

## MAN IN THE VIEW OF SOME CHRISTIAN THEOLOGIANS WITH PHILOSOPHICAL BACKGROUND

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**Abstract.** The study investigates man in the view of some Christian theologians with a philosophical perspective. The works of some theologians, of Greek language, from the first three centuries, emphasize the fact that their training and their getting acquainted with the ideative and argumentative thinking of Philosophy were the ones that helped them lay the bases of Christian Theology and, ipso facto, of Christian Anthropology, one of the main chapters of the „Dogmatic” of the Churches both in Eastern and Western Europe. The discourse about God, „that is rationalization in a broad sense”, and „the systematization of Christian faith” were a full-fledged philosophical approach to these matters.

**Keywords:** Theology, Christian Anthropology, God, Philosophy, faith.

The discourse about God, „that is rationalization in a broad sense”, and „the systematization of Christian faith”, were necessary both to propagate Christianity „among the pagan culture”, and to express and formulate the teaching of faith in a language „... that needed a rational reinforcement in its environment ...”<sup>1</sup> that is the philosophical reasoning. Actually, that is why, from the very first centuries, in the process of formulating the Credo of faith, of explication, and of systematizing the Christian faith, they had appealed not only to the text of the Bible, but also to the works of philosophers.

The works of some theologians, of Greek language, from the first three centuries, emphasize the fact that their training and their getting acquainted with the ideative and argumentative thinking of Philosophy were the ones that helped them lay the bases of Christian Theology and, ipso facto, of Christian Anthropology, one of the main chapters of the „Dogmatic” of the Churches in Eastern and Western Europe, too. Indeed, ever since the pre-Nicene age, the theologians of the Church, „people educated at pagan Schools, realized they could not successfully refute paganism but by using its own weapons: its reasoning and philosophy”<sup>2</sup>, hence the necessity to articulate a theology that

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<sup>1</sup> I. G. Coman, *Patrologie (Patrology)*, vol. I, IBMBOR Publ. House, Bucharest, 1984, p. 228.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*.

also involved the necessity to appeal to the heritage produced by the act of thinking and philosophical creation.

This phenomenon, that „... had been continued in the patristic theology up to the end (St. John Damaskinos was writing a general philosophy of Christian faith entitled: *The springs of knowledge*)”, was alternately named „the Christianization of Hellenism”, and „the Hellenisation of Christianity”<sup>3</sup>.

Before starting a text evaluation of some Christian writers and theologians (laymen or clergymen) from the first three centuries – some of them martyred for confessing their faith in Christ our Lord, the One Resurrected from the Dead – with regard to their anthropological perspective, we will make some brief statements on the Christian Anthropology.

According to the official teaching of the Ecumenical Orthodox Church – grounded on the revealed Word of the Holy Scripture (cf. Fc. 1, 26-27; 2, 7, 21) – „the man, just like every other being, came from God, namely through the Creation”<sup>4</sup>. The same biblical text tells us that, first of all, God created the human body out of earth, and then he created a soul for the body through His divine breath. However, we should not understand that „the creation of man involved two separate and subsequent stages, the creation of the body and then that of the soul, but that there was a single act of creation, or a simultaneous creation of the body and of the soul”<sup>5</sup>. We should also notice and keep into our minds the fact that „God created all the other creatures through His Word, and he made the man with his hands; but, just as by word we should not understand an utterance, but God`s will, here, by the creation of man, we should not understand the work of hands, but, as the theologian Theodoret of Cyr († 457) specified, a greater care for this thing...”<sup>6</sup>.

The same Orthodox Church teaches us that man „was created in God`s image, ...”, which however it does not relate to „the man`s body, as the Audian heretics thought, because God has no body”<sup>7</sup>. If some of the theologians and Fathers of the pre-Nicene Church as, for example, Justin, Tatian, Irenaeus etc., „while fighting back Gnosticism”, considered „the body to be God`s image, hereby they did not imply that God`s image would be peculiar to the body, but that the body somehow takes part in this image, through his unification with the soul ...”<sup>8</sup>. We also want to mention that „... most of the Saint Father distinguish between image and likeness, after which the man was created, albeit the Holy

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>4</sup> N. Chițescu et al., *Teologia dogmatică și simbolică (Theod dogmatic and symbolic theology)*, Renașterea Publ. House, Cluj-Napoca, 2008, p. 390.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 391.

<sup>6</sup> Apud N. Chițescu et al., *op. cit.*, p. 391.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 400-401.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 401.

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Scripture seems to use them sometimes as synonyms: Fc. 1, 26 refers both to image and likeness; Fc. 1, 27; 5, 1; 9, 6 to image; Jacob 3, 9 to likeness”<sup>9</sup>. Finally, we want to specify that, according to the dogmatic Theology of the Eastern Church, „the image of God relates itself to the man`s intellectual and moral nature, to reason and liberty, in their inclination towards God; and the likeness of God is the purpose towards which the man strives in its moral development and continual improvement. God`s likeness can be reached – the theologians of the Orthodox Church specify – through consistency in good deeds, depending, on the one hand, on the action of human spiritual and moral powers and, on the other hand, on the help of the holy grace. The starting point of the likeness of God is the image of God, the human reason and liberty as holders of the inclination towards the truth and the good. However, God`s image belongs to the nature of man itself, through the creation of the latter, whereas the likeness of God is only as a potentiality that can be materialized through the free working of man with the divine grace”<sup>10</sup>.

We, the people, are „κατ’ εἰκονά” (in God`s image) „through our creation”, and „κατ’ ὁμοίωσιν” (in likeness of God) we become „through ourselves, through our free will ... But even that which depends on our will can only be found in us as a possibility to earn it, and we can only reach that through our personal activity .... In fact – St. Gregory of Nyssa († 395) wrote – through the creation we got the possibility to become like God and, by giving us this possibility, God made us ourselves the workers towards our likeness of Him, ...”<sup>11</sup>.

The merit of Christian writers, of Greek, Latin, Syrian, Egyptian language from the 2<sup>nd</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries, from „the age when the first pages of extra biblical theology were written”<sup>12</sup>, does not only consist in the fact that they put at our disposal a rich informative and documentary material of the pagan philosophical and literary culture, especially of the Greek-roman one, but also in the fact that they created a new conception about man, laying thus the foundation of Christian Anthropology, that Fathers of the ecumenical Church from the 4<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> centuries such as, for example, the Capadocian Fathers from the 4<sup>th</sup> century (St. Basil the Great, St. Gregory of Nyssa and St. Gregory of Nazianzus), St. Maximus the Confessor (the 7<sup>th</sup> century) and St. John Damaskinos (the 8<sup>th</sup> century), the Father of the Dogmatic of Eastern Church, formulated and expressed in the language of Platonic, Aristotelian and Neo-

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<sup>9</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>11</sup> Apud N. Chițescu, *op. cit.*, p. 402.

<sup>12</sup> I. G. Coman, *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 433.

platonian philosophical thinking, but always with the Vetro- and Neo-Testamentary biblical texts as a main source and ground.

In the opinion of some patrologists, the acquisition of the philosophical language and thinking of Hellenic expression by the theologians-writers from the first centuries was mainly due to the fact that „... the embodiment of God and the self-revelation of Godly truth took place in the space where the Greek philosophy ruled”<sup>13</sup>. Anyhow, it is doubtless that „... in the space of Christian theology we encounter many metaphysical conceptions ..., which are known to philosophers... The conceptions of this kind – the patrologist Stylianos G. Papadopoulos specified – of course, do not make up the focal point of Theology, but, in any case, they approach it and follow it in all of its stages”<sup>14</sup>.

In order to present – be it briefly – the evolution of this process of developing and formulating the Christian Anthropology from the 2<sup>nd</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries, whose principles can also be found in the „Summa” of the dogmatic Theology of the Eastern Church, alias in the Dogmatic of Saint John Damaskinos (†749), grounded on the core of the philosophical thinking and reflection (especially of the Aristotelian one), we shall make certain references to the text of some writers-theologians of Greek language in this period (the 2<sup>nd</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries), that also lie at the basis of the theology created along the centuries by the theological Schools of the Byzantine Empire and afterwards by the ones in the Churches in South-Eastern Europe, founded in a well-outlined ethnical and geographical area, as it was also the case of the Romanian Church whose theologians, although they had remained loyal to the teaching of faith of the ecumenical Church, managed however to bring a meritorious sui-generis contribution in its formulation and expression both in the context of the European theological, philosophical and social-humanistic thinking of the age when they lived and created, and in the cultural context of their own people.

Ever since the post-apostolic age, the Fathers of the Church also expressed their opinion on Anthropology, appealing as a ground and reference not only to the biblical text, but to the text of the philosophers of Greek language, from Plato up to the ones in their age.

In the perspective of the Christian theologians from the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, „philosophy is, in fact, the greatest possession, and most honorable before God. Only philosophy leads us and approaches us to God”<sup>15</sup>. Moreover, they think that „truly holy men are only those who have bestowed attention on

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<sup>13</sup> St. G. Papadopoulos, *Patrologie (Patrology)*, vol. I, transl. from greek language by A. Marinescu, Bucharest, 2006, p. 143.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>15</sup> St Justin (the Philosopher and Martyr), *Dialogul cu iudeul Trifon (The dialogue with Trypho the Jew)*, 2, 1.

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philosophy”<sup>16</sup>. For example, in his work, „The Dialogue with Trypho the Jew”<sup>17</sup>, Saint Justin wrote that „philosophy is the science of Being and the knowledge of Truth and the privilege of this science and of this wisdom is happiness” (Dialogue, 3, 4).

Philosophy was thus perceived by the first Christian philosophers as „a science of the being” and „knowledge”. However, in order to know God, Whom „... neither Abraham, nor Isaac, nor Jacob, nor any other man has seen...” (Dialogue, 127)<sup>18</sup>, we need the power of the Holy Ghost, „who improves intuition or enhances contemplation through the sanctifying purity of Godliness”<sup>19</sup>. That is why the same Christian philosopher from the 2<sup>nd</sup> century stated that the philosophers who had not acquired the „science about Divinity”, that is the Christian Theology, cannot „... have a correct conception about God and tell the truth about Him, as they have no knowledge about Him ...” (Dialogue, 3, 5-7). In this sense, this science about Him is actually – according to Saint Justin – a philosophical „Theognosis”, that is a continual research, search, finding and experiencing, at the highest intensity, of the knowledge of the truth about God and about the works of His creation, with the man as its apex.

The oldest Christian „Apology” that was kept belongs to Aristides of Athens<sup>20</sup> and it was written „around the year 140 or a little earlier ...”<sup>21</sup>. Competent researchers of the text of this Apology stated that its author’s presentation „... is not alien to the atmosphere of Stoic morals and of Platonic and Aristotelian thinking which, ..., he knows and uses ...”<sup>22</sup>. In fact, St. Jerome († 420) tells us that Aristides of Athens, who was a „philosophus eloquentissimus (a very talented philosopher) and a disciple of Christ, under his old coat, presented to Emperor Hadrian ... an Apology for Christians ...”<sup>23</sup> which is „... composed of extracts from philosophic writers. His example was afterwards followed by Justin, another philosopher”<sup>24</sup>.

As the testimony of Saint Jerome itself certifies, the first theologians, of philosophical background, – who also wrote the first Apologies for Christians –

<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>17</sup> St. Justin the Martyr, *Dialogul cu iudeul Trifon (The dialogue with Trypho the Jew)*, transl. by Ol. N. Căciulă, Bucharest, 1941, p. 17-38 (transl. rendered in the *Părinți și Scriitori Bisericești* (Church Fathers and Writers) Collection, 2, 1980, p. 91-266).

<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem* (transl. by Ol. N. Căciulă), p. 279-280.

<sup>19</sup> I.G. Coman, *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 297.

<sup>20</sup> *The Apology of Aristide on behalf of the Christians from syriac Ms. Preserved on Mount Sinai*, edited and translated by J. Harris, Cambridge, 1893.

<sup>21</sup> St. G. Papadopoulos, *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 186.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 186-187.

<sup>23</sup> St. Jerome, *De viris illustribus*, 20.

<sup>24</sup> Idem, *Scrisoarea 70 (Letter 70)*, 4.

went on thinking and expressing themselves „under the(ir) old coat”, that is in the language of the philosophical thinking of the School they had come from.

Talking about Christians, Aristides „uses the 3<sup>rd</sup> person (never „we”): „the Gospel that he preached (to Christians) a short time before”, „as I could read in their books” (15, 1, 3)”<sup>25</sup>, hence the conclusion that „Aristide appears not as a member of the Church (as in the case of Saint Justin (the Martyr and Philosopher), but as a philosopher convinced of the superiority of Christianity and that is why he takes over the apology of Christians”<sup>26</sup>.

As concerns the anthropology, from the Apology of Aristide we can take over the following ideas and statements:

1. That God is the creator of the seen and unseen world.
2. That people can be divided into three large groups, „according to the criterion of observing the truth, which is according to the criterion of their piety. These three groups are: the worshipers of gods, the Jews and the Christians. The worshipers of gods will be divided into three groups, too: Chaldeans, Greeks and Egyptians. They are the ones that idolatry started from”<sup>27</sup>.
3. Anthropolatry, that is the worship of man, is rejected and fought off, just like nature worship (of the sky, of earth, of sun, of wind etc.).

Among others, the pre-Christian world also practiced anthropolatry, as it worshipped gods with anthropomorphic faces, hence the serious accusations of atheism and *lèse-majesté* crime brought both to Jews and to Christians, who „...rejected the cult of gods as an inert cult addressing to matter and to the creatures made out of matter...”<sup>28</sup>. In this sense, in order to respond to these accusations, the respective Christians also needed a solid philosophical background. And, fortunately, the first Christian theologians – especially the Apologists, who had also been the first „church teachers”, – had come to a large part from the world of philosophers. That is why they appealed to the knowledge that the Greek-roman culture, of philosophical expression, could offer them. Of course, „through the embrace of Christianity by some cultivated men, by some great „philosophers”, such as Aristides, Justin, Athenagoras, Tatian, Teophilus of Antioch and by some Christians` attending the classes of pagan Schools, „... the didascalía broadened and deepened with philosophical knowledge and turned into a scientific theological education. This is how the first Christian schools were founded due to the personal initiative and to the education offered by some teachers such as Justin, Tatian, Rhodon, who, just like pagan philosophers, had gathered around them and had educated groups of

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<sup>25</sup> St. G. Papadopoulos, *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 187.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>27</sup> I. G. Coman, *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 248.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 210.

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Christian disciples, among which some entered the clergy, left apart that the church officials did not contribute with anything to this new form of education which is lay, Christian, theological and philosophical at the same time”<sup>29</sup>.

Regarding „the conception about the soul that Plato attributes to Phaidon”, it was said it belonged to Socrate, whose „follower” Plotin also declared himself to be”<sup>30</sup>. In this sense, it is only certain that „the myths of Plato related to the soul, its origin, its fall into the body”, – that „were kept together with the Platonic dialectics, ... furnished to the Socratic spirit a doctrinarian body comparable with the one that will move the Evangelical spirit, ...”<sup>31</sup>. It is also certain that „the myths of Plato ... discreetly went across the entire Greek metaphysics and came to light again once with the Neo-Platonism of Alexander, maybe once with Ammonius, but certainly once with Plotin ...”<sup>32</sup>. In fact, „the myths of Plato simply „translated in the terms of the Platonic thinking an emotion with creative power, an emotion tightly bound to the moral teaching of Socrates”<sup>33</sup>.

This platonic and Neo-Platonist conception about the soul is also expressed – in its different forms of expression – by the writers – theologians, of philosophical background, from the first three Christian centuries. In this sense, one of the first writers-theologians, of philosophical background, who appealed to the text of the philosophy of Greek expression was St. Justin (the Martyr and Philosopher †165), „the founder of the first Christian theological school” and „the first great theologian of the Church who felt the importance of Greek philosophy, that he had grasped in the manner of the Stoic Posidonius and from which, anyhow, he only used a few elements”<sup>34</sup>. In fact, about Justin the Martyr it was said that „his greatness doesn`t lie as much in the result of his effort, as in his originality. His purpose was – a competent commentator of his work wrote – to create the new and true model of philosopher, the Christian philosopher ...”<sup>35</sup> that was also to create the profile of Christian philosophy.

For the new kind of „philosopher” – that Saint Justin (the Martyr and Philosopher †165) wanted to be and actually had been – the resurrection of bodies from tombs, that is their recovery to the natural elements they left a long

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<sup>29</sup> T.M. Popescu, *Primii dascăli creștini (The first Christian teachers)*, Bucharest, 1932, p. 70-71. Also see I. G. Coman, *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 38-39.

<sup>30</sup> Henri Bergson, *Cele două surse ale moralei și religiei (The two sources of morals and religion)*, transl. by D. Morărașu, Publ. House of the European Intitute, Bucharest, 1998, p. 85.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>34</sup> St. G. Papadopoulos, *op. cit.*, p. 225-226.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 225.

time before certifies the life of the soul after death<sup>36</sup>. In fact, Saint Justin wanted to specify that „the resurrection takes place for the fallen body ... The soul is in the body, which does not live without a soul. The body will no longer exist if the soul leaves it. The body is the house of the soul ...”<sup>37</sup>

Saint Justin also referred to the fact that philosophers such as, for example, Socrates, Plato, Pythagoras, Empedocles etc. stated that the soul is also conscious after death. The oracles and the descent of Ulysses in Hades<sup>38</sup> also certified this thing, but – Saint Justin stated – only Christians believe that God can resurrect the bodies of people<sup>39</sup>.

The Christian apologists from the 2<sup>nd</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries A.D. took over from the Jewish apologetics (cf. Aristotle, 15 B.C.. and Philo, 40 A.D.) the argument that Moses and the prophets had existed before all the great personalities of pagan culture (poets, philosophers, Homer, Plato etc.), hence their statement that „... the best they had: poetry, philosophy and the entire pagan culture was taken over from the Holy Scripture of the Old Testament: Plato took over from Moses and from other authors of the Old Testament, as Moses is older than all the Greek writers (St. Justin, Apology I, 44; Minucius Felix, Octavius, 34) ... The subsequent patristical theologians have used this argument ever since, ...”<sup>40</sup>.

St. Justin (the Martyr and Philosopher) indeed stated that Plato borrowed his ideas and truths about the Divinity and the world from Moses<sup>41</sup>, whom he considered to be „the oldest among all writers”<sup>42</sup>. We cannot exclude that Plato could also have become acquainted with the books of Moses, but this thing does not prove the fact that the philosopher would have remained tributary to the conception about „Divinity” and „the World” expressed in the revealed text of the Pentateuch<sup>43</sup>, actually known before the age of Plato in the geographical area of Greek language. In his works, Saint Justin stated that the man is „...a rational being made up of soul and of body”, and, as such, this rational being will become a man „through the binding of both” elements of „the whole, that

<sup>36</sup> Cf. I. G. Coman, *Elemente de antropologie în operele Sf. Justin Martirul și Filosoful (Elements of anthropology in the works of St. Justin the Martyr and the Philosopher)*, in *Ortodoxia (the Orthodoxy)*, XX (1968), no. 3, p. 378-394.

<sup>37</sup> St. Justin, *Despre Înviere (On Resurrection)*, 5, Otto Publ. House, vol. III, p. 244.

<sup>38</sup> Idem, *Apologia I (Apology I)*, 18.

<sup>39</sup> Idem, *Despre Înviere (On Resurrection)*, 5.

<sup>40</sup> I.G. Coman, *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 229.

<sup>41</sup> St. Justin, *Apologia I (Apology I)*, 44 (cf. J. Giordani, *Justinus, Le Apologie*, Rome, 1962).

<sup>42</sup> *Ibidem*, I, 54-60 and 44-46.

<sup>43</sup> With regard to the text of the Pentateuch, its genesis, history and comment, see J. Ben Isaac Achkenazi de Janow, *Le Commentaire sur Torah*, transl. from Hebrew by J. Baumgarten, Verdier Publ. House, Dijon, 1987.



is of the soul and of the body”<sup>44</sup>. In other words, in the perception of Saint Justin the Martyr and Philosopher, the man is a psychosomatic being.

Saint Justin (the Martyr and Philosopher) also wrote a „Comment about the soul” (Περὶ ψυχῆς σχολικόν)<sup>45</sup>; where – among other – he stated that „the soul is in the body, which does not live without a soul. The body no longer exists if the soul leaves it. The body – he specified – is the house of the soul, and the soul is the house of the ghost”<sup>46</sup>. At the same time, he specified that the soul is not part of the being of God – as in the anthropology of his great master, Plato, – but it is created and becomes immortal through the will of God and through its merits. Although he often lets himself influenced by the platonic anthropology, St. Justin comes to the conclusion that the soul can see God not because of his kinship with Him, but only if it is virtuous and just. That is why St. Justin tells us that the souls worthy of God won't die<sup>47</sup>, whereas the sinful ones will be punished after God's will.

In „The dialogue with Trypho the Jew”, St. Justin (the Martyr and Philosopher) wrote that the soul „... lives not as being life, but as the partaker of life; but that which partakes of anything, is different from that of which it does partake. Now the soul partakes of life, since God wills it to live. Thus, it will not even partake [of life] when God does not will it to live. For to live is not its attribute, as it is God's; but as a man does not live always, and the soul is not for ever conjoined with the body, since, whenever this harmony must be broken up, the soul leaves the body, and the man exists no longer; even so, whenever the soul must cease to exist, the spirit of life is removed from it, and there is no more soul, but it goes back to the place from whence it was taken”<sup>48</sup>.

The statements of Justin about the nature and the fate of soul<sup>49</sup>, who are mainly based on the word of the Scripture, are actually also expressed in the official teaching of the ecumenical Church, therefore we can say that, in this regard, they are „by and large” in complete harmony with the dogmatic doctrine of the ecumenical Church.

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<sup>44</sup> St. Justin the Martyr and Philosopher, *Despre Învierea morților (On the Resurrection of the dead)*, apud. I. G. Coman, *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 301.

<sup>45</sup> See Eusebius of Caesarea, *Istoria bisericească (The history of the Church)*, IV, 18.

<sup>46</sup> *Despre Învierea morților (On the Resurrection of the dead)*, Otto publ. house, p. 10, 244, 246, apud. I. G. Coman, *op. cit.*, p. 303.

<sup>47</sup> St. Justin the Martyr and Philosopher, *Dialogul cu iudeul Trifon (The dialogue with Trypho the Jew)*, 5, 2-3. (Also see I. G. Coman, *op. cit.*, p. 302).

<sup>48</sup> *Ibidem*, 6, 1-2.

<sup>49</sup> Regarding the statements of St. Justin about the soul and its nature, see Prof. I.I. Rămureanu, *Concepția Sfântului Justin Martirul și Filosoful despre suflet (The conception of Saint Justin the Martyr and the Philosopher about the soul)*, in *Studii Teologice (Theological Studies)*, X (1958), no. 7-8, p. p. 401-423.

In the oldest Symbol of faith, written „by the beginning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century”<sup>50</sup>, „the resurrection of the body”<sup>51</sup> is also expressly mentioned. In the Treaty whose author he is considered to be, on the resurrection of the dead, St. Justin also tells us that God can resurrect the bodies, that is bring the souls back into the natural elements they had left a long time before<sup>52</sup>.

The same post-apostolic Saint Father – who is also „the author of the first Christian Martyrdom”<sup>53</sup> – stated that the man was endowed with the gift of free decision or of the good will, or of the free will<sup>54</sup>. In this regard, this gift of free decision – as a supreme power of the soul – could give man the possibility to do the things that God loves in order for the former to remain immortal<sup>55</sup>.

In his work, „Deputation for Christians” (Πρεσβεία), St. Justin also „uses a lot of Greek poets and philosophers, with the help of which he succeeds in proving the uniqueness of God for the first time.... He draws his inspiration from the Middle Platonism and from Stoics ...”<sup>56</sup> In this respect, through these references to the text of the Greek poets and philosophers in the pre-Christian age, Saint Justin also proved to be completely imbued with the ancient philosophical culture, to which he remained tributary up to the end of his life and which he used and made subservient in order to convey the message of Christian teachings to the Greek-roman world of his time.

Saint Justin was followed by „two strong spirits”, who worked „in his shade”<sup>57</sup>. We are talking about Athenagoras of Athens (the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D.), „... who was much more reconciling towards philosophy than St. Justin (the Martyr and Philosopher)”, and by the Syrian Tatian (†Apr. 170/175).

Athenagoras was the Christian „philosopher” by excellence. Indeed, „if the use of the term <Christian philosopher> is allowed, the only Christian of his age who really deserved that name was Athenagoras”<sup>58</sup>. In fact, the interpreters of his work emphasized the fact that, „... essentially”, the latter is „more

<sup>50</sup> St. G. Papadopoulos, *op. cit.*, p. 312. Here, we refer to the symbol of faith discovered in the year 1907 and edited in a critical manner based on the papyrus Der Balizeh from the VI<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. St. Justin, *Despre Învierrea morților (On the Resurrection of the dead)*, 5. Also see I. G. Coman, *op. cit.*, p. 303.

<sup>53</sup> St. G. Papadopoulos, *op. cit.*, p. 232 (We refer to „the Martyrdom of Ptolomeu and Luciu”, which St. Justin described in his Apology II, c. II).

<sup>54</sup> St. Justin the Martyr and Philosopher, *Apologia (The Apology)*, I, 43, 5-6, 8, apud. I. G. Coman, *op. cit.*, p. 303.

<sup>55</sup> Idem, *Dialogul ... (The Dialogue....)*, 88, apud I. G. Coman, *op. cit.*, p. 303.

<sup>56</sup> St. G. Papadopoulos, *op. cit.*, p. 264.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 263.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 260.

philosophical and less theological”<sup>59</sup>, as Athenagoras „... wrote about the Christian truth only based on philosophical premises...“<sup>60</sup>.

We also owe to Athenagoras „... the first elements of Christian Anthropology ..., yet unsupported by the biblical data”<sup>61</sup>. These elements of anthropology were described – without any biblical reference or ground – in his work „On the resurrection of the dead” (Περὶ ἀναστάσεως νεκρῶν), which is „... a collection of logical and philosophical argumentations and testimonies in proof of the resurrection of the dead, that is of the soul and of the body”<sup>62</sup>.

According to Athenagoras of Athens (2<sup>nd</sup> century, A.D.), man, created in the image of His Creator, namely endowed with a rational mind and judgment, received from the Creator the mission of perpetuation. And the same „Christian philosopher” specified that it is not the soul of itself who receives the mind and reason, but man, that is the human psychophysical unit<sup>63</sup>.

About Tatian – born in Syria around 120 A.D., where „he studied philosophy and got to know the mysterious Eastern religions”, – it is known that he also studied in Rome, where his teacher was St. Justin the Martyr and Philosopher and that, afterwards, „... he created his own school, his own theological standpoint and almost his own Church”<sup>64</sup>.

The competent interpreters of his work let us know that „... Tatian was profoundly influenced by philosophy and especially by the one pertaining to popular and middle Platonism. Basically – the interpreters of his work state – he is a monotheistic and dualistic philosopher, while also using Gnostic and Docetist conceptions, without being either a Gnostic, or a Docetist ...”<sup>65</sup>

In his work, „Πρὸς Ἕλληνας”<sup>66</sup> (To Greeks), – written in Rome in the year 165 – Tatian also made an express reference to the resurrection of the bodies and to the soul, however without giving „ his conceptions the shape of an established system, as any Gnostic teacher did”<sup>67</sup>.

According to Tatian the Assyrian († 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D.), there are two kinds of spirits, one of them is called soul and the other, superior to the soul, is

<sup>59</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 261.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 263.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 265.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>63</sup> *Despre Învierea morților (On the Resurrection of the dead)*, 12, 15, apud. I. G. Coman, *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 350-351.

<sup>64</sup> St. G. Papadopoulos, *op. cit.*, vol. I, ..., p. 274.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 275.

<sup>66</sup> Published by E. Schwartz, *Tatiani Oratio ad Graecos*, in *Texte und Untersuchungen*, no. 4, 1, Leipzig, 1888.

<sup>67</sup> St. G. Papadopoulos, *op. cit.*, p. 276.

the image and the likeness of God. The first people had both of these: as such, they were partly material, partly superior to matter<sup>68</sup>.

Tatian the Assyrian tells us that „... man is a really rational being through his creation in the image and likeness of God, which His Spirit gave him, Spirit which reflects itself in the spiritual image of man, aiming continuously at new heights”<sup>69</sup>.

A theologian-bishop, Melito of Sardis (the 2nd cent.), wrote that there is an ancestral sin, because the sin puts its stamp on every soul and everything is meant to die. He also wrote that it is the body that is subdued by the power of sin<sup>70</sup>. Thus, man was only regarded from the perspective of biblical theology, the contribution of platonic or Aristotelian theology being hereby left aside. Melito was actually one of the first theologians-bishops of the pre-Nicene Church who preferred the revealed Truth of the Holy Scripture to any ideate argumentation of philosophical origin.

A first theologian of the Church, who became bishop of an apostolic Church, was Teophilus of Antioch, born in Syria, close to the river Euphrates, a country where he enjoyed „a high-level education and a serious study of the Greek poets and philosophers”, although he had expressed himself „always as a Judeo-Christian”<sup>71</sup>.

With regard to Teophilus of Antioch, who activated „between the years 169 and 188”, they said that „...the existence of a bishop as a writer who represents the Judeo-Christian theology and mentality with accuracy, to the extent that its Christian elements (only) have a decorative character, is a unique phenomenon in the old Church”<sup>72</sup>.

Teophilus, the bishop of Antioch (the 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D.), wrote that man was made by the hands of God, but free and responsible. He also stated that Adam could not receive „the science”, as he was not old enough<sup>73</sup>.

About his work, Πρὸς Αὐτόλυκον<sup>74</sup> (To the Autolic), – written after the year 180 – it was said that Teophilus of Antioch „... demonstrates the emptiness of Greek (pagan) religion and the correctness of the creation in the Old Testament”<sup>75</sup>. Indeed, in his work, Teophilus brought by arguments in support of the priority and superiority of the Old Testament to philosophy, and he also

<sup>68</sup> *Cuvânt către Greci (Word to Greeks)*, 12, apud. I. G. Coman, *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 318-319.

<sup>69</sup> *Cuvânt către Greci (Word to Greeks)*, 15, ..., p. 319-320.

<sup>70</sup> *Omilia despre Patimile Domnului (The Homily about the Sufferings of Our Lord)*, 54 and the next, apud. I. G. Coman, *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 335.

<sup>71</sup> St. G. Papadopoulos, *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 269.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 268.

<sup>73</sup> Teophilus of Antioch, *Către Autolic (To the Autolic)*, lb. I, chapt. II, 25-27, apud. I. G. Coman, *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 342.

<sup>74</sup> See, G. Bardy, *Trois livres à Autolyclus*, în *Sources Chrétiennes*, nr. 20, Paris, 1948.

<sup>75</sup> St. G. Papadopoulos, *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 271.

stated that the Greek philosophers „stole from the Holy Scriptures”<sup>76</sup>, that is they took over the ideas from Moses and from the other Prophets of „the Old Law”. But, in the opinion of some interpreters of his work, such a statement – made by Teophilus of Antioch – was actually intended to be an answer to the work of a pagan philosopher of his time, namely to the work „Ἀληθῆς λόγος” (True word), written around the year 178 by Celsus<sup>77</sup>, where the pagan philosopher stated – among other omissions and untrue facts – that our Lord Jesus Christ „... had studied Plato and many elements from the Greek philosophy were taken over by Christianity, but it altered them”<sup>78</sup>. In this respect, it was this kind of statements, tendentious and lacking any credible testimony, that the Christian theologians, of philosophical background, contemporary with Celsus, wanted to respond, namely St. Justin (the Martyr and Philosopher), Tatian, Origenes etc., hence their idea that „... Greeks (pagans) took over ideas from Moses and from the Jews”, whom „the Christians follow”<sup>79</sup>.

It was also noticed that, „in contrast to Saint Justin the Martyr and Philosopher, to Athenagoras, Tertullian, etc., who demonstrated the possibility of the resurrection of the dead also through philosophical arguments, Teophilus based the resurrection solely on faith”<sup>80</sup>. In fact, Teophilus of Antioch is the first among the Christian writers who no longer gives priority to the culture of philosophical origin, but to the text of the Scripture, on whose authority he based his entire system of theological thinking. That is why we could say that Teophilus of Antioch was also the first Christian theologian for whom “Philosophy” was nothing but an „ancillary Theologiae”.

Saint Irenaeus of Lyon († 202) is another hierarch-theologian who also appealed to philosophy, but only to the extent to which ideas, notions and concepts provided by the latter could serve him in the process of formulating and developing the teaching of faith of the Church based on its fundamental sources, the Holy Scripture and the Holy Tradition.

His works, written in Greek, that were only kept in „Latin and Armenian translation”, are the proof that he had had a „remarkable education in philosophy and classical philology”<sup>81</sup>. In this sense, this philosophical

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<sup>76</sup> Teophilus of Alexandria, *Către Autolic (To the Autolic)*, I, 14.

<sup>77</sup> See, Origen, *Contre Celse*, I-II, in *Sources Chrétiennes*, no. 132, Paris, 1967; J. Vermander, Théophile d’Antioche, *Contre Celse*, À Autolykos III, in *Revue des Etudes Augustiniennes*, Paris, nr. 17 (1971), p. 203-225.

<sup>78</sup> St. G. Papadopoulos, *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 242.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>80</sup> I. G. Coman, *op. cit.*, p. 343.

<sup>81</sup> St. G. Papadopoulos, *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 290.

education – where we trace „the echo of the Platonic philosophy”<sup>82</sup> – gave Saint Irenaeus not only the possibility to distinguish between body, soul and ghost as man is concerned, but also to become „... the main initiator of the so-called polemical (combative) theology, ...”<sup>83</sup>. However in contrast with apologists, who „... appealed to philosophy because they believed in its possibility to reach the truth, be it partially (St. Justin the Martyr and Philosopher: *spermatikos logos*, Athenagoras: the godly sympathy and blast (creative power) etc.)”<sup>84</sup>, Saint Irenaeus remained tributary to the Holy Tradition of the Church, hence his appellative „the theologian of the Holy Tradition”<sup>85</sup>. In fact, this is how we can explain the fact that his anthropological doctrine is Christocentric, since – according to his statement – only through Christ can man become aware of what „in the image” of God means, and only through the work of Christ can he understand what „in His likeness”<sup>86</sup> means, because Christ was the One who restored „the whole creation in His godly-human (teanthropic)”<sup>87</sup> person.

The same theologian of „Tradition” wrote that man was created „... in order to grow and to develop in Christ”, hence his statement that only the one who participates „in God” gets to know „God”<sup>88</sup>. And this participation was understood and expressed by Saint Irenaeus – who was also „bishop of Vienna”<sup>89</sup> – as an expression of the spiritual-religious experience that only the man who lives in Christ can have.

Concerning the Athenian Clement of Alexandria (150-211/215) it is known that, before settling in Alexandria, he had studied at the well-known Hellenic schools in Athens and Alexandria, where he acquired „his vast knowledge of literature and philosophy...”<sup>90</sup>, who made him „... the first great theologian of Christian Egypt”<sup>91</sup>. A universal spirit, Clement of Alexandria was also interested in studying and getting to know „all sciences and religions which express man”<sup>92</sup>.

His works certify that this „first great theologian of Egypt” has come to know the philosophy of Greek expression by means of the Jew Phylo (20-15 Î. Hr.), „one of the greatest thinkers and writers of mankind and the most significant in the first Christian century”, and of Antioch Ascalonites († 96 ante

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<sup>82</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 283.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 282.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 281.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 283.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 287.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 290.

<sup>90</sup> I.G. Coman, *op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 244.

<sup>91</sup> St. G. Papadopoulos, *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 319.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 320.

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Hr.), „who represented the so-called Middle Platonism, whose intermediary he is considered up to a certain point. In the same time, he also became acquainted, of course, with other post-platonic philosophers, namely Posidonius, Musonius (sec. I d. Hr.) and Epictetus († 120), as his moral system is a collection of platonic, stoic, Aristotelian and, of course, Christian conceptions”<sup>93</sup>.

Referring to his courses (the catecheses) held at the Cathetical School of Alexandria – where „... an intense scientific activity both in the field of the Holy Scripture and in that of the lay culture with a comparative profile ...”<sup>94</sup> took place – the researchers of his work think that „his intense lay and Christian culture, ..., and his tireless striving for knowledge and balance”, made his lectures „a genuine spiritual delight”<sup>95</sup>.

The same competent interpreters of his work state that Clement of Alexandria was „a real scholar, interested in his contemporaries` faiths and thinking, in matter of philosophy, mythology, archaeology, poetry, literature and other spiritual manifestations. He introduced – one of the latter wrote – the erudition and science in the Church as collaborators and helpers of Revelation”<sup>96</sup>.

They also observed that, for Clement of Alexandria, „philosophy is a preparatory form for those who want to obtain their faith through demonstration”, and it was given to „Greeks in order to educate them for Christ ...”<sup>97</sup> Actually, through philosophy, Clement does not understand the doctrine of a philosophical School (Platonism, Aristotelianism, Stoicism, Epicurism etc.), „but the amount of all good things taught in these schools that cultivated justice along with the science of piety (Stromata I, 7, 37)”<sup>98</sup>.

The same theologian from Alexandria defined philosophy as a „work” and „thinking” of God, hence its role to prepare man for wisdom (cf. Stromata I, 5-6 and VI, 17). But, as the interpreters of his work noticed, Clement`s purpose was not „to reinforce philosophy with Christian elements, but to raise Christianity up to the level of a philosophy, to the category that all people praised”<sup>99</sup>.

With regard to „man”, to „people”, Clement of Alexandria wrote that „we are the carriers of the image of God in this living and lively statue that it is man, an image which resides in us, which sanctifies us, accompanies us, lives

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<sup>93</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 322.

<sup>94</sup> I.G. Coman, *op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 244.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 245.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 256.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 257.

<sup>99</sup> St. G. Papadopoulos, *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 328.

in our home, shares our feelings, gives us a little more sensibility. “We are – he wrote – an offering given to God for Christ” (Protreptic, 4, 59, 2)<sup>100</sup>. In this sense, it was „for the first time” – in the history of Christianity – when they gave „such an explanation to the image of God in us, an image that, ..., is not identical to man, but some kind of collaborator of man, a force in us, who is always ready to help us up to offering us to God for Christ, even until to be deified through laws given to our mind, ...”<sup>101</sup>.

The same interpreters of the works of the theologian of Alexandria noticed that „tightly linked to the anthropology of Clement is the Greek Christian humanism”, that an erudite patrologist defined as „the sum of all the efforts for the accomplishment of the ideal man, requested by the Bible through the formula „in God’s image and likeness”, a formula so long elaborated and recommended by Clement – professor Rev. Ioan G. Coman concluded – to his disciples from the Cathetical School of Alexandria”<sup>102</sup>.

In Clement’s vision, „the real Gnostic” is the man who has the qualities of the real Christian (cf. Stromata V, 14, 94, 6)<sup>103</sup>. In fact, in Alexandria of his times – that was above all „the centre of the culture of Gnosticism, which had created a new and strong climate of love for knowledge”, – Clement was deeply influenced by the doctrine of the former. In fact, „... for his entire life he will try to reach and to demonstrate the gnosis, he will build the profile of the Gnostic Christian. The gnosis leads his soul so strongly – the patrologist Stylianos Papadopoulos noticed – that he would prefer knowledge instead of redemption (if these were separate), as he himself certifies (Stromate, IV, 22)”<sup>104</sup>.

The same theologian from Alexandria stated that both „the image” and the „likeness” do not refer to „the body”, but to „mind” and „judgment” (Stromata II, 19, 102, 2-4).

The philosophers did not talk about sin, but about „mistake”, which Plato said that „is made by the man who choses; its cause does not lie with God” (The Republic X, 617E). In this respect, when he refers to „man”, Clement from Alexandria does not mention the ancestral sin, as for him the latter „does not represent a determinant factor of his thinking ...”<sup>105</sup>. In fact, for Clement, human love itself „... is rather synonymous with knowledge”<sup>106</sup>, that is with the philosophers` gnosis. Of course, this fact also constitutes a evidence that, as the

<sup>100</sup> Apud I.G. Coman, *op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 269; See also the text translated by C. Mondesert and A. Plassart, *Protrepticul (The Protreptic)*, in Sources Chrétiennes, no. 2/1949.

<sup>101</sup> I.G. Coman, *op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 269.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>103</sup> For the text of the work, «*Stromata*», see Sources Chrétiennes, no. 30, 38 (1951-1954).

<sup>104</sup> St. G. Papadopoulos, *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 320.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 329.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 390.



cognitive act is concerned, the theologian from Alexandria remained tributary to his philosophical education, which had defined him throughout his life.

Another bishop-theologian, who grounded the structure of his theological thinking especially on the biblical text, was the Bishop Peter of Alexandria († 311/312), who, among others, in his work „About the soul and the body”<sup>107</sup> also mentioned Origen’s idea regarding the pre-existence of the human soul in the sky and its fall in time, that Origen had taken over from the Greek philosophy. However, as it was alien to the teaching of Christian faith, Peter of Alexandria condemned it strongly, specifying that „... the man out of an earthly body and a soul was created as one and the same all at once”<sup>108</sup>, that is at the same time, when God said: „Let`s make the man in our image and likeness” (Gen. I, 26).

Another Christian theologian, of philosophical background, was Origen<sup>109</sup> (185-253/254), who was not only one of the pioneers of Christian theology, but also „one of those rare appearances who impose respect and admiration not only to friends, but also to enemies”<sup>110</sup>.

In one of his works, Origen stated that „... God, when, at the beginning, created what he wanted to create, that is natures endowed with reason, he had no other reason but His own Goodness ... He created all men equal and similar” (De principia, II, 9, 6)<sup>111</sup>.

It was rightfully stated that „the anthropology of Origen lays the stress on the freedom of the will or on the free will, to whom he dedicated the entire 3<sup>rd</sup> book of the work *De principia*”<sup>112</sup>. In fact, according to Origen, the fall of „the evil angels” (of devils) themselves is also a result of their free will, and not of their nature, through which they can actually be – Origen tells us – „redeemed,” (Apol. Adv. Lib. Ruf. II, 19)<sup>113</sup>.

Talking about the creation of man, Origen referred to the principle of the creation of the soul „in God`s image”, and, with regard to the intellectual nature of man, he considered it to be an accident or a consequence of the body (*De principia* I, 1, 7)<sup>114</sup>. In this respect, through that final statement, Origen also proved to have remained tributary to „the ideas of Plato” and to the statements of Stoic materialists, who „did not want to understand that there is a certain

<sup>107</sup> Its text was published in Migne, P. G., XVIII, 519-522.

<sup>108</sup> I. G. Coman, *op. cit.*, vol. II, Bucharest, 1985, p. 437.

<sup>109</sup> See, N. V. Dură, Origene, *Selected Works. Part Three*, Bucharest, 1982, p. 408, in Romanian Orthodox Church (R.O.C.), XIII (1983), no. 3, p. 73-74.

<sup>110</sup> I. G. Coman, *op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 292.

<sup>111</sup> Apud I. G. Coman, *op. cit.*, p. 349.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 350.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 353.

<sup>114</sup> Apud I. G. Coman, *op. cit.*, p. 353.

relationship between intelligence and God, that intelligence is an intellectual image of God ...”<sup>115</sup>.

About Origen, who belongs „... to the greatest men of mankind”, also being „the most productive writer of the old Church”, it was also said that „he bore in his chest ... the perpetual quest of the Greek philosopher ...”<sup>116</sup> In this sense, the very quest separates faith from knowledge, which the theologian Origen expressly mentioned in his works<sup>117</sup>, where „he uses the (platonic, stoic ...) philosophical conceptions broadly and frequently...”<sup>118</sup>, actually to give a philosophical grounding to faith.

Both in his *Comment to the Genesis* (‘Υπόμνημα εἰς τὴν Γένεσιν) – written around the years 229-234, from which „only the Greek fragments”<sup>119</sup> were kept, – and in „Περὶ Ἀναστάσεως” (*About Resurrection*) – written between 222 and 229, and from which „fragments in Greek and Latin were kept”<sup>120</sup> – Origen brought meritorious contributions to the definition of Christian Anthropology<sup>121</sup>.

His being the disciple of the platonic philosopher Ammonius Saccas – together with the one who was to become the leader of neoplatonics, that is Plotin, – resulted into the fact that, in the person of Origen, „we have the first church writer who accepted the influence of Neoplatonism ...”<sup>122</sup>.

Although his works were also imbued with conceptions and opinions belonging to the Stoics and Gnostics, nonetheless, Origen also referred to „the spiritual man”, „who goes beyond the subsequent stages of faith, knowledge, wisdom or being, of seeing and of theology (*Comment to The Gospel after John*, XIV, 8)”<sup>123</sup>.

According to Origen, „humans are sinful and they need to be purified after their death (*Comment on the Book of Prophet Jerome*)”, but – in his opinion – „there would be a definite reestablishment of all men in the primary state through a new coming (a return) of Christ in the world, through the spiritual

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<sup>115</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>116</sup> St. G. Papadopoulos, *op. cit.*, p. 373.

<sup>117</sup> See, *Περὶ ἀρχῶν* (*Despre principii*), (*About principles*), §3 and *Comentariu la Evanghelia după Ioan* (*Comment to the Gospel after John*), 19, 3-4.

<sup>118</sup> St. G. Papadopoulos, *op. cit.*, p. 376.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 391.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>121</sup> See, J. Dupuis, “*L’esprit de l’homme*”. *Étude sur l’anthropologie religieuse d’Origène*, Bruges, 1967, p. 3 et sq.

<sup>122</sup> St. G. Papadopoulos, *op. cit.*, p. 376.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 381.

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(πνευματική) resurrection of bodies and through the undisturbed communion between God and His creation”<sup>124</sup>.

In his works, Origen also discussed certain subsequent stages of purification for sinful men – according to their level of sinfulness – that will come after this world<sup>125</sup>. Anyhow, such a conception, „assumes the existence of metempsychosis, but Origen explains – the patrologist Stylianos Papadopoulos specified – that the souls of humans do not enter into the bodies of animals”<sup>126</sup>.

In his work „Περὶ ἀρχῶν” (*About principles*) (c. III, 1, 23), Origen indeed tackled, albeit „not very clearly”, „the pre-existence of souls”. Anyhow, these conceptions about metempsychosis and the preexistence of souls – that came from philosophical and religious systems very distant from the Christian doctrine „... caused great reactions, also with regard to his Christology (the pre-existence of the soul of Christ etc.)”<sup>127</sup>, since the age of Origen. In fact these very conceptions, also received by his disciples from his Schools of Arabia and Palestine, where „philology, geometry, astronomy, ethics, philosophy and theology”<sup>128</sup> were studied, also led to the condemnation of Origen by the ecumenical Synod V (Constantinople, 553), „also based on the order of Justinian of the year 543, urged by the theological and church factors”<sup>129</sup>.

These conceptions about metempsychosis and the pre-existence of souls were also peculiar to the philosophical thinking propagated by the Buddhist Schools. For example, with regard to the human body, in *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* – the product of some old traditions of the philosophical Buddhist School from the Monasteries of Tibet – it is mentioned that the former is considered „a location of Divinity”, and that through the „recognition of the signs of death” the soul will reach „a natural release”<sup>130</sup>. Also, according to the teachings of this School, physical death can be delayed through „the uttering of prayers”<sup>131</sup>. However, the ones who have „a high capacity” follow „the doctrine”; the ones with „average capacities meditate on Divinity ...”, depending on the stage of their perfection ...” and, at last, „the ones who have a minor

<sup>124</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 382.

<sup>125</sup> Comment to the Book of prophet Jeremia, VII, 2.

<sup>126</sup> St. G. Papadopoulos, *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 382.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 382-383.

<sup>128</sup> St. Gregory Thaumaturgus, *Cuvânt de mulțumire (Word of Thanking)* (presented in the year 245 on the occasion of the ending of his studies at the School of Origene from Arabia), apud St. G. Papadopoulos, *op. cit.*, p. 384.

<sup>129</sup> St. G. Papadopoulos, *op. cit.*, p. 385.

<sup>130</sup> Padmasambhava, *Il libro tibetano dei morti*, ed. G. Coleman and Th. Jinpa, Oscar Mondadori Publ. House, Milano, 2007, p. 139-141.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 150.

capacity must persevere in accumulating merits (*nell'accumulazione di merito*)<sup>132</sup>.

Another bishop-philosopher – from *illo tempore* (from those times) – who was familiar with Greek philosophical culture, but who related his theological thinking and contribution to the text of the Holy Scripture and to the testimonies provided by the Holy Tradition, of apostolic and post-apostolic origin, was Saint Dionysius, the bishop of Alexandria.

About Saint Dionysius of Alexandria (ab. 195-265), a philosopher, theologian, jurist and canonist – we know that „... he was married” and had had „children of flesh”<sup>133</sup>. In fact, St. Dionysius – who was bishop of Alexandria between 248-264/265 – is „... the first Father and Teacher of the Church who is known to have had children (St. Gregory of Nyssa was married, but we do not know if he had children)”<sup>134</sup>.

It is also known that Dionysius of Alexandria had had „an impressive teaching activity”<sup>135</sup> and that during his Courses at the Cathetical School of Alexandria „he also tackled the origin of man and of the world”<sup>136</sup>. That Dionysius had a solid philosophical knowledge, that he had appealed to anytime he referred to Cosmology and to Anthropology, is also proven by his work about nature<sup>137</sup>, in which the teacher from Alexandria evaluated the conceptions of Democrit and of Epicure on the origin and the creation of the world<sup>138</sup>. In order to justify the principle that world and man are the work of a Creator, that is of God, St. Dionysius of Alexandria drew his inspiration not only from the philosophical system of Democrit and Epicure, „from which he sometimes quoted some fragments”, but also from „... other systems such as Platonism, Stoicism etc. ...”<sup>139</sup>.

However, St. Dionysius of Alexandria had used „terms with a philosophical content” not only in his work *About nature*, but also „in his epistolary treaties, anyhow without transforming „theology into a philosophical discussion and into scholasticism”<sup>140</sup>. In this sense, this is what made Saint Dionysius – whose „trust into the Tradition of the Church does not exclude the critical study, no matter how harsh that would be”<sup>141</sup>, – „teacher” of „the ecumenical Church” (St. Athanasius the Great, *About the two Dionysius*, 6, 1).

<sup>132</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 151.

<sup>133</sup> St. G. Papadopoulos, *op. cit.*, p. 426-427.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 427.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>136</sup> I. G. Coman, *op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 413.

<sup>137</sup> Cf. Eusebius of Caesarea, *Pregătirea evanghelică* (The Evangelical preparation), XIV, 23-27.

<sup>138</sup> See the text from Migne, P. G. X, 1249C-1252A.

<sup>139</sup> I. G. Coman, *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 417.

<sup>140</sup> St. G. Papadopoulos, *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 422.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 426.

Finally, in one of his books against Sabeliu, St. Dionysius of Alexandria categorically excludes both the coexistence of matter with God, and the existence of matter of itself<sup>142</sup>.

About Methodius, Bishop of Olympus (311/312), it was said that „he rather activated as a teacher than as a bishop, at the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> and at the beginning of the 4<sup>th</sup> century”, because „... he enjoyed a rich philosophical-ethical education ...”<sup>143</sup>. This philosophical-ethical education anyhow determined him not only to combine „... the biblical cosmology and anthropology with the metaphysics of Plato and with the popular-philosophical morals, especially with the Stoic one, but to erroneously consider that „the souls attach themselves to Logos in the first place (a theme belonging to Origen)”, and that Christ is „a man full of entire divinity, without any mixing and a God residing in man ...”<sup>144</sup>.

In his work, “Περὶ βίου και πράξεως λογικης” (*On rational living and working*) – that was kept in the Slavic language<sup>145</sup> – Methodius from Olympus approached the theme of inequality between men and in “Περὶ τῶν γενητῶν”<sup>146</sup> (*On created things*) he also tackled the Creation of man, contributing thus to the foundation and promotion of Christian Anthropology.

Methodius from Olympus considered man to be the most valuable Creation of God. That is why – he mentions – Christ too, the Son of God, took the body of man on his coming on earth. Regarding human soul, Methodius from Olympus stated that it was made „in God’s image and likeness”, hence his conclusion that the souls of humans are the work „of unborn, unearthly beauty, without beginning and ending, unchanged, unaging, lacking nothing: beauty is the light which rests in itself, in those that are not to utter or to appropriate, and which... built the soul in the „image” of its own image. That is why – Methodius from Olympus concluded – the soul is rational and immortal. Created „in the image” of the Born One, the soul has a „beauty that is hard to bear” (the Banquet, 6, 2)<sup>147</sup>.

As it could be noticed, „under the influence of the Bible and of Plato”, Methodius made „out of the divine beauty the genesis of human beauty and, hereby, he built an esthetical vision of the world”<sup>148</sup>.

<sup>142</sup> See the text in Migne, P. G. X, 1269 BCD-1272A.

<sup>143</sup> St. G. Papadopoulos, *op. cit.*, vol. II/1, transl. A. Marinescu, Bucharest, 2009, p. 63-64.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 64.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 68.

<sup>146</sup> Published in Migne, P.G., XVIII, 332-344.

<sup>147</sup> Apud I. G. Coman, *op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 455.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibidem*.

In his work, *Against Porfirio*<sup>149</sup>, where he „combated for the first time the 15 polemical books of the Neo-Platonist philosopher ..., written around 270 A.D.”<sup>150</sup>, Methodius from Olympus wrote that, through the Embodiment of Christ, God came down to men and marked the victory over material spirits”. That is why, for Methodius, the Cross, the symbol of the defeat over death, is a „symbol of liberty”.

According to Methodius, „Creation needs the beauty of God which, just like the good itself, attracts everything in life through His Logos”<sup>151</sup> and “the whole creation needs the beauty of God, because through His Logos He urges everything to life from any essence and nature. If He wants the good, given that He is the good, He will remain in Himself. If he wants it to be beautiful, He being the only beautiful one, he will look at Himself, disregarding the ones admired by men, God is very beautiful through His truths...” (Against Profirio, 3, B, 506).

For Methodius from Olympus, the Creator is above all beautiful not so much through his creation, as through His truths. In this sense, as it is known, among others, the great Christian writer and philosopher, Dostoyevsky, – who came to know and became acquainted also with the spirit of philocalic thinking, of a patristic nature, – stated that the world will be redeemed through „beauty”. Of course, he referred to this kind of „beauty of God”, that is of „Truth, that makes you free” (John 8, 32), and not to the beauty of this world, of yesterday, of today or of tomorrow. In fact, the Psalmist tells us that „the Word of God” is „the Truth” (Ps. 33, 4), and Christ our Savior testifies to us that he is „the Path, the Truth and the Life” (John 14, 6).

Beyond doubt, „...the most original and profound chapter of the anthropology of Methodius is that of the freedom of decision and will or that of the free will ...”<sup>152</sup> Indeed, in line with the statement of Methodius from Olympus, man decided in a free manner on the choice of good or evil ever since he was in Heaven (*About resurrection*, 38, 1-5, B)<sup>153</sup>. The same Methodius refers to the „limits of justice according to freedom” – that man enjoys by birth or through the act of his creation itself – but, as our regretted Professor, the patrologist Ioan G. Coman noticed, he „does not specify the sense or the dimensions of these limits”<sup>154</sup>.

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<sup>149</sup> Only a few fragments were kept in Codex Monacensis 498 from the X-th century. His work, „*Comentar la Geneză*” („*Comment to the Genesis*”), was lost, just like other works (About the soul and about Pythonisă).

<sup>150</sup> I. G. Coman, *op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 450.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 456.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibidem*.

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For Methodius, liberty is also a sine qua non condition for progress, because its value lies especially in its function to urge or to lead „towards better” (εἰς τὸ Κρεῖττον) (*About the free will* 17, 1-6 B). In this regard, for the orthodox theology, of apostolic and patristic origin, „liberty belongs to the elements of the „image” of God in man. Apart from God and angels – its followers specify – only man has the freedom to choose and to decide”<sup>155</sup>.

As it could be noticed, the theologians of the pre-Nicene Church – who understood and defined Theology as a „word”, or as a „science” „about God” and His „Creation”<sup>156</sup>, – have had a solid philosophical education<sup>157</sup> (Aristides, Justin, Athenagoras, Tatian, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Methodius from Olympus etc.), for some of them doubled by a theological education, of biblical substance and reference (Justin, Dionysius of Alexandria, Peter of Alexandria etc.).

Founders of the first Christian schools – where the philosophical doctrine about the Creation and about Man was reconciled with or opposed to the text of the Bible – these theologians, of philosophical background, also laid the bases of Christian Anthropology, that found the expression of its definition and accomplishment in the ideate content of the former, in „the Teaching of faith” of the Ecumenical Church elaborated in the first millennium.

Romanian philosophers and scientists – with an inter- and pluridisciplinary education – noticed and emphasized the fact that as Religions and, generally, Theology is concerned, they still operate „... with an image belonging to the past on the relation between religion, on the one hand, and philosophy and science, on the other hand”<sup>158</sup>. In this sense, in the pages of this study one could also notice that such an approach and settlement of this relation is not only outdated, but with no historical ground because, ever since the first centuries, the theologians of the Church also made use of the Greek-roman culture, of a philosophical origin, to enter a dialogue with it and, thus, to respond to the accusations brought by their leaders.

In fact, this was the main motivation for which the first Christian theologians – who came from the pagan, Greek-roman world, – appealed to the

<sup>155</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 456.

<sup>156</sup> See also the definition of Atenagora in his work „Προσβειά”, 10, 13 (cf. G. Ruhbach, *Altkirchliche Apologeten*, Gütersloh, 1966, p. 35-62).

<sup>157</sup> See, D. Powell, *Athenagoras and the philosophers*, in *Church Quarterly Review*, no. 168 (1967), p. 282-289.

<sup>158</sup> A. Marga, *Universitatea și noua perspectivă a religiilor (The University and the new perspective of religions)*, in the vol. *Pași spre integrare. Religie și drepturile omului în România (Steps towards integration. Religion and human rights in Romania)*, coord. by S. Frunză, Limes Publ. House, Cluj-Napoca, 2004, p. 11.

knowledge provided by its philosophers and men of letters, to which they gave a different expression, a different ethos, a different ideate load and a different message, of a Christian-humanistic nature, values that were also taken over and asserted by the Christian patristic and afterwards reasserted and strengthened by the confessional Theologies<sup>159</sup>, animated by a strong ecumenical spirit<sup>160</sup>, up to our days.

Since “*exempla trahunt*”, we hope that the example of the first Christian theologians, too, will attract and determine both the philosophers and the theologians to appeal to the knowledge that both fields of the human culture can provide, *id est*, Philosophy and Theology, in order to bring thus a holistic meritorious contribution also to the ontological knowledge of the most wonderful creation, Man and, ipso facto, of Anthropology.

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<sup>159</sup> See, N. V. Dură, *Teologia ortodoxă și teologiile confesionale în ecumenismul contemporan (Orthodox Theology and confessional theologies in contemporary ecumenism)*, in *Ortodoxia (The Orthodoxy)*, XXXVIII (1986), no. 3, p. 61-88.

<sup>160</sup> Idem, *Receptarea textelor rezultate din dialogurile teologice ecumeniste. Considerații ecleziologice-canonice (The receipt of the texts resulting from the ecumenical theological dialogues. Ecclesiological-canonical considerations)*, in *Mitropolia Banatului (The Metropolitan Church of Banat)*, XXXIV (1984), no. 11-12, p. 692-706; Idem, *Considerații canonic-ecleziologice privind Documentul de la Lima (B.E.M.) (Canonical-ecclesiological considerations regarding the Document of Lima (B.E.M.))*, in *Ortodoxia (The Orthodoxy)*, XXXVIII (1986), no. 2, p. 119-147; Idem, *Documentul de la Lima (B.E.M.) și evaluarea sa teologică (The document of Lima (B.E.M.) and its theological evaluation)*, in *Mitropolia Moldovei și Sucevei (The Metropolitan Church of Moldova and Suceava)*, LXII (1986), no. 1-2, p. 46-58.

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