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A Hermeneutical Pilgrimage

A HERMENEUTICAL PILGRIMAGE

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I opted for the notion of 'hermeneutical pilgrimage' instead of my Western colleagues' phrase 'lost among hermeneutics', as I am not inclined to idealise or dogmatise any of the biblical hermeneutics throughout history, but rather reflect, to the best of my abilities, upon Him who is the exegete par excellence, namely Christ the God-Man. From this perspective, I invoke the notion of pilgrimage, for a Pilgrim does not seek a place, nor a theoretical rule, but the rule enbody, the rule *in-wordened*. Saint Justin Popovich of Chelije, in his work *The Abysses of Human Thought and Feeling*, stresses the fact that the divine wisdom and theology planted by God in all of Creation are bestowed by Christ the Lord Himself, who is the eternal Logos. They become 'manifest only in the light of the Logos of the incarnated God. Only when it is enlightened by the incarnated God's radiance can the human mind (reason) comprehend the divine and rational (*logos-ni*) meaning of Creation, namely the meaning of the divine Logos within Creation, and allow itself to be thus convinced by the truth of the Apostle's words: *all things have been made through Him and for Him*.'

During this pilgrimage, both analytic and synthetic, we dwell on: ▪ *the apostolic era* and see that the Apostles speak as eyewitnesses and earwitnesses and that such active participation entails a martyrial responsibility to confess the resurrected Christ; ▪ *apologists* and realise that we need to testify to the incarnated truth and to His transcendence-immanence, which is what gives the Scriptures their unity (Behold, a new norm! That of unity that stems from monotheism, from the unity of being – the testimony or rule of the obvious.); ▪ *the Holy Fathers*, the golden age of the Church, whence we borrow the *ethos*, *pathos*, and the spiritual understanding that can provide us with the model of incarnation in the sense of emptying one's mind and having it inhabited by Christ and, implicitly, the acquisition of the mind of Christ to see and express that which is natural, for all, in the light of Christ. 'Unfortunately – Father G. Florovsky pointed out in *Church. Scripture. Tradition* – we are often inclined to

evaluate the Word of God by our measure instead of letting our mind be led by Christ's measure.' The Gospel of the Word of God must be preached as it has been entrusted to us by our Saviour Himself through the saints to be preserved through faith. The words of the Scriptures cannot be adapted in a facile manner to the times it is preached according to each person's mind. The Fathers teach us to avoid exchanging the Gospel of Jesus Christ with someone's random *alien gospel*, which is why that same father stressed that 'the Gospel itself can be understood to the full extent of its wealth and depth only through spiritual experience (marked by faith). But that which is revealed through faith is truth itself. The Gospels are written within the Church. Thus, they are the testimony of the Church. They are records of the experience and faith of the Church.' According to the Fathers, the Church is the one able to interpret the message of the Scriptures, which is the *core* of the revealed scriptural text, through the direct intervention of the Holy Spirit; ▪ *modernity*, the morphosyntax of languages as a reflection of the synaxis of eternity; even ▪ *postmodernity* as a time of challenges generated by individual and sectorial developments, which call upon us to bring out the eschatological and eternal unity of nature found in the Scriptures and the epiphanic spiritual dimensions, so that everyone may identify with this eternal Self by hearing the echo of the primordial definitions within themselves.

I, therefore, believe that every one of us must acquire that minimal wisdom which requires us to include in the equation of our exegetic enterprise a time for thought/reflection/contemplation, during which we should break free from clichés and allow the echo of primary definitions to sound within us, as they are the words that create, that confess Christ and bring good tidings, they are fatherly words, ever loving and guiding towards the ever-enlightening breath of the Spirit.

The conference titled *Hermeneutics between Tradition and Postmodernity*, organised under the auspices of our magazine, ROOTS (*Romanian Orthodox Old Testament Studies*), through the papers it comprises – integrated into the two volumes of 2021 – aims to provide these perspectives for the reading of the Holy Scriptures and a hermeneutical pilgrimage towards the Truth. The studies included in this volume are intended to: offer solutions to the problematic situations resulting from the interference between the divine and the political; highlight the limitations of mundane, secularised politics and the way in which it can subsist from a historical point of view, but not necessarily from a theological-historical one (*The Secularisation of Divine Sovereignty. Saul and Samuel – King and Prophet*); reposition within the understanding of the

modern world a historical event of overwhelming importance for the restructuring of the identity of the chosen people; transpose the Babylonian exile into a modern pedagogical method that should open a series of metamorphoses of events in the history of Israel as orientation indicators or methods for the peoples of our times (*Jeremiah 29,4-14. A Prophetic Lesson for Modernity?*); trace a connection between several sources of reference in the history of Christianity, a connection that can be the object of the correct description and understanding of the phrase 'the Book of Life' (*'The Book of Life' in the Biblical Texts and in the Dead Sea Scrolls*); transpose the scriptural text into the indicators of modern, human, artistic, visual relations; specify the manner in which hermeneutics applies to the visual in universal art within the sphere of Christian understanding (*The Old Testament in Universal Art: the Hermeneutical Act between Description and Normativity*); and combine the theology of a sacrifice, of a historicalreligious act of remarkable significance with the theology of Byzantine art in order to access a universe of symbolism and mystical interpretation (*Is There Any Form of Brutality in the Byzantine Representation of Abraham's Sacrifice?*).

Thus, the studies included in this volume confront us with the truth: Christ is the ultimate hermeneutical criterion, the pillar and foundation of any exegesis. An exegesis that ignores this criterion may make for a wonderful philological, historical, philosophical or any other kind of study, but not a theological one. We promote the theological dimension as a relentless attempt to bring man to the hypostasis of the complete/integral man (*Theo-anthropic*) and to that of total knowledge.

ORTHODOX EXEGESIS

THE SECULARISATION OF DIVINE SOVEREIGNTY. SAUL AND SAMUEL – KING AND PROPHET

Abstract

In this study, we would try to tackle an old rabbinic dilemma, always presented in disagreement, regarding the theological legitimacy of the monarchy, if the covenant made with God remains operative and whether full sovereignty belongs only to Yahweh. Can the chosen people "ask" for a king and remain faithful to the Lord and their destiny? How far can the voice of the community go in legitimising a regime when it seems to undermine God's rule over the chosen people? We will provide a few answers to these questions by focusing on King Saul and prophet Samuel, who were the protagonists of the advent of the monarchy within the chosen people.

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Keywords

Saul, Samuel, king, theocracy, covenant

Introduction

When the Jews wanted to make the transition from theocratic governing to monarchic rule, they believed the solution to their problem was strictly political. God, on the other hand, gave them the lesson of Saul, of his military and moral decay, sharing with them the fact that no historical crisis can be solved only immanently. Being God's chosen people, Israel can be free and honourable only theo-politically. For Israel, no solution doesn't include theology. This is because their final mission and destiny are not only political but notably eschatological. Secularisation is possible, but never feasible from a historical point of view.

Samuel's voice pervades this episode, fulfilling an important anamnestic function: the last judge of Israel reminds the people of their covenant and the destiny

they freely took on. Israel swore before God that they would be His people and not a mere nation among nations. Consequently, Samuel constantly underscores that they are not allowed to follow in the footsteps of the other nations, as only by following the Covenant will Israel be fulfilled. Not only Samuel and Saul will be the protagonists we analyse, but also God's (mediated) voice and the collective voice of the people "laden" with their unique mission.

Transition Challenges – the Decay of King Saul

In the biblical text, Saul plays a double role, both historical and pedagogical. On the one hand, he represents a first attempt to get out of the state of anarchy, which was reigning over Israel towards the end of the time of judges. A powerful, yet impulsive and politically incoherent leader, showing the purely immanent solution the chosen people found, namely that of taking control of their destiny. Historically speaking, besides the complicated "transition from a tribal structure to a state" (Kreuzer 2006, 39), the episode of Saul's rule also marks a difficult transition for other people.

On the other hand, the failure of Saul's governing, which was not secured by a new divine covenant, has a deep symbolic-educational meaning. Indeed, if Saul had not existed, no one would have invented him (Dietrich 2007, 166), for he is a counterexample of a the-political leader. His improper kingship, although accepted by God, presents judge Samuel with a fait accompli. In the end, God gives people what they want, with all the consequences this entails, even if they are tragic (von Rad 1962, 325). Moreover, it also shows them that any decision made beyond the boundaries of the divine law will undermine even the freedom of the chosen people.

From a structural point of view, this part of the Book of 1 King, which tackles the advent of the monarchy in Israel, Samuel's trial, and failure, is much more complex than the previous one. Five structural elements can be identified:

- The first episode describes the request of the people to have a king just like the "nations", against the backdrop of a crisis regarding the legitimacy of Samuel's successors.
- Later, Saul is secretly anointed king by Samuel, at God's urge.
- Then, Saul leads the Jews into battle against the Ammonites and, being triumphant, he asks for a large public celebration, where he is anointed king once more, before the entire people.
- Without a solid foundation for his authority, Saul temporarily usurps Sam-

uel's function by presenting an offering on his own, which brings divine punishment upon himself.

- Although he manages to defeat the Philistines, through the bravery of his son Jonathan, and later the Amalekites, Saul himself is eventually rejected by God.

To outline this path that Saul took and his tense relationship with Samuel, we shall tackle the narration from a chronological point of view, by resorting to historical or conceptual digressions whenever a certain episode requires a more complex approach.

Israel Demands a King

The starting point of the new theo-political transformation takes on a profound community form. On their initiative, the men of Israel gather to express the will of the chosen people. Their request is not a mere fancy of the people; it marks a paradigm shift. They argue for their decision in front of the judge, but only from a socio-political point of view, referring to the integrity of the civil function. That is why the men of Israel invoke both Samuel's old age and the argument of the end of ruling legitimacy (1 Sm 8:5).

The reproach is not addressed directly to Samuel, but it highlights a much more complex phenomenon: the preoccupation of the people with the very reform put forward by their judge. It is not Samuel that they question, but the governing paradigm he brought in. The main issue is that the entire community overlooks the theological dimension of Israel's existence, which is made even more evident by the fact that it is not included in the argumentation. At no moment in time do the people point to a moral deviation from the Mosaic Law, but they invoke purely utilitarian arguments: age and the fact that the sons of Samuel do not follow in their father's footsteps. Thus, the people emphasise the inconsistency between Samuel, a genuine, saving judge, and his successors and not between their undignified behaviour and the imperatives of the Torah. They seem to be rejected by Israel because they do not measure up to their father and not because they do not comply with the divine Law.

Along this logical line, the people come up again with a purely political solution, by asking Samuel: "And said to him, 'Now appoint for us a king to judge us like all the nations'" (1 Sm 8:5). Israel does not need to be like other nations, but its people want to be like them. Through its wish to have a strictly immanent ordering, the chosen people seem to ignore the burden and blessing of its having been chosen by God. It is precisely

this part of the people's demand that borders on blasphemy. For, if its history had an immutable foundation, then that was precisely the idea that Israel was like no other nation, that Israel was the only chosen people, and that Israel was unique.

Therefore, Samuel resumes his legitimate role, the only permanent one, that of representative of the Keter Torah (the Crown of Torah) and intercedes between God and the people. He instantly notices the negative consequence of Israel's decision and seeks God's advice. The Living God does not punish, nor does He take back His Covenant, but tells Samuel: "Obey the voice of the people in all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them" (1 Sm 8:7). God rids the demand of the people of all political arguments and reveals its ultimate theological meaning: the desire to be a mere nation among nations equals the rejection of divine sovereignty.

It is not Samuel and his reformative project that Israel rejects, but God Himself (Provan, Philips Long and Longman III 2003, 208). That is why God tells Samuel that he must listen to their request and not consider it a personal offence. Saint John Chrysostom demonstrates that "their demand disheartened Samuel to such an extent, that he needed a lot of consolation" (St. John Chrysostom 2005, 109), which the Lord did not hesitate to offer [our translation].

Thus, Samuel is immediately told: "Now then, obey their voice; only you shall solemnly warn them and show them the ways of the king who shall reign over them" (1 Sm 8:9). The rights of the king represent the core of the advent of the monarchy. This new governing mode brings on a radical change of perspective in achieving the people's freedom, which, from now on, will be structurally redefined and limited. The concentration of civil and military power in the hands of a single man will inevitably lead to the decreasing autonomy of tribes, families, and individuals in Israel.

Samuel shows them a whole series of rights that the new king will have over the people, warning them in the end that: "you shall be his slaves. And in that day, you will cry out because of your king, whom you have chosen for yourselves, but the Lord will not answer you in that day" (1 Sm 8:17-18). As Clement of Alexandria mentioned, "the Word [...] when the people asked for a king, promised not a loving lord, but threatened to give them a self-willed and voluptuous tyrant, [...] ruling by the law of war, not desiring a peaceful administration" (Clement of Alexandria 1982). The rights of the kings, listed by the prophet, are those which the Eastern autocrats who were contemporary with the Israelites (in Canaan, Mesopotamia, and Egypt) enjoyed,

subjugating their peoples (Gordon 1993, 42-3). If Israel wants to be like the other nations, this is the situation they are facing.

Nonetheless, the group of Israeli men is not convinced: "But the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel. And they said, 'No! But there shall be a king over us, 20 that we also may be like all the nations, and that our king may judge us and go out before us and fight our battles" (1 Sm 8:19-20). While the prophet acts defensively, by presenting a negative image, the people set forth what they expect from the monarchy and implicitly accept its weaknesses. Thus, bearing in mind the characteristics described by the gathering, they wish their monarch to have a triple role: that of a civil judge, and that of diplomatic representation and military rule. They are all secular roles, with no sacred connotation whatsoever. Israel secularises its royal crown (Keter Malchut).

God allows them to freely go with their choice, telling Samuel: "Obey their voice and make them a king" (1 Sm 8:22).

The Limits of Political Power. The Dynamics of the Ketarim (the Crowns)

Therefore, the appointment of a king is the responsibility of the prophet. The God of Israel tolerates the advent of a centralised, secularised regime, but He will choose the king, through Samuel's hand. A new dynamic is introduced between the Keter Torah and Keter Malchut, one which will mark three thousand years of Jewish and Christian history. Sometimes, the tension between the two areas of the people's leadership becomes destructive (the episode between Saul and Samuel) or competitive. However, most of the time, an organic balance settles in, which is only occasionally troubled by the personality of a king who wants to usurp the other "crown".

As to the appointment of Saul as the first candidate for Jewish monarchy, the Lord points out to him, by telling Samuel that "Tomorrow about this time I will send to you a man from the land of Benjamin, and you shall anoint him to be prince[a] over my people Israel. He shall save my people from the hand of the Philistines...". (1 Sm 9:16). The right to anoint kings is conferred upon the prophet, who is the keeper of divine law and the sacred mediator. Thus, as far as the legitimacy mechanism is concerned, the king becomes dependent on the Keter Torah.

Samuel proceeds to the anointment of Saul away from the eyes of the people, granting him the mandate by divine law: "Then Samuel took a flask of oil and poured it on his head and kissed him and said, 'Has not the Lord anointed you to be prince[a] over his people Israel? And you shall reign over the people of the Lord, and you will save

them from the hand of their surrounding enemies'" (1 Sm 10:1).

Just like Moses, after Samuel explains to Israel the fundamentals of the new regime, he writes them down (McConville 2006, 139). "Then Samuel told the people the rights and duties of the kingship, and he wrote them in a book and laid it up before the Lord..." (1 Sm 10:25). The new constitutional document is presented to God for consecration. From now on, Israel has a new institutional arrangement.

On the other hand, throughout this episode, one can feel an ideological tension between the political structure envisioned by the people and the one accepted by Samuel in the name of God. The terms used are very suggestive in this respect. The gathering of Israel keeps asking for a king (melekh), while the prophet promises to anoint a prince, a ruler (nagid – 1 Sm 9:16). The Hellenic version follows the same differentiation, by using the dialectal terms basileus and archon. Therefore, while the people take on the full reality of a personalistic autocracy, just like the other nations in Canaan, Mesopotamia and Egypt, the God of Israel makes a concession only to the point of offering them a unique, powerful leader, but whose military (Elazar 1989, 176) and administrative mandate is specific.

Namely, the hermeneutic difference between the two terms can be highlighted "in the ideological view each project of the relation between Yahweh, Israel, and Israel's governor. In our texts, the Melek sees his power from Yahweh as susceptible to his arbitrary manipulation, who obtrudes himself inappropriately and disproportionately between Yahweh and Israel, and who treats Israel as little more than the subjects of his monarchic power. The *nagid*, on the other hand, is positively portrayed as one who sees his power as a sovereign and inviolable devolvement from Yahweh, who acts strictly under the orders of Yahweh for the benefit of Yahweh's people and holds himself as no more than the willing subject of the divine monarch" (Murray 1998, 299).

Although Samuel and God keep talking about the monarch as *nagid* (*archon*), the voice of the people is trenchant in describing how they understand the new constitutional function – "Long live the king!" (1 Sm 10:24). The entire chapter ends in the general acclamation of Israel, who greet their monarch (as melekh and not as *nagid*), but for a handful of people, who are not pleased with the choice which has been made (1 Sm 10:27). However, they do not question the full royal function, but the person who was chosen. From now on, the people of Israel live under a full monarchic regime.

Saul – Keter Malkhut. Samuel – Keter Torah

The beginning of Saul's rule is a confirmation of his military virtues. Being a governing based on the personal qualities of the monarch, early Jewish royalty needs constant proof of these qualities. The initial legitimacy given through anointment is maintained only if the ruler persists in morality and devotion towards the people. The insurance of external security prevails over all the other tasks. That is why the first significant episode following Saul's anointment is the confrontation between Israel and the Ammonites. With excellent tactics, Saul manages to crush the Ammonite army.

Very important is how he understands, at this point, the functioning of the monarchy concerning the other institutions. Namely, Saul seems to have reached a model of "Byzantine symphony", in which royalty and prophetism compete with each other in governing the people, with one power in charge of actual administration and the other playing the role of a legitimation-acknowledgement mechanism. Thus, Saul points to three implicit conditions for efficient political functioning in Israel and for defeating external enemies:

- the unity of the people;
- the following of Saul-the king;
- the following of Samuel-the prophet.

These conditions are meaningful only if they are taken together. Saul himself cannot imagine that the people could resist without showing the same degree of respect to Samuel. Only together do the two make the governing legitimate. Keter Malchut and Keter Torah substitute each other and, from a complementary point of view, the latter acts as a theological warrant for the political monarchy.

After the battle against the Ammonites, Samuel has the initiative to guide the people towards Gilgal, to "renew the kingdom", by anointing Saul as king before the Lord for the second time: "Then Samuel said to the people, 'Come, let us go to Gilgal and there renew the kingdom.' So, all the people went to Gilgal, and there they made Saul king before the Lord in Gilgal" (1 Sm 11:14-15). Right after this episode, Samuel fully gives up the last symbols of his function as a judge, leaving the entire Keter Malchut in the hands of the king alone. In the speech he delivers when he gives up his civil dignity, Samuel briefly shows them the mistake they made by asking for a king when "the Lord your God was your king" (1 Sm 12:12).

Nonetheless, even if the people themselves realise the fundamental theological error they have made – "for we have added to all our sins this evil, to ask for ourselves

a king" (1 Sm 12:19) –, Samuel shows them that the error is not without a solution in front of the Lord if the monarchy does not become idolatry. Therefore, he warns them against the dangers of paganism, slightly referring to the idea that a kingship like the one professed in Mesopotamia and Egypt must be avoided at all costs. The new regime is accepted and blessed by the Lord if the people of Israel remain loyal to the Lord and firm in their faith.

Towards the end, Samuel shows that he holds all the attributes of prophecy and remains the keeper of the law and a sacred mediator, the only depositary of the authority of the Keter Torah: "Moreover, as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord by ceasing to pray for you, and I will instruct you in the good and the right way" (1 Sm 12:23).

He keeps on giving directions to the people as to the path they should follow (Gunn 1998, 65) while keeping the same control over the moral hermeneutic role. Being also a king, in a different area of authority, Samuel is the first in the history of Israel "to hold the office of the prophetic observer, which the biblical account places as an accompaniment and corrective at the side of the ruling king" (Dietrich 2007, 35). This is the premise of a monarchy blessed by the Lord.

The Decay of King Saul. The Campaign Against the Philistines

Soon afterwards, Saul begins his military campaign against the Philistines, which should have been the crowning of his rule. This has been the very motivation for his anointment as king, his early mandate ordained and blessed by God. What begins as an insurrection of Jewish vassals against those who had a monopoly on the manufacture of weapons gradually grows into an actual war. The episode of the battle against the Philistines does not have only a strong historical basis, but also a theo-political one. Now come to light the limits of human governing and Saul's weaknesses.

Being in a very difficult military situation, Saul refrains from starting the main attack and waits for Samuel, who has ordered him: "Then go down before me to Gilgal. And behold, I am coming down to you to offer burnt offerings and to sacrifice peace offerings. Seven days you shall wait, until I come to you and show you what you shall do" (1 Sm 10:8). Samuel's instructions have been clear, showing that, even in purely military situations, the prophet must tell the king what path to take, presenting an offering to the Lord together. Saul's royal mandate has been circumscribed ab initio by this institutional balance between Keter Torah and Keter Malchut.

Thus, the king seems to depend on the prophet when exercising his function and Saul must "satisfy the test of obedience" (Gordon 1993, 55). The king fails this test. Being impatient and fearing that the military situation might worsen, the king gathers his people and tells them, "Bring the burnt offering here to me, and the peace offerings. 'And he offered the burnt offering. As soon as he had finished offering the burnt offering, behold, Samuel came. And Saul went out to meet him and greet him" (1 Sm 13:9-10).

The confrontation is theo-political. Saul usurps Samuel's function and presents the offering alone. It is not only a conflict between institutions but also evidence of mistrust in the Lord's promise. As always in the history of Israel, the tragedy is theological. Saul allows military reason to prevail over sacred reason (Dietrich 2007, 43), because he fears for the fate of his campaign, although God has announced their liberation. Thus, the fall of Saul has a dual nature: institutional, by usurping another Keter, and soteriological, by believing that he could attain liberation all by himself. As Saint John Chrysostom mentions, "Saul presented an offering against God's will" [our translation] (St. John Chrysostom 2005, 109). God, and not Samuel, is defied by the king breaking the laws of the Torah

Samuel shows the long-term consequences of such a sin, "And Samuel said to Saul, 'You have done foolishly. You have not kept the command of the Lord your God, with which he commanded you. For then the Lord would have established your kingdom over Israel forever. But now your kingdom shall not continue. The Lord has sought out a man after his own heart, and the Lord has commanded him to be prince over his people because you have not kept what the Lord commanded you" (1 Sm 13:13-14). Saul's falling from faith leads to an administrative delegitimisation. His theological mistake has radical political consequences: kingly dignity can no longer be conferred upon a man who has broken God's commandment. Monarchy shall endure, but Saul must be removed from power. On the other hand, from Saul's perspective, although he understands the cause of the divine sentence, the situation is urgent. He continues to lead the armies of Israel, and, with the help of his son Jonathan, he is victorious against the Philistines. However, the interpretation of Samuel's words can be multifold: either Saul will not be the founder of a dynasty, or he will soon cease to be a king himself (Gunn 1998, 67).

Until a new sign from the Lord comes, the monarch continues to fulfil his military mandate and he is successful in doing so: "Saul [...] fought against all his enemies on every side, against Moab, against the Ammonites, against Edom, against the

kings of Zobah, and the Philistines. Wherever he turned he routed them" (1 Sm 14:47). Consequently, his victories seem to soften his previous fall, as Saul fulfils his royal destiny to free the people of Israel and to ensure their external security. The episode of the illegitimate offering fades away in the collective memory and Samuel does not show any interest indirectly causing the abdication of the monarch.

The Delegitimization of the King. The Campaign Against the Amalekites

A new episode, marking a new beginning and a new opportunity for Saul to prove his obedience, begins with the campaign against the Amalekites, "the archetypal implacable enemy of Israel" (Alter 1999, 87). Through the voice of the prophet, the Lord asks Saul to fully purge the territory of Amalekites. Nothing alive must survive and no good must be kept under any circumstances.

From now on, instructions are very clear and leave no room for interpretations and hermeneutic doubts. Any deviation from Samuel's words shall be an insurmountable sin. Maybe this is also his opportunity to redeem the mistake he made by presenting the offering, for nothing is said about the Lord's previous verdict, namely that of removing his royal dignity (Gunn 1998, 70). The setting is ready for Saul to complete a new task, with the possibility of being confirmed as a monarch.

However, the king of Israel falls again. The Lord's commandment is not fully followed, and Saul spares the Amalekite king and allows the people to keep a considerable part of the spoils. What had to be fully destroyed is appropriated by Israel as their own. This is not only an act of greed and love for richness but also an act of idolatry. Prophet Samuel himself gives this spiritual diagnosis when he finds out about the deeds of the king and his armies: "For rebellion is as the sin of divination, and presumption is as iniquity and idolatry" (1 Sm 15:23). This breaking of the commandment leads to the irrevocable removal of the divine mandate. The Lord's word in the Torah is blatantly broken and the verdict of the divine Sovereign of Israel is unambiguous: "I regret that I have made Saul king, for he has turned back from following me and has not performed my commandments" (1 Sm 15:11).

Nonetheless, Saul is given the possibility to defend himself, by being asked why he has not followed the imperative commandment, but he gives a completely unsatisfactory answer: "I have obeyed the voice of the Lord. I have gone on the mission on which the Lord sent me. I have brought Agag the king of Amalek, and I have devoted the Amalekites to destruction. But the people took of the spoil, sheep and oxen, the

best of the things devoted to destruction, to sacrifice to the Lord your God in Gilgal" (1 Sm 15:20-21). His guilt is now threefold:

- he considers the voice of the people more important than that of God;
- he tries to defend himself by blaming the community which he was ordained to govern;
- he gives a false ritual excuse.

Thus, first, Saul seems credible from a political point of view, but unworthy for a king anointed by the Lord, as he fears the voice of the people and acts according to their will and not according to his principles, dictated by the divine imperative. Therefore, there is a (pathological) sovereignty mutation in Israel. After the Lord limited His own political governing and offered a full administrative-military mandate to the king, Saul renders heavenly sovereignty inoperative, by transferring the final authority to the will of the people (Zimran 2014: 12).

Moreover, blaming the people is a poor "verbal strategy". Saul tries to show that he should not carry the whole burden of responsibility, although he has been blessed with governing the people. Thus, the king "is also testifying to his inability to restrain the people" (Green 2003, 255), namely, to the poor fulfilment of his monarchic duties.

Samuel carries on with his prophetic discourse of delegitimisation of the monarch, showing that royal dignity can begin and end only with a Keter Torah and offers the final verdict: "And Samuel said, 'Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, he has also rejected you from being king'" (1 Sm 15:23).

Monarchy shall not be abolished, but the ruler shall be replaced. Thus, the new constitutional regime is visibly consolidated. As far as our theo-political analysis is concerned, the narrative thread ends, as we have a full cycle of legitimisation and delegitimisation of a monarch, having in mind the divine and human coordinates of royal dignity.

Conclusions

The prophet, judge and priest Samuel show as unequivocally as possible what the consequence is if the chosen people give up their unique theo-political model. Essentially, the demand of the people symbolises the drama of the entire humankind: the history of a predictable, yet avoidable fall. Even though they were shown the right path, just as we were shown Orthodoxy, and salvation under God's sovereignty was promised to them, Israel, as an icon of humankind, choose the world; they choose

political (d)efficiency, thus neglecting their Providence Insurer. The people look for fulfilment here and now, turning their eyes from eternity to immanence. Like a political Adam, Israel takes again a bite from the only forbidden fruit: that of being like the other nations. How topical for the Christians of our times, the new people of God!

Through Samuel, God reveals to the people the limits of secularised politics. Tyranny is always the dead-end that purely human governing tends to reach. That is why the lesson given in the episode between Samuel and Saul (1 Sm 8-15) is not only theoretical but as pragmatic as possible from a historical point of view.

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JEREMIAH 29:4-14. A PROPHETIC LESSON FOR MODERNITY?

Abstract

The prophetic text of Jeremiah 29:4-14 is not strictly theological, but very concrete and immediately applicable. It is a social, cultural, and political program, appropriate for the new realities – the people of Israel, who would be taken into Babylonian captivity. Unlike the experience of Egyptian captivity, Babylonian slavery would be characterized by more leniency on the part of the authorities, a real chance for the Israelites to survive as a nation, and even to assert themselves as a people united around the same values. This research aims to identify and enhance the relationship between the biblical past, characterized by the chosen people's history under divine providence, and modernity. This relationship is facilitated by the topical nature of the biblical message, which, although referring to the times of biblical antiquity, is full of meaning and significance for contemporaneity, if we believe that ancient history is another one of God's pedagogical lessons for us.

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Jeremiah, biblical prophecy, exile, migration, diaspora

Introduction

My introduction is facilitated by the academic contribution of Rev. Prof. John Behr, from the University of Aberdeen (UK), who, at the inaugural conference of ROOTS, stated: "To speak about Scriptures (the Old Testament) as events that took place before Christ and about the Gospels as what followed is a misunderstanding of the Scriptures, of the Gospel, and Christ Himself". As Rev. Dumitru Stăniloae stated (Stăniloae 1993, 34-7), there are two dimensions of history: a horizontal dimension of history, the history of man any time and everywhere, of the past, present and future, marked by the events of humanity; and a vertical dimension of history, marked by the

intervention and presence of God, Lord of time, which He created, but to which he descends to meet a man as his Savior. Each meeting of the two axes, horizontal and vertical, is an epiclesis, a meeting between God and man.

The history of man's salvation is, therefore, the history of the elevation of man, by divine grace and personal efforts, to the status of God, the new history of the resettlement of man in the "before" state, because history is no longer old or new, but always updated.

What we call "history" is living as if moving in a line. For us, every moment is the last one, which always passes, a present that can also be the "fullness of time" (Gal 4:4), when revealed: every moment which is revealed is thus open to the "coming" of Christ. We are always standing still at the foot of the Cross and, at the same time, we are moving (temporally, not spatially) along the horizontal and vertical axes, from Adam to Christ. The same movement of our intellect descending into our soul takes place while reading of revealed Scripture, as events from ancient history, which are now being revealed, show us new meanings of our existence towards eschatology. In my next research, we intend to decipher this aspect through the exegesis of the text in Jeremiah 29:4-14.

My research has the following objectives: first, a general objective, namely, to identify and fructify the relationship between the biblical past and contemporaneity, because of rereading the holy text on an updated note; second, a specific objective, namely, to understand God's pedagogy in the time of the Jewish biblical diaspora as a lesson for the current Christian diaspora.

The exegesis of Jeremiah 29:4-14

The prophetic synthesis of the preparation of the chosen people for exile is found in "the words of the letter that Jeremiah the prophet sent from Jerusalem unto the residue of the elders which were carried away captives, and to the priests, and the prophets, and to all the people whom Nebuchadnezzar had carried away captive from Jerusalem to Babylon" (Jer 29:1). The prophetic words are not a simple exhortation, but they are introduced by the standard phrase: "Thus says the LORD". This shows that they are, in fact, a commandment. In addition, their fulfilment is related to God's decision to "relocate" (lit.) Israel to Babylon, which also means changing their lifestyle. However, what we first want to decipher from the prophetic text is its theological significance, after which we will focus on the concreteness and applicability of the commandments.

First, the emphasis is on God, the author of the commandment, and then on its recipient, man, thus highlighting the personal relationship between the Creator and man. God is Alive, Lord of creation and Creator of time. The value of Israel's history is validated by the reference to the Torah, as a verbal and written manifestation of divine authority. God is the content and purpose of history. Therefore, the confession of God is proof of man's religious identity. God is the One who makes "everything new" (Rv 21:5), offering new experiences to man, in new places, while always being the same. Only man distinguishes between here and beyond. For us, the Lord says that He takes us "out of here" and moves us "beyond", even though we often believe and affirm that "We are free to roam; we will come to you no more" (Jer 2:31), "If we live, we live for the Lord; and if we die, we die for the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord" (Rom 14:8).

Secondly, we are dealing with the call to accept the state of bondage and to move into a "foreign land" (Ps 137:4). God would bring Israel out of His land and move them to Babylon. "I will drive you out of the city and deliver you into the hands of foreigners and inflict punishment on you", says Ezekiel (11:9). The theological idea of "bringing Israel out" by divine power was reminiscent of the Exodus from Egypt, as ground zero for Israel's election and its foundation as a holy nation. The Exodus from Egypt meant offering, entering, and settling in the Promised Land, a land offered as a gift by God. Now, on the contrary, the verb is used to get out of the comfort zone and offer foreignness, the unknown, and insecurity. Nonetheless, this move decided upon and commanded by God, which is accomplished with the instruments of horizontal history, must be freely and obediently accepted by Israel, "Because of the sins which ye have committed before God, ye shall be led away captives into Babylon by Nabuchodonosor king of the Babylonians" (Letter of Jer 1:1).

Thirdly, we are dealing with a temporal prescription: the exile and, consequently, the displacement would last seventy years: "When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfil my good promise to bring you back to this place" (Jer 29:10). Therefore, the exile will last at least two generations until the One who brought Israel out of his land would bring them out of Babylon. The coming back is like a return of the soul, renewed, to the flesh. According to prophet Ezekiel (37:12-13), it is like a resurrection: "Therefore prophesy and say to them: 'This is what the Sovereign Lord says: My people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back to the land of Israel. Then you, my people,

will know that I am the Lord when I open your graves and bring you up from them". However, while the time of return from captivity is ordained by God from the beginning of the pedagogical decision, and it would be followed, the historical reality would be that "when ye have come unto Babylon, ye shall remain there many years, and for a long season, namely, seven generations: and after that, I will bring you away peaceably from thence" (Letter of Jer 1:2). If the exile in Babylon is determined by God, the exodus to the house would not be the same. Many of the exiles would remain in Babylon, thus constituting the most important Jewish diaspora, a witness to God's work from afar.

The prophetic text in Jeremiah 29:4-14 is not strictly theological, but also has a high degree of applicability. This is a rather social, cultural, and political program, which is appropriate for the new realities and intended to be put into practice immediately, to be organized and structured. Unlike the experience of Egyptian slavery, Babylonian slavery would be characterized by more leniency on the part of the authorities, a real chance for the Israelites to survive as a nation, and even to assert themselves as a people united around the same values.

The following analysis of the Hebrew text, accompanied by my translation into Romanian, aims to highlight those theological contents that can still substantiate a theological ethic of the relation of foreigners to locals and natives to immigrants.

Hebrew text (BHS)	Romanian translation
בְּנוּ בָתִּים וְשֵׁבוּ	"Zidiți case și locuiți-le!" (v. 4)
וְנִטְעוּ גַנּוֹת וְאִכְלוּ אֶת־פִּרְיָן	"Sădiți grădini și mâncați roadele lor!" (v. 5)
קְחוּ נָשִׁים וְהוֹלִידוּ בָנִים וּבָנוֹת וּקְחוּ לִבְנֵיכֶם נָשִׁים וְאֶת־בְּנוֹתֵיכֶם תְּנוּ לַאֲנָשִׁים וְתֵלַדְנָה בָנִים וּבָנוֹת וּרְבוּ־שָׁם וְאַל־תִּמְעָטוּ	"Luați-vă soții și nașteți fii și fiice! Fiilor voștri luați-le soții, iar pe fiicele voastre măritați-le, ca să nască fii și fiice; și înmulțiți-vă acolo și să nu vă împuținați!" (v. 6)

וְדִרְשׁוּ אֶת־שְׁלוֹם הָעִיר אֲשֶׁר הִגְלֵיתִי אֶתְכֶם שָׁמָּה וְהִתְפַּלְלוּ בַעֲדָהּ אֶל־יְהוָה כִּי בִשְׁלוֹמָהּ יִהְיֶה לָכֶם שָׁלוֹם	"Căutaţi pacea ţării în care v-am dus robi şi rugaţi-vă pentru ea Domnului, că de pacea ei depinde şi pacea voastră!" (v. 7)
אַל־יַשִּׁיאוּ לָכֶם נְבִיאֵיכֶם כִּי בְשֶׁקֶר הֵם נִבְּאִים לָכֶם בִּשְׁמִי לֹא שְׁלַחְתִּים	"Să nu vă lăsaţi amăgiţi de proorocii voştri şi de ghicitorii voştri(...)!Că aceia în minciună profeţesc vouă în numele Meu. Nu Eu nu i-am trimis." (vv. 8-9)
וּקְרָאתֶם אֹתִי וַהֲלַכְתֶּם וְהִתְפַּלַלְתֶּם אֵלַי וְשָׁמַעְתִּי אֲלֵיכֶם וּבְקַשְׁתֶּם אֹתִי וּמְצָאתֶם כִּי תִדְרְשֵׁנִי בְּכָל־לְבַבְכֶם	"Mă veţi chema şi veţi veni şi vă veţi ruga Mie, şi Eu vă voi auzi! Şi Mă veţi căuta şi Mă veţi găsi, dacă Mă veţi căuta cu toată inima voastră!" (vv. 12-13)

Building a house is the first and most important sign of stability and durability. The house is a private environment that ensures life security and the development of livelihoods. At the same time, it is the sacred heart of a family's identity, with its traditions, beliefs and customs. Materially and spiritually, the house builds a family. In a home, husbands feel confident to give birth to sons and daughters, to educate and instruct them for life, and to marry them.

In addition to building the house, cultivating the garden is a creative act, reminding us of the Gardener of this world, God, and the fact that the earth is a gift given to man (Gn 1:28). Nonetheless, given the lengthy maturation of some plants, cultivating the land is a long-term concern and, at a spiritual level, it is a cultivation of faith and hope.

If the first three requests refer to the domestic space, and the internal experience of the family, the next ones refer to others and God. Once, through the psalmist, God asked the Israelites to pray for Jerusalem and its leaders: "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem! May those who love you be secure" (Ps 122:6). Therefore, the commandment expressed in the words of the prophet Jeremiah is the most difficult to understand and fulfil. The Israelites should refrain from all curses against non-Jews, especially from the political oppressors. The fact that fulfilling this commandment was difficult is confirmed by the song between the reeds of the waters of Babylon, from

Psalm 137:8-9: "Daughter Babylon, doomed to destruction, happy is the one who repays you according to what you have done to us. Happy is the one who seizes your infants and dashes them against the rocks". Of course, we can see these imprecations as a spiritual slippage of the hopeless man, starting from the conviction that divine justice brings death to those who caused death (Freedman 1980, 318). Maybe that's why prophet Jeremiah surprises his contemporaries with such a striking request.

This time, in the Babylonian diaspora, the Israelites are being asked to "seek the good of the country" and to "pray for it", these being rhetorical expressions of obedience to political and administrative authorities, but also invitations to work together and to have a good coexistence with locals. Respect, peace, balance, and dignity are the keys to empathy, tolerance, acceptance, integration, and solidarity. The obedience to the authority of the rulers contains the hidden lesson of humility, godliness, and obedience to God. Denial and disobedience to worldly authority are prerequisites for the annulment of any kind of authority, including the spiritual one. Even after returning from captivity, the priests in Jerusalem are urged to pray for the Persian authorities: "So that they may offer sacrifices pleasing to the God of heaven and pray for the well-being of the king and his sons" (Ezr 6:10). This type of exhortation shows the need to pray for the authorities, for they need the spiritual support of the righteous people, even if they have strayed from the right faith. In addition, if the exiles pray for the local authorities, they become an example for locals and a necessary prayerful intercession of God's people for those with another faith.

Times of crisis, which cause instability and mistrust among people, are speculated and exploited by those who seek to gain from any circumstance, regardless of the difficulties of others. Therefore, God asks the contemporaries of the prophet Jeremiah to discern between the messages which add to the anxiety and concern of people, and often to their ignorance, on the one hand, and the divine word which gives confidence and hope, on the other hand: "Do not let the prophets and the diviners who are among you deceive you, and do not listen to the dreams that they dream, for it is a lie that they are prophesying to you in my name; I did not send them, says the Lord" (vs. 8-9). False prophets, engaged in leadership structures, abuse people's emotional instability and their willingness to receive only positive news. Their message of peace, coming in the context of discourse about God's unconditional mercy, is an invitation to lax faith, morality, and worship. Specifically, the speech of the false prophet Ananias is cunning, misinforming, and inciting indifference and ignorance:

"This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: 'I will break the yoke of the king of Babylon. Within two years I will bring back to this place all the articles of the Lord's house that Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon removed from here and took to Babylon" (Jer 28:2-3). God, Himself is the salvation of Israel, not the Temple, as a magical, delimiting, compelling, and manipulative construction of Holiness: "This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: Reform your ways and your actions, and I will let you live in this place. Do not trust in deceptive words and say, 'This is the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord!'" (Jer. 7:3-4). The mere physical presence of the Temple amid Zion and of the people of Israel, on the one hand, and of the Israelite (or his sacrifices) amid the Temple, on the other hand, does not authenticate a centrality of faith in human life: "Will you steal and murder, commit adultery and perjury, burn incense to Baal and follow other gods you have not known, and then come and stand before me in this house, which bears my Name, and say, "We are safe", safe to do all these detestable things?" (Jer 7:9-10). It is not the physical centrality of the sacred that means anything, but the assumption of this centrality of the inner, spiritual living, as God requires through Moses: "But if from there you seek the Lord your God, you will find him if you seek him with all your heart and with all your soul" (Dt 4:29).

Hence the last exhortation: "Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart" (Jer 29:12-13). These words come in the context of the tradition of daily Jewish prayer (Resceanu 2018, 242-3), according to which prayer is a dialogue, a search for, and the finding of God. After the birth of Enos, "people began to call on the name of the Lord" (Gn 4:26); Abraham "built an altar there to the Lord, who had appeared to him" (Gn 12:7); "Exalt the Lord our God and worship at his footstool; he is holy. Moses and Aaron were among his priests, and Samuel was among those who called on his name; they called on the Lord and he answered them. He spoke to them from the pillar of the cloud; they kept his statutes and the decrees he gave them. Lord our God, you answered them; you were to Israel a forgiving God, though you punished their misdeeds", says the psalmist (Ps 99:5-8). These are just some of the many exhortations to meet God in prayer, highlighting the Old Testament theology of the presence of the Living God near man. God hears and answers (Melniciuc-Puica, Vatamanu, Hârlăoanu 2014) (Gn 3:9-10; Ps 65:2; 116:1-2: "I love the Lord, for he heard my voice; he heard my cry for mercy. Because he turned his ear to me, I will call on him as long as I live").

And even though Israel is far from the Holy Land and the Temple (which would be destroyed) in Jerusalem, they would be heard by the Lord, because, according to Ezekiel's prophecy, "although I sent them far away among the nations and scattered them among the countries, yet for a little while I have been a sanctuary for them in the countries where they have gone" (Ez 11:16). In the absence of the Temple, God Himself would be the Holy Place for the Israelites. In exile, God would constantly be present in prayer through the liturgy of the Word, through the Torah. The true God is the Lord of the revealed Word. And, to remove any fear, the psalmist reinforces the prophetic words: "From Zion, perfect in beauty, God shines forth. Our God comes and will not be silent; a fire devours before him and around him a tempest rages" (Ps 50:2-3).

The re-reading of the prophetic text as the key to national and religious survival

Despite Zedekiah's efforts to save the political independence of the Kingdom of Judah, King Nebuchadnezzar wanted to subdue all military forces in the Levant, and, after an eight-month siege of Jerusalem, he conquered it, ordering the deportation of the people to Babylon (Donner 1995, 402-13). Thus begins the 70-year exile prophesied by Jeremiah. However, the deportation of the Israelites to Babylon was not nearly as tragic as the plunder and destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, the true religious exile of the chosen people. The texts from the Lamentations of Jeremiah (1:6-10; 2:6-8) highlight the unprecedented pain of the people, the destruction of Zion as a spiritual death of a nation, an end allowed by the Lord. But Zion is a place that was destroyed to be recreated (Poulsen 2014, 39).

Against the backdrop of the loss of loved ones and deprivation, it is obvious that the drama of the exile caused a lot of frustration, anger, mistrust, fear, and despair! The texts from the Psalms and the book of Job refer precisely to this suffering that the righteous, an exponent of the enslaved people, cannot immediately explain, but for which God has a meaning. The experience of the Jewish diaspora in Babylon was built on the prophetic foundation of the holy text. The strong faith in the Living God, Who has a special plan with His people, whom he pedagogically and providentially sent to Babylon, further strengthened the theology of Israel's distinction among nations. The despair was turned into hope. Being far from the Holy Land, among non-believers, the Israelites were re-reading the Scripture on a hermeneutic note, to understand the new historical experiences, seeing the exile as a chance to express their faith to everyone.

Of particular significance for their spiritual resurrection in exile was their awareness of the moral state at that time, because they disobeyed God. The key to a redeemed future was to assume the past, to acknowledge the state of decay in which the sin had brought them. They live among dispersed nations, because "there is only cursing, lying and murder, stealing and adultery; they break all bounds, and bloodshed follows bloodshed. Because of this, the land dries up, and all who live in it waste away; the beasts of the field, the birds in the sky and the fish in the sea are swept away. (…) My people are destroyed by a lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge" (Hos 4:2-3.6). And this is not only an accusation that comes from the Lord, while seeking the guilty elsewhere, outside, among people from another nation and from another faith, but it is an assumed responsibility, among themselves, as the collective guilt of the chosen people. The exiles blame themselves, and the sins which led them to this moral state.

The divine pedagogy of the exile was expected and that is why the Jewish prophets in exile no longer talked about what God's judgment would make out of them – because that is what they were already experiencing – but about the end of the divine trial: the deliverance, the redemption. For example, as I mentioned above, prophet Ezekiel speaks in Babylon to his compatriots about the end of the exile as a resurrection, as the union of all bones into a new body, having a new spirit (Ez 37:1-14), or as a union of the two parts of the rod, which was once broken (Ez 37:20-28). Jeremiah anticipates a recreation of the time before the exile, or he expects something entirely new. The new covenant in Jeremiah is merely a renewal of the Sinaitic covenant (Lundbom 2004, 466).

Because this theology of resurrection and salvation does not refer only to eschatological times, but prophetically refers to an immediate history, it also contains a political theology. It is another kind of political message, in which the concepts and contents are theological. Lex operandi is lex credendi. And this is because, behind an obvious religious message, focused on messianism, there is a strong testament to social, and national unity. The literary context of Ez 36:10-12 and Ez 37:21-28 is more than eloquent. Invoking the kingdom of David and the Messianic hope, as restorers of the covenant between God and man, it calls to transform the unity of the diaspora into a centralized unit around the Holy Place of the Lord. The House of the Lord would no longer have the role of a cult place for formal rituals but would be "in their midst". It would be the cathedral of national unity, a landmark and standard for everyone.

Conclusions: The exile as alienation – meanings for modernity

Returning home should not be only a physical return, but primarily a spiritual return, an inward conversion, a return to the Lord, in response to frequent prophetic calls (Is 44:22; Jer 3:7.12; 4:1; 31:21; Hos 12:7; 14:2; Ps 116:7). "This is what the Lord Almighty says: 'Return to me,' declares the Lord Almighty, 'and I will return to you,' says the Lord Almighty", through the prophet Zechariah (1:3). The prophetic call to re-evaluate the status of the exiles' faith through the spiritual instruments of humility and repentance must bring spiritual renewal and a return to the matrix of God's redemption: "The days are coming", declares the Lord, "when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them", declares the Lord. "This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time," declares the Lord. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people" (Jer 31:31-33).

The exile and the diaspora are antithetical to the space we call "home". In the history of the chosen people, the dramatic loss of the homeland strengthened the connection between the exiles and the Holy Land, a relationship which grew stronger at a theological level, becoming a feature of identity, and important for their self-definition. In this context, the theology of the earth as a divine gift is very strong, emphasizing the covenant relationship that exists between God and the people of Israel. The land of Canaan was separated from other geographical areas and it was set aside and sanctified. It was a holy land and the Holy Land because it was the land of promises and the land where they would be fulfilled. Israel is the land "in which milk and honey flow" (Dt 26:15) and the pedagogical space for the trials of faith. The holy land preserves in every stone and dust the memory of a history of redemption, and, whenever he is far from this land, the Israelite longs for the earth received as a gift from God, he longs for "home", for sitting in the shadow of the Temple.

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LE « LIVRE DE LA VIE » DANS LES TEXTES BIBLIQUE ET DANS LES MANUSCRITS DE LA MER MORTE

Abstract

The expression "the book of life" can be immediately connected with a range of biblical texts such as Ex 32:32-34; Ps 69:29; Dn 12:1; Lk 10:20; Phil 4:3; Heb 12:23 or Rv 3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 20:12.15 and 21:27. Along with other known texts from the intertestamental literature, with the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, we draw up an inventory of texts which present this expression. Given that a similar formula has been identified in other non-biblical texts (notably two texts from Qumran, 4Q504 1-2 vi 14; 4Q318 31 8), these compositions provide a specific context and the most interesting connections are to be addressed with the help of the book of Revelation, I propose a crisscrossed analysis between Dn 12, the texts from the Dead Sea Scrolls, the second temple literature and the last book of the Bible. Would it be possible that this expression travelled across ages before receiving the most evolved form and meaning in John's Apocalypse? With this question in mind, this compared analysis may facilitate our understanding of the meaning of this expression not only in the Qumran texts but also in the books of the New Testament.

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Introduction

Depuis plus d'un demi-siècle, de nombreux points de contact ont été recensés entre les livres bibliques et les manuscrits de Qumrân. Tout en partageant le même terreau théologique et philologique – celui de l'Ancien Testament –, des rapprochements singuliers ont été signalés entre le

Nouveau Testament et les rouleaux de la mer Morte. C'est dans cette optique que je compte m'arrêter sur l'expression בספר החיים (« livre de la vie ») qui, tout en étant bien présente dans les textes du Nouveau Testament et dans la littérature intertestamentaire (*1 Hénoch* 47:3 ; 108:3 ; *Livre des Jubilés* 30:21-22 ; 36:10; *Apocalypse de Sophonie* 3:7 ; 9:1-3 ; *Joseph et Aséneth* 15:3-4), est moins employée – en tout cas sous la forme complète de « livre de la vie » –, dans les écrits de l'Ancien Testament. L'unique occurrence vétérotestamentaire se trouve dans le Ps 69:29 (מִסֵּפֶר חַיִּים).

Jusqu'à présent, deux monographies ont traité la place et la fonction des livres célestes, y compris donc le livre de la vie. Celle de Leo Koep (1952) commence par l'exploration de l'arrière-fond du Proche-Orient et du monde gréco-romain. L'auteur retrace, dans un premier temps, l'usage de ce motif dans la littérature judéo-chrétienne, avant de s'attarder, dans un deuxième temps, sur sa réception dans les textes liturgiques médiévaux. Tout en restant un point de départ très important, ce n'est qu'avec John J. Collins (1979) que la fonction du livre céleste (« heavenly book ») a été mieux esquissée dans la paradigme centrale des éléments qui s'enchaînent dans le genre littéraire de l'« apocalypse ». Plus récemment, Leslie Baynes (2012) s'est penchée sur la fonction et les dynamiques que comportent ce motif – sous tous les aspects et formes revêtues –, notamment dans les apocalypses.

Tout en restant attentif à la fonction de ce motif dans le genre littéraire de l'apocalypse, par la suite, je me propose d'approfondir la portée et le développement théologique de l'expression « livre de la vie » dans l'ensemble des écrits du Nouveau Testament. La trajectoire de cette expression culmine dans l'Apocalypse de Jean (Rv 3:5 ; 13:8 ; 17:8 ; 20:12.15 ; 21:27), qui est une vraie révélation, car c'est ici que le lecteur apprend l'identité du propriétaire du « livre de la vie » et la finalité du sort de ceux qui y sont inscrits.

L'Ancien Testament

La toute première référence vétérotestamentaire à cette expression se trouve en Ex 32:32-34. Le lecteur apprend que celui qui pèche contre Yhwh sera effacé de Son livre au jour de Sa visite (v. 34). Ce livre appartient à Dieu et c'est Lui qui peut y inscrire ou en effacer un nom. Même s'il n'est pas spécifié, il s'agit très certainement du « livre de la

vie ».

Ainsi, l'action de garder les commandements de Yhwh ouvre la possibilité d'avoir son nom inscrit dans ce livre. La bénédiction de Dieu pour la fidélité est la vie et celle-ci sera donnée lors de Son jugement. Voir en ce sens Is 4:3-4 : « Le reste laissé à Sion, ce qui survit à Jérusalem, sera appelé saint, tout ce qui est inscrit pour la vie à Jérusalem. Lorsque le Seigneur aura lavé la saleté des filles de Sion et purifié Jérusalem du sang répandu, par le souffle du jugement et par le souffle de la destruction ». Ex 32:32-33, Is 4:3-4 et Mal 3:1-18 font référence à un jour de jugement quand la qualité des actes des hommes (Is 43:25 ; 65:5 ; Dn 7:10 ; Jer 22:30 ; Mal 3:16 ; Mt 16:27 ; Rom 2:5-6 ; 14:12 ; 1 Cor 3:13 ; 2 Cor 5:10 ; 2 Tim 4:14 ; 1 Pt 1:17 ; 2:12 ; Rev 2:23 ; 20:12), enregistrés dans le « livre », aura des conséquences sur l'existence dans la vie d'après. Les saints vivront, tandis que les pécheurs subiront la punition de Yhwh, qui est la mort, symbolisée ici par le geste d'être effacé (Watts 1985, 50).

La seule fois où l'expression le « livre de la vie » apparaît dans l'Ancien Testament sous sa forme complète est dans le Ps 69:29 (מִסֵּפֶר חַיִּים). Le Psalmiste rappelle l'existence d'un livre dans lequel le fait d'être effacé constitue le plus grand châtiment possible pour ses ennemis.

Avec le livre de Daniel, la fonction de cette expression est mieux explicitée. En parallèle avec les livres des actes des hommes de Dn 7:9-10, le « livre » (de la vie) de Dn 12:1-2 contient les noms de ceux qui survivront au jugement opéré par Yhwh, lorsque les morts ressusciteront soit pour la vie éternelle, soit pour l'opprobre éternel. Dans ce texte, aucune différence n'est faite entre les inscrits dans le « livre » et les ressuscités qui « resplendiront comme la splendeur du firmament … pour toute éternité » (Dn 12:3 ; cf. Mt 13:43).

Par rapport à l'Ancien Testament, la littérature d'après le second temple (j'inclus ici aussi les manuscrits découverts à Qumrân) fait bon usage tant du motif, en général, que de l'expression « livre de la vie », en particulier. Sans entrer dans les détails – vu que Nickelsburg (2006) et Baynes (2012, 27-167) ont déjà traité le sujet –, le lien qui existe entre le livre de la vie (et parallèlement celui des actes) et le jugement (final) est évident.

Le jugement décrit en Dan. 7, à part la mention de l'existence des livres des actes des hommes, évoque à deux reprises des comportements liturgiques.

Au v. 10, des milliers et des milliers servent l'Ancien des jours (יְשַׁמְּשׁוּנֵהּ / ἐθεράπευσον) et au v. 14, le Fils de l'homme reçoit tout pouvoir, accompagné du service de toutes les nations, les tribus et les langues (καὶ πᾶσα δόξα αὐτῷ λατρεύουσα / וְכֹל עַמְמַיָּא אֻמַיָּא וְלִשׁנַיָּא לֵהּ יִפְלְחוּן).

La littérature intertestamentaire / Les manuscrits de la mer Morte

1 Hénoch 47:3 adresse le motif du livre de la vie (ou du vivant) dans un contexte apocalyptique, des derniers jours. Ainsi, les « saints uniront leurs voix, pour intercéder et prier, pour glorifier, louer et bénir le nom du Seigneur des Esprits ». Cette activité doxologique est réalisée par les « saints », c'est-à-dire par des anges dans ce cas-ci (Dupont-Sommer et Philonenko 1987, 517). Le Jugement se succède, lorsque « les livres des vivants » seront « ouverts devant Lui » (v. 3).

Le *Livre des Jubilés* 36:10 emploie cette expression dans un tableau de jugement (« au jour de perturbation et de malédiction, de colère et de fureur »). Le livre de la vie se différencie de son pendant, le livre du châtiment (*Livre des Jubilés* 30:21-22). La punition des pécheurs est éternelle et ceux qui se rattachent au Seigneur et pas aux idoles sont appelés à respecter son Nom, en le craignant et en l'adorant (36:7). Aucune mention du sacrifice n'accompagne ces révélations ultimes, soit parce que l'auteur n'a pas (plus) la possibilité de l'accomplir, soit parce qu'il le rejette, soit parce qu'un certain processus de spiritualisation de l'acte sacrificiel fermentait dans le monde juif.

Joseph et Aséneth 15:3-4 précise que le nom d'Aséneth a été inscrit dans le livre de la vie suite aux paroles de confession de l'épouse de Joseph (v. 2) par un grand ange ou par un homme ou par une voix (Burchard 1985, 224). Pour l'*Apocalypse de Sophonie* 3:5-9, c'est le Seigneur Tout-Puissant qui inscrit dans le livre de la vie le nom de ceux qui ont fait de bonnes œuvres (3:7 ; 9:1-3). Toutefois, ces deux textes n'évoquent pas les comportements quelconques des inscrits dans ce livre.

On retrouve cette expression en hébreu dans deux textes de Qumrân, respectivement en 4Q381 31 8 (ou *4QNon-Canonical Psalms B*) et en 4Q504 1-2 vi 14 (connu aussi comme *4QDibHam* ou *Paroles des luminaires*). 4Q381 31 8 (מספר החיים) avec le Ps 69,29 (מִסֵּפֶר חַיִּים), à la différence de l'article devant le substantif « vie », qui se rencontre plutôt dans 4Q504 1-2 vi 14 (בספר החיים).

Même si le rouleau de 4Q381 a été daté autour de 75 av. J.-C. (Eshel et al. 1998, 88), sa composition pourrait remonter jusqu'au début de la période hellénistique ou même de la période perse (Schuller 1992, 96). Nous sommes devant une collection de psaumes où, même si on ne cite jamais des psaumes canoniques, des mots ou de courtes phrases du livre canonique des Psaumes peuvent être signalées (Schuller 1992, 93).

4Q381 31 4-9

4 [תפלה ל ... מ]לך יהודה שמע אל[הי ...].שיך ...

עזי[...].תך אספרה נגד ידאיך [...]...[...]עמדי ...[...]
5 [...מח]שבתיך מי יבין להמא כי רבו צרדי נגדך אתה ידעתם
ולשנאי נפשי לנגד ע[ינים]ך כפיתה כי אחיה [...]
6 [... אל]תכחד עוני ליידעי בינה ואתה להם תשחט אלהי ישעי צפנים
ימי עמדי ומה יעשה אנוש הנני ואיככה
7 [... תגיר] לחכי על ידי חרב ביום עברה האמרים פענה שרגו
עטרת ראשי כי אדר נציב כבודם ועידם
8 [...]לם שפתי שאלה ס[...]...[...]... מספר החי[י]ם[ו]מפחדי
יפמו [ו] צררי יכלו ואין ...
9 [...] נני שיר ותוד[ה...]כל עמך לג[...] vacat [...]

4 [Prière de …r]oi de Juda. Écoute, [mon] Die[u…] ton … ma force […] tu … Je vais raconter devant ceux qui Te craignent […] … […] mon existence … […]
5 […] Tes [p]ensées, qui peut les comprendre car mes ennemis sont nombreux devant Toi. Tu les as humiliés et ceux qui haïssent ma vie Tu les as renversés devant Tes y[eux] ; mais je vais vivre […]
6 […] Tu [ne] cacheras pas mon péché de ceux qui savent, mais Tu le détruiras. Dieu de mon salut, les jours de mon existence sont réservés. Que peut faire un homme ? Me voici et comment
7 […] Tu livreras] ceux qui m'attendent pour l'épée ; au jour de fureur, ceux qui disent … ils ont tressé une couronne pour ma tête, pour la majesté de … est leur

gloire et leurs ornements
8 […] … mes lèvres une supplication […] … […] … du livre de la vie [et] ceux qui m'effrayent soient détruits [et] mes ennemis périront et ne …
9 […]… un chant et un remercie[ment …] … avec Toi […]

4Q381 31 4-9 (texte et traduction légèrement adaptée de García Martínez et Tigchelaar 1999, 758-759), le seul psaume conservé en entier dans ce rouleau fragmentaire, est une prière, sous forme de lamentation, attribuée à un roi de Juda, mais dont le nom n'est plus lisible. Il contient l'expression « du livre de la vie (מספר החיים) (l. 8) et fait référence au « jour de fureur » (ביום עברה) (l. 7) (Zeph. 1:15.18 ; Sir. 5:8 ; Job 21:30 ; Ezek. 7:19 ; Prov. 11:4 ; Isa. 13:9.13 ; Rom. 2:5). Ce jour semble lié au fait d'être ou d'être pas inscrit dans le livre de la vie, car les ennemis de l'auteur seront mis à mort. Puisque le rouleau est pauvrement conservé, il est difficile de conclure si le livre de la vie fonctionne ici comme une référence temporelle aux accents eschatologiques.

Sans pouvoir parler de citations, ce chant puise dans psaume canonique 69 (Schuller 1992, 93). En nous rapportant au Ps. 69:29-31 (v. 31 : בְּשִׁיר … בְּתוֹדָה), nous pouvons supposer que l'usage de l'expression « du livre de la vie » pourrait être en lien avec l'action de performer un chant et un remerciement (4Q381 31 9 : שיר ותודה). Il est évident que l'état fragmentaire de ce rouleau ne nous permet pas d'en conclure plus, mais il est intéressant de souligner qu'il s'agit du deuxième autre texte découvert près de la mer Morte qui, très probablement, connecte l'expression « livre de la vie » avec l'action de remercier. L'autre est 4Q504 1-2 vi 14-15 (בספר החיים [...] לעובדכה ולהודות).

Si le rouleau de 4Q504 peut être daté autour de 150 av. J.-C. (Baillet 1982, 137), l'œuvre *Paroles des Luminaires* se rattache vraisemblablement à une période pré-qumrânienne, où la future communauté cherchait encore une identité spécifique (Baillet 1961, 250; Chazon 1992, 17).

Un livre de prières pour chaque jour de la semaine, 4Q504 se réfère notamment au peuple, dans le sens de la communauté fidèle aux commandements divins et qui s'adresse avec confiance à Dieu. C'est le sixième fragment qui nous intéresse – un morceau qui correspond à la prière de vendredi – car nous y retrouvons l'expression « dans le livre de la vie » (texte et traduction de

García Martínez et Tigchelaar 1999, 1016-107).

4Q504 1-2 vi

2 [... ותשלי]ך מ[ע]לינו כול פשעינ[ו] ות[ט]הרנו
3 מחטתנו למענכה לכה אתה/אדוני/ הצדקה כיא
4 אתה עשיתה את כול אלה ועתה כיום הזה
5 אשר נכנע לבנו רצינו את עוונו ואת עוון
6 אבותינו במעלנו ואשר הלכנו בקרי ולוא מאסנו
7 בנסוייכה ובנגיעיכה לוא נעלה נפשנו להפר
8 את בריתכה בכול צרת נ/פ/שנו כיא אתה/אשר
השלחתה בנו את אויבינו/
9 חזקתה את לבבנו ולמען נספר גבורתכה לדורו/ת/
10 עולם אנא אדוני כעשותכה נפלאות מעולם ועד
11 עולם ישוב נא אפכה וחמתכה ממנו וראה ע[ונינו]
12 ועמלנו ולחצנו והצילה את עמכה ישר[אל מכול]
13 הארצות הקרובות והרחוקות א[שר הדחתם]
14 שם כול הכתוב בספר החיים[...]
15 לעובדכה ולהודות ל[שם קודשכה ...]
16 מכול צורריהמה[...]
17 מכשילים [...]
18 ש...[
19 ל[...]
21-20 [...]

1 […]
2 […et Tu] nous [as débarrass]és de toutes n[os] fautes et Tu nous as [pu]rifiés
3 de notre péché, pour Toi. À Toi, oui, à Toi, (Adonaï), la justice ! Car
4 (c'est) Toi (qui) as fait tout cela. Et maintenant, aujourd'hui même

5 où s'est humilié notre cœur, nous avons expié notre iniquité et l'iniquité de
6 nos pères pour notre infidélité, ainsi que {leur} notre conduite rebelle; nous n'avons pas rejeté
7 Tes épreuves, notre âme ne (les) a pas méprisés Tes punitions au point de rompre
8 Ton alliance, malgré toute l'angoisse de notre âme. Puisque (c'est) Toi /qui as envoyé contre nous nos ennemis/
9 (qui) nous as réconforté le cœur, pour que nous racontions Ta bravoure aux générations
10 éternelles, eh bien ! nous T'en prions, Adonaï, comme Tu fais des miracles de tout temps et à
11 jamais, que se retire donc Ta colère et Ta fureur loin de nous. Vois [notre] m[isère],
12 notre peine et notre détresse, et délivre Ton peuple Isra[ël] [de tous]
13 les pays, proches et lointains, o[ù Tu les as bannis].
14 Tous ceux qui sont inscrits dans le livre de la vie […]
15 Te servir et rendre grâces à [Ton saint nom …]
16 de tous {ceux qui les frappent/les fléaux}(leurs persécuteurs) […]
17 (ceux) qui font trébucher […]
18-21 […]

Selon Esther Chazon, chaque jour de la semaine, à l'exception du samedi, devait se présenter sous la forme d'un long hymne. La prière de type supplication comporte un schéma formel : 1) la prière est précédée d'une souscription indiquant le type et l'occasion de la récitation, 2) la prière commence par un appel à Dieu, pour qu'il se souvienne de la relation avec Israël, 3) un sommaire plus ou moins développé des rapports entre Dieu et Israël, 4) une supplication, 5) une bénédiction et 6) la réponse « Amen, Amen » (Chazon 1992, 447-451).

Dans ce fragment, l'attention porte sur les lignes 14 et 15. La l. 14, « Tous ceux qui sont inscrits dans le livre de la vie », qui renvoient au livre de Daniel 12. Même si Dan. 12:1 ne présente pas de parallèle philologique parfait, des mots communs et une grande affinité théologique peuvent être décelés (Nickelsburg 2006, 29).

Dn 12,1 : יִמָּלֵט עַמֶּךָ כֹּל־הַנִּמְצָא כָּתוּב בַּסֵּפֶר

4Q504 1-2 vi 12.14 : והצילה את עמכה... כול הכתוב בספר החיים

Le texte des *Paroles des luminaires*, par le fait qu'il ajoute au mot « livre » le terme « de la vie » et qu'il lie l'action de la délivrance (והצילה) au peuple, se rapproche, au niveau du sens, de Dan. 12:2. Dans ce livre biblique, il n'est pas question uniquement de la guerre d'Israël contre les ennemis, mais aussi de la guerre eschatologique qu'opposera les impies et les justes. Le jour du jugement (cf. Dan. 7:26), ceux qui auront leurs noms inscrits dans « le livre » seront délivrés de la mort en étant appelés à la « vie éternelle », tandis que les autres « s'éveilleront … pour l'opprobre, pour l'horreur éternelle » (Dan. 12:2).

Les Juifs fidèles à la Loi ou les justes sont « le reste », qui s'éveilleront pour recevoir la vie éternelle, tandis que les traîtres ou les impies iront vers l'opprobre éternel. Il n'est pas question ici de résurrection en tant que restauration nationale (Di Lella, 1978, 308-309; Kvalbein 1997, 118; Puech 1997, 290) (comme en Hosea 6:1-2 ; Ezek. 37:1-14 ; Ps. 80:19-20 ; 85:6-7), mais plutôt d'une eschatologie individuelle, qui prendra en compte d'abord la conduite morale de chaque membre du *verus Israel* (Puech 2003, 151).

Cette idée a fait son chemin aussi dans 4Q504 1-2 vi, car, s'il est question du peuple d'Adonaï, le peuple d'Israël, il n'est pas clair si cela épouse une perspective ethnocentrique (cf. 4Q504 1-2 vi 10.12). La finalité de la prière est loin d'être un éloge d'un retour quelconque à la splendeur de la nation. De même, s'il n'est pas évident si Dan 12 aide à confirmer le caractère eschatologique de l'activité décrite en 4Q504 1-2 vi, il est certain que le texte de Qumrân confirme qu'il est question chez Daniel du « livre (de la vie) » (Nickelsburg 2006, 29). Les deux textes puisent dans l'Exod 32:32-34, leur source commune, et confirment, indirectement, qu'Israël ne tient plus exclusivement à l'appartenance ethnique, c'est-à-dire que l'inscription dans le livre ne se résume plus à un peuple, mais se rapporte à une Alliance d'ordre éthique (voir Dn 12:3).

Les futurs bénéficiaires de l'intervention miséricordieuse d'Adonaï auront une activité éminemment spirituelle (« de Te servir et de rendre grâces » ; voir aussi Dt 10:8 ; Ps 52:11 ; 107:22 ; 1 Chr 23:13 ; Sir 51:11-12). Même s'il n'est pas limpide si servir et rendre grâces auront lieu sur la terre ou dans un temps eschatologique, le texte de Qumrân va dans le sens de la spiritualisation des futurs rapports entre Adonaï et

Son peuple. L'inscription du nom des membres justes du peuple d'Israël dans le livre de la vie est mise en parallèle avec l'action de louer et remercier le Nom (d'Adonaï). À noter aussi que, dans ce rouleau, nous retrouvons l'énumération « [… un royaume de] prêtres et une nation sainte … que Tu as choisi » (4Q504 IV 10). Probablement, ceux qui louent le Nom d'Adonaï exercent aussi une tâche liturgique perpétuelle (voir notamment Ps 86:12 ; 52:11 ; 106:47 et Sir 51:1.11).

Tant les textes bibliques que ceux de la littérature intertestamentaire convergent vers l'idée que la présence d'un nom dans le livre de la vie assure l'obtention de la vie éternelle en tant que membre du peuple, c'est-à-dire le Juif juste. Il est moins clair si entre ceux dont les noms sont inscrits dans le livre et ceux qui se réveilleront il y a une relation de type cause-effet. Est-ce que le fait d'être inscrit comporte-t-il des conséquences quant à la rétribution des uns et à la punition des autres ? C'est le livre de l'Apocalypse qui reprendra et développera ce concept. Aucun autre texte de la Bible hébraïque ne parle si ouvertement de la vie éternelle, du livre (de la vie) et du lien entre les actions humaines et leurs conséquences. Et quoi dire sur ce qui suit après l'inscription dans le livre de la vie ? Une comparaison avec l'Apocalypse de Jean ouvrira la perspective sur ce point.

Le Nouveau Testament

Dans le Nouveau Testament, on compte cette expression six fois dans le livre de l'Apocalypse de Jean (3:5 ; 13:8 ; 17:8 ; 20:12.15 ; 21:27) et encore une fois en Phil. 4:3. En Luke 10:20 et en Heb 12:23, il est question de ceux dont les noms se trouvent inscrits dans les cieux, ce qui désigne aussi « le livre de la vie », autrement formulée (Fitzmyer 1985, 860-861).

Trois éléments sont à mettre en évidence quant à l'unique référence du livre de la vie dans les évangiles (Lk10:17-20). Si en Exod 32 c'est Yhwh qui mentionne l'existence d'un tel livre, cette fois-ci, c'est Jésus qui reprend et souligne l'importance de faire partie de ce livre. Il rappelle que jouir du pouvoir extraordinaire de contrôler les puissances démoniques n'est pas aussi important que le grand bonheur de savoir que le nom des soixante-douze apôtres a été écrit dans les cieux. Enfin, la mention de la chute du Satan –cela dans une perspective intertextuelle avec Rev 12:9-12 (Baynes 2012, 138-139), qui parle aussi de la précipitation de l'ancien serpent, le diable ou le Satan –, laisse entrevoir le contexte apocalyptique de la parole de Jésus.

À part les références de l'Apocalypse de Jean, du point de vue philologique, l'unique occurrence complète de l'expression « le livre de la vie » se trouve en Phil 4:3.

Dépourvu de tout contexte apocalyptique, l'usage que fait Saint Paul de cette expression rappelle plutôt l'avantage d'être inscrit sur la liste de la citoyenneté céleste (voir Is 4:3). La condition pour y être inscrit constitue, tout comme en Rev 12:11, le fait d'avoir témoigné le Christ.

Pour Heb 12:23 –dans un tableau clairement apocalyptique –, être inscrit dans les cieux signifie l'entrée dans la Jérusalem céleste, la ville du Dieu-vivant. L'arrière-cadre est clairement tirée de la théophanie de Sinaï (Ex 19-20) (Baynes 2012, 140-143). La nouvelle vie dans les cieux est partagée avec les anges, qui vivent dans une assemblée solennelle, de fête (cf. Hos 2:13 ; 9:5 ; Am 5:21). Les nouveau-nés sont ceux mentionnés dans le livre et, par rapport à Deut. 4:10 ; 18:16 LXX (voir aussi Acts 7:38), ils vivent uniquement grâce à la médiation du Christ, dans le cadre d'une nouvelle Alliance. Un dernier détail est la connexion avec le sang du juste, le sang du Christ, un motif familier chez l'auteur de l'Apocalypse de Jean. Ce texte fait référence à un comportement festif de la part des anges, mais sans parler, quoiqu'indirectement plausible, d'une activité liturgique quelconque des nouveau-nés. Néanmoins, en Heb. 12:28, l'auteur de l'épître exhorte ses lecteurs à rendre à Dieu un culte (latreu,wmen) agréable, avec piété et crainte, car, dit-il plus tard, en 13:14-15, il faut chercher la cité à venir afin d'offrir un sacrifice de louange, c'est-à-dire confesser/louer (o`mologou,ntwn) Son Nom. Le seul autre texte qui relie directement l'action de louer et celle de remercier le Nom (saint) de Dieu, et cela uniquement dans le contexte de l'inscription dans un livre de la vie, est 4Q504 1-2 vi 15.

De tous les livres scripturaires et non-bibliques, l'expression « le livre de la vie » connaît le plus important développement dans l'Apocalypse johannique. Avec pas moins de six occurrences, ce motif fait partie intégrante de l'image apocalyptique décrite dans le dernier livre du canon biblique chrétien.

Au niveau philologique, l'expression affiche deux éléments spécifiques : l'attribution du livre à l'Agneau (evn tw/ bibli,w th/j zwh/j tou/ avrni,ou) et l'utilisation du diminutif bibli,on (« petit livre », en 13,8 ; 17,8). La variante philologique de l'Apoc. 20:15, ἐν τῇ βίβλῳ τῆς ζωῆς est l'équivalent de l'hébreu בספר החיים de 4Q504 1-2 vi 14.

Le contexte du livre est apocalyptique, dans le sens de la révélation qu'il porte sur la parousie et, en dernier lieu, sur le jugement final de Dieu. Jusqu'au chapitre 20, un premier combat cosmique et surnaturel entre la divinité, accompagné de ses anges, et le diable et les siens, est dépeint. La raison de cet affrontement tourne principale-

ment autour du sort de hommes (Rev 20:3.8) et subsidiairement de la fin du monde (Rev 20:1). Le deuxième combat, très brièvement présenté, s'achève par la punition définitive du diable. Ces affrontements sont accompagnés par deux résurrections et deux morts (Beale 1999, 1005).

Le jour de la fureur, le jour du jugement est entamé par l'ouverture du livre scellé (Rev 6:1-2 ; voir aussi le chap. 5). Celui-ci culminera avec la défaite de la bête et de son faux prophète (Rev 19:11-21). Ces deux seront jetés vivants dans l'étang de feu qui brûle avec du soufre (Rev 19:20). Dans un deuxième temps, ce sera le tour du serpent, qui est le diable et Satan, d'être puni. Cependant, il sera seulement lié pour une période de mille ans (Rev 20:2.3.4.5.6 ; voir aussi le Ps 90:6 et 2 Pt 3:8-13).

Après la première défaite du diable, la première résurrection aura lieu (Rev 20:4-6). De celle-ci ne bénéficieront pas les morts, qui devront attendre l'écoulement des mille ans. Par contre, ceux qui auraient été décapités pour leur témoignage en faveur du Christ, ceux qui n'auraient pas adoré ni la bête ni son image et qui n'auraient pas reçu la marque sur leur main et sur leur front, ressusciteront et vivront avec le Christ, pour mille ans (Rev 20:4).

Ceux-ci, les martyres ou les vainqueurs, ne seront pas jugés lors de la seconde mort (Rev. 2:11 ; voir aussi 2:7.17.26 ; 3:5.12.21 ; 6:9-11 ; 7:9.14.15.16.17 ; 13:8), précisément parce que leurs noms sont présents dans le « livre de la vie » (Rev 20:15). C'est pourquoi ils iront au Paradis de Dieu (Rev 2:7), ils recevront une couronne de victoire (Rev 2:10b), ils ne courront plus le danger d'être effacés du livre de la vie (Apoc. 3:5), ils auront le droit de siéger à la droite de l'Agneau (Rev 3:21), ils n'auront plus faim et soif, ni le soleil ni aucune chaleur ne les frappera plus (Rev 7:16) et ils seront les prêtres du Christ (Rev 20:6 ; cf. 1:6 ; 5:9-10).

En cette qualité, habillés de vêtements blancs (Rev 7:9.13-15 ; aussi 3:4.5 ; 4:4 ; 6:11 ; Mt 24:21), ils rendront un culte, jour et nuit, dans le temple (λατρεύουσιν αὐτῷ ἡμέρας καὶ νυκτὸς ἐν τῷ ναῷ αὐτου. (Rev 7:15).

Pour ce qui est de la seconde résurrection, tout d'abord, à la fin des mille ans, le diable, une fois libéré, reprendra son action de séduction des nations, avant qu'il soit, finalement et très rapidement, vaincu et jeté dans le même étang de feu et de soufre où se trouvent la bête et le faux prophète (Rev 20:7-10). Concomitamment, la mort et l'enfer (Hadès) seront jetés dans l'étang de feu (Rev 20:14).

Tous ceux trouvés inscrits dans le livre de la vie de l'Agneau (Rev 21:27) rejoindront la ville de la Nouvelle Jérusalem (voir aussi Ezr 37:27 ; Is 54:11-12 ;

Tob 13:16-17 ; 5Q15 ; 11Q19 ; Heb 12:22-29), l'Épouse (Rev 3:12 ; 21:1-2.10). Cette nouvelle demeure ne comporte plus de temple, car l'Agneau est le temple. Il n'y a plus besoin de soleil, car c'est la gloire de Dieu qui l'éclaire et l'Agneau est son flambeau (Rev 21:22-23).

Les rapports entre les inscrits dans « le livre de la vie de l'Agneau » et Dieu seront très proches, car ils verront Sa face (Rev 22:3) et auront Son Nom sur leur front (Rev 22:4). Cela signifie que la glorification du Nom de Dieu sur la terre, y compris son témoignage ici-bas, se traduira par l'inscription du Nom même. Être inscrit dans le livre de la vie pendant la vie terrestre est expliqué ici par la capacité de porter sur son corps physique la marque divine, le Nom de Dieu. Dans cette qualité, ils pourront régner pour l'éternité en Jérusalem et adorer l'Agneau (Rev 22:5). Ainsi, il y a une inversion au sujet de l'inscription. Si, avant, c'est le Christ qui inscrit des noms dans un livre (cf. Lk 10:20 ; Phil 4:3), après la Parousie, c'est le Nom divin qui est inscrit sur le front, en s'imprégnant dans le corps de celui marqué (Rev 3:12 ; 14:1).

Conclusions

L'examen des données de la littérature chrétienne et intertestamentaire a permis de saisir l'existence d'un développement théologique du motif du livre de la vie.

Ainsi, pour que l'inscription dans le livre (de la vie) soit effective, Ex 32:32 et Dn 12:1-3 lie indissolublement la foi en Yhwh et la pratique de la justice. Exod. 32:33-34 laisse comprendre que, lors de la Visite, Yhwh punira ceux qui auront péché contre Lui (voir ici l'Alliance), tandis que le livre de Daniel (avec 4Q504) anticipe le jugement et la constitution d'un nouvel Israël, entité composée de citoyens justes. En mettant en parallèle l'inscription dans le livre de la vie et le témoignage du Christ, l'Apocalypse johannique dépasse tout horizon ethnique.

Si Exod. 32 laisse comprendre que c'est Yhwh qui écrit ce livre, dans l'Apocalypse de Jean, l'inscription dans le livre appartient à l'Agneau, donc au Christ. Ceci se trouve dans les mains du Christ, car Lui seul a vaincu la mort (cf. Rev 1:18). Si, en Dn 7:9, le livre est dans les mains de l'Ancien des jours (ou de la Tête en *1 Hénoch* 47:3), selon Rev 1:13 ; 14:14, c'est le Fils de l'homme qui en prend le relais. Par son identification sans équivoque avec l'Agneau (Rev 13:8 et 17:8), à partir de l'Apocalypse de Jean, le livre de la vie n'est plus mis en rapport avec Dieu (selon les écrits hébraïques tant de l'Ancien Testament que des manuscrits de la mer Morte) ou avec les anges (voir la littérature juive du second temple).

Quant aux destinataires du livre de la vie, l'Apocalypse clarifie leur identité et les conditions requises pour y être inscrit. Il s'agit soit de vainqueurs soit de morts qui ressusciteront lors de la deuxième résurrection. Si, pour les premiers, c'est le sang de leur témoignage de Christ ou leur vie morale qui engendre l'inscription dans le livre (Rev 3:2-5), pour les autres, c'est la qualité de leurs actions qui est déterminante (Rev 20:12). La certitude que l'absence du nom de ce livre comporte des conséquences indésirables et permanentes est annoncée en Ps 69:29 ; Dn 12:1-2 ; Lk 10:20 et bien précisée par Rev 20:15.

Toujours à travers l'Apocalypse, l'aspect spatial de l'existence suite à l'inscription est nettement exposé. Entièrement spiritualisé, le Paradis se dévoile comme la « cité du Dieu vivant, la Jérusalem céleste » (Heb 12:22) ou la ville de la Nouvelle Jérusalem, l'Épouse (Rev 3:12 ; 21:1-2.10). Cet espace, entretenu par et focalisé sur l'Agneau (Rev 21:22-23), est étroitement corrélé avec l'activité doxologique des inscrits dans le livre de la vie. Partiellement évoquée en Dan. 7:10.14.27, 4Q504 1-2 vi 14-15 (louange et remerciement) (peut-être aussi en 4Q381 31 8-9 via le Ps 69:29-31), en *Livre des Jubilés* 36:7 et en Heb 12:22-23.28 (un culte avec piété et crainte pour louer/confesser le Nom), l'existence liturgique des inscrits est bien plus détaillée dans l'Apocalypse de Jean. Ainsi, servir et remercier constituent l'activité des vainqueurs (Rev 7:15), qui seront les prêtres de Dieu et du Christ pendant mille ans et avec qui ils règneront (Rev 20:6 ; voir aussi Rev 1:6 ; 5:9-10). Les « prêtres » (c'est-à-dire tous ceux fidèles à l'Alliance avec le Christ) sont appelés à un service perpétuel devant le Christ et en lien avec « le livre de la vie ». Même si l'idée d'une prière continue existe dans les écrits de l'Ancien Testament, un service perpétuel des prêtres devant le Christ n'est attesté qu'avec l'Apoc. 7:15 et 20:5. Cette perspective sacerdotale sans sacrifices sanglants, mais avec des actions de grâce, est suggérée par 4Q504 1-2 vi 14-15 et par le *Livre des Jubilées* 36:7. Dans le contexte de l'inscription dans le livre de la vie, ces deux derniers textes ne proposent pas de lien entre sacrifices et prières, ce qui les distingue de la théologie dominante au temple de Jérusalem. De même, les prêtres de l'Apocalypse ne sont pas des sacrificateurs, comme prévu dans la Loi de Moïse, mais des prieurs.

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THE OLD TESTAMENT IN UNIVERSAL ART: THE HERMENEUTIC ACT BETWEEN THE DESCRIPTIVE AND NORMATIVE APPROACH

Abstract

The subject I am proposing draws attention first to the possibilities universal art presents in terms of the reception and valorisation of biblical texts in theological and cultural environments. Over the years, the transposition of biblical texts into plastic arts has been a hermeneutic act, understood as an "art of interpretation". Thus, how the biblical text was perceived became a mirror of the hermeneutic act, perceived as a process of interpretation, in which both the author and the world before them, which they address, are present. This world entails the (post)modern one, about which the great works of art which tackle a biblical subject are meant to reveal their "kerygmatic nature".

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art, culture, biblical hermeneutics, creation, ground

Introduction

The choice of this subject is motivated by my personal experience, following a course on biblical hermeneutics and universal art that I am giving, based on which I would like to underscore the alternative ways of perception of the biblical text, which we can put forward and which we can use when interacting with the post-modern world. Therefore, this study aims to emphasise concrete ways of perceiving, interpreting, and cultivating the scriptural text through art, bearing in mind the challenges of such a hermeneutic endeavour for the post-modern world.

The interpretation of the scriptural text with the help of works of art originating in the biblical period facilitates the hermeneutic act by offering the possibility to use those clues reflected in art, which are provided by the most common cultural background of the Ancient Middle East. Thus, we are not limited strictly to the culture of Ancient Israel, constrained, depending on the historical epoch it belongs to in terms of artistic expression, by the interdiction of the second commandment of the Decalogue (Ex 20:4-5; Dt 5:8) (Pentiuc 2019, 322; Zimmerli 1978, 120-4; Reșceanu 2018, 166, 170).

In this context, we have chosen to dwell upon a major biblical subject, namely the creation of man and his relationship with divinity, trying to understand the meaning of the act of creating man from the dust from the ground (Gn 2:7), with the help of art and of ancient culture in terms of hermeneutics. Having in mind this desideratum, we should not forget that, even if such a hermeneutic act entails the research of ancient works of art, it must not remain strictly descriptive, but also needs to emphasise its normative character as regards the faith.

The Creation of Man and His Relationship with Divinity in the Context of the Art of the Ancient Middle East

An important help in the interpretation of the act of God creating man from the dust from the ground is provided by *Egyptian art*, to which we can resort not only for its antiquity but also for its great spiritual character. Here, we encounter the image of king Khnum, represented before the potter's wheel, where he creates man (Sarna 1989, 17). Khnum is one of the earliest-known deities, originally the god of water. His image is strongly connected to the flooding of the Nile and the fertilisation of its valley, as it brought the clay, which, as a potter, he used to create man. His most important temple is on Elephantine Island, where we can find many of his representations. The representation of king Khnum as a potter is full of symbolism, showing, through the solemnity of the act of creation, authority, and power, which, using the masterful work of the two hands, seems to share the special dignity that man receives from his very creation.

The same concepts that we can find at the beginning of Egyptian civilisation are also present much later, in the Wisdom of Amenemope. Man is fashioned by the gods out of clay and straw, the focus being, once again, on the almightiness of the gods compared to the relativity of men: "As for man, he is only clay and straw, while the god is the one who fashioned him. The god destroys and the god makes (people)

every day. He makes thousands of people down there if he wishes so..." (Daniel 1974, 172) [our translation].

The relation between divinity and man, as revealed by Ancient Egyptian art, can also be seized, using the same conceptual terms, by observing the suzerain-vassal relationship in the Tell-el-Amarna texts. The over 380 tablets discovered at Tell-el-Amarna, which represent part of the royal archive in the time of king Akhetaten (Amenhotep IV, c. 1350-1334), contain Egypt's diplomatic correspondence with other major powers from the Ancient Middle East (44) and especially with the vassal states of Canaan and Northern Syria (over 300). They use cuneiform writing, and the Akkadian language (East Semitic/Babylonian), which, in the 4th century BC, had become the *lingua franca* in the Ancient Middle East. It was already a foreign language, both for Egyptians and their addressees in Canaan, Northern Syria and even Mesopotamia, who were no longer using it, at that moment being spoken only on its Western outskirts (Na'aman 1992, 171-3).

The correspondence with the great kings of Babylon, Assyria, Mitanni or Hatti, often called "great king" or "brother", is done by following the equality of political status. For the correspondence with the vassal kings of Canaan or Northern Syria, the tone used was always humiliating, to underline the superiority of the Pharaoh compared to the inferiority of the addressee (Na'aman 1992, 174-6). The same humility forms of address are also used by the vassal king when addressing his suzerain. Such an example is that of Milkilu, the Canaanite king of Gezer, who addresses the Pharaoh as follows: "Say to the king, my lord, my Sun, my god: Message of Milkilu, your servant, and the dirt at your feet, the ground you tread on. I prostrate myself at the feet of the king, my lord, the Sun from the sky 7 times. May the king, my lord, be informed that the war against me and Šuwardata is severe. The king, my lord, cast your land from the hands of the Khabiru! May the king, my lord, send chariots to fetch them, lest our servants kill us!" (Moscati 1975, 110).

We, therefore, see that, about his suzerain, the vassal king is associated with the dust and dirt from the ground. He prostrates himself at the feet of his master, in token of humility and acknowledgement of the full authority the latter has over him.

The same reality of the relation between the suzerain and the vassal is also present in *Assyrian art*. In the Ancient Middle East, Assyrian art stands out through its concision, through its direct way of expressing forms and especially ideas, which make Elie Faure characterise it as showing "a terrible simplicity" (Faure 1988, 103)

[our translation]. However, precisely due to "this simplicity", Assyrian art is characterised by force and vigour, in terms of artistic expression, making the scenes presented lively and dynamic. In a society dominated by a strong warlike spirit, these representations are dedicated especially to the king and his royal court; through the fighting or hunting scenes, they speak about his power, heroism, and majesty. A similar posture of the king is also present on stars and obelisks on which various laws, treaties, diplomatic relations, or other important political events from the life of the king are noted down (Bourke 2018, 174-5).

When representing a relation of absolute obedience to the suzerainty of the other king, the Assyrian king is rendered in a posture like that of his counterpart. This is also the case of the meeting between king Shalmaneser III and the Babylonian king Marduk-Zakir-Shumi, represented on the throne of Shalmaneser III from Nimrud (The Iraq Museum). This is not the case with the representation of the relation between the Assyrian suzerain and his vassals on the famous black obelisk of Nimrud, currently found at the British Museum in London, which presents, among others, the meeting between the Assyrian king Shalmaneser III and the Israeli king Jehu (Reade 2019, 62-4).

History records the fact that, after the battle of Qarqar (853 BC), where a coalition made up of 12 kings, including the Israeli king Ahab, managed to hold back the Assyrian king Shalmaneser III, the latter resumed the attack and, in 841 BC, he laid siege to Damascus. In this context, various kings from the Syrian-Palestinian region pay homage to him, among whom king Jehu of Israel (some believe it was Joram, the last king of the House of Omri (McCarter1974, 5-7; Thiele 1976, 19-23). As mentioned above, the moment is reproduced on the black Obelisk (198 cm h/45-60 cm l), erected around 825 BC to immortalise the majesty of king Shalmaneser III about his neighbours. The artistic record of the homage paid by king Jehu to king Shalmaneser III is also a confirmation of the fact that Assyrians considered Jehu an important king in the region. The representation of king Jehu prostrating himself before Shalmaneser III recalls a common practice in those times, hence, the mentality of that epoch, which we thus see represented in art as well. The focus is on acknowledging authority through a gesture of complete humility. We can notice this attitude much later, in the context of the New Testament, when Simon "fell at Jesus' knees" (Lk 5:8) after the miraculous catch of fish, in the sign of humility before the manifestation of divine power, the correct translation of the expression is that he fell to the ground at the Lord's knees, "with his whole body" (Bădiliță 2016, 289). Through his gesture, Simon Peter shows his

obedience and repentance before Jesus, Whom he acknowledges as the Lord (Kyrios) and to Whom he confesses his condition of a sinful man.

The Creation of Man from the Dust from the Ground According to the Old Testament

In the Old Testament, the creation of man from the dust from the ground is described in a similar way to that of Egyptian art. In the act of creation, God is indirectly portrayed as a potter who shapes clay: "Then the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature" (Gn 2:7). Both the Hebrew term "wayyițer" and the term used in the Greek translation (the Septuagint) "*plasso*" point to the work of a potter. The Romanian translation follows the Hebrew text (the Bible following the Hebrew text, 2017, 95) and the one following the Greek text of the Septuagint (Septuagint, 2004, 56), which uses the term "l-a plăsmuit" ("formed"), are much closer to the actual text and its meaning, even if those which use the established formulas "l-a făcut" ("fashioned") (the synodal edition) and "l-a zidit" ("made") (the jubilee edition-Bartolomeu Anania) do not discard it.

This conception is also reinforced by the author of the Book of Job, who recalls the act of man's creation from the ground as resembling the work of a potter: "Your hands fashioned and made me" (Jb 10:8) and "Behold, I am toward God as you are; I too was pinched off from a piece of clay" (Jb 33:6). Prophet Jeremiah uses the same terms, explicitly comparing God to a potter Who has the power to shape Israel according to His own will: "So I went down to the potter's house, and there he was working at his wheel. 4 And the vessel he was making of clay was spoiled in the potter's hand, and he reworked it into another vessel, as it seemed good to the potter to do. Then the word of the Lord came to me: 'O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter has done? declares the Lord. Behold, like the clay in the potter's hand, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel.'" (Jer 18:3-6).

We thus notice that the word țărână/pulbere (dust/dirt – *apar*) is a synonym for pământ/lut (ground/earth – *adamah*). The Hebrew term *wayyițer*, used in the Romanian translation as *l-a făcut/plăsmuit/zidit* (fashioned/formed/made) points to the work of a potter/yoțer (Gn 2:7) (Sarna 1989,17; the Bible after the Hebrew text 2017, 207), God is compared to a potter who shapes clay in the act of creation. The image expresses both the glory to which man has risen through the act of creation

(Resceanu 2013, 243) and his pettiness and relativity about his Creator. The association made with the dust/dirt from the ground is meant to underscore the state of humility in which man must find himself about God.

Numerous texts from the Old Testament which recall the creation of man from the dust/dirt from the ground refer to this state of humility that man must show about his Creator. Thus, after Adam's fall into sin, God tells him: "you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust, you shall return" (Gn 3:19). These words are also reinforced by Eliphaz, who, looking into Job's righteousness, rhetorically asks himself: "Can mortal man be in the right before God? Can a man be pure before his Maker?" and his answer is: "Even in his servants he puts no trust and his angels he charges with error; how much more those who dwell in houses of clay, whose foundation is in the dust, who are crushed like the moth" (Jb 4:17-19). Just like his friend, Job is fully aware of his origin before God: "Remember that you have made me like clay; and will you return me to the dust?" (Jb 10:9).

Just like the psalmist, he exclaims: "For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust." (Ps 103:14), man and the world are completely relative before God's almightiness: "When you hide your face, they are dismayed; when you take away their breath, they die and return to their dust. When you send forth your Spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the ground" (Ps 104:29-30).

Similarly, after being sceptic about man's fate after death, which he associates with the fate of animals, recalling the fact that "All are from the dust, and to dust all return. Who knows whether the spirit of man goes upward, and the spirit of the beast goes down into the earth? (Eccl 3:20-21), the Ecclesiasticus clarifies the situation by saying that: "and the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it" (Eccl 12:7), also resorting to the meaning of the term dust/dirt from the ground, which is well-established in Hebrew thinking.

Likewise, the act of sprinkling dust on the head (Jb 2:12) and of sitting in the dust (Jb 7:21; Ps 7:5; Is 47,1; Jon 3:6) were considered acts of humility and deep repentance performed by those in trouble, with the hope that God will forgive their sins and will have mercy on them. In this regard, the psalmist shows that the Lord our God, "Who is seated on high", is the One Who "looks far down" and "lifts the needy from the ash heap" (Ps 113:5-7).

Therefore, in the Old Testament and the world of the Ancient Middle East, the creation of man from the dust from the ground is a true leitmotif, which first of all

denotes man's ephemeral character about his Creator (the Bible following the Hebrew text 2017, 207).

However, starting with the Philo of Alexandria, the interpretation is more nuanced and acquires new characteristics, which are considerably different from the previous tradition. Gradually, in the spirit of matter-spirit dualism, which is specific to Greek thinking, the focus moves to man's bodily and spiritual constitution and the description of its characteristics. Thus, Philo "claimed that the sensitive and individual man was made up of a substance like earth and the holy spirit. For the body appeared when the Craftsman took dust from the ground and formed a human form, but the soul does not come from any created matter, but from the Father and ruler of all things" [our translation] (Philo 2016, 181). In fact, Philo is the one who distinguishes between the man who is made (Gn 1:26) and the man who is "formed" (Gn 2:7), the former being the ideal, spiritualised man, neither a man, nor a woman, but an androgynous – an aspect which was later on criticised by Blessed Augustine (Septuagint 2004, 57) –, in the image of God (the Logos), and the man who is made of dust, having a sensitive, corruptible body (Philo 2016, 181). As John Behr also notices, these terms were replaced by Origen with those of the Pauline contrast between the "man within" and the "man without", the same distinction being kept (Behr 2016, 118; Septuagint 2004, 57).

Although he does not use Philo's distinction between the *making* (Gn 1:26) and the *fashioning* (Gn 2:7) of man, St. Irenaeus of Lyon highlights the simultaneous making of man's body and soul, just like other Fathers who follow him. Moreover, he resorts to the patterns of Philo's thinking when he describes the quality of the matter out of which man is created. Thus, just as Philo considered that God "took out what is best out of all the earth and what is purest and most select out of pure matter so that it would especially be appropriate for His work", so does St. Irenaeus show that God "fashioned man with his own hands, taking the purest, the finest and the most delicate (elements) of the earth, mixing with the earth, in due measure, his power". St. Irenaeus' choice to follow Philo is the result of the support provided by his belief that "the representation of a model of absolute beauty (the divine Logos) is itself absolutely beautiful" [our translation] (Philo 2016, 181). It was on this desideratum that St. Irenaeus based his theological endeavour to highlight the creation of man in the complete image of God, God being the One Who "sketched upon the handiwork his form – so that what would be seen should be godlike" (Behr 2016, 118). Along the same line, Clement of Alexandria emphasises the creation of man in the image of God, based on the complete

model of the divine Logos (Behr 2016, 183).

To understand the act of man's creation from the dust from the ground (Gn 2:7), St. John Chrysostom seems to refer less to the patterns of Greek thinking and resorts instead to the patterns of Hebrew thinking, to which the dualism between matter and spirit was completely unknown (Wolfson 1994, 19), not meaning that the two overlapped in Hebrew mentality (Mihăilă 2011, 352). In the exegesis of the text in Gn 2:7, St. John Chrysostom, being deeply connected to the Eastern world and mentality, easily becomes the representative of Hebrew biblical thinking, which, in most of the instances in which it is used in the Old Testament, associates the dust from the ground with a state of humility:

"What is that you say? Taking dust from the earth he shaped the human being? asks himself the great Antiochian exegete. Yes, it says; it did not simply say "earth" but "dust," something more lowly and substantial even than the earth, so to say." (..) "Whenever we consider where our nature derived the beginning of its subsistence, we are humbled and chastened..." (John Chrysostom 1987, 143-4). We thus notice that St. John Chrysostom is in clear contrast with Philo of Alexandria and with those who followed him and who saw in the dust the most valuable part of the earth, thus trying to emphasise the beauty and special quality of man's material, bodily constitution. To St. John Chrysostom, who was aware of the other forms of understanding the text, the act of man's creation from the dust from the ground has a clear, concise meaning. He even seems to insist on the reception and understanding that he puts forward to his audience: "Instead, to communicate to us lasting teaching through the manner of creation to avoid an impression false to reality, everything is explained precisely in this way, and the text reads, 'God formed the human being, taking dust from the earth'" (John Chrysostom 1987, 148-9).

Paradoxically, however, St. John Chrysostom doesn't want to underscore only the state of humility which should be proper to man when speaking about his creation, but also the special honour bestowed upon him by God through the act of his fashioning out of something as insignificant as the ashes: "Even in this detail notice the regard for us. He does not simply take some soil, but dust, the finest grains of soil, so to say, and this very dust of the earth by his design he changed into the humankind of body. You see, just as he brought into being the very substance of the soil when it did not exist, so now, at will, he changed the dust from the soil into the body... revealing in all this his loving-kindness. That from dust he produced such a creature and elevated it

to such eminence, and that he displays such marks of regard for it right from the outset." (John Chrysostom 1987, 149).

Consequently, the interpretation of St. John Chrysostom, without excluding others, helps us understand the early literary meaning of man's creation from the dust from the ground (Gn 2:7), which, besides complying with the rule of the context and parallel places in the Old Testament, is also based on solid knowledge and understanding of the cultural context of the Old Testament. As we have noticed, this interpretation is also supported by art and by the culture of the Ancient Middle East, whose aim was that of providing a favourable context to the understanding of the realities and mentalities of the world of the Old Testament, on which we could base our hermeneutic endeavour.

Conclusions

Thus, the interpretation of the biblical text inevitably entails the interaction between biblical and cultural, historical, philological, and theological data. Any approach which perceives the Holy Scripture as a closed system risks limiting the possibilities man has nowadays in terms of interacting with and knowing God. Our motivation should not be limited to the knowledge of the text per se, but, through the text, it should aim to know God.

As to the hermeneutic act, art helps us first at a descriptive level in our endeavour to understand *what it meant*. At a normative level, if the hermeneutic endeavour is carried out within the framework of our faith, art can also help us understand *what it could mean to us nowadays*.

Through images, we help the viewer become a reader and then an interpreter. The image or the visual representation of a biblical scene challenges the viewer to act like a hermeneutist. They thus embark upon dialogue with the scriptural text, which they can study thoroughly and fructify in their relationship with God.

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IS THERE ANY BRUTALITY IN THE BYZANTINE REPRESENTATION OF ABRAHAM'S SACRIFICE?

Abstract

The episode of Abraham's sacrifice underscores his unwavering faith/trust in his God. The biblical patriarch had to prove to the One he served that, for Him, he could give up everything he held dearest. The sacrifice of his beloved son was obediently and promptly accepted by the patriarch. As soon as he received his commandment, he headed for Mount Moriah to offer Isaac as a sacrifice to the Lord. However, the sacrifice was no longer necessary. The Lord stopped the sacrifice at the last moment and the patriarch was rewarded for his faith. The artistic representation of Abraham's sacrifice in the Byzantine iconographic tradition provides the viewer with the possibility of fathoming the mystery of this event. The artist's/painter's interpretation of the sacrifice highlights how Eastern Orthodox tradition has related to this terrible episode. For the contemporary viewer, the image of Abraham bringing sacrifice cannot be separated from brutality. It is difficult for him/her to understand how a father is capable of mercilessly sacrificing his son to prove his faith. However, we believe that the details engraved by Byzantine artists/painters in mosaics and on frescos can change this perspective. They capture the father's care, the unwavering love between the patriarch and his son, the joint acceptance of the trial, self-control, total faith in the Father/father, and by no means brutality. Therefore, through this study, we wish to emphasise the theological message conveyed by Christian art and implicitly offer a model for the interpretation of Byzantine painting.

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Abraham, Christological interpretation, iconographic pattern, sacrifice, emotions

Introduction

The sacrifice of the patriarch Abraham has been represented by Christian artists ever since the early Church. This scriptural episode has constantly borne witness to an essential Christian coordinate, namely, the unfailing faith in God. Therefore, the event mentioned in the Book of Genesis (chap. 22) has been painted, engraved, drawn, or depicted in mosaics on the walls of catacombs or worship buildings, on sarcophagi, and on various liturgical objects or books. Gradually, the artistic representations of sacrifice have generated certain prototypes which have come into prominence in the big centres of Christianity. A. M. Smith identified six patterns, which he grouped as follows: the type, which is characteristic to catacombs, the Hellenistic type, the Asian-Hellenistic type, the Alexandrian-Coptic type, the Palestinian-Coptic type and the Byzantine type (Smith 1922, 159-173). The last one would become general in the Christian East. The mosaic of the Basilica San Vitale of Ravenna, made in the 6th century, would become the main model, followed by the artists who would represent the patriarch's sacrifice according to the Byzantine pattern.

In international literature, the subject of the artistic representation of Abraham's sacrifice has been tackled in numerous studies. Some of them addressed the evolution of the scene in Jewish art (Gutmann 1984; Lerner, Gutmann 1987), especially in the medieval one (Gutmann 1987, 67-89), while others had in mind how the Christian art of the first millennium represented this event (Kessler 2004), while others focused on various representations from the modern and contemporary periods (Robinson 1984, 538-44; Jasper 1993, 123-9; Jaffé 1994, 193-210; Bloch 2016, 96-130). A few studies tackled the Byzantine pattern (Van Woerden 1961, 214-55; Altripp 2015, 35-48), but most of them are limited to the first Christian millennium. Nonetheless, we do have several reference points for the medieval period, which are useful to us. We are referring especially to the contributions of John Lowden (2003) and Father Eugen Pentiuc (2019).

This study aims to continue our previous research (Pașca-Tușa 2016, 123-38), in which we highlighted the prototypes and lines of interpretation developed by Jewish and Christian artists in the 3rd and 4th centuries. In this case, we will have a look at the evolution and how the Byzantine prototype crystallised in the Christian East, in the two established schools of painting, namely, the Macedonian and the Cretan ones.

First, we will focus on the mural representation of the church belonging to the Medieval Serbian Gračanica Monastery and then on the paintings of the Stavronikita and Saint Dionysius Monasteries of Mount Athos, executed according to the rigours of the Cretan school. In addition to the artistic analysis of these paintings, we will also use the instruments which are specific to the Eastern scriptural exegesis to identify the painters' interpretation, particularly when reproducing the climax of the sacrifice, namely the *Aqedah* (the binding of Isaac), and, implicitly, to offer a relevant answer to the question in the title.

However, before presenting the peculiarity of the two Byzantine schools of painting, besides the famous mosaic of the Basilica San Vitale, we will also describe two more 12th-century representations, which have marked the evolution of the Byzantine pattern of Abraham's sacrifice.

Abraham's Sacrifice in the Byzantine Mosaics of the 6th-12th Centuries

The mosaic of the Basilica San Vitale (Ravenna) is one of the models which mark the stage of crystallisation of early Byzantine art (6th c.). The scene of the sacrifice, which is thematically linked to the theophany of Mamre, was thoroughly elaborated (Smith 1922, 168). The patriarch is represented at the climax of the sacrifice when he is preparing to offer his only son as a sacrifice. Isaac is wearing golden clothing and is standing on the stone altar. His head is slightly leaning towards his father, who is holding his left hand on the top of the child's head. His hands are tied to his back, and he is wearing his footwear. His face does not express fear. He is looking at those who contemplate the scene as if to convey the faith he has in his father, who is waiting for divine approval for the sacrifice. Patriarch Abraham is looking at the sky, holding a sword in his right hand. God's intervention is marked by the presence of a hand that blesses, or which suggests the idea of dialogue. A white ram is placed at the patriarch's feet, staring at him. Even if the author did not fully abide by the details mentioned in the scriptural text (see Gn 22:9-13), he chose a literal interpretation of the event by representing the moment of sacrifice (Pașca-Tușa 2016, 134).

For quite a long period (approx. six centuries), the patriarch's sacrifice was quite seldom painted in worship buildings. Up to the end of the 11th century, we did not have significant representations (Smith 1922, 169). The situation would change only during the following century, with the mosaics made in the Palatine Chapel (Palermo) and the Cathedral of Monreale (Sicily). These two artistic representations of the sacrifice

confirm the fact that, within the Byzantine prototype, there were tendencies to dynamise and crystallise the model fostered by the mosaic of Ravenna.

The mosaic of the Palatine Chapel of Palermo is one of the most successful representations of the 12th century. The scene, which was represented sometime between 1130 and 1143, consists of two moments: God's commandment and the actual sacrifice. This complex representation of the event can also be encountered in the mosaic of the Basilica San Vitale, only that, in the latter, the sacrifice is associated with the episode of Abraham's philoxenia when he regaled God at Mamre (Gn. 18). As such, in the left register, God is commanding Abraham to offer Isaac as a sacrifice. It is important to mention that the artist pictures Jesus Christ when he wishes to represent God. Our Saviour is wearing His blue and purple clothes, He is holding a closed scroll in His left hand, which is close to His chest, and He is addressing the patriarch, whilst blessing with his right hand stretched out. Above, the following Latin words are written: "Tolle filiumtuumquemdiligis Isaac et offer eumibiholocaustum" (Gn 22:2), that is "take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and offer him as a burnt offering". Abraham is standing before the Lord, stretching out both his hands, which suggests obedience and acceptance.

In the other register, which presents Isaac's sacrifice, we have several frames which we will stress. The first of them, which marks the transition between the two parts of the event, portrays the two servants of Abraham. Their left hand are pointing to Abraham, who is preparing to sacrifice his son. Their gestures and mimicry suggest that they are talking about what is happening on Mount Moriah. One of them is holding a staff pointing to their ass, which is grazing. On the right, Abraham is holding his son's hair with one hand, while preparing to stab him with his other hand. As for Isaac, we would like to mention that he is lying on a few crosswise pieces of wood. We believe this detail can be an allusion to the Christological dimension of the event. This is also confirmed to a large extent by our Saviour's presence in this scene (Smith 1922, 159). Isaac is lying on the altar, with his hands tied to his back and with a scarf over his eyes. This detail appears for the first time in a representation of the sacrifice and suggests the father's care for his son. Abraham is looking towards an angel who is stretching out his hand towards the patriarch, blessing just like our Saviour. The words uttered by this messenger, who represents God's hand, are written at the top: "Abraham Abraham ne extendasmanum tuam super puerum ABRAHAM ABRAHAM NE EXTENDAS MANUM TUAM SUPER PUERUM" (Gn 22:11-12), meaning "Abraham, Abraham!

Do not lay your hand on the boy." On the right-hand side of the register, somewhere at the top, there is also the ram, whose horns are caught in a thicket. We would also like to point here to the fact that the patriarch's look is almost identical to that of the first register. The differences are minimal. His face does not express tension, but a clear composure. This indicates that the patriarch was serenely fulfilling God's commandment (Lowden 2003, 185).

The mosaic of the Cathedral of Monreale (Sicily), which originates in the same period (11801194), follows the same pattern to a great extent. From an iconographic point of view, these mosaics owe their structure to those executed in the Palatine Chapel (Munteanu 2011, 139). The two episodes (God's commandment and the sacrifice of Mount Moriah) are presented in two adjoining frames. In the first scene, Jesus Christ is commanding Abraham to sacrifice his son. The second register represents the sacrifice, with all its elements (servants, ass, ram, etc.), just as they appear in the model of the Palatine Chapel. The patriarch is holding Isaac's hair and is preparing to stab him. Isaac is lying on the altar, with his hands tied to his back. The wood is not arranged crosswise. Instead of God's hand, an angel is represented, communicating to Abraham the following message: "Abraham Abraham ne extendasmanum tuam super puerum ABRAHAM ABRAHAM NE EXTENDAS MANUM TUAM SUPER PUERUM" (Gn 22:11 – The patriarch's look is almost identical to that of Palermo. We notice, however, a slight difference: Isaac's eyes are not covered with a scarf (Lowden 2003, 200).

Even if the two mosaics were executed in Italy, the Byzantine influence originating in Constantinople is evident. In those times, when artistic tendencies were being generated in the capital of the Byzantine Empire, many mosaicists of Constantinople were brought to Italy to promote the Byzantine models and patterns in the Christian West (Delvoye 1976, 91-2; Munteanu 2011, 138). The Sicilian school proved to be a good keeper of Byzantine traditions.

Representation of the Sacrifice in the Byzantine School of Painting

In the Christian East, Byzantine art was conserved and implicitly developed by the school of Constantinople (Trifa 2008, 346), which had a strong influence in the Greek area and the Balkans (Macedonia and Serbia). In these territories, the Byzantine style would reach its climax through two schools: the Macedonian one, influenced by Manuel Panselinos' paitings, and the Cretan one, which is based on

Hesychastic theology, a perspective which was adopted in a painting by Theophanes the Cretan (Hristou 2008, 63).

The Macedonian School

This school of painting had an impressive influence on religious art so the value of the frescoes made by the representatives of this new direction achieved pan-orthodox recognition. The realism of the figures (focusing on inner qualities instead of bodily qualities), volumetry, the replacement of pictoriality with linearity, the ascetism of shapes, transcendental accents of images, compact chromatics, without any impressionist touch, the indissoluble balance between shape and architecture and, last but not least, the dissolution of the contradiction between shape and content conferred this style the necessary qualities to gain prominence in the Christian East (Trif 2007, 82), ever since the 13th and14th centuries (Chatzifótis 1995; Trifa 2009). Even if the most representative frescoes which belong to the Macedonian style are located on Mount Athos (where Manuel Panselinos worked), the centre where this direction, which is specific to Byzantine art, was promoted and where it spread was Thessaloniki. Besides these two important centres, the Macedonian style was also used in Veria, Ohrid and Central Serbia.

One of the most representative paintings of Abraham's sacrifice made in the Macedonian style can be found in the Gračanica Monastery in Serbia (nowadays Kosovo). The frescoes of this church, which were executed starting with the years 1321-1322, mark the sumptuousness of the Byzantine style of the Palaeologus period. Likewise, the style of this worship building represents the peak of Serbian Byzantine medieval architecture. According to Father Eugen Pentiuc, who dedicates a subchapter of his work to the analysis of this fresco, the painting of the monastery combines Jewish and Christian interpretations. In this *interesting marriage*, the painter merged several time sequences into a single artistic representation, thus achieving a simultaneous reading of the scriptural episode (Pentiuc 2019, 345). The painting is divided into two sections: the bottom one can be named *Abraham's obedience* and the other on *the binding of Isaac* (Pentiuc 2019, 347).

In the lower part of the scene, the focus is on Abraham, who stands out through his height. The other persons, Isaac and two servants, are like children. Even if Isaac were a child (Wells 1939, 579-582), the servants Abraham took with him on the journey could not have been children. As such, the painters' intention was that of emphasising

the patriarch. This is also confirmed by the size of the ass, which is like that of the three. Thus, Abraham, whose stature is impressive, is placed behind the three, holding a knife in his right hand. The other hand is held on his chest and indicates the inner tension he undergoes between unconditional obedience and fatherly love for his son, that is (St. John Chrysostom 1989, 149). His worried gaze is directed ahead. His servants and Isaac are looking intently at him. The energetic movement of the patriarch's right leg suggests his hurriedness in fulfilling the mission with which God had entrusted him. Abraham was waiting to see the denouement of the sacrifice and how exactly would God fulfil His promise through which He assured him that his many offspring (St. Cyril of Alexandria 1992, 74) would be from the bloodline of Isaac, whom he would offer as a burnt offering: "Paradoxically, by obeying, Abraham connects himself to God's sovereign will, so that, in the end, the physically bound Isaac is not offered to the fire on the altar, but rather to the God of life" (Pentiuc 2019, 347).

Contradictorily, the offering of Isaac as a sacrifice is the means through which God fulfils His promise. Without accepting the divine commandment and, implicitly, without fulfilling it, Abraham could not partake of the promise. By relating to this episode from the perspective, Abraham's attitude during the sacrifice can be understood much more easily. The patriarch offers his son to the God Who had given him life, Who, eventually grants Isaac a privileged role in the divine plan. No one can question the patriarch's love for his son, whom he had long waited for. And we believe that the promise of a descendant made Abraham more determined to leave his country, his kindred, and his father's house (Gn 12:1-3) (Wenham 2002, 334). Thus, even on Mount Moriah, the patriarch showed his infinite love for his son. His death cannot be an end, but the beginning of a supernatural mystery, that no one else could have understood. Abraham learns to love like God, which is why he mysteriously sees how the Father sends His Son to be sacrificed (Basarab 1997, 46). The Christological dimension of this event of the Old Testament is underscored in many representations of the sacrifice, but not in the fresco of the church of Gračanica. The act of Isaac carrying the wood is considered the main image referring to Jesus Christ's sacrifice (Van Woerden 1961, 230). In the Serbian fresco, the wood is barely visible under the burning altar. Moreover, Isaac is not painted carrying the wood, but he is carrying the fire vessel. Therefore, the intention of the author of the fresco of Gračanica was not that of underlining the typological character of the sacrifice, but that of emphasising Abraham's obedience and faith, which guaranteed the fulfilment of divine promises.

The upper part of the scene depicts the preparation for the sacrifice. Isaac's hands are tied to his back, and he is lying before the altar. Abraham is leaning while holding his left knee on the back of his son. In his right hand, he is holding the knife and is prepared to perform the stabbing. On the other hand, he is pressing Isaac's chin and, implicitly, his head backwards to stab him. Even if the patriarch's look would also urge us to look towards the sky, where God's intervening hand is represented, our focus is on how he is holding his son. In this case, the painter's interpretation is literal. He does nothing else but creates the actual tension which would have existed during such a sacrifice. In Jewish literature, this scene is called *Aqedah*. Father E. Pentiuc mentions that this term originates in a verbal root whose meaning is: "to tie together the legs of an animal for sacrifice". Moreover, he underlines the fact that the term *Aqedah* is used in this form only once in the Holy Scripture, namely, in Gn. 22:9, where Isaac's sacrifice is described. On the other hand, in the 2nd century AD, this term indicates in the Mishnah the tying of the lamb for the morning and evening offerings presented in the Temple (Ex 29:38-42; Nm 28:1-8; 2 Kgs 16:15; Ez 46: 13-15; Neh 10:34; 2 Chr 13:11). According to the Mishnah, the lamb had to be tied just like Isaac had been tied by the patriarch (*Tamid* 3: 2-3; 3: 7; 4: 1) (Pentiuc 2019, 345).

The Cretan School

This school of painting emerged and developed against the backdrop of a strong Hesychastic influence generated by the monks of the Holy Mountain. In a full dispute with the West, they started to be reluctant to the Renaissance influences in the paintings executed in the Macedonian style. In this context, a need was felt to imprint the mystical experience of those who were partaking of divine light onto art. Therefore, the tendency of this new style of painting, which spread towards Russia through Theophanes the Greek, towards Mystras (see the frescoes of the Peribleptos and Pantanassa churches) and towards Crete (the place which also gives the name of the school), was that of maintaining the accurate Byzantine ideal in art. This style of painting grants special attention to the morphological outline, contained movements, and simplicity, to the inner peace of the saints represented by shadowy colours and bright lines in prominent areas. The Hesychastic tendencies of this painting method are influenced by the art of mobile icons, which focuses on the face (Hristou 2008, 63). Due to this association, the scenes are separated by red bands, thus giving the viewer

the impression that, in front of him, there is a wall made up of several icons (Trif 2007, 83). To highlight the characteristics and nuances that this pictorial style (developed up to its apogee by Theophanes the Cretan) imprints upon the representation of Abraham's sacrifice, we have chosen two frescoes of Mount Athos (Stavronikita and Saint Dionysius) dating from the 16th century.

The mural paintings of Stavronikita (dating from 1546) represent the apogee of Theophanes the Cretan's artistic style, for it reaches the climax of his ascetic thinking. As such, the fresco of Abraham's sacrifice, being part of this exceptional pictorial ensemble, is referential to the Cretan School (Hristou 2008, 65-66). Given the limited space allotted to this event, Theophanes chooses a representation that is focused on its main moment, namely Isaac's sacrifice. Thus, at the centre of the fresco, there are two protagonists of the sacrifice. Isaac is lying on the ground, with his hands tied to his back. His body is arching. The patriarch is keeping his knees on his son's stretched legs. With his left hand, he is holding Isaac by the hair, so that his head is leaning backwards. With his other hand, Abraham is pointing the knife at the bare neck of Isaac, who is also looking towards the altar on which the wood is already burning or towards the angel who is fast descending from the sky, with his hand stretching out towards the patriarch. Abraham's look is directed towards the sky, as can be noticed in all representations. In this case, instead of God's hand, the angel's presence is used. Theophanes chooses this option for two reasons: to accurately render the scriptural text and to underscore God's immediate intervention. This detail would not have been captured had he chosen to paint the divine hand. Opposite the angel on a rock, we can notice the presence of a ram tied to a thicket. In this representation, Theophanes the Cretan suggests focusing our attention on the main character of the events of Mount Moriah, namely, patriarch Abraham. He is placed at the centre of the scene. The space between the two peaks, the dark blue sky and the halo focus our attention on the patriarch's face, which expresses solemnity, obedience, composure, courage, hope, trust in God, faith, and infinite love (Chirilă 2014). This is the message that the fresco of the Stavronikita Monastery wishes to convey.

Saint Dionysius Monastery provides us with a more complex representation of the sacrifice, which includes the main stages of the sacrifice found in Byzantine mural mosaics/paintings. The fresco of this worship building was executed by Zorzis, one of Theophanes' apprentices. This can be easily inferred, as Zorzis generally uses his mentor's technique and models. Nonetheless, he differs from Theophanes as he uses

some elements of Italian technique, his clothes are painted in a sketchier manner and are better outlined, and his faces are more luminous and are presented in a clear dynamic (Hristou 2008, 66). The scene of Abraham's sacrifice is executed over a line of arcades, in several frames. The first frame portrays Abraham as he receives the divine commandment. The next one presents Abraham's two servants and the ass. The third frame depicts Abraham and his son moving away from the servants. Then, we see Isaac carrying the wood on his back and the fire in his left hand, whilst the patriarch is walking in front of him, heading towards the mountain. The climax is represented in the last frame, using his mentor's pattern.

The first frame captures the moment when the divine commandment is received. The attention is focused on the patriarch, who is looking towards the sky. The blue semicircle on the three rays towards which Abraham is looking symbolically signals God's presence. The communication between God and the patriarch is suggested by the latter's stretched hand and by the inscription which renders the content of the text in Gn 22:2. The composure and the unconditional obedience he showed and would show God are etched on Abraham's face. The following scene captures one of the events which occurred at the base of Mount Moriah. The servants who have accompanied the two protagonists of the sacrifice to the place indicated by God, remain next to the ass, waiting. Two servants are sitting on a rock, talking. The position of their bodies and the direction to which the hand of one of the servants is pointing suggests the fact that the two are talking about the sacrifice that the patriarch is about to bring on the mountain. We notice the fact that the ass is still saddled; this detail is meant to indicate that they will not linger much in that place.

The third frame captures the moment of separation from the servants and the beginning of the mountain climbing. The scene highlights both the patriarch's care for his son and the strong connection between the two. Abraham is holding Isaac's hand and is looking at him, while the position of his body indicates the dynamism of climbing. Here, we have in mind the hand stretched out towards the mountain and his left leg slightly lifted, in a natural walking position. Isaac's face denotes composure and faith in his father, who is, however, consumed by an extremely heavy tension. We see that Isaac is wearing red clothes, which suggests the sacrifice he is about to endure. In the following frame, the same persons are represented, but in different hypostases. Isaac is carrying the fire in one hand and, on his back, he is carrying the wood for the sacrifice. The Christological connotation of this gesture is straightforward. To support

his intention of underscoring the typological character of the sacrifice, the painter used a thin rope to tie the wood crosswise. The outstretched hand and the words written on the wall refer to the dialogue between Isaac and his father concerning the lamb for the burnt offering (Gn 22:7-8). Abraham is holding the knife in one hand and, in the other, he is pointing towards the place where the sacrifice will occur. Their gestures suggest a common acceptance of the sacrifice. Isaac understands from the patriarch's answer that he will constitute the sacrifice and they move on (Gn 22:9). For Zorzis, the patriarch pointing towards the mountain was essential. Therefore, he does not fully abide by the scriptural details of the episode and places the fire in Isaac's hand, while, in reality, it was carried by Abraham.

The last frame illustrates the apogee of the sacrifice. Isaac's hands are tied to his back and he is lying on the wood. Abraham is keeping his knees on his son's body and, with one hand, he is grasping his hair and pulling his head backwards to make the sacrifice. Saint John mentions the fact that, at this moment, when the patriarch grabbed the knife to stag his son, the latter "did not struggle or fight back, but he obeyed and accepted what his father was doing, he was lying still like a lamb on the altar and was waiting for his father's right hand". (St. John Chrysostom 1989, 150). It is worth mentioning that, in this fresco, the altar is not painted. The lack of this element, which is indispensable to any act of sacrifice, suggests to a certain extent that the sacrifice was not finalised. This plausible explanation has a complementary role. The inscription which partially renders the content of verses 11 and 12, the semicircle with three rays, which suggests God's intervention, and the presence of the ram tied to the thicket fully confirm that Isaac's sacrifice was stopped.

Therefore, Zorzis' painting of St. Dionysius Church represents one of the most important Byzantine representations of Abraham's sacrifice (Ștefănescu 73, 78). The five frames, the complexity of the composition, and the highly refined pictorial details illustrate the depth of interpretation the apprentice of Theophanes the Cretan gives to the events of Mount Moriah. The model promoted by his master would gradually become general in the Christian East, especially in the worship buildings where the scene of the sacrifice is painted in the apse of the altar. Given the limited space of the altar, most painters chose to render the climax of the sacrifice. Their choice was directly influenced by Dionysius of Fourna, according to whom Abraham's sacrifice is painted on the walls of the Proskomide (Dionysius of Fourna 2000, 234; Cristea 1905, 152-3), together with other sacrifices which prefigure our Saviour's sacrifice: Abel's sacrifice,

Melchizedek's sacrifice, Manoah's sacrifice and the three youths in the fiery furnace (Branişte 2017, 7-8).

Conclusions

The literal interpretation of Abraham's sacrifice has been prominent in Byzantine artistic representations ever since the 6th century (the mosaic of the Basilica San Vitale – Ravenna). In the Middle Ages, the accurate painting of the historical details included in the text on which it is based, namely, Genesis 22, tends to become common practice (the Palatine Chapel – Palermo and the Cathedral of Monreale – Sicily). The Byzantine schools of painting (the Macedonian and the Cretan one) adhered to this direction and, where the space allowed for it, there were several registers which represented the main moments of the patriarch's trial: the moment when he received the divine commandment, the journey to Mount Moriah together with his servants, the rest at the base of the mountain, the climbing to the place of sacrifice and the actual sacrifice (the Great Lavra, the Koutloumousiou Monastery, St. Dionysius Monastery). When the space allotted to the sacrifice was limited, the representation of the climax of the sacrifice (Stavronikita) or several elements of the sacrifice in a single frame (the Gračanica Monastery) was chosen.

The position of Isaac's body during the sacrifice, as it is represented in the frescoes of the Gračanica Monastery, Stavronikita and St. Dionysius Monastery, is identical to that of the animal to be presented as an offering before being stabbed. Thus, this image does not suggest in any way the patriarch's violence or the unacceptance of the sacrifice of Isaac. Abraham does nothing else but presents an offering according to the rules such a ritual entails. Understanding these artistic details, which originate in a careful exegesis of the text, but also in a mindful perception of the mysterious dimension of the event, offers us the possibility to look at the climax of the sacrifice from a new perspective, which does not impact the viewer emotionally. In no circumstance does the patriarch's supposed brutality find a place in Eastern tradition, even if some painters wanted to impress at times through emotional details.

Considered as a whole, the representation of Abraham's sacrifice, as it is promoted and perpetuated in Byzantine tradition, re-establishes the natural order of things. The patriarch loved his son very much and this was seized through various details: Isaac's trustful eyes about his father (Basilica San Vitale), the covering of Isaac's eyes with a scarf (the Palatine Chapel), composure, and serenity in the

patriarch's eyes (the Cathedral of Monreale), the inner tension caused by the love for the son (Gračanica Monastery), the patriarch's hopeful eyes looking at the sky (Stavronikita), the holding of his son's hand while climbing up the mountain (Saint Dionysius) and, last but not least, the repeated allusions to our Saviour's sacrifice (the Father's beloved Son).

It would be desirable that the artistic details which fall within the area of typology be included in a future study. The Christological perspectives of the event, which are captured in the Byzantine representations of Abraham's sacrifice, could emphasise even more love between the Father (father) and Son (son).

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BOOK REVIEWS

THE SACRED MYSTERY OF THE CHURCH – THE THEOLOGY OF DIVINE NAME

Rev. Grigore-Dinu Moș

Ilarion Alfeyev, *Taina Sfântă a Bisericii. Introducere în istoria și problematica disputelor imiaslave* [The Sacred Mystery of the Church: Introduction to the History and the Problematic of the Debates on the Veneration of the Name of God], ed. Rev. Ioan Chirilă (Cluj-Napoca: Renașterea, 2021).

We would like to highlight the publication at Renașterea Publishing House of Hilarion Alfeyev's *Taina Sfântă a Bisericii. Introducere în istoria și problematica disputelor imiaslave* [The Sacred Mystery of the Church: Introduction to the History and the Problematic of the Debates on the Veneration of the Name of God], edited by Rev. Prof. Ioan Chirilă. The paper is an emblematic reference point amid the newest publications in the field. It is of utmost interest for both dogmatic theology and Orthodox spirituality, as it tackles highly important core subjects and theoretical and practical challenges and dangers. First of all, the prayer of the mind in the heart, "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner", is a forever living treasure of the Church, extremely topical for all those who aim for a spiritual life which goes beyond monotony, mediocrity and stereotypes. In this respect, the long excerpts from the writings of the Hesychast Fathers, which are included in this book, cannot be understood if we do not try, at least to a certain point, to practice the Jesus Prayer ourselves. The paper is also interesting for dogmatic theology, as the dogmatic issues it discusses, regarding the nature of the name of God in general and the name of Jesus in particular, are extremely complicated from a dogmatic point of view. Metropolitan Hilarion Alfeyev aply puts together a file containing possible solutions, without however positioning himself for or against any of the sides, given that the theological issues raised have not yet been satisfactorily solved by the Russian Church; de jure, the synod's 1913 decision to condemn the adepts of imiaslavie (namely, those who support the veneration of the name of Jesus) is still valid.

The dispute started from Saint John of Kronstadt's assertion that the Name of God is God Himself. Indeed, at first sight, it seems outrageous, but, to understand the premises and significant aspects related to this issue, we would need to delve into the history of philosophy, into the so-called "problem of universals". One of the biggest philosophical issues was that of trying to clarify the nature of intangible, concepts. Are they real, meaning that they objectively reflect the intelligible "skeleton" of the world or, on the contrary, are they simple conventions, constructs or projections of human reason? The big issue of the imiaslavie dispute was that it did not entail only the relation between a created being and their intelligible name but mainly referred to the relation between God and His name. Here, a double relation needs to be clarified: 1) between the rational, speaking man and the Name of God and 2) between the Name of God and God Himself, in His reality. In other words, this relationship contains three terms: a) the concrete word we use when we say God, meaning its phonetic and grammatical form; b) the form or intelligible essence of the word; c) the supra-intelligible meaning aimed at, namely, the very reality of God, Who is beyond reason. (Incidentally, the connection between the intelligible and the supra-intelligible is nowadays a great challenge for contemporary theology, with exceptional cultural stakes.)

I believe the solution to this problem was partially given by some of the Orthodox intellectuals who intervened in the final part of the dispute, namely:

1) Vladimir Ern, a Professor of universal history at the University of Moscow, noticed the crucial importance of the subject, which focuses on "all the rays of the shining Truth, dispersed into various concerns and yearnings of the contemporary spirit" (p. 701). It "answers with infinite depth to the entire series of negations of European history, thus proving to be a great, worthy moment in the dialectic of life worldwide". [our translation] Ern pleaded for those who believed there was an objective connection between the Name of God and God Himself. According to Vladimir Ern, there is an ontological relationship, an objective presentation of the grace of God in His Name, irrespective of the intentionality of human consciousness – that is, irrespective of what man aims for when they utter the name and of the attention level reached by the one praying. Ern puts forward several arguments:

First, if the Name of God were a simple convention, if there were no real, objective connection between God and His Name, how could the sin of blasphemy and of taking the Name of God in vain exist?

Another argument is the analogy between the presence of God in His Name and the presence of Christ in the Eucharist. Just as, in the Eucharist, after the consecration of the gifts, we have an objective presence of Christ, meaning that we have the Flesh and Blood of God, irrespective of how worthy or not we are about this reality, so is God present in His Name.

The third argument is borrowed from the iconodules: just as there is an actual relationship between an icon and its prototype, between an icon and Christ or the saints it portrays – irrespective of how we position ourselves in front of the icon and of the quality of our prayer, so in the Name of God a carrier of increate divine energy, no matter how worthy the man who utters it is. Ern blames the opposite side, belonging to nominalism, psychologism and subjectivism. He explains the fact that few people have the mystical experience of the power of the Name of God through the real fracture which exists between man and God, because of sin. However, this separation is not between God and His Name, but between man and the Name of God, between man's consciousness and the Name of God. Here is the essence of the separation which prevents us from getting into real contact with God by uttering His Name in prayer.

2) Another solution is that proposed by Losev, a scholar with a complex educational background, covering almost all the significant cultural fields of his time. He goes along the line of Pavel Florensky, according to whom we can say that the Name of God is God, if we understand this to be as rendering present or if we bear in mind the platonic model of the participation of the uttered name to the hypostatic reality it denominates, in other words, the relation between phoneme, morpheme and sememe (p. 738). However, we cannot say that God is His Name. Therefore, the Name of God is God, but God is not His Name. It is so, because, in full Palamite tradition, the Being of God is not fully covered by His Name, as God cannot be fully encompassed by any concept; it remains forever in an irreducible affirmative indeterminacy, which we can call both Mytery and infinite Light. Consequently, Losev puts forward an antinomic solution, avoiding religious rationalism and absolute apophatism; the latter entails agnosticism and atheism, by projecting upon God the Kantian "thing-in-itself", meaning a reality altogether inaccessible and unknown in the very phenomenality of its manifestation. To absolute apophatism, nothing of what God reveals or says has any substance or value.

Losev believes that the Name of God is God's highest energy, inseparable from the essence of God; it is God's Light, Power and Perfection. Otherwise, even the most

fervent and consummate prayer would not lead to communion with God, but an encounter with something created (pp. 748-749; 752).

3) Finally, Bulgakov makes a surprising assertion, which will also be my conclusion, that is, the Name of Jesus comprises all the names of the divine being (Jesus being the hypostatic name of the Person of Jesus, not only the name of a feature or a divine attribute); the Name of Jesus comprises all human names, as He fully hypostatised the entire human nature. The Name of Jesus is the absolute Name.

In conclusion, the name of Jesus is uncreated divine energy, containing also an intelligible human articulation. It is an uncreate, divine-human name, supra-conceptual in its divine nature, but with a relative diversity of morphological and phonetic material forms (varying around an intelligible, semantically univocal nucleus) in the various languages in which we use the name Jesus to address the incarnate Logos.

CHOCHMAH – DIVINE WISDOM OR GOD – THE WISDOM?

Cătălin-Emanuel Ștefan

Claudiu Cristian Damian, *Hochma – Înțelepciunea în Scrierile Sapiențiale ale Vechiului Testament* [Chochmah – Wisdom in the Sapiential Books of the Old Testament] (Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2018), 486 p.

If we reflect on our condition, we will realise that man is not the only one to have evolved over the years; his reference points, ideals, perspectives and everything that could give meaning to his life have also changed. Consequently, we can say that there is a strong connection between the history of mankind and the evolution of concepts.

The present work is clear proof of this reality. Claudiu Cristian Damian's research focuses on the evolution of the concept of wisdom – Chochmah – first in the Ancient literature of the Middle East and then in the biblical space, at the confluence of Jewish and Greek thinking.

To analyse the role of wisdom in the thinking of various peoples, the author resorts to a series of literary works more or less known, but extremely enlightening. Writings such as the Epic of Gilgamesh, the Code of Hammurabi, Apkallu, Adapa, the Instructions of Shuruppak, The Poem of the Righteous Sufferer, Theodicy, and The Wisdom of Amenemope are only a few of the works belonging to the vast Ancient sapiential literature this book highlights. The author thoroughly explains their connection with the inspired writings of the Old Testament and shows how they possibly influenced the collective mentality of the various cultures with which Jews interacted over the years. Damian's whole endeavour demonstrates a fundamental perspective of Christianity, best rendered by Saint Justin Martyr and Philosopher: The Divine Logos "sowed" in all civilisations elements which allow people to understand, to a small or great extent, part of God's will (*The Second Apology in Favour of Christians*). It is precisely this perspective that makes the present work more than a historical study or a linguistic and conceptual analysis.

Moreover, the study of these works is not necessarily a purpose of the present book, but rather a foundation of its most important part. As I was saying, the present work is not dedicated to the general concept of wisdom, but to its peculiarity in the Jewish space, namely to the idea of chochmah. Thus, resorting to Ancient Eastern literature only facilitates the understanding of this idea in Jewish thinking, as it was influenced by other cultures.

Although wisdom was an important subject in the books of the Old Testament, the author decides to focus only on the passages which best render its fundamental features for the understanding of the chosen people: divine origin and personification. These couple of elements differentiate the Jewish chochmah from any other Eastern conception. Consequently, Damian's research tackles especially the passages in Proverbs 1:20-33; 8; 9:1-18; the Wisdom of Solomon 7;8 and the Wisdom of Sirach 24. Besides the two aforementioned characteristics, the feature which makes these texts unique in the Eastern sapiential landscape is the fact that wisdom is perceived as a relational means between man and God. Thus, the author shows the true value of the concept of chochmah.

In the end, Claudiu Cristian Damian's book constitutes an element of novelty for biblical research. Normally, the personified wisdom from the aforementioned passages is considered a typological image of the Divine Logos, the One Saint Paul himself calls the wisdom of God (1 Cor 1:24). Nonetheless, the author nuances this typological understanding. According to him, these texts from the Old Testament indeed prepared the ground for the proclamation of God's Embodiment. However, he believes their content is not enough to fully render the greatness of God getting closer to man. That is why this book encourages us to reflect on the fact that the Chochmah from the Holy Scripture refers to God, but does not identify with Him. This relation is similar to that between Saint John the Baptist and Christ, as described by Saint John the Evangelist: "He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light" (Jn 1:8).

Knowing all this, we can say that Damian's book is the result of a work that is very necessary for Romanian biblical research. As we have seen, the issue tackled by the book is bold, the perspectives are vast (being historical, literary, and hermeneutical research, among others) and the ideas conveyed can be actual subjects that a mind with a true penchant for wisdom can reflect upon.