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Meditation and Hesychasm - a Transdisciplinary Approach

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Abstract: Throughout the historical ages, man has sought to approach the Divinity in various ways: through fasting, prayer, meditation, etc. The states of asceticism reached by the Holy Fathers have remained a testimony and persist over the centuries. Not only in Christianity have such states been obtained, but in almost all religious traditions.
Nowadays, man has not given up his relationship with God and certain practices are still perpetuated today, especially in the Holy Mount Athos. In this paper we will mainly address the hesychasm, but we will also draw a number of parallels with other religious doctrines in order to make a theoretical analysis of asceticism.

Keywords: *medidation; hesychasm; Divinity.*

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1. Introduction

In the early years of our era, Saul, a Pharisee who was executing Christians, was making a journey from Jerusalem to Damascus (Eliade, 2011, p. 270), when, "a light from heaven, lightning-like, suddenly enveloped him. And he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying unto him: Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me? And he said, Who art Thou, Lord? And the Lord said: I am Jesus whom thou persecute ... Arise, go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do". With this story from the Bible, which took place in the years 32 or 33 of our era, Mircea Eliade begins his chapter on the birth of Christianity. In this passage from the "Acts of the Apostles" the conversion of the atheist into man of God is found, the Enlightenment taking place instantly, with the descent of the Holy Spirit. Saul (Faptele Apostolilor, 9: 3-5) the nonbeliever (if we could call him that) persecuted Christians, and more than that, his actions were considered cruel and violent. This conversion that takes place after the conversation with Jesus Christ is expressed by the term "return" and understood nowdays as spiritual transformation. The understanding of God, of existence in itself, meant for Saul a change of values, of the way of relating to the world, to the other. Conversion here involves overcoming the limits of the self, Saul later dedicating himself to the community and tying his existence to God.

2. Analysis of the scientific literaure

Orthodox literature (Morariu, 2019) contains a wide variety of texts that describe the teachings of the holy apostles, the lives of the saints, but also the passions of Christ. Nowadays, patterns of behavior influence the believer, both morally and socially (Cojanu, 2019). A model for the connection between man and God is provided by Gregory Palamas, the saint who speaks of hesychasm and inner prayer:

"Those who truly pray with the mind must be impatient and have forsaken the connection with the things in the middle, (between them and God), for only in this way can they reach the undisturbed prayer; and those who have not reached this measure (of impatience), but are forced towards it, must go beyond the passion of pleasure (sweet passion), in order to free themselves completely from passion" (Filocalia, 1977, pp. 228-229).

Hesychasm was founded in 649 by Ioan Scărarul, his ideas being found in the work "Scara Raiului" [The Starway to Heaven] (Sfântul Ioan Scărarul, 2008), an important book that:

"It also spread in Greek manuscripts and maybe not long after that it was translated into Romanian and circulated in Romanian manuscripts. I. P.

S. Metropolitan N. Corneanu talks about the great circulation of the "Stairs" between Romanians, since the XV century. But although His Eminence says this in connection with the Slavonic manuscripts, it is not excluded that the monks, hierarchs, scholars, who read the Slavonic and Greek manuscripts, tried to lay down in Romanian words the sentences "Stairs" in the Slavonic text and Greek, which of course they understood and translated in their minds into Romanian words, which they also used in free speech. I. P. S. Metropolitan Corneanu says: "Bishops and monks, voivodes and high dignitaries, merchants and villagers, men and women, all read with the same satiety the" steppes " (steps) ascending to heaven of Lestviţa (Stairs). For example, in the advice he gives to his son, Teodosie, the ruler Neagoe Basarab, from the beginning of the 16th century, to whom the building of the famous Curtea de Argeş monastery is related, he refers several times consecutively to Ioan Scărarul" (Filocalia, 1980, p.16).

Ioan Scărarul brings to the fore the "deceiver", represented by the image of the devil whose role is to remove from prayer those who are needy, by: "praise of the care of strangers to the listeners", "love of brothers", etc., but also brings a sin to the forefront, when he says that:

"The lazy hesychast will speak false things, urging people with double meanings to stop them from being silent. After leaving the cell, he blames the devils and forgot that he himself became a devil" (Filocalia, 1980, p.381).

From this we deduce that laziness is one of the most important problems not only of priests, monahs or monks. Laziness is also called into question by the laity, given that the postponement of prayer is one of the greatest challenges in Christianity. Withdrawal from the world or the hermitage and the constant practice of the prayer of the heart (by simply pronouncing the name of the Savior: Jesus) is called by Evagerie Ponticul (345-399) as an anchorite, but we can say that, before this, the writings of Pythagoras contain a series of ideas of esoteric thinking (Dunca, 2016, p.394). On the other hand, the terms mentioned above are used by St. John of Sinai, but hesychasm also develops as a movement in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries on Mount Athos, contributing to the writings of Gregory Palamas, Mark the Ascetic, Maximus the Confessor or St. Paisius. Monasteries in Moldova are both testimonies of Romanian hesychasm, and the most eloquent testimony is the cell of Daniil Sihastrul, dug into the rock and which is still visited by thousands of believers every year, but there are also testimonies of a community near Dragomirna Monastery, founded by Father Paisie, who will later settle at the Secu Monastery (Robică, R., 2012).

Within the phenomenology of hesychasm, there are two dimensions: on the one hand the dimension of uninterrupted praxis, and on the other hand, the soteriological dimension. Regarding the roots of hesychasm, the Apostle Paul in the Epistle to the Thessalonians says, "Pray unceasingly" (Biblia) . If we analyze the previous quote, then we come to the conclusion that hesychasm is not a new current / way of prayer in Orthodoxy, given that the above quoted statement ("pray unceasingly") is written in the context of salvation of the soul after the physical death of the body. Like any other way of prayer, the prayer of Jesus reaches perfection, but the ascetic practice, on the one hand, involves bodily asceticism, and on the other hand, spiritual asceticism.

Hesychasm has given rise to much controversy and this is still the case today, as it contains associations with certain techniques from Buddhism. However, it is necessary to draw a parallel: first of all it is imperative to highlight the roots of hesychasm in Platonicism and Aristotelianism, the discussions being evident in Byzantine theologians, the "conflict" being fueled by contradictory discussions between Gregory Palamas and Varlaam Calabria:

"Mysticism raises the question of what the Soul is to the Body, what the intertwining of the Soul and the Body is, what the Soul is like, and what the Body is. Many are confused here! Plato tends towards pure Psychism, Aristotle towards Psychism integrated in the body. The Indians, with their magic, exclude a Psychism in Self, considering the Soul beyond our Mental psyche. As Hesychasm, we must define this problem in the purely Christian view. The Philocal Saints speak of an integrated soul and body reality. The Philocalics do not separate the Being from its energies. But the question that arises is what is the Being and what are the body energies towards the Soul" (Ieromonah Ghelasie Gh., 2007, p.122).

3. Hesychasm and philosophy

Analyzing the texts of the trainee and those of Plato, the Neoplatonists were concerned with the connection between body and mind, Plotinus emphasizing that "the spirit emanates vibrations that by their removal and dilution give relative evil-matter" (Ieromonah Gelasie Gh, 2007, p.123). At the same time, Plotinus tries to get out of pantheism, the Platonic system surprising:

- "Being in Self" (Ieromonah Gelasie Gh, 2007, p. 123);
- "One-Good (God)" (Ieromonah Gelasie Gh, 2007, p.181)

- "Intelligences - Archetypal Ideas" (Ieromonah Gelasie Gh, 2007, p.181)

- "The soul" (Ieromonah Gelasie Gh, 2007, p. 181)

For the Platonists, Apeiron is situated beyond the "hypostatic Trinity", that is, the Good, the Intelligence (with the ideas themselves) and the soul (Ieromonah Gelasie Gh, 2007, p.153). The differences regarding the two great philosophers of Antiquity are given by the fact that Plato considers that "the Spirit as the Ideal principle that dresses in matter and gives birth to the Soul-Pneuma, as an Intelligent element mixed with the Vital-Soul. In Aristotle, the Spirit is the Psycho-Intellect, as Intelligence, Affect and Will" (Ieromonah Gelasie Gh, 2007, p.151) If Plato brings to the fore the sensible and the intelligible world, for Artistotel the material and the spiritual world are united. Reanalyzing Plato's theses, neo-Platonists like Plotinus seek to understand the transition from a sensible to an intelligible one, starting from the analysis of the intelligible number as a possibility of being (Vlad, M., 2011, p.16) so that: reality unfolds successively, progressively moving away from a "first principle, source and absolute cause" (Vlad, M., 2011, p.33) according to the first principle, the Neoplatonists place first the intelligible world, the soul, and after the soul, the sensible world (Vlad, M., 2011, p. 33). From this ordering, it is observed that there is a circularity, the reality tending to return to the first principle (Vlad, M., 2011, p. 33).

Unlike Plato, Aristotle considers that the first principle would be separate, the first principle thinking of itself and being dual (Plotin, V, 1, 9.7-8) The position of the intern is analyzed by Plotinus in the context in which "one of each thing is different from the simple being of that thing" (Vlad, M., 2011, p. 47), ie "one and the being of a thing are not distinguished from the thing itself and are not distinguished from each other" (Vlad, M., 2011, p. 47). For Aristotle, being, one and what-is are the same thing, but "man is different from one" (Plotin, VI, 9, 2.19-21). On the other hand, analyzing Aristotle, Plotinus brings to the fore the idea of plurality. Taking the second aporia from Parmenides, that is, that "one accompanies every part of the being", Aristotle points out that there are as many species of one as there are species of being (Aristotel, 1003b 33-34) Given these, Plotinus concludes that, given the first Platonic hypothesis (that of an absolute one), "the plurality of being no longer takes place" (Vlad, M., 2011, p. 47).

Returning to the idea of hesychasm, a term that must be discussed when we talk about Gregory Palamas, also known as palamism, the anthropological and philosophical implications are obvious. Nowdays, hesychasm retains its essence, signifying the continuous repetition of Jesus'

prayer, which eventually leads to a state of peace and inner peace. Gregory Palamas argued during the period in which he lived the hesychasm, but encountered difficulties, and for this reason did not participate in the Synods of 1341, 1345, 1347 and 1351. Finally the Synod ruled "in favor of hesychasts" (https://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grigore_Palamas, accessed at 11.10.2020) and" in 1345 Grigore Palamas was anathematized" (https://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grigore_Palamas, accessed at 11.10.2020.)."The synod of 1347 lifted the anathema, and that of 1351 again approved the hesychastic doctrine". "The Synod of 1451 (the last hesychastic synod) proclaimed Hesychasm as the official doctrine of the Orthodox Church" (https://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grigore_Palamas, accessed at 11.10.2020). Gregory Palamus embodied hesychasm in writings such as: "The Virgin Mary and Peter the Athonite - prototypes of the hesychastic life and other spiritual writings" (Palama, ., 2005, pp. 289-322) or "Word about the entry into the Holy of Holies and about the life here in form of Deity of Our Blessed Mistress of God the Mother of God and Pure Mary" (Palama, G., 2005, pp. 173-216).

Nowadays, hesychasm is brought back to the forefront, being rediscovered: "knowledge of hesychasm requires initiation, followed by persistent practice" (Andru, V., 2016, p. 8) or, as highlighted in the following quote:

"Hesychasm is, in short, a mystical ritual of union with the uncreated energies of the Divinity. The ultimate bliss that hesychasm brings with it is called the state of pure fusion with divine power and not with its Being" (Gavriluţă, N., 1998, p. 93).

For believers today, uninitiated in the mysteries of prayer, the following questions are fundamental: what does hesychasm actually mean? Is it accessible to anyone? To these questions, we can say that, through the prayer of the heart, the human being is transformed, reaching from the barbarian to the man of God, to the Enlightenment. In today's literature (Andru, V., 2017, Andru, V., 2016) man is increasingly seeking liberation from his biological side, constantly trying to give up the animal state that actually defines him (Vlad, L., 2019).

4. Conclusion

It is stated that in order to begin the prayer of the heart which opens the way to hesychasm, man must have a master to guide him; moreover, hesychasm can be a way of life for each of us, as the practice of heart prayer

removes worldly thoughts. Fear and the like are removed if the prayer of the heart is practiced daily.

In the context of hesychasm and the incessant practice of heart prayer in the mind, it can be emphasized that thoughts determine language, and language action. If thoughts are elevated to Divinity, then language and actions will be consistent with thoughts, which contain vibrations that are emitted in the universe, and often, great importance is given to both thoughts and language. In Genesis we find the following: "And God said, Let there be light. And it was light" (http://www.bibliaortodoxa.ro/vechiul-testament/25/Facerea, accessed at 13.10. 2020).

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