

An Apologetical Approach regarding the Religious Feeling

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Abstract

The religious feeling represents the first step in the process of knowing God. In our study we have tried to analyze apologetically the human predisposition to the divine reality. Our main interest was to demonstrate the necessities of the religious human being in their process of self- discovery. In this regard, the feeling of religious belonging is very important. Therefore, the moral law is the starting point in the divine knowledge of the human consciousness. In the process of revelation God gives the Old Testament to the Jewish people. Furthermore, when the Logos has come in the world the divine knowledge started to be more straightforward and the religious feeling acquired a Christological dimension. Finally, the religious feeling demonstrates a beautiful process of an ontological discovery in Christ of all human race. In conclusion, our study is an apologetic debate about how to reestablish the conceptual harmony between theology, philosophy, culture and science in the process of knowing God.

Keywords: Jesus Christ, Apologetic Theology, Christian Church, Old Testament, New Testament, Religious Feeling.

I. Introduction

The issue of “religion”, as a dynamic and permanent connection between natural and supernatural, transcendent and immanent (from Latin *religo, -are* – meaning ‘to link’ or ‘to rebind’) (F. GAFFIOT, 1934, 2183), in one word the intimate relationship between God and man, is

one of the most important aspects in the dialogue between theology and philosophy, culture and science. Therefore, religion is coexistent with the human being and having both an intern and extern condition. It is potentiated through a symbolical metamorphosis and it appears in “the daily life of human beings” (Boldișor, 2014, p. 234); it is reflected in art, mythology, in culture or science. Moreover, religion is to be found in the ideas, thoughts and internal feelings of man. “As the soul and body are united together in man, in the same way these elements are gathered together into one unique idea. As the soul’s activity is dependent on feelings, showed through the organs of the body, in the same way the religious idea acquires importance through the external part of the ritual which is itself strengthened and developed by the liturgical life” (Schanz, 1891, p. 74).

According to the ancient philosophers, the etymological meaning of the term refers to some formal preoccupation of the human intellect. For example, Cicero says that the Latin verb *religere* means in a proper way: “to re-read, to study with attention, to reserve something for an important usage, to distinguish something from the ordinary things”; and in a formal sense: “to respect someone in a special way, to venerate”. Cicero’s attitude is justified by the fact that in his period the term “religion” hadn't reached its most proper spiritual signification yet. This is the reason why “in some parts, it defines religion as an approach sprung from fear and, in other parts, he says that religion is the care and worship given to gods and or, even piety”. Among the first century writers, Arnobius is the most familiar with this meaning which adds an inside view of the worship. Therefore, he defines religion as man's alive and conscious relationship with God. On the other hand, Lactantius is the first Christian writer who asserts this theory. According to him “we are born with this condition to show proper obedience to God, who is our Father. We must know Him and follow Him. We are bound to God with the relationship of worship (*Deo religate sumus*) and this is the source of religion (*religio*) itself, and not from the word *relegendo*, as Cicero explains” (*Institutiones divinae*, Cartea IV). In the same

context, Saint Augustine says that "God is the Source of our happiness and the purpose of our aspirations. Choosing Him or rather re-choosing Him (it seems that religion itself has got its name), we move towards Him through love". Holy Father anchors this relationship between our soul and God in man's heart, as if it were a call, towards which man is always lured due to its vocation as an "image of God". This is the source where the liturgical manifestation to Father Creator springs from, to which we are all bound in an ontological way. "Great are You, o Lord, and truly worthy of praise! says the Holy Father. Great is Your power and Your wisdom cannot be measured. And still, a man, an immeasurable glimpse of Your creation, wants to glorify You! A mortal man confesses that You stand against the proud ones. And still, a man, an insignificant glimpse of Your creation, wants to glorify You. You exhorted him to find his happiness in the act of glorifying You, because You created us for Yourself, o Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in You" (St. Augustine, 2010, p. 49).

We, therefore, understand that the purpose of religion is not only that of possibility, but also one of necessity since "the presence of religious feeling in the human soul, as a part of it, shows the psychological necessity in the same manner as the soul's aspirations toward the absolute and divine imply the metaphysical necessity of religion ... Without religion, there would be no society since the man, before being a social animal, as Aristotle used to say, is a religious being, as the modern anthropology defines, stating that religion is the point where humanity dissociates from animality" (Savin, 1996: 21).

Therefore, we cannot speak about religion as something which was attached to human nature at a later moment since it is from the start rooted in it as existential reality and, in the same time, indispensable to our life. The corruption of this relationship is justified from a theological point of view in the context of the original sin, through which the image of God in man was darkened and the true meaning of his liberty was altered. The consequences of this kind of relational corruption were inherited from generation to generation, infiltrating in our nature, in the existence and manifestation of all

human nations. However, God has not completely vanished out of their conscience, being felt through the reminiscence of the primordial revelation. "In support of this thesis, says professor Ioan Savin, there is the research carried out by the History of Religion, who points out that even the most fallen nations, with the poorest religious forms, keep the memory of a better social virtue and the idea of a superior religious life. This state of corruption was followed by a state of regeneration towards more and more refined religions, from the natural religions to the anthropomorphic ones, finally reaching the religion of absolute and revelation, i.e. Christianity, which came out «just at the exact moment of time». Therefore, a primordial revelation, followed by corruption and after that by raising with the help of natural and supernatural revelation, is the path from origin to Christianity" (Savin, p. 22-23).

Starting from the primary coordinates of the religious feeling, placed sometimes under the mark of "misterium tremendum", pragmatic rationality, and innate action or under the oscillation between sacred and profane (Popescu, 2009, pp. 31-34), this ontological and inexhaustible capacity reaches, in the light of the divine revelation, the state "of existential addiction of man to God, which we find in Christianity". From this complex process of becoming, identifying and defining its nature, origin and manifestation, religion has preserved the conscience of two structural aspects: piety (as an interior and subjective aspect) and external cult (as objective manifestation). Their unity "lays at the basis of religion and allows man to be connected with God in all his psychological nature. In as far as, in terms of soul, man takes part at the religious knowledge of God due to his rationality, he attends the fulfilment of moral law due to his will, develops the love for God due to his feelings, working to fulfil the acts that the moral law of his body demands. Therefore, soul and body are integrating part in the religious life of man, since the image of God inside man embraces his real nature" (Popescu, p. 37-38).

II. The Religion of "The Old Testament"

God has progressively prepared the moment of restoration of the human icon in Him, re-establishing at the same time the content of the true liberty. This was the reason why He revealed Himself amidst the chosen people, activating once again the seed of the religious feeling that man had preserved after he had fallen into sin. This legitimate relationship is highlighted in the Semite tradition of the Old Testament through the word "berit" (The Encyclopaedia of Judaism, London, 1989, p. 181-182), which means "covenant". In this way, the covenant of the old Jews people always looks for, in its original content (Cocagnac, 1997, p. 42), a personal reference to Yahweh. In fact, it is "the final act through which God establishes a defensive relationship that He has initiated and set its borders" (Cocagnac, p. 42). "Then when the sun went down and it was dark, he saw a smoking fire and a flaming light which went between those pieces. In that day the Lord made a covenant with Abraham, saying: To your seed I have given this land from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates" (Genesis 15, 17-18).

The relationship between created and uncreated is present in the conception of the chosen people through "the divine fire". This is also the context that outlines the support and definition of interpersonal relations that go further to the knowledge of God. This relationship first defines the ontological contents of the human nature, thus completing the proximity between God and the chosen people. On Mount Horeb, Moses discovers God in "the burning pyre" (Cf. Exodus 3, 3-4), being shown how and what is the state that man must receive the divine covenant. Although, it was not burning before receiving the Law, symbolizing the image of eternal godhead, the divine fire started burning at the moment of establishing the covenant, thus creating the perfect context for the work of theophanies (Matsoukas, p. 41). Moreover, due to the fact that all the history of the Old Testament is under the incidence of the theophanies (Matsoukas, p. 42), we understand that the divine covenant in its dynamics and incidence is attracted towards the uncreated knowledge and permanent experimentation. Through the

theophanies of the Old Testament, Yahweh authenticates himself in the history of the chosen people as guiding and redemptive power (cf. Exodus 13, 20-22; 14, 24-25; 40, 38; Deuteronomy 1, 33; Numbers 9, 15-23; Psalms 77, 14; 104, 38), while legislative and purifying (Isaiah 42, 8; Psalms 77, 59; Leviticus 19, 2; Numbers 15, 40; Isaiah 6, 6-7; 48, 9-10; Ezekiel 22, 19-21; Psalms 11, 6; 26, 2; 66, 10; Zachariah 13, 8-9).

The sanctification of the divine covenant was especially confirmed by the cultic form within the Jewish traditions. In this respect, the Russian theologian, Paul Evdokimov highlights the supra-rational and supra-legislative dimension of divine knowledge within the Jewish tradition. "The verb «to know» in the works of the inspired writers does not necessarily refer to intelligence. Jewish people believe that we think by the heart. Therefore, knowing God would mean to recognize Him in the act of worship that activates the entire nature of the human being and all its capacities" (Evdokimov, 2013, p. 45).

This is the reason why on Mount Sinai, Moses does not only receive the Tables of the Law, but discovers God in darkness. Paul Evdokimov believes that this event is an important part of the biblical theophanies due to its apophatic dimension. "The darkness or the cloud emphasizes the divine transcendence, and witnesses the presence of God and, at the same time, reveals and hides Him" (Evdokimov, p. 46-47). Furthermore, father Sofronie Saharov says that "there cannot be any doubt for us and for the entire Christian world that one of the most relevant events in the chronicles of that time was the revelation of God on Mount Sinai, where Moses received a new kind of understanding of the divine nature: I am who I am - Yahweh, Ho on (Exodus 3, 14). From that moment on, wide horizons have been opened in front of the humanity and history turned a new direction. The real cause of these historical events is the real state of the people of a nation: the spiritual part is more important than the material one ... By the name of Yahweh, Moses led and released the Hebrews from the Egyptian captivity, who were still primitive people. However, during the desert wandering time, He discovered that the chosen people, although they had faced

various miracles, were far from receiving the great revelation of the Eternal One. This happening became obvious in the moment when they reached the Promise Land. The chosen people's heart weakness and lack of belief, made God say that none of them will see the Promised Land (Deuteronomy 1, 32, 35, 38). And they will leave their bones in the dessert and Moses will encourage and prepare a new more capable generation to sense the Unseen God Who keeps everything in His Hands" (Sofronie, 2007, pp. 20-21).

It is therefore a progressive increase from the notion of covenant to the burning desire to know God as a final reality in the process of perfection and holiness (Lemeni, Mihalache & Ionescu, 2013, p. 108). From the very beginning, the Jewish people believed that the organization of the earthy life is the work of God and this is the reason for which "they could only conceive religion as a relationship between God and man. Therefore, man can complete this relationship through his obedience to God, through circumcision and from God's part through granting special gifts, that no other nation can enjoy. Therefore, religion hasn't always had the same importance. For example, paganism inspired fear in the context of the Old Testament, since in the New Testament the relationship between a slave and a master changed" (Mihălcescu, 1932, p. 50).

III. Natural / universal or unwritten law

In addition to the physical order of life, there is also an unwritten or moral law, established by God through His perfect Will in the perspective of an ontological re-becoming and potentiating. This is therefore the purpose of the divine urge: "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" (Matthew 5, 48). In a broader meaning the rule or law (be it physical or moral) is the guide that rules any human being. In this way, every particle in the universe directs itself according to some precise coordinates set out it by God from the moment His creation so that each of them could reach its own ontological purpose. Even the irrational creatures (lifeless bodies, plants, animals) have their own ruling laws in their earthy work or existence: the law of gravitation, the law of rotation,

the disintegration of matter, the succession of seasons or days, the law of decomposition of matter, we call all of these natural laws (Rezuș, 1989, p. 13; Mihălcescu, p. 86). All these natural elements seen in the materiality of their existence are essential arguments in promoting and supporting natural revelation, confirming therefore "visible marks and obvious evidence of the Creator in the universe (cf. Psalms 104) or the seeds of the divine wisdom (Logos) which are set in the created nature. Therefore, man is a rational being and the creation has his rationality" (Bria, 2000, p. 14).

Created with the purpose of being the highest of all the divine creation, man received from God from the very moment when he was created, moral conscience or natural law that embedded within him after the original sin. Created to be the crown of God's creation, man received the moral conscience or the natural law from the moment of his creation. This natural and divine gift was preserved deep down in his soul even after the original sin. Therefore, we can say that natural law was rooted in man's heart and its fulfilment was perfect. It is also true that in the virtue of the original sin, moral conscience darkened and became somehow opaque as by tasting fruit from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, Adam "disobeyed God". "He despised God's command". This mistake led to our ancestors cast out from Paradise. Under these circumstances, their only guide remained nevertheless the moral conscience. "Moral conscience and judgment, which are set by God in man's heart, are the principal guide and also man's teacher. Man is seemed as a living being (Genesis 2, 7) endowed with moral responsibility to God and his fellow (Matthew 5, 8). Due to this kind of knowledge and conscience, «the ones with pure heart will see God» (Matthew 5, 8). Church also recognizes the moral quality of these righteous people who lived before the Mosaic Law (Abraham and Job) and under the Law (Moses) and sees them as examples of Christians" (Bria, 2000, p. 14-15).

This unwritten criterion of life remained ingrained in the nation's conscience over the centuries as Saint Paul, the Apostle says: "For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto

themselves, which show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another; in the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel." (Romans 2, 14-16). The Holy Bible of the Old Testament also offers many examples and proofs about the existence and importance of moral conscience. "For this commandment that I command you today is not too hard for you, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven, that you should say, 'Who will ascend to heaven for us and bring it to us, which we may hear it and do it?' Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, 'Who will go over the sea for us and bring it to us, which we may hear it and do it?' But the word is very near you. It is in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can do it." (Deuteronomy 30, 11-14). And also God speaks through Jeremiah: "This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time," declares the LORD. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will they teach their neighbour, or say to one another, 'Know the LORD, 'because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest", declares the LORD. "For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more." (Jeremiah 31, 33-34).

The emergence of the created realities as positive resources of the divine work in the world is therefore strengthened and inner fulfilled by the existence of moral conscience. It provides the most appropriate background in order to experience the religious feeling, favours man's personal intercommunion with God and also proper reference to our fellows. Only based this theo-central support, the moral and natural law can reach the original climax of its becoming, it synthesizes "the gifts of human rationality, perfects the human ideal in the divine purpose and exalts the idea of mankind culture to that of God's Kingdom". In this context, "religion penetrates morality with the warmth of love that was born from Good and sets new life in it through intuition excited by feeling", all of these because "God

made Himself man so that you could learn from a Man how a man be risen to God”, says Saint Clement the Alexandrian (Tărchilă, 1934).

Therefore, we cannot talk about a moral law without God. Set in the work of natural revelation, it acquires a theonomic character, being “lit by the Word of the Father through the Holy Spirit” (Popescu, 2005, p. 45). He is the Only and True Legislator (Devivier, 1904, p. 8), who endows each of us with the most appropriate norms of living in order to discover Him, first in the beauty of his creation (Answers to Talasie, in „Philokalia, vol. 3, Sibiu, 1944, p. 312) and second in the perfect communion of interpersonal knowledge where we become members of the Holy Body of His Church.

IV. The Christological Dimension of the Religious Feeling

The religious feeling of the primitive man, brought out by the history of salvation, craves continuously for the fulfilment of its existence in the person of Jesus Christ, our Saviour. “The essence of Christianity as religion, says Father Ion Bria, is to gather together the children of God separated and scattered in one unity. It is a commitment in which the free man is called and trained as theophoros, with the mission to turn Earth into the Kingdom of Heaven” (Bria, 2000, pp. 11-12).

Completely restored through the Sacrifice of the incarnated Son of God, the commitment of our ancestors became “at once: alive, free connection aware of God and believer ... unchangeable basis given to the Church by God Himself who provides the right direction” (Rezuș, 1989, p. 11). In the Christian tradition religion has first an ontological dimension. In its state as “image of God” man is personally involved and dialogically activated. He is permanently attracted by “this ontological relationship since God reveals Himself and speaks to the people (cf. Hebrew 1, 1) not only as One who exists for and through them but as a living God that is love in His personal being and who gives only love”. Therefore, we understand that “religion is an active relationship so that man can receive the vocation of free cooperation in the act of restoration of the world from he himself is apart. In this

way, man increases the love that he had received from the Heavenly Father” (Bria, 2000, p. 10).

Christian religion is the context where the relationship between the natural and the religious supernatural is created. The last instance of knowing God (the supernatural one) is “the most precious element of the Christian religion since it becomes the divine character of this religion as well as the essence of the religious education. The Old Testament was revealed by God through the patriarchs and prophets; it brings together all the formal and essential conditions of divine Revelation, legitimizing itself through miracles and prophets. In the same way, the New Testament is revealed by the Son of God Himself, whose goodness is the angular stone of Christianity. This reality was described by Saint Paul the Apostle in his memorable words: «And if Christ is not resurrected then our preaching is in van and your faith also»” (Rezuş, 1989, p. 13).

The divine answer to the search of the religious man came through Natural and Supernatural Revelation. Within Revelation man can find the acknowledgement of his own beliefs and can also discover the work of God amidst His creation. Being permanently correlated with the internal vibration of the human nature, the Revelation has a progressive evolution that starts through the work of the prophets of the Old Testament. In their work, God reveals Himself through word, signs and physical things. This process is fulfilled in a personal way through the revelation of His Son as Mystery of His Will, “where all the secret treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden” (Cf. Colossians 2, 2-3). Every step of divine revelation is stated by the Holy Scripture. This aspect is highlighted by Saint Paul the Apostle, when he says that: “In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe” (Cf. Hebrew 1, 1-2). However, although “God is eternal, hidden and unseen (Cf. Colossians 1, 15; I Timothy 1, 17), yet, from love, He has shown Himself and talked to the people (Cf. John 15, 14-15), speaking in this way so that “all men may have salvation and

come to the knowledge of what is true" (Timothy 2, 4). Without His revelation man would not have ever been able to outrun the pantheism and know a personal and living God (I Corinthians 1, 21). About God's love for the world preaches the Holy Scripture when it says that: «For God had such loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that whoever has faith in him may not come to destruction but have eternal life» (John 3, 16). In conclusion, God reveals Himself out of love for people" (Popescu, 2005, p. 42).

In his state of "icon of God", man fulfils his purpose through a permanent desire of communion and the act of free knowledge. His life is placed under the incidence of primordial good, having the confidence of his personal future within the divine revelations. This is why liberty must not be understood "by chance", but it must be understood "according to life and skills" (Sf. Damaschin, 1993, pp. 102-104). Therefore, we can understand that the necessity of divine Revelation is first a dialogue, exceeding solitude and selfishness and casting out false freedom.

Therefore, knowing God, which is a necessity of the religious man, can only be understood in the dimension of His "condescension", of "His sorting out the mystery of His ineffable Goodness, in the act of human touch and see. Therefore, man has access to the intimate life of the Creating Father, starting with the creation but especially with His theophanies, which are tangible manifestations of His personal presence in the world (Cf. Genesis 32, 32), until the Divine Incarnation of His Son, which is described in the books of the New Testament ... (John 1, 14) This multiform revelation, from creation to Incarnation, that has its origin in God, is neither heterogeneous, nor destructive for man. Christian religion asserts man's capacity to guide through God (*capax Dei*), to perceive the divine law and also receive the process of Revelation through the Mosaic Law and the New Testament's perceptions. Being created by the image of God (*imago Dei*), meaning, having the spiritual liberty of entering into a relationship of love with the Creator, man, who is not eternal, receives the gift of eternal life" (Bria, 2000, pp. 13-14).

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