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NAME OF GOD IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

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Name of God in the Old Testament - Revelation, Significance, Prayer, and Theology

Name of God in the Old Testament – Revelation, Significance, Prayer, and Theology

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The name of God, especially in its sacred form, YHWH (known as Yahweh), is a profound and complex concept and plays a central role in ancient religious traditions, especially in Semitic and Jewish culture. In antiquity, names were not just simple identifiers or appellatives as they are perceived today. They had profound meanings, reflecting the nature and essence of the person or being named. In a spiritual context, knowing and uttering a name meant gaining power and knowledge over the one named. Thus, the name of God was seen as a channel of communication and communion with the divine, enabling the knower to invoke the divine presence intimately and directly.

In the Jewish tradition, the divine name YHWH is not just a title but a direct revelation of God's identity and essence. When Moses was commissioned to deliver the Israelites from Egyptian bondage, he asked for the knowledge of God's name to answer the questions of his people. God answered him from the burning bush on Mount Horeb, revealing his holy name: YHWH. This revelation was not just an act of identification but a gesture of communion, revealing the eternal and all-powerful nature of the divinity. The name YHWH, which means "He is" or "He will be", suggests God's eternity, immanence, and continuous existence, offering the chosen people the guarantee of the divine presence and involvement in their life and history.

The linguistic origin of the name YHWH is a subject of debate in academic circles. While there are numerous theories about deriving this name from other languages or cultural traditions, most scholars recognize that Yahweh is a verb form that transcends simple meanings. It is primarily regarded as a verb reflecting to be, to become, again emphasizing the permanence and dynamism of God. Although attempts have been made to associate it with other deities or cultural practices, the only precise and reliable

references to this name are in biblical texts and some ancient inscriptions preserved in ancient monuments, such as the Moabite Stone and the Sinai Peninsula inscriptions.

Throughout history, the name of God has acquired special importance in Jewish ritual and religious life. The name YHWH was not to be pronounced routinely because of respect and fear for its sacredness. Other divine titles, such as Adonay (Lord) or Ha-Shem (Name), replaced it in liturgical use and prayers. The reason for the inviolability of direct pronunciation is to be found in scriptural and Talmudic teachings, which prohibit the profane use of God's name. This tradition reflects a fear of taking the name in vain and protecting the sacredness and mystery of the divine essence, which, once known, gave one an extraordinary power over the sacred.

The relevance of God's name is most profoundly manifested in the theophanic episode on Mount Horeb, which marks a turning point in Jewish sacred history. By becoming a pillar of the people's religious identity, the name YHWH not only reaffirms the covenant between God and Israel but also emphasizes the continuity of the divine presence and God's faithfulness to the promises made to the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. In essence, this sacred name constantly witnesses the righteousness, deliverance, life, and redemption God promises to his people. In this context, the Tetragrammaton YHWH symbolizes God's timeless existence and his commitment to be with the Israelites in all the circumstances of their lives, offering them support, guidance, and deliverance.

A deep connection with his people reflects the relationship between God and his name. It is a symbolic name and a vehicle through which divine presence and power are conveyed and manifested. The Jews saw in the name of YHWH a certainty of a tangible and real divine presence, a spiritual guardian to protect them in times of vulnerability and difficulty. This holy name was invoked in prayers and ceremonies as a bridge between the divine and the human, between the Creator and his creation.

In later theological interpretations, especially Christian ones, the name YHWH takes on new dimensions and connotations, being integrated into the New Testament revelation. In Christianity, the essence and promises of the divine, as reflected in the Tetragrammaton, are fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ. In Greek texts, Christ is often called Lord (Kyrios), a title that equates the concept of divine sovereignty with that expressed by YHWH in Hebrew writings. Through his sacrifice and resurrection, Jesus becomes a teacher and the promised Savior, bringing salvation to all mankind in a way that continues and fulfills the promises of the Old Covenant.

Thus, in Christianity, the name of Jesus becomes a source of saving power through which divine grace and love are imparted to believers. The Apostle Paul speaks of Christ's name as "above every name," emphasizing the importance of faith and recognition of Jesus' lordship for the salvation of souls. In many Christian traditions, invoking the name of Jesus in prayer is a powerful means of spiritual protection and fulfillment, reflecting the continuity between the divinity of the Old and New Testaments.

Invoking the holy name in this way helps believers navigate through life's trials, strengthens their faith, and gives them inner peace. In both religious traditions – Jewish and Christian – God's name remains a spiritual anchor reflecting the divine's ongoing covenant with humanity and the divine capacity to transform, protect, and save. From biblical antiquity to contemporary Christian communities, God's name is a constant that unifies and guides those who place their hope in it.

This continues the tradition of the spiritual and mystical meaning of the divine name as a symbol of a living and dynamic relationship with the Creator. In modern society, this perception can give depth to a culture that often perceives the name only functionally. Thus, reflecting on the power and sacredness of the divine name, be it YHWH or Jesus, brings a better understanding of how ancient traditions and beliefs can anchor meaningful spiritual experiences in an often provisional and transitory world.

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The studies that we include in this volume were mainly presented at an international biblical conference dedicated to the name of God and its theological implications in the Old Testament. The conference was organized in Cluj (Romania) on October 17-21, 2022, in the framework of the ROOTS project, organised by Rev. Ioan Chirilă, professor of Old Testament at the Faculty of Orthodox Theology, "Babeș-Bolyai" University of Cluj-Napoca.

ORTHODOX EXEGESIS

The Name of God in Judaism and Christianity – a Mystical Approach

Abstract

This study explores God's names' meaning and role in Jewish and Christian traditions. In Judaism, the divine name, including the Tetragrammaton, is perceived as a mysterious and creative entity essential to understanding the Torah as a sacred language. The Tetragrammaton is seen as an expression of divine power, having a mystical nature that allows for a deep relationship with divinity. In Christianity, the name of God is seen as a personal and intimate revelation of divinity that transcends human knowledge and sensory experience. Christian thinkers such as Dionysius the Areopagite, Maxim the Confessor, and John of Damascus explore divine names to understand God's workings and as means of spiritual communication. The study emphasizes the importance of the calling of God's name in Eastern mysticism as an act of communion and transfiguration, pointing to the connection between the divine name and the essential presence of God in the lives of believers.

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Keywords

Tetragrammaton, Divinity, Revelation, Mysticism, Transcendence

Introduction

The name is how we represent and know ourselves. Being closely linked to our representation, the way we name a thing, a being, or a person will determine the authenticity of the image we will have. The name preserves a reality that is proper to the thing, the person designated, and is related to them. In this sense, in direct reference to the third commandment of the Decalogue (Ex 20:7), whoever degrades the name of God will degrade his concept of God and will remove the very manifestation of God

within his being. This is why the Savior Christ in the Lord's Prayer teaches us to sanctify God's name (Mt 6:9) before the prayer petitions. God's name is sanctified because God is holy; otherwise, our knowledge will be untrue and vain.

More often than not, the name has fallen into a plane of banality in contemporary society. That is why we think it is time to return to the type of original acts. And when I say original acts, I consider the kind of counsel that does not determine or express the revelation but is the clear expression of revelation. The name must be received as a *nomen revelans*. Such a name is a relational reality; it is not something dry and individualized, but it is the expression of how and through which I transcend myself by intuiting and embodying the transcendent dimension of the Other. The name is the very dynamic presence of the Other. To speak its name is to speak oneself in its revelational structures. And when it is said, "You shall not take the name of the Lord God in the desert," it is not the desert as a geophysical state but the desert of our being. We need to make God a partaker in our fruitfulness and not in our dryness. And when it is a question of fruitfulness, perjury or vows lose their existence, banished by authentic martyrdom. To be fruitful means to be in God; those who abide in God bring forth much fruit.

Therefore, in this study, we propose to investigate the complexity and significance of the names of God as perceived in the Jewish and Christian traditions. These names are not merely appellations but are true theological mysteries that reflect different aspects of faith and spirituality within each religion. The study will explore how divine names capture the essence and presence of God, emphasizing the deep and dynamic connection between the Creator and his creation. In the Jewish tradition, God's names, such as the Tetragrammaton, are considered to have creative and mystical powers and have a central function in religious and mystical practice. In Christianity, on the other hand, divine names are perceived as manifestations of an intimate and personal relationship with God, offering believers access to the infinite and transcendent divinity.

The study's objectives include analyzing these names conceptually and theologically, investigating their role in religious practices, and identifying how they facilitate a deeper communion with God through the name. By comparing these perspectives, a more comprehensive understanding of the spiritual and theological significance of the names of God in the context of both religions is sought.

The name of God in Judaism

The divine noun is defined as *Shem hamephora*, having a content consisting of several meanings. The perfect participle *mephora* means both *made known*, *spoken* or *explained*. But, in this context, it also means *concealed* or *separated*. Over time, the center of gravity of the divine Name has shifted to the second meaning, meaning the Name that evades explanation is silenced. Even in Christian Apocrypha, the *Prayer of Manasseh*, God is said to have sealed the creature and sealed it with his almighty Name. At the same time, some passages mentioned in various mystical writings speak of this Name as a *creative agens*, emphasizing the magical conception of the Name. This is due to the coincidence between the word and Name. By becoming a word, the Name of God becomes a component of divine language, the verb by which God represents Himself, manifests Himself, and communicates Himself to His creation.

This mystical-magical structure of the Torah, seen as a string of divine Names, explains why each letter is important and why a Torah scroll in which a letter is wrong is not recognized in synagogal usage. As Gershom Scholem rightly observes, the Torah itself forms the Great Name of God. "The five books of the Torah represent the Name of the Holy One, praise be to Him!" (Scholem 1996, 39) The Law thus becomes a mystical unity whose primary goal is to express the might and omnipotence of God, which is concentrated in His Name. The presentation of the Torah as the Name of the Lord presupposes that God expresses his transcendent being, at least in that aspect of his being, which was revealed through the act of creation. All the sensory layers of the Torah as the language of the Name are but relativizations of the absolute, opening up to man-specific mystical perspectives.

The name considered, above all others, holy in itself, is the Tetragrammaton (Pașca-Tușa 2010, 16). Composed of four consonants, *Alef, Hei, Vav,* and *Yod*, it encapsulates the spirituality of the divine being. Its letters, with a numerical value of 22, appear as a symbolic combination of the fact that a single name can encompass the entire string of the alphabet. The consonant with which the Law given on Sinai, *Aleph*, begins is the element from which every articulated sound comes and the spiritual root of all the letters. The name of God is the embodiment of this Torah *Aleph*. Based on this interpretation, which goes beyond the mystical, the Tetragrammaton appears as a totality of the manifestation of divine power that man can control. This is because "the Holy One, praise be to Him, is in His Name and His Name is in Him, and His Name is His Torah" (Scholem 1996, 62). All the names given to God are organically linked

to the Tetragrammaton, so the Torah is ultimately centered and warped on these four consonants.

Joseph ben Abraham Gikatilla, a 13th-14th century Spanish Kabbalist and disciple of Abulafia, dealing with the occult meanings of the divine names, states that "all His holy names mentioned in the Torah depend on the Name composed of four letters. [...] The four-letter Name is the stem of a tree. [...] All holy names are the branches and leaves that grow from the tree trunk, and each branch bears its fruit." [our translation] (Cohn-Sherlok 2000, 137) As a guide in the ascent to God on the path of the sefirot, the divine names are like keys to man, used by him to decipher the divine mystery. Thus, we can say that the Tetragrammaton appears as "the cause of causes and the source of all sources. All things are enclosed, from the *keter* to the smallest mosquito." [our translation] (Cohn-Sherlok 2000, 143) According to this theory, the divine Name has been transformed through permutations and combinations of letters. This metamorphosis has a double function: on the one hand, it gives the Torah the appearance of communicating a message from God, but on the other hand, it indicates a secret action of divine power, recognizable only through the woven garment of the holy Name. From this point of view, the quotation from Jer 20:24 is simple to interpret: if one pronounces the Name of God, aware that the whole Godhead is circumscribed in it, he is performing an act of creation, and because of the unity between God and his Name, he is a co-participant in the Primordial Word. To be sure, this conception has deepened and diversified, leading to the conclusion that each letter of the Tetragrammaton is a divine name; not just the letters of the Tetragrammaton, but each letter of the Torah has a self-existence as a divine name: "each letter must be pronounced in a single breath as if the spirit were coming out of the person [pronouncing it]. The result of this practice is to receive the influx of wisdom and the [power] of creation." [our translation] (Idel 2019, 233) By conceiving of the Name not as a revelation of the Divine but as access to Him, in the sense of creative identity, Jewish mysticism receives esoteric and magical connotations.

We may conclude that Jewish mysticism conceives of the Torah as being built integrally on the Name of God, being at the same time a weaving of the multitude of names or epithets attributed to the Divine. Thus, the Torah is the living garment in which the Tetragrammaton is vividly woven like a milkweed, and the Name is the supreme expression that contains within itself, as in focus, the structure of the Abyss and the dynamics of the commandment. The divine Name vibrates in every letter of the Torah, every created thing becoming reality only as it contains, in some way, a part

of the Great Name. The mystical Jew is always aware that the letters of the Hebrew alphabet are holy in themselves, condensing themselves into the Name of God. They are holy worlds and testimonies of the spiritual world. Linked as they are to the doctrine of the ten sephiroth, in the letters of the Holy Name dwells the presence of *the Shekinah*, which makes possible man's connection with the abyss of the Godhead. The biblical expression "the word of God" is translated as *Memra d'Adonai*, synthesizing the divine Name. In this meaning, *Memra* has the sense of *Shekinah*, i.e. God's presence dwells in his Name (Agus 1998, 82-5).

God's name is the essential name that is the source of all speech. Every other name correlates with some activity of His, but His essential Name has no standard meaning or concrete significance. Its lack of meaning shows precisely its position at the center of Being and Creation, of which it is the foundation. Without meaning, it gives meaning to all existence. In creation and Revelation, the divine Name is reflected in our language; its rays or sounds are communications and calls. In this sense, Gershom Scholem believes that the existence of any word and the fact of its utterance is due only to the Name of God, schematically contained in its metaphysical structures (Scholem 2000, 74).

Names in Christian thought

In Christianity, God reveals himself in a personal way to human persons. Or nothing is more personal, more intimate than the name. What God reveals is primarily his person and his existence. This is also totally infinite, transcendent, beyond all sensory experience. Dionysius the Areopagite uses a series of revolutionary terms and expressions in this sense, showing that the theology of the divine names is like knowledge by guesswork, a view through the narrow prism of created things. In this sense, Dumitru Stăniloae emphasized that "when we call the supernatural hiddenness God, life, essence, light, or reason, we understand nothing other than the powers that come to us..." [our translation] (Stăniloae 1996, 105)

Divinity is infinitely beyond all essence and knowledge. It is not what philosophy calls the Absolute in itself, nor is it some universal consciousness or primordial unity that stands behind diversity. Even if it can be called the Absolute Unity, Divinity goes beyond the unity-plurality relation. For this very reason, it is neither one nor many, containing within itself, in an undifferentiated state, the number principle, which is translated into human language and thought of only as the unity-plurality relation.

In an approach that goes beyond the bounds of apophaticism reduced to a mere negation, Dionysius the Areopagite affirms that God is above being and unity above unity. As supra-unitary unity, as unity above the mind, God encompasses within himself the nature above essence and undifferentiated, the principle of plurality that appears in the act of creation.

Referring to the names given to God in Holy Scripture, Dionysius the Areopagite says that these are various revelations of His work in the world, by no means expressing the divinity in its super-essence. This is because the divine being "is above all reason and all knowledge, and has its foundation beyond mind and essence, circumscribing, encompassing, embracing, anticipating all things, while it is wholly and all things incomprehensible, not being grasped either by the senses or by images or by thought, having no name or word, nor being able to be known" (St. Dionysius Pseudo-Areopagite 1993, 29). Though possible because of the existence and dynamism of the divine works, all the Names of God do not encompass being; do not exhaust it. That is why blackness and silence are the states closest to God, and the absence of the Name constitutes the greatest wonder and mystery. And here, it is no longer a question either of linguistic convention or mystical speculation. For "about the divine super-essentiality, that is, the meaning of the super-existence of transcendent goodness, no one is permitted to extol it as reason, or power, or mind, or life, or being, but rather it surpasses every condition, movement, life, imagination, opinion, opinion, name, thought, being, state, dwelling, union, limit, limitlessness; any of all that exists" (St. Dionysius Pseudo-Areopagite 1993, 30).

It is essential, however, following the structure of Dionysius' discourse, to note that when Holy Scripture names God, the names ascribed refer to the whole divinity, not just to certain parts or aspects of it: "all the divine names in Scripture always glorify the divinity, not in a partial way, but wholly, completely, fully, entirely, and that they refer in an undecipherable, absolute, unreserved, unreserved, all-in-all way to the whole universality of the whole and total Godhead" [our translation] (St. Dionysius Pseudo-Areopagite 1993, 42). Dionysius, however, distinguishes between differentiated and undifferentiated names, some referring to the whole divinity and others only to its hypostatic differentiations. Thus, "undifferentiated names refer to the whole divinity, as, for example, supra-good, supra-divine, supra-essential, supra-essential, supra-vital, supra-wise, and all abstractions expressing superiority. Among these are also names with a causal meaning, such as good, beautiful, existent, life-producing, and wise

[...]. On the other hand, differentiated names are supra-essential names and the connotations of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, which neither can be exchanged nor taken in common." [our translation] (St. Dionysius Pseudo-Areopagite 1993, 58) Thus, this „scholastic" differentiation has in view precisely the affirmation that the Godhead, in its transcendent unity, cannot be named. Identical with Itself, It is affirmation and negation, transcending the boundaries of apophaticism. Even dwelling in Its differentiated hypostases, It remains in an undifferentiated and transcendent unity.

Dionysius the Areopagite, when he speaks of names, does so, understanding them as the predicate of the Divinity, works in which one participates and shares "attributes of the divine generation, that which is above essence". He affirms that the most proper name of God, seen from this perspective, is *Good* before being called existence, being, or life. Of course, even if one sees this as a Platonic influence, the approach is profoundly theological. For example, he states that "the good is the cause of the foundations and edges of heaven" (St. Dionysius Pseudo-Areopagite 1993, 74), finding not only the foundation of creation but also the ontological principle of being. "If the good is above all that exists," says Dionysius, "then its formless nature produces every form. In itself non-existent, it is an excess of existence; without life in itself, it is an excess of life; without mind, it is an excess of wisdom." [our translation] (St. Dionysius Pseudo-Areopagite 1993, 73) All other divine names have their root in this one, as the one who is the basis of all God's relation to the world. Thus, the Good is called light, wisdom, being, existence, being above all these and containing them all in itself. Just as light "contains in itself, in a simple form, the ultimate and entire principle of light, being the transcendent prototype of light," so also Good can be called spiritual light because "it is the ray that springs forth and pours forth radiance, illuminating from its fullness every supra-luminal mind." (St. Dionysius Pseudo-Areopagite 1993, 76)

All that is cognizable in God is this "life-giving outflow" of being, that is the divine things. To them, the whole of Scripture refers when it seems to attribute to God a proper name. Dionysius is very clear on this point, affirming that God is not identical with any of his attributes that neither circumscribes being nor the hypostases in which being subsists but is situated only "around being." "The divine appointments desire to praise the manifestation of the pronoia; they do not promise to express the goodness above being and the being and life and wisdom of the supernatural Godhead, which is, above all, the goodness and Godhead and being and wisdom and life that abides steadfastly in the hidden, but the beneficent pronoia and cause of all goodness which,

manifesting itself, remains at the same time above all. [...] For there is not something else good and something else being and something else life and wisdom, nor are there many causes [...], but of one God are all the good things and the names of God praised by us." [our translation] (St. Dionysius Pseudo-Areopagite 1993, 194)

No matter how much we talk about Dionysius the Areopagite, we fail to exhaust the depth of his mystical thought and the height of the apophaticism he proposes in works such as *The Divine Names* or *Mystical Theology*. His way of theologizing is a conceptual synthesis of what Evagrius Ponticus said, namely, that everyone who prays is a theologian, and everyone who prays is a theologian. His discourse and its style can be found both in the patristic works that followed him and in most medieval and modern commentaries on them. Referring to the apophatic mode proposed by Dionysius, which did not exclude the possibility of affirmations and the Name, St. Maximus says: "He who wishes to know God affirmatively makes the word bodily, not being able to know God as a cause from any other than from what is seen and felt. And he who wishes to know Him negatively, through negations, makes the word spirit, knowing the supra-knowable One as the One who was, in the beginning, God and was at God, but not from anything that can be known." [our translation] (St. Maxim the Confessor 1947, 182)

St. John of Damascus distinguishes between the name of the works of God and the Name of God. Even if the latter is understood as a synthesis of the former, it nonetheless has a reality because of its non-existence of a specific property of encompassing being. Its reality is experiential, to a greater extent than all the energies it contains. Nevertheless, John of Damascus carefully specifies the lack of gnoseological substance of the Proper Name of God: "Because the Godhead is incomprehensible, it will certainly be nameless. Therefore, in that we do not know its being, let us not seek the name of its being, for the name indicates things." [our translation] (Evdokimov 1995, 36)

It is essential that the theology of St. John of Damascus developed during the iconoclastic struggles. Both he and Theodore the Studite make it clear in these struggles that the image is not identical in essence and substance with its model, its archetype. Being a likeness that mirrors the model, the image retains its natural difference from it. Described as "receptacles of divine energy," icons make it possible for a man to communicate more intimately with God, bringing the reality and miracle of salvation up to date. In the same sense, with the same spiritual connotations, the Names of God are also seen as icons of his divine and supernatural revelation. Through the Incarnation,

the Son of God makes himself seen and thus offers the possibility of painting and honoring his material image. Through Revelation, God makes himself known to human beings, offering them the possibility of naming him, of approaching human nature through his name and lifting it out of the narrow space of a proper name, that is, of a history suspended in nothingness. Like the icon, the name of God differs in kind from the divine being in that it cannot express that which is by nature negated; nevertheless, the naming of the divine presupposes the reality of His existence and knowledge, moreover, of His living and experiencing, in a word, the miracle of salvation (Evdokimov 1995, 36).

Like Dionysius and Maximus, John of Damascus affirms that each name, as the fruit of the divine works, refers to the whole Godhead, Who is the unique source of all energies. Whether used in an affirmative or negative sense, the name of God encompasses the totality of names as attributes or personal attributes of being. Even if the attributes do not show what the being is in itself, in its essence, they constitute themselves as effects or reasons of the divine activity and life, not about the Self, but to the whole of creation, thus making possible every naming and at the same time every negation of naming. Following the apophaticism of the Holy Fathers, John of Damascus follows the gnoseological and mystical line already existing in the Church, his work directly influencing every theological and dogmatic approach of the Christian East. His work is, therefore, the first attempt at a clear and profound systematization of Christian doctrine after the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Symbol.

Calling on the Name of God in Eastern Mysticism

According to the Holy Scripture, the Name carries within itself and reveals the person's mystery. When the angel reveals the Incarnation of the Son of God, he also tells Mary His Name (Lk 1:31), the Name of the Messiah being also a *nomen praesens*. Thus, praying the Name of God is not a mere speaking to God, but a participation in his speaking. This participation is achieved through the calling of His Name, for which there is no need for some specialized and formal knowledge, the calling being as simple as the human being: "To walk you must take a step; to swim you must jump into the water. The same is true with the calling of the Name. We begin by saying it, praising Him with love; we cling to Him. We represent Him. We don't think we are calling on the Name. We think only of Jesus Himself. We say his name slowly, slowly, quietly." [our translation] (Gillet 1950, 5-6) Thus, the essential element, whatever the form of

prayer, remains the Name. As *the Russian Pilgrim* states, this interior prayer, which finds its foundation in the Name of Jesus, summarizes the Gospels, including the principal mysteries of Christianity: The Trinity and the Incarnation. In the same way, even *the Shepherd of Herma* affirms that *the Name of the Son of God is great and boundless and sustains the whole universe.*

According to St. Diadochos of Photiki, the prayer of the heart boils down to two words: "Lord Jesus." (Gouillard 2008, 52) But the other words, added later, constitute a general petition for God's mercy, manifested in and through his name. God's power and glory are present and at work in his Name, so to learn God's Name deliberately and carefully is to bring oneself into his presence, open oneself to his energy, and offer oneself as a living instrument or sacrifice to him (Pașca-Tușa 2011, 67). The name of God cleanses the soul and keeps it from all remembrance and waste. "The thought of the Lord Jesus (by His Name) shakes out of the heart all the power of the enemy, overcomes it, and gradually uproots it. By descending the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ into the depths of the heart, the dragon that rules the depths of the heart is broken, and the soul is encircled." [our translation] (Stăniloae 1992, 238) Quoting St. John Climacus, St. Gregory of Sinai testifies in the *Philocalia* that the Name of Jesus overcomes the enemies, there being no more powerful weapon in heaven and on earth than His Name.

The Name of God has a unique spiritual and eschatological value in Eastern mysticism. The ascent towards deification is ultimately characterized only by the remembrance of this Name, which encompasses the human mind in an immaterial and uncreated way. The human subject turns in on himself, and this encounter with himself in the space of the Name results in a boundless longing for God. The spiritual act of negation changes its structure, becoming a positive sense of the profound reality of the subject's subject. But this reality is revealed only in the dimension of the Name of God (Stăniloae 1992, 271).

This whole conception is grounded in Holy Scripture (e.g., Jn 16:23; Acts 4:10-12; Phil 2:10; Rev 2:17). The name of God, being intimately connected with His Person, has a sacramental character, serving as an efficacious sign of His unseen presence and work. It is not, however, a magic talisman, but, through the calling of the Name, man cooperates with God, not in the sense of a creative identification, but in the sense of a graceful divinization. This synergy between the human Name, as a mirror of the human spirit, and the divine Name, as presence, work, and transfiguration, is realized through

the heart's prayer. The repetition of the Name signifies the interiorization of Jesus, the stepping out of the limits of the human, and the being's validation in the likeness of the Godhead. The Name of Jesus is the way that leads from fragmentation to unity, from dispersion and multiplicity to singularity. He is not a letter or combination of letters, nor an image, but a living presence so that the calling of the Name presupposes participation in the presence offered by him. "It is not enough to have a prayer: you must become prayer – prayer incarnate." [our translation] (Ware 1992, 48) or "The invocation of the divine Name builds us after the prototype of the One Whom we carry unseen within us from the making. His presence in us, through His Name, makes us *Theophorans* or *Christophors*, which is the meaning of our existence. The call of the Name expresses an unquenchable thirst and a sign of the time to come. The Name of Jesus can become a mystical key to the world, an instrument of the mystical offering of all things and all beings, the divine seal on this world..." [our translation] (Gorodetzky 1954, 17-18) The Name of God is a search, in the Holy Spirit, for His divine Person in this sigh of the age, in its becoming eschaton, so that, in Orthodox mystical language, *Lord Jesus Christ* means *Come, Jesus Christ!*

Conclusions

This study emphasizes God's name's profound and multidimensional significance in Jewish and Christian thought, with each tradition offering complementary perspectives on divinity. In Judaism, the divine name, especially the Tetragrammaton, is seen not simply as an identifier but as a sacralized entity with mystical and creative powers. The Tetragrammaton bridges God and creation, reflecting the transcendent and impenetrable nature of divinity and the limits of human expression in the face of this absolute reality. This vision emphasizes the importance of the correct practice of the name, which is a form of reverence and spiritual knowledge.

In contrast, in the Christian tradition, the name of God, particularly Jesus Christ, is perceived as a personal and accessible revelation of divinity. It opens the way to an intimate relationship with God, emphasizing God's personal and close character in believers' lives. By calling his name, the believer becomes part of a mystical communion characterized by divine care and grace.

Therefore, in Judaism and Christianity, the names of God play an essential role in forming spiritual identity and understanding of divinity. Whether it is reverence and sacramentality or accessibility and personalization, these concepts reveal how divine

names are channels through which believers connect with the divine mystery. Therefore, exploring these names is a theological analysis and a spiritual endeavor that invites reflection on one's relationship with God.

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El, Yahweh and the Emergence of Monotheism in Israel

Abstract

This study explores the evolution of monotheism in ancient Israel, focusing on the names El and Yahweh as primary designations for the divine. It analyses how biblical texts reflect varying theological perspectives that emerged over time, indicating the coexistence of polytheistic traditions with the worship of Yahweh. The author argues that while the Hebrew Bible does not consistently present a monotheistic framework, specific passages point to an evolving belief system culminating in exclusive monotheism, particularly during the exile and post-exilic periods. The emergence of Yahweh as the singular God of Israel responds to sociocultural pressures and historical events, such as the conquest of the Promised Land and subsequent challenges from surrounding nations. The study synthesizes textual evidence from Ugaritic texts, prophetic writings, and archaeological findings to illustrate the gradual transition from a pantheon of gods to the centralized worship of Yahweh. It concludes that this process was characterized by a dynamic interplay of religious, cultural, and political factors, leading to a unified theological identity among the ancient Israelites.

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Introduction

Biblical Theology has an important role in the study of theology. It first appeared in the 19th century as an approach to Christian Theology, equivalent to systematic and scholastic theology. Systematic Theology accepts a given belief system and searches the

texts to support it, while biblical theology focuses on the biblical text in search of the foundations of a Theology.

The biblical text was not written as a systematic theology but consisted of books containing, among other things, stories, hymns, prophecies, and ritual instructions. However, this does not mean that the Bible is an outdated source of theology, as in all text forms, a particular view of God is implied. The task of Biblical Theology is to map out the implied ideas concerning God while continuing the ongoing dialogue with the given texts. In other words, Biblical Theology seeks the belief system indicated in the Bible. A belief system is a coherent set of religious views held by society or religious community members.

Therefore, a more correct definition of Biblical Theology is that it seeks the belief system of the author of the texts and the communities to which they are addressed. However, this search indicates that more than one belief system is shown in the Bible. The various ideas regarding God depend on the time and place of writing, on the social position of the author, and on the social situation of the time (e.g., the differences presented between the verses Ps 72 and Mi 3). Some texts emphasize the idea of divine creation, while others do not mention it. Another goal of Biblical Theology is the constant effort to search for a conceptual continuity among the various testimonies of the biblical text. This coherence becomes apparent when we focus on specific themes, such as the Covenant, Election, the idea of the community of faith, and the name of God.

In daily life, Christians invoke the name of God many times. They rarely stop considering how the word name works regarding its lofty referent. What is the meaning of God's name? What does the name of God hide? Is it one or many? If Adam received the blessing to name all creations on earth, then is a man capable of understanding the name of his Creator?

This understanding concerns not only the meaning of his name but also how he developed. One should refer to the Old Testament to follow this evolution of the name of God. However, such a review is not easy at all since 72 different names of God are presented in the text of the Old Testament. So, while the God of the Old Testament is offered with 72 other names, nevertheless, these names identify the one and only God, leading to Monotheism. "The name of God," following the grammar of Monotheism, is single and singular. However, it is clear that the above picture seems illogical:

How the one and only single and singular God, the core of the Monotheism of the Old Testament, is combined with the mention of different names of Him.

Furthermore, while there are references in the Old Testament that forbid the invocation of the name of God, at the same time, in specific passages, the reader is urged to invoke the name of God. For example, the Third Commandment says, "You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God" (Ex 20:7), and on the other hand, Psalmist's exclamation is, "Blessed be the name of the Lord from this time on and forevermore!" (Ps 113:2). Furthermore, in the Gospel of Matthew it is written: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name" (Mt 6:9). These constant references become increasingly frustrating the deeper we get into the scriptural world and its patterns of thought, for the Bible never reveals that name.

The question about the name of God

In the biblical text, there are three instances in which the question of God's name arises. The first is when Jacob asks the One, "Please tell "me your name." He responds with a rhetorical question, "Why is it that you ask my name?" (Gen 32:29). The same icon appears in the dialogue between the angel of Yahweh, Manoah and his wife when the first wonders: "Why do you ask my name? It is too wonderful" (Jdg 13:18). Finally in the famous dialogue between Moses and the Lord, before the Covenant when the leader of the people of Israel says "If I come to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your ancestors has sent me to you' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" God responds with the famous phrase, "I am who I am – אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה (*ʾe|hyè ʾášer ʾe|hyè*) / *Ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ Ὤν*." "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'I am has sent me to you.' ... This is my name forever, and this my title for all generations." (Ex 3:13-15).

God's answer seems ontological as it includes totality. This ontological wholeness through the *I Am* / *Ἐγώ εἰμι* provides everything, even what the human mind cannot comprehend and name. This ontological response on God's part essentially conceals and overshadows God's name. So what about the other 72 different epithets or names that present God? These are appellations mainly used in the liturgical life of the people of Israel to make it possible to refer practically to God, whose proper name remains incomprehensible.

As a result, the main question, which is God's name, can not be answered if the various names attributed to him by the human mind and the popular tradition that

the people of Israel cultivated about God are not taken into account. In other words, systematic research about the name of God should be a negotiation between theology and the demands shaped by the people's traditional rhetorical practice.

God El

The search for the answer leads us back to the source, the text of the Old Testament. There are two prominent, primary names with which the author of the text refers to God: El and Yahweh. The analysis of these two names indicates that the information about El originally comes from Ugarit's records. This ancient Syrian city flourished during the Late Bronze Age. For most scholars, the connection between Ugarit and ancient Israel is undeniable (Loretz 1990). A pantheon is recorded in her texts, in which El. The father of the gods of the Ugaritic pantheon, El, is the father of gods and men and is given designations such as 'Father of Years,' El, creator of Earth.

In the texts of the book of Genesis, we often find the name El Siadai (17:1; 35:11, 48:3), as in the more significant part of Job's poem, and it seems to be the main deity that forms the book's core. In Genesis 14:18, the deity "El Elyon" is introduced, for which it is mentioned nowhere else. Exodus 6:3 states that God appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob with the name El Shaddai (God Almighty), but he was not known to them by the name of Yahweh. The names El Shaddai, El Elyon, and El Bethel of the biblical testimony are indeed connected with the higher Canaanite deity El. Still, there are myths of Ugarit, which influenced the image of Yahweh, "the merciful and long-suffering El" (Ex 34:6) (Craigie 1983, 68). So, if these passages have some weight, they indicate that the name of God was not known to Israel before the time of Moses.

Some other biblical texts indicate a time when Yahweh was not a deity along with other deities but subordinate to Elohim. The scholars wondered whether the interpretation of the Hebrew text of Deuteronomy 32:8 they were not due to later editing because of the Septuagint text. This text seemed to presuppose a different Hebrew original: God Elyon "established the boundaries of the nations according to the number of his angels God." The suggestion of a more authentic Jewish interpretation of the text has been confirmed by a Jewish manuscript of Qumran, in which the sons of God are mentioned. It is also said that Jacob was part of it, Yahweh. The text is as follows:

"When Elyon delivered the inheritance of the nations,
When he separated the sons of Adam (or man)
Establish people's boundaries

According to the number of the sons of Elohim.
Sufficient for Yahweh are his people
And Jacob his inheritance."

So, the text hints that Yahweh inherited Israel as a specific part of it. Such a state, in which Yahweh is chiefly one of the sons of Elohim in the divine assembly, is found in Psalms 89:7-8, which is the following:

"For who can be compared to Yahweh?
Who is like him among the sons of Elim (gods)?
El creates awe in the council of the saints.
He is great and causes fear in all about him."

Yahweh here appears as one of the sons of Elohim, even if it is mentioned that he cannot be compared to them. Similarly, Psalm 82:1 speaks of one God judge among the gods. The concept of divine assembly, or council, is widespread among the Semitic pantheons. Later, the heavenly council was interpreted as consisting of angels surrounding Yahweh, but generally, angels have little place in Israelite tradition. In Hebrew, the angel is called מַלְאָךְ (*mal´ak*) – 'messenger'. The studies on the Southwest Semitic pantheons showed that the gods had various ranks, with the lowest being that of the messenger gods. Exodus 3:2-5 states that God's messenger appeared to Moses about angels in the Bible, but the rest of the text seems to be Yahweh speaking. Not in later Judaism, they were now called messengers of the Lord, angels, yet the layout of the original polytheistic divine council was preserved despite the monotheistic aspirations of the final editors of the tradition.

El and Yahweh

According to M. Korpel (1990), the attributes of the "father of all gods and men" El, such as wisdom, goodness, fatherhood, blessing, and creativity, belong to the characteristics of El-Yahweh, Ugarit, and Israel. Yahweh's blessing (and sometimes His Asherah) meant that this would pass for the ancient Israelites. The cultural and religious environment of the Ugarit legends reflects the traditions and institutions of the proto-Israelites of central Palestine.

The religion of the Patriarchs is placed at the center of the research to clarify if Yahwism developed during this period or existed alongside the popular Israelite religion, which contained many elements of comparison. It is possible that an early clear

Yahwism did not exist except in the belief of a small social group or the minds of the authors of Deuteronomistic History. As for the events of the Exodus, it is a fact that they have been attributed to a later tradition in the light of the historical assumptions of the authors of the biblical text. Indeed, there is the passage of Numbers 23:22, according to which El Yahweh was the God of Israel from the time of the Exodus. However, the relevant teachings of Moses were never universally accepted by the people of Israel, except perhaps by a small section of the Levites who kept in memory the traditions about Moses and a God.

Researchers hypothesize that Yahwism derived from the religion of the Canaanites, as many relevant archaeological finds attest, more to a gradual transition from Canaanite religion to extreme Yahwism rather than a parallel coexistence with elements of syncretism. The scandalous question of the credibility of the 8th century prophetic writing and Deuteronomistic History does not affect this because the biblical writers turn against paganism as they anxiously try to keep the traditions of the past alive.

At that time, deities worshiped, according to the biblical text, seem to have been Baal and Asherah (Jgs 2:13), a god for whom there is a lack of information from mythology regarding her character and divine powers, both in the Ugaritic texts as well as in the later sources. The parallel existence of the deities Baal and Asherah is also noted by Kitchen, extending it in time from the 13th to the 6th century. According to Smith, these deities (including El) were inextricably linked to Yahweh and his worship in that early period of the Judges, which seems to explain the cultural continuity between the native culture of the UE. X. and of the modern urbanite of the coasts and plains.

However, according to J. Hackett (1998, 348), information about the early religious beliefs of the people of Israel can be drawn from poems of Israelite historiography (e.g., Ex 15:1b-18. Jgs 5, Dt 33, Gn 49). Briefly commenting on some of these passages, as they refer to events outside the examined period, the following can be said: (a) in the Exodus, Yahweh is described with characteristics of a storm god, an image already known in texts of the Ancient Near East, especially where the deity is presented as a warrior, (b) in that of the Book of Judges, in the song of Deborah (Jgs 5:4-5), Yahweh is again presented as a warrior God, an image typical of the myths of the Ancient Near East and (c) in that of Deuteronomy 33:2-3 vocabulary is used similar to the passage above of the book of Judges, but also to the Crit. 5, 11. 5, 19-21.

However, as Walls notes, how Yahweh is depicted in the biblical texts differs from that of the pantheistic deities in Canaanite literature, as the dramatic exaggerations involved in these polytheistic myths are avoided.

More specifically, L. Grabbe (2008, 120) argued that the people of Israel had been polytheistic for a long time but that perhaps Yahweh functioned, in a way, as a national god and was the most widely worshiped deity. In the same pattern, Hackett adds that for the Near East at that time, belief in a national god was linked to a people's national identity. According to M. Liverani (2007, 76), the people took a long time to establish this recognition of Yahweh as a national god. In contrast, His adoption as the only god from the beginning of the history of this people is an interpretation of later historiography.

W. Zwickel (2012, 592) also favors the later recognition of Yahweh as a national god based on the presence of the theophoric element in the personal names of the Late Bronze Age. According to him, perhaps Yahweh was worshiped by some groups of people of the Iron Age I. Still, he was a newly arrived god who emerged from the traditional religious systems' crisis. In contrast, his evolution into a central god of the people of Israel – and probably his worship by people of a lower social class – took place during the time of David with the formation of the state. Perhaps again, Yahweh was the national god of the people of Israel as early as the 9th century BC, with his worship tolerating, or even officially accepting the existence of other deities, a view expressed by Preuss, noting that the monotheistic religion of the people of Israel did not punish apostasy, as it was an environment with tolerance in religious choices, also because heathen nations surrounded it. To the above, it is worth adding the reference to Yahweh's relationship with El, with R. Albertz (2012, 165) arguing that the religion of Yahweh and that of El had merged before the formation of the state, an opinion that J. Pakkala (1999, 228) also cites, adding that this merger enabled the new god Yahweh-El to fully meet the requirements and perform more functions than the other simple deities. Equally interesting seems to be the perspective of M. Dijkstra (2001, 104-5) here, who argues that El was the worshiped deity of the early Israelite tribes in the region of the tribe of Ephraim, the later Northern Kingdom, while "revolutionary", finally, seems to be the view of Gnuse that there is no need to speak of two different religions, that of the Canaanites and that of the Israelites, which were in dialectical confrontation with each other.

Although J.C. Moor (1990: 233-45) believes Yahweh was the only God in the earliest period (before 1000 BC), the name El was still popular before the night century. This is obvious because, in the prophecy of Balaam, which is placed on Mount Nebo, it is clarified that the group of Exodus believed that his God was El/Yahweh. Nebo is in Moab, where the Column of King Moses (850 BC) was found. This is the oldest extra-biblical evidence that mentions Yahweh without a doubt. According to 2 Kgs 3:4-5, during the reign of Joram (852-841 BC), King Moses conquers Nebo and declares himself independent from Israel. Then, he destroys vessels that were dedicated to Yahweh. A fascinating text (800 BC), which mentions El and Ishtar, fertility goddess, was found in Deir ʿAlla, an Israelite area. This text proves that some Israelite communities worshipped during the 800 BC El.

In Kuntillet el ʿAjrud (Conrad 1988, 563), a text from the 9th or 8th century BC was found. The most probable date is 850-837 BC when the dynasty of Omrides from the North Kingdom of Israel ruled or at the time of Josiah (801-786 BC), who conquered Judah. This text came from a shrine in the wilderness on a trade route to Sinai. The inscription says: "I bless you by Yahweh of Samaria, and by his Asherah, and Yahweh of Teman and his Asherah."

The Pillar of Moses and the inscription of Kuntillet el Ajrud prove the pluralism in the names of God and the variety of worship. Against this pluralism are fighting the prophets to establish true Yahwism, the faith in the one and only God of Israel.

The examination of the question of the deities worshiped is followed by that of the cults, which demonstrate the influence above that the people of Israel had received from the surrounding nations in the matter of their religion, with Hackett arguing that there is evidence that the ancient cults were part of the belief system of ancient Israel both in that period and later, also noting the differentiation between the concepts of "ancestor cults" and "ancestor worship" and providing examples from the biblical texts, where polemics against the worship of dead ancestors are answered (e.g., Dt 26:14, Ps 106:28, Jer 16:5-9).

The existence of ceremonies related to ancestor worship is also discussed by H.J. Marsman (2003, 611-2), noting that this was a religious practice accepted in early biblical times. At the same time, it is unknown if only a family or even a tribe participated in it (with a gathering of people in a tomb), with R. Albertz (1995, 106) arguing that perhaps this ceremony played an essential role in strengthening the identity of the members of the nuclear family of that time. For their part, however,

King and Stager report that, in ancient Israel, the worship of the dead was condemned by official monotheism (Lv 19:31, Dt 18:10-11). However, in popular religion, it is acceptable, as the practices of the Canaanites influence it. At the same time, it is the way of obtaining the favor of their ancestors, but also of appeasing them. Thus, the reference to the prohibition of worshiping the dead in the legislation of the people of Israel means its continuous performance. An end to ancestor worship, which, according to Marsman, was the responsibility of women in the absence of the eldest son of the family, seems to be given by the prevalence of monotheism, as this seems to oppose the belief that Yahweh is the only master of the fate of the people. For Smith, however, the only ceremony related to the dead was necromancy, a practice that was probably prohibited until the period before the 7th century.

Therefore, as P.H. Preuss (1995, 106) also notes, the worship of the people of Israel had absorbed elements of the pre-Yahweh period (e.g., the paschal lamb) and had incorporated elements of the Canaanites (e.g., many sacrifices, agricultural festivals, the presence of Yahweh in the Temple). He also sought to introduce theology from the worship of El (e.g., Yahweh as king) but rejected orgiastic ceremonies, conjurations, and magic.

Yahweh and Yahwism

According to Mihalik, Elijah played a significant role in establishing Yahweh's name and Yahwism. His name means "My El is Yahweh." It signifies the change from El to Yahweh. The people in Canaan who viewed El as a prior deity started following the conception of those who believed in Yahweh. Although there was a time when both deities' names were worshipped against Baal of the dynasty of Omrides, the name of Yahweh gradually became more powerful.

M.S. Smith (2010, 66-7), who studied the Ugaritic texts and the West Semitic pantheon, argues that El and Asherah were at the top of the hierarchy of gods and then followed the second level with Athirat. The whole council constitutes a royal supreme court, and at this stage, as (Nm 23:24, Dt 32, Jgs 5, and Ps 82) point out, Yahweh belonged to the second level of deities. This picture remains unchangeable during the period of Elijah, Amos, and Hosea, although they tried to introduce the worship of one God, Yahweh (Stolz 1970; Stolz 1980, 144-89).

The sociological factors that gradually took shape, as well as the threat from foreign peoples (Assyrians), gradually changed the perception of the ancient royal

court and prepared the entry into the foreground of the name of Yahweh as an exclusive name of God (Theissen 1985, 51-81). The people of Israel need one God, Yahweh, not a pantheon, to protect and guide them through the threats and the difficulties. This God, Yahweh, was the same God that marched through the desert of Sinai and conquered the Promised Land, saved Israel from the alliances, and inhabited the prominent place of worship, the Temple of Jerusalem.

That was the main goal of the reform of Josiah, who tried to unify the two names under one cult and one ritual place (Lang 1983, 13-59). Josiah pushed through his reform to eliminate El's presence, associated with the region of Ephraim, Benjamin, and Shechem, and to bring forth Yahweh of Jerusalem. El became Yahweh and Yahweh, the God of all Israel. This Israel was the kingdom of Judah. The Israelites of the South Kingdom and Jerusalem had a long history that should be associated with the only God of Israel, Yahweh. An excellent example is the name El Elyon, which was used by Abraham and Melchizedek, king of Salem (the ancient name of Jerusalem), and perhaps with the centralization of Josiah's reform to the Temple of Jerusalem, Yahweh adopted the throne, sanctuary, and attributes of the god El Elyon.

The emergence of Monotheism

True monotheism under Yahweh emerged, as H. Saggs (1984, 257) suggests, "with the oracles of Jeremiah and Second Isaiah." Exilic and post-exilic passages such as Is 43:10-13, Dt 4:35,39; 6:4, 32:12,39, and 2 Sam 7:22 reflect the idea of Monotheism after a revision. Monotheism was mainly cultivated by the exile community trying to give it an identity. This community of exiled Israelites had a glorious past, with a God who was always present from the Exodus and the conquest of the Promised Land until the destruction of Jerusalem and God's temple.

This God was the creator God, the providential god of Israel, and at the same time, a universal God whose power and influence were not limited to the permanent national contexts of the land of Judah but also included the lands of Exile and Diaspora. This almighty, universal God, Yahweh, who manifests his presence and power in alien lands, remains holy, unchanging, the same God who created the world in wisdom and became Israel's guide in its historical path. This perception constitutes the response of the spiritual leaders of Israel, the prophets, to the worldview and religious beliefs of the pagan peoples. In a globalized environment, Yahweh is both the national god of Israel

and the only holy God, who does not stand as the highest of all deities but is the one and only God, as all other gods essentially do not exist.

Conclusions

The Hebrew Bible is not a monotheistic book. Of course, some passages refer to a monotheistic belief system. Deuteronomy 6:4 and the texts of Deutero-Isaiah testify to the attempt for religious unity. From Isaiah 40 ff., Yahweh is glorified as the only deity worthy of worship by the Israelites, while all "other gods" are pushed aside as human constructs, and the whole earth is called upon to worship Yahweh. This belief system is characterized as exclusive monotheism. Although some continued to worship the other deities, they were considered weak entities.

However, other ideas are also mentioned in the Bible. In the Exodus, Moses does not teach exclusive Monotheism, as it seems that he did not want to preach to the people a specific idea about God but wanted to witness the encounter with a liberating God who acts in history. Moses preaches that Yahweh is a living divine being who saves His people and wants to establish ties with them through a covenant. However, he does not explain whether this divine being is the only one that exists in the entire universe. Of course, several elements lead us to the conclusion that Moses Yahweh was the only God worthy of worship by him and the Israelites. The biblical text reflects the path from encountering this God-Savior to accepting monotheism in an exclusive form.

Essential parts of the biblical text testify to a belief system characterized as Monotheism, Monoyahvism, or inclusive Monotheism. "Mono-worship" means that the existence and value of other gods are recognized, but their worship by community members is prevented. For example, the Ten Commandments begin in both accounts with the exhortation not to worship other gods (Ex 20 and Dt 5). So, their existence and the possibility of worship are admitted, but it is forbidden to the Israelites. An exciting example of the worship of one god among many others occurs in 1 Kgs 11:24. Also, in this chapter, where the exploits of Judge Jephthah are presented, it is implied that in the Ancient Near East, the various deities had their territory. Hamosh is presented as the Savior-god of Moab, as Yahweh is correspondingly seen for Israel. The idea of the territorial delimitation of the deity can also be seen from the passage 1 Kgs 26:19.

The idea of "Mono-Yahvism" presupposes the possibility that the worship of Yahweh varied across the regions of Ancient Israel, which is very likely to have been the case given recent archaeological findings. The form of Yahwism that developed in

Jerusalem after the fall of the Northern Kingdom and was greatly supported by the reformation of King Josiah is presented as the only acceptable form of worship of Yahweh, as "Mono-Yahvism." The idea of "inclusive Monotheism" refers to a form of religion that claims the universal worship of one god by the community.

Gradually emerges the idea of the mobilization of God in favor of His people. Because of divine love, Yahweh is interested in His people and remains close to Israel. This idea is found in Isaiah 9:1-6, where in the problematic situation that the country and the people have sunk into, the prophet receives the joyful message of the birth of a royal child who will relieve the people from oppression, Emmanuel. He is the Messiah, the true God, who will come to fulfill all the prophecies and give the answer about the role that the people of Israel played in the apocalypse of the divine plan to the whole of humanity.

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Monotheism and the Meaning of God "The One": Theological Insights from the Shema to Christian Thought

Abstract

This study explores the theological significance of the concept of "oneness" in the monotheistic tradition, with a specific focus on the *Shema*, the central declaration of faith in Judaism: "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is One" (Dt 6:4). By examining the linguistic, historical, and spiritual dimensions of the divine name and its association with unity, this study seeks to elucidate how the proclamation of God's oneness shapes the monotheistic worldview, informing both doctrinal formulations and communal identity. The analysis delves into how "oneness" serves as a theological anchor, emphasizing the indivisibility and sovereignty of God while fostering a collective identity centered on worship and ethical living.

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Introduction

The number *one* occupies a special place in multiple fields of thought, from theology to mathematics, philosophy, and culture. One is the primordial symbol of unity, the beginning and the indivisible essence, being perceived as the expression of perfection and the foundation of all existence. It represents the starting point in mathematics, symbolizing unity and coherence. It begins with any numerical system around which everything else is organized. In philosophy, one reflects the idea of unity as a universal principle, signifying harmony and wholeness. Still, it transcends the simple numerical dimension, symbolizing unity, indivisibility, and the beginning,

bridging knowledge, faith, and cosmic order. Thus, in the theological message, number one is associated with the absolute uniqueness of God – "The One" – the source and foundation of all created things. God is not only the First, but also the Only One, in the ultimate sense of divine existence, and this uniqueness is a testimony to the fact that everything that exists finds its root in Him.

The revealed text of Scripture categorically proclaims the uniqueness of God. From the first statement of the Bible: "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth" (Gn 1:1), God presents himself as the sole Creator of all things. The act of creation is concentrated in *yom echad* ("one day"), an expression that highlights not only the unity but also the identity of creation with the Creator. The exact dimension of unity is reflected in man, the crown of divine creation. Adam is created with a soul and a body, each of which is indivisible and inseparable. Likewise, the unity between man and woman is consecrated in Genesis 2:24 as a reflection of divine unity in the diversity of human relationships: "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh."

The theology of the Old Testament states the character of Israel as a "chosen people", presenting it as the unique witness of God among the nations. The understanding of this choice is exceptionally expressed in Exodus 19:5 as obedience and fulfillment of the Law: "If ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine." The Promised Land, where "milk and honey flow," is where God's people must live in obedience to the Torah, reflecting on a social level the harmony and fullness of life in communion with God.

The uniqueness of the place of worship in biblical times is another expression of divine exclusivity. The Tabernacle of Meeting, described in Exodus 25-27, was built according to divine instructions and was the visible form of God's dwelling among men. Later, the Temple built by Solomon (1Kgs 8:10-11) symbolizes the unique place where the people could meet with God. This uniqueness combines the theological dimension of the sacred place with a call to unity in worship of all peoples, as Isaiah states: "Even them will I bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer: their burnt offerings and their sacrifices shall be accepted upon mine altar; for mine house shall be called a house of prayer for all people" (Is 56:7). From a liturgical point of view, the sacred text warns of the need for single worship of God. Centralized around a single Holy Tabernacle, a single Temple, this cultic uniqueness means the exclusivity

of worship to God and excludes any form of division or syncretism, polytheism, or idolatry. This cultic model leads to the affirmation of the eschatological importance of Mount Zion, prefigured in Isaiah 2:2-4 as the spiritual centre of the world. Also, the hierarchical structure of the priests and Levites established by divine command (Nm 3:5-10) had as its objective not only the cultic worship in the holy place but also the preservation of holiness in the community of God's people. A particular manifestation of uniqueness is the commandment to dedicate the firstborn to God, fulfilled in recognition of divine sovereignty over all aspects of life: "Sanctify unto me all the firstborn, whatsoever openeth the womb among the children of Israel, both of man and of beast: it is mine" (Is 13:2).

In theological discourse, the number one affirms the plenitude and infinity of God. God is One and All, complete, indivisible, and represents the source of every other number since all others are composed of a series of unities. This transcendent uniqueness of God is without equal: "I am the LORD, and there is none else, there is no God beside me" (Is 45:5). The uniqueness of God is the foundation of the life of faith, calling for exclusive reverence and a relationship of obedience and love towards the Creator of all.

Using the fundamental literature of the theme [1], commentaries on the texts of the Holy Scripture (see Dohmen 2004; Otto 2012; Veijola 2004), specialized studies (see Oeming, Schmitt 2003; Knierim 1965; Smith 1990; Schmidt 1969) and treatises on the Theology of the Old Testament (Kaiser 2003; Westermann 1985; Brueggemann 1997; von Rad 1962), we propose in this study to highlight the meaning of the divine name "One" and the attribute of divine unity, to understand how they reflect the unique nature of monotheism. How the name of God is associated with absolute unity leads us to understand how this aspect influences collective identity and the ethical principles promoted by monotheism, such as justice, love of neighbor, and individual responsibility, but also strengthens the link between faith and identity.

The God-Man Relationship in the Light of the Oneness of Yahweh

The relationship between the One God and man, His unique creation, "in His image," is affirmed in Old Testament Scripture. Gradually, this God-man relationship deteriorated, and man, basing it on selfish and egotistical interests, inverted it. The new relationship – man-God – led quickly to polytheism, as cultural history has recorded among pagan peoples.

Although part of the same Semitic religious framework, the God of Israel is entirely different from the other gods of the peoples of the Ancient Near East. The Unity and Uniqueness of Yahweh are expressed in the Old Testament Scripture in a clear, specific way, compared to the same attributes granted to pagan divinities by the scriptures of other peoples. The immutable identity of God is revealed positively through His manifestations and confessions but also negatively through the denial of all other deities. Only Yahweh is One and Only, the deities are non-existent (Dt 32:39; Jr 10:10-12), and they are only human creations of wood and stone (Is 37:19; 44:13-20). "There is no one like the Lord" (מֵאֵין כָּמוֹךָ יְהוָה), Yahweh often announces through His prophets: Ex 8:10; Dt 33:26; 1Kgs 2:2; 2Kgs 7:22; Jr 10:6-7,10.

The Unity and Uniqueness of God are not a philosophical conclusion, the result of a strictly rational approach, but are, directly, His self-revelation. Monotheism is founded on this direct revelation, so polytheism is rejected. "I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me" is the confession recorded in Isaiah 46:9. Yahweh, the God of Israel, is not "a god" in the sense of belonging to a "group of gods". He is "One God", He is *sui generis*. The divine aseity is inextricably linked to His uniqueness, to the fact that God encompasses in Himself the "totality of divinity" as a unity.

The affirmations of the Unity and Uniqueness of God are formulated, as simply is His identity, with no ambiguity: "I am God" (אָנֹכִי אֵל) (Is 46:9). The rhetorical question of the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah: "Who is like Me (Yahweh)?" (מִי כָמוֹנִי) (Jr 49:19; 50:44; Is 44:7), is of a simplicity that easily stands out, without being helped by other parts of speech: nouns, adjectives, adverbs. The reason is apparent: Yahweh-God does not need to justify Himself in any way. He is Unique. The reality of God does not need to be argued "by anyone", it is not human experience that justifies it, God is not a debatable working hypothesis. He is "He who is" (Ex 3:14), he is the foundation of any attempt to discover the mysteries of creation, he is the *sine qua non* of theology. Without God, the one who claims to do theology ends up in polylogy, talking without a message. The text of Scripture, as Good News – the Gospel of man's salvation – has a katabasic role. Through it, God descends to man and reveals Himself. Theophany as confession is a special way of revealing God in the Old Testament, which anticipates, then only veiled, the manifestation of "the form of God" (Phil 2:6), "in the fullness of time", the coming of Christ the Lord – the fulfillment of the most awaited messianic promise.

Shema Israel: One God, a Living Faith

Deuteronomy 6:4-9 is not a simple exhortation but a command in the fullness of the word. It states (Hebrew text and personal translation after *BHS* [2]):

4 שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְהוָה אֶחָד׃
5 וְאָהַבְתָּ אֵת יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכָל־לְבָבְךָ וּבְכָל־נַפְשְׁךָ וּבְכָל־מְאֹדֶךָ׃
6 וְהָיוּ הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה אֲשֶׁר אָנֹכִי מְצַוְּךָ הַיּוֹם עַל־לְבָבֶךָ׃
7 וְשִׁנַּנְתָּם לְבָנֶיךָ וְדִבַּרְתָּ בָּם בְּשִׁבְתְּךָ בְּבֵיתֶךָ וּבְלֶכְתְּךָ בַדֶּרֶךְ וּבְשָׁכְבְּךָ וּבְקוּמֶךָ׃
8 וּקְשַׁרְתָּם לְאוֹת עַל־יָדֶךָ וְהָיוּ לְטֹטָפֹת בֵּין עֵינֶיךָ׃
9 וּכְתַבְתָּם עַל־מְזוּזוֹת בֵּיתֶךָ וּבִשְׁעָרֶיךָ׃ ס

"4. Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is one Lord.
5. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might.
6. And these words which I command you this day shall be in your heart.
7. Fix them (in the mind) of your sons and talk about them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way, when you lie down and when you get up.
8. You shall bind them as a sign upon your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes.
9. You shall write them upon the doorposts of your house, and upon your gates."

The message, received in critical literature as *Shema Israel* "Hear, O Israel!," urges not only listening and understanding, but also fulfillment. Therefore, we are not dealing with a piece of purely theoretical knowledge, but with one that "through faith, imposes a plenary commitment to the meaning of what is believed and confessed" (Semen 2007, 265).

After the call to the people to listen, two main sentences follow:

יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְהוָה אֶחָד with the following possible translations:

1. Yahweh, our God, Yahweh is the only one.
2. Yahweh, our God, is one Yahweh.
3. Yahweh is our God, Yahweh is one.
4. Yahweh is our God, Yahweh is the only one.

The proper name of God – יְהוָה – is the subject of both sentences and, consequently, remains the subject in all translation variants. In variants 1 and 2,

אֱלֹהֵינוּ would be an apposition of this name, and אֶחָד would be a predicative noun. In variants 3 and 4 we would have two coordinated main sentences, with two predicative nouns: אֱלֹהֵינוּ and אֶחָד. From a grammatical point of view, the last translation seems more possible.

The name אֱלֹהִים appears very often in the Hebrew text: over two hundred times in Genesis and 2,570 times in the Old Testament (Henry 1994, 236). Although the plural אֱלֹהִים is used in the Old Testament Scripture as a singular, not from a desire to generalize the divine, nor from any henotheistic tendency, but as a confession of His unity and uniqueness. The Book of Jubilees, an apocryphal work from the second century BC, deletes any reference to the plural when we encounter אֱלֹהִים, in the Hebrew text, imposing a rigid monotheism. Likewise, any plural dimension of the Godhead is canceled in the targums or in the Aramaic translation, where the plural pronoun referring to God is not used, "betraying a tendency to reconstruct these passages in the interests of a pure monotheism" (Henry 2000, 222).

The difficulties of translation and interpretation appear mainly in the translation of אֶחָד. It appears as an adjective about 960 times (Koehler 1953, 27). The multitude of references also relates to a diversity of meanings. Thus, אֶחָד can be translated by:

- "one" – as a cardinal numeral, the most common use and understanding of the word (attested over 600 times in the Hebrew Scriptures) (Gn 1:9; 2:21; 3:22; 42:11 etc.);
- "first", as an ordinal numeral (Gn 1:5; 2:11; 8:5 etc.);
- "the same" or "one and the same" (Gn 11:6; 40:5; 41:25 etc.);
- expressing singularity (Ex 12:46; 37:22; Nm 13:23; 1Kgs 8:56; Is 51:2; Zech 3:9 etc.);
- expressing indivisible unity (Gn 2:24, Ex 24:3; Zeph 3:9; 2Chr 30:12 etc.);
- expressing uniqueness (2Sam 7:23; Zech 14:7.9; Song 6:9 etc.).

Most interpreters of this verse oscillate between translating אֶחָד as "one" or "unique"/"the only one". But beyond the efforts of philologists to agree on the translation of אֶחָד, it is evident that the Deuteronomist wants to convey a precise message, that of the unity and uniqueness of Yahweh. An ultimate decision from a grammatical point of view is difficult to make, since the numeral אֶחָד can be both "one" and "unique," to the exclusion of alternatives (see Gn 11:1.6). But, making a synthetic analysis of the text,

putting it in dialogue with the other revealed texts (2Kgs 22-23; 2Chr 34-35), as well as placing it concretely in the life of the people, we ask: Is it not about the proclamation of Yahweh – The One, the desideratum of the centralization of the cult in the context of the Josianic reform, a public confession, full of authority, of the "only" Yahweh among the multitude of gods? Let us not overlook that the discovery of the Law, of the text of Deuteronomy, was made after "he had purged the land, and the house (the temple of God)" (2Chr 34:8). The answer can only be clarified from the religious context. Is it possible that the different forms of the appearance of the name Yahweh in the numerous places of worship were a major problem for the centralization of the cult? If so, then we believe that the desire was to reach from this multitude of forms to a single one. However, in the texts about the centralization of the cult, there is no indication of such a reform of the divine name.

Even the first commandment of the Decalogue, "I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Thou shalt have no other gods before me. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me" does not deny the existence of "other gods," but forbids cultic proximity to them (Ex 20:2-5; Dt 5:6-7). Yahweh is the only true God, he is "our God" אֱלֹהֵינוּ. Therefore, there is a close connection between the Shema Israel (Dt 6) and the first commandment of the Decalogue (Dt 5).

The commandment to love in v. 5 is possibly the result of a later redaction, since the verb *bha* appears only in the margins of the Deuteronomic paragraphs (5:10; 7:9; 10:12; 11:1,13,22; 30,6,16,20) or in later texts, such as 13:4 and 19:9. The commandment to love Yahweh (see also Mk 12:29-32) does not imply sentimental love, but, in the legal sense of the relationship between master and disciple in the ancient Oriental world, means a special respect given to the one in authority.

"These words which I command you today" in v. 6 refers to those expressed in v. 4. Therefore, we are dealing with a practical recommendation: the commandment should be worn as an amulet on the chest [3], for a constant reminder, as we see in Exodus 28:29-30: "And Aaron shall bear the names of the children of Israel in the breastplate of judgment upon his heart, when he goeth in unto the holy place, for a memorial before the Lord continually. And thou shalt put in the breastplate of judgment

the Urim and the Thummim; and they shall be upon Aaron's heart, when he goeth in before the Lord: and Aaron shall bear the judgment of the children of Israel upon his heart before the Lord continually." and Song of Songs 8:6: "Set me as a seal upon thine heart, as a seal upon thine arm".

A spiritualization of the idea appears only in *Dt* 11:18, where the hagiographer asks that these words be placed not only in the heart, but also in the soul: "Therefore shall ye lay up these my words in your heart and in your soul, and bind them for a sign upon your hand, that they may be as frontlets between your eyes". This spiritualization must be understood concerning the commandment to love God in v. 5.

Verse 7 refers to the transmission of the message. The verb שנן [4] is usually used in practical situations of sharpening something, for example sharpening a sword (Dt 32:41) or arrows (Is 5:28; Ps 45:6; 120:4; Prov 25:18) and, along the same lines, in metaphorical form, "sharpening the tongue" of the wicked, to attack the righteous (Ps 64:4; 140:4). The idea is that the *Shema* be engrafted [5] on the descendants, as emphasized in Dt 6:20-25. The times and spaces mentioned: when you are at home, when you are on the road, when you go to bed, when you get up, characterize, overall, the entire life of man: at home and outside (private and public space), evening and morning.

Verses 8 and 9 resume the exhortation from v. 6, that the confession of faith in the One God should not only be affirmed in words and physically worn on the chest but should become a visible work throughout life through deeds of virtue. Visible signs should not have a metaphorical role (as in Ex 13:9; Prov 3:3; 6:21; 7:3) but should be, concretely, an obstacle to forgetting [6].

The three texts of the Shema, Exodus 13:1-16, Deuteronomy 6:4-9, and 11:13-21, are preserved in *tefillin* and *mezuzot* [7]. The "doorposts" and "gates" are signs of public openness. This practice has proven that the confession of faith is short enough to be written anywhere and uttered as often as possible.

The Echo of Divine Unity in Ancient Scripture and in Jewish Tradition

Shema Israel, *Dt* 6:4-9, is not any text. It belongs to the basic redaction of Deuteronomy and the book that concludes the Torah and, therefore, must be understood in this theological context. Therefore, the divine command to honor the One and Only God is not only enunciated in *Shema Israel*, but constitutes the centre of gravity of Deuteronomistic theology. It emphasizes the reality that God is One and

Only: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord" (Dt 6:4). The affirmation is a divine sentence, sealed with the holy name of Yahweh, which no human authority can surpass.

When אֶחָד modifies a plural noun into a singular form, then it is compound. In Dt 6, 4, אֶחָד modifies the relationship between אֱלֹהֵינוּ (God, plural) and יְהוָה (God, singular), which shows that אֶחָד, one, has an absolute meaning, is the only Almighty One. Yahweh is the God of Israel, he is "the God of our fathers" (Ex 3:13). He is greater than all the gods of other peoples; He is Lord of lords, הוֹדוּ לַאֲדֹנֵי הָאֲדֹנִים ... הוֹדוּ לֵאלֹהֵי הָאֱלֹהִים (Ps 136:2-3), אֵל אֱלֹהִים (Ps 50:1). The other gods do not exist, they are only the work of man's hands: מַעֲשֵׂה יְדֵי אָדָם (Ps 135:15). Job recognizes God as the Only Creator: "Did not he that made me in the womb make him? and did not one fashion us in the womb?" (Job 31:15). In the context of the same theology of divine paternity over creation, אֶחָד appears as an attribute of אֵל in Mal 2:10: "Is there not one father (אָב אֶחָד) for us all? Did not one God (אֵל אֶחָד) create us?".

The *Shema* texts biblically substantiate the monotheistic essence of Judaism. The Talmudic tract *Berachot* comments in detail on the *Shema*, emphasizing the Hebrew *echad* as an attribute of God's Being: "All who prolong the word *echad* will have their days and years prolonged" (Berakhot 13b). Rationalist medieval Jewish philosophers, such as Maimonides, describe biblical monotheism in the sense that there is only one God, whose essence is unique, simple, and an infinite unity. Jewish mysticism gives a much deeper explanation, distinguishing between God's essence and His emanation. God is present everywhere, including in the most mundane aspects of life. This mystical principle, based on the teachings of the Baal Shem Tov, reflects the belief that every human action can become holy when it is done in the name of God. In his book, Norman Lamm refers to the Kabbalistic concept of *tzimtzum*, the idea that God partially "withdrew" to allow creation to exist. Thus, Isaac Luria speaks of God's "withdrawal," which refers only to *or ein sof* "endless light" and not to the *ein sof* "the Endless One," the divine essence. God's infinity is revealed complementary in both, in the deity (infinite light) and creation (finite light). This doctrine is reinterpreted in Hasidism to explain divine omnipresence: although God appears hidden, He remains essentially present in all creation (Lamm 1999, 7) [8].

"Hear, O Israel": The Shema Reflected in New Testament Theology

The *Shema* is one of the many Old Testament texts quoted in the Gospel of Mark, as in 12:28-30: "And one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, and perceiving that he had answered them well, asked him, Which is the first commandment of all? And Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord. And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment."

Luke and Matthew quote Deuteronomy 6:5 according to the LXX, where it is written: καὶ ἀγαπήσεις κύριον τὸν θεόν σου ἐξ ὅλης τῆς καρδίας σου καὶ ἐξ ὅλης τῆς ψυχῆς σου καὶ ἐξ ὅλης τῆς δυνάμεώς σου. Matthew 22:37 is close to the *Shema* text: Ἀγαπήσεις κύριον τὸν θεόν σου ἐν ὅλῃ τῇ καρδίᾳ σου καὶ ἐν ὅλῃ τῇ ψυχῇ σου καὶ ἐν ὅλῃ τῇ διανοίᾳ σου·. But in Lk 10:27, numerous differences are visible: Ἀγαπήσεις κύριον τὸν θεόν σου ἐξ ὅλης [τῆς] καρδίας σου καὶ ἐν ὅλῃ τῇ ψυχῇ σου καὶ ἐν ὅλῃ τῇ ἰσχύϊ σου καὶ ἐν ὅλῃ τῇ διανοίᾳ σου, καὶ τὸν πλησίον σου ὡς σεαυτόν. Significant is the use in the Septuagint of the preposition ἐξ, "from," while in the New Testament writings ἐν, "in" is preferred (Melniciuc-Puica 2005, 107). The *Shema* biblical texts converge towards the use of the verb ἀγαπήσεις, through the *gezerah shawah* technique (the union of two texts based on a keyword) (Melniciuc-Puica 2005, 107).

In Matthew 22:34-46, Jesus refers for the first part of the answer, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind" to Dt 6:5, and for the second part to Lv 19:18: "You shall love your neighbour as yourself". But the discussion between Him and the Pharisees continues: "What think ye of Christ? whose son is he? They say unto him, The son of David. He saith unto them, How then doth David in spirit call him Lord, saying, The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, Till I make thine enemies thy footstool?' (quoting Ps 110:1). If then David calls him 'Lord,' how can he be his son?" No one could say a word in reply, and from that day on no one dared to ask him any more questions". Christ means that He is the Lord and the son of David, being the Son of God.

In addition, the Holy Apostle Paul elaborates the Shema in 1Cor 8:6 with reference to the risen Christ: "But to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him".

The prohibition of the representation of God in the Old Testament is explained by the fact that God revealed Himself through His Word, His manifestation was made through the Word. This is His uniqueness: the rejection of material representations of God, in favour of the audible revelation of His name. The specific work of God the Father becomes known through the revelation of the Son of God Incarnate, co-existent with the Father, from eternity in the unity of existence: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it" (Jn 1:1-5).

Many biblical hymns begin with the praise of God (1Chr 29:10; Dan 2:20; Lk 1:68; Eph 1:3; 1Pt. 1:3) or end with it (1Chr 16:36; Ps 41:14; 72:18; 89:53; 106:48). We encounter the same doxological language in the New Testament regarding Christ (2Pt 3:18; Rm 11:36), and in Rev 5:12 God (the Father) glorifies Christ the Lamb. The text Rm 9:5 is the most apparent scriptural confession of the divinity of Christ, together with the texts Jn 20:28, Tit 2:13, Rm 9:5, and Jn1:1: "Christ, who is over all, God blessed forever." Studying the sacred text, it is evident that Rm 9:5 follows a specific doxological tradition, well known to contemporaries. Rm 1:25 glorifies God the Creator, "Who is blessed forever, Amen!" In 2Cor 11:31 we encounter the expression: "The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which is blessed for evermore". The fact that the pastoral epistles abound in such solemn doxological expressions, sometimes addressed to "God", sometimes to "Christ", leads us to believe that such a doxological formula was transferred from the Jewish cult of God-Yahweh to the Son of God, in the early Church, under the Apostles' conviction that "God has raised this Jesus" (Acts 2:32) and that "God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name" (Phil 2:9). The only difference is topical: in the Old Testament, the doxology is "Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel" (1Kgs 8:15, 56 and then Eph 1:3; 2Co 1:3).

Revealed Monotheism: The First Commandments through the Lens of Patristic Thought

The first commandment, "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me!" (Ex 20:2-3), is constantly reaffirmed in the Pentateuch, especially in legal texts such as Ex 6:6; 13:3; 15:13.16.26; 29:46; Lv 11:45; 26:1; 26:13.

Its reception in the Church's catechetical and homiletic discourse is more than obvious, most often bringing to the fore the words of the Savior from the Sermon on the Mount: "You cannot serve God and Mammon" and "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness" (Mt 6:24.33). For Philo of Alexandria, this first commandment is the chief commandment of the entire Old Testament. Therefore, "let us establish in the depths of our being this initial commandment, as the holiest of all commandments, let us think that there is only one true God and let us honour Him alone" (*The Decalogue* XIV, 65, 69). St Gregory Palamas emphasizes that this commandment refers to the dogma of the Unity of the Godhead, which we must understand as the Trinity of Hypostases: "The Lord your God is One Lord, known in the Father and in the Son and in the Holy Spirit: in the Father-unbegotten, in the Son-begotten, without beginning, without time and without passion, the Word made flesh, Who by His own body anointed what He took from us, hence the name Christ – that is, the Anointed One; and in the Holy Spirit – the Same One Who proceeds from the Father, not by birth, but by procession. Only and only This God is true – The One in the Trinity of hypostases, One Lord being also undivided: by being, will, glory, power and work and by all that by which we know the Godhead. You will love Him alone and worship Him alone with all your mind, with all your heart, and with all your strength, and His words and His statutes will be in your heart, so that you may do them" [9].

Origen invites us to reread the first commandment in a contemporary context: "These words are not addressed only to those who once came out of Egypt; they are also addressed to you, the one who hears them now" (Origen 1982, 80). Making the transition from faith (dogma) to action, the great church writer urges us to leave the Egypt of our existence, the life enslaved by passions, to live free from sin, keeping the commandments of the Lord.

The second commandment, "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me" (Ex 20:4-5), is closely linked to the first, stopping idolatry, which can mean egotism through the service of passions. That is why the Savior urges us not to attach our souls to worldly things but to lay up treasures in heaven (Mt 6:19-21).

Origen and Philo take the commandment's text literally and make a brief list of possible idols made of silver, gold, wood, or stone. They insist that those who glorify creation instead of the Creator, "filling the world with idols," invoke demons (Origen 1982, 84-85; Philo of Alexandria, *The Decalogue* XIV, 66).

Moving on from the temptation of worshipping matter, Saint Gregory Palamas urges us to avoid understanding the spiritual world as divine in itself and that the glorification is only of the One God: "You shall not make any likeness of anything that is in heaven above and anything that is in the earth below and in the water to worship them and honour them as God. All are the creation of the One God, the One at the end of the ages Who took flesh from the virgin womb, Who was seen on earth, living among men and suffering for their salvation, dying and rising again, Who ascended into heaven with the body and sits at the right hand of the Majesty and with whose body He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead. Therefore, you will make an icon of Him Who, for us became human out of love for Him, and through it you will remember Him, and through it (the icon), you will worship Him, raising your mind to the worship of that Body of the Saviour Who sits at the right hand of the Father in heaven" (Sf. Grigorie Palama 2003, 262-4).

Conclusions

"In the beginning Elohim…" (Gn 1:1) are the first words of the Hebrew Scriptures. Saint John begins his Gospel with the same message: "In the beginning the Word…" (Jn 1:1). The two Testaments testify to the same absolute reality: God appears at the beginning of our creation and for our salvation. The dogma that God is One is fundamental to both Testaments. Holy Scripture is monotheistic from the first words to the last. If the Old Testament emphasizes the idea of God One, Christianity does not add anything new. "For I am the Lord, I change not" is the divine message through Malachi 3:6. The New Testament is not "less monotheistic" than the Old, but, on the contrary, emphasizes the confession of One God. The confession of God One is the only revelation, and this testimony denies any form of polytheism. The one God reveals Himself in Scripture, first to the forefathers, then to the patriarchs, then to the prophets, then to the entire Church throughout the ages.

Christianity proclaims the Trinity of Divine Persons in unity, but the Church has never glorified three gods. God is triune. "For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one" (1Jn 5:7). Speaking

of the specificity of the Israelite religion, W.F. Albright concludes: "This is the conception of the entire Old Testament: only one God, Who reigns over all that exists. (...) He is the unique God, Who is above all, a God of morality and human relations, a God of all nations, a God over all nature. There is only one God, Who has supreme control over destiny, a God Who creates man with free will" (Albright 1964, 99).

In the Old Testament liturgical experience, God's uniqueness had to be confessed through prayer amid the chosen people (Ex 15:11; 2Chr 14:11; 20:6; Ps 35:10; 71:19; 89:9; 113:5; Mi 7:18). In the Church, confessions of faith played a fundamental apologetic role, delimiting what was false from what was true.

Christ is the Son of God. He does not replace God, because He is God of essence with the Father and the Spirit. The Word became flesh (Jn 1:14), but He "was God" (Jn 1:1), He did not become God through the Incarnation. Biblical revelation does not use only the names Yahweh and Elohim for God, but reveals to us His hypostases of חָכְמָה/ σοφία/ Wisdom, דָּבָר/ λόγος/ Word and רוּחַ/ πνεῦμα/ Spirit. Divine revelation – the testimony of the Church is unequivocal: personal distinctions in God do not threaten the unity of the divine essence.

Just as in the *Shema Israel*, we encounter the testimony of God Elohim, which determines a verb in singular form, so in the mandate entrusted to the Church through the Apostles to baptize, we find the Trinity: "In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Mt 28:19-20). The "name" of God-Elohim must be known, preserved, and confessed in the Church of Glory as "the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit," of the "consubstantial and indivisible Trinity." This is the Good News, the Gospel of the New Testament, before which the holy servant of God no longer cries out imperatively *Shema*! "Listen!," but "Wisdom! Arise! Let us hear the Holy Gospel! Peace be with all!".

Notes

[1] Where necessary, to highlight the theological significance of the Hebrew text, I translated from *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*, Stuttgart, 1997.

[2] Here, my translation in Romanian: "Ascultă Israel! Domnul, Dumnezeul nostru, este singurul Domn. 5. Să iubeşti pe Domnul, Dumnezeul tău, cu toată inima ta, cu tot sufletul tău şi cu toată puterea ta. 6. Şi să fie cuvintele acestea, pe care Eu le poruncesc ţie astăzi, în inima ta. 7. Să le fixezi (în mintea) fiilor tăi şi să vorbeşti despre ele atunci când şezi în casa ta şi când mergi pe drum, când te culci şi când te scoli. 8. Să le legi ca semn

la mâna ta şi să fie ca o bandă între ochii tăi. 9. Să le scrii pe uşorii casei tale şi pe porţile tale".

[3] The imperative expression "write them on the tablet of your heart" (כְּתְבֵם עַל־לוּחַ לִבֶּךָ) (Prov 3:3; 7:3; Jer 31:33; Dt 6:6) can also have a concrete meaning, namely, it can be understood as an allusion to the tablets for schoolchildren's exercises, which were hung around their necks.

[4] This verb is used mainly in the Qal, Piel and Hitpoel forms, but we are particularly interested only in the Piel form, where it has an intensive meaning: to give education from an early age, with perseverance and repeatedly.

[5] In this text, the meaning of the verb is "to stimulate," "to sharpen," "to impress," "to inculcate." The Jerusalem Bible translates it as "to repeat." (Jamieson, Fausset and 1863, 117).

[6] Also, in Exodus 13:16, reference is made to the deliverance from Egypt: "And it shall be for a token upon thine hand, and for frontlets between thine eyes: for by strength of hand the Lord brought us forth out of Egypt". This quotation from Dt 6:8 suggests that the "sacrifice" would be left tied to the hands or between the eyes. Such an act has no physical meaning, and if it were to be understood metaphorically, it is difficult to understand the author's intention.

[7] This tradition may be based on foreign ideas: it is known that Egyptian officials wore a band on their wrist, on which the name of the master or pharaoh was inscribed.

[8] Norman Lamm highlights that Hasidism, as a religious movement, emphasizes man's direct approach to God. This approach is not just an intellectual or dogmatic experience but one lived and felt through prayer, love, and devotion.

[9] In Romanian translation: "Domnul Dumnezeul tău Unul Domn este, cunoscut în Tatăl şi în Fiul şi în Duhul Sfânt: în Tatăl-nenăscut, în Fiul-născut, fără de început, fără de timp şi fără patimă, Cuvântul cel întrupat, Care prin însuşi trupul Lui a uns ceea ce a luat de la noi, de unde şi numele de Hristos – adică Cel Uns; şi în Duhul Sfânt – Acelaşi Care de la Tatăl purcede, nu prin naştere, ci prin purcedere. Numai şi numai Acest Dumnezeu este adevărat – Cel în Treimea ipostasurilor, Unul Domn fiind şi neîmpărţit: prin fiinţă, voinţă, slavă, putere şi lucrare şi prin toate cele prin care cunoaştem dumnezeirea. Pe Acesta singur îl vei iubi şi Acestuia Unuia I te vei închina din tot cugetul tău, din toată inima ta şi cu toată puterea ta, şi vor fi cuvintele Lui şi aşezămintele Lui întru inima ta, pentru ca să le faci pe ele." (Sf. Grigorie Palama 2003, 263).

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The Divine Name Yahweh Sabaoth ("Lord of Hosts") in the Biblical Literature – Problematizations and Divergences

Abstract

This study analyses the interpretations and debates in the literature on the divine name Yahweh Sabaoth ("Lord of Hosts") in the Hebrew Bible. The author presents three main methodological approaches scholars use to understand the meaning and origin of this name: semantic analysis, syntactic analysis, and historical/contextual analysis. The semantic analysis focuses on the possible meanings of the term *sabaoth*, leading to various interpretations such as "Lord of the armies of Israel," "Lord of the angelic armies," or "Lord of all creation." The syntactic analysis examines the grammatical relationship between Yahweh and *Sabaoth*, proposing understandings such as "Yahweh the (all)mighty" or "He who creates the hosts." The historical/contextual approach considers the historical and cultural circumstances of using the name, suggesting connections to the Canaanite tradition or the Temple in Jerusalem. The study highlights the complexity and diversity of interpretations, emphasizing two main perspectives: the Yahweh Sabaoth as the warrior God of Israel and as the Almighty God, the "heavenly King" who rules history. These investigations reflect efforts to understand divine revelation in the context of the Old Testament and its reception by the Israelite people.

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Introduction

In the Hebrew Bible, the God of Israel is often referred to as יהוה צְבָאוֹת (*Yahweh ṣəḇāʾōṯ*). The proper name *Yahwe* is joined to the term *ṣəḇāʾōṯ*, a plural of the noun *ṣāḇāʾ*, meaning "host" or "army." This juxtaposition of terms, i.e., this compound divine name, has generated numerous problematizations in twentieth-century literature [1]. Biblical scholars concerned with the subject have proposed various hypotheses and opinions on its origin and meaning, but without reaching a consensus (Ross 1967: 76). The questions that have arisen are: what is the significance of the divine name *Yahweh Sabaoth*? What attribute or quality of divinity is emphasized through it? Has its primary meaning been preserved over time, or has it undergone an evolution? What is its origin – is it a construct that originated in the tradition of the chosen people, or was it taken from the Canaanite tradition? The answers given are often incompatible and essentially contradictory [2].

Methodologically, biblical scholars have first identified the Old Testament passages in which *Yahweh Sabaoth* [3] appears, and then various analysis methods are applied to determine its meaning. In particular, three research methods can be distinguished: semantic, syntactic, and historical/contextual. The study aims to expose the results by using each method separately. Such an analysis shows how the divine name *Yahweh Sabaoth* has been received in the literature, how differently it can be interpreted, and how difficult it can be to make it explicit.

Both the Hebrew language, through the polysemy of the term *ṣāḇāʾ*, and the historical and spatial context in which the chosen people, who defended their monotheistic faith surrounded by polytheistic peoples, were devolved, have opened up the possibility of different answers (Mettinger 2005, 154-5). Consequently, one cannot speak of a unanimously accepted interpretation. Nevertheless, the analysis of the opinions launched by different biblical scholars is helpful because it presents a long process of trying to fathom the meaning of the divine name Yahweh Sabaoth, establish its significance, and arrive at the meaning that the Hagiographers themselves had in mind when they referred to God by naming him thus.

Semantic analysis

The most common approach is to analyze what the term *ṣəḇāʾōṯ* means in the Old Testament, in texts where it is not used in the divine name. It has been thought that establishing the meaning of this term can determine the meaning of the divine name *Ya-*

hweh Sabaoth. Scholars have agreed that *ṣəḇāʾōṯ* is the plural of the noun *ṣāḇā'*, a term whose root is found in most Semitic languages with the meaning of "host" or "army." (Zobel 2003, 218) In the Old Testament, the term is used to denote either the army/people prepared to fight a battle (Gn 21:22.23; Nm 1:3; 2:4; 2 Sam 3:23), or the host of angels around the divine throne (1 Kgs 22:19; 2 Chron 18:18; Ps 103:19-20), or the host of stars (2 Kgs 17:16; 2 Chron 3:5; Jr 8:2), and rarely to express the sense of the totality of creation (Gn 2:1) (Ringreen 2003, 212-4). What kind of "hosts" are envisaged in the divine *Yahweh Sabaoth*? Since different meanings can be considered, *Yahweh Sabaoth* has been interpreted according to the variant emphasized by each exegete.

In the mid-twentieth century, Benjamin N. Wambaqc published his doctoral dissertation concerned with the philological, historical, and exegetical analysis of the divine name *Yahweh Sabaoth* (Wambacq 1947). [4] In the first chapter of his work, he shows how this divine name has been interpreted in various studies published up to the realization of his research. B. Wambacq systematizes the different opinions into six directions of interpretation. For the various biblical scholars who have analyzed it, *Yahweh Sabaoth* has been understood as 1) "Lord of the armies of Israel" [5]; 2) "Lord of the stars" [6] or 3) "Lord of the angelic armies" [7]; 4) "Lord over the forces of nature" [8]; 5) "Lord over the forces of darkness" [9]; 6) "Lord of all creation" [10]. All these views have been launched from the meaning that the term *ṣəḇāʾōṯ* may have in the various OT contexts in which it is used.

Of the six directions of interpretation analyzed by B. Wambacq, three have received greater prominence. Many biblical scholars have taken *ṣəḇāʾōṯ* to refer to the hosts/army of Israel and have interpreted the divine name as "Lord of the armies of Israel". This interpretation has led to the idea that *Yahweh Sabaoth*, the God of war, engages in his chosen people's battles and ensures victory (Eichrodt 1967, 192). The use of the divine name *Yahweh Sabaoth* in the context of Israel's struggle with the Philistines (1 Sam 4:1-7) and the explanation David gives in 1 Sam 17:45 [11] led to the formulation of this view [12]. However, Gerhard von Rad points out that *Yahweh Sabaoth* is very rarely put in connection with earthly hosts; this divine name is used most frequently in prophetic literature, and most cases do not involve events of a military character (von Rad 1975, 19).

Other biblical scholars point out that *ṣəḇāʾōṯ* refers to angelic powers, so *Yahweh Sabaoth* is understood as "Lord of the angelic hosts." Yahweh is pictured as a king surrounded by angels who are part of the so-called "divine council" or

"kingly council." *Yahweh Sabaoth* is the "King of glory" (Ps 24:10), who has prepared his seat/throne in heaven (Ps 103:19). He is shown before the prophet Isaiah seated on a high throne, surrounded and honored by seraphim (Is 6:1-3). The image of the kingly council is described in 1 Sam 22:19-23 (cf. also 2 Chron 18:18-22), in which the prophet Micaiah, son of Imlah, speaks of a vision in which he sees Yahweh surrounded on the right and the left by angelic hosts. Yahweh consults with the angels ("one said one thing and another another"). Finally, one of the angels offers to fulfill the mission of persuading King Ahab to go to war against Syria, saying that he will inspire the court prophets to advise the king. These texts, corroborated, led to the understanding of *Yahweh Sabaoth* as a "heavenly king" who rules not only over the heavenly hosts but also the earthly (Kaiser 1983, 126-7). Biblical scholars have had difficulty with the fact that the Old Testament uses the singular form *ṣāḇā'* to refer to the angelic host; no passage uses the plural *ṣəḇā'ōṯ* ("hosts") (Mettinger 2005, 155).

A more general, inclusive perspective speaks of *ṣəḇā'ōṯ* to be translated as "totality" and understood concerning all elements of creation. *Yahweh Sabaoth* is the Almighty God who rules over His creation [13]. The hosts of Yahweh are the armed forces of the Chosen People, the angelic powers, the forces of nature, and by extension all the elements of creation, and the name *Yahweh of Hosts* indicates Who exactly rules over them (Driver 1897, 232). The interpretation is based mainly on texts from prophetic literature. The Seraphim of the prophet Isaiah's inaugural vision praised *Yahweh Sabaoth*, saying that "all the earth is full of His glory" (Is 6:3). The prophet Isaiah encourages Jerusalem by telling them not to be afraid, for "your man is your Maker, and His name: *The Lord of Hosts* and your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel: *the God of all the earth* is his name" (Is 54:5). The interpretation has often been considered too general, or too broad, but given the contexts in which *Yahweh Sabaoth* appears, one can speak of evolution in its meaning. For this reason, B. Wambacq concludes in his Ph.D. thesis that, in the beginning, this name was used to designate Yahwe, who defends his people by his vigorous intervention; later, in the period when the question of the difference between Yahwe and idols was raised, the name presented the God of Israel in his capacity as creator of the world; in the time of the monarchy, *Yahweh Sabaoth* becomes the defender of his people, whom he had brought out of the land of Egypt, to whom he had offered the promised land and pledged himself to pronounce over it from Mount Zion – in this period he is presented in a royal posture, having around him servants of a spiritual nature; in the times when

the people experienced hardships of a political nature, *Yahweh Sabaoth* was received as the God of the phenomena of nature, the one who manifests his power through the various elements of creation, for B. Wambacq, *Yahweh Sabaoth* is the all-powerful God (fr. *le Dieu tout-puissant*), who is involved in the history of Israel (Wambacq 1947, 272-83).

Syntactic analysis

In addition to semantic issues, biblical scholars have also been concerned with syntactical issues. The emphasis has been on the grammatical relationship between the two terms that make up the divine name. Yahweh is considered a proper name. In Hebrew, proper names themselves say something about the person designated. They usually do not have an attribute next to them, emphasizing an explanatory qualification. Therefore, most scholars have considered that in the case of *Yahweh Sabaoth,* we are dealing with a proper name followed by a genitival substantival attribute: "Yahweh of hosts" (Tsevat 1965: 55). Some scholars, however, have interpreted the term *ṣəḇāʾōṯ* in an adjectival sense. This interpretative direction was launched by Wiliam R. Arnold, who, in 1907, pointed out that *ṣəḇāʾōṯ* is indefinite and should be understood as an adjectival attribute. He considers that *ṣəḇāʾōṯ* refers to neither earthly nor heavenly hosts nor to astral elements. When used within the divine name, the term does not point to something separate from Yahweh but emphasizes a quality of divinity. Consequently, it is wrong to translate *Yahwe Sabaoth* as "Yahwe of the hosts" (heavenly or earthly). The name should be translated as "Yahwe the Warrior Yahwe" (eng. *Yahwe Militant*) – the name presents Yahwe in the hypostasis of a deity who masters the art of battle. W. Arnold points out that this is the primary meaning of the name, which can be seen in its early usage (1 Sam 15:2; Ps 24:8,10; Is 14:4; Jr 46:10). Although the meaning of the name has evolved in the prophetic books, the basic idea has remained the same: *Yahweh Sabaoth* emphasizes Yahweh's lordship over the "hosts" of angels, astrals, demons, all the forces of the universe, and implicitly that Yahweh is a military deity (Arnold 1917, 142-8). Otto Eissfeldt takes this kind of approach and argues that *ṣəḇāʾōṯ* could be understood, also in an adjectival manner, as a plural of intensity or as an intensive abstract plural, emphasizing the quality of "power", "might", "force," which refers to God's omnipotence (Eissfeldt 1915, 128-50). He translates *ṣəḇāʾōṯ* as "strong, mighty" (germ. *mächtig*) and together with the

divine name *Yahwe*, as "Yahwe the (all)mighty" (germ. Jahve der Mächtiger). This interpretation was later accepted and supported by many biblical scholars.

Matitiahu Tsevat points out that *Yahweh Sabaoth*, grammatically judged, is a proper noun followed by an appositive, in which case it should be understood as "Yahweh (is) the Hosts" (Tsevat 1965: 59-8). He notes that as King Joash addressed the prophet Elisha, "Father, father, the *charioteer of Israel* and *horseman of Israel*!" (2 Kgs 13:14), so too the people could address God as "the hosts" (Tsevat 1965: 55). The term, referring to military might, is an expression of faith in Yahweh, "the mighty in battle", "the divine warrior" (Is 15:3; Is 42:13; Ps 24:8).

A different approach is proposed by William Foxwell Albright (1957, 16) and Frank Moore Cross (1973, 70), who argue that the divine name should be interpreted as a verb followed by a noun. They insist on the verbal form in the hyphen of the divine name *Yahweh*, according to which the translation of this name would be "He who brings into being" or "Giver of existence" [14], *Yahwe Sabaoth* is interpreted as "He who brings the hosts into being" (Albright 1957, 16) or "He who creates the (heavenly) hosts" (Cross 1973, 65-72). However, the interpretation is considered to be subjective (Zobel 2003, 219).

Historical/contextual analysis

Other specialists concerned with the subject have shown that beyond solving semantic or grammatical problems, a historical/contextual analysis is needed, an analysis that considers the historical circumstances in which the divine name was used. According to this line of reasoning, one who wishes to say something about the meaning and origin of the divine name must first consider the different historical contexts and the different types of writing in which it was used. Victor Maag sees *Yahweh Sabaoth* as a novel element of Israelite faith, generated by the encounter between Judaic monotheism and Canaanite polytheism. The name begins to be used at the sanctuary of Shiloh towards the end of the period of the Judges when the Promised Land had not yet fully come under Israelite rule. During this period, the Chosen People integrate certain elements specific to the Canaanite tradition into their faith to emphasize the uniqueness of God. V. Maag argues that the *ṣəḇāʾōṯ* is a designation for the Canaanite natural mythical powers which, over time, lost their independent status and became subordinate to Yahwe. Therefore, the Israelites used the

name to emphasize the omnipotence of the one God concerning the Canaanite deities (Mettinger 2005, 64).

J.P. Ross analyzes the passages in 1 Sam and Psalms in which *Yahweh Sabaoth* is used. He is concerned with the texts that he considers the earliest and sets out to observe whether speaking about the divine name of God's being lord over the army of Israel is possible. He observes that the passages under study refer to a royal hypostasis of the divinity; therefore, the name has no military connotation. Consequently, he considers that there is no relation between *Yahweh Sabaoth* and the noun *ṣāḇā'* (army). The name comes from a root whose meaning has been lost. It is possible that a tradition developed in Canaan named the deity, thus emphasizing his kingship. The fact that the divine name appears in the Israelite literature of the conquest period prompts him to assume that it was taken from Canaan. J. P. Ross supposes that the name of the Canaanite deity was Baal *Sabaoth*, who had an altar in Shiloh. The Israelites took over this altar, and in it was placed the ark of Yahweh, and the term *ṣəḇāʾōṯ* began to be used concerning the name *Yahweh*. From that period, *Yahweh Sabaoth* became the name that portrays God in his capacity as King/Emperor (Ross 1967, 76-92).

Tryggve Mettinger, in the studies he devotes to the subject (Mettinger 2005, 62-91; Mettinger 1983, 19-37) emphasizes the relationship between *Yahweh Sabaoth* and the Temple in Jerusalem [15]. He emphasizes how this divine name appears in the prophetic books and insists that by using the name *Yahweh Sabaoth*, the Hagiographers spoke of God as the "King" enthroned in the Temple, who rules and determines the destiny of the whole world. In the volume *Dethronement of Sabaoth*, they emphasize that, due to the destruction of the Temple during the Babylonian Exile, the divine name *Yahweh Sabaoth* was no longer used, only to reappear in the post-exilic prophetic writings (Mettinger 2005, 15).

Conclusions

In the face of these numerous and often conflicting interpretations, Gerhard von Rad wondered whether attempts to elucidate the meaning of *Yahweh Sabaoth* are based on the false assumption that this cultic divine name can be explained strictly rationally (von Rad 1975, 19). The three types of analysis to which biblical scholars have resorted to unravel what *Yahweh Sabaoth* stands for speak of the attempt to understand how God revealed himself to the chosen people and, consistent with this, how the Israelites received the message of revelation. Research shows that *Yahweh Sabaoth* is of

particular importance for Old Testament theology. The interpretations clarify specific issues, some of which are subjective, others more limited. Looking at the research as a whole, two ideas stand out: first, the idea that *Yahweh Sabaoth* is seen as the God of the hosts of Israel and understood as a warrior God – this idea emerges particularly in studies concerned with the early period in which this divine name is used; the second idea – noticeable especially in studies emphasizing the prophetic writings – that *Yahweh Sabaoth* is God Almighty, the "heavenly King" surrounded by angelic hosts, who is actively involved in the history of the chosen people and the history of salvation.

Notes

[1] The divine name Yahweh Sabaoth has been taken up by scholars as a research topic as interest in biblical studies grew in expounding biblical teaching about God systematically. Thus, against the background of the development of Old Testament Biblical Theology as a distinct discipline, numerous scholars of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries included this research topic in their concerns because, in general, the divine names contained in Holy Scripture can contribute to a more precise exposition of how God revealed Himself to mankind. The divine names have been understood as landmarks on the way to the knowledge of God, which gradually appeared in the course of salvation history, each divine name in its way showing something of the Personal God concerning the world and man. In contrast, the theology of divine names also speaks of God as the "Nameless One" or above every name, showing that all the names given to God are nothing more than accommodations of the revealed message to the capacity of the human mind to comprehend. These aspects were first emphasized in the patristic literature, in which St. Dionysius the Areopagite's treatise On Divine Names is particularly relevant. Subsequently, in the scholarly literature, numerous monographs or extended chapters have been written in Old Testament Theology treatises dealing with the issue of divine names, works in which the name Yahweh Sabaoth is also analyzed (see, e.g., Jukes 1986; Anderson 1999, 48-56; Eichrodt 1967, 178-94; Jacob 1955, 33-51; Gerhard von Rad 1975, 179-87; Preuss 1991, 139-46; Zimmerly 1978, 17-21; Dyrness 1977, 44-7). In the Romanian milieu, the theme of divine names in general and of the divine name Yahweh Sabaoth in particular has been treated in volumes such as Ioan Chirilă (2003, 87-113), Athanase Negoiță (2004, 7-22), Mihai Vladimirescu and Mihai Ciurea (2006) and Cristian Prilipceanu (2016).

[2] Tryggve Mettinger notes that perusing the literature reveals a state of uncertainty and hesitancy in providing concrete answers as to the origin and meaning of the divine name Yahweh Sabaoth (Mettinger 1982, 108-38; cf. Schmitt 1972, 145-59).

[3] The divine name Yahwe appears alongside the noun *ṣəḇāʾōṯ* in the following expressions: Yahwe *ṣᵉḇāʾōṯ* (240 times); Adōnāy Yahwe *ṣᵉḇāʾōṯ* (15 times); Yahwe Elōhê *ṣᵉḇāʾōṯ* (14 times); *hāʾādôn* Yahwe *ṣᵉḇāʾōṯ* (5 times); Yahwe Elōhim *ṣᵉḇāʾōṯ* (4 times); Elōhim *ṣᵉḇāʾōṯ*; Adōnāy Yahwe Elōhê *haṣṣebāʾôt*; Yahwe Elōhê *ṣᵉḇāʾōṯ* Adōnāy. In total, the number of occurrences is 285 times, as follows: in the book of the prophet Jeremiah, it occurs 82 times; in the book of the prophet Isaiah 62 times; in the book of the prophet Zechariah 53 times; in the book of the prophet Malachi 24 times, in Psalms 15 times; in the book of the prophet Haggai 14 times; in the book of the prophet Amos 9 times; in 2 Kings 6 times; in 1 Kings 5 times; in 3 Kings 3 times; in 1 Paralipomena 3 times; in 4 Kings 2 times; also 2 times in the books of the prophets Nahum and Zephaniah and only once in the books of the prophets Hosea, Micah and Avacum (Zobel 2003, 216-8).

[4] The author states in the introduction that the doctoral thesis was defended on November 23, 1938, in the presence of Pope Pius XI (1922-1939) and that its delayed publication was due to events that had occurred in the meantime (most probably referring to the outbreak of the Second World War).

[5] The term *ṣəḇāʾōṯ* is correlated with the meaning of "earthly hosts." According to this interpretation, the able-bodied men of Israel are part of Yahweh's host, and Yahweh, as the leader of the hosts, is actively involved in the wars that the chosen people wage. The main sources B. Wambacq are Vuilleumier (1877: 287-306); Kautzsch (1886: 17-21); König (1923, 151) (see Wambacq 1947, 4-16).

[6] According to this understanding, the Lord's "hosts" are heavenly angels/heavenly lights, who are subject to their Creator, fulfilling the purpose for which they were created (cf. Gn 1:14-18; Dt 4:19; 17:19; 2 Kgs 17:16). Departing from the reason of the lights, Yahweh Sabaoth is presented as God who rules over all creation. But in the passages where the noun *ṣāḇāʼ* is used as applied to the heavenly bodies, the chosen people are strictly asked to remember that God created the "host of heaven" (sun, moon, stars) and not to idolize it. Heinrich Ewald supported the interpretation but was not accepted by other exegetes (Ewald 1871, 339-40; Wambacq 1947, 17-20).

[7] Proponents of this interpretation have pointed out that *ṣəḇāʾōṯ* does not refer to the hosts of Israel, but to the angelic hosts (Jos 5:14-15; Ps 79:2,5,8,15,20; Is 6:3-5). Consequently, the divine name Yahweh Sabaoth speaks of the Lord of the heavenly hosts, the One who is served by "myriads of myriads" (Dn 7:10). Otto Borchert argues this interpretation and is received in other scholarly studies. Hermann Shultz shows that the meaning of the divine name evolved, at first being applied to the hosts of Israel and later to the heavenly hosts (Shultz 1898, 139-41; Wambacq 1947, 21-8).

[8] This interpretation shows that the divine name Yahweh Sabaoth emphasizes divine omnipotence, manifested in supremacy over the forces of nature. Vincent's (1937, 63-5) is among the most relevant studies (see Wambacq 1947, 29-35).

[9] B. Wambaqc points out that the interpretation of Yahweh Sabaoth as "Lord of the forces of darkness" or "God who rules over demons" has not had many supporters. The interpretation has been proposed and supported, among others, by Friederich Schwally, but it does not correctly find its basis in the Old Testament. Referring to the model of certain mythologies (such as Germanic or Indian), Schwally speaks of "war spirits" who may be involved in battles, just as Joshua encountered the "captain of the host of the Lord" (Jos 5:14), so too other peoples may have such spiritual leaders who, being opposed to Israel, are considered to be spirits of darkness. These spirits of war eventually become subject to Yahweh. B. Wambacq analyzes the work Friederich Schwally (1901, 4-6) (see Wambacq 1947, 36-7).

[10] The interpretation that B. Wambacq also argues in his thesis is that, for the prophets, the divine name Yahweh Sabaoth has a universal meaning. While in the historical books, one may speak of a different meaning, in the case of the prophetic literature, the divine epithet *ṣəḇāʾōṯ* is used to emphasize divine omnipotence, to designate Yahwe as the Lord over all creation. Other sources that B. Wambacq brings up are Alexander Kirkpatrick (1892, 98-9) and Samuel R. Driver (1897, 231-2) (see Wambacq 1947, 39-42).

[11] In the context of the battle against Goliath, David says to the Philistine soldier, "You come against me with sword and spear and shield, but I come against you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of hosts of Israel, whom you have blasphemed" (1 Sam 17:45). The text has been regarded as the only one in which a further explanation of the divine name Yahweh Sabaoth is offered (Zobel 2003, 218).

[12] Moreover, the conception of Yahweh as a warrior in other Old Testament texts also supports God. The Hagiographers portray the God of Israel as "mighty in battle" (Josh 15:3), "the mighty and mighty, the mighty in war" (Ps 23:8); he shows the Israelites that "Yahweh will fight for you" (Josh 14:14). But is this the proper meaning of Yahweh's name Sabaoth or is it merely a secondary meaning? Biblical scholars have shown that understanding God as the "God of war" is secondary to understanding God as the "God of Israel." God is presented as the ruler of the people whom he has chosen; he is seen as the King of Israel and of all creation (1 Sam 12:12; Ps 5:2; 46:3). As King, he has armies under him, but these armies do not pursue a worldly purpose of territorial conquest, but serve the plan of salvation, the telos to which God desires his creation to attain (Kišš 1975, 101-2).

[13] By often translating the divine name Yahweh Sabaoth by *Κύριος Παντοκράτωρ*, the Septuagint emphasizes this quality of God as the Lord over all creation (Dodd 1954, 19; Talshir 1987, 57-75).

[14] Biblical scholars generally agree that the divine name Yahweh comes from the root of the verb hāyāh ("to be"), but some consider it to be finite (qal) – "He is," "He will be," and others causal (hifil) – "He brings to life," "He who brings into being". William Foxwell Albright and Frank Moore Cross insist on the second option to explicate the divine name Yahweh Sabaoth (Prilipceanu 2006, 121-50).

[15] The theme is also developed theologically by Rainer Albertz, who shows that the divine name Yahweh Sabaoth and the notion Yahweh Melek ("Yahweh King") are closely connected with the Temple in Jerusalem (Albertz 1992, 132-8).

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"Lord, have mercy" – A Psalmic Paradigm for the Prayer of the Heart

Abstract

In this study, I aim to emphasize that the psalmic prayer יְהוָה חָנֵּנִי (*Lord have mercy*) is the early form and the foundation of *the Prayer of the Heart*. It has been generally accepted that Jesus' prayer, in its established form – *Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner* – originates in the Holy Scripture, particularly in the Gospels. In this research, I will prove that the New Testament contains an echo of psalmic spirituality. Those who first invoked God's name and asked for divine mercy to be poured out on them were the authors of psalms. To demonstrate this reality, I will resort to the Eastern Orthodox interpretation method without excluding the interpretation rigors of the critical school. I will use the latter especially when I tackle terminological delimitations and identify the occurrences of the imperative חָנֵּנִי / *ἐλέησόν*. In this study, I will capture, in a few chapters, how the psalmic Prayer of the Heart (*Lord, have mercy*) became the prayer of the heart.

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Introduction

Kallistos Ware (1992, 26-7) and John Breck (2003, 301) claimed that the Prayer of the Heart has two essential moments, namely adoration and repentance, and that it has had several versions, what we now call the prayer of the heart being one such version of this mystical manifestation. I have looked in the Psalms for all types of prayers falling within this pattern, and I have identified an expression that represents their foundation, synthesizing the two moments already mentioned: Lord, have mercy, which in Jewish is

יְהוָה חָנֵּנִי and in Greek *Κύριε ἐλέησόν*. According to Oliver Clément (1997, 26), these words with psalmic origin would be the beginning of a (re)entrance into communion with the One Who is named/called in this prayer for all the believers who belonged to the Early Church and participated in the public divine cult and in particular for those who were in a state of repentance. These perspectives have helped me understand that the purpose of the prayer, *Lord, have mercy*, is the same, irrespective of the moment it is uttered. In other words, the Lord pours out His mercy on all those who say His name and ask for the grace of redemption, irrespective of whether it is psalmist David, an ill person who lived in the time of our Saviour, a newly baptized Christian, a Hesychast or one of our contemporaries.

In this study, I aim to highlight the words, *Lord, have mercy*, which I consider to be the core of the Psalmic prayer and the premises of the prayer of the heart in the Psalms. Before synthesizing the psalmic contexts in which this prayer was uttered, I will underscore the theological content of its words, starting from their Hebrew etymology. I will then emphasize how the spirituality revolving around this prayer was received and used in the time of the New Testament. In the third section, I will present how hesychastic mysticism reached the climax of this means of spiritual manifestation and established the framework for unceasing prayer and, in the end, I will propose to our contemporaries the prayer *Lord, have mercy* as a paradigm for reaching continuous communion with God. To achieve this undertaking, I will adopt the Eastern Orthodox method of relating to the holy text, without however excluding the instruments of the critical school of interpretation whenever the content requires such an analysis. I will mostly resort to patristic literature, particularly Philokalic writings, and to the works of contemporary theologians, who wrote various monographs or studies on the prayer of the heart.

יְהוָה חָנֵּנִי (*Lord, have mercy*) – Semantic and Theological Perspectives

The syntagm יְהוָה חָנֵּנִי is made up of a noun – the proper name YHWH – and an imperative verb, whose root is חָנַן, having as basic meaning the idea of *being merciful towards someone* or of *showing mercy towards someone* (Harris et al. 1999, 298; Botterweck and Ringgren 1986, 22-35; Ap-Thomas 1957: 128-48; Lofthouse 1933: 29-35). The verb *chanan* emphasizes indulgence in interpersonal relationships and always entails an active state. Being merciful means getting involved so that the one who needs or asks for help immediately feels the effects of the action undertaken by the

one who owns the desired thing and offers it to the person who wants it (Flack 1960, 137-54). In addition, this verb regulates the relationship between the one who offers mercy and the one who asks for it. The former's superiority is obvious, as they have something the other does not, and the one who asks for mercy is in no way entitled to receive it. In other words, the one who asks for mercy is entirely dependent on the goodwill of the one who can give it to them and can never force the former to offer it to them. This perspective transpires more accurately from the analysis of the noun חֵן, which derives from the same radical as *chanan*. The basic meaning of *chen* is that of *grace* or *favour* (Botterweck and Ringgren 1986, 24). Finding *grace/mercy in someone's eyes*, an expression that has 43 occurrences in the Scripture, entailed a favorable disposition on the part of a person toward someone in need of help or who asked for help or salvation (Harris et al. 1999, 299). This term did not involve reciprocity or any constraint. Any legal provision could not force the one who offered mercy to show themselves merciful. As such, they could offer mercy to whomever they wanted and take it back at any time. Nonetheless, mercy requires responsibility, indulgence, and much understanding, especially if it relates to God.

From a theological perspective, the most essential element of the syntagm *Lord, have mercy* is the proper name (Jacob 1955, 38) under which God revealed Himself to His people, a name which defines the godly being (Loichiță 1956: 144). In Jewish mentality, YHWH was God's name *par excellence*, which, besides its ineffable, mysterious character (Chirilă 2003, 94), held within everything that could be known about God (Breck 2003, 307). Put differently, this name contained a call to knowledge, communion, and a clearer understanding of how God interacts with people. From a linguistic point of view, the vast majority of specialists considered the name YHWH as being expressed through a verbal structure – *to be* (Hebr. הָיָה from the archaic form *hwh*) (Freedman et al. 2000, 1402; Sakenfeld et al. 2008, 591). A consensus regarding the form of the verb in this name has not yet been reached. Some believed it to be a finite structure, while others saw it as causal. In the former case, YHWH could be translated as *He is, He will be* or *He shows himself in the present moment*, and in the latter – *He determines the state of being* or *He brings to life* (van der Toorn et. al. 1999, 914). I must mention that these translations are made following the correlation specialists established between the name YHWH and the name God revealed to Moses (אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה) when He called him (Ex 3:14). To give you a broader image of how exegetes perceived this name, I believe it is helpful to mention other translations

as well: Karel van der Toorn understands the name as a promise – *I will definitely be there*) or as a means of underscoring uniqueness – *I am who I am, having no equals* (van der Toorn et. al. 1999, 914; Elwell and Elwell 1997, 883). William Albright considers the expression mentioned above to refer to God's quality of Creator – *He brings to life everything that comes to life* (McKenzie 1961, 317). Edmond Jacob also adopts this vision, claiming that this name "is an expression of a living God" who exerts His power over life and, therefore, reveals His eternal nature (Jacob 1955, 41). Gerhard von Rad claims this syntagm is an axiomatic formula through which God expresses His almightiness and aseity (von Rad 1975, 180). Edouard Cothenet and Marcel believe the main aim of the name revealed on Mount Sinai is to underscore God's continuous presence next to His chosen ones (Leon-Dufour 1967, 181). In other words, this name highlights the Lord's unmitigated presence among those who are the beneficiaries of the promises He once made to their forefathers (Viller et al. 1981, 399; Epstein 2001, 16). This new name through which God makes Himself known confirms the promises He made to the patriarchs and a new argument that validates God's unchangingness (Vladimirescu and Ciurea 2008: 122). Hans-Joachim Kaus claims this name, frequently used in the Book of Psalms, becomes a guarantee of godly fidelity and the sign of His salvific presence (Ps 23:3; 25:12; 31:3; 106:8; 109:20; 148:5.13) (Kraus 1996, 24). Consequently, the name YHHW "is a simple guarantee, self-repercussion, and self-manifestation of the Lord in His people. His name is God Himself, a manifestation of Yahwe *ad extram* [...] That is why the psalmists are aware and convinced that this name is not something void, because It encompasses everything: justice and salvation, life and redemption, knowledge and wisdom" (Kraus 1996, 24). [our translation]

Lord, have mercy – The Core of Psalmic Prayer

The prayer, *Lord, have mercy*, is not a simple invocation of divine mercy but rather a ferment that requires a living interaction between the one who suffers or longs for communion and God. Consequently, this means of calling God, lover of men, merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in mercifulness (Ex 34:6), can be considered the heart of the psalmic prayer and the climax of the manifestation of prayer in the Old Testament. To support these assertions, I will synthetically evaluate the scriptural contexts that determined the invoking of godly name and mercy; I will show the meaning and implications of the prayer *Lord, have mercy* in the contexts I will mention, and I will underscore the consequences of invoking the presence of God the

merciful. However, before doing this, I will mention the psalmic texts in which the syntagm *YHWH honneni* is used and point out its occurrences.

The imperative "have mercy on me" is used in this form only in the Book of Psalms (4:1; 6:2; 25:17; 26:11; 27:7; 30:10; 31:9; 41:4.10; 51:1; 56:1; 57:1; 86:3-4.16; 119:29. 58.132). If we also take into account the three related forms חָנְנֵנִי – Ps 9:14, יְחָנֵּנוּ – Ps 67:2; 123:2 and חָנֵּנוּ – Ps 123:3, this verb occurs 22 times in 16 psalms. In all cases, the verb *chanan* is associated, either directly or indirectly, with God (Ps 25; 26; 86: 15; 119), whether we have YHWH (Ps 6; 9; 31; 41) or one of His other names: יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ – Ps 123; אֲדֹנָי – Ps 86:3; אֱלֹהִים is present in this form in four psalms (51; 56; 57; 67); אֱלֹהֵי צִדְקִי – Ps 4.

Generally speaking, traditional exegesis, both patristic and rabbinic, and part of the representatives of the critical school, ascribe 12 of the 16 Psalms to King David. Therefore, the events which inspired or determined the creation of these psalms, hence the uttering of the words *Lord, have mercy*, belong to the life of the second king of Israel: the persecution of the King by Saul (Ps 4; 31; 57; 86), his refuge at King Achish (Ps 25; 55), the adultery he committed with Bathsheba and the murder of Uriah (Ps 6; 25; 26; 51; 86), Absalom's rebellion (Ps 4; 6; 25; 31; 41; 86), the three-day plague (Ps 30) and the anointing of David as king of Hebron (Ps 27). The other events identified by specialists are connected to a couple of moments from the life of King Hezekiah (Ps 27; 30; 31; 41; 86) and to the situation of Jewish people during the Babylonian captivity (Ps 25; 26; 31; 56; 67; 119; 123). Considering that the opinions of exegetes have not always been the same as to the events that determined the genesis of the psalms above (which is quite normal), I will emphasize the elements that have to do with the spiritual view of the text. In other words, I will resort to the historical context indicated by most exegetes only to clarify the theological message the psalmist wanted to convey, to which any generation following the one it was addressed can adhere.

The psalmist asked for God's presence and the pouring out of His mercy as a consequence of his fall into sin, whether it had to do with mistakes from his youth, which he made out of ignorance (Ps 25:7), or with a large ego causing great spiritual pain and severe distress (Ps 30:6), or with wickedness, which drains the soul (Ps 31:10), or with laziness when it comes to fulfilling the Law (Ps 119:28), or with the transgressions and iniquities mentioned in psalm 51.

Another reason mercy is invoked involves direct or secret plots cunningly hatched by enemies. Starting with King Saul and continuing with dignitaries, persons of high

rank (*sons of people*), and *lions*, but also with the members of his house, King David had many troubles tormenting him and sometimes bringing him close to death (Ps 9:13). The association between their behavior and that of lions reveals their cruelty and lack of compassion (Ps 57:5), and their willingness to tear him apart as soon as he fell to the ground (Ps 27:3). The use of terms such as *lurkers* (Ps 55), *net* (Ps 55), chains, ropes, etc. suggests the plots of King David's close ones hatched in great secrecy to expedite his fall. The climax of these plots belonged to Ahithophel, David's advisor, and Absalom, David's son, who caused a rebellion during which the King was forced to leave Jerusalem.

Divine mercy is often requested to end physical suffering caused by illnesses. Even if the psalmist's suffering was physical, the pain he felt filled his entire being, confirmed in Psalm 31 by using the term *eyes*, *soul*, *belly,* and *bones*. The psalmist's existential decline is suggested by such Hebrew terms, which places the one who is suffering next to the dwelling of the dead and far away from their close ones, from life in the light.

The effects of invoking God's name and calling for mercy are visible in every psalm. It is enough to see the psalmist's spiritual state before asking for mercy and compare it with his feelings after God's merciful intervention. If the psalmist wanted to make peace with God, his dwelling in heavenly mercy guaranteed that his sins had been forgiven. The washing and purging with hyssop, the obedience to God, the joy felt in the body and the regaining of its firmness, the blotting out of transgressions and the return of the kind face, the unhesitating, just spirit, the pure, broken, and contrite heart, the joy of salvation, the acknowledgment of sin and the desire to straighten, the redemption through death, the joy of uttering the words of divine justice, the announcement of God's mercy, the regaining of the state of grace and the re-establishment in the environment of communion fully reveal the guarantee that God had shown His great mercy (Ps 51). If he was surrounded by enemies who wanted his death, as soon as divine mercy was poured out on him, the threats of enemies vanished away, and his soul felt free from any constraint or fear. The destruction of the opponents' refuges (Ps 9:6), their disarmament and their falling into their nets (Ps 57:6), the sleeping in peace in times of danger (Ps 4:8), his sitting on a rock and the lifting of his head up above the enemies (Ps 27:6), the refuge taken under the shadow of godly wings (Ps 57:1) or the concealment in the most secret place of the sanctuary (Ps 27:5; 31:20-21) are only a few of the signs which show the salvation of the psalmist. If mercy was asked for the curing of physical illnesses or the removal of spiritual weakness, the first signs

of curing offered the guarantee of the presence of God's mercy. In the case of physical suffering, the signs of God's intervention are obvious: the comforting of pain (Ps 9:13; 31:12; 86:13) and the healing, which entails the raising from the bed of suffering (Ps 41:10-11). Doxological manifestations and gratitude are a constant for those who benefit from God's mercy. This way, God's fidelity, providence, and love for those who call His name and ask for His help are extolled (31:22; 51:14-15; 56:10-11) (Craigie 2002, 255).

For the psalmist, God's mercy is the only thing to save him from suffering. Thus, the prayer *Lord, have mercy*, with all its variations, immediately attracts the attention of God, who instantly pours out his rich mercy on the one who suffers and asks for heavenly help (Bratcher and Reyburn, 1991, 510). Consequently, the psalmist offered the prayer that calls for mercy a central position in the contexts where it is used: five of the 16 psalms (Ps 4; 51; 56; 57; 67) where the prayer of mercy appears to begin with the words *have mercy* and the lamentations of six other psalms (Ps 6; 9; 27; 41; 86; 123) start with the same term. The one who asks for God's mercy does not doubt their request being fulfilled. The only uncertainty concerns the moment when God mercifully intervenes to end the suffering or the besiegement by oppressors. Therefore, according to Saint Gregory of Nyssa, trust in God and the request for His help are *sine qua non* conditions, without which one cannot receive God's mercy (St. Gregory of Nyssa, 1998, 194).

Our Lord Jesus Christ and His Healing Mercy

The conditions for the pouring out of divine mercy mentioned by Saint Gregory, namely the calling for help and faith, are much more visible in the events of the New Testament, which describe the healings performed by Jesus Christ, Whom the apostles and the crowd considered to be the Lord (*Κύριος*). This is very important, given that the moment He was deified (Parke-Taylor 1975, 104), our Saviour assumed the existential name of YHWH (translated by the fathers of the Septuagint as *Κύριος*), with all the prerogatives the Jews offered Him, except that of Father (Cullmann 1959, 236-7). Due to this linguistic procedure, the Christians of the Early Church assigned to their Lord (Jesus Christ) texts from the Old Testament uttered by YHWH or addressed to Him (von Rad 1975, 187). Thus, the Christological reading of the Old Testament became legitimate. As to the latter fact, I would like to mention that the Fathers assigned the words *Lord, have mercy* from the Christological psalms to

Jesus Christ (St. Cyril of Alexandria 1989: 196), Who mysteriously taught the suffering how to ask for God's mercy: "Listen, thus, to the prayer of our Master and learn it, for it is why He prayed so that you might learn how to pray..." [our translation] (St. Augustin 1997, 227; Cassiodorus 1990, 39). Therefore, according to bishop Theodoret of Cyrus (2003, 118), this prayer, assigned by the psalmists to Christ, became His prayer, *the Jesus Prayer*, and, through Him, the prayer of the suffering mentioned in the New Testament, of fathers/hesychasts and, implicitly, the prayer of our heart.

The use of the *prayer of mercy* or, better said, of the *heart of the psalmic prayer* in the New Testament opens, through the messianic titles attributed to our Lord, the prerogatives of its transformation into the Jesus Prayer. Those who ask for Jesus Christ's mercy and acknowledge Him as the son of David confirm the messianic horizon of this psalmic prayer, just as the Church Fathers anticipated in their Christological interpretations. By directly asking Jesus Christ for mercy, the suffering saw in Him the characteristics of the promised Saviour, Who would also pour out His grace on the Gentiles, confirmed by the healing of the Canaanite woman's daughter. However, before giving more details about this aspect, it is necessary to mention the evangelical contexts in which the calling for divine mercy appears.

In the Septuagint, the verb *hanan* corresponds directly to *ἐλεέω* (*to show mercy* or *goodwill*), as it best renders the meaning and nuances of the Hebrew term. The imperative form of this verb (*ἐλέησόν*) and the pronominal addition *με* (*on me*) or *ἡμᾶς* (*on us*) always refer to a personal relationship that is full of compassion, whether it is the mercy God pours out on people or interhuman compassion (Martin and Davids 2000, s. mercy). In the Gospels, the imperative *ἐλέησόν* is used in 11 verses in the following contexts: the healing of two blind men of Capernaum (Mt 9:27); the healing of the Canaanite woman's daughter (Mt 15:22); the healing of the lunatic boy (Mt 17:15); the healing of the two blind men at Jericho (Mt 20:30-31); the healing of Bartimaeus, the blind man of Jericho (Mk 10:47-48); the healing of the ten lepers (Lk 17:13); and the healing of a blind man of Jericho – most likely Bartimaeus (Lk 18:38-39).

By analyzing these events from the point of view of this undertaking, I have drawn the following conclusions: the calling for mercy mainly had two reasons: the suffering caused by illness (blindness and leprosy) and the attacks of the enemy and the murderer of men (acc. Jn 8:44) through possession; some ask for mercy for themselves, while others for their family (the father for his lunatic son, the Canaanite woman for her daughter); in some cases, mercy is called for individually, while in others two or

several people join to ask for Jesus Christ's help; one of those who asked for mercy was not part of the chosen people, namely the Canaanite woman (Blomberg 2001, 242); the names they used to address our Saviour are the following: Son of David (*Υἱὸς Δαυίδ* – Mt 9:27; Mk 10:48; Lk 18:39); Lord (*Κύριε*), Son of David (Mt 15:22; 20:30-31); Lord (*Κύριε* – Mt 17:5); Jesus (*Ἰησοῦ*), Son of David (Mk 10:47; Lk 18:38); Jesus, Master (*Ἰησοῦ, ἐπιστάτα* – Lk 17:13).

If we compare the evangelical contexts with the psalmic ones, we can notice the following: illness and physical suffering can be a common cause for the request of mercy; the same holds true for the plots of the enemies, only that the level at which the battle takes place is different; the lunatic boy and the Canaanite woman's daughter were being possessed by demons; we know that the former was suffering terribly – the demon threw him into the fire and into the water to take him to death – and the Canaanite woman's daughter was severely oppressed by a demon; besides individual prayer, mercy is also called for by several people in both categories of writings; perseverance in prayer characterises the requests of the suffering; mercy is called for when man is overwhelmed by his suffering, being helpless when faced with a test which goes beyond his own power; in the gospels, we have an element of novelty, namely that mercy is called for by some for others (the father of the lunatic asks for mercy for his son); the case of the Canaanite woman is also special, as she believes that the healing of her daughter will be perceived as an outpouring of divine mercy on her (St. John Chrysostom 1994, 600); the *prayer of mercy* is used by a woman belonging to another people, along with God's proper name and with a messianic title – this is extremely important, considering that someone from another people knew what the right way to ask for the Lord's mercy was; if in the psalms the prayer is addressed to God, the Lord, in the Gospels mercy is asked from Jesus Christ, the Lord of the New Testament; another difference with respect to the psalmic texts is the onomastic register – in the gospels, our Saviour is called: *Lord, Son of David, Jesus and Master.*

In conclusion, the invocation of the divine name and the request for mercy undergo no theological change, whether the authors were the psalmists or the suffering who lived in the times of our Saviour. The contexts that determine the calling for mercy are similar; the need for salvation is just as visible, and the effects of the outpouring of mercy are present in the psalmic paradigm. It is extremely relevant that the prayer of mercy is addressed to the Lord of the Old Testament by the psalmists and to the Lord of the New Testament by those who acknowledged this quality of Jesus Christ

(Stine 1992, 494). An important step for the prayer of mercy in the New Testament is that the heart of the psalmic prayer became the Jesus Prayer, given that it was addressed directly by the suffering of Jesus Christ.

The Prayer of the Heart / the Jesus Prayer in Hesychastic Practice

In Eastern Orthodox spirituality, the prayer of the heart or the Jesus Prayer is considered a form of continuous prayer in which one experiences the mystical life in Christ by having the mind descend on the altar of the heart to mysteriously live in communion with the Holy Trinity. It is evident that the complete formula of this prayer, which most mystics recommend – *Lord, Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner* – has a biblical origin. It is enough to draw such a conclusion to look only at the names and titles assigned to our Saviour. Even the rest of the prayer is inspired by the scriptural text, the words by which mercy is called for belonging to the tax collector who prayed at the temple (Lk 18:13). However, this formula can also be synthesized through a biblical syntagm this time from the psalms – *Lord, have mercy*. This summarises the two structures that make up the Jesus prayer: adoration and repentance (Gouillard 2008, 202). I believe it would be much better to say that the foundation of the prayer of the heart is this psalmic prayer, which was developed over the years by adding specific divine names and by underscoring its penitential character.

I should mention that the Desert Fathers also used other formulas or, better said, other short prayers, not only those mentioned above. Their desire to pray unceasingly, to be in communion with God, was much more important than the words through which they reached that state. The main source of inspiration for these prayers was the Holy Scripture. The syntagms *Maran atha!* (*The Lord is coming* – 1 Cor 16:23; Rev 22:20) or *Lord, save me!* (Mt 14:30) were among the first prayers uttered by the Christians of the Early Church (Breck 2003, 301). Hermits also used to take certain verses from the Holy Scriptures and say them for a long while until they replaced them with others. Saint Macarius the Great, who organized the monastic life in the Desert of Scetis, recommended several types of prayers to his disciples and allowed them to choose whichever option they found more suitable for the practice of the unceasing prayer. His recommendations included the following verses: *Lord, help me!* (Mt 15:25), *Save me, I pray, O Lord, as you wish and know!* (Ps 118:25) (Gouillard 2008, 38), *Let you will be, O Lord, as you wish* (Ps 33:22) or *Blessed be, Lord Jesus, help me!* (Ps 28:6). Abba Anthony used these two prayers: *Lord, save me as You know!* (Ps 3:7; 20:10) and

Lord, cast me not away! (Ps 51:11; 71:9); Saint Cassian repeated the words: "Make haste, O God, to deliver me! O Lord, make haste to help me!" (Ps 70:1); and Abba Lucius recommended unceasingly uttering Psalm 51, which begins with the words "Have mercy on me, O God!" (*Patericon* 1997, 234). Thus, emphasis was not on a certain prayer, but on the continuous invocation of God's name.

Nonetheless, it gradually became widespread that this act of praying unceasingly should be achieved by uttering the prayer whose fundamental structure was the name of our Saviour: "Lord, Jesus Christ, Son of God". Even if these names were not always used or not all at the same time, the conclusion was that there could be no communion with the One Who was called to come into the heart without them. Moreover, some Fathers believe that the last stage of the prayer of the heart could entail only one word (Jesus) or two (Lord, Jesus), as Diadochos, bishop of Photiki used to pray (Gouillard 2008, 52).

The one who lives among others but who wants to adopt this practice of the Church is recommended to start their continuous prayer with the short formula *Lord, have mercy*. According to Oliver Clément, this prayer was used by novices since the Early Church. Its penitential character prepared the Christians for a higher stage, in which they could utter the name of Jesus (Clément 1997, 26). The famous pilgrim Egeria wrote in her diary that this prayer was frequently used in the cult developed on the territory of the Holy Land in the first Christian centuries. She also noticed a unique practice, which involved children. After each name mentioned during the Vespers service, they answered with the words *Lord, have mercy* (Egeria 2006, 85). However, the prayer *Lord, have mercy*, which Rev. Ioan Bizău considers to be "a summary of the prayer of the heart and the true prayer of Eucharistic community" (Bizău 2009, 124), was also used by the great mystics of our spirituality. [our translation] St. Niketas Stethatos mentions an episode in which his spiritual father, St. Symeon the New Theologian, uttered this prayer when he saw and was surrounded by the uncreated light: "... astonished as he was, he started to cry out loud unceasingly: *Lord, have mercy*, as he remembered once he came back to his senses. At that moment, he was unaware that his voice was uttering words and that others could hear them..." (Gouillard 2008, 120). [our translation]

Therefore, this prayer, which Metropolitan Bartholomew of Cluj recommended to the faithful as a continuous prayer, could be a solution for those currently seeking unceasing communion with God. The words *Lord, have mercy* can be uttered both by

novices and those who reach a state of mystical ecstasy and partake of the radiance of God's glory.

Conclusions

The Prayer of the heart or the Jesus Prayer, as we know it today – *Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner* – originates in the scriptural practice of invoking the name of God. The early form of this prayer can be found in psalmic writings.

The prayer *Lord, have mercy*, uttered for the first time by the psalmists, became a means by which they and those who followed their example established an accurate, personal contact with God. Entire generations of believers adopted this model of prayer to reach a state of communion with God. Hesychasts took this biblical model of unceasing prayer and perfected it, creating even a complex method of uttering these words, which entails a unique breathing technique. Contemporary believers can adhere to this model of prayer to experience the possibility of praying unceasingly and directly feeling God's presence.

In the future, it would be desirable to outline and assert more firmly the scriptural, in the particular psalmic, origin of this prayer, which has decisively influenced Eastern Orthodox mysticism.

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The Bridal Chamber and the Mystical Wedding. Interpretations of Psalm 18(19):5 in Christian Tradition

Abstract

This paper examines the concept of the bridal chamber within the framework of the mystical wedding, particularly in Psalm 19. The article presents the significance of the bridal chamber in both secular and religious traditions throughout history. In ancient times, the retreat of the bride and groom into intimacy was considered the key moment of the wedding ceremony, and the marital union was not considered complete until it was consummated. Drawing on historical and patristic sources, the paper proposes four interpretations of the bridal chamber in biblical history: (1) the Holy Temple, in parallel with the Garden of Eden, the Church, and the Synagogue; (2) the womb of the Virgin Mary; (3) the tomb of Christ; and (4) man himself, both body and soul.

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Keywords

Bridal Chamber, Psalm 19, Hierogamy, Mystical Wedding, Garden of Eden, Temple

Introduction

Continuing the Jewish discourse on hierogamy, Christian theology associates salvation with the metaphor of the mystical wedding. In the New Testament, the Saviour suggested that He is a bridegroom (Mt 9:14-15), and He explicitly presents John the Baptist as *the friend of the bridegroom* (Jn 3:22-39), because John was His friend. In the Gospels, in some parables, salvation is described as a wedding day (Mt 22:1-14;

25:1-13), and in the Pauline epistles the Church is designated as the bride of Christ, betrothed to the Saviour (Eph 5:21-23; 2 Cor 11:1-3).

While at the beginning of the Bible, in the Book of Genesis, an uncompleted wedding can be observed, at the end of it, in the Book of Revelation, it is explicitly stated that "the wedding of the Lamb has come, and His bride has made herself ready" (Rev 19:7). So, as can be seen, this topic is not present in the New Testament only, but also in the Old Testament, specifically in the discourses of the prophets, in Psalms, and Song of Songs, serving as a leitmotiv throughout the Holy Scriptures. Therefore, a large number of works have been written on this subject, from both Jewish and Christian perspectives, emphasizing that the bridegroom from Scripture must be YHWH or Jesus Christ, and His bride must be the world as a whole, the Synagogue, the Church, or any person, depending on the context.

Within this framework, the present investigation seeks to clarify the earthly site of the mystical wedding in Christian thought. Specifically, the first part of this study provides an overview of the role of the bridal chamber in world history, considering its significance across different cultures and time periods. The second section, which forms the core of the work, analyses various hypotheses regarding the possible locations of the bridal chamber in the context of biblical hierogamy. These include the Holy Temple, the womb of the Virgin Mary, the tomb of the Saviour, and, last but not least, man himself. The final section of this paper offers general reflections on the place of the bridal chamber in the Christian tradition, leaving the question open, as each of the variants proposed in this study has its own arguments. They are not mutually exclusive, but complementary images, even juxtaposed, which together form the ideal picture of the bridal chamber according to the biblical narrative.

Bridal Chamber in History of the World

Regardless of culture, historical period, or geographical place, the consummation of marriage has always been a special moment for people, accompanied by special rituals.

In the History of Religions, the concept of the bridal chamber or nuptial bed has been present since ancient times in Ugarit, in some ritual texts such as RS 24.291 (*KTU*[3] 1.132) (see Dietrich, Mayer 1996, 165-176), in Mesopotamia, in *the Emar's entu Installation* (see Fleming 1992), and also in Egypt, in *the Liturgy for a New Year's*

festival imported from Bethel to Syenes by Exiles from Rash (Papyrus Amherst 63) (see Steiner 1991, 362-363).

It also appears in Herodotus' writings regarding Babylon (*The Histories*, 1.181.5), in the *Iliad* (XVIII.490) and in the *Odyssey* (XXIII.198-202), and even in the poems of Catullus (*Carmina* 66). In Latin culture, it was the mother's duty to prepare the bridal chamber for her son on the wedding day (Pilitsis 1981, 12), while the best friend of the bridegroom had the duty to guard this room (lat. *thalamos*) during the wedding, for the two spouses not to be disturbed (Oakley, Sinos, 1993). This ritual was almost the same in Greece, but slightly different in ancient Israel, where a friend of the bridegroom was responsible for preparing the bridal chamber, not the bridegroom's mother (Malul 1989, 241-278).

In biblical literature, even from the Book of Genesis, it is mentioned that in Jewish culture, the wedding culminated with the bride and groom entering the bridal chamber (named in Hebrew huppah), while the guests were celebrating and rejoicing (Gn 29:15-29) [1]. The bridal chamber is also mentioned in the Old Testament, in Tobit 6:17-18, in Joel 2:16, and in the apocryphal literature (IV Ezra 9:38-10:4; Joseph and Asenath, 15), while in the New Testament, the bridal chamber is only suggested in Matthew 9:15; 22:10 [2].

In the early centuries of Christianity, the bridal chamber is mentioned in *The Shepherd of Hermas* (23, 1). It occupies a special place in Gnostic literature, being present in *The Wedding Hymn of Acta Thomae,* in *The Gospel of Philip*, and not only [3]. Furthermore, it seems that the Valentinians had a special ritual dedicated to the bridal chamber (see Strathearn 2009, 83-103), attested by both Clement of Alexandria (Clement Alexandrinul 2020, 90) and Irenaeus of Lyon (*Adversus Haeresis*, 1.21.3, 196), but without any details about it.

According to Constantine Porphyrogenitus (10th century), in the Middle Ages, in the Byzantine Empire, the Basileus and Augusta were greeted with cheers by the crowds when they entered the nuptial chamber on their wedding day, but there is no record of any kind of blessing for the nuptial chamber by the clergy (Radle 2012, 135, n.18).

In the same century, according to the *Sinai Gr. 957* manuscript, in Christianity existed both a special prayer for preparation of the bridal chamber, named in Greek *Εὐχὴ εἰς τὸ στῆσαι παστὸν γάμου*, and a special prayer for the "untying" of the bridal chamber, named *Εὐχὴ εἰς λύσ(ιν) παστοῦ γάμου*. Similar prayers are found in that time in *Vatican Gr. 1863* and *Ottoboni Gr. 344* manuscripts, but also in some documents of

the East Syriac Church, with the particularity that there the bridal chamber was blessed on the day of the wedding, and on the 7th day after the wedding it was "untied," after the "bridal week", time during which the two spouses spent time together in intimacy in a specific part of the house (Radle 2012, 139-143).

In that period, Western Christianity had a special blessing for the bridal chamber, recited by the clergy, known in Latin as *Benedictio ad thalamus* (Van Houts 2023, 119-141), and even a *bedding ceremony*, referring to a wedding custom in which the couple was laid together in the nuptial bed in front of numerous witnesses, usually family, friends, and neighbors, to fulfill the marriage.

Nowadays, this practice is not so meaningful to people. In Christianity, the wedding ceremony still includes references to the intimate union of the spouses, and the wedding night is a special moment for many couples, but not as visible as in the past.

Interpretations of the bridal chamber in the biblical hierogamy

"[At the ends of the Earth, the Lord] has prepared a tent for the sun, and from there it rises like a bridegroom coming out from its bridal chamber" (Ps 19:5b-6^{BHS})

Over time, various authors have tried to clarify who is the bridegroom and who is the bride within the mystical wedding, in the context of Psalm 19. Perhaps this aspect was not very clear for pagans. For them, the sun was a deity to which they worshipped (Ezek 6:4), as can be seen in Egypt, where the god Ra was famous; in Rome, where it was celebrated *Sol Invinctus*, but also in Babylon, where the divine couple *sun-moon* was well-known: *Šamaš-Sîn*. This is why the Scriptures urge believers not to worship the sun, because it is only a creature made by God on the fourth day.

Meanwhile, in Christianity, this question is quite simple (see Pașca-Tușa 2011; 2018; 2020). Jesus Christ must be the bridegroom, because He is *the sun of righteousness* (Mal 3:20^{BHS}) and *the light of the world* (Jn 8:12). According to the Bible, there is a close relationship between the king and the sun (Pașca-Tușa 2018, 425): the sun represents the king, and the king leads the people and helps them in wars, like the sun. (Josh 10:13). He is the Messiah, and "the glory of God comes from the East" (Ezek 43:2).

For this reason, the focus of this paper will no longer be on the bridegroom or the bride in Psalm 19, but on the nuptial chamber – the tent from which the sun rises like

a bridegroom – trying to find its characteristics, and its place in the World, where God and man intimately encounter each other, as in a wedding moment.

To designate the place where the sun retreats, the psalmist used the term אֹהֶל (Heb. *ohel*), which means an ordinary tent. For the bridal chamber, however, the Jews used the word חוּפָּה (Heb. *huppah*), which was the chamber, canopy or bed where the bride and groom retreated on the wedding night and consummated their marriage, as can be seen, for example, in Joel 2:16, where it is written: "Gather the people, consecrate the assembly; bring together the elders, gather the children, those nursing at the breast. Let the bridegroom leave his room and the bride her chamber" (Tob 7:15-17).

In the Gospel of Philip, this chamber is called: ⲛⲩⲙⲫⲱⲛ, ⲡⲁⲥⲧⲟⲥ or ⲕⲟⲓⲧⲱⲛ (Strathearn 2009, 89). It says that *the children of the bridal chamber* can enter there every day (*Gos. Phil.* 122), because the mystical union celebrated there is eternal (*Gos. Phil.* 78). Perhaps the tent had some marital connotations for the Jews, in everyday life, as can be seen in Genesis 24:67, where it is said that Isaac entered his mother's tent with Rebekah and loved her there. But since the Bible in Psalm 19 does not speak about an ordinary wedding, but about hierogamy, it is obvious that there cannot be an ordinary room, but a special space, as we will see in the following chapters, where we will present some hypotheses about the bridal chamber.

The bridal chamber is the Holy Temple

There is a close connection between the Garden of Eden, the Tabernacle, the Temple in Jerusalem, the Church, and the Kingdom of God. All these places are spaces of encounter between Heaven and Earth, between *here* and *beyond*, built according to a unique pattern: in the centre is always the Divine Presence (in the Garden of Eden was the Tree of Life || in the Holy Tabernacle was the *Kavod*, likewise in the Temple in Jerusalem || in the Church is the Holy Eucharist || in the Kingdom of Heaven is God Himself), and around it, concentrically, is placed the whole of creation.

Following this pattern, rabbinic literature asserts that God is present amid the world, surrounded by angels who, as true gentlemen of honor, participate in the mystical wedding along with the whole of creation (*Genesis Rabbah* 58,3).

In this perspective, from the Christian point of view, the Church is par excellence the place where man's direct encounter with God takes place, reproducing, on the one hand, the scene in the Garden of Eden and anticipating, on the other hand, the eschatological encounter in the Kingdom of Heaven. Having consecrated himself

to God through Baptism and accepted divine paternity by grace (Eph 1:5; Gal 4:7; Rom 8:15; 8:23), man is incorporated into the body of the Church, the spouse of Christ. In this way, he has the possibility of inheriting the patrimony of the Father and, through the Church, of re-entering the Garden of Eden, the Kingdom of Heaven, which is man's home (Phil 3:20), the ultimate place of encounter between the Creator and His creation.

By its nature, the Church is *a thin place*, between Heaven and Earth, and the mystical wedding must take place in the middle of it, close to the altar, because nowhere else can the meeting between the bridegroom and the bride be more intimate than in the place where each sacrifices for the other.

God is present everywhere, for the whole creation, like the sun which, although it is only one and in one place, shines everywhere in the world and can be felt in many houses simultaneously. To demonstrate that He is present everywhere, God spoke to the people in many ways: sometimes through unbelievers, sometimes through animals, or even through a bush, as happened to Moses, without any problem for Him (*Exodus Rabbah* 2:5). But just as there is more water in a river than in the air, so God's *Shekhinah* is more present in the holy place than anywhere else. So, the mystical wedding must be in the Church | in the Garden of Eden | in the Holy Temple | in the Kingdom of Heaven, which are all expressions of the same single reality.

In the Jewish conception, the sanctuary was located in the center of the Earth (*Ioma* 64b). The consecration of the Temple was a wedding day for the Jews, and their return from Exile and re-entry into the Temple in Jerusalem was like a wedding moment for them, Israel meeting its Bridegroom there, in the Holy Temple, in the new Garden of Eden (*Leviticus Rabbah* 9:6; *Song of Songs Rabbah* 5:1)

God revealed Himself to the people in the Holy Tabernacle, between the two cherubim that were above the Ark of the Law (Ex 25:22). The people, however, did not worship the cherubim, but the One who sits on the cherubim (Ps 98:1). So, as in the case of the Song of Songs, YWHW is present in the Holy Temple, in the midst of the people, paradoxically by His supra-present absence, living among the people as He promised (Is 25:8). Moreover, He receives the people in His place (Ex 25:10-11) and dines with them.

In the Gospel of Philip, the mystical wedding is described as an initiation in three stages, corresponding to the tripartite architectural structures observed in many Middle Eastern temples, including the Jerusalem Temple (69:14ff) (MacRae 1984, 184-185). In the final stage of the Temple, designated the bridal chamber,

a sacred marriage was celebrated, binding for the etenal life (Robinson 1982, 30). According to some authors, this ritual probably involved a holy kiss (59:2-6) (Nibley 2005, 526), while others think that this act (gr. *ἀσπάζομαι*) could be a hug or a greeting (Lampe 1961, 245-246). Regardless of its form, the most important thing for this investigation is that such a practice is associated by some scholars with the Temple of Jerusalem (Schenke 1997, 403).

In the New Testament, the Body of Christ is the temple of the Holy Spirit (Jn 2:21), the tent that was not made by human hands (Heb 9:11), where the Lord came into the world to save human nature. Furthermore, Christ will be personally in the midst of creation at the end of time. People will no longer need another temple (Rev 21:22), because He is greater than the temple (Matt 12:6). As has been said, the most essential thing in the Word is not the tabernacle or the temple, but the One who is inside it (Mt 23:21).

St Peter, referring to his body, calls it a tent (2 Pt 1:13), but more than that, in the Gospel of John (1:14), it is said that "the Word Himself became a tent", because He gathers in Himself divinity and humanity, time and eternity, soul and body, the uncreated and the created (Sf. Grigorie de Nyssa 1995, 128-130). In this sense, it is essential to note that in ancient Judaism, the bridal chamber was the same size as the holy tent and was decorated similary, reinforcing a specific connection between the two (Bb 6, 4). (Pitre 2018, 126)

From an ontological point of view, there is only one archetypal reality of the bridal chamber, and that is eternally in Heaven. The others (the Garden of Eden, the Tabernacle, the Temple, the Church) are only reflections of the bridal chamber of Heaven, helpful for a man to perceive that reality according to his measure and to understand what is beyond the veil.

In the Christian view, the Church has surpassed the Tabernacle and the Holy Temple. While in the Temple YHWH was present amid the people only through His glory (Ezek 10:4), in the Church He is truly present, because for Christians the Eucharist is Jesus Christ Himself, the actual tree of life (|| Hos 14:9), with whom the believers have real communion within the Divine Liturgy.

Thus, in Christian thought, the union between man and God is accomplished in the bridal chamber, which in the Old Testament was the Holy Tabernacle, then the Holy Temple, and now it is the Holy Church, the inaugurated Kingdom of God.

The bridal chamber is the womb of the Virgin Mary

In Sermons 187, 188, and 191, St Augustine used Ps 18(19) to explain the birth of the Saviour into the world, affirming that the Virgin's womb is the actual bridal chamber, Christ is the true sun, and the Church is the bride prepared for the wedding. St Augustine further affirms that every believer who has renounced sin can be a virgin in front of God and give birth to the divine Logos by confessing the truth to people (St Augustin 1992, 41).

The womb of the Virgin is the bridal chamber in which, through Jesus Christ, the divine and human natures were united as in a temple. The Saviour is *the sun of righteousness* (Mal 3:20). The womb of the Virgin is the holy tabernacle, from which the Saviour, coming forth, appeared to the world like a bridegroom on the wedding day, as it is written in the Psalms (Ps 19:5). So, by descending into the womb of His Mother and assuming, by *enhypostatise*, human nature in all respects except sin, He became one body with the Virgin, having one flesh. By this act, however, Christ did nothing else but anticipate the nuptial union between Himself and the Church, which He would accomplish on Golgotha at the proper time.

In the Epistle to the Ephesians (5:29-31), the Apostle Paul says that the Saviour and the Church are a single body. He is the head, and the believers are the members. This union between man and God would not have been possible, in the broadest sense, for each person, if it had not first taken place in the womb of the Virgin (Chavasse 1940, 152-15). Just as the Lord, after the Resurrection, passed through locked doors without opening them (Jn 20:26), so He passed through the womb of the Virgin without damaging it, as Ezekiel had foretold (Ez 44:2).

The bridal chamber is the Saviour's Tomb

In the Christian Orthodox Church, the Paschal hymnography beautifully describes the nuptial relationship between Jesus Christ and the people. In the Greek tradition, the first three days of Holy Week are known as *the Days of the Bridegroom* [4]. In Byzantine liturgical tradition, the hymn "Behold, the Bridegroom cometh" is sung in Church during this period, recalling the mystical wedding. Along with it, the hymn "I see Your Bridal Chamber adorned" is sung in the Church in this period, which is important for the present investigation because the Greek term used for *chamber* is *τον νυμφώνα*, i.e., bridal chamber.

The New Testament scene in which Mary Magdalene searches for Christ after the Resurrection, as it is constructed in the Fourth Gospel, seems to be composed on the narrative level according to the model of the Song of Songs. Mary Magdalene looks for the body of Jesus, which she did not find in the tomb, just as the woman in the Song of Songs once looked for her beloved in bed, whom she did not find at home (Song 3:1-6).

At the same time, the angels placed in the tomb on either side of the stone in the Resurrection scene – the interior of the tomb being empty – are aesthetically echoes of the Ark of the Law and the Covenant on Mount Sinai, which, according to some exegetes, represents the wedding moment in the Old Testament between YHWH and the people of Israel. The tomb of the Lord is, therefore, reminiscent of the bridal chamber, both philosophically and aesthetically.

In the Fourth Gospel, the Resurrection of the Saviour takes place in a garden. In biblical exegesis, this place is associated with both the Garden of Eden and the Song of Songs. Although Adam and Eve did not give birth to children until they were expelled from the Garden of Eden (cf. Gn 4:1), they were a couple there. Although in the Song of Songs the bridegroom sometimes seems to be absent from the bridal chamber (Song 5:2-8//1:4; 2:4), the main action took place in a garden (4:16; 5:1; 6:11). So, the garden is a wedding place in biblical aesthetics, and the fact that Mary Magdalene, according to the Gospel of John (20:14), mistook Jesus for the gardener after the resurrection is not without significance, but suggests the idea of mystical wedding.

Expanding on this image, St Romanos the Melodist says that, according to the New Testament, heaven should be the bridal chamber where Christ receives people after the Resurrection, as seen in the parable of the ten virgins (Sf. Roman Melodul 2012, 184). In this case, the tomb is nothing more for man than a cloakroom through which he passes in order to reach the true bridal chamber, the Kingdom of God [5].

Last but not least, with regard to the tomb of the Saviour as a bridal chamber, the Syrian theologians use the term *gnōnā* for the baptismal font or baptistery (Klijn 2003, 28; Murray 1975, 39), because in the Christian faith baptism means death and resurrection together with Christ, as St Paul also says in the Letter to the Romans (Rom 6:3-11).

The bridal chamber is the man himself

The idea that man himself is a bridal chamber is quite reasonable, considering that the human body is the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 6:19, 20), or if the temple built of stone was a bridal chamber for the Jews, as have already shown in this paper,

then it is natural to think that man, the temple of the Holy Spirit, should himself be a nuptial chamber (see Pugliese 2004, 299).

St Basil of Ancyra says that no virgin should seek immorality with her tongue, her hearing, her eyes, or her mind, but adorn her body like a bridal chamber, because there her soul unites with God like a bride and a bridegroom (Sf. Vasile al Ancyrei 2014, 146). Furthermore, St Ephrem the Syrian says that, in relation to God, the human soul is a bride, the body is a bridal chamber, and the senses are the guests of this universal event, the mystical wedding. (St. Ephrem the Syrian 1998, 28).

In this respect, in Christian spirituality, the *mystical ecstasy* is not so important for the knowledge of God, as *enstasis,* because the Kingdom of God is within man (Lk 17:21). Only in this way can man enter the Kingdom of Heaven, being ready at any moment to give himself to the Bridegroom who is already there, ready for the mystical wedding.

Taken as a whole, human life is a continuous occasion of encounter between man and God. In this respect, prayer is an important moment for man and God to be together, and this does not happen anywhere, but in the chamber of the soul (Mt 6:6 – *ταμεῖον*), in maximum intimacy. But more than prayer, Eucharistic communion brings man closer to God, body and soul. Through it, man receives the body of Jesus Christ and obtains perfect union with Him. Thus, for Christians, the Divine Liturgy is a nuptial event during which Christians consecrate their bodies and souls to God, as God has ordained (Lv 21:8).

While Gnostic literature maintains that the human body has negative valences and that therefore only the human soul can be a bridal chamber for the mystical marriage, Christian literature maintains that the human body contains the image of God and therefore, together with the soul, it must be a bridal chamber, as can be seen, for example, in the case of holy relics, which are an ark in which divine gifts rest.

In the Divine Liturgy, believers unite with Christ and become members of the ecclesial Body of Christ. They receive a foretaste of the Resurrection, and as they are spiritually alive, they draw closer to Christ, particularly through the Eucharist. In this sacred sacrament, humanity and divinity are brought into perfect union, fulfilling the mystical wedding.

Conclusions

This study has explored the significance of the nuptial chamber within the context of the mystical wedding. In the first section, the special role of the bridal chamber in world civilizations was highlighted, particularly in the writings of antiquity and the Middle Ages, when rituals for its blessing were present in both Eastern and Western Christian traditions.

Regarding the tent of Psalm 19, we demonstrated that it likely refers to the bridal chamber, offering four interpretations: (1) the Holy Temple, akin to the Garden of Eden, the Church, and the Synagogue; (2) the womb of the Virgin Mary; (3) the tomb of Christ; and (4) humanity itself, encompassing both body and soul.

When considering the significance of the nuptial chamber within the Christian tradition, it is essential to acknowledge that its role in biblical hierogamy remains open. The interpretations presented here are not mutually exclusive, but rather serve to illustrate a complementary and interwoven set of images that collectively shape the ideal conception of the bridal chamber in Christian thought.

Notes

[1] In the Greek world, wedding songs are called *epithalamium*, derived from *ἐπι* + *θάλαμος*, which means song dedicated to the bridal chamber/bed.

[2] The Patriarch Callistus of Constantinople, reproducing the text of Mt 9:15, says "the disciples of the Bridegroom" (*οἱ τοῦ νυμφίου μαθηταί*) instead of "the children of the nuptial chamber" (*οἱ υἱοὶ τοῦ νυμφῶνος*). See Corbu 2024, 51.

[3] In Gnostic literature, the bridal chamber can be seen in: *Gospel of Thomas* 75, 104; *Dialogue of the Saviour* 138.48–50; *Second Treatise of the Great Seth* 57.10–18; 62.6–10; 65.35–66.8; 67.5–11; *Authoritative Teaching* 22.23–34; *Teachings of Silvanus* 94.19–29; *Exegesis of the Soul* 132.2–133.10; *Tripartite Tractate* 93.1; 122.15–16, 21; 128.33; 138.11; *Gospel of Philip* 65.1–26; 67.2–27; 69.1–70.4; 70.9–71.15; 72.17–23; 74.12–24; 76.1–5; 81.34–82.26; 84.14–86.18. See 2009, 85, n. 4.

[4] In Orthodox churches in Greece, during the first part of Holy Week, it is customary to place a life-size icon of Jesus the Bridegroom in the centre of the nave. On Good Friday, this is replaced by the Holy Cross, which is placed in the centre of the church instead of the icon of Jesus the Bridegroom.

[5] In his commentary on the Parable of the Ten Virgins, St. Jerome states explicitly that those who awoke from their sleep entered the bridal chamber [of the Bridegroom] (lat. cubiculum sponsi). See Fer. Ieronim 2023, 365.

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Abraham's prayer for Abimelech (Gn 20) – an Old Testament model of prayer for one's neighbor

Abstract

This study, based on Genesis 20, where Abraham prays for Abimelech, presents an Old Testament model of intercessory prayer. It explores the theological significance of prayer in the Hebrew Bible and its impact on relationships with God and others. The narrative follows Abraham's journey to the land of Gherar, his encounter with King Abimelech, and the subsequent divine intervention to protect the sanctity of marriage and the promise of an heir. Emphasizing the role of prayer as a tool for spiritual growth and transformation, the study contrasts Abraham's flaws with Abimelech's integrity, highlighting the power of prayer to effect change and divine favor. It discusses Abraham's intercession as foundational, illustrating the importance of praying for others, which aligns with divine will and brings personal blessings. The allegorical interpretations of Abimelech's encounter and the broader implications for understanding biblical narratives are also considered.

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Intercessory Prayer, Abraham, Abimelech, Genesis 20, Divine Intervention

Introduction (about prayer)

"The act by which man turns to God to praise Him or to ask for His favor," prayer is also how we acknowledge our dependence on our Creator and ask Him: "O God, do not forsake me" (Ps 70:18). Even "remembering Him is prayer", which "constitutes a way of knowing" Him, by which God introduces man "into His intimacy" and, if necessary, intervenes in history to fulfill requests. Although words are essential because they express thoughts when we pray, their number matters less; God appreciates the

"inner disposition of the soul," for prayer is more "the sincere outburst of a soul in relationship with its Creator" (Stancu 2018, 226-7).

"Considered among the vital values," prayer can be understood as the work of "the divine Spirit in man," as "the uncreated Light of the Holy Trinity in the human nature and as the graceful life that permeates all that is within us." If "after the work," prayer is "the sustainer of the world," after its appropriation, through it, we accompany and unite ourselves with God, acquiring "a principle of life" which "elevates both body and soul in a deeper register than the biological and the psychic." "Through prayer, man makes the most of God's unmixed presence in creation and His openness to communion, and makes himself the recipient of His grace, thus exalting his life in God." Since "an organic, ontological relationship is established between prayer and life," prayer is "the source of life, in the sense of the ontological regeneration of human life." It is a prayer that "maintains life and ennobles it," it is "a co-working of a man with God in the act of building immortal gods," which means that through it, "a new creation is constantly being made." Prayer is a response given to the Heavenly Father, through which man is ennobled, for "every power of the human being, when it is enriched by prayer, becomes above the world." Since "to be human is to pray," we maintain that "prayer is the defining, fundamental element of the human being." Because it is normal and natural, human nature tends "wholly towards God," and "through prayer," it moves "towards the building origin of all that is." Precisely because he is a "praying creature" (Vlad 2019, 791), man "differs from the animals" and "joins himself to the angels." (John Chrysostom 2005, 88)

Through prayer, man "penetrates" "like a diver into the endless depths of God who, as a loving Person, remains distinct from the one who prays and keeps him distinct as well." (Stăniloae 2004, 669) "Prayer is a temporal deviation from the human self, encompassing it, so that, reaching God, it returns full of fruit, to the same human self, enriching it." (Stan 1983, 514)

Praying involves communicating with the Creator of the universe, a personal Being willing to listen to people, and has included prayer in His divine plan. Thus, "prayer is innate to the human heart," and because it portrays man's paternal relationship with his Creator, it must be understood as "the fellowship of the child of God with his heavenly Father." Keeping the same family ties, man's prayer to God is an "outpouring of the heart before the Creator, and His response is the outpouring of His blessings" (*Bible Dictionary* 1998, 213).

In the Holy Scriptures, "prayers abound", in the pages of which countless episodes are recounted in which "God's people pray." "Like a conversation among friends," "biblical prayer" "presupposes a mutual posture of trust and devotion," for it "offers both comfort/support and challenge," and "its purpose includes serving others" (*Dictionary of Biblical Images and Symbols* 2014, 888-9).

"Prayer is different from any other type of communication because when we pray, we can expect the One we are praying to understand our incoherent mumblings and translate them into effective prayers." This image corresponds to "that of a loving parent listening to the confused cry of a child" (for "we do not know how to pray properly, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with unutterable sighs." cf. Rom 8:26) and which responds to profound but not very well expressed longing" (*Dictionary of Biblical Images and Symbols* 2014, 890).

"A key dimension of the divine-human relationship," prayer "marks the people of God and is rooted in human need and divine love and sufficiency" (*Dictionary of Biblical Images and Symbols* 2014, 890).

In the account in Gherar, God appears to Abimelech in a dream and assures him that, after giving Abraham "the woman back" because he is a prophet, he will pray for him, and so he will live (Phil 20:7).

Of the multitude of Hebrew terms [1], which can be translated as "supplication (prayer)," the Masoretic Text here uses the verb פָּלַל [2] (which can also have the meaning: "to intervene," "to judge" or "to meditate"), – with eight occurrences in the Pentateuch: Gn 20:7,17 [3], 48:11 [4], Nm 11:2, 21:7 (two occurrences, meaning: "to intervene") and Dt 9:20,26 [5]. From the same radical is also formed the noun תְּפִלָּה, which has no occurrence in the Pentateuch.

Alongside the terms mentioned, other "more expressive formulations are preferred: to spread one's heart, to praise, to bless, to rejoice, to sing, to seek the face of God" (Fouilloux et all 1998, 183).

Abraham moves

"No other person is more important to the message of the Torah than the patriarch Abraham, who plays a decisive role in the book of Genesis." A "central figure," the narratives about Abraham are spread over fifteen chapters, during which one can see the importance of his actions, a "distinctive pattern" that "oscillates between the divine promise of a seed, i.e. an heir, and the persistent complications that threaten to

thwart the fulfillment of that promise." Thus, this episode (Gn 20) is the "complication" that followed the divine "promise" of an heir (Gn 17-18) and preceded the "fulfillment" of Isaac's birth (21) (Kaiser 2001, 173-4).

After only fifteen years in Mamvri's grove, the patriarch "moved his camp again to the south of the country," "to that land where once Hagar had fled because of her mistress Sarra's emplacements." Probably, "the terrible calamity that had fallen upon the valley of Sodom with its five cities, the appearance of this desolate place, the idea of ruin [...] made the whole surrounding locality unbearable for the docile patriarch" (Lopuhin 1944, 349), who found himself unable to practice hospitality, for, because of the destroyed cities, there were no more travelers to cross the threshold and stay (Ginzberg 2003, 216).

From Hebron, the "chief home" of Abraham, the patriarch, he traveled, from time to time, "some distance in search of better pastures for his flocks." This may be another reason why the patriarch also reached Gherar [6], a Philistine city "close to the seashore," at a distance of "65 km. from Hebron" (Halley 1983, 100).

For other commentators, Abraham chose to go "to a lonely region where there were no connections with the wilderness of Shur" because he intended "to live in some seclusion." It is argued that Abraham "only occasionally went to the city of Gherar, probably for supplies," wishing to "isolate himself" before the birth of Isaac (Wurmbrant 1994, 80).

Although some exegetes consider that we have here an example of a "double narrative" (from "different sources"), that this story is the same as the one from Egypt, related earlier (Gn 12:10-20), chapter 20 did not arrive in the book of Genesis by chance, "but was carefully placed by its author where it is and in its present form." So, to discover the meaning of this narrative, we must relate it to "the whole book" and "take into account both the factors that were carefully prepared by the preceding chapters and those that are covered by the following chapters. The key factor seems to be related to the seed promised to Abraham from Sarra." This view is confirmed "by how the events of Abraham's life are chosen to be placed throughout the narrative." For example, if the distance of the events recounted in chapter 17 from the previous one is 13 years, in five consecutive chapters (17-21), the events take place "at an interval of not more than one year", and in chapter 23, the event recounted is at a distance of 15 years. Tracing the "frequency of the events related" in the book of Genesis, "on the time axis of the life" of the patriarch, we see a concentration of five chapters when Abraham was 99-100 years

old, which proves the importance of the events related there. If fourteen chapters cover about a hundred years of Abraham's life, five of them "focus on the events surrounding the birth of Isaac." Thus, "how the narrative has been constructed draws our attention to its focal point: Isaac," "the unique bearer of the seed from which, in the perspective of history, that seed of the woman was to be born, which would crush the head of the serpent (Gn 3:15)" (Sansgău 2009, 121-2).

St. John Chrysostom presents the "right Abraham" as a stranger and traveler on earth, for "he did not settle in any place" and "all his wealth was only in servants and flocks!" "Look at the life of the righteous, how simple and humble it was! They moved easily from place to place. They ordered their lives as if they were strangers and travelers on earth. They pitched their tents here and there as if they lived in a foreign land." (John Chrysostom 1989, 128)

Although Scripture does not tell us the reason for Abraham's move, it can be seen that the patriarch "did not move in vain and without purpose," if he had not moved his "tent," "how would all the Gerasenes have known how much God cares for him?" "Because of the trials" he was subjected to, "the virtue of the right shone more brightly." Before, "when he went down to Egypt," he was "a stranger," "a stranger," and "one whom no one knew," but he returned "suddenly laden with much honor." Likewise, when he "dwelt temporarily" in Gherar, "at first" he did nothing remarkable, "but later he enjoyed so much help from God that the king and all the inhabitants there served him rightly with all eagerness" (John Chrysostom 1989, 129-133).

From "God's silence" about moving from the place where he had lived "in fellowship with God" to Mamvri, where he had interceded to save Sodom, now turned into a "smoking valley" full of ruins, we can assume that "Abraham acted on his initiative, without direct direction from God." Quite a dangerous action, "a wrong move," "ready to be made a matt by God" (Phillips 1992, 199-200).

Abraham in Gherar

"What an extraordinary continuation of the previous chapter!" After hosting God Himself (Gn 17) and boldly interceding for the inhabitants of Sodom, it is amazing to observe Abraham behaving in Gherar with the same fear he showed in Egypt (Gn 12:10-20). The way this chapter is phrased presupposes knowledge of the previous episodes. It is noteworthy that Abimelech was so God-fearing and pious compared to the Sodomites; on the other hand, it is interesting that for the second time, Sarra is

taken into a royal harem, this time very shortly before she gives birth to Isaac (Wenham 2003, 54).

The events recounted in chapter 20 teach us about the relationship between Abraham and God. In parting with Lot, Abraham shows his "victory in giving up the treasures of Sodom," and in "the matter of the destruction of Sodom," a "memorable intercession" came to light. We do not know how much time had passed since the news was received at Mamvri, but there is a possibility that, at that time, "Sarah was already with child, and even if she was not, the time prophesied by the Lord was under pressure of events." So we know neither the exact time nor the reasons that led Abraham to live in Gherar "as a stranger," what happened to the patriarch, "how did he forget his experience in Egypt? How was such a fall possible, after all he had experienced in the past year?." Some commentators suggest that "things are, it seems, left unclear," believing that the devil was „no stranger to the plans God had for Abraham." Thus, on this occasion, "more than ever before, the promised Seed itself was in danger" (Sansgău 2009, 120-1).

The structure of chapter 20, which relates to this episode, is interesting. The chapter opens with two introductory verses, which geographically locate the event and set out the "method/tactics" Abraham adopts to escape with his life and the consequence of declaring Sarah his sister. Beginning in verse 3, the action occurs in a dream, presenting the dialogue between God and Abimelech. Not only does God initiate the conversation, but He is also the One who responds and assures Abimelech of His omniscience and that He Himself has kept him from sin. If the first intervention resembles a divine decree: "You shall die for the woman whom you have taken, for she has a husband" (Gn 20:3), after Abimelech disavows himself by showing that he did not know this fact, in the end, although the command remains just as firm: "And now give the man back his wife", he is presented with two options: to obey and live, or to resist God, and then, "you know that you will surely die, you and all of you." At the same time, God also presents the benefits of choosing good, for the "man" from whom he took the woman "is a prophet and will pray for you and you will live" (Gn 20:7). From verse 8 onwards, the events recounted no longer take place in a dream, and present Abimelech, who soon ("in the morning" Gn 20:8) relates to all his servants [7] the dialogue he had with God in the dream, and calls Abraham to carry out the divine command. A conversation with Abraham follows, in which the latter has to answer Abimelech's question: "What have you done to us? What have we done wrong to you [...]? [...] What

have you done to us that you have done this?" (Gn 20:9-10). Abraham's strategy of declaring his wife to be his sister is based on the following three rationales: 1. he believed that "through that land, the fear of God is lacking" and that he would be "killed for the woman's sake"; 2. his statement is true because his wife "is indeed his sister after his father, but not after his mother"; and 3. this statement is a decision made by mutual consent, for, with their wanderings, he convinced his wife to say about him: "He is my brother" (Gn 20:11-13). Verses 14-16 depict Abimelech returning to Sarra and giving her many valuable gifts. The final verses, 17-18, depict Abraham praying to God, who brings healing.

From a historical perspective, after the episode at Mamvri Oak, after the destruction of Sodom and the rescue of Lot, Scripture tells us that Abraham went from there to the south to the king of the Philistines [8], where he agreed with Sarra not to say she was his wife but his sister. Abimelech [9] takes Sarra into his harem, but God reveals to him that He Himself did not allow him to touch her [10]. Sarra is returned to Abraham, who is reproached for the lie (Origen 2006, 263).

However, the letter alone should not understand this episode. The Christian and Paul's disciples know that "the law is spiritual," and allegories must be sought. Through prayer, the Lord Himself will lift the "veil of the letter," and the "light of the Spirit" will be revealed (Origen 2006, 265).

Suppose the literal meaning of the scriptural words ("Abimelech [...] had not touched her") "indicates holiness and purity". In that case, however, there is a "deeper meaning" the encounter between Abimelech and Sarra is symbolic of the encounter of a "foolish soul" who "does not wish to attain or approach virtue and is unable to do so because of his peculiar nature" (Philo 1953, 342). Thus, for Origen, Abimelech's wife is "called natural philosophy," and his handmaidens "point to the various and special reasonings of dialectic" (Origen 2006, 269).

These events are presented in Scripture through a chiastic structure, after the two introductory themes, the presentation of Abraham's plan and its consequence, there follow three themes during Abimelech's dream: the dialogue with God, the divine command to return his wife, and God's assurance to Abimelech that the prophet will pray for him. These themes are repeated in the second part of the chapter: Abimelech informs his subjects of the dream and then fulfills the divine commands he has received, and finally, the prophet prays for Abimelech.

By threatening Abimelech with death, God shows that "He is more than a bystander on the edge of history" and that He "can overcome the evil in His people, even through the lives of sinners," for in this incident, "the pagan Abimelech acted more righteously than Abraham, God's friend" (MacDonald 2002, 54).

Although Abraham initially considers the people of Gherar to be "unrighteous, ungodly, and heathen" and places Abimelech "among the people who have neither knowledge, nor law, nor God," their actions later showed them to be "a people who feared God and honor and guarded human righteousness." Thus, referring to this initial attitude, Evgeny Vulgaris says of Abraham that he "was wicked," that "it was a wrong grasp at first," but "later it was proved by deeds and the patriarch himself" that "often good deeds dwell where one counts them banished," and "wickedness is encased where no one suspects it." (Vulgaris 2012, 61)

Abraham is a prophet

Although this is the first place in Scripture where someone is called a prophet, Abraham does not live up to expectations, for we would expect a divine representative to be "beyond reproach, both in his personal and public life" and his integrity to be "beyond question" (Phillips 1992, 200), but God "holds Abraham in the high rank of His representative, a prophet who speaks in His name" (Gn 20:7) "and as an intercessor whose prayers are answered" (Koechlin 2005, 31) (Gn 20:17).

The prophet was "offering a message" from the deity. Still, in this case, we see "a more complex picture of a prophet as one who has close relations with the deity" for Abraham does more, is "able to intercede," "prays for the healing" of Abimelech (Walton et al. 2021, 54).

Jewish legend holds that Abraham, being a prophet, "knew beforehand the danger" he would be in if he "revealed the whole truth" and at the same time "knew" that Abimelech would not touch Sarra (Ginzberg 2003, 216).

Although Abraham "committed this deception, he was still the prophet" on whom and on whose prayer "depended" the very "welfare of Abimelech." "God is not ashamed to appropriate an unbelieving, lying, deceitful man as His prophet" because "Abraham had the main thing: love, faith, longing for a heavenly homeland" (Wurmbrant 1994, 82).

"Abraham's right soul was beset with the most tyrannical passions, and fear terrified him." Because the fear of death was more significant than the fear that his

wife would fall into the hands of strangers, "he preferred to see with his own eyes how the companion of his life would fall into the hands of the king." However, St. John Chrysostom does not blame the patriarch "for smallness of soul" in fearing death but urges us to understand Abraham. If, for Christians, Christ made it "easy to despise death," for now "it is no longer death, but sleep, a journey, a moving from a worse place to a better," then it was "fearful and bitter" and "shook the souls of the righteous" of the Old Testament (John Chrysostom 1989, 129-130).

The difficulty of understanding this passage can only be overcome if we interpret it in an allegorical key [11]. Thus, Abraham no longer wants virtue (Sarra) to be called his wife and to be alone; he wants to share it with others. Although Abraham "now wishes to share the gift of divine virtue with the Gentiles," "it is not yet time for the grace of God to pass ... to the Gentiles" (Origen 2006, 269).

Abraham is not a "betrayer of the laws of marriage" but "a wise man" (*τὸν σοφόν*), and Sarra is the virtue (*ἀρετῆς*) that rightfully belongs to the wise man and which Abimelech, an "impure, licentious and unbridled lustful king" who disregards "the laws concerning strangers," desires. Like the "wicked" who "pretend to be champions," Abimelech desires virtue (on Sarra), "but not by hard work and effort" but by abducting it (Philo 1953, 341).

Philo calls Abimelech "a foolish man" because he "violently insists that he possesses virtue," but "is convinced by the divine Logos, which enters into his soul, examines him, searches him and compels him to confess that this is the possession of another man and not his own." "Virtue is foreign to foolish men, who deem it worthy to be owned as a wife and not as a sister," she "may indeed be a kinswoman" to such a man, "as to a brother," but virtue cannot be a "true wife" only to "the perfect man" (Philo 1953, 342, 346).

Because "only with a virtuous partner as a wife" can one live "an immortal soul-life" (Philo 1953, 345), Origen considers Sarra, whose name has the meaning of "ruler" or "holder of primacy," the very "virtue of the spirit": *ἀρετή* (Origen 2006, 265).

Virtue "has no mother and has no part in the female sex, but is sown only by the Father of all, who has no need of material substance for His generation." In this way, "the just man is a consort of justice, the ignorant man of ignorance, the sincere man of sincerity, the godly man of godliness, and [...] the wise man of wisdom." Using Sarra, Philo tries to show that virtue is related to the male gene of man, not to the female (Philo 1894, 105,347).

Like a man "skilled in every kind of wisdom" (called a "gnostic" by St. Clement of Alexandria), the patriarch does not put marriage "before love of God and living in righteousness," for "having borne children," "his wife is his sister," "they are as if they both had the same father [....]; that she will indeed be his sister after she has separated herself from the body, which by the appropriation of the bodily structure divides and separates [...]; that the souls [...] are equal, and neither of them is either male or female [...] neither marries nor is married" (Clement of Alexandria 1982, 43, 442).

Abimelech represents the "scholars and sages of the age" who are dedicated to philosophy but who "do not reach the full and perfect doctrine of faith, observe that God is the father and king of all." However, they "devoted their efforts to the purification of the heart", seeking "with all their soul and with all perseverance the infusion of divine virtue," God did not "allow" them to "attain" virtue, for it was determined that this grace should be "given to the Gentiles," not through Abraham, "but through Christ" (Origen 2006, 267, 269). Understood in this way, this episode may constitute Abimelech's initiation into wisdom/faith, which becomes a typos of the Gentile Church (Septuagint 2004, 97).

"Every virtuous man," "every good man," is a prophet, for he says nothing about himself, but "is the resounding instrument of God's voice" (Philo 1894, 146). The prophet is the "herald" of God's will, a person like Abraham, who has "privileged relations with God" (Usca 2008, 222).

Why did Abraham say that Sarra was his sister?

He told the truth. Indeed, Sarra was a wife/sister [12], i.e. she married her half-sister. In those days, such a marriage "was not considered taboo incest, being rather a way of ensuring that girls born of secondary marriages enjoyed the protection of the family" (Walton et all 2021, 54).

Abraham's wife is mentioned for the first time with the name Sarai (Gn 11:29), which in Hebrew שָׂרָי means "my princess." Her name will be changed to Sarra (Gn 17:15), which in Hebrew שָׂרָה can also be translated as "princess." The Book of Genesis records her with Abraham, coming from the Chaldean Ur and accompanying the patriarch on all his journeys. Among her independent actions, we can note the contrary attitude of the handmaid Hagar and Ishmael (one interpreted symbolically by St. Paul the Apostle. cf. Gal 4:22-31). She played an essential role in her two journeys (Egypt and Gherar), where she accepted Abraham's strategy of

declaring herself his sister. "A beautiful woman in appearance" (Gn 12:11), full of faith ("By faith Sarra herself received power to bear a son [...] She counted him faithful who had promised") and conjugal affection (".. . as Sarra submitted to Abraham, calling him Lord" cf. 1 Pt 3:6), Sarra would live 121 years and be buried in the cave of Machpelah (*Smith's Comprehensive Dictionary of the Bible* 1901, 970).

"We must also marvel at Sarra's great love"; by her attitude, she "wanted to escape the danger of death by right." Although she "could have discovered the truth and escaped reproach," she "endured everything with courage, only to save the just. St. John Chrysostom makes a beautiful analogy with the text of Scripture (Gn 2:24) and shows that this decision, although taken by the two, was made "as if they were one body, so they cared for each other's salvation; and there was such understanding between them as if they were one body and one soul." [13]

It was cowardly. Abraham deserves rebuke for denying his wife for the second time. Even if this is a "half-truth," commentators wonder how it was possible for such a "privileged man, enjoying intimacy with God," to lose "awareness of his relationship" and fail "to bear witness." Abraham is accused of "losing" godliness and using "unfortunate" language when he describes his divine calling thus: "God brought me out of my father's house to wander" (Gn 20:13). Consequently, "it is necessary for God to repeat His lessons until evil is judged from the root and confessed." Although God sometimes, for teaching purposes, "gives a lesson" to His chosen ones, He even then "continues to watch over them with gentleness" (Koechlin 2005, 31).

The biblical patriarchs presented their wives as sisters because of the "fear" of death. However, Scripture portrays such episodes as "not at all flattering." Indeed, it repeats them (three times), "each scene" in turn occurring after God makes a promise/pledge (Skulski 2012, 90).

Abraham resorted to "the dosing of the truth" because of his "unbounded" faith "in the help from above." He had faith that "no matter how dangerous the road, no matter how difficult the situation," God would help him, he had "hope in the Almighty Providence and faith in his high purpose made Abraham at ease and sustained in himself the hope of all good even in the most critical situations" (Lopuhin 1944, 351).

The patriarch's action should not be defended, but, rather, his mistake should be acknowledged, for, by his statement, he "led them astray" and "had already committed a sin against them," which brought upon them "a great sin, and it did not matter, at all, whether the statement was true or false" (Ramban 1971-1976). Instead of fearing for his

life and forgetting that God had the power to save them, Abraham should have shown more faith (Skulski 2012, 91).

Thus, some commentators argue that the hero of this chapter is not Abraham but Abimelech, who did not even know that Sarra was Abraham's wife and who, had he not been stopped by God, would have been guilty only of unintentional wrongdoing.

"Abimelech was without sin; but the good Master brought this punishment upon the king, so that by the prayers of Abraham, he might lift his punishment, thereby making him more just and famous and more illustrious. Yes, God makes and orchestrates everything and orders everything, so those who serve Him may shine like stars, and their virtue may be known everywhere." (John Chrysostom, 1989, 136)

If Abraham is depicted in an exalted posture in the previous chapters, now his "character" "simply fades into the shadow of the integrity of the Philistine Abimelech." It is very clear that the biblical author "carefully" builds "the contrast between Abimelech and Abraham." This is why, "out of the multitude of events of the century of Abraham's life," the author has chosen "only fifteen," among which this one must also have a place. "For one who seemed to have become God's counselor and friend," the Hagiographer could easily have replaced this event with a more favorable one or ignored it, as he probably "did with hundreds and hundreds of other events in his existence," but did not. Perhaps he didn't want to miss "something important of what he intended to communicate to his contemporaries and future generations." If not the saintly author, perhaps "the Spirit of God was determined that this chapter should be part" of the Book of Genesis to show that God fulfills his promises even though his most chosen collaborators are not faultless or invulnerable (Sansgău 2009, 124-126).

Called before Abimelech and his servants to explain his statements and behavior, Abraham fails by offering a "miserable, incoherent, shaky explanation," for towards God, he proved "untrustworthy, as a man he proved dishonest," and towards himself, he "disgraced himself." [14]

By explaining to Abimelech, Abram shows himself distrustful of God, dishonest as a man and dishonored by himself. "Of all forms of dishonesty, none is worse" than half-truth (Phillips 1992, 202).

It is a real "tragedy" that Abraham repeats the mistake of Egypt, that those "disastrous" experiences taught him nothing. Scripture does not hide the sins or shortcomings of the righteous. Like the patriarch, we too "are delivered from a wrongdoing by divine mercy, grace, and intervention" but immediately "slip back ... into

a similar situation." Abraham goes down the same road "where he had fallen once again years before" (Phillips 1992, 198).

"It seems incredible that a man who has won so many victories," who has been so much in the presence of God, "should stumble so badly, so soon." "Behind the whole incident" was Satan, "who was making a last-ditch attempt to prevent the birth of Isaac and, consequently, the birth" of Jesus (Phillips 1992, 199).

"Unfounded fear" drives Abraham back to sin, a sin "all the more grievous because it was repeated," and Sarah "was now with a child of promise" (Wurmbrant 1994, 80).

If it was this fear of death that led Abraham to this plan to claim Sarra as his sister, the fear of death from the frightening dream in which he "dreamed himself dead," [15] brought Abimelech to reality. Since his moral principles were far from those required by God, not even a lie could excuse his "promiscuity." "Abimelech's code" allowed him to approach any desire to gratify his pleasures. It seemed natural to him to use his power to exercise his prerogatives without regard to the desires of others but simply "throw the cloak of legality over his passions" (Phillips 1992, 201).

Human laws can be very flexible, written to satisfy the desires of the powerful. Today, laws are rewritten to "satisfy the wayward." Laws that make "concessions to human desires" do not please God (Phillips 1992, 202).

"Abimelech's last examination" (Gn 20:6-7) shows that only divine intervention prevented him from sinning and that obedience to the divine command was not due to a sense of love of righteousness but "fear of punishment" (Phillips 1992, 202).

Ginsburg believes that this episode can be understood as a new "assault/attack" in the perspective of the "Great Controversy" (The Companion Bible 2005, 28), in which the devil sought to destroy the promised seed of man immediately after the fall (Gn 3:15).

Because the "promised seed" will come through Sarra, we can assume that "the whole incident was planned by the Evil One, either to prevent the birth of Isaac or to discredit that birth" and to consider Isaac the son of Abimelech. To guard Sarra and silence such suspicions, God defies Satan's plan by making all the women of Abimelech's household barren (Phillips 1992, 206). For the "promise of the heir" of Abraham and Sarra, "lawfully conceived," was to be fulfilled, and nothing was to "delay the fulfillment of the divine promise" (Lopuhin 1944, 351).

Abimelech chose Sarra not because he was "charmed by the beauty of a 90-year-old woman,"[16] who had either grown younger or had not yet grown old ("withered/old"), but perhaps "to ally herself with Abraham, a wealthy, prince-nomad" (Keil & Delitzsch 1885, 239).

The reason for divine intervention is theological: We want divine protection of Sarra in order to fulfill the promise (Brown et al. 2007, 66). However, some cynics believed that Isaac was conceived with Abimelech because he did not give birth the entire time he was with Abraham (Rashi 1970, 52). Such a conception is not supported by Scripture, which emphasizes "... Isaac the son of Abraham" (Gn 25:19).

Abraham prays

Because prayer is a dialogue with God, Adam and Eve prayed; because prayer is an offering to God of his best, Abel prayed; when Seth began "to call on the name of the Lord God," he prayed. Because the one who prays experiences the intimacy of God, when righteous and righteous Noah "walked with God" (Gn 6:9), he prayed. Also, prior to the episode in Gherar, we note Abraham's prayer for his barren wife (Gn 15:1-4) and intercession (prayer-negotiation) for the people of Sodom (Gn 18:16-33).

Even though Scripture does not mention it, Abraham prayed for Sarra before praying for Abimelech. St. Ephrem the Syrian, believes that "sleep [17] fell quickly upon Abimelech" precisely because Abraham prayed so diligently (Ephrem the Syrian 1994, 165).

"Thanks to Abraham's prayer," God heals Abimelech so that his wife and his maidservants are no longer barren" (Origen 2006, 263). Abraham's prayer was of great use, for no physician was able to do what Abraham did. Sin caused Abimelech's problem, and "no physician but the great Physician Jesus Christ" could treat this disease (Phillips 1992, 206).

Although God tells him that "his salvation depended on it," Scripture gives us no indication that Abimelech asked Abraham to pray [18] for him or to tell him about the "living and true God" or salvation. On the contrary, some believe that Abimelech "intentionally" dishonors Abraham by offering him animals (20:14), pushing him away and despising him. Accordingly, it is believed that because Abraham does not stand out positively during the events of Gherar, "true spiritual greatness" will be seen in the end. Without looking elsewhere for the culprits, Abraham knows he is responsible for the "sad circumstances." He understands that Abimelech rightly refuses him "his services

as a prophet," but if he "missed the opportunity to preach to him," he can still "pray for him" (Phillips 1992, 204-5).

Other commentators consider that Abraham, by his words of vindication, not only "appeased the king's anger and revealed his virtue; but at the same time, he also gave them a teaching about honoring God" (John Chrysostom 1989, 134).

"Mediation" through prayer causes God to "open again the womb" of the women of Abimelech's house. "The irony is that Abimelech is denied the right to have children, just as much as he denies Abraham the right to have a wife" (Walton et al. 2021, 54).

Fulfilling Abraham's request, "it was the first time in human history that God fulfilled the prayer of one human being for the benefit of another." (Ginzberg 2003, 217)

Scripture places this event before chapter 21, where God is reported to have remembered Sarra (Gn 21:1), and she became pregnant, to show that Abraham's prayer for Abimelech was a lesson. One who prays for his neighbor when he is in greater need of that gift, for Abraham, prays that Abimelech would have children (Gn 20:17-18), but he did not (Rashi 1970, 46).

Abraham demonstrates a great virtue: forgiveness (a divine attribute, for the Lord is called, in the sixth blessing of the Amida prayer: "He who forgives abundantly." (cf. *Prayers for the Day of Atonement* 5709-1949, 34). Jewish tradition insists that man must not be content with God's forgiveness but must strive to obtain that of his neighbor. If God is willing to forgive from the first signs of repentance, man is also urged to imitate and appropriate this divine quality. So does Abraham, who forgave Abimelech and prayed to God for his healing (*Encyclopedic Dictionary of Judaism* 2001, 347).

A parallel with two other events: Abraham and Sarai in Egypt (Gn 12:10-20) and Isaac and Rebekah in Gherar (Gn 26:1-16)

"Introducing your wife as your sister does not seem like the kind of thing" a righteous, God-fearing man should do [19], but in the book of Genesis, "this is not singular but happens three times" (Skulski 2012, 89). Abraham thus introduces Sarra twice (Gn 12:10-20 and 20:1-18) and Isaac once to Rebekah (Gn 26:1-16).

Some scholars consider this chapter an insertion of an "Elohist document into the narrative plot of the Iachus," which "presents a parallel event" to chapter 20, "but without taking into account the chronology of the context," because "Sarra was no longer a young woman." Archbishop Ananias points out that even the

adherents of this theory consider that "the main emphasis [...] falls on the idea that God intervenes in time to defend morals threatened by premature and unnecessary precautions" (*Bible or Holy Scripture* 2001, 41).

The similarities with the other two events cannot be denied, but "it is equally foolish" to claim that it is the same event handed down by tradition in "three different forms." No less than six significant differences can be pointed out: two different places (Egypt and Gherar), two different monarchs with different characters (the idolatrous Pharaoh and the God-fearing Abimelech), different circumstances (famine and migration), different ways of discovering the truth (Pharaoh intuits it, in plagues sent by God, and Abimelech receives, in a dream, the divine revelation), different reactions (silence and offering explanations to Abimelech) and different conclusions (forced to leave Egypt and invited to stay in Gherar). It is as straightforward as possible that we are not dealing with "two versions of the same tradition" but with two events, which, although similar, are distinct, as they took place twenty years apart (Leupold 1942, 310).

Origen also notes some differences between the two events: The pharaoh (which can be translated as "he who destroys") does not want Sarra "with a pure heart," but Abimelech (whose name can be translated as "my father is king") wants virtue with a pure heart, so he acts differently from the pharaoh, who is ignorant and unclean (Origen 2006, 267).

The existence of two distinct events is proved by the difference between Abimelech and Pharaoh, by the superiority of the former, who had "a pure heart and innocent hands" (Gn 20:5), over Pharaoh.

The differences are instructive (educational/pedagogical): Abimelech did not abuse Sarra, which was not explicitly said about Pharaoh. Abraham's so-called lie becomes a mere mental restriction since Sarra was indeed his half-sister. God intervenes directly, like a "guardian of morality" (de Vaux 1962, 99) "lest the promise" made by God to Abraham be spoiled by something, for "the time was at hand" (John Chrysostom 1989, 131).

Analyzed, the three episodes are to be understood as "typical scenes," which can be interpreted by determining "how they differ from each other," giving us the possibility to reach a better "understanding of the biblical character." Analyzing the three scenes, one can see the "dramatic differences" between the Isaac-Rebekah scene,

"in which God does not intervene at all, and the other two scenes," in which God makes his presence felt (Skulski 2012, 92-93).

To many commentators, "it seems incredible" that Abraham still tried to "recommend Sarra" as his sister, even now, "twenty years after the first mistake" in Egypt (MacDonald 2002, 54).

From an allegorical perspective, Pharaoh is the "unclean and destructive man" who could not receive virtue (Sarra); Abimelech, who lived pure and philosophically, "could at least receive it, for he sought with a pure heart; but the time had not yet come." Virtue "remains in circumcision" in Abraham until the Incarnation, when, through Christ, it passes "into the Church of the Gentiles" and "the house of Abimelech and his handmaids" because they have been healed, "will give birth to the sons of the Church" (Origen 2006, 271).

Conclusions

Following the Saviour's exhortation ("Search the Scriptures" Jn 5:39), St. John Chrysostom shows that to be able to reap "the profit they have," to bring to light the great "treasure" that "lies hidden" in the depths of Scripture, "research" is needed ("let us search again the words of Scripture") so that then "we can use them for our benefit" (John Chrysostom 1989, 128).

The "prayers of the saints" (Rev 5:8, 8:3-4) are prayed in heaven before the divine throne by angels or by those already in heaven.

"God's intention" is not that people pray only for themselves but also "for one another" (Lesetre 1912, 669). Alongside Abraham, who prayed for Abimelech (Gn 20:7,17) there are plenty of other Old Testament examples: Pharaoh asks Moses and Aaron to pray to God for him (Ex 8:8,28, 9:28, 10:17), Job prays for his friends (42:8,10), Zedekiah asks Jeremiah to pray for the people (Jr 37:3) and the people renew this request (Jr 42:2,20). As Christ prayed for his disciples (Jn 17:9,20,21), we can even speak of "the obligation to pray for others" (Col 1:3,9, 2 Thes 1:11) since the Old Testament (1 Kgs 7:5, 12:23).

The man who lives his daily life in a constant rush blames the "lack of time" to excuse himself for the lack of prayer. Lacking prayer, modern man "cannot see his failings and to communicate them to God, to ask Him for help to rise from them." All the more, "prayer for others becomes nonsense" as long as there is no time to pray for yourself, you cannot pray for others (Cocoșilă 2014).

After Abraham prays for Abimelech (Gn 20:17), God "searches out Sarra" (Gn 21:1). The place of these biblical accounts is not incidental; they are meant to teach us that if one prays for another, "when he needs the thing for which he prays, he is answered first." In this regard, Rashi shows that Sarra became pregnant before Abimelech was healed (Rashi 1970, 46).

Although God had promised Abraham an heir (Gn 15:4) with the covenant made thirty years earlier, it was not until Abraham prayed for Abimelech that Sarah became pregnant "immediately," so that the power of prayer for another could be seen, "who was able to bring to fulfillment a promise that had lain dormant" for so many years. The rabbis argue that one can pray for another before praying for oneself for two reasons: either the other's problem bothers him more than his troubles or because "he wants to receive the reward first" (Chumash 2008, 121).

When one person prays for another and "sweetens a Divine Judgment, the flow of blessing descends into the soul of the one who prayed, and from there, the blessing spreads to other souls. Therefore, if the person who prayed needs the same blessing as the one for whom he prays, he will receive the blessing first, since his soul is the channel through which the blessing enters the world" (Chumash 2008, 120).

The difference between asking for something for another and praying for it is bargaining (see the Sodom episode) and praying (see the Gherar episode). Abraham then bargained for the lives of the Sodomites without the outcome of his bargaining affecting his existence. Now the involvement is total, what he prays to God for Abimelech's house is what he wants most.

On this occasion, through Abraham, we are taught how to pray for ourselves through prayer for one another. As God heard the patriarch's prayer and brought fruitfulness to those Philistines, so will he hear our prayer. Through a holy but also practical pedagogy, God teaches us, even through the negative experiences of others, that the power of prayer does not consist in (magic) formulas but is a way of life, a way of action, a confession.

Christ taught us to use "prayer as a way of service, not as a means of gaining personal power" (*Dictionary of Biblical Images and Symbols* 2014, 890). Prayer is not "a spare tire" to be used only in crises; it should be the "steering wheel" of life, guiding us through the events of daily life.

"King, Helper, Deliverer, and Shield. Blessed are You, O Lord, Shield of Abraham." [20]

Notes

In the Pentateuch, to express this action, in addition to the verb פָּלַל, eight other Hebrew terms can be mentioned, which the Masoretic Text uses:

עָתַר – Gn 25:21 (it is interesting that the two occupations in this verse have different meanings: "to pray" and "to implore," respectively: "to listen," "to answer," "to grant," this being due to the different verbal forms: paal-active, respectively niphal-passive), Ex 8:8-9 (meaning "to pray"). In the other six occupations (e.g., Ex 9:28, 1-:17-18, translated by the Septuagint προσεύχομα and εὔχομαι in the following verse), the meaning is: "to make a request." This verb has only 20 occurrences in the Old Testament.

פָּגַע – the verb can be translated: "to pray," "to implore" or "to intercede" and has eight occurrences in the Pentateuch (Gn 23:8, 28:11, 32:1, Ex 5:3,20, 23:4, Nm 35:19,21) and 76 in the Old Testament. Although in chapter 23 of the Book of Genesis, the meaning of the verb is: "to meet" or "to intercede," for the expression וּפִגְעוּ-לִי בְּעֶפְרֹן has the meaning: "meet, for me, with Ephron," it was translated by Archbishop Ananias: "ask Ephron on my behalf." The other two occupations in the Book of Genesis have different meanings: in chapter 28: "to come" and "to arrive," and in chapter 32: "to meet," and can be related to the act of prayer, for the verb is used to relate Jacob's arrival in Bethel, the House of God and the gate of heaven (Gn 28:17) and his encounter with the angels of God's camp at Mahanaim, "who met him," according to Archbishop Ananias' translation. In four of the other five occurrences in the Books of Exodus and Numbers, the verb means "to meet" or "to welcome." Interestingly, in the same chapter 5, a few verses apart, the meaning is different: "to fall upon," referring to the Divine Justice, Who will allow the "plague/plague" and "sword" to "fall upon" the people if they do not offer a sacrifice (Gn 5:3).

כָּפַר – In the Book of Genesis, the verb has only two occurrences: Gn 6:14 (with the meaning: "to cover") and 32:20 (with the meaning: "to calm," "to appease"). In the following three books, the verb is used intensively. In the Book of Exodus, the verb has 10 occurrences: 29:33,362(twice),37, 30:102, 15-162, 32:30. In the Book of Leviticus, there are 49 occurrences: 1:4, 4:20,26,31,35, 5:6,10,13,16,18, 6:7 (5:26 in the Septuagint, 6:6 in Archbishop Ananias' translation), 7:7, 8:15,34, 9:72, 10:17, 12:7-8, 14:18-21,29,31,53, 15:15,30, 16:6,10-11,16-172,18,20,24,27,30,32,333,34, 17:112, 19:22,28. In the Book of Numbers, there are 16 occurrences: 5:8, 6:11, 8:11-12,19,21, 15:25,282, 16:46-47, 25:13, 28:22,30, 29:5, 31:50, 35:33. Used 75 times throughout the three books, the verb has the following meanings: "to sanctify," "to make atonement," "to atone," "to cleanse," "to redeem." In the Book of Deuteronomy, there are only three occurrences: 21:82, and 32:43, and the verb has the meaning: "to forgive," "to have mercy," and "to cleanse." Of the 104 occurrences of the verb in the Old Testament, 80 are in the Pentateuch.

נֶדֶר – the noun has 60 occurrences in the Old Testament, of which 34 are in the Pentateuch. It is translated in Romanian: "prayer" (Lv 21:23) or "promise": The two occupations in the Book of Genesis (28:20, 31:13), the six in the Book of Leviticus (7:16, 12:18,21,23, 23:38, 27:2), the 20 in the Book of Numbers (6:2,5,21, 15:3,8, 21:2, 29:39, 30:2-9,11-14) and the six in the Book of Deuteronomy (12:6,11,17,26, 23:18,21), have the meaning of "oath," "promise" or "offering."

נָפַל – is a verb used very often in the Old Testament, having 435 occurrences, 58 of them in the Pentateuch (Gn 2:21, 4:5-6, 14:10, 15:12, 17:3,17, 24:64, 25:18, 33:4, 43:18, 44:14, 45:14, 46:29, 49:17, 50:1,18, Ex 15:16, 19:21, 21:18,27,33, 32:28, Lv 9:24, 11:32-33,35,37-38, 26:7-8,36, Nm 5:21-22,27, 6:12, 14:3,5,29,32,43, XVI,4,22,45, 20:6, 24:4,16, 34:2, 35:23, Dt 9:18,25, 21:1, 22:4,8, 25:2) and has the meaning: "to fall on one's face", "to prostrate oneself". It is worth noting that, of the eight occurrences in the Book of Deuteronomy, in two cases (9:18,25), the verb has been translated into Romanian: "I prayed".

עָבַד – of the 289 occurrences in the Old Testament, 113 are in the Pentateuch. The verb has the meanings "to worship" (Ex 3:12, 12:31, 20:5, Dt 4:19, 5:9, 6:13, 8:19, 13:6) and "to serve" (Gn 14:4, 15:13-14, 25:23, 27:29,40, 29:15,18,20,25,27,30, 30:26,29, 31:6,41, Ex 1:13-14, 3:12, 4:23, 7:16, 8:1,20, 9:1,13, 10:3,7-8,11,24,26, 12:31, 13:5, 14:12, 20:5, 21:2,6, 23:24-25,33, Lv 25:39-40, Nm 6:24,26, 8:15,25, 18:7,21, Dt 4:19,28, 5:9, 6:13, 7:4,16, 8:19, 10:12,20, 11:13,16, 12:2,30, 13:2,4,6,13, 15:12, 17:3, 20:11, 28:14,36,47-48,64, 29:18,26, 30:17, 31:20. In Dt 13:6, the Hebrew verb "to say" was translated by Archbishop Ananias: "to pray". Thus, the Hebrew expression "in secret he said: let us go and serve other gods" has been translated into Romanian: "he will pray to you in secret saying..."

חָנַן – the verb has 78 occurrences in the Old Testament, ten of which are in the Pentateuch. Translated into Romanian "to pity," the term has several meanings: "to give with kindness," "to act with kindness" (cf. 28:5,11), "to have mercy" (cf. 43:29), Ex 33:19 (the term appears twice, with the meaning: "to be merciful," is translated in Romanian differently: "to pity" and "to endure"), Nm 6:25 (meaning "to pity"), Dt 7:2, 28:50 (with the meanings: "to show mercy"). Only in Gn 42:21 and Dt 3:23, where the verb means "to implore," the Romanian translation opts for "to pray."

חָלָה – the verb has 76 occurrences in the Old Testament but only three occurrences in the Pentateuch: Gn 48:1 (in the pale form, the verb has the meaning: "to be sick"), Ex 32:11 (in the piel form, the verb has the meaning: "to pray") and Dt 29:22 (in the form piel, the verb has the meaning: "to send").

Note that, in the Pentateuch, out of eight occupations, in seven, the verb is in the verb form hitpael, expressing a reflexive action, "back to the subject," but to make "someone else intervene or mediate for one's case." This is what man does through prayer,

"We ask God to intervene when we can do nothing more" (Watson 2018, 91), after the model after which Abraham also mediated for Abimelech.

Only in these two verses of chapter XX is the Hebrew verb פָּלַל translated by the Septuagint as *προσεύχομα*.

This is the only occurrence in the Pentateuch where the Masoretic Text uses the verb in the piel form, which expresses an intensive (insistent, repeated) action in the active diathesis. The meaning of the verb is: "to believe" (this is how Archbishop Ananias also put it), "to think," and "to wait." The Septuagint opts for a loose translation of this verse, and instead of the Hebrew verb פָּלַל, the verb στερεοω is used, "to strengthen."

Of the other six occurrences of the Masoretic Text, in five cases (except Gn 48:11), the Septuagint opts for εὔχομαι.

Etymologically, the term would mean "the danger of the ancestress" (Usca 2008, 220).

The fact that Abimelech himself relates the content of the dream to the servants was not common in those places and times; usually, the servants were informed by the master through messengers. The rabbis believe that Abimelech's act of gathering all the servants and speaking to them "in their hearing" (Gn 20:8), i.e. face to face, terrified the servants terribly (Chumash 2008, 119). They became even more frightened because they believed that the angels who destroyed Sodom had now come to destroy the city of Gherar (*Midrash Rabbah Genesis* I 1961, 456).

Some historians believe that the Philistines could not possibly have lived there at that time "since this population occupied the southwestern coasts of Palestine only in the 13th century" (Monumenta Linguae Dacoromanorum 2004, 348) BC, but others indicate that "isolated groups of Philistines had entered the area many centuries before" (Usca 2008, 220).

It is possible that Abimelech is not a proper name but merely "a generic name given to Philistine kings" (Bondalici 2005, 17), like the titles Pharaoh in the Egyptians, Caesar in the Romans, or Shah in the Persians (Smith's Comprehensive Dictionary of the Bible 1901, 4).

"God's standards of purity in marriage are high and unchanging ... To take another man's wife is a mortal sin in God's moral code." (Phillips 1992, 200-201)

The allegorical interpretation, a "decent and honorable" one, "lifts up" the "actions of the fathers" and preaches the words of the Lord, "uncorrupting them with inappropriate, Jewish stories." We have no gain if we read that the great patriarch "not only lied to ... Abimelech but also endangered his wife's modesty" and that she was "exposed to defilement, with her husband's assent." This is what "friends of the letter, not of the spirit" believe. Christians must unite "the spiritual with the spiritual" in order to become "spiritual in deed" (Origen 2006, 265).

Regarding how Abraham and Sarra might have had a partnership relationship, whereby the wife was known in those times as a "sister-wife," we can find similarities with the Hurite society, where the husband could adopt his wife as his sister and give her special status, as she was treated as a blood relative by the husband's family (Sarna 1970, 103). It is argued that Abraham asks Sarra to accept this special status, the legality of which would be recognized by both the Egyptians and the Gherarites and thus "could not harm the couple." "As knowledge of this custom faded," the episode is considered "a lie of the patriarchs" (Skulski 2012, 90).

Abraham is called a "thankful servant" because he "endured all things with ease" and "in all that he did he showed his gratitude to his Master," and though "so many dangers surrounded him and fell into so many trials [...] he remained steadfast as a diamond; he showed his love for God unceasingly, and none of the obstacles hindered him." St. John Chrysostom declares admiringly, "Look [...] what a trial came upon him in Gerar, and marvel at the strength of righteous virtue! He has endured what no one can endure, what no one wants to hear. He was not displeased, nor did he ask the Master for an account [...] he did not question the Master's deeds and decisions but received everything in silence and with much gratitude." It was not easy for him "by right" to endure a "storm of thoughts", to see his "woman" taken into the harem, but "he suffered in silence, knowing that God would not overlook him, but would quickly come to his aid" (John Chrysostom 1989, 128-130).

"What disbelief [...] How dishonest [...] That a saint of God could stoop to such subterfuge is almost unbelievable. That Abraham could repeatedly stoop to this dishonesty was almost inexcusable [...] what a disgrace! What cowardice." A "terrible" cowardice, like that which "drove" the apostle Peter to deny Christ, made Abraham "deny his wife." "Who would have thought that so great and noble a man [...], the friend of God, would be so unworthy and contemptible?!" (Phillips 1992, 203-204).

The barrenness with which Abimelech's harem was struck is the death of which God speaks (Usca 2008, 224).

To explain how Abimelech desired a 90-year-old woman, it is believed that Sarra had already impregnated Isaac, and the seed she received rejuvenated her (Ephrem the Syrian 1994, 166). God resurrects "Sarra's youth to prepare her for her future role as a mother." (Phillips 1992, 199)

According to Jewish legend, Abimelech fell asleep "towards evening, before retiring, while still seated on his throne." The king "fell into a sleep [...] until morning, and in a dream, he saw an angel of the Lord raising his sword to strike him dead." (Ginzberg 2003, 216)

Although we don't know what Abraham said when he prayed for Abimelech, some have tried to imagine, "... Please have mercy on Abimelech and all his house! I failed to show him what You are really like. Show him, Lord." (Phillips 1992, 206)

The expression "fear of God" (Gn 20:11) יִרְאַ֥ת אֱלֹהִ֖ים – pietas – *θεοσέβεια* (term used in the Pentateuch only now, the rest of the time the expression: *φόβος θεοῦ*) refers to respect for God, from which respect for one's fellow men follows (Septuagint 2004, 98).

מֶ֚לֶךְ עוֹזֵ֣ר וּמוֹשִׁ֔יעַ וּמָגֵ֖ן: בָּר֣וּךְ אַתָּ֔ה יְיָ֖ מָגֵ֥ן אַבְרָהָֽם Cf. Prayers for the Day of Atonement 5709-1949, 34

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The Resurrection of the Body and the Immortality of the Soul in the Light of the Old Testament Writings and the Work of Philo

Abstract

Suppose the hope of the Hellenistic world regarding survival in the afterlife can only be reduced to the belief in the soul's immortality (Plato), which has nothing to do with the belief in bodily resurrection. We can say that the only place where we can find the foundation of the belief in the resurrection of the first Christians is the Jewish world; only here the belief in the resurrection could have any chance of being accepted. The Old Testament texts to which we will refer in this article are Is 26:19; Ez 37:5,10,14; Dn 12:2; 2 Mac 7. A great exponent of Alexandrian Judaism who attempted to create a synthesis between the Mosaic faith and Greek philosophy was Philo of Alexandria. Since he does not refer to the bodily resurrection of the dead in his writings, Philo of Alexandria can support the thesis of the soul's immortality.

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Resurrection, Immortality, Body, Soul, Philo of Alexandria

Death and the afterlife in the writings of the Old Testament

Whereas the ancient pagan world's hope for survival in an afterlife can be reduced to the idea of the immortality of the soul and that it has nothing to do with bodily resurrection. We can say that the Jewish environment is the only place to find the basis of the early Christians' belief in resurrection. It is precisely for this reason that when the Apostle Paul writes to the Corinthians about the resurrection of Jesus, who

"was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures" (1 Cor 15:4), he is referring to the Old Testament, the Holy Scriptures of the chosen people.

Then we ask what the Old Testament says about death and what comes after death? In the Old Testament, death is presented as a natural fact; the reality of death is linked to the very constitution of man (Gn 3:19; Eccl 12:7). In the Judaism of the patriarchal period, two different anthropological schemes were used when speaking of man: concerning the living man, we speak of בָּשָׂר (*basar*) [1], נֶפֶשׁ (*nephesh*) [2] and רוּחַ (*ruach*) [3]; regarding the deceased, the Jews distinguished between corpses buried in graves and רְפָאִים (*refaim*) [4] surviving in שְׁאוֹל (*Sheol*). The Rephaim were perceived as shadows of the whole man, not as a separation between soul and body (Pozo 1986, 195-206).

Everyone is born to die with death; therefore, true life ends, and everyone descends into שְׁאוֹל (*Sheol*, *Hell*) [5], the kingdom of the dead, a dark existence in which the human being is in a situation that no longer allows him to praise God (Ps 6:5; 113:25-26; Is 38:18); it is far from God, but God is also far from it (Ps 87:5-7). Thus, starting from the words of King David on the occasion of the death of his first son [6], we can say that death in specific pages of the Old Testament is a one-way street; one goes only forward without the possibility of turning back [7].

The Hebrew concept of שְׁאוֹל, as the eternal abode of the dead, expresses a certain kind of survival after death, for the Israelite's death was not the total end. For example, in the Old Testament, the expressions "he passed to his fathers" and "he was added to his people" indicate an ancient cult of the dead and a specific survival or coexistence with ancestors in the afterlife. However, large sections in the Old Testament do not support the existence of an afterlife. The emphasis is on earthly life, which is identified with longevity and prosperity (Ps 143:12-15 – LXX), with many descendants and offspring (Gn 25:7-8). The place of God's blessing, joy, and praise is in this world. According to D. Ø. Endsjø, YHWH's promise of salvation in the earliest texts of Scripture translates into the survival of the Jews as a people, not the immortality of the individual, and this promise has a collective rather than an individual dimension.

According to G. Lohfink, the Israelites' lack of faith in the afterlife for a certain period is due to the diversity of worldviews and Godviews. For example, in many ancient Eastern peoples surrounding Israel, death was endowed with its divine power; there was a god of death (in the Canaanite religion, the god of death was called Môt). The practice of necromancy (evocation of the dead) was widespread in Israel,

necromancy was also practiced in Israel (1 Sam 28:3-25), but this practice was forbidden. Unlike these beliefs and practices of the surrounding peoples, the God of Israel was the God of the living, the creator of the world, who would not abandon his creation, a God faithful to his people, who felt safe in his hands. For this very reason, the people of Israel have for centuries maintained their rejection of an afterlife, distancing themselves from various beliefs about the afterlife.

"The peculiarity of the Old Testament lies not so much in the idea of *Sheol* – present elsewhere – but rather in the assertion, with great determination, of God's foreignness to the world of death and hell. God's sphere and the sphere of death have nothing to do with each other. In this way, death is devoid of any sacred and divine character. It is here, at this very moment, that the estrangement of the surrounding peoples and their religious systems from Israel has its deepest roots." (Lohfink 2020, 74)

However, in contrast to this conception of earthly life as the only true and real one, the ancient Israelites know of a curious typology of survival that escapes the common mortal destiny, namely, the possibility of avoiding death through a rapture to heaven. In the Old Testament, the cases reported are not many, two or three, but significant enough. The first case is that of Enoch (Gn 5:23-24); the second is that of Elijah (2 Kg 2:11); the third possible case is the uncertain fate of Moses after his death ("no one has known to this day where his tomb is" – Dt 34:6b). All these miraculous raptures have given rise to apocryphal writings of the apocalyptic kind. As for the type of existence into which these characters were abducted, we have no information.

If we find information about the afterlife absent in some Old Testament passages, this does not mean that the chosen people would be without a firm hope in the God of Israel. At some point, the Jews begin to think about the afterlife in new terms. YHWH's faithfulness and steadfast love for his people give rise in Israel's heart to the conviction that this experience cannot be limited to earthly life alone but can continue into an afterlife.

It isn't easy to pinpoint the exact starting point of the reflection on the eternal life and resurrection of the chosen people. For example, theologians N. T. Wright and G. Ancona [8] identify the origin of this hope of restoration in the encounter between robust faith in God (source of life and faithful to His promise) and Israel's experience of suffering and persecution.

According to E. Noffke, belief in the resurrection of the dead finds its original expression in the prophetic literature of the Old Testament. He identifies two elements

underlying the Jews' hope in the resurrection: the idea of the "holy remnant," indicating that part of the people survived divine punishment (Is 10:20-22); the second element highlights the change of perspective until the Babylonian exile attention was paid to the destiny of the people, with the experience of suffering in exile, they also began to reflect on individual responsibility (Jr 31:29-30; Ez 18:1-20). Theologian N. T. Wright (2006, 157-8) argues that the primary moment in which Israel hoped that their God would do for a human being, an individual, what he had promised to do for all his people, is found in Isaiah's chapters on the suffering Messiah (chapter 53).

The response of the God of Israel to the suffering, martyrdom, and persecution of the exile was the promise of the national restoration of His people, expressed metaphorically with the idea of the bodily resurrection of human beings (Acosta 1996, 177) (Is 26:19; Ez 37:5,10,14; Dn 12:2; 2 Mac 7). In conclusion, we can say that in the early pages of the Old Testament, there was no hope of life after death, then at some point (probably beginning in the Babylonian exile) [9]. The people of Israel begin to believe that YHWH's love and power cannot be defeated even by suffering and death. As this faith matures, it comes to confess hope in bodily resurrection.

"If the books of the Old Testament deny the possibility of eternal life in itself, it is equally true that it is precisely there that we find some elements that in the Jewish environment will develop between the end of the Persian era and the Hellenistic era, precisely to affirm it."

In line with the above, one can admit an evolution in Jewish thinking about the afterlife. If, in early Judaism, *sheol* was perceived as a standard and undifferentiated place for all the dead, the fate of the righteous was no different from that of the wicked. At some point (in prophetic literature), *the sheol* ceases to be an undifferentiated place, the righteous are separated from the evil, who go to the abyss of hell (Is 14:15; Ez 32:22). A new and important step in evolution is outlined in the so-called mystical psalms: 15:9-10; 48:16; 72, where the psalmist expresses the hope that YHWH will deliver him from the grave. Assuming this faith in God's power over the grave as well (Am 9:2; Ps 139:8; Dt 32:22; Job 14:12-15; 26:6; Ps 15:11), deliverance from hell takes on the form in Ps 15:9-10 of hope in the bodily resurrection, which points to the deliverance of the body itself. According to F. Manzi (2019, 36), although the psalmist did not specify how he imagined that God would bring him out of hell, he hoped he would not remain forever forsaken by God in the pit, a place of corruption.

National restoration and individual resurrection in prophetic writings

The context of persecution and suffering during the Babylonian exile caused Israel's faith in YHWH to mature. Hoping in his faithfulness and omnipotence, the people of Israel could not accept that the righteous had been abandoned into the hands of the wicked.

If it is not easy to find elements of eschatology in the Pentateuch (Ska 2022: 55-75) [10], this is confirmed by the Sadducees of the Saviour's time (Mt 22:23; Mk 12:18; Lk 20:27; Acts 23:8), who rejected the idea of resurrection from the dead precisely because, according to them, this idea is not present in the five books of the Pentateuch only these were considered by them to be inspired. However, in the books of the prophets, we can find a creative fluidity between the national restoration of exiled Israel and the new creation or bodily resurrection of the dead.

Such a text can be considered that of Is 26:19: "Your dead shall live, and their bodies shall rise! Awake, sing for joy, you who dwell in the dust! For Your dew is the dew of light, and out of the bosom of the earth the shadows shall rise (רְפָאִ֔ים)." This verse should be read in chapters 24-27, the so-called apocalypse of Isaiah. According to B. Childs (2005, 190) and A. Mello (2012, 174), these chapters belong to the apocalyptic genre because they focus on the cosmic judgment of the world and its final restoration by God but lack explicit historical references. The first part of these chapters deals mainly with the destruction of an unspecified "desolate city" (Is 24:10), and the second part deals with the building of the "strong city" (Is 26:1).

The alternation of possessives: "Your dead" (מֵתֶ֙יךָ), "their bodies" (נְבֵלָ֖תִי) creates difficulty in understanding who the speaker is: is it God or is it the Jewish community? In the context of chapters 26 and 27, is v. 19 the conclusion of the previous word, in which Israel speaks, or is it the beginning of the next one, in which God speaks? [11] If the confession of faith in v. 19 is attributed to an individual or the entire prayer community, then the dead are Israel's. If, however, God speaks, we are looking at a promise in answer to the community's prayer.

Another issue raised by v. 19 is whether it is a metaphor for the restoration of the exiled people of Israel (Johnston 1988, 80; Levenson 2006, 200; Beuken 2007, 383; Finney 2016, 32) or whether it affirms individual resurrection (Young 1992, 227; Blenkinsopp 2000, 371; Kaiser 2002, 263). According to B. Childs (2005, 209), the distinction is entirely irrelevant to understanding the function of the promise in chapter 26. The meaning of verse 19 is not to be reduced to a mere promise of an end to

persecution and suffering; its content emphasizes God's promise that life extends beyond the end of earthly existence. God's extraordinary intervention in his creation is expressed through another metaphor, the "bright dew". Resurrection as the work of God's "luminous wheel" is denied for some (v. 14) and affirmed for others (v. 19).

According to P. S. Johnston, this is probably more than just a national restoration of the people of Israel. Both vs. 14 and 19 refer specifically to "shadows" and "dead," i.e. deceased individuals. The application may be national, but the image implies a concept of individual resurrection of at least some of the Israelites, the righteous.

Another prophetic text that is similar to Is 26:19 is that of Ez 37:1-14. In an extraordinary vision, Ezekiel, at God's command, prophesies to the spirit to raise the multitude of dry bones scattered on a plain. The vision is immediately explained: "These bones are the whole house of Israel. [...] And I will put my spirit within you, and you shall rise" (v. 11.14). The exiled Israelites have lost hope, but the Lord will open their graves and repatriate them, and they will live. Israel's condition in exile is comparable to that of the dead; without a breath of life, only YHWH's miraculous intervention can restore hope to the exiled people. The vision of resurrected bodies points to a restored people. According to J. D. Levenson (2006, 165), for the Jews of that time, the resurrection of the dead is always and inextricably linked to the restoration of the people of Israel.

The Prophet uses a suggestive metaphor, resurrection, to convey to the people the hope of a "return to life." This metaphor does not have a precise and explicit eschatological character, but it is nonetheless possible that the image of the return to life (Hos 6:1-3; Ez 37:1-14) implicitly contains a projection of the eschatological bodily resurrection.

The resurrection metaphor will be transformed into an accurate and precise eschatological concept. Texts almost contemporaneous with those mentioned that testify to faith in the bodily resurrection are Dn 12:1-3 and 2 Mac 7. These two texts interpret realistically the expectations of Ez 37 and Is 26:19.

Both texts are dated to the 2nd century BC. Specifically, they describe the persecution and the era of the Maccabean revolt against the Hellenization program of Palestine initiated by the Seleucid king Antiochus IV Epiphanes (215-164 BC) in the second half of the 2nd century BC.

These two texts have elements in common: the suffering of the martyrs has a redemptive function for the people of Israel; the people's faithfulness will be rewarded,

while the God of justice will punish the brutality of the persecutors; and the new life, the bodily resurrection they await, is the gift of the Creator God.

Dan 12:2-3 is probably the most explicit text in the Old Testament that speaks of the bodily resurrection, and it has become a staple. At the same time, it gives us one of how some older texts (in which similar imagery and terms are present) were read in the 2nd century BC. According to G. Ancona (2007, 39), "the announcement of the future resurrection in Daniel, besides taking on a more universal perspective, manifests a qualitatively new depth from an eschatological point of view."

"And at that time, Michael, the great prince who protects the sons of your people, will arise, and there will be a time of trouble that has not been since the beginning of time, even until now. But in that time, your people will be saved, whoever is found written in the book. And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth will rise, some to eternal life, and some to eternal shame and disgrace. And the wise shall shine as the brightness of heaven, and those who have guided many in the way of righteousness shall be as the stars forever and ever."

In 2 Mac 7, King Antiochus IV Epiphanes arrests and forces seven brothers and their mother to eat the forbidden pork. To achieve his goal, the king subjects them to torture. Before being tortured, they take the opportunity to confess their belief in the resurrection. For example, the second son addresses the king: "But you, wicked one, are putting us out of this life, but the King of the world, we who die for his laws, will rise again with the resurrection of eternal life" (7:9). The fourth, in turn, says: "It is good to put off the hope of men and wait for the hope of God, for we shall rise again through him, and to you there shall be no resurrection to life" (7:14). Finally, the mother with manly courage says: "The Creator of the world, who has built man from his birth, will give you as a merciful One spirit and life again" (7:23).

Immortality of the soul

In passages 2:23-3:10 of Wisdom of Solomon, the author highlights the contrast between the righteous' hope of immortality and the wicked's belief that death has the final word on human existence. These hopes will be fulfilled on the day of judgment, when it will be shown that man is made in the image of God, i.e., unholy.

The book Wisdom of Solomon was written probably around 30 BC by a Jew of Hellenistic origin (probably Alexandria in Egypt), with the use of the concept of immortality (*ἀθανασία*) and also of non-destruction (*ἀφθαρσία*) introduced a

significant novelty into the biblical eschatological context. The book's author probably uses these new terms to express the content of the Jewish faith because he was in a different cultural environment from the Jewish one. Although the author prefers to emphasize that souls will survive after death (immortality of the soul), his view of life, death, and the afterlife remains firmly rooted in biblical revelation (7:1-6).

According to the assumption that the Greeks believed in the immortality of the soul and the Jews in the resurrection of the body, the explicit teaching of the Wisdom of Solomon on the immortality of the soul would exclude bodily resurrection after death. Such an interpretation of Wisdom is still prevalent among theologians, according to N.T. Wright (2006, 204), the concepts of "resurrection" and "immortality" are not antithetical per se. The concept of "immortality," if not reduced to the Platonic perspective (a pre-existing immortal soul imprisoned in a body for some time until death releases it), does not exclude bodily resurrection. In reality, resurrection is a form or type of "immortality."

For the author of The Wisdom of Solomon, the soul is not immortal by nature (according to Platonic and Stoic conceptions) but can attain immortality through wisdom; it is an immortality that will consist of a renewed bodily life when the soul will receive a body that corresponds to it (9,15). According to theologians F. Manzi, N.T. Wright, and A. F. Segal, although the term "resurrection" is not mentioned in the book of Wisdom of Solomon, the concept of "immortality of the soul" also implies bodily resurrection.

Although the author uses the linguistic infrastructure of Greek-Platonic thought (e.g. the contrast between the "immortal and incorruptible soul" and the "mortal and corruptible body"), the content of the message remains consistent with the whole biblical tradition. Chapters 1 to 5 are a classic Hebrew narrative: the Creator God is the God of life, who created human beings in his "image and likeness" (Gn 1:26; Sol 2:23b), and their destiny is an endless existence. It is precisely for this reason that the entrance of death into the world cannot be attributed to God (Sol 1:13-14) but to the serpent of Genesis (Sol 2:24a). For the Judeo-Alexandrian author, death does not have a liberating role as for the Greeks. Still, it intrudes in the good and beautiful creation the Creator desires (Sol 1,12-15).

The hope of the author of the Wisdom of Solomon is in harmony with the prophets' hope: God will not leave the righteous in the hands of the wicked. The righteous persecuted and killed by the wicked do not disappear forever as they suppose

(Sol 3:2); their souls are safe, "in the hands of God" (Sol 3:1), and their hope is a life without death; it is immortality (Sol 3:4).

Perhaps the author of the Wisdom of Solomon uses the concepts of "immortality" and "incorruption" of souls (Sol 2:23; 6:19) and not bodily resurrection because the recipients of the book included pagans.

The immortality of the soul in the writings of Philo of Alexandria

A great exponent of Alexandrian Judaism who tried to create a synthesis between the Mosaic faith and Greek philosophy was Philo of Alexandria (25 BC – 40 AD). According to H.A. Wolfson, two tendencies on the afterlife of the individual emerged in Judaism at the time of Philo: one that held the thesis of the resurrection of the body (specific to Palestinian Judaism) and another that had the thesis of the immortality of the soul (specific to Hellenistic Judaism).

Since he does not refer to the bodily resurrection of the dead in his writings, Philo of Alexandria can be considered a proponent of the theory of the soul's immortality. Philo's position on the soul's immortality differs from that of all philosophers who hold this position. For example, unlike the Platonic doctrine that the soul of both the righteous and the wicked is immortal by nature, Philo admits the soul's immortality only for the righteous and virtuous as a gift or grace from God. Instead, the souls of the wicked are doomed to eternal death. For Philo, the soul's immortality is a reward reserved only for the righteous but denied to the evil. Unlike the Stoics, who admitted the survival of the soul of the wise for a certain period, Philo held that the immortality of the soul of the righteous is eternal. The text quoted by Philo as an argument for his thesis is Genesis 15:15: "And you shall pass to your fathers in peace and be buried in happy old age." Referring to this verse, he states: "For when someone says to a dying person, 'You will pass to your parents,' what else does it mean but to represent another life without a body, which only the soul of the wise should live?" (Philo, *Quaestiones et solutiones in Genesim* III,11).

What is similar but simultaneously distinguishes Philo from the apostle Paul is the theory of the two. Philo developed his two-man theory based on the two accounts of the creation of man present in the book of Creation (1:26-27; 2:7). According to Philo, God created two categorically different types of man: a "heavenly man" (*οὐράνιος ἄνθρωπος*), made in the image of God (Gn 1:26-27) and an "earthly man" (*γήϊνος ἄνθρωπος*), fashioned from the dust of the earth (Gn 2:7). Describing the two-man theory, Philo

states: "There are two kinds of people, one is the heavenly man and the other is the earthly man. The heavenly man, as created in the image of God, does not partake of a corruptible and generally earthly substance, while the earthly man was taken from a scattered matter, which Moses called dust. Therefore, he says that the heavenly man was not *fashioned* but rather *fashioned in the image* of God, and the earthly man is a fashioned being and not generated by the Master." (Philo, *Legum allegoriae* I 31. Mondésert 1962, 59).

According to Philo, the soul is not immortal in itself; it becomes immortal only through the divine spirit given by God: "breathed the breath of life and man became a living being" (Gn 2:7b). The one who breathes is God; the one who receives is the intellect; and what is breathed is the spirit. Philo indicates in some of his writings that human beings pre-existed as pure, ethereal minds before their life in the body (Philo, *De Gigantibus* 12. Cf. Mosès 1963, 27; *De Somniis* I,135-138. cf. Savinel 1962, 81-3), and, with the end of earthly life, will return to that form of existence (Philo, *Questiones et Solutiones in Genesis* 3,11; *Legatio ad Caium* 1,105; 2,77. cf. Pelletier 1972, 135; *De Cherubim* 114. cf. Gorez 1963, 73; *De Sacrifciis Abelis et Caini* 5). According to Runia, the two-man theory highlights the contrast between life in the body and life as a disembodied mind. Philo conceives of the afterlife only regarding the soul's intellect, abrogating man's somatic dimension.

According to Stefan Nordgaard (2011, 355), Philo's theory of the two men can be summarized as follows: the heavenly man can be defined as a man as he is before and after his earthly existence, i.e., as a pure and bodiless mind, enlivened and illuminated by the spirit of God (for Philo the intellect was "the sovereign element of the soul" – cf. *De opificio mundi* 69), and the earthly man as he is during his earthly life, i.e. a compound of body and mind, animated and illuminated by the breath of God.

If for Philo, who admits a double creation, the first man is the heavenly, ideal, immortal, created in the image of God (Gn 1:26-27), and the second is mortal, composed of body and soul (Gn 2:7); for the apostle Paul the first man, Adam, became a living being, and the last Adam (Christ) became a life-giving spirit (1 Cor 15:45). It is important to note that the emphasis in 1Cor 15 is not on earthly and spiritual things in general, but on the fleshly (*σῶμα ψυχικόν*) and spiritual (*σῶμα πνευματικόν*) bodies. In 1 Cor 15, the emphasis is on the body; the apostle Paul means that only eschatologically, the Spirit of God will influence the body to such an extent that the body will become a pneumatic body. Only then will we bring to full fruition the image of the heavenly man

who is the eschatological man (1Cor 15:49). Victory over death and the spiritualization of the bodily dimension of man are given to man through the Lord Jesus Christ "the beginning of the dead" (1 Cor 15:20,57).

Conclusions

Man has always tried to understand the mystery of life, death, and possible survival in the afterlife. For this reason, this article has aimed to analyse some Old Testament texts that highlight the hope of the chosen people in the afterlife. From the earliest writings of the Old Testament, we can see that the hope of the chosen people is limited to the conquest of the promised land, prosperity, and the multitude of descendants without a clear perspective on the afterlife.

According to most exegetes, the experience of persecution, suffering, exile, and especially martyrdom suffered by Israel contributes to the maturation of the faith of the chosen people in the God of justice who, remaining faithful to his people, will not leave the righteous of Israel in the hands of the enemies. Initially, victory over death has a collective dimension (Ez 37:1-14; Is 26:19), but then this collective hope becomes an individual hope (Dn 12:2-3; 2 Mac 7). We can see a shift from the hope of national restoration to the affirmation of personal resurrection.

If, in the Hellenistic cultural context, a clear distinction was made between soul and body (dualistic anthropology), survival after death was described only in terms of the soul's immortality, denying the possibility of resurrection from the dead. In the Jewish context, however, a unitary, holistic anthropology prevails. Consequently, resurrection from the dead becomes part of the hope of the people of Israel (Dn 12:2-3; 2 Mac 7).

Philo of Alexandria, a contemporary of the apostle Paul, tried to create a synthesis between the Mosaic faith and Greek philosophy; as regards the eschatological dimension of man, he remained faithful to the Platonic theory of the immortality of the soul, excluding the resurrection of the body, even though he was a Jew. However, as Plato claimed, for Philo, the soul is not immortal by nature but is a gift from God to the righteous. For Philo, the resurrection of the body is not conceivable, only the immortality of the soul of the righteous; instead, both the doctrine of the resurrection from the dead and the doctrine of the immortality of the soul are articulated in the writings of the Old Testament (especially in the Book of Wisdom of Solomon).

Notes

[1] According to Hans Walter Wolff, the term basar appears in the OT 273 times, referring only to man and animals, never God. He identifies four possible meanings of this term: a) flesh (Is 22:13; Lv 4:11; Nm 19:5); b) the whole body (Lv 19:28; Nm 8:7; Ps 38:4); c) affinity (Gn 37:27; Lv 18:6; Is 58:7; Ez 11:19); d) weakness (Ps 56:5; 65:3; Jr 17:5,7; Job 34:14) (Wolff 2002, 40-7; Cavedo 1988, 309-11; Lipinski 1995, 368-9; McCasland 2000, 451).

[2] The diversity of meanings of the term nephesh is evident from the fact that of the 755 occurrences in the Old Testament, in only 600 passages in the Septuagint is it translated with the Greek term ψυχή. The same author, Wolff, hypothesizes seven possible meanings of this term: (a) greed (Is 5:14; Ps 107:9; Nm 21:5b); (b) gluttony (Ps 44:26; Ps 115:18; Jer 4:10); (c) desire (Gn 34:2; Hos 4:8; Ps 23:2); (d) soul (Ex 23:9; Job 19:2; Jr 13:17); e) life (Lv 24:17; Dt 24:6; Prov 8:35; 19:8); f) person (Gn 2:7; Lv 17:10; 23:30; 18:29; Nm 19:18); g) pronoun (Gn 12:13; 19:19; Nm 23:10; Ps 54:6; 103:1) (Wolff 2002, 18-39; McKenzie 1975, 59-61; Lipinski 1995, 115-6; Russell 1991, 187-90; Barr 1992, 36-47; Moncuso 2007, 55-71; Pleijel 2019: 194-206).

[3] According to Wolff, the term ruach refers more often to God (136 times) than humans, animals, and idols (129 times) and should be described primarily as an anthropological concept. He identifies six senses of the term: a) wind (Gn 1:2; 8:1; Ex 10:13); b) breath (Is 42:5; Ez 37:6,8,10.14; Jr 2:24); c) power of life (Ex 15:8; Ps 33:6; Is 42:1); d) spirit (2 Sam 19:7; Nm 11:29; 27:16); e) state of soul (1 Sam 10:5; Job 15:13; Prov 18:14); f) strength of will (Jr 51:11; Ps 32:2) (Wolff 2002, 48-57; Russell 1991, 190-4).

[4] For the concept of remapping, see McKenzie 1975, 804; Schnell 1993, 35; Lipinski 1995, 1092; and O'callaghan 2011, 79-80.

[5] Gn 37:35b: "Weeping, I will go down to the grave to my son"; Gn 42:38; 44:29,31.

[6] 2 Sam 12:23: "But now he is dead; why should I fast? Can I bring him back? I will go to him, and he will not return to me."

[7] On the concept of Sheol and, in general, on the afterlife in the OT, see Fenasse 1971, 549-53; McKenzie 1975, 912-4; Lewis 1992, 101-5; Bernstein 1993, 140-6; Jarick 1999, 22-32; Tábet 2010, 11-24.

[8] "The particular experience of exile not only strengthens the people's hope in a redemptive renewal of YHWH on their behalf but also contributes to the emergence of a new eschatological perspective." (Ancona 2007, 49).

[9] For example, B.B. Schmidt identifies radical changes in Jewish beliefs about death and the afterlife during this period, listing several possible causes for this transformation: "In the period following the Babylonian exile of 586/587 BC, the Jewish people were in a state of exile. C. there were significant transformations in Israelite/Jewish beliefs

about death and the afterlife. Notions of bodily resurrection, ascension, and immortality seem to have roots in Jewish traditions of this period. This has been explained as the result of a combination of factors: foreign religious influence – Persian, Greek or other – social and individual crises, and the inadequacy of traditional constructs of theodicy." (Schmidt 2000, 96).

[10] In his article, the author distinguishes three phases in the history of research on biblical eschatology: Wellhausen and his school, which limits eschatology to the post-exilic period; a renewed interest in eschatology beginning with Klaus Koch, Otto Plöger, and Paul Hanson; and the current situation. The author prefers to speak of eschatology as "reflection on the final destiny concerning the individual and the whole people" (Ska 2022: 68).

[11] Most authors, with whom we agree, describe v. 19 as a confession of faith by the praying community: Kaiser 2002, 265; Beuken 2007, 380-5; van der Woude 2013, 154-63; Childs 2005, 205; Goldingay 2014, 51).

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Wine as a Symbol in the Old Testament

Abstract

According to archaeology, scriptures, and the Bible, wine is a typical drink in ancient Israel. Wine is a drink and a significant symbol in the Bible that reflects the cultural reality of ancient Israeli society. In this article, I have reviewed research literature on wine drinking, and I will argue that wine is an essential symbol in some literary genres in the Bible. The symbolism of wine can be divided into a few themes of symbolic representation: a positive sign of blessing, A negative symbol of emotions and actions, and an ambivalent symbol of disobedience to God and social order. The choice of wine as a symbol in the Bible as a drink produced in ancient society is considered a gift from God and part of the blessing for the abundance of the land. Excessive use of wine, however, can lead to irresponsible acts. Wine is not a prominent symbol but an enclave whose essence emphasizes the obvious in human life in ancient Israeli society. Combining the archaeological research with literary research in the Bible and non-biblical sources, it will be possible to form a better picture of ancient Israeli culture if we remember that there is a bias in the excavated areas and the biased writing of biblical writers in time, place, and purpose. This is an opportunity to peek into the depths of ancient Israeli society's culture and understand its arrangements and power relations.

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Drinking wine, Positive Symbol, Negative Symbol, non-compliance with God, Social orders

Drinking Wine

Wine, an intoxicating, usually alcoholic drink made of grape juice, was used daily thousands of years ago in Mesopotamia and ancient Israel. The Hebrew word for wine, יַיִן (*yēn*), is common in the Bible 144 times. Various expressions related to

wine can be found in the Old Testament, but they create different meanings, such as drunkenness (Gn 9:24; 1Sam 25:37), ale (Isa 28:1,7), or dark senses of incidence (1Sam 1:14; Mic 2:11) (Anani 2020, 16-7; Melamed 1943, 189). But also, the opposite meaning of wine is "to make happy" (Dt 14:26; 2Sam 13:28; Ps 75:65) (BDB 2018, 406; TDOT 1990, 06).

Studies on wine drinking in the Bible, based on archaeological and epigraphic findings published in the 20th century, expose ample information on the subject without focusing systematically on specific themes. In poetic and prophetic texts, wine is used as a metaphor for the people of Israel and their relationship with God. Studies on prophetic texts have dealt with several Prophecy books, such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, Habakkuk, and Micah (Field 1882, 284-320; Haupt 1917, 75-83; BDB 2018, 1015-6; Beinart 1965, 672-8; Brown 1969, 146-70; Shpanier 2001, 119-65; Bottéro 1994, 3-13; Michalowski and Milano 1994, 33; Sasson 1994, 399-419; Broshi 2001, 146; Rosso 2012; Brown 1969, 146-70).

Theological studies, too, have indicated a complex attitude toward wine. Most Christian studies treat wine as a cultural symbol, distinguishing between drinking wine in a religious context, as a gift of God, and drinking in a secular social context. Other theological studies present a moderate approach to alcohol. Studies see drinking wine as a blessing. A person may choose to avoid the social drinking of wine, as opposed to the necessity of using wine as medicine (Ray 2018, 1-2).

Ryken et al. (1998) believe that water shortage in the Ancient Near East led to the proliferation of the wine industry, which was not considered a luxury. Evidence for drinking wine in a variety of circumstances is found in prophecies, where the prophets refer to people who drink at the Temple in Jerusalem (Jr 35:6; Ez 44:21), in feasts (Is 5:11-12, 22:5; Prov 23:30-31, Job 1:4), in contexts of idolatry (Is 22:13; Am 2:8) or at the dedication of leaders (Prov 31:4; Hos 7:5; Est 1:5,7) (Ryken, Wilhoit, Longman 1998, 201; Brown, 1969, 153, 169; Golden 2020, 1-19). Therefore, the widespread use of drinking wine at religious and secular events has led to ambiguous references regarding wine.

In Ancient Israel, Grape-harvest days became family merriment, celebrated with wine drinking accompanied by music and meals that symbolized fertility and continuity. Dietler (2006) claims that wine production in small societies was usually assigned to women and workers whose wages generally consisted of drink and food given to them by the wealthy owner of the vineyards (Dietler 2006, 239). Hence, there

is another ambivalent reference point to the importance of men drinking wine and women making wine.

In the Old Testament literature, we find many references to the frequent use of wine for everyday needs (Prov 3:10) and sacred purposes (Lv 23:13; Nm 28:14) (Beinart 1965, 680). The wine has been used for daily life for necessities such as drinking but also supplies for times of emergency (Jr 40:10; Lam 2:12), supplies for builders (1 Chron 2:9), a drink for travelers (Josh 9:4) and people tired of their journey (Gn 27:25; Josh 9:13; 2Sam 16:2), and even a drink for elephants before a battle (1 Mac 6:34) (Rapaport 2004). Broshi (2001) suggests that humans resorted to alcohol when they wished to escape reality (Prov 27:20), when depressed and sad (1Sam 1:15; Prov 31:6), or when they wanted to confess their sins (Zeph 1:13) or undesirable behavior (Hos 4:11; Prov 23:20) (Rapaport 2004). On the other hand, wine was intended to evoke positive feelings (Hos 7:5; Ps 78:65) and make people happy (as in Yotam's Parable, Judg 9:12-13; Ps 104:15) during celebrations (Is 24:9; Est 5:6), royal meals (Gn 40:20-21), in feasts, most notably in the Book of Esther (Est 1:1-22, 5:1-8, 6:14-7:10, 9:12-28) and in seasonal festivities (2Sam 13:23-28), or others feast (Gn 27:25; Is 55:1; Dn 1:16) (Kerem 1999, 19-20). The wine was also used as medicine for the ethanol released in the process of its fermentation. For example, wine is mentioned in ancient Mesopotamia as a remedy for intestinal disease and a pain reliever (Seely 1967, 212; Wiseman 1996, 23; Rosso 2012, 237; BDB 2018, 1015; Skolnik 2007, 80; Sherratt 1995, 18). The wine was given to mourners during the condolence meal (Dn 10:2-3) (Beinart 1965, 675-6; Skolnik 2007, 81). Thus, wine was used in both positive and negative contexts and sometimes in the ancient world.

In addition, the wine was also used for unique purposes that did not occur every day; for example, wine was used in ceremonies for anointing kings (1 Chron 12:41) (Kerem 1999, 18; BDB 2018, 406; Lehnardt 2014, 14-16; Steel 2004, 283; Kaddari 2006, 424-5; Brown, 1969, 148, 166, 169). It was used in religious ceremonies such as weddings (Jdg 14:1-20; Song 4:10) and Passover Seder (Lev 23:13). In Ancient Israel, quality wine, especially from Judah Mountains, was used for libations in religious rituals (Peha 7,8) (Gesenuis 1962, 299; Kerem 1999, 17; Kaddari 2006, 425; HALOT 2018,1015 -6) It was also used at the ceremony of sacrifice at the Tabernacle and the Temple (Nm 9:5,7,10; Hos 9:4) (BDB 2018, 406).

The wine was not only used for drinking on various occasions but also served as a symbol in the Bible of important property, as the following examples illustrate.

Wine is mentioned in the Bible as a "gift" between people (1Sam 16:20; 25:19; 2 Sam 16:1), and as a fine (Prov 4:17), a tithe of the Tirosh (must) was contributed to the Temple (Nm 18:12; Dt 12:17-18; Neh 10:38-40), or as treasure, property, or tax to the Temple (1Chron 9:29), and tax to the king (Am 2:8; 1Chron 12:41), but also the opposite as taken from wine robbery metaphorically (Ezek 27:18) (Beinart 1965, 675-6; Skolnik 2007, 80; Kaddari 2006, 425).

Wine as Symbol

The literary symbol is part of the motif characterizing different meanings, such as a verbal system with archetypes and thematic links to the work. The sign will often signal a natural phenomenon to illustrate programmatic and structural connections between units to the reader and create a plot promotion. The power of the icon will strengthen the plot. In the case of wine, it is a tangible but also an abstract symbol. It has an environmental connection, and the narrator builds its power in the structure. The symbolism of wine may be controversial, yet it isn't easy to understand its nature and is a complex motif. It is not only used as a metaphor but also as an image and a pictorial symbol. However, drinking wine symbolizes national and international customs in the ancient world. Understanding the symbolism in drinking wine may explain different works in a different light (Rivlin 1990, 32, 46; Even 1978, 93-95, 197-38).

According to Cohen (1992), the word יַיִן – wine in flowery phrases, imagery, or metaphor is seen mainly in prophetic and poetic books. The prophet, Cohen argues, was well aware that wine was a popular drink and could be used for bringing through social and religious messages (Cohen 1992, 60).

Ray (2018) recognized in her research the complex nature of wine drinking in ancient Israel. She found that wine has a positive meaning as a drink in celebration. Wine in celebration means blessing and joy, a symbol of society's abundance. However, it can assume a negative sense as the cause of poor judgment or decision-making and as a symbol of God's anger over erroneous moral behavior. Ray studied a variety of theological references in prophecy, law, or historiographic texts in the Bible and their interpretations to evaluate the different references to drinking wine. She finds four approaches to the subject: 1. Prevention; 2. Moderation; 3. Celebration regardless of worship (drinking to get drunk); 4. consuming wine is a sin. Ray concludes that drinking wine is an invitation from God to celebrate life (Ray 2018, 2-3, 16-8).

Similarly to Ray's research, we can divide the wine drinking as a symbol for three themes: A. a positive symbol of action and emotion; B. a negative symbol of emotions and actions; C. a symbol of non-compliance with God and social orders (in some cases can be positive or negative).

A positive symbol

Wine is used many times in Biblical literature in a positive symbolic sense, signifying abundance (Gn 49:12) and blessing (Gn 14:18). Wine signifies happiness (Gn 34:34; Dt 14:26; Is 24:9; Zech 10:7; Zeph 1:13; Est 1:10, 5:6; Ps 104:15). It points out the positive effects of wine, such as raising one's spirits and diligence (Ps 33:8, 104:15; Prov 9:1-9). Using wine in an agricultural banquet (2Sam 13:28) to celebrate your hard work over all year can symbolize fertility (Nm 13:23) and sexuality, gratitude, and obedience (Gn 27:38; Jdg 9:27; Am 9:13) and ask for forgiveness for sins (Ex 19:38-40). It symbolizes the promised land (Dt 8:7-8) and the society dealing between father and son (Gn 27:25). Wine is used for religious customs (at the altar – Lev 23:13; and in the Temple – Hag 2:12). Wine is a symbol of salvation (Is 25:6; Ps 23) in the context of prayer (Neh 5:18) or offering (Lv 23:13; Nm 15:5).

A similar reference to wine can be found in the work of Klaus (1993), who analyses the vertex structure of Psalms 104, at the center of which stands verse 15, describing the joy of drinking wine. Klaus claims that the author of this text assigns a psychological role to bread and wine, not merely a physical one (he bases this claim on the phrase לְבַב-אֱנוֹשׁ – human's heart, on Jdg 9:13; 19:8-9; Jr 31:11; Eccl 9:7-9; Sir 31:27-28 and on Ugaritic texts. According to this study, the author of Psalms sees wine as the crown of creation, meaning wine drinking symbolizes harmony, serenity, and brotherhood (Klaus 2003, 257-9).

This shows that wine was a significant element in Early Israelite life, so it was widely present as a positive symbol in Biblical literature (Agmon 2007, 98-100).

A negative symbol

The word for wine is used metaphorically for the wisdom of drinking (Is 55:1; Jr 25:15; Prov 9:5). Although drinking wine was a common practice in the Ancient Near East, and perhaps for just that reason, the Bible, in all its literary forms, forbade excess drinking, especially for the leaders such as when a Nazirite (נָזִיר) was concerned (in the story of Samson in Judges 13:4,14; and also, in Nm 6:3; Is 5:11). That is why Amos

reproaches the Nazirites for drinking (Am 2:12, 18). The Priests, too, were warned about drinking wine (Lv 10:8-9; Ez 44:21), and the Rechavim (הַרְכָּבִים) refrained from it altogether (Jr 35:1-19) (Beinart 1965, 679; de Vaux 1969, 189-90; Broshi 1985, 29; Cohen 1992, 61, 63; Lehnardt 2014, 14-6; BDB 2018, 1015-6).

Although regular occasions in a person's life cycle were designated for drinking wine, Biblical literature referred to the limits and dangers of drinking (Prov 31:4;), against drinking excessive wine (Is 5:22, 22:13, 28:1,7; Prov 23:20-21), and condemns drunkenness leading to disastrous consequences (Jdg 12:20-13:2), or drunkenness as punishment behavior people of Israel (Ps 60:1-3), as a symbol for anger, or God's "cup of rage" (Is 51:17; Jr 25:15, 25:15, 23:31-33; Hab 2:16; Zech 2:12, Ps 78:8) (Ryken, Wilhoit and Longman 1998, 3203-5, 3024-5; Krzeszowski 2008, 61, 63-4, 66, 69; BDB 2018, 1015-6; Agmon 2007, 99-100; HALOT 2016- 5101,8). The negative consequences of excessive wine drinking, according to scripture, are a deep sleep (Neh 3:11, 18; Joel 1:5), impoverishment and idleness (Prov 23:20-21, 31:7), obnoxious behavior (Is 28:7; Nazirite; Prov 20:1), foolishness (Prov 27:22), cause of dizziness (Jer 60:5; Ps 75:9), self-exposure (Gn 9:21-22), incest due to drunkenness (Gn 9:21-22, 19:31-35), alcoholism (Dt 21:20; 1Sam 1:13, 16:9; Job 12:25), loss of judgment (Dt 21:18-20), physical illness (Is 19:14; Jr 25:27) and even death and murder, where wine is used as part of a surprise strategy (2 Sam 11:11, 13:28; 1 Kgs 16:9, 20:12-17), or in extreme situations or as poison, in the term חֲמַת יַיִן (Hos 7:5; Hab 2:15). Thus, the Bible also uses agricultural images of the vine as a dangerous symbol of war and national disasters (Dt 32:33; Jer 25:15; Ps 25:9, 60:5) (Samet 2012, 6-11; Sutzkever 2011, 2-11).

In addition, the Bible dedicates considerable space to the use of wine as a negative figurative measure for acts of violence, for example, the death of Mo'av (Am 16:9-11) (Seely 1967, 217-8; Krzeszowski 2008, 63; Sherratt 1995, 18; Risch 2009, 89-93), as well as the victory of Gideon in war (Jdg 6:11), the Midianites' power (Jdg 7:25), the Babylonian conquest (Jr 51:7), an invading army or wicked nation (Joel 3:13). And for loyalty versus betrayal (Jr 23:9; 2 Sam 11:11). But drinking wine is not just the only issue of nations and the leader. It also refers to any negative aspects (Prov 4:17; Lam 2:12; Job 1:4-5), from very simple seemly a brawl in the streets (Prov 20:1) to a metonymic symbol for violence (Prov 4:17) and revenge (Ps 78:65).

Wine symbolizes negative emotions such as sadness (1 Sam 1:15) and mourning (Dn 10:3). Beyond that, wine's symbolic reference is too negative in general, such as

sinful behavior (Prov 23:30-33). Other symbols are associated with suffering as divine punishment (Is 24:4-9; Jr 48:33; Am 5:11; Lam 2:12) and despair of prophecy (Jr 23:9).

Studies about wine in Wisdom Literature broaden our picture of wine in the Bible. Zakowitz (1999) refers to the parable in Prov 23:29-35, interpreting it as a warning against the recklessness caused by drinking (Zakovitz 1999, 33-5). According to Zakowitz, the commentators negatively associated wine with foreign women by linking the parable to the preceding example (Prov 23:27-28, and Midrash Lev Raba 12:1). He finds a connection between wine and poverty, presented in a pun (Prov 23:29). Zakowitz points out that the parable summons an ambiguous puzzle: On the one hand, the wise man documents the co sequences of drinking wine by looking at the drunkard. On the other hand, he supposedly lets the drunkard win. In other words, the wise man realizes that drinking is not necessarily harmful in a complex, varying reality (Zakovitz 1999, 21-2).

In addition, another point of view on the negative of drinking wine was found; according to Duran (2005, in biblical cases, women used food and drink wine to seduce men to kill them. That is why the symbolic role of food and drink can be seen in the context of sexuality and murder presented, for example, in the story of Yael (Jdg 4:17-22), Esther (Est 4-7), and Judith (Jdt 12-13). Those three women who successfully use their beauty and sexuality as a personal weapon to deceive men stand against society and weaken their enemies. Duran believes that Yael's innocent story is opposed to Esther's and Yehudit's stories, which depict manipulative women. In his opinion, the weapon each of them uses, the food and drink and fasting they take upon themselves, intensifies their strength contrary to the pleasures of the flesh. Reading Esther's story, Judith's goal is clear. Perhaps in the story, there is a critique of the weakness of the Jewish people, and thus the name of the heroine, Yehudit (יהודית – a Jewish woman) expresses complete identification with these people (Duran 2005, 117-23).

Although the Wisdom Literature notes the consequences of drinking too much wine, it encourages a balanced habit of drinking. That is why a king, as leader of his people, was forbidden to drink to the point of drunkenness, lest he distort justice (Rosso 2012, 237; BDB 2018, 1015-6; Kaddari 2006, 424-5; Krzeszowski 2008, 64). Therefore, the advice in Prov (23:31) and Sirach (31:34-46) is to drink moderately (Broshi 1985, 33). From all the above, it can be concluded that drinking wine also served as a negative symbol, not only in the behavior of a leader or a people but also in emotions, and it was negatively associated with women.

A symbol of non-compliance with God and social orders

Drinking wine in many biblical stories reveals different aspects of life in the context of social order, such as political interaction (peace treatises – Gn 14); war – 1 Kgs 20:15-22; political actions – Josh 9:13; socio-cultural structures (as a symbol for prosperity and settlement – Job 1:1-15. This shows that wine was a significant element in Early Israelite life, so it was widely present in Biblical literature (Agmon 2007, 98-100).

In addition, drinking wine is associated with obedience to a social order in the context of divine morality. For example, we can point to a disturbance of the holy work in the god house in a social and religious context (Lv 10:9; Dt 29:5). Accordingly, wine is perceived as a symbol of moral blindness (Is 5:12, 28:7-8, 56:11-12, Am 6:6); in this sense, wine drinking serves as a metaphor for adopting bad habits, such as disloyalty to God (Joel 1:5) (Haupt 1917, 76-9; Zakovitz 1999, 33-4; Broshi 2001, 163; Agmon 2007, 98; Hadas 2007, 99).

Although wine's negative physical and mental effects were acknowledged, even in religious contexts, wine was used in Biblical stories as a metaphor for the relationship between God and His people. After all, the fertility of the soil was associated with God, and so was the fruit it bore (Ex 29:40; Dt 28:7). And the soil's produce was associated with other gods (Is 11:65; Jr 18:7; Hos 4:1). Drinking wine, then, especially at home, is served as an agent for cultural worship, according to Welton (2020). She bases her claim on other symbols, such as the pomegranate, which symbolizes desire, which does not rely on the senses and memory alone, but also on social relationships (Welton 2020, 224-7).

Several studies have been conducted on the texts of biblical law. Begg (1980), for example, refers to the expression bread and wine (יין ולחם) in Deut 29:5. He claims that the situation was written in the context of desperate people walking around in the desert (an extreme environment) that required drinking as part of the culture in the environment (שיכר – liquor, Dt 4:26). Because food could not be carried in the desert, the Israelites dedicated to wine and bread as a symbol to God as the remaining part of God's gift, so they accepted the Spirit of God and promised to obey His morals (Begg 1980; 266, 274-5).

In another way, McGovern (2013) chose to focus on the study of morality in the conduct of Noah rather than in wine production. But he emphasised drinking wine as immoral conduct (McGovern 2013, 16-39). But Green (2006) explored the vineyard for

wine as part of Noah's new creation. He analyzed the vineyard motif in Noah's story in its broader context. He found it significant because it emphasizes Noah's faith in God, trusting that God will continue his creation with a new product. Thus, the vineyard represents the creation that has been completed, giving us a view of the ideal world as God wants it to be. Therefore, according to Green, wine symbolizes loyalty (Jdg 9:13). However, Green does not state that wine symbolizes a return to the primitive state of Eden. Wine, he claims, rather signifies progress in the moral attitude of mankind by cultivating the land. Wine is a sign of the culture of God, and the production of wine emphasizes humankind's role in maintaining God's creation and ruling it. Wine symbolises food culture in biblical texts, and rhetorical means and other food motifs stand out. In this sense, the vineyard and the wine are seen as a gift of love, which God bestows on all His creatures and the people of Israel (Green 2006, 126, 139, 147, 360; cf. Sasson 1994, 399-419).

Studies on Prophetic literature and biblical poetry relate primarily to the symbolism of wine and its use as a symbolic instrument for the relationship between God and the Israelites. Prinsloo's study (2016) compares three sources (Hab 5:5; Jeremiah and Pesher Habakkuk) that, in his opinion, they demonstrate an obsessive desire for wine to the point of absurdity, and the motif of wine plays a triangular role here. Wine is used as a weapon in God's hands, a drink for thirsty people, and the fermentation of wine symbolizes violence or punishment (Prinsloo 2016, 7).

Sasson (1994) points out in his study that the feasts in the Prophet Books, where wine is mentioned, signify two opposite ideas. On the one hand, they show that God helps those who believe in him (Is 25:6-8). On the other hand, they suggest that wine causes violence, greediness, and selfishness (Zeph 12:1). The same applies to other prophets (Ez 39:17-21; Am 6:6-7). The text in Isaiah 5:11-12 illustrates this, depicting violent behavior brought on by drinking wine (Prov 17:4). Sasson refers to later periods in exile when wine testified the presence of God as if God-intoxicated the believer (Jr 23:9). Elsewhere, God is referred to as the "wine of rage", and God's salvation links God to Israel and renews their relationship (Jr 51:7-9; Hab 2:15-16). Jeremiah compares Babylon to a cup of wine, a tool in God's hands to punish Israel. Isaiah continues this cup motif as an image of God's anger at Jerusalem's sinning. He figuratively refers to the punishment and torture of the people of Jerusalem as taking the cup of poison (Is 51:17-22) (Sasson, 1994, 409-10).

A limited review of the proverbs and parables in the Bible also reveals a reference to a desirable social order for the leader as a result of obedience to God in a two-faced manner. For example, Oprica and Ugarte (2011) suggested that the symbolic significance of wine varies considerably in different proverbs: signifying old age, friendship, relations with women, conversation (evoked by good wine and bread), "Wine shall delight a human heart" (Ps 104:15), "Wine reveals secrets" (נכנס יין יצא סוד – Erub. 65:1) (Oprica and del Carmen Ugarte 2011, 1-2).

In addition, Albright (1980) refers to the ambivalence towards wine and focuses on the prophets and the book of Proverbs. He finds evidence of drinking wine not intended for pleasure but, ironically, for relieving pain (Prov 31:6) (Albright 1980, 63-4, 203-4).

Douglas (2003) mentions three contexts of social drinking: 1. Drinking arranges a person's social status according to his behavior; 2. Drinking shows a person's economic ability; 3. Participation in a drinking ceremony is a social ideal. From this, in her opinion, it is possible to deduce who the people who drink in society are and who the groups excluded from the community are (Douglas 2003, 3-4, 8).

Interdisciplinary studies shed light on ancient Israeli society from a historical and social perspective. Walsh (2000) studied recurring patterns of stories that referred to drunkenness and found that in the biblical story (Noah's story is unusual), Maine drunkenness is a condition for social belonging to a community, in which norms of behavior affect all participants. Drinking is not a matter of escapism or the collapse of the social order but the essence of a preferred social order. In Walsh's opinion, there is no social restriction to attending banquets to get drunk, but this is the norm of ancient Israeli culture. People who drink in society strengthen their social status and form social relationships. Therefore, drinking is a social act that generates trust within a circle of friends. However, drinking wine can also lead to social devastation. Heavy drinking can push good people into a state of intoxication. They may find themselves betrayed or expelled from the banquet, involuntarily involved in unwanted situations, or even murdered (2 Sum 13:28). Drinking within the family is different (Jer 25:27; Prov 31:6). It may be beneficial but it can also intensify tensions in the family. The biblical writer does not encourage Noah and Lot's drinking in the family's bosom; it was perceived as an escape from extreme conditions (Walsh 2000, 15-29).

In short, the complex and ambivalent nature of wine, which is also implicitly mentioned, shows the positive and negative views of drinking wine, even when it comes

to a social order made by man or God. On the one hand, drinking wine encourages and blessing Israel by God, and a cultural component symbolizes drinking wine as a curse and is considered harmful when consumed excessively (Krzeszowski 2008, 70-1). Therefore, the Bible recommends avoiding wine when it might cause moral corruption (Ray 2018, 1-2).

Insights

Drinking wine is a common motif in the various genres in the Bible. The different literary studies point to an ambivalent attitude of the Bible to drinking wine (Teachout 1979, 254-62, 300-11, 336). On the one hand, it has a positive attitude toward creating joy, influencing the creation of community, and strengthening the belonging of family and religious identities in Israel and Judea (Welton 2020, 314, 317-8). Drinking wine affects communication for the individual in the relationships within the family and the community (Sherratt 1995, 11-3, 18, 29; Silman 2013, 13-16; Lehnardt 2014, 9). It strengthens socio-political alliances and effectively enhances the social status of the host person (Steel 2004, 283; Kaddari 2006, 281-284). But on the other hand, wine hurts the person, causing various physical problems and unwanted behaviors, exclusion from the community, and a socioeconomic structure that is not necessarily egalitarian (Singer 1986, 113-30; Dietler 2006, 229-33). The ambiguous reference to drinking wine is also expressed in God's attitude towards it as a positive symbol that wine is a divine gift. As a negative motif, it symbolizes God's anger and violence toward His creatures (Welton 2020, 224-7).

Despite the abundance of research in the article, there is a considerable lack of research about wine, especially wine drinking, in parables in Biblical and post-Biblical Wisdom literature. Furthermore, no study examines Wisdom proverbs in the Bible in light of post-Biblical sources such as Sirach. Although Sirach (2nd century BCE), sums up this bifold view of wine in a positive statement: "Even life to men is wine drunken in soberness; if thou drinkest it measurably, thou shalt be sober. What is the life which is made less by wine? What defraudeth life? Death. The wine was made in gladness, not drunkenness, at the beginning." (Sir 31:27 trans. WYC)

However, he makes a statement that wine must be drunk in moderation (Sir 31:29, trans. WYC), which is followed by an altogether negative message (Segal 1997; Shupak 1996; Horovitz 2012): "Wine drunken much maketh voiding, and ire, and many fallings, or mischiefs. Wine intoxicated much is bitterness of (the) soul. Strength of drunkenness

and hurting of an unprudent man maketh virtue less and making wounds. In the feast of wine, reprove thou not a neighbour, and despise thou not him in his mirth. Say thou not words of shame [or of reproof] to him, and oppress thou not him in [again]-asking." (Sir 31:29-31, trans. WYC)

In conclusion, Biblical references reveal a complex attitude toward wine and wine drinking, involving social, economic, religious, and medical aspects and shifting notably between negative and positive notions. These shifting notions and their relation in different Biblical texts require a more thorough study.

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BOOK REVIEWS

PhD Students Research on the Old Testament (I)

Constantin-Radu Iliescu

Interpretarea Sfintei Scripturi în tradiția patristică și rabinică – repere și direcții de cercetare, vol. 1, eds. Ioan Chirilă și Bogdan Șopterean (Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2023), 118 p.

Edited by Ioan Chirilă and Bogdan Șopterean, the volume is an outstanding academic work that brings together PhD students' perspectives in Orthodox theology on profound and sometimes controversial topics in biblical exegesis. Focusing on how the Jewish and Patristic traditions interpret the sacred texts, this volume plays a crucial role in fostering an interreligious and interdisciplinary dialog that is not just academic but also essential for contemporary theological and cultural understanding, keeping the audience connected and informed.

The preface, written by Rev. Professor Ioan Chirilă, establishes a solid philosophical basis, discussing the spiritual unity gained through the knowledge of divine revelation reflected in the Scriptures. Rev. Chirilă emphasizes the perennial relevance of sacred texts and the need for their continuous reinterpretation to face the challenges of postmodernity. He suggests that this approach should not be merely an academic examination but a spiritual and cultural integration process that can renew today's religious and intellectual communities. This conceptual framework is vital to the structure and direction of the entire volume, orienting the reader from present-day disjunctions to the unifying potential of biblical spirituality.

The first chapter, written by Alexandru Ciucurescu, discusses a novel interpretation of the Patriarch Jacob, seen symbolically as a אֵל (ʿĒl – "god" or "God") in specific midrashic interpretations. This analysis explores in depth the complexity of ancient conceptions of divinity and provides an illuminating context for later theological developments in Judaism. By providing evidence of the diversity of monotheistic beliefs of the time, the study contributes to a better understanding of how these conceptions influenced not only Jewish thought but also the early structure of Christianity.

Continuing in the same vein, Marius Tanase contributes an in-depth comparative study of the belief in the resurrection according to the Talmud and the Targums, shedding light on rabbinic perspectives on the afterlife in contrast to those in the New Testament texts. This exploration is indispensable for anyone studying eschatology, providing a rich understanding of how different spiritual and cultural trajectories have worked together or contrasted over the centuries.

In his study on the resurrection of Christ as the typos of our resurrection, Iancu Buda brings a distinct Christian dimension by analyzing Psalm 30. He combines a scriptural approach with a reflection on the symbolic meanings of the resurrection, interpreting them both as fundmental historical events and as ongoing spiritual processes of inner restoration. This dual perception, emphasizing personal and communal transformation, highlights the deep theological roots of the Christian tradition that continue to influence contemporary faith.

Bogdan Negrea addresses the concept of the "School of the Wilderness," describing spiritual and ascetic experiences as essential stages in knowing and drawing closer to God. Through interrogations of the reclusive life and ascetic disciplines, the author highlights how these practices have realized resilient spiritual and moral structures in theological history and how they can still inspire the spiritual lives of modern individuals. The idea that asceticism is not merely a relic of the past but a path of contemporary spiritual development is a key element in understanding the enduring relevance of ancient practices.

Ioan-Daniel Manolache examines an ancient marriage custom, levirate marriage, in the light of the legal traditions of antiquity, offering a historical and critical perspective that enriches our understanding of this complex phenomenon. He analyzes the cultural context in which this practice was accepted and its social and legal implications on the community, helping the reader understand how ancient traditions echo in contemporary societies. Manolache also emphasizes how these marriage norms were perceived in the Old Testament and how their nuances influenced biblical thinking on human relationships and the status of women, reinforcing the idea that the social and religious picture of ancient times has deep roots worth exploring.

Another captivating chapter is written by Ioan Dorin Salvan, who focuses on the "raising of the Ark" and the mystery of the biblical artifact of the Ark of the Covenant. I. Salvan examines the physical search for it throughout history and the profound symbolism associated with the Ark in Christian and Jewish traditions.

By comparing the image of the Ark with the figure of the Virgin Mary in Orthodox theology, the author reinterprets the role of this artifact within the biblical narrative, suggesting a continuity of divine presence through sacred symbols and artifacts. This iconographic exploration offers fascinating insights into how biblical symbols can evolve and adapt in diverse cultural contexts without losing their holy essence.

Ioan Krauciuc's analysis of the 'Lord's Prayer' as interpreted by St. John Chrysostom is a testament to the continuity of liturgical tradition. This study meticulously details the evolution of the prayer's text and demonstrates how the tradition has adapted to the needs of faith communities over time, providing a comprehensive understanding of the prayer's enduring significance.

In conclusion, Mădălin-Vasile Tăut presents a pastoral meditation on fasting based on the teachings of St. Basil the Great. M. Tăut explores the biblical origins of fasting and its importance in contemporary religious practice, highlighting when and how fasting becomes a tool of spiritual renewal. Reflecting on the impact fasting has on the shared consciousness of believers, M. Tăut argues that despite the diversification of religious views, fasting remains a central pillar in Christian spirituality, acting as a mechanism of discipline and introspection.

This volume proves to be a reference work for all those interested in biblical studies, comparative theology, or the history of religions. The thematic diversity and the depth of the research carried out by young academics give readers a picture of theological differences and commonalities that can lead to more incredible spiritual and intellectual unity. This work thus significantly contributes to interreligious dialogue, enlightening readers and showing that the study of sacred texts is an academic activity and a source of inspiration and personal transformation in a modern world characterized by complex challenges. For interested readers, the volume offers a unique opportunity to explore the intersections between Judaism and Christianity, to understand the reciprocal influences between the two traditions, and to reflect on their relevance in the present context. The research in this volume shows that, despite the diversity of approaches, the universal message of Scripture is evident.

PhD Students Research on the Old Testament (II)

Cătălin-Emanuel Ștefan

Studii de exegeză și teologie biblică. Perspective de interpretare specifice tradiției răsăritene, vol. 2, eds. Ioan Chirilă, Stelian Pașca-Tușa și Bogdan Șopterean (Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2024), 215 p.

The volume edited by the professors of Old Testament Theology at the Faculty of Orthodox Theology in Cluj-Napoca is an outstanding academic work that significantly contributes to the field of biblical exegesis, providing a nuanced understanding of Scripture from an Orthodox perspective. This book, which brings together papers from doctoral students at a conference devoted to biblical exegesis, covers various themes and topics, each exploring an essential aspect of the divine will as reflected in the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament.

Structured on 215 pages, this volume is divided into studies on various topics, ranging from the sacredness of biblical places and sacrifices to aspects of anthropogenesis and the relationship between Jewish and Christian worship. In his opening address, Ioan Chirilă emphasizes the importance of returning to the roots of the Orthodox tradition and the role of Scripture as the foundation of faith and culture. He appeals to the need to respond to the challenges of modernity by returning to the essentials that form our spiritual identity, making this volume a relevant resource for contemporary theological discourse. Among the works included in the volume are studies analyzing Mount Sinai as a symbol of divine self-giving, works on blood and sacrifices in the Holiness Code, and aspects of abomination in the Torah. Each article contributes to a deeper understanding of Scripture, discussing the complexity of the relationship between divinity and humanity and the connection between the Old Testament and the patristic tradition.

Bogdan-Marius Negrea's study illuminates Mount Sinai's spiritual and geographical identity. This place is not just a geographical point but a manifestation of the divine will, symbolizing man's encounter with God. B. Negrea argues that although

biblical references to Sinai are rare, their impact on religious faith and identity is profound and inspires contemporary theology.

In his work, Dan Vele examines the central role of sacrifices and blood in the Mosaic rituals, providing a detailed analysis of the Holiness Code. He outlines how these practices not only reflected a cultural error but also served as mechanisms of spiritual purification, highlighting the strict regulations that were implemented to maintain the religious purity of the people of Israel.

Iancu-Ionuț Buda discusses the messianic character of Psalm 88, emphasizing how it highlights the importance of faith in God in times of adversity. This interpretation directs our attention to divine providence and invites us to understand the depth of prayer as a means of divine intervention.

Mircea-Grigore Grec discusses the prophetic schools in the historical and religious context of the Old Testament, shedding light on their role in Israelite society. The study highlights how these groups influenced the development of prophetic and subsequent literature, emphasizing their relevance in the religious landscape of the time.

Florin-Constantin Dobocan explores man's relationship with material goods, emphasizing how the biblical doctrine of goods is essential in understanding the relationship between humanity and divinity. His study details how the Old Testament portrays goods as divine gifts, inviting people to be wise stewards of the resources received from the Creator. This ethical and theological approach provides a robust framework for discussing believers' social and moral responsibility, including the importance of goods in community life.

Constantin-Radu Iliescu reiterates the influence of Moses Maimonides – the central figure who left a profound imprint on religious thought in the three great monotheistic traditions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. R. Iliescu proposes a new conceptual framework called the "edge effect" to highlight Maimonides' contributions at the intersection of these traditions, bringing to light the complexity of his thought and its diverse influence on spirituality and theology.

Decebal Gorea discusses the myths of Mesopotamia and how these ancient stories influence the biblical understanding of creation. D. Gorea's insights raise essential questions about the origin of humanity and the nature of cultural collaboration, demonstrating that although the myths have similar elements, each tradition culminates in unique revelations about God and humanity.

Gabriel Solomon turns his attention to the symbolism of the cloud in the context of divine revelation. In his study, he analyzes iconographic representations of the cloud and how they correlate with biblical texts, highlighting how religious art uses nature to communicate God's presence. This examination allows for a deeper understanding of how humans interpret divine extravagances and how these representations evolve in the visual realm.

Călin-Alexandru Ciucurescu proposes a comparative analysis of the Book of Judith, highlighting its influence on later biblical thought, especially in the New Testament. The study emphasizes the book's complexity and theological maturity and suggests significant parallels with nouthetic themes, thus strengthening its position in the Christian tradition.

Ioan-Daniel Manolache examines how Jesus Christ interacted with the Old Testament, emphasizing his exegetical method of quoting, explaining, and fulfilling biblical texts. This analysis deciphers the Savior's interpretive techniques and provides a contemporary model for believers in reading and applying Scripture.

Bogdan Șopterean discusses the theological significance of the marvelous healing of the man born blind, emphasizing the connection between this divine act and the theme of light as the revelation of Christ. His work connects patristics, church music, and visual art to illustrate how Christian culture interprets and celebrates this miracle.

Marian-Cristian Porțan discusses the power of the Spirit in the Epistle to the Romans, describing how the apostle Paul emphasizes this element as essential for the life and development of the Christian community. This paper analyzes the importance of the manifestation of the Spirit in strengthening the faith and the essential virtues necessary for Christians.

Dorin-Ioan Sălvan's contribution to the two Beasts of Revelation offers a Christian Orthodox interpretation of these complex symbols. His study examines the identity of these biblical characters, which have been interpreted throughout history, clarifying confusions to date and shedding light on their role in Christian eschatology. I. Sălvan emphasizes that, despite the diversity of interpretations, the Orthodox Church retains a unified vision that combines the patristic tradition with an updated hermeneutic to understand contemporary spiritual threats.

Marius-Gheorghe Tănase tackles a fundamental topic in depth by analyzing the evolution of patristic thought on the resurrection and eternal life, starting from the Didache of the 12 Apostles and continuing up to the Fathers of the Golden Age.

His work is essential for understanding how the concept of the resurrection was documented and interpreted in the earliest centuries of Christianity, with clear implications for Christian ethics and behavior theorized throughout the ages.

This study by Lucretia (Iustina) Gagea examines the writings of Evagrius Ponticus, one of the founders of ascetic literature who profoundly influenced Christian spirituality. It details the intricacies of asceticism and prayer practices, which were central to mystical-spiritual development in the Orthodox tradition and significantly impacted later theological thought.

Finally, Eduard-Robert Matyas compares Jewish and Christian worship, emphasizing the similarities, continuities, and differences between the two traditions. This analogy is fundamental for understanding the liturgical evolution and the moral principles that guide the believer's life, highlighting how biblical principles remain relevant today.

This volume is an excellent resource for theologians and readers who seek better to understand the sacred text from an Orthodox perspective. The diversity of topics covered in the works and the wide-ranging approaches of the doctoral students bring a fresh breath of fresh air and not merely a mere act of study but an invitation to deep reflection on religious faith and practice. The recovery and deepening of the Orthodox theological tradition contributes significantly to an interreligious dialog. These studies are relevant to the academic community and believers who wish to deepen their knowledge of God and Scripture. Works such as those included in this volume make valuable contributions, demonstrating that the intellectualization of faith does not detract from spirituality but, on the contrary, enriches it. This volume is a study tool and a means of strengthening the Orthodox Christian identity, a guide for those who wish to find a balance between faith and contemporary challenges. As society evolves and transforms, these exegetical and theological insights remain essential to understanding and living our faith authentically.