

Ethics, Spirituality and Ecumenism

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Lumina Învierii. Spiritualitatea Sfintelor Paști (*The Light of the Resurrection. Spirituality of Holy Easter*, 2019)

Etica Protestantă. Scurtă istorie. Secolele XVI-XIX (*The Protestant Ethics. A Brief History. 16th – 19th Centuries*, 2019)

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Introduction

We present today to the general public and those interested the volume *Ethics, Spirituality and Ecumenism* which includes the most important scientific articles held at various international congresses and conferences, on Christian Ethics, Spirituality and Ecumenism and subsequently published in journals and collective volumes. The texts are in the original English or German language because we have tried to gather together the results of personal theological research so far and make them accessible in their initial form with exact references to the original publications. Naturally the texts were slightly revised and modified where we considered it necessary, and the footnotes and bibliography were adapted to a common standard.

The name of volume, *Ethics, Spirituality and Ecumenism*, signifies a *symbiosis* between personal theological concerns dedicated to Ecumenism and its implications at the academic, institutional and social levels, specific to the first period of personal theological research, on the one hand, and the special and persevering interest in Orthodox Morality, Christian Ethics and Eastern Spirituality, from the second period of scientific concerns and research, on the other hand. This does not mean that in the beginning I had ecumenical concerns, and later they turned into moral and spiritual issues. Rather, the special and constant interest in morality, ethics and spirituality,

which will most likely follow me throughout my life, was also facilitated by ecumenical research and meetings. These have helped me to better understand the crucial importance of morality and spirituality for the Christian life and to support genuine ecumenical efforts in the future. It is difficult to say where the ecumenical interest ends and where the moral concern begins.

Even the terms themselves have a special inner connection: true ecumenism cannot be done without the foundations of Christian moral principles, on a personal, familial and social level, and authentic Christian ethics will always understand and promote the efforts and sacrifices of ecumenism that strongly supports the approaching, communion and unity of Christians, as well as the respect and appreciation of other religions.

The presented texts generally aim the analysing of current theological themes through the thinking of Church Fathers, authentic preservers of Christian moral norms and Eastern spirituality, constantly supported by the reflections of famous modern theologians and important philosophers. The understanding and life of the Fathers who wrote mainly moral and spiritual works are essential and determinant for Christian morality, for the acquiring and work of virtues and for man's unceasing struggle against passions and sins. Patristic thinking represents the most authentic and purest form of preserving and transmitting the words of our Saviour Jesus Christ and the Holy Apostles in the Church.

The eternal truths of the Church regarding ethics, spirituality and ecumenism have a greater significance in the new context of the COVID-19 pandemic, which we are beginning to go through, generated by the mass infection of

the global population with the new coronavirus SARS-Cov2. It has already brought great and important changes in the structuring and development of human life, as well as in the understanding and wiser “reassessment” of God’s creation.

The topics discussed in this volume are analysed through Orthodox morality and spirituality, but also taking into account the norms of Protestant and Catholic Christian Ethics. They address current issues facing Eastern and Western European society and how they have been clarified theologically, culturally or socially.

I would like to mentioned here that the initial concerns in this systematic analysis were embodied in my first book *Libertatea omului la Karl Barth, Emil Brunner și Rudolf Bultmann. O evaluare ortodoxă (The Human Freedom in Karl Barth, Emil Bruner and Rudolf Bultmann. An Orthodox Evaluation)*, which “offers an interesting and important sample of this issue” that “investigates in a completely unique way the concept of freedom” and “creates ecumenical bridges, in the sense of knowledge, showing ecumenical respect, even if the differences appear here and there in broad daylight”¹. Professor Hauser stated that the book is “a gemstone in the new cultural, philosophical and theological construction we hope for”². These concerns were gradually completed in the first phase in the volume *Etica Protestantă. Scurtă istorie. Secolele XVI-XIX (The Protestant Ethics. A Brief History. 16th – 19th Centuries, 2019)*. The second part of the writing, *The*

¹ Prof. Dr. Martin Hauser, “Preface” in Mihai Iordache, *Libertatea omului la Karl Barth, Emil Brunner și Rudolf Bultmann. O evaluare ortodoxă*, Romanian Academy Press, Bucharest, 2017, p. 11.

² Martin Hauser, “Preface”, p. 12.

Protestant Ethics. A Brief History. 20th Century, will soon appear.

The texts addressed in this volume have as a specific feature a bipolarity of theological, cultural and social contexts in the West and in the East. Contrary to current trends of globalized and hypertechnological society, ethical, spiritual and ecumenical efforts do not aim a unification or homogenization of these contexts, but the discovery of specific values and gradually assuming them in their own culture and life. The contribution of this book can be extrapolated to the social paradigms in which we live, trying to dismantle the huntingtonian barriers and find the seed of the common language between East and West, in the spirit of preserving and understanding cultural diversity as a way to communicate and share Christian values.

In approaching the topics, I have always strove to maintain an honest and pure Orthodox critique, based on Holy Scripture, patristic thinking and philocalic experience. I will always strive that Orthodoxy based on moral and spiritual principles to be open to others and generous in their understanding, and not polemical, closed or partisan. The encounter with Western Catholic and Protestant theology must be one without aggression, fear, prejudices and ready-made ideas (clichés), seeking in the thinking and spirituality of Fathers the liberating solutions to theological problems, without tendencies to criticize or judge the others.

Consequently, in the text I will often make references to St John Chrysostom, St Basil the Great, St Maximus the Confessor, St Gregory of Nazianzus, St Gregory of Nyssa,

St Cyril of Alexandria, St Cyril of Jerusalem, St Cyprian of Carthage, Clement of Alexandria, etc.

Among the modern theologians mentioned, Father Dumitru Staniloae will stand out the most. Considered as the “spiritual patriarch of Romanian theology and a theologian of ecumenical Orthodoxy” († Daniel, Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church), he was a “pan-Orthodox theologian”, as Jürgen Moltmann has said, who fulfilled to understand and live in depth the patristic thinking and to form a “neopatristic synthesis” (Georges Florovsky), based on a “theology of experience” (Costa de Bauregard). In this sense, Father Staniloae establishes a presence and actuality of the Church Fathers and forms a personal vision on ecumenism, ethics and spirituality, being the author of the famous volume *Asceticism and Mysticism of the Orthodox Church*, translated into English as *Orthodox Spirituality*³. He also translated the entire twelve volumes of the Romanian *Philokalia*, being far more than a simply translation from the Greek, because he included theological introductions to each author and volume and numerous footnotes to the text, which take full account of recent critical research of Western (Catholic and Protestant) and Orthodox scholars as well. That is why his theology and thinking were rightly comparable to that of Karl Barth in Protestantism and Karl Rahner in Catholicism (Kalistos Ware), “himself becoming in a way a Church Father in the twentieth century” (Patriarch Daniel).

In the same time, we often refer to famous Orthodox theologians such as Vladimir Lossky, Paul Evdokimov,

³ Dumitru Staniloae, *Orthodox Spirituality*, St Tikhon’s Seminary Press, South Canaan, Pennsylvania, 2003.

Nicolai Berdiaev, John Meyendorff, Kalistos Ware, John Zizioulas, Christos Yannaras, important Catholic Fathers and theologians as Thomas Aquinas, Erasmus of Rotherdam, Cardinal Christof Schönborn, Servais Pinckaers, famous Protestant theologians and well-known scientists such as Carl Gustav Jung, Walter Eucken, Wilhelm Röpke, Mircea Eliade, etc. As it can be seen, three articles are directly dedicated to Martin Luther, Jean Calvin, Ulrich Zwingli, Karl Barth and Emil Brunner, in an ethical, spiritual and ecumenical approach at the same time.

The texts of this volume address ecumenical issues such as: Church, common values, reception of the other, conversion, catholicity and wholeness of the Church, theological education, Protestant Reform, modern Protestant theologians, other religions, nationalism etc., along with ethical and spiritual topics as: migration, people, state, economy, family, human freedom, faith, obedience, law, consciousness, virtues, sins and passions, will and free will, spiritual progress and perfection, etc.

Moral Considerations about Nationalism, Migration and Church⁴

The issue of nationalism and of its relationship with the Church is a very old one. Since the Descent of the Holy Spirit, the Church, the Mysterious Body of Christ, was founded in the midst of a people or nation, but at the same time it addressed other peoples, having from the beginning a universal or transnational character. Subsequently, local churches were established in the great cities and provinces, and gradually every Christian people identified themselves with their own Church, because »in Eucharistic ecclesiology the word *ecclesia* means the people of God, called together no longer in the Temple of the Old Covenant, a particular place, but in the *Body of Christ*. The fullness of the Body is found in the Eucharist, which means that every proper local Eucharistic assembly, i.e., with the bishop at its head, possesses all the fullness of the Church of God in Christ«⁵.

⁴ This paper was presented at the 20th Academic Consultation of the *Societas Oecumenica Nations and Churches: Ecumenical Responses to Nationalism and Migration*, University of Heidelberg, Ludwigshafen am Rhein, Germany, 23-28 August 2018.

It will be published in Jelle Creemers, Ulrike Link-Wieczorek (Eds.), *On Nations and the Churches: Ecumenical Responses to Nationalism and Migration*, Beihefte zur Ökumenischen Rundschau, 129, Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, Leipzig, 2020.

⁵ Paul Evdokimov, *Orthodoxy* (New York: New City Press, 2011), p. 138.

Thus, the connection between the local and the universal, between the people and the whole world, between the national and transnational character, is fulfilled in the Church of Christ, through its central point, the Eucharist, which links not only the local to the universal, but also the earthly to the celestial.

The present study aims to identify some moral considerations regarding nationalism and migration, as well as their connections to the Church.

The Peoples Are Created by God. Pure and Natural Nationalism

In the acceptance of this article, »people« means all the members of a nation, who speak the same mother tongue and who live largely between the borders of a country, but also outside the borders. A people (folk) can include different denominations, religions and cultures. In this text, »people« is somewhat synonymous with »nation« although not entirely, in all nuances and meanings. »Nation« is more related to the country and the state, and »people« is closer to the language and the faith of folk. In no context, the term »people« does not refer to each individual.

Father Dumitru Staniloae states that the peoples are created by God, and the states are created by men. So, countries, states, empires and even the EU are human constructs. St. Paul says: »For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom every family (people) in heaven and on earth derives its name« (*Ephesians* 3, 14-15).

Peoples do not represent the cause of their own existence; the respective cause has to be looked elsewhere

for, in God, Who created them. St. Maximus the Confessor argues that »nothing of what is created has the final end in itself since it is not its own cause either, for otherwise it would be uncreated and without beginning and immovable, having nothing to move towards«⁶.

Just as each person has a face, a name and an individual purpose, by the will of God, so every people has a face, name, language, faith and vocation in history, before God and other peoples.

The peoples were created by God according to the person's *pattern*, respecting its structure and its characteristics. Like human beings, the peoples are born, have an early »childhood«, they grow up, they live according to the decisions and actions they undertake and finally they disappear in history. Moreover, one can speak of a certain type of general psychological and social behaviour of a people, as in the case of human person. So we can say that, for example, Germans are more organized and more pondered, and Romanians are more contemplative and more religious⁷.

Following the same structure of thought, we can see that, after the family, the matter that forms the child and leaves deep fingerprints in his soul and in his psyche is the people in the midst of which he grows, through the powerful influences of the various social environments in

⁶ Dumitru Staniloae, *The Experience of God. Orthodox Dogmatic Theology 2. The World: Creation and Deification* (Brookline, Massachusetts: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2005), p. 8–9.

⁷ Cristian-Ion Popa, »Ordnungspolitik: The German Solution«, in Dan Dungaci, Ruxandra Iordache (ed.) *The Perfect Storm of the European Crisis* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2017), p. 120-133.

which he develops: language, kindergarten, school, university, church, workplace, social life, leisure, media, digital devices etc. David Eagleman notes that »as an example, the language that you're exposed to in infancy (say, English versus Japanese) refines your ability to hear the particular sounds of your language, and worsens your capacity to hear the sounds of other languages... We are sculpted by the world we happen to drop into«⁸. Therefore we can say that, partially, a person is »formed« also by the people he belongs to.

In the opposite direction, the psychophysical and spiritual features, the way of being and the attitudes of each individual, make up the psychological and spiritual character of the people he belongs to. The nation, in its turn, is modelled by individuals' characters, their attitudes, their thoughts and their aspirations. A people develops harmoniously if each person makes an effort to grow nicely and harmoniously.

Following the pattern of the communion of the Persons of the Holy Trinity, men and peoples can achieve their purpose *only* »in communion« with others. The unremitting beauty of every people is expressed through the depth of its communion with God. Like men, the peoples are social beings who are meant to live alongside other peoples, with whom they share the natural frame of the place where they are situated, and with which they naturally should have good neighbour relationships, good cooperation, understanding and help. Peoples are not built to live individually without coming into contact with other

⁸ David Eagleman, *The Brain: The Story of You* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2015), p. 9.

nations, at least with neighbours, especially today, when communication and transport opportunities have reached an impressive technological level, drastically reducing time and distance. Whether they want it or not, the peoples get in touch with each other quite often. However, history has shown us that when their interests have not respected moral principles or when there were hidden interests, the ties between peoples have degenerated into disputes, conflicts, struggles, battles and even wars.

At other times, the cooperation among peoples was only official, diplomatic, or apparent, but in turn, each state was seriously armed, preparing for a possible conflict. This is how the so-called »cold wars« appeared.

As examples, on one hand, we could mention here the good relationship between the different ethnicities and religions (Romanians, Turks, Jews, Tatars etc.) in today's Dobrudja (Scythia Minor of the past) in Romania, a region situated between the Danube and the Black Sea. On the other hand, we may notice the permanent, religious and social conflicts, present even today, between different religions and ethnicities on the territory of the former Yugoslav Federative Republic.

Every Christian people expresses Christianity in a different form, through its faith, culture, language, folklore and traditions. It conceives the idea of Christianity and embodies it in a specific and unique form, in comparison with the neighbouring peoples and the nations it can relate to its language, culture or faith with.

We can talk about remarkable differences even when it comes to the same confession and different nations. For example, the ethos of the Orthodoxy of the Romanian

people is different from the ethos of the Orthodoxy of the Greek people. Similarly, Lutheranism of the German people differs from the Swedish people's Lutheranism. In the case of different Christian confessions, things change even more regarding their forms and manifestations, preserving a last *common foundation* of the Christian faith, such as, for example, the case of doctrinal and liturgical *differences* between the Romanian Orthodoxy and the German Lutheranism. This is one of the »ineffable beauties« of God's creation, the fact that every nation has its specific and unique features in history, which testify to the indelible image of God inherent in every folk's being.

Every nation bears responsibility for its actions and decisions before its sons and daughters, history, and God. That is why the Saviour Christ says that, at the Last Judgement, the *peoples* will also come and they will be judged individually, according to the purpose every nation has had in history. »When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left« (*Matthew 25, 31-33*).

Moreover, each person will be judged not only *for* himself, but also *for* the people he belongs to, because our deeds have a double meaning: a. *for* us and our family; b. they *also* have a reverberation *on* our people. That's why, therefore, at the Last Judgement, »every human person will know the consequences that his deeds will yield after his death, and he will be judged for these consequences; also, every person will know the antecedents of his good and evil deeds in the behaviour of his predecessors and will rightly