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From Slavery to the Freedom of the Will – An Exegesis to the Prodigal Son’s Parable from the Perspective of Moral Theology

Vasile Vlad

Vasile Vlad

“Hilarion V. Felea” Faculty of Orthodox Theology, Arad, Romania

E-mail: prvasile_v@yahoo.com

Abstract

The present study aims, in the form of a exegesis to the Parable of the Prodigal Son, to highlight a few nuances which the Eastern Fathers propose in understanding the freedom of the human will, of the report between freedom and grace and of the providential and savior work of God with the world. The sin it means the estrangement of the man from the unique spring of the life, from God, the leaving out from the father’s house in a foreign country and the trying of existing autonomously. But in the land of the sin the life is diminishing, the nature becomes weak and poor, and the existence is transformed into survival. From this existential failure the man cannot deliver himself by himself! The merciful and providential love of God accompanies the Prodigal Son also in the exile of the sin. The coming into sense of the beginning of the salvation doesn’t belong exclusively either to the godlike grace or to the human liberty. The grace can support the liberty for entering in the naturalness of the collaboration only because the naturalness of the collaboration it is the grace. So it begins the road towards the Father’s House. And the salvation of the creature it holds on the Eucharistic feast: the fattened Calf sacrificed Himself for the live of the world. The present study also makes some emphases of the way in which God searches, receives and forgives the strayed sheep.

Keywords

Freedom, grace, sin, the Prodigal Son, the liturgical realism

According to the traditional exegesis of the Eastern Church transmitted by hymnographers, the Sunday of the Prodigal Son “is a concentration of the oikonomia of the salvation”¹, accomplished by God and to which we can be partakers through the rule of the Great Lent. The Liturgy of this Sunday analyzes several aspects of the religious-moral life: the *sin* (as existential failure, or falling from God, and, in this way, the renouncing to the true self), the *consequences of the sin* (suggested by the image of the foreign country and by the feeding with carobs), the *repentance* (as coming back into senses), and the *coming back* and the *forgiveness* (as reinstating in the state of son).

I. Sin, an Existential Failure

Sin means the renouncing to the communion and to the intimacy of the Father and with Father’s House, the going out from the nature, the self-wasting and the self-impoverishing, and the taking into slavery by the foreign one. “I have wasted in an evil manner the godlike richness, that you have given to me; I went far from you living uncleanly, merciful Father”²; “By totally going out of my senses, as a broken minded, I stuck myself with the contrivers of the lusts...”³; “The richness of the goods that you gave me, You heavenly Father, I have wasted it in an evil manner, making myself servant to foreign citizens” (...); I have enslaved myself to all evilness, leaning myself as a wicked to the lusts makers, and by going out of my senses by not taking heed...”⁴; “by going away from your commands, I have made myself servant to the deceiver in a wicked way...”⁵

The going out of the Prodigal Son from the father’s house it means renouncing to freedom and the exile in the country and in the slavery of the foreign one. Outside the communion with the Father there cannot be about moral freedom. The moral will cannot find anymore reason and power

¹ Makarios Simonopetritul, *Triodul explicat. Mistologia timpului liturgic*, translation into Romanian by Rev. Ioan I. Ică jr, Editura Deisis, Sibiu, 2000, p. 71.

² *Duminica Fiului Risipitor, Utrenia, Cântarea 1-a*, in “Triod”, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune Ortodoxă, București, 1970, p. 18.

³ *Duminica Fiului Risipitor, Utrenia, Cântarea 3-a*, in “Triod”, p. 18.

⁴ *Duminica Fiului Risipitor, Utrenia, Cântarea 4-a*, in “Triod”, p. 19.

⁵ *Duminica Fiului Risipitor, Utrenia, Cântarea 8-a*, in “Triod”, p. 22.

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source in an impoverished and diminished nature of its natural capacities. The estrangement from himself of the fallen man it is expressed by the Psalm 136 that is nostalgically and in a sad manner song at the service of the Matins: “By the Babylon’s river, there we sat and cried, when we remembered Zion. Sing also to us the songs of the Zion, urged us the ones who enslaved us! How could we sing the song of the Lord in foreign land? If I forget you, Jerusalem, let my right hand be forgiven! Let my tongue cleave to my throat, if I won’t remember you, If I won’t put Jerusalem before, as beginning of my joy! Daughter of the Babylon, you wicked one! Blessed is he who will dash you children against the stone”.

“This is the Psalm of the estrangement. This psalm was song by the Jews during their Babylonian captivity, while they were thinking at the holy city of Jerusalem. This Psalm has become forever the son of the man, when he realizes his getting away from God and, by realizing this, he become human again: as one who cannot be satisfied anymore by anything of this fallen world, who by structure and vocation is a pilgrim of the Absolute.”⁶

The hymnology of the Psalm 136 affirms that the nature and the theological vocation of the human nature as also the imposture of the rule of the foreign one (of the devil upon the man). Whether the man cannot be ever fulfilled with anything from the values of the created world, these ones amplifying the existential hunger the more they are abundantly consumed, the nostalgia after the Father’s House, which urges him after and with any satisfying from the world, it unveils that the intimate nature of the man is *only* in the image of God: “The image of Your glory I am, even if I am bearing the wounds of the sin”. The nostalgia of the man after his own image can constitute the first impulse and the natural source of structuring the moral will. But, being in the slavery of the sin, the man, the man cannot actualize his moral will. His moral will is manifested only as nostalgia after the Absolute, only like nostalgia after value and only as helplessness of transferring itself into actualization: “for to want the good is in me, but to do I don’t find it; for I don’t do the good that I want, but the evil that I don’t want that I do. And if I do what I don’t want, is not me doing this, but the sin which dwells into me. Therefore, in me, the one

⁶ Alexander Schmemmann, *Postul cel Mare*, translation into Romanian by Andreea Stroe and Laurențiu Constantin, “Universul Enciclopedic” Publishing House, Bucharest, 1995, p. 23.

who wants to do the good, I find out the law that the evil is tied on me. That after the inward man I rejoice the law of God; but in my limbs I see another law which fights the law of my mind and makes me servant to the law of the sin, which is in my limbs” (Romans 7, 18-23). The moral will and liberty were “spent in an evil manner” through autonomization from the Father. “The richness of the grace that You have given to me, Savior, by going myself into foreign countries, I the wicked one, I have spent it, by dissolutely living and by scattering it to the demons...”⁷. The enslavement to the evil one it seems to give to the devil the right to constitute himself in a subject of adoration to the people: “sing also here from the songs of the Zion” commands the devil. “Rejoice also into the sin; worship also me, as you were worshipping God”. But how could we sing the song of the Lord in foreign land?⁸. So, the enslavement of the man by the devil generates an existential imposture. Ontologically the man resembles only to God and only of Him, he gets thirsty even when he refuses Him. The sentiment of estrangement felt by the man even in the most delightful pleasure, the repentance and the nostalgia after the One Who is likewise and the desire of coming back to the Father’s house, all of these are defining to the man. These are the structural premises of his moral vocation.

II. Let Nobody Despair Due to the Sins

The Parable of the Prodigal Son is the preceding way of the travel of the Great Fasting⁹. The meaning of the Great Fasting is the travel of the human nature towards Resurrection, towards its placing again in the state of resurrection. The liturgy of the Sunday of the Prodigal Son is a preceding and actualizing of the savior work of the Great Fasting. According to the *Synaxar*, the Liturgy from this Sunday “it brings the despair to an end”, to the ones who know themselves as being fallen into the slavery to the foreign one.

⁷ *Duminica Fiului Risipitor, Luminânda*, in “Triod”, p. 19.

⁸ Petroniu Tănase, *Ușile pocăinței. Meditații duhovnicești la vremea Triodului*, Publishing House of the Metropolitan of Moldova and Bucovina, Iași, 1994, p. 21.

⁹ “Starting with the second Sunday of the preparing period, each of the candidates to enlightenment must identify spiritually himself to the Prodigal Son for personally pass through the stages of the return of the Prodigal Son to the Father during the Great Fasting, which can thus be considered right a ample dramatization of this parable”, Makarios Simonopetril, *Triodul explicat...*, p. 66.

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“There are some people who by recognizing that they have done many evil deeds, that they have lived since their youth in a dissolute manner, that they have spent their life in drunkenness and delights and that they have fallen in this way into the deep of the sins, they reach at despair, which is the child of the pride. The Holy Fathers, behaving towards this kind of people with much love and paternally, and wanting to get them out of despair, they have place now, after the Parables of the Publican and of the Pharisee, the Parable of the Prodigal Son. Through this, they uproot the sin of the despair and lift them up again to doing the virtue; they show, through the Prodigal Son to the people loaded with many sins, the loving of people and most-good mercifulness of God; they show through the parable told by Christ, that there is no sin which to overcome that loving of people will of the Lord.”¹⁰

In other words, the sentiment of estrangement of the man gone far from God and from himself, the nostalgia after the Father’s House, the repentance, they find the wanted echo in the father’s attitude. The despair of the sinner is by no means justified. The Liturgy from the Sunday of the Prodigal Son it is the answer of God to the repentance and the fragile and not daring nostalgia of the Prodigal one. Even before the Fasting (before the time during which the Embodied Son will work to the deliverance of the fallen man), and even before Crucifixion and Resurrection, the Father puts up clothes on the fallen nature.

“The Father receives the one who repents himself; He doesn’t take him bad; but on the opposite he hugs him and embraces him, showing him His godlike and parental mercifulness. He gives him a coat, namely the Holy Baptism, a seal and a ring, namely the Grace of the Most-Holy Ghost. Besides these He gives him also footwear, to not be anymore harmed his walking according to the will of God by snakes and by shrews, but, rather, to be able to crush their heads. Finally, the Father, rejoicing with great joy, He stabs for him the fattened calf, namely his Only One Begotten Son, and he gives him to impart himself with His body and with His blood.”¹¹

¹⁰ *Duminica Fiului Risipitor; Sinaxar*, in “Triod”, p. 21.

¹¹ *Duminica Fiului Risipitor; Sinaxar*, in “Triod”, p. 21.

The Parable of the Prodigal Son and the Liturgy of the Sunday of the Prodigal Son are a superposition of plans. The Parable is the prophetic announcing of the savior work which Christ was to commit it and at the end of uttering the Parable he still hasn't done it yet. The reading of the Parable now, during the Liturgy from before the Great fasting, it belongs to another plan and time – to the one from after Crucifixion and Resurrection. The interpretation from Synaxar, of Nicephorus Kallistos, quoted above, identifies to the prodigal Son each Christian fallen into sins. The framing in the Liturgical Year it has the purpose “to bring despair and fear to an end” to every believer and “to determine him to start working good deeds”. Even before starting the Fasting or the travel towards Resurrection, towards the state of adoption, towards the Father's House, the Liturgy from the Sunday of the Prodigal Son it gives in advance, to the sinner, all the fruits which the Fasting aims to achieve. The Liturgy overflows also the forgiveness of the Father; it renews the coat of the Baptism, actualizes the seal and the ring, namely the gifts of the Anointment, elevates the sinner above the power of the evil one and imparts the believer with the Body and the Blood of the Son. The travel of the Fasting, of which finality is the Father's House, it starts from the Sunday of the Prodigal Son, just from the Father's House. Behold why no despair of the fallen one can be justified in any way. The liturgical act and time they made out of end (Redemption) a beginning, and in the beginning there is present the entire end. In other words the moral will is restored even since the beginning of the spiritual travel of the Great Fasting. The moral liberty is complete because the fattened Calf has made Himself food and power to the human nature. The Sunday of the Prodigal Son, in the virtue of the cultic Liturgy, it is a little Easter – one of the repentance, through which the soul comes back with all its powers towards God, by willingly opening itself to the ascetic toils from the Fasting to come, one of the forgiveness which the Father gives it to the Prodigal one who turns back, even before he has done the smallest gesture for deserving it.

III. The Forgiveness of the Father

The Parable of the Prodigal Son is troubling and overwhelming through each detail of it. It is troubling and surprising also the story of the prodigal one. It is equally surprising the reaction of the Brother. But the

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Father's attitude is overwhelming, as also overwhelming is the sentence, the "condemnation", uttered by the two sons of him. The placing of this evangelical pericope to be read as introduction to the Great Lent it is significant: the certitude of the forgiveness.

The prodigal Son turns back home, but not before he comes back in his senses. By achieving the conscience of getting away from the father's House, and by reaching at the acute feeling that he is estranged, he wants and craves for the communion with the Father. What the coming back into senses is, what the coming back into himself is? The painful conscious awareness that the unique, the fundamental guilt is the loss of the adoption, which is the separation from the Father. The sin of the Prodigal one it wasn't the spending out of the wealth, either the fornication, or the whores; it wasn't the luxurious life, either the parties, or the slatternly sensualism. These ones were only consequences! The only sin of the Prodigal Son was the separation from the Father! Namely the through that you can ask: "give me my share of wealth, my share of life, of being, of existing, of existing!"; the fact of not knowing that the Life of the Father, the Being, the Existence, the Existing, they cannot be broken apart and shared; the fact of believing that you can live broken from the community with the Father; the fact of not knowing that living in breakage with the Father it is a not-savior mode, a miserable and against-nature mode... The sin stays in not feeling and not knowing the grace (the state) of the Resurrection, of now knotting the Father. When you don't know God as Father, you ask for your share of wealth (of existing); when you don't know the Father you want to be in that far away country! The other things to come are consequences and not the sin itself. Not the luxurious life, not the whores, not the parties, not the lusts, not the lust after them brought the Prodigal Son into world! But the fact of not feeling the adoption, of not knowing God as Father! This is the only sin. The rest isn't but the consequence of the estrangement. Therefore, *what the turning back (coming back) into himself is?* - to know, to feel pain, to feel that you have lost the adoption. *This is the achieving of the feeling of being son!* This is the great encounter with yourself: to feel Whose son you are, to feel the acute need of having a Father! Here, any estranged one could find out the answer to the question: why the man doesn't renounce to the sin? This is because he feels himself as being the son of the body, the son of the soul, the son of the culture, the son of the world. And from this position you cannot see *beyond of* (and

you remain only to the body and only body, you remain only a psychic man, only a soul, and you get yourself stuck into culture, into the world)!

By coming in his senses (feeling himself as the Father's son), the Prodigal one turns back home, he comes to the Father. We did not need anything – either wealth or resting or position; but only to be received into Home, inside, in the intimacy of the Father. This is would have been a great Paradise to him! To be accepted as servant, a slave – the liberator slavery of the Father, incomparable to the “liberty” experienced outside the Home! It is a great Paradise to be able to count yourselves among the one from the father's courts, as His servant¹²! *The addiction to the absolute independence of the Father it is the addiction to liberty, while the autonomy from God it brings the addiction to the world (to the body, to the soul, to the society, to the history, to the culture, etc.), namely the circumscribing and the obedience to the understood, deciphered and then made absolute need!*

Over and towards the state of mind with which the Prodigal one turns back Home, the Father utter his judgment: *are you craving to be a servant? I make you the central character of the Joyfulness, of a great feasting, subject of the Gladness!: do you feel yourself unworthy of being My son and do you consider to be the supreme privilege to be My servant? I condemn you to a crushing love, joyfulness and forgiveness! I am overwhelming you with the Life and of the Life! I am giving you a crushing forgiveness!¹³; you want to wipe away your own self, to abolish what you have called life until yesterday and to live at the gates of the house in the chambers of the servants? I am throwing you into Paradise! You don't ask anything? I am giving you Everything, namely the fattened Calf! Joy over joy, Life over life, Vestment over vestment!*

¹² Servant as Messiah (Ebed Iahve, the servant of the Lord) Who was able to utter before death: “*Nobody takes y life but I give my life...*”; like the Virgin Mary Who affirms that the unique and supreme change of the man is the possibility of uttering with his entire availability: “*behold the servant of the Lord!*”; like the saints to whom the supreme happiness is gathered in the utterance: “*unworthy servants we are!*”

¹³ And not only to the Prodigal from the Parable! The attitude of God in this sense is undeterred in this sense: the on the Servant of the Lord, he made Him the Savior, the only name under the sun Who delivers from death and before Whom all every knee bows down; on the Virgin Mary, the Servant of the Lord, He made Her the Mother of the Life, the mediator one; on the unworthy servants (the saints) he overwhelmed them with the joys of the Kingdom, making them criteria at the judgment of the world.

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This is the sentence of God towards the Prodigal Son who understands what the adoption is, who has achieved the feeling of being son! The prodigal one experiences a *liberator turning back*. The Liturgy from the Sunday of the estranged Son it gives to the ones who will enter in the stadium (in the toils) of the Great Fasting at least two gifts: first, the forgiveness and the Eucharistic food through which to work and to prolong the forgiveness of the Father in all the compartments and in the concrete aspects of the life, and then, the capacity of assuming the horizon of the ascesis for this entire existence.

The Parable continues by presenting the Brother of the one who was estranged. He also turns back home. Not from a far away country, but from the *field of the Father is he coming back to the Father's House*. He stood at the gates because he didn't want the Father's House, he was the son who didn't feel his adoption! "Angry he didn't want to enter!" By hearing about the turning back and the receiving of the Prodigal one he unveils his whole inward estrangement and death. He defiles the feast by throwing the venom of the resentments gathered inside: *for so many years I serve you...*; he doesn't call Him Father for he rather felt Him as master and even an unjust one who deserved to be condemned; *I have never transgressed your command!* (but he also never has felt that the commandment was that something after which he was craving for, he was getting thirty for) – namely, I am in order, I am irreproachable, I haven't done any mistake, but, on the opposite, You are a total failure!; *You haven't ever given to me a yeanning to rejoice myself...*, namely, although I have never done something wrong, You have never done something good to me!; he was staying in the house of the bread and he was starving...; *and when this son of Yours has turned himself back, who...* - the brother was not his brother anymore, but that one, that one from far away, namely, a son of Yours; he felt not bothered at all and didn't suffered when the prodigal one went far from the being of the Father, but, now, he feels menaced to the wealth, and regrets the wealth wasted with the whores. The Father looked at him and listened to him with an unspoken torment. And then he uttered him judgment and his sentence also for this son. By seeing that he doesn't care about the state of being son and knowing that he doesn't cherish Him he didn't run to welcome him (when he turned back from the field); He measured and skimped the showing of the love which was consuming Him for this son of Him lacked of understanding, and meet him but only in the

doorstep, burdened by a painful and wounded love; knowing his heart of being darkened by envy and inundated by the greediness of wealth, he didn't kiss him, nether embraced him – for not stirring him up -, but he calmly spoke to him, but measure though, and enduring the waves of fury. And then he voiced His Sentence: *you don't call Me Father, but I call you child (son), because I feel you, I look at you and I call you My child, and not servant neither subject; you say never, and I say always you are with Me, you are together with Me* (he didn't know that this is the freedom, this is Paradise and the richness: the fact of being son and always inheritor and inhabitant in the House – “*Come, you the blessed of My Father and inherit...*”); *you say yeanling, I say that everything of Mine are yours; you are angry and full of resentment you are bitter, thinking at who knows what life, joyfulness and liberty would have gorged himself with the Prodigal one... and this is because you don't know through what diminishing and poverty that one crossed and how much bounty and torrent of existence it is the one into which you are moving yourself without seeing it! That's why I am telling you that we must rejoice ourselves and to be glad, because this brother of yours has been resurrected and has been saved! This is My Sentence for you: please come and enter into Joy!* We don't know if the older brother entered or not to the joyfulness of retrieval of the Prodigal one, but we know that in the turning back of this one from the field of the Father at the Father's House there was a come-and-go which was suffocating him (This is the tragedy of Israel!).

The attitude of the Father is overwhelming: it is the love which overflows, which inundates, which gives, without expecting anything else but the joy of the recipient...

The message of the Sunday of the Prodigal Son, like introductory Sunday to the Great Fasting it aims the unveiling of the attitude of God towards the world and the way of His working during the Fasting period to come: while we are here on earth, to the one who comes into his senses, to the one who intuits also and knows the grace of being son, he gives the whole Paradise to him; to the one who doesn't know Him, and who accuses Him, and who judges Him, He stays on the doorstep and asks him, he stays and allows him, he stays and gives him the possibility of a full option, of whole respect, of unconditioned cherishing, a deeply shy silence. This is the story of God with the world: praying and working to enter into the joyfulness of the Kingdom.

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“*And in that country was a great famine and he started to be in need...*” (Luke 15, 14). This was the impulse which determined the Prodigal Son to put himself on the way of coming back into his senses: *how many servants of my Father are satisfied with bread, and, here, I am starving!*” (Luke 15, 17). One of the questions related to the spiritual life, which is presupposed by the passing into the Great Fasting, it is this one: *Who determined the coming into his sense of the Prodigal one and his repentance? – The man or God?* The Eastern Fathers, in their theologizing, they don’t admit this or and they never presuppose the disjunction between God and man. “*A strict separation between nature and grace, between the divine act and the human act*”¹⁴ it is not known in the Orthodox Theology. The man, when he engages himself on the road of the salvation, he doesn’t go out from his nature but, a contrary, he manifests it in its whole dynamism and its original structure.

The first impulses of the Prodigal’s repentance, which seem to belong to his will and to be determined strictly by hunger and needs, they are not possible in reality but because the godlike Oikonomia or the Providence is *already involved*, because God *already* provokes into man the possibility of noticing the need in which he lives. “*Lord, You have put in me (You open the door; You make the things, You provoke the state into me, (our comment)), the sinner one, repentance, by willing to save me, the unworthy one, with Your unmeasured mercy...*”¹⁵. The impulse of the repentance it hangs on the “judgments” (Providence) of God with the world. The natural man, the man of the falling doesn’t find in himself the beginning of the salvation: “*who will now weep for my falling? What beginning will I put to my salvation? I who live in fornication! You merciful One, with the judgments that You know, save me!*”; “*I made myself slave, I opened myself the door to the lusts. But You, easily-forgiving Word, You turn me back, save me with Your mercifulness*”¹⁶. Therefore, “*how will I cry?*”, “*what beginning will I lay?*”! The fallen Adam doesn’t find in himself the

¹⁴ Makarios Simonopetritul, *Triodul explicat...*, p. 71.

¹⁵ *Utrenia din Joia Săptămânii Întâia a Postului Mare, Stihira Sihoavnei*, in “Triod”, p. 169.

¹⁶ *Utrenia din Lunea Săptămânii Întâia a Postului Mare, Cântarea Întâi*, , in “Triod”, p. 115.

triggering of the repentance; he doesn't have this *how* and *that something* to make him noticing his own state, to give him the possibility of seeing himself. Where from crying, where from beginning, if these ones hang on the light of the Ghost and not on the biology and on the psychic of the man?! Without diminishing at all the liberty of the human will, God is a dynamic agent Who take the whole state of the creature, all the deeds and the doing of this one and He works both with our gifts and with our denials, in order to support the man for determining himself towards becoming eternal. The prayers from the service of the Vespers form the Day of the Pentecost sound like this:

“Master All-Keeper, God of the Fathers and Lord of the mercy, Maker of the mortal kind and of the immortal one and of all the human nature, which is build up and then is broken again, Builder of the life and of the death, of the living from here and of the moving to there; the One Who measures the years of the living ones and establishes the hour if the death; Who brings and gets out from hell; the One Who ties into helplessness and unties into power; the One Who composes the ones from here towards need and orders with profit the future ones; the One Who animated with the hope of the resurrection the ones wounded by the pin of the death...”¹⁷; “To You we give thanks for everything: for our entering into this world and for exiting from it... For You are also the Beginner of our resurrection and the incorruptible Judge and Lover of people and Master and Lord of the rewarding...”¹⁸

God is the One Who provokes the requests into the man; He is the One Who build up the thought towards the things that he gives even before asking for them:

“(You) Who made the heavens and the earth and the sea and all the things built into them; Who fulfills the requests before their requesting...”¹⁹ (You) open also to me the sinner the lips and teach me how it is due to pray myself and for what must

¹⁷ *Rugăciunea a cincea, Slujba Vecerniei din Duminica Pogorării Sfântului Duh*, in “Penticostar”, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune Ortodoxă, București, 1999, p. 334.

¹⁸ *Rugăciunea a cincea, Slujba Vecerniei din Duminica Pogorării Sfântului Duh, Rugăciunea a șasea*, in “Penticostar”, p. 335.

¹⁹ *Rugăciunea a cincea, Slujba Vecerniei din Duminica Pogorării Sfântului Duh, Rugăciunea întâi*, in “Penticostar”, p. 329.

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I pray. For You are the One Who knows the much multitude of my sins, but Your mercifulness will overcome their torrent because, behold, with fear I am standing before You, putting the despair of my soul before the depth of Your mercy. Correct my life, You Who corrects every creature with the word and with the unspoken power of Your wisdom, the One Who is smooth shore to the ones engulfed by waves, and show me the path on which I must go. Give to my thoughts the ghost of Your wisdom, give to my lack of understanding the ghost of understanding; overshadow my deeds with the ghost of Your foundation, right ghost renew into the ones from inside me and with ghost of mastery strengthen the sliding away of my thought. For in every day, being corrected, through You good Ghost, towards what it is useful (...) strengthen me to want the gaining of the good things.”²⁰

Therefore, in the Orthodox theology God is a *dynamic presence presupposed* in any movement of the human nature. The nostalgia of the Prodigal Son after the Father’s House is caused by the strength of the grace, which provokes the desire of the man, but without being a mechanic predetermining. In the same time the thought of the man and the Ghost of God stay in a reciprocal interpenetration, in a together dwelling and work.

“By adopting the mode of being (tropos) of the virtue, he conforms himself to the divine-human behavior of Christ, in Whom the divine nature and the human nature perfectly interpenetrate each other. The first impulses of the repentance, which don’t seem to us of hanging but on the free will of the sinner, they aren’t possible in reality but because the Oikonomia it is already done and Christ has already opened the doors of the repentance.”²¹

The quoted prayers which express the Orthodox Tradition, showing God as the cause of any startles and spiritual living, like the Builder of the whole reality and the Beginner or the Cause of any resurrection, as also the Judge with an oikonomia full of love of every of our deeds, they don’t want to express anything else but that the intimate and ultimate nomos and the telos of the creation are God and His Kingdom. Consequently, the fact

²⁰ *Slujba Vecerniei din Duminica Pogorării Sfântului Duh, Rugăciunea a treia*, in “Penticostar”, p. 332.

²¹ Makarios Simonopetrul, *Triodul explicat...*, p. 71.

of being human as such, it presupposes also the dynamic and structural presence (but not in the pantheist sense!) of God and of His works. Structurally and functionally the human being never is outside the image, and the image makes God being a implicit presence into man. That's why, any intervention of God in man and upon the man, doesn't mean adding a foreign agent but only expressing the normality of the human being. The withdrawal of God and of His grace from creature, as also the refusal of the man to stay in God and the option of the man for becoming autonomous, it means in fact a failure of the existence in the register of which the man cannot do anything more. He cannot anymore, because without God the human being doesn't exist! His nature becomes callous, becomes opaque towards the possibility of being.

V. Everything is from God

Saint Ephraem the Syrian, speaking about *ways of the Providence of God* expresses just the things from above. Because the disjunction God *or* the man (who does the beginning of the salvation, the grace or the man's freedom?), could not have even conceived in the theology of the Eastern Fathers, then everything that the dynamic reality of the existence comprises it is a loving work of God, through which he tries to place the man in his own purpose: the eternity (the Kingdom). The good thing can happen, says Saint Ephraem, because the virtue is the consequence of the collaboration with the grace; the things that are called good, are like that, only because they manifest in a sensitive (seen) manner the Good One. Without God, the good and the virtue cannot exist but at most as conventions, as relative notions, because besides God nothing can transgress the death. What value would have those virtues and that good which haven't any word to say before death? The good springs out only from God and it is the concrete expression (visible, seen) of the work of the grace of God into Creation. The *saddening* ones says Saint Ephraem the Syrian, can take place through the *leniency* of God. But this is not a *leniency* as passive and detached attitude of god towards world, but as expression of the *loving oikonomia or judgment* of God with the world. Respectively, God accepts the refusal of the man of remaining in communion with him (and into life). But he doesn't desert the man! God takes the evil deeds of the man *judging them*,

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avenging them. But not through an revenge of the eye-for-eye or tooth-for-tooth type, but through one through which He tried to place reestablish the good, namely to place again the liberty of the man towards his own failure, to restore the man's nature by plucking it out from the counterfeit into which the his has placed it. Only in this sense God permits the evil and punishes it. This is also the *impulse* of the foreign country, impulse through which the Prodigal Son *could notice himself in order to come into his senses.* God doesn't watch passively the show of the history and of the world: "*there is no evil into city that I would have not caused Myself, says the Lord*". When, despite to the punishing judgment of God, the creature remains into the refusal of deliver itself from death, God accepts to be removed this creature from creation, case in which, says Saint Ephraem the Syrian, *the built nature becomes callous,* as the Pharaoh's heart. The biblical expressions: *God blinded their eyes, and darkened their heart* (Romans 1, 28), or, *I will thicken the Pharaoh's heart* (Exodus 7, 3; 8, 19), they don't want to show but that in the absence of the grace, in the withdrawal of God from creature (in fact in the accepting of God to be rejected), the nature becomes callous, becomes opaque, it thickens, to not being able to do nothing more. *Consequently the moral will cannot find ground for itself in a nature deprived of grace.* Everywhere the tendency towards morality appears, tendency which is a man's searching for the self, we have already a dynamic presence and implication of God into world and with the world. Behold also the commentary of Saint Ephraem the Syrian:

“Everything is from God, both the good ones, and the saddening and the unworthy ones; the good ones, through His benevolence, the saddening ones through His oikonomia, and the unworthy ones through the desertion from Him. The living into the good deeds isn't anything else but the ones (which can happen) through His benevolence (blessing). This is because God wants us to live sinless and with awe and to live into good deeds. When we do wrong and commit sin and we are punished, then take place the one according to oikonomia. And the ones through desertion come to us when by punishing us (for our sinfulness we don't turn ourselves back to good. This is because God deigns that the man to be saved, as also the angels shout out in heaven saying: «glory into the highest of God, and on earth peace amongst

people and good will» (Luke 2, 14). When we commit sin, God punishes us with *oikonomia*, to not be condemned together with the world, as the Apostle says: «but when the Lord judges us, a punishment is given to us, to not be condemned together with the world» (I Corinthians 11, 32), and: there is no evilness into the city which the Lord hasn't done, namely famine and plague, diseases and stabbings of wars; for all of the sin are killers. And the one who don't want either the sinless living, or to turn themselves back through the punishment for the sin, God deserts them leaving them into their wills. These ones want themselves to remain into evilness as it is written: «God blinded their eyes, and he darkened their heart, and let them to their mind, the one without judgment, to do what it is not appropriate...» (Romans 1, 28). Namely he deserted them for the self-mastery (he left them due to their choice), and when he says that he will make their heart callous God shows that by their desertion their heart becomes callous.”²²

²² Sfântul Efreem Sirul, *Cuvinte și învățături, Cartea a III-a*, Bunavestire Publishing House, Bacău, 1996, p. 466.