Psychological-mystical Aspects at St. Evagrius Ponticus and St. Maximus the Confessor

Gheorghe Teofil Popovici
The Orthodox Parish of "Saint Demetrius", The North Deanery
600350 Gherăieşti, Bacău, Romania
teofilgheorghe@gmail.com

Abstract

The Holy Fathers are those who have experienced and deeply studied the mysteries of the human soul. The way a human being is being considered is very special. According to St. Maxim, man is the mediator between God and creation. Created with body and soul, man is charged with knowing God starting even with his earthly life. But, as Plato said, man must at first know himself. The Holy Fathers describe at length this path along which man, as he renounces sins, discovers God inside his heart. These descriptions are extremely actual and relevant to the modern man who seems to have lost a little of the overall picture of the mystery of the human soul showing the great destiny for which man was created.

Keywords: patristics, teology

1. Introduction

For St. Maximus, knowing God – the epistemology which makes the subject of dogma – is a theological spirituality issue, an issue which discusses the perfection and transcending of the rational being under the infinite rays of divinity. The process of cognition, as a direct connection between God and the human subject through immanent energy is in fact the process of our becoming divine. The anthropology of St. Maximus concerns the dichotomous construction of man who is made up of body and soul which, in turn, consists of several distinct parts that are in contradiction in a fallen man and are to be harmonized through a work of ascetico-mystical restoration. In describing them, St. Maximus stoops mainly upon detailed observations concerning man's relation to God: *"Enlightened by grace, the saints have found out that the soul has three general movements, all gathered into one: one in the mind, one in reason and one in feeling. The first one is simple and impossible to expound. By this the soul, moving in an incomprehensible way around God, does not apprehend him in any way, from nothing out of those which were created, because it surpasses these all. The second one determines the unknown One according to the cause; by this, the soul moving in a natural way, gathers through doing, as a science, all the natural reasons of the known One only according to the cause, reasons which act upon it like some modeling powers. And the third one is composed. By it, the soul reaches those which are outside, gathers in itself, as from some symbols, the reasons of the seen. Feeling, which retained only the spiritual reasons of the sensible things, was simply raised, by means of reason, to mind. Reason, which gathered the reasons of things, was united, by means of a unique, simple and undivided thoughtfulness, with the mind. And the mind, which was redeemed through purification from moving around all things, in fact even rested from the natural work inside it (φισικης ενεργεια), was brought to God. Gathered thus entirely in front of God, they were worthy to be wholly united with the wholly God, through the Holy Spirit ..."*[6] [22]

Saint Evagrius Ponticus, a predecessor of Maximus the Confessor, who had a considerable influence upon him, took the tetrad of the soul's division from Origen and turned it into a triad: mind, anger, lust, by identifying "νουs" with the reasoning side of the soul[7] [17]. According to Evagrius, all the three parts must be cured on a par with their disease:

---

[6] PSB 80, Saint Maximus the Confessor, *Ambigua*, ch. 65: *Tâlcuire privitoare la partea pasivă a sufletului şi la împărţirile generale şi subîmpărţirile ei,* Institutului Biblic şi de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române Publishing House, Bucureşti, 1983, p. 185.

[7] Lars Thumberg, *Antropologia Teologică a Sfântului Maxim Mărturisitorul*, Sofia Publishing House, 2005, *"Evagrie şi origenismul"*, p. 211.

"the mind through knowledge, the concupiscent part through restraint, and the irascible part through love"; "The wondering mind [the nous] is stabilized by reading, watching and praying; the burning lust [epithymia] is quenched by hunger, thirst and withdrawal [anachoresis], and raised anger [thymos] is allayed by chants, patience and mercy; but these work when they are made in time and according to the appropriate measures, for those without measure and inappropriately timed are short-lived, and those which are short-lived are rather harmful than helpful:"[8] [9]

2. The eight thoughts of wickedness according to Evagrius's system of spirituality

Passions, which lay hold of man and which should be cleansed away in order to reach an unimpassioned state, love and gnosis, are placed by Evagrius in connection with the demons, so that fighting against these is also fighting against demons. This idea becomes an important leitmotif of the entire eastern ascesis [2-7], [11-12], [15-20].

The method by which the devil, or the forces of darkness influence man is constituted by thoughts (λογισμος- in Greek)[9], imagination, memories and senses and neighbour: *"For all the pleasure for the forbidden springs out of a passion for the forbidden, by means of the senses' doing. Because pleasure is nothing but a form of sensation modeled into the organ of the sense by means of some tangible thing or a way of the senses' working determined by an irrational lust. For lust added to sensation turns into pleasure, by printing a form onto sensation, and the sensation moved by lust gives birth to sensation when it reaches tangible things."*[10] In Evagrius's view, only God knows the depths of the soul (the heart or the subconscious), the higher level or the discursive conscience of compound thoughts is available both to man and devil[11]. Coping with one's passionate thoughts that stop man from uniting with God is done, according to Saint Evagrius, by uttering appropriate responses to each tempting thought. These responses are taken from the Holy Scriptures and are grouped so that they may be immediately used as a remedy against attacks[12].

Responses have had a long career especially among Egyptian monks, being written in the famous work *"Antirrhetikos"*. Being collected mainly from the Psalms, they are primarily addressed to God. The Holy Fathers recommend, first of all, avoiding inner dialogue with these thoughts because man can win no fight against the devil by his own forces: "For without God we cannot fight against our enemies, for they are much stronger than us" (Ps 34, 10) [22]. Only calling the name of Jesus Christ, in the shortest and most comprehensive prayer of the votary, has maximum efficiency: *"Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, the sinner"*.

In classical Greek, the word *"pathos"* (from the verb *pascho*) means an accident, a disease, or a bad or good frame of mind, instinct, passion, change or transformation. Plato is the one who developed the tripartite theory of the soul according to which the soul is made up of three parts: a rational part (logistikon), an irascible part (thymikon, thymos), a concupiscent part (epithymetikon, ephitymia)[13]. The irascible and the concupiscent parts have a higher wage in the construction of the fallen man, and of demons. According to the Blessed Augustine, the irascible part and the concupiscent (lusty) one are included in the accidental structure of a fallen intellect and a body and constitute "the passionate side of the soul" [23].

---

[8] Evagrius Ponticus, *Tratatul practic. Gnosticul,* ch. "Remedii generale ale celor trei părți ale sufletului", Curtea Veche Publishing House, Bucureşti 2009, p. 135.

[9] *Le traité pratique* 43, SC 171 (1971), p. 599.

[10] PSB 80, op.cit., p. 110.

[11] According to René Guénon, "*Simboluri ale ştiinţei sacre",* Humanitas Publishing House, Bucureşti, 2008, p. 495: "It is probably here that the fundamental dualism of good and evil springs from, a dualism which men felt acutely enough, irrespective of his culture or religion (yin and yang – in the religion of Asians), being the essential forces which make up the interval of spiritual becoming"; according to Carl Gustav Jung , Trei Publishing House, vol. 6, Bucureşti, 2004, p. 213: "Indeed, there are two forms of Brahman, namely the created and the uncreated, the mortal and the immortal, the immovable and the movable, being [das Seiende] and transcendence [das Jenseitige]."

[12] St. Evagrius Ponticus, *op.cit.*, p. 317: "Împotriva gândurilor demonului slavei deşarte", repl. 20: "To our thoughts which urge us into showing our bright actions for transient glory: Let not your mouth praise you."

[13] Cf. Tomas Spidlik, *Spiritualitatea Răsăritului creştin-vol.I,* Deisis Publishing House, Sibiu 2005, p. 299.

For the Stoics, the purpose of human life is the struggle between free reason and passion. The Stoics have discovered that, in practical life, there are four sins grouped into two fundamental trends: pleasure (hēdonē) and sorrow (lype)[14], which tend to be conducted at present, and lust (ephitymia) and fear (phobos): *"And the more he cared about the passion of bodily self-love, the more he invented ways of producing more bodily self-love. And because all wickedness perishes with the conditions that produce it, by finding out that any pleasure is surely followed by pain man will be completely urged towards pleasure and away from pain*.[15]" – are closely related to future things.[16] The variations and combinations of these passing states give birth to more complex psychic states of exaltation, decay, hope, latent anxiety of the spirit, trust or panic[17]. Emotional states of this type are also described in psychiatry textbooks. In describing some psychic diseases immune to psychological therapy, Carl Gustav Jung [14] speaks about "emotionally strengthened complexes"[18] [13]. Thus, here comes science from behind, with small steps, and recovers what practitioners once knew directly from their practical experience.

The Western scholastic authors draw a finer line between the various types of passions. The passionate side of the soul is not evil through itself alone, they say. They make a clear distinction between the metaphysical meaning of passion (responsiveness)[19], which is a good movement of the soul through itself, having been planted by God inside man, and its psychological meaning (where concupiscent emotions, sensual appetites and irascibility are born. In conclusion, passion is a power of the soul planted by God inside man. Morally speaking, it is neutral, using it to virtuous purposes makes it morally good, and using it to evil purposes makes it sinful or evil[20]: *"From among thoughts, some of them cut, others are cut. That is, the evil ones remove the good ones, but the evil ones are also removed by the good ones. The Holy Spirit heeds the thought that we placed first and according to that one He bans or receives us. Here is what I mean: I have the thought to welcome strangers and I truly have it for God, but the tempter comes and cuts it away, and sneaks the thought of welcoming strangers for glory into the soul. Or, I have the thought to welcome strangers in order to be respectable; but a good thought comes over it, and cuts the evil thought away, directing our virtue towards God and forces us not to do this for the praise of men.*"[21] [8], [21]

Passion can be caused by the simple expression of will, driven by imagination. If it were evil by nature, man would automatically cause evil without his consent. But this assumption is invalidated from the start by the fact that man is built, according to the biblical account, after the image and likeness of God. Or God is free, through Himself as an Absolute Being, and man created after the image of God is also free to follow even evil if he chooses to do so, but real freedom is the one similar to the image according to which man has been created. Thus, man finds his true freedom by living free of passions, according to his Archetype: *"Crawlers and*

---

[14] Ibidem.

[15] Filocalia III, p. 30.

[16] *Ibidem*, p. 314.

[17] In modern psychology, there are four types of temperaments: choleric, sanguine, flegmatic and melancholic. It is also recognized that although these four types are clearly defined theoretically, in reality they cannot be found in a pure state. The traits of certain types interfere spontaneously, according to certain particularities such as: education, the psycho-somatic state, sex, stress factors, etc. Cf Gerald Matthews, Ian J. Deary, Martha C. Whiteman, *Psihologia Personalităţii,* Polirom Publishing House, Bucureşti, 2005, p.35.

[18] Jung analyses the concept of God as subjective, izează notiunea de Dumnezeu, ca fiind subiectivă, putting it on account of a complex: "In the language of analytical psychology, the notion of God coincides with that complex of representations which, according to the above definition, concentrates in itself the largest amount of libido (psychic energy). Therefore, the notion of God of the soul would actually be different depending on the individual, which corresponds as a matter of fact to experience. God is not even theoretically a stable being, so much the less in practice.", cf. Carl Gustav Jung, *Tipuri Psihologice,* Trei Publishing House, Bucuresti, p.68.

[19] Toma D'Aquino, *Summa Theologiae*, Polirom Publishing House, 2009, I, 77, 2.

[20] Cf. Tomas Spidlik, *ibidem.*

[21] Pr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Filocalia I , Capete despre deosebirea patimilor şi a gândurilor,* Humanitas Publishing House, 3rd Edition, 2003, p. 53.

beasts, driven here and there by nature, find it really impossible not to stay away from that which brings them pain. But those made after the image of God, driven by reason and empowered by God's knowledge, who received the law from Him, find it possible not to avoid those who harm them and to love those who hate them. That is why the Lord says: "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you ..."[22]

In "Spiritual Homilies", Saint Macarius the Great says that "All the struggle of man takes place inside thoughts, so that man may remove the matter of evil thoughts", or that "The source and origin of all sin is evil thoughts"[23] [18].

Saint Evagrius distinguishes between the struggle of the ascetic as opposed to that of the "worldly man". "Demons fight against worldly men by using particularly things". Winning this battle depends upon man's capacity to renounce things" [24]. But against ascetics, "demons fight using particularly thoughts; because they lack things due to solitude"[25] [25]: *"All evil things sneak the image of sensible/tangible things into the soul which, by improinting themselves into the mind, make it carry in itself the shapes of those things"*.[26] If struggling with thoughts affects the inner forum of the human being, the struggle of the worldly man is considered "a novice war" because it implies a more direct fight, exterior to one's own self.

Father Evagrius Ponticus deals with the subject of the thoughts of evil in several writings, and in establishing a list of these one can notice the effort of setting a scheme as accurate and comprehensive as possible as well as its flexibility and refining based on the inner state or the spiritual stage of the direct receivers of his writings, almost always the result of certain specific requests. The focus is sometimes placed on the sin of anger: *"The devils' goal is very much helped by our anger, when it is directed againsta nature, being of great use to any of their tricks. That is why all of them hasten to inflame it day and night. But when they see it connected to goodness they look for rightful reasons to unleash it at once, to heat it up and thus use it for their angry thoughts. That is why we must inflame it neither for just things, nor for unjust ones"*[27]. Anger is not evil in itself, but by being well used it brings blessing*: "It is very useful to direct our anger against devils, and also useful in our virtue's doings. But nourishing it from ourselves, as we would nourish a good sprout, is impossible because the spirits asking for pleasures smother it and call the soul again to friendship and familiarity with them"*[28].

The meaning of "spirit" (pneuma) is lost to the use of the term "the spirits of evil" [29]. The classic systematization – the one from *Pratikos* 6-14 and *Antirrhetikos* – is: the greed of the stomach (*gastrimargia*), rioting/fornication (*porneia*), the love of silver/avarice (*philargyria*), anger/temper (*orgi*), sadness (*lype*), boredom/weariness (*akedia*), vain glory/vanity (*kenodoxia*),

---

[22] Pr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Filocalia a IIa*, Humanitas Publishing House, 3rd Edition, 2003, p. 36.

[23] PSB 34, Bucureşti, 1992, p. 122.

[24] Cf. Evagrie Ponticul, *În luptă cu gândurile,* Deisis Publishing House, Sibiu, 2006, p. 35.

[25] Cristian Bădiliță, *Tratatul Practic,* Polirom Publishing House, Bucureşti, 2003, p. 48.

[26] Pr.Prof.Dr.Dumitru Stăniloae, *Filocalia I*, ed.Humanitas, 3rd Edition, 2003, p. 61.

[27] Ibidem, cuv.5.

[28] Ibidem, cuv.9.

[29] The problem of the manuscripts forms the first volume of the edition published by Antoine and Claire Guillaumont in the "Sources Chretiennes" collection. The interested reader may see the paper *Gîndurile cele mai generale* (genikot atoi logismoi). In the monastic literature, *logismoi* loses its semantic neutrality by turning into "evil thoughts". In almost all of these writing the meaning is pejorative. In *Despre cele opt duhuri rele (PG* 79,1145A-1164D), Evagrius uses the term "spirit" (*pneuma*) for thought. The theory of the eight evil thoughts of spirits has been undertaken by the entire Eastern and then Western monastic tradition. Cassian, the disciple of Evagrius, discipolul lui Evagrie, enlarges upon it in *The Institutes of the Coenobia* (Books V-XII). In fact, the full title of the work is *De Institutis cenobiorum et de octo principalium uitiorum.* Here is the list offered by Cassian (V, 1, ed. Guy, *SC* **109,** p. 190): *octo principalia uitia... id estprimum gastrimargiae, quae interpretatur concupiscentia gulae, secundam fornicationis, tertium philargyriae, quod intelligitur auaritia, uelut proprius exprimatur, amor pecuniae; quartum irae; quintum tristitiae*; *sextum acediae, quod est anxietas siue taedium cordis; septimum cenodoxiae, quod sonat uana seu inanis gloria; octauum superbiae,* cf. op.cit., p. 60.

pride/conceit (*hyperephaneia*)[30]. If Evagrius invented neither the number of thoughts, nor any of the names in their list (these can all be found in Origen[31]), the order and classification undoubtedly belong to the ascet from Kellia. This is an ascetic, climbing "order of the battle" which clearly follows three stages of the ascet's spiritual progress. This starts from the struggle against material, bodily passions (greed, fornication, avarice) related to lust, a struggle led by novices; it continues with the one led by the advanced against the passions of the soul (anger, sadness, boredom) related to irascibility; and it culminates with fighting off more subtle spiritual passions (vain glory, pride), related to intelligence and whose victims are the faultless, the unpassionate and the knowing who have reached the final steps of the spiritual progress: *"From among the thoughts, the one of vain glory works alone by many means. It includes almost everybody and opens the doors to all devils, acting as a kind of cunning traitor of the city. That is why it deeply humiliates the mind of the hermit, filling it with many words and things and draggling his prayers by which he struggles to heal all the wounds of his soul. After having been defeated, all devils try to strengthen this thought so that they may be allowed again into the soul by means of it and thus do from the last worse than from the first.*[3] *This thought also gives birth to the thought of pride which has caused the sonorous fall from heaven of the seal of likeness and the crown of beauty. Arise from this thought and do not tarry, lest we sell our lives to others, or our time to those without mercy. This devil is driven away by arduous prayer and the labours of not willingly doing or saying something that may help the accursed vain glory.*[32]"

Therefore, the Evagrian catalogue is a systematic inventory of the most general thoughts of evil, but it has an accurate origin and destination: it starts from the experience of the solitary ascets of Nitria, Kellia and Sketis, being written by an experienced anachorite to serve as a guide to other anachorites. In the desert, the souls of the ascetic elites of Christianity were tormented not by passionate affections resulted from the contact with things and people, but by the passionate representations of these natural realities, by thoughts activated by memory and amplified in imagination by the evil spirits of demons, as well as by the psychological risks of an extended exposure to a regime of isolation, and by the routine or excesses of ascetic and contemplative life.

The eight thoughts make up a chain (*concatenatio*), each of them being born from the previous one; they are also grouped in four pairs: the greed of the stomach and fornication are achieved in the flesh, avarice and anger occur in the soul caused by factors exterior to it, sadness and boredom are generated by inner causes of the soul, and vain glory and pride have no need at all of a body to come into being: *"The demons that resist our work, the first ones who are raised into battle, are those responsible with the lusts of the greed of the stomach, those who sneak the love of silver into our soul and those who dangle us with the glory of men. All the others follow these to take over those injured by them. For one cannot fall into the hands of the spirit of fornication without having first been beaten by the greed of the stomach. Just like anger cannot affect the one who fights for food, or money, or glory. And it is impossible to get rid of the devil of sadness for the one who has not denied all these. And pride, the first progeny of the devil, will also be inescapable for those who have not previously torn the love for silver out of their souls, the root of all evil, if*

[30] Cf. R.Sinkewicz, *Evagrius of Pontus. The Greek Ascetic Corpus,* Oxford, 2003, p. 73 and J.Danielou, "Demon", *Dictionnaire de spiritualité* III, 1967, col. 151-189.

[31] The entire topic is discussed, based on an exhaustive documentation, by A. Guillaumont in his introduction to the edition: EVAGRE LE PONTIQUE, *Traité Pratique ou le Moine (SC* 170), Paris, 1971, p. 63-84, 90-93. Origen admits in *Horn. Josua* XV, 5 that the idea according to which each "demon" or "spirit" corresponds to a thought *(logismos)* was found in the Judaic apocrypha *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs.* Behind the Greek *dialogismos* lies the Judaic notion *dcyetser* (thought, spirit) found in the Old Testament, in the texts from Qumran and in the *Testaments of the Patriarchs*. Starting from here, the demons of the evil thoughts have been assimilated to the demons of the celestial spheres crossed by the soul after death like some "customs". We cannot take into consideration, as a possible source of the Evagrian scheme of the eight thoughts, the esoteric-gnostic theory which establishes a correspondence between the seven main vices and the seven spheres of planets through which the soul has passed both in its descent into the world and in its redeeming exit through death.

[32] Filocalia I, op cit. cuv.13, p. 59.

poverty humbles man according to wise Solomon. Briefly speaking, it is impossible that man may fall under the power of any devil if he has not been previously wounded by their chiefs. That is why the devil presented the Savior with these three thoughts: firstly, urging him to turn the stones into bread, secondly by promising him the entire world if he will kneel to him, and thirdly by telling him that he will be covered in glory if he listens because he will not be affected by such a great fall. But the Lord, proving to be above all these, commanded the devil to walk behind Him. Byt his, He taught us that it is impossible for someone to chase away the devil from himself if he has not despised these three thoughts."[33]; at the same time, each evil thought (*vitium*) from the series of the eight main thoughts generate series of special thoughts (*vitia*).[34]

But Evagrius varies the scheme of the thoughts of evil according to the one to whom it is addressed and his spiritual level. Thus, to a certain Euloghios, a prominent character (tortured by envy and vain glory) who wanted to enter the monastic life, Evagrius writes a comprehensive treaty in the form of a letter, in which he outlines a program of appropriate spiritual life, insisting upon the risks which novices are exposed to. To the same Euloghios — according to the oldest manuscripts — Evagrius addresses a short piece of writing in the shape of a post-scritpum to the previous treaty about "the evils opposed to virtues" "[35]. The paper is a remarkable example of ascetic rhetorics offering 245 brief descriptions of *nine* main vices and of the nine virtues opposing these vices. The "vices" or "evils" are the ones we know from the catalogue of the "eight main thoughts", with a certain change but, no doubt, determined by the tendencies characteristic of the receiver of the writing: between "vain glory" and "pride" there also appears "envy". The nine pairs of "evils – virtues" are [1]:

gluttony — abstinence
(gastrimargia — enkrateia)
lust — moderation
(porneia — sophrosyne)
avarice — possessionlessness
(philargyria — aktemosyne)
sadness — joy
(lype-chara)
anger — patience
(orgi — makrothymia)
acedia — humble
(akedia — hypomone)
vain glory — freedom from vainglory
(kenodoxia — akenodoxia)
envy — willingness
(phthonos — aphtonia)
pride – humility
(hyperephaneia — tapeinophrosyne)[36]

[33] Pr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Filocalia I, Evagrie Ponticul,* 3rd Edition, Humanitas Publishing House, Bucuresti, 2003, p. 60.

[34] Cf.Jean-Claude Larchet, *Terapeutica bolilor spirituale,* Sofia Publishing House, Bucureşti, 2001, p. 108.

[35] *"Something like this commonly happens to the mind, either by seeing with the eyes, or by hearing with the ears, or by some other sense, or by some memory which imprins in the mind, by moving them, those that have been gathered by means of the body. Therefore the devils, it seems to me, by imprint memories into the mind by stirring them …* There is also, however, a simple movement of the memory, stirred by us or by the Holy Powers. Through it we speak and spend time with the Saints. But we should be careful. For the images which the soul receives together with the body are stirred by memory without the help of the body. This can be seen from the fact that we often suffer from this in sleep.

[36] Evagrius, *De diversis malignis cogitationibus* 2, PG 79,1201B.

To some ascets who have already entered the arena of ascetic struggles but ar still at the beginning of a practical life, Evagrius addresses a brief – psychological and literary – remarkable treaty on "the eight thoughts", in the shape of particularly beautiful proverbs[37]. The success of this writing, whose content consists in a sapiential phenomenology of the eight thoughts of evil through a series of extremely vivid elementary analysis of their psychological pathology, is attested by the fact that it has been the most copied from among the Evagrian writings, and is to be found (most often under the name of Nil) in over 80 manuscripts.[38]

Psychology has discovered the fact that the psychic of the human being is made up of three layers: the conscious, the subconscious and the unconscious. According to specialists, a tenth of man is conscious and nine tenths is unconscious[39]. As the terms suggest, man is mostly a great unknown, a great mystery. But in specialized therapies, psychologists have discovered that neurotic symptoms, chronic anger or depressions do not yield to the simple treatment of the causes of the disease. By looking more carefully into it, they have discovered the fact that man hides inside himself a wider dimension of both content and complexity. The source of all images which appeared spontaneously during delirium, the source of all symbols, of imaginative creativity, of originality which, after all, constitute a significant part of the complexity of the human character, is located, according to most psychologists, in the unconscious.[40]

The preliminary knowledge of these things is needed before penetrating deeper into what the Holy Scripture called "the bottom of the heart"[41]. The bottom of the heart is, for Saint Evagrius, the place where the spiritual and the material dimensions meet. The spiritual self-imposed efforts of getting rid of passion and of knowing are aimed precisely at the descent of man, by the light of his conscience, to the bottom of his heart, or of his unconscious. What is there to be found are things which are beyond the power of imagination of the uninitiated. The Holy Fathers call these representations hideous crawlers, snakes. Modern psychology also describes these "archetypal representations" as somewhat belonging to the realm of the legendary. In order to diminish somehow the powerful and unpredictable impact that the revealing of these images may have, psychologists focus more on their positive interpretation. But the Holy Fathers explain with great brevity the fact that man discovers great obstacles to overcoming oneself in his heart. Man is born with a degenerate background which gathers centrifugally through the process of plenum, all these "archetypal images" which, in time, turn into real "tares" or fixations which further degenerate into obsessions, fears and chronic states, bringing the passionate man close to the edge of the abyss. The passionate man turns into a mere executor of one's own prejudices and conceptions, the level of conscience being drastically decreased and that is why discernment is at its critical borderline. The Saint is the one who, by dispassioning himself and knowledge becomes free and independent towards things and ideologies. That is why, it is rightfully said that although he lives like any other man, the dispassionate man has overcome almost entirely the time of his history and the ideologies of his epoch, reaching the maximum level of conscience or awareness.[42]

In *Praktikos* and in *Antirrhetikos* Evagrius also enlarges upon the theme of the relationship between the thoughts of evil and demons in a process in which, following Origen and an old Judeo-Christian tradition, closely associates ascetic psychology and demonology. According to Jean Danielou [4], Christian demonology has two main sources: pagan Neo-Platonic and Judaic[43]. For

---

[37] "The beginning of fruit is flower, and the beginning of achievement is abstinence", *Despre lăcomia pântecelui,* Tratatul practic, op.cit., p.

[38] Cf .Evagrie Ponticul*, op.cit*.,p. 21.

[39] Cf. Arhim. Simeon Kraiopoulos, *Te cunoşti pe tine însuţi? Viaţa duhovnicească şi problemele psihologice,* Bizantina Publishing House, Bucureşti, p. 21.

[40] Cf Carl Gustav Jung, *Opere complete,*vol.1, Trei Publishing House, Bucureşti, 2003, p. 80.

[41] Jeremiah 17, 9: "The heart is deeper than anything else; it is man himself: who will ever know it?"

[42] Carl Gustav Jung, *Introducere în psihanaliza junghiană*, Trei Publishing House, Bucureşti, 2001, p. 45.

[43] J. DANIELOU, "Demon", *Dictionnaire de spiritualité* III, 1967, col. 151-189, about demons in the Jewish church literature up to Origen.

pagans, the demons which can be good or evil, are intermediary beings between gods and people and live in the air between heaven and earth, and preside over the action of mediation between these two zones through magic and religion. Jews and Christians spoke not of good or evil demons, but of good or evil angels, entirely identifying the demons responsible with pagan practices and idolatry with the evil angels who have revolted aginsta God (cf. the *Enoh* books*)*. Demons have become the main causes and agents of evil by excellence, but not only of the religious-social evil, also of the moral-psychological individual one. The Jewish intertestamentary (Essenian) and Paleochristian literature has thus developed not only the demons-idols relationship but also the demons-temptations one, trying to offer an answer to the question: where does the evil in the human heart comes from? Obviously, not from God, but from demons and their suggestions. The two "thoughts", dispositions or tendencies of man towards good or evil, which lead him alond two roads, that of life and that of death, have been viewed as coming from angels and demons — who thus become the patrons of virtues or vices — between whose suggestions the Jew and the Christian must learn to permanently distinguish. The two "ways" become the two "spirits": the good one inspires peace and tranquility whereas the evil one, on the contrary, anxiety and torment; and demonology thus becomes a chapter of ascetic psychology. This mutation first occurs widely developed together with the theme of spiritual discernment and of the struggle against thoughts, in *The Shepherd of Hermas*[44], a capital work in the history of Christian spirituality.

Evagrius himself clearly explains the meaning of the replication method in the significant prologue to *Antirrhetikos,* to which Father Gabriel Bunge rightly dree attention. Christianity is not a "religion" of individual self-salvation; we ourselves do not have the power to overcome evil or inner conflict by means of some autogeneous technique. Evil does not have only an inner source, its psychological manifestation is the sign of the inner presence of evil and its demons who were defeated only by Christ.

3. Stages in the volitional work of Saint Maximus

Unlike his predecessor, from whom he takes part of the Evagrian ideas concerning the platonic triad of the soul, the famous hierachy of the thoughts of evil, Saint Maximus the Confessor brings many innovative contributions to the problem of knowledge, ontological, cosmological, anthropological, and mystical problems, where he enlarges "upon love" in a unique way.

As far as evil is concerned, or the source of evil Saint Maximus makes a significant contribution by defining it*: "Evil neither was, nor will be something which subsists by its own nature. For it is in no way being, or nature, or hypostasis, or power, or work in those which are. It is neither a quality, nor quantity, relation, time, position, action (ποίησις), movement, skill, passion (passivity, emotion) naturally contemplated in some existence and in neither of all these none of them subsist by some natural affinity. It is neither beginning (principle), nor middle, nor end. But to include it in a definition, I will say that evil is the deviation (ἔλλειψις) of the workings of the powers (faculties) planted in nature from their purpose and nothing else. Or again, evil is the unadvised movement (ἀλόγιστος) of the natural powers towards something other than their purpose, following a misjudgement."*[45]

Saint Maximus creates a true map of the different stages through which the mind, the soul and the will pass when achieving something*: "Thus, in orderfor secondary, but initiatory causes, to exist, their action should be rooted in obscure states and should develop across the penumbra of an ascent towards an intellectual and moral order which may leave way to the work of reflexion, the calls of conscience, rational and volunteer choice ".*[46]

---

[44] This paper is presented in the opening of the book written by Ioan I. Ică. Jr. and Germano Marani: "*Gândirea socială a Bisericii, fundamente, documente, analize şi perspective*", Deisis Publishing House, Sibiu 2002, p. 9.

[45] Filocalia aIIIa, p. 29.

[46] Pr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Filocalia a IIIa*, Humanitas Publishing House, 3rd Edition, 2003, p. 56.

The simplest scheme could look as follows: suggestion (representation) – will (Βουλησιν) – research (ζητησιν) – becoming aware (σκεψισ) – judgement (κρισισ) – choice (προαιρεσισ) – decisive impulse (ορμη) – action (χρισισ).

The premise which lies at the basis of all eventual volitional stages is the fundamental capacity of manifesting will (θελησις). God created man for eternal union with Him. The will of man is not enough for this union, but it is compulsory*: "But from this position of St. Maximus and from those who claim that Christ if the being of virtue, it results that one cannot make such a clearcut distinction between the union with God through virtues and mystical union. The union through virtues is not only a union in the sector of the will, but it also reaches the being of man. And the union through being cannot be done without the union through will.*"[47]

The manifestation of will is the fundamental act of the manifestation of the image of God into man: *"He has been our way, impulse and attractive goal, He has become a man together with us in front of virtues and of knowing the reasons of the world, helping us to achieve the unimpaired image of the human nature."*[48] Man's single, intelligent, rational and very original way of thinking is a proof of the divine origin of man's immortal soul: *"Man is made, by his own nature, to want and to reason ... And this is, as I have seen, the personal disposition or the skill of the will to choose (γνωμη) which develops through the constantly updated will of man"*[49]. Thus, the act of will depends on an innate side and on a side learned through education.

In the first stage, Saint Maximus the Confessor has a more Stoic rather than Aristotelic vision concerning the unity of the forces which drive up man's soul. In Aristotle, will as a rational act is called "βουλισις", different from "concupiscence" which is will mixed with sensitive imagination (φαντασια)[50] and which Maximus also calls "joy of imagination": *"From among the powers of the soul, one of them feeds and supports the increase, another one is immaginative and impulsive and another one is rational and intellectual. The first one is shared among plants. Besides it, irrational beings also share the second one. And people, besides these two, also share the third one. The first two powers are subject to corruption, the third one proves to be unalterable and immortal.*" [51] The devil or God's enemy uses man's will and imagination to give suggestions to him him*: "and, if by finding itself inside it makes the soul through spiritual passions to yield to the outside passions too, by means of the body deceive it to surrender entirely to feeling, leaving those whoich are appropriate by nature; or, by being outside, through a touch of the body shapes the unseen soul according to those which are material (πρός τά ὑλιά), planting into it a composed form and giving it the appearance of matter received through imagination ..."*[52]

This is because God cannot be fit within the limits of discursive reason or of imagination: *"Great Moses, by setting his tent outside the camp, that is, setting outside the seen his will and reason, starts praying to God. After entering darkness, or the place of knoweldge without shape and matter, he remains there to be initiated in the holy ordinances*."[53]

For Saint Maximus, imagination is not opposed to reason. But it is imprinted with the memory of things: *"Dreaming (φαντασία), this is imagination which is driven in its workings by the emprintings left inside it by the old sins. Imagination for the experienced man is no longer a neutral power, but is always influenced, determined by the fantasies it creates, by the facts it has done and the images it has had, although these no longer move inside the conscinece but sank into the*

[47] Pr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Filocalia I, Evagrie Ponticul,* 3rd Edition, Humanitas Publishing House, Bucureşti, 2003, p. 325.
[48] Ibidem, p. 20.
[49] Lars Thunberg, *Antropologia Teologică A Sfântului Maxim Mărturisitorul,* Sofia Publishing House, Bucureşti, 2005, p. 244.
[50] Cf. Harry Austryn Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Church Fathers,* Harvard University Press, 1956, p. 463.
[51] Filocalia aIIa, *Răspunsuri către Talasie,* p. 121.
[52] Filocalia IIIa,p.26
[53] Ibidem, 85.

subconscious."[54] This fact is extremely important because the will relates to its object which is the goal (τελος)[55] oment f the act of willing*: "The first man, having lost the movement of his natural faculties towards the goal, has ignored its cause ... Thus, by breaking and ignoring God's command and mixing all his mental power with all his being, he embraced the composed and alterable conscience of the sensible/tangible things which leads to passion and has likened himself to unthinking beasts... and falling into irrationality, he has changed the natural function of reason into one contrary to nature"*[56], whereas choice, the next stage (προαιρεσις) is associated only with means of reaching this goal. If man wants a good thing, this means that he has the power to guess its usefulness from the start. Wanting somehting reasonably means almost knowing (γνωμη) it from the start.

The next step, "research", belongs rather to reason than to will, according to Saint Maximus, although will is the one which nourishes it. Here, iamgination mingles with rational analysis: *"For by loosening the will from the things reason is free from by nature, he does not feel their tempations sadden him, as one who has calmed down from any agitation related to them and directed all the power of the soul towards divine liberty*".[57] Saint Maximus also calls it, in another work, "a consistent effort of the rational faculty", when it is conscious of its goal. In this stage, will nourished by desire seeks to (deliberates upon-Βουλευσις) the most adequate means of achieving the goal, with the help of reason.

During the third stage, becoming aware (σκεψις), Saint Maximus explicitly states that the object of "becoming aware" is the one which has been "sought", and the object of "deliberation" is the one which has been "set into awarenes"[58], so that nobody decides until becoming aware first: "The one who has achieved the virtues and has increased his awareness, hereon looking at things in a natural way, does and says everything according to the just judgement, slipping in no way from this path."[59] Althoguh for Aristotle and Nemesius the third stage was the one of deliberation, it was still called "βουλευσις". This stage aims precisely at the means by which desired good can be reached.

Maximus, however, draws a finer distinction by calling it "searching lust" (ορεξις ζητητικη), that is a desire driven by the search for the wanted goal which takes place inside the mind. Only a human being can decide on such an intelligent level.

The next stage is judging (κρισις) upon the things which have been delibered upon. A process of analysis takes place during this stage according to the noetic intuition of telling right from wrong (διακρισις). In the tradition of Orthodox spirituality, judgment is the most dominant mark of the divine rational image inside man*: "When the mind is daring and stops wondering, by means of the proper search of the Word which gives knowledge, which anointed it against passions, about what it should do and should not do, it will certainly fall under the power of passions because of lack of knowledge*."[60] This is influenced by man's bias to different sorts of impressions and representations. The way in which judgement ocurs is affected by acquiescence. Man often knows what he wants even before weighing well. Saint Maximus the Confessor shows the connection between reason and the other spiritual forces: *"Judgements and intentions" which the word is said to judge are the affectionate ties of the soul to God's reasons and with the thoughts and causes of these connections. For judgement moves memory, which is affection by nature, and intention looks*

---

[54] Pr.prof. Dr.Dumitru Stăniloae, Filocalia a treia, Humanitas Publishing House, p.74.

[55] *"And purpose (τέλος) I call the cause of all that are, according to which all are normally desired*", Filocalia IIIa, p. 29.

[56] Introduction to *Quaest ad Thalas*. P.G. 90, 253.

[57] Ibidem, p. 316.

[58] Lars Thumberg, op.cit., p. 247.

[59] Pr. Prof. Dumitru Stăniloae, Filocalia aIIa, 3rd Edition, *Cuvânt ascetic prin întrebări şi răspunsuri,* p. 31.

[60] Pr. Prof. Dumitru Stăniloae, Filocalia II a, *A doua sută a capetelor gnostice,* 35, 3rd Edition, p. 235.

towards the end, which is characteristic of the cause"[61]. In passion, for the people subdued to vice, this stage is automatically eliminated, man choosing vice addiction to the detriment of listening to one's inner reason which judges.

Judgement then leads to choice – Saint Maximus says. According to Aristotle, choice is not a separate act, but merely the meeting between desire and judgement.[62] Saint Maximus introduces the problem of "lust" (ορμη) in the initial process of manifesting the will. it is already the third time that Saint Maximus brings this term into discussion. The first time, desire was discussed as a "lust of imagination" (ορεξις φανταστικη), deliberation as "lust of searching" (ορεξις ζητητικη) and, thirdly, as "deliberative lust" (ορεξις βουλευτικη). Almost a thousand years before, Plato identified this "lust" with "eros". Eros is the desire which pushes the will of man towards commitment. Thus, one can say that Saint Maximus closely follows Aristotle's view.[63]

The decisive impulse is the final stage which leads man to action or commitment that Maxmus also calls "ορμη". Here is a clear Stoic influence upon the views of Maximus concerning commitment, who generally uses the simplified triad: imagination, lust and consent. For Saint Maximus, imagination and lust are very closely linked, one being a prerequisite for the other. In order to reach this target, choice should be associated with desire (ορμη) and with use (χρησις). In conclusion, if there is no initial desire, no positive touch of the eros, man does not reach decision or practice. In other words, if man does not feel joy in commiting a certain thing, he will not be able to build a career in that field, no matter how hard he may try.

Action or the "use" of conclusions reached after the preliminary processes of deliberation are called "commitment": *"The Creator of nature has filled everything with the knowledge of nature called power of carrying out debts."* [64] If the preliminary stages of preparing an action make use of faculties such as imagination, reason, intelligence, commitment is conditioned by means external to the subject such as physical health etc. The deed is the final fruit of thought and deliberation. This fruit is either worthy of God's reward, or evil, turning man into the devil's servant: *"worshipping is the faithful honoring of God, and serving means serving through facts. This worshipping, that is, faith, being moved by people towards being, has honored it instead of the Creator, believing in devils which they also served through their evil deeds."*[65]

Karen Horney, a psychologist, psychiatrist and researcher whose theories give greater concision to the ideas of Freud, Jung or Adler, approaches the fundamental problems of society from the perspective of each individual's spiritual problems. Thus, more specifically, she claims that problems start in the structure of man, in the structure of his personality and are related to the attitude that man will have towards his kind. She distinguishes three general attitudes: the movement towards people, the movement against people and the movement of driving people away. When considering the problem of the hermit one notices that the hermit does not walk away from people in a diseased and pathological manner, but on the contrary, he departs from people so that he may recapitulate through peace and prayer.[66]

By true love, we take the right attitude towards the others, too. There is an abnormal, vicious love which aims at a certain goal, or even at a selfish attachment to God, where man sees himself as humble: "And the goal *(τέλος) is called the cause of all that are, according to which all are naturally desired, although the Cunning, often covering his envy under the guise of benevolence and cunningly trepanning man to direct his desire towards something of those which are and not*

[61] Filocalia aIII-a, Humanitas Publishing House, 3rd Edition, 2003, p. 328.
[62] Ibidem, p. 248.
[63] Ibidem, 250.
[64] Ibidem, 165.
[65] Ibidem, 71.
[66] Arhim. Simeon Kraiopoulos, *Te cunoşti pe tine însuţi,* Ed. Bizantină, Bucureşti, 2008, p. 46.

towards the goal, planted inside him the unknowing of the cause"[67]. This attitude drives the one who ardently prays to rude and unacceptable insistance, because without realising it, he forgets his status and addresses God with too much courage. For this, God will not even hear such a prayer, considering it a scorn.

The same psychologist identifies a special category of people who conform to the general opinion of others in order to be liked by the others at all costs. Concerning these, Saint Maximus the Confessor would say: *"Also, the one who commits or pursues virtue in order to be esteemed by men places human approval above the approval of God, suffering from the passion of being liked by men. And the one who cunningly paints his behavious in the propriety of virtue, willingly hiding his evil disposition of will under the seen apparel of piety, in order to delude people, buys virtue with the cunning hypocrisy*"[68]. This is a perverse way of understanding relationships with others where those concerned slash their greatest value: freedom of thought. These people will conform to others at any cost, they see reality through the eys of others, they develop forms of sickly possessiveness, seek love, appreciation and respect. These are quickly identified and marginalized by everyone.[69]

Another symptom is that of the abnormal dependence upon others manifested by obedience. This person is ready to make any gesture of humility in order to obtain the appreciation of the person with whom he has quarreled. Deep inside his soul, the wounds are left unhealed and claim their price. They often experience transient states of imbalance, depression, panic attacks, anger extended to friends for no reason. The more he feels inside like an exploited slave, who does not receive back everything that he offers, the more his state of frustration increases. This kind of obedience or submission was very quickly identified and penalized by the greatest experiencers of wilderness, true connoisseurs of the soul.

These states have in common, as we have just seen, the passion of pride. The pride one is always preoccupied with the others' opinions, with his own image in the eyes of others. This eternal state of tension and stress leads to spiritual and mental disfunctions. That is why the therapeutic models of the Holy Fathers aim at dispassioning the body and the soul at the same time. If the dispassioning of the body is generally done through poor nutrition, the dispassioning of the soul is carefully done only by the great spiritual masters who passed, themselves, through these states. Besides the presented generalized scheme – of the stages of thought and will – there are still a lot of other paradoxical states and situations facing each candidate, also due to the fact that each person is unique in construction and the gifts that were left to him by God. The radical decisions made by the Fathers are related to the art of the profound knowledge of the human spirit, decisions which came with long observation work enlightenment from God*: "And again He said: if you lawfully fast, do not flaunt. And if you pride yourself on it, you would better eat meat than take pride in it and bosat about it*";[70] - a normal recommendation with the purpose of not falling into the temptation of pride, or of subjective distorted self-appreciation[71]. Other times, as is the case of Father Pimen, he restrains from eating in order not to lead the others into error: *"It so happened that some of the fathers came to the house of a lover of Christ, among who was also Father Pimen. And as they ate, they were offered meat and all of them ate, except Father Pimen. And the elders were amazed at his not eating, as they knew his right judgement. And after they rose, they told him: you are Pimen and this is what you have done? The old man answered to them: forgive me, fathers, you have eaten and nobody went mad; but had I eaten, because many brothers come close to me, would have been blighted, saying: Pimen ate meat and why should we not eat, and they were amazed at his right judgement*."[72] And the recommendation of Saint Anthony addressed to a money-lover brother seems drawn out of the pages of the ancient Greek*: "A*

---

[67] Filocalia III, p. 29.

[68] Pr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Filocalia II,* Humanitas Publishing House, 3rd Edition, 2003, Scolia a 8 a, p. 327.

[69] Cf. Ibidem.

[70] Patericul Egiptean, *Pentru Avva Isidor, 4*, Anastasia Publishing House, p. 75.

[71] Evagrie Ponticul, *În luptă cu gândurile*, Deisis Publishing House, Sibiu 2006, p.167, *Remediul Mândriei: "Pride is the absurd temptation which makes man believe that he does not owe anybody what he is but to himself: Do not surrender your heart to pride and do not say <<in front of God: I am powerful!>>"(Mn 62)".*

[72] Ibidem, Avva Pimen, p. 169.

brother, after having denied the world and shared his wealth to the poor, keeping little for himself, went to Father Anthony. And finding out about this, the elder told him: if you want to become a monk, go to that village and buy some meat and put it around your naked body and come back here. And by doing so, dogs and birds tore off his body. And coming to the elder, the elder asked him whther he did as he had advised him. And showing him his torn body, Saint Anthony told him: those who deny the world and want to have money, are torn to pieces like this, being fought over by devils."

4. Conclusion

Knowledge of the experiences and theories of all these Fathers, and especially of the most brilliant who have marked through innovation, power of synthesis and grace-inspiring genius and blessing new ages of spirituality is of great significance for posterity. Texts such as "Antirrhetikos" and "Praktikos" belonging to Evagrius, or the "ends of love" and the famous interpretations of Maximus, which are only drops in the wide ocean of the wisdom of the Holy Fathers, marked the times of their contemporaries and of their followrs for ever as they described, in a psychological – pedagogic and deeply Christian manner, the long and difficult road that every Christian must take in order to reach salvation. The aim of dispassioning was receiving the grace of sonship and living with Christ starting with this life, as an anticipation of the eternal life in God's Kingdom, according to His word: "And this is eternal life, to know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You sent"[73].

5. References

[1] Eliade, M., Culianu, I. P. (2007). *Dicţionar al religiilor.* Iaşi: Ed. Polirom.
[2] Nesteruk, Al. (2009). *Universul în comuniune-către o sinteză neopatristică a teologiei şi ştiinţei,* Bucharest: Ed. Curtea Veche.
[3] Barbour, I. G. (2006). *Când ştiinţa întâlneşte religia.* Bucharest: Ed. Curtea Veche.
[4] Danielou, J. (1963). *Dictionnaire de spiritualite, ascétique et mystique, ed. II*, Paris.
[5] Matthews, G., Deary, J. J., Whiteman, M. C. (2005). *Psihologia Personalităţii.* Bucharest: Ed. Polirom.
[6] d'Aquino, T. (2009). *Summa Theologiae*. Iaşi: Ed.Polirom.
[7] Spidlik, T. (2005). *Spiritualitatea Răsăritului creştin - vol.I,* Sibiu: Ed. Deisis.
[8] Stăniloae, D. (1992) PSB 34, Bucureşti.
[9] Evagrius of Pontus (2006). *În luptă cu gândurile.* Sibiu: Ed. Deisis.
[10] Bădiliţă, C. (2003). *Tratatul Practic.* Bucharest: Ed.Polirom.
[11] Larchet, J.-C. (2001). *Terapeutica bolilor spirituale.* Bucharest: Ed. Sofia.
[12] Kraiopoulos, S. (2008). *Te cunoşti pe tine însuţi? Viaţa duhovnicească şi problemele psihologice*. Bucharest: Ed. Bizantină.
[13] Jung, C.G. (2003). *Opere complete,* vol.1 şi 6, Bucharest: Ed.Trei.
[14] Minulescu, M. (2001). *Introducere în psihanaliza junghiană*. Bucharest: Ed.Trei.
[15] Ică.jr., I. I., Marani, G. (2002). *Gândirea socială a Biserici, fundamente, documente, analize şi perspective*. Sibiu: Ed. Deisis.
[16] Guenon, R. (2008). *Simboluri ale ştiinţei sacre.* Bucharest: Ed.Humanitas.
[17] Thunberg, L. (2005). *Antropologia Teologică A Sfântului Maxim Mărturisitorul*. Bucharest: Ed. Sofia.
[18] Wolfson, H. A. (1956). *The Philosophy of the Church Fathers.* Harvard University Press.
[19] van Gennep, A. (2000). *Totemismul.* Bucharest: Ed. Polirom.
[20] Dennet, D. C. (2006). *Tipuri mentale*. Bucharest: Ed. Humanitas.
[21] Stăniloae, D. (2009). *Filocalia sfintelor nevoinţe ale desăvârşirii,* vol.1, 2, 3. Bucharest: Ed. Humanitas.
[22] Stăniloae, D. (1983). PSB 80. *Ambigua*. Bucharest: Ed. Institutului Biblic de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române.
[23] Sinkewicz, R. (2003). *Evagrius of Pontus. The Greek Ascetic Corpus.* Oxford

[73] Ioan 17, 3.