems of today's world.

This volume is a document which recognises the merits of Rev. Ioan Chirilă and provides a detailed view of his life and theological contributions. This book also strikes the perfect balance between academic and spiritual content, reflecting the duality of the roles that Rev. Ioan Chirilă played in his life. This holistic approach makes the volume a valuable resource not only for theologians but also for those interested in the spiritual dimension of education and academic formation.

Taken as a whole, the volume is a comprehensive homage to a remarkable personality in Romanian Orthodox theology, Rev. Prof. Ioan Chirilă. Each section of the book contributes to the construction of a complex and nuanced portrait of him, revealing not only his academic and pastoral achievements but especially the profound influence he had on those around him. This final volume in the *in honorem* series successfully blends the academic and spiritual dimensions, providing readers with a deeper understanding of Rev. Ioan Chirilă's life and work. In this sense, the book is not simply a collection of studies and evocations, but a true testimony of a life dedicated to faith, knowledge and education.