

TRUTH, FUNDAMENTAL VALUE OF THE WORLD, ACTUALIZED THROUGH PRIESTHOOD¹

Ph.D(c) Cosmin Iulian CÎRSTEA

*University of Bucharest, Faculty of Orthodox Theology „Justinian Patriarch”,
Doctoral School „Dumitru Stăniloae”
cosminiulian93@yahoo.com,*

ABSTRACT: TRUTH, Fundamental Value of the World, Actualized Through Priesthood.

The plan according to which God created the world consists of a constant that gives meaning and direction to all existence. This constant is the Truth. We do not speak here about a relative truth, but about the Absolute Truth, the Son of God incarnated into man, who says about Himself, „I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life”. (John 14:6).

The world is thus made to aspire to the Creator, to transfigure and to be in a gracious relationship with Him. Here, man has a crucial role. Since impersonal creation cannot relate to God who is a Trinity of Persons, the Creator placed in its midst the man created in His image; that is, a creature with whom He can establish such an intimate relationship, that through it He can unite with Himself the whole created world. Man has, therefore, the calling to put the whole world before the Creator as a sacrifice, therefore, an ontological sacerdotal vocation. Man is the priest who is meant to update in himself and then in the whole creation, the Truth that is the foundation of the world. This mission, however, can be missed by man. We do not mean that he can stop from his work of transfiguring the world, because this is impossible, it is a fact from which he cannot escape. The way he can miss his vocation is the replacement of the Truth with an idea that he considers the measure of all things. This is the case with ideologies. They reduce the world to ideas which they substi-

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tute for the Truth, and since man has in himself the calling to permanently update the creation, he will do so in this case, not according to the Truth, but according to the idea which he substitutes for it. That is why ideologies transform people who should be priests of creation, into idolatrous priests, who no longer serve the Truth, but ideas.

The purpose of this article is to demonstrate that The man has this vocation to be a priest of creation, that is to transform the world according to a transcendent principle. This transcendent principle is the truth. If the truth is absent or corrupted the man becomes a idolatrous priest, who transfigures the creation according to an idea. In this way the priest of creation becomes an ideologist and he miss his vocation.

Keywords: *priesthood, truth, world, ideology, creation.*

Introduction

Truth is the fundamental value of the world, the basic principle of the plan according to which God created all that exists. It gives purpose to all existence, being both the potentiality of creation, the goal towards which this potentiality develops, and the means by which it is continually actualized.

This truth is directly related to the person of the Son of God made man, the One who speaks of Himself: „I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life”. (John 14, 6). Christ is therefore the foundation and aspiration of the whole world. He is the ‚measure’ to which everything must attain.

So the world is also destined to be united in grace with the Creator. It must be said, however, that this union, which is not a pantheistic union, takes place through the human person. Impersonal creation, not being capable of dialogue, is drawn by man into his dialogue with God. Man therefore has an essential role in the sanctification of creation. Just as the fall of Adam altered the whole world, so the deification of man through Christ, the New Adam, shares God’s grace with all creation. Moreover, the fact that the Logos assumed human flesh makes man a partaker of His priesthood. Or, in other words, God has created a creature, which he can unite with himself so intimately that through it he can sanctify all existence. We can therefore say that man has the priestly vocation in an ontological way, he being placed after the creation of the other creatures as their organiser and perfecter. At the same time, being united with Christ, he can also make

himself a sharer in a special priesthood, which intercedes for the actualization in every soul of the work of the Saviour. Moreover, by working for the sanctification of men, the basic work of the priesthood is the actualization of the Truth in the world or the transfiguration of the world according to the Truth of Christ. This takes place because the sanctification of man is not confined to himself, but automatically spreads to the surrounding nature, which is indissolubly united with him.

In view of what has been said so far, we speak of Truth as the Second Person of the Holy Trinity. Of course certain concepts characterized by truthfulness can also be called truths, but these are only relative truths. When I say this, I am not referring to postmodern relativity, which wants to trivialize any truth, but to the relationship they have with the Absolute Truth, Christ. The closer something is to Absolute Truth, the more pronounced quality of truth it has. In other words, truth in the world has a fundamental norm, a standard by which it is defined. When we deny God, the norm of truth, we become virtually truthless; we enter a dead-end relativism and regard everything as an arbitrary construct.

Relativism hides far greater dangers than we might realise at first glance. The relativistic approach to existence, as a hazard, makes man throw aside everything that has hitherto been solid and guides his life. However, ontologically predisposed towards priesthood, i.e. having the tendency to accommodate the world to a universal truth through sacrifice and responsibility, man cannot act according to the relativism described; he cannot remain in a kind of existential neutrality, in which he cannot relate to anything solid. Thus he will find something that he can turn into universal truth and try to adapt the whole world to what he believes is right. This is how ideologies arise, which have imposed themselves over time and created real horrors.

By approaching the problem in this way, we can understand why society's estrangement from God² is the cradle of ideologies and why faith in the Truth of Christ is the best antidote against utopian horrors. We can therefore say that the attitude of some regimes and movements to-

2 Ioan-Gheorghe Rotaru, "Aspecte ale secularizării și ale omului secularizat" ("Aspects of secularization and secularized man"), *Studia Universitatis Babeș-Bolyai, Theologia Orthodoxa*, (2006), L-LI, nr.1, Presa Universitară Clujeană, Cluj-Napoca, pp. 251-266.

wards authentic Christianity reveals whether they have ideological-totalitarian aspirations or not; we need only look at recent history, marked by communism, to see this. Such a movement will try to weaken and destroy society's attachment to Christianity. At the same time, the ministry of the priesthood comes to do just the opposite, that is, to unite man with the One who is the Truth, and thus makes vain the attempt to impose any idea with a false claim to truth.

This paper aims to show that Truth is the foundation of the world. The latter is perfected by the priestly mission of man who relates to Christ, „the Truth of things”, and is diverted from the trajectory for which it was created, by replacing the service of Truth with ideology.

I. Truth, the Fundamental Constant of the World

The concept of „truth” has been disputed many times over the years, with attempts to define it as precisely as possible. However, no definition can explain it in its depth, let alone circumscribe it. The Explanatory Dictionary of the Romanian Language describes it as „concordance between our knowledge and objective reality; faithful reflection of reality in thought; what exists or has happened in reality (...)”³. At the same time, three meanings of the term are distinguished: reality, as opposed to imaginary, truthfulness, as opposed to falsehood, and accuracy, as opposed to approximation. Thus, however one looks at it, truth implies conformity to a norm, to something immutable; this norm gives it the quality of truth. It must be said, however, that the meanings mentioned do not succeed in exhausting the notion of truth; rather, they point to applications of it in aspects of human life.

The birth of modern science is closely linked to what these three meanings express. It was about gaining a secure knowledge of the world. This knowledge was to be real, free of unprovable myths, truthful, from which all error could be separated, and accurate, based on precise, mathematically verifiable information. Out of a desire for objective investigation, truth was formalised; in other words, it was removed from the auspices of human subjectivity and placed under those of reason, which neither affirms nor believes anything without experimentation. Truth no longer rep-

3 *Dicționar Explicativ al Limbii Române (Explanatory Dictionary of the Romanian Language)*, Editura Univers Enciclopedic, București, 1998.

resents, as in the case of classical science, a certain matching of the realities under investigation to human interiority. It now becomes a universal truth demonstrable by the repetition by anyone of the experiments that led to its deduction.⁴ This approach is not necessarily incorrect, as long as the scientist does not speculate when he has the results of an experiment in front of him and as long as he does not claim that his theory is exhaustive. To give an example: the biologist observes that a certain species of bird looks different in a certain geographical area because of environmental conditions. He can draw the objective conclusion that living creatures can adapt to their environment and change a number of features. What he cannot do is extrapolate his conclusion and create a theory with an absolute claim to truth; for example, that all species on earth evolved from one. This approach is no longer based on objective observation; science is transformed into ideological scientism.

The honest researcher must be aware that science has self-imposed limits. It observes, describes and makes discoveries on the basis of what is within the range of the senses, but it cannot give opinions on what is beyond human comprehension and in no case can it circumscribe the truth. The latter must be much more than what we have hitherto expounded and what we can perceive. Truth must be more than a series of conclusions drawn on the basis of experiments. There is more than can be observed through the natural sciences. There are other levels at which it can be seen, in a much deeper way than its common usage. Another level of perception of truth is the philosophical one, which sees truth as something complex and quite difficult to unravel.

Socrates, for example, regards truth as a reality to be discovered and expressed, and not a product of conjecture and oratory. Truth does not need, flourishes' to assert itself; it is powerful by itself, it exists and inspires, it is not a mental construct:

"(...) instead, from me you will hear the whole truth. But I swear by Zeus, citizens of Athens, that you will not hear words embellished and adorned with clever twists and choice words like these, but I will use the words that happen to come to my mind, confident of the truth of my words; and let none of you expect anything else."⁵

4 Pr. Răzvan Ionescu, Adrian Lemeni, *Dicționar de Teologie Ortodoxă și Știință (Dictionary of Orthodox Theology and Science)*, Editura Doxologia, Iași, 2016, p. 22.

5 Platon, *Apărarea lui Socrate (Socrates' defence)*, 17bc, in *Opere complete*, vol. I, Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, București, 1976, p. 15.

Socrates' view is also shared by his disciple Plato, who believes that truth can only be known through a sharpening of the senses, a development of intuition. The latter acts as a receptacle of truth. It is not sought through sophisticated reasoning, designed to form an idea, but through introspection, which brings out or „gleans” what already exists but is undiscovered. That truth is, for Plato, a reality in itself and not a product of reason is also proved by the attitude he takes in the „Menon” as to how it is arrived at. The idea is expressed plastically: the knowledge of truth can be considered as the knowledge of the way to Larisa. One can assume the route correctly and another know it accurately. Plato considers them both equal, since both knowledge and assumption lead to the same place. Thus, it is not the process that is the essence of truth, but the arriving at it⁶. The process of knowing is not the source of truth, but only the instrument with which to study it. Knowledge, says Plato, sees what is, supposition sees what is or what is not-without knowing clearly-, and non-knowledge refers to what is not.⁷ The constant of all these elements is truth; how they relate to it gives one or other of them legitimacy.⁸

Another example from the world of philosophy is Martin Heidegger's (1889-1976) conception of truth. He speaks of truth as something that reveals itself; truth is not a result of method, of discursive reasoning that structures an investigation. Truth is revealed to the one who catches himself in a sincere search, through a lifestyle in accordance with it.⁹ Truth is not for him a simple adequacy of an idea, of a thing to the intellect. If in the scholastic tradition man, as a rational creature, is the element of reference of truth, Heidegger remains faithful to the Hellenic conception, according to which «αλητεία» is an existence in itself, to which, to a certain extent, man can accede. Man's reason cannot give birth to truth, but can contemplate and render it.

6 Platon, *Menon*, 97a, in *Opere complete*, vol. II, Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, București, 1976, p. 409.

7 R.M. Hare, *Platon*, trad. Matei Pleșu, Editura Humanitas, București, 1997, p. 68.

8 Adrian Lemeni, *Adevăr și demonstrație. De la incompletitudinea lui Gödel la vederea mai presus de orice înțelegere a Sfântului Grigorie Palama (Truth and demonstration. From Gödel's incompleteness to St. Gregory Palamas' view beyond all understanding)*, Basilica, București, 2019, pp. 151–152.

9 Martin Heidegger, *Problemele fundamentale ale fenomenologiei (The fundamental problems of phenomenology)*, trad. Bogdan Mincă și Sorin Lavric, Editura Humanitas, București, 2006, p. 352.

It must also be said that Truth cannot be the result of algorithms that reduce reality to concepts and statements. The latter are nothing but representations that put us in front of reality, that point us in the direction of the thing described. The representations must be preceded by a view of the truth, which can only be achieved through an assumed search for it. We need a sincere involvement in this process, an involvement that does not seek to impose a particular point of view, but an honest search for reality. We must not set out with the idea that we already have everything we need and that we only need to find the arguments that validate us; such an attitude only makes us impervious to the truth. Nor should we pretend that it is thought that generates truth and exhausts it, because it only helps us to receive reality, and to a certain extent. However sharp the mind may be or become, it cannot penetrate reality so deeply that it leaves no room for anything more than it has perceived. Such an exaggeration of the qualities of one's own intellect succeeds only in making us blind to discovery." Truth takes precedence over thought. Truth structures reality, including thinking. Truth is discovered, not constructed, revealed, not conquered, by the state of non-concealment of the thing."¹⁰

We see that philosophical perception of truth¹¹ goes deeper than the one we have in everyday life. However, it is not the maximum of our reception of the subject. There is a much deeper approach that goes beyond the limits of human systems of thought. This is, of course, theological knowledge. This does not so much refer to the knowledge of the world on an intellectual level, through conceptualisation, but rather to the participation that God offers man through the sharing of Himself. It is about a particular kind of experience, rather than conceptualization at the level of the intellect. Theology mediates a living connection with the One who is the source of Truth, and thus an authentic knowledge that goes to the essence of things and does not remain only in manifestations and appearances.

10 Adrian Lemeni, *Adevăr și demonstrație. De la incompletitudinea lui Gödel la vederea mai presus de orice înțelegere a Sfântului Grigorie Palama (Truth and demonstration. From Gödel's incompleteness to St. Gregory Palamas' view beyond all understanding)*, Editura Basilica, București, 2019, p. 232.

11 Ioan-Gheorghe Rotaru, *Istoria Filosofiei, de la începuturi până la Renaștere (The History of Philosophy from the Beginning until the Renaissance)*, Presa Universitară Clujeană, Cluj-Napoca, 2005, pp.19-20.

The truth to which theology refers lies at the foundation of all creation. It lies at the foundation of the cosmos and is meant to grow and bring creation to perfection.¹² Truth is the seed of the Kingdom of Heaven of which the Saviour speaks; it is the mustard seed „...which a man took, and sowed in his field: Which indeed is the least of all seeds: but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof.” (Matthew 13, 31-32).

Truth is the leaven that leaveneth all leaven (Matthew 13:33); it has the capacity of a leaven that enlivens and moves creation towards its goal. These examples only show truth as something that is not a concept, not exhausted by words such as plausible or real (these are only meanings of it). Its essence lies in the Divine Being Itself and from it springs and in it too the universe finds its fulfilment.¹³ The Savior says: „I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life”. (John 14, 6). This is because, All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. (John 1, 3). Therefore, Truth is the Divine Logos Itself through whom and to whom all things were created.

Only connection with the Truth par excellence ensures authentic knowledge of truth. Truth does not allow itself to be possessed, it shares itself with the sincere seeker. It cannot be found by reasoning detached from the thing being studied, but is related to the union of the subject, who seeks to know, with the object known.¹⁴ At the same time, the terminology of subject and object is not exactly applicable to theological knowledge either. If we discuss, for example, the personal presence of the Blessed Trinity, we cannot call it a known object, but it is the Subject that reveals itself and comes into contact with the knowing subject. For this reason, the Divine Truth can only be known in communion of life with God, a communion which can only be lived in the Church of Christ, as the social extension of His body in the world. Any separation from the divine-human Person of Christ leads us away from the ultimate reality of truth; this is because truth

12 Sfântul Iustin Popovici, *Dogmatica Bisericii Ortodoxe (Dogmatics of the Orthodox Church)*, vol. I, trad. Diacon Zarko Markovski, Doxologia, București, 2016, pp. 316–317.

13 Jean-Claude Larchet, *Îndumnezeirea omului la Sfântul Maxim Mărturisitorul (The deification of man in Saint Maxim the Confessor)*, trad. Marinela Bojin, Basilica, București, 2019, pp. 302–306.

14 Pr. Prof. Dr. Ion Bria, *Dicționar de Teologie Ortodoxă (Dictionary of Orthodox Theology)*, Editura IBMBOR, București, 1994, p. 10.

cannot be thought of as separate from the divine Logos. When Pilate asks for a definition of truth, Jesus does not begin to conceptualize, but confesses: To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. (John 18, 37)¹⁵

It is a personal connection, through which man has access to revelation; Christ reveals Himself and dwells through the Holy Spirit in the mind of man and from there helps him to see reality correctly. It must be said that by the word „mind” we do not mean reason, for the mind is deeper than that. Reason also belongs to the mind, but the mind also has places deeper than reason, called in some cases also „heart”. This heart in turn has two meanings:

„There is a heart as the hidden centre of the mind, as the face of the mind turned towards God, it is what we have called the supraconscious or transconscious. It remains closed to our consciousness as long as we are in a lower, automatic life, closed in the seen horizon of the world. (...) But there is another heart. This is the subconscious of the passions. We could say that this is the memory of our vibrations and our acts of passion, imprinted in our being, linked to the biological side of our being, just as the superconscious is the memory of spiritualized acts and the potency of higher energies.”¹⁶

Having all this information, we can say that the truth addresses itself to the superconscious part of the mind, because that is where Christ has been dwelling since Baptism; from there, the Truth radiates and reveals what is true and what is false, because the concepts we rationalize are true or false insofar as they fit the Truth that lies in the depths of the mind.

The question arises, of course: How can we distinguish truth from untruth, since we don't know which thoughts come from the „subconscious” and which from the „superconscious”? The answer is to be found in the patristic tradition, for it is the Holy Fathers who have gone through the steps of perfection and thus reached the discernment that can distinguish between the emanations of the two sides of the mind. St. Gregory Palamas, for example, summing up patristic gnoseology, shows that the truth of Christ is accessible to those with a pure life, faith and who have the

15 Pr.R. Ionescu, A. Lemeni, *Dicționar de Teologie Ortodoxă și Știință*, pp. 20–21.

16 Pr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Ascetica și Mistica Bisericii Ortodoxe (Asceticism and Mysticism of the Orthodox Church)*, Editura IBMBOR, București, 2002, pp. 172–173.

experience of grace. But those who have not had this experience must be guided by the authority of the Fathers who knew the truth by seeing the uncreated light.¹⁷

Sharing the experience of those who have known the truth by seeing beyond the flesh, people can know the truth, but only to a small extent; or rather, they know how to remove the lie, they take note of some boundaries and directions of reality. Truth, however, can only be known in the truest sense of the word through the experience of the state of grace¹⁸. Contemplation of the divine reasons in creation is in fact a clear view of the truth present in the world. It is only by walking on the steps of perfection that man is in a sincere search for truth; by stumbling over trifling realities which correspond to conventional rules laid down by other men, the seeker after truth will only absolutize concepts, but by coming to the contemplation of Truth par excellence, he will be able to attain that perfect knowledge.

II. TRUTH, the foundation of the world, actualized through the priesthood

As I have stated, theology does not see truth as a mere concept. It is the plan of creation, „logos”, reason; it is the reason of being of all things, or „logos”, as it is also called, because it is related to the Divine Logos.¹⁹ Each creature thus has its own reason, its own „logos” in God.²⁰ All these reasons, being part of the plan of creation, name the very essence of things; they reveal the potency of the creature, beyond its present unfinished mask.²¹ When God looks at His creatures on the sixth day and says that they are very good (Acts 1:31), He is referring to the power of perfection in them, not to the

17 A. Lemeni, *Adevăr și demonstrație. De la incompletitudinea lui Gödel la vederea mai presus de orice înțelegere a Sfântului Grigorie Palama* (*Truth and demonstration. From Gödel's incompleteness to St. Gregory Palamas' view beyond all understanding*), p. 270.

18 Pr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Viața și învățătura Sfântului Grigorie Palama* (*Life and teaching of St. Gregory Palamas*), Editura IBMBOR, București, 2006, pp. 299–300.

19 Pr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă* (*Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*), vol. I, E.I.B.M.O., București, 2010, p. 363.

20 Vladimir Lossky, *Teologia dogmatică* (*Dogmatic Theology*), trad. Pr. Dr. Cristian Galeriu, Anastasia, București, 2014, p. 94.

21 J.-C. Larchet, *Îndumnezeirea omului la Sfântul Maxim Mărturisitorul* (*The deification of man in Saint Maxim the Confessor*), p. 114.

fact that they were already perfect. The truth in them will behave like a germinating seed. Thus creation will not remain at the stage of the sixth day, nor even at the stabilization (rest) of the seventh day, but will advance to the eighth day, which will be brought about by the coming of Christ. Once made man, He will unite the created with the uncreated and bring about the possibility of the seed of truth being revealed in the world.

Of course, this plan of God in which the world is to be brought to completion through union with the Creator could not be carried out if creation did not have a representative, a person to relate to God. A personal being was therefore needed to work together with God for the completion of the world. It is man, the icon of creation, who has the task of cultivating the seed planted in the cosmos and making it bear fruit: And the LORD God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it. (Genesis 2, 15). But what does it mean to work it? Man, as the image of God, wants to create his own world; he will never be satisfied with the universe given to him as such. As a creator, in the image of the Creator, he will try to make the world his own, to put a stamp on it.²² There are two possibilities here: the first possibility is that man wants to possess creation and consume it. In this way, man would rule nature like a despot, and it would be a mere insignificant object in his hands. Man would become (in his own sense) an autonomous God and not a god by grace, in relation to the only God. In this way, he would be able to dispose of everything around him as he pleased and subject the world to his selfish passions. At the same time, man would no longer consider necessary an organic link with the created creature. He would be far superior to it and would therefore have to seek to distance himself from it because nature would only drag him down.

The second possibility of the attitude of world ownership would be diametrically opposed to the first. Man would adapt nature, humanise it, and organise it according to the order present in him. What he would actually achieve would be to take the first step in harmonising it with the Truth²³. We say the first step because to fully lead the world to the truth requires a special work. What man has done up to this point, that is, to put

22 Pr.Prof.Dr.D. Stăniloae, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă (Orthodox Dogmatic Theology)*, vol. I, pp. 430–431.

23 Ioannis Zizioulas, *Creația ca Euharistie (Creation as Eucharist)*, Editura IBMBOR, București, 1999, pp. 84–85.

his own seal on the world, refers to the work of the general priesthood, to the hypostatic dimension of the priesthood. Further, to place everything before God, as „Thine from Thine”, in the ecstatic dimension, requires a special work. It is not separate from the universal priesthood, but comes in continuation of it, taking from the people the humanized world and giving it to the Creator in the Eucharist. This is, of course, the sacramental priesthood, without which the Eucharistic act would not be possible.

The Liturgy is the truest expression of man's priestly vocation. Each believer carries the cosmos with him, together with the gifts of bread and wine, and with his body, as a recapitulation of all creation. These are all received by the priest, who embodies Christ, who received from human nature, through the Blessed Virgin, the created nature and united it intimately with Himself.

„The wearing of the disc, which is another manifestation of the same spirit-is the act that reveals that in the Mass there is indeed an advance, a parade one might say, of the whole world towards the Holy Mass. Of a world as it is and as it will be again, in a little while, when the eschatological glimmer, the foretaste of Heaven that the Eucharist offers will come to an end, and the faithful will be called again to go out in peace to the world”.²⁴

The setting forth of creation in the Holy Mass does not ignore the fact that it is no longer „very good” as God created it, but, on the contrary, the world is brought forth as it is, with the consequences of the fall, and is sanctified in its present form. Nor has the fact that the Son of God became man restored the cosmos to its pre-fall state, but has transformed it, raised it to a higher stage of potential; it can become the Church, the body of Christ²⁵. But what does this mean? It means that the world is like a vine that was cut down by the fall of man, but through the Logos²⁶ made man it was grafted onto Christ and given the opportunity to flourish beyond its created nature.

Thus bread and wine, the most authentic symbols of nature adapted to man, are placed before the priest-servant and, through him, before God.

24 I. Zizioulas, *Creația ca Euharistie (Creation as Eucharist)*, pp. 14–15.

25 Panayotis Nellas, *Omul, animal îndumnezeit (Man, a godlike animal)*, trad. diac. Ioan I. Ică jr, EDITURA Deisis, Sibiu, 2009, p. 158.

26 Ioan-Gheorghe Rotaru, „Logosul și înțelepciunea” („Logos and Wisdom”), in Alexandru Boboc, N.I.Mariș (coord.), *Studii de istorie a filosofiei universale*, XIII, Editura Academiei Române, București, 2005, pp. 295-324.

The priest invokes the grace of the Holy Spirit to transform them into the body and blood of Christ. In this way, creation is accommodated to the Truth of Christ through the priestly ministry. Matter is filled with divinity and transfigured according to the sacrificed and risen body of the Saviour. The transformation in the direction of Truth does not stop there. The gifts of bread and wine, now become Holy Body and Holy Blood, are returned to the faithful who, in turn, are shaped according to the Truth of Christ. Thus transformed, they will project onto all their surrounding existence what they have acquired. The transformation of man will be followed by the transformation of the environment and thus the whole world progresses on the path of union with the Truth.²⁷

All creation has within itself the possibility of becoming Church; this is the mystical truth planted in it. But this potentiality must be actualized. The truth of the world is put into action by filling it with the Truth par excellence, the goal and perfection of creation's reasoning. Now, we know that Christ shares Himself through the Holy Mysteries. They are the circulatory system that nourishes everything, just as the vine nourishes its branches²⁸:

„I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every *branch* that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit. Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye *are* the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast *them* into the fire, and they are burned. If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you. Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples.” (John 15, 1-8)

The main purpose of the sacraments, as fundamental works of the priesthood, is the union of man with Christ. We spoke earlier of how the Eucharist Christifies man and, through him, the whole of creation, thus putting into action the potential truth of creation. But this is not only hap-

27 Pr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă (Orthodox Dogmatic Theology)*, vol. III, E.I.B.M.O., București, 2010, pp. 112–113.

28 P. Nellas, *Omul, animal îndumnezeit (Man, a godlike animal)*, p. 156.

pening here. Every Mass of the Church does the same thing, just in different contexts. The Sacrament of Baptism, for example, introduces man into the state of the new man brought about by Christ through his death and resurrection; it transforms him ontologically and makes him a member of the Body of the Church. The Mystery of the Anointing sets to work the powers of the soul which must tend towards union with the Truth. Repentance unites the one who has missed the mark with the One towards whom everything is aimed, and thus he is set back on the path towards the Truth. The mystery of Marriage puts the two, who become one body, in communion with Christ, the Bridegroom of the Church. It is through the priesthood that all other modes of union with the Eternal Truth are worked out, and it also unites the ordained with the Priest par excellence, who will make the sacramental works effective. Last but not least, the Sacrament of Holy Mass intercedes for the healing of the sick also through union with the One who is the state of health, the most proper way of being of the world.²⁹

We can say, therefore, that the work of the priesthood, both universal and sacramental, is nothing other than putting into action the potential truth God has planted in the world. By performing the sacraments, the priest unites others and himself with Christ. Man thus becomes a bearer of Christ, living his life and letting God transform him. Further, man projects onto his environment what is at work within him. Once the potential truth is actualized in his own person, he will draw out the truth of the world and assume it. But by assuming it, by humanizing it, he will only unite it also with the One who dwells within himself, with the Supreme Truth.

III. The Idolatrous Priesthood of Utopian Ideologies, Missing the Target of Truth

Through the ministry of the priesthood, the Church seeks to transform the human person and, through him, the whole world, in the sense of putting into action the potential according to which it was created. As we have stated above, the potential is none other than the fullest possible union with the Truth. Thus the whole cosmos is destined to accommodate itself to the Kingdom of Heaven, brought to the world through the coming of

29 Jean-Claude Larchet, *Viața sacramentală (Sacramental life)*, trad. Marinela Bojin, Basilica, București, 2015 passim.

the Word. This fact is preached both by Saint John the Baptist and by the Saviour Himself: „Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” (Matthew 3, 20); „Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” (Matthew 25, 34).

The spiritual progress of man brings with it the progress of the world; thus it is not good social organization that will lead the world to the Kingdom of God, but the sanctification of the human person. In the continual updating of the image to the likeness of God, man involves the whole world. His progress or regression means the progress or regression of the cosmos³⁰.

The role of the Church is therefore the sanctification of man and all creation. It must be said, however, that we are not suggesting that she is not involved in the good of society. Through her ministers, the Church forms the best citizens of the Polis, although this is not the aim. The work of the Priesthood is to form good citizens of the Kingdom of God, but this has as a side-effect the formation of the basic people of society. The Kingdom of Heaven comes first: „But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.” (Matthew 6, 33).

The Kingdom of Truth does not belong to this world, but this world belongs to the Kingdom; the Truth is not contained in the world, but the world is contained in the Truth. The Truth of Christ is the Absolute, and the Absolute cannot be circumscribed. When St. Peter the Apostle suggests that the Absolute be confined to the confined space of the world, he is acting childishly; scripture says he did not know what he was saying: „Lord, it is good for us to be here: if thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias.” (Matthew 17, 4). Christ did not become man to accommodate this world, but to transfigure it and draw it to the truth for which it was made.³¹ The world is thus placed, by the coming of the Absolute, in a state of tension, of continuous movement towards the Truth. The coming of the Kingdom does not imply its stagnation in self-sufficiency, it does not imply the fulfilment of a utopia. This is what the words refer to: „Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword.” (Matthew 10, 34). This sword is

30 Lars Thumberg, *Microcosm and Mediator. The Theological Anthropology of Maximus the Confessor*, Open Court Publishing Company, Illinois, 1995, p. 149.

31 Pr. Lect. Univ. Dr. Sorin Bute, „Creștinul în cetate” („The Christian in the city”), in *Almanah Bisericesc, Arhiepiscopia Târgoviștei, Târgoviște*, 2019, p. 175.

none other than the truth (Ephesians 6:17) which „...piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.” (Hebrews 4, 12). Truth was planted in the world to germinate, to separate good from evil and to set creation in motion towards its finality.

The Church continually strives for the Kingdom of Truth and therefore has not and does not participate in the implementation of any utopian ideology. She is not satisfied with unfulfilled forms of Paradise and is aware that it cannot be fully established in this world. Any utopia is inevitably idolatry, because it absolutises a limited structure. „The Church follows the same programme of seeking a Kingdom which is not of this world, but which, from beyond history, is continually transforming history itself into a form which more and more closely approximates the true Kingdom.”³²

This continuous evolution implies a perpetual ordering according to a transcendent truth. In fact, any evolution is made by an ordering on the axis of the permanent tension between order and chaos.³³ Chaos is the disorganised mass in which maximum potential lies. It is truth in its raw, undifferentiated and undefined form, as at the beginning of the cosmology described in the biblical account of creation: „And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness *was* upon the face of the deep.” (Genesis 1, 2). Acest haos inițial însă nu este inert și nu este vid, ci este reuniunea tuturor rațiunilor nediferențiate încă, dar care sunt pregătite de Duhul lui Dumnezeu pentru a fi actualizate: This initial chaos, however, is not inert and it is not empty, but it is the reunion of all the reasons not yet differentiated, but which are prepared by the Spirit of God to be actualized: „And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.” (Genesis 1, 2). Potential truth must be organized according to a goal transcendent to it, it must be put into action by a work of ordering like that of the Creator: „Let there be...”. Likewise the world must be continually organized and directed towards perfection. I have said, however, that for this to be accomplished, a goal is needed above it. This transcendent goal of the cosmos is none other than the Logos who united Himself with the created to harmonize it with the uncreated. The ascension and bodily seating of the Saviour at the right

32 Pr. Lect. Univ. Dr. S. Bute, „Creștinul în cetate” („The Christian in the city”), p. 176.

33 Jordan B. Peterson, *Maps of meaning. The architecture of belief*, Routledge, London, 1999, p. 289.

hand of God does nothing but give man, the world and history in general a trajectory³⁴. The Son of God's birth and ascension into heaven is the foot the world puts into the transcendent; it is the chance given to history by Christianity³⁵, is the target after which the chaos of the world is ordered, a target that can never be said to be reached, but only tended towards.

It now becomes even clearer why the Church does not join ideologies that seek utopia. An approach that seeks the establishment of the Kingdom of Heaven at the immanent level is a false approach; there is no such thing as attaining perfection and stagnating in it. The truth to which the world must be accommodated is not about a utopia. We can check historically and see what the utopian ideologies of the modern period have brought: a „paradise” with over a hundred million dead.

Ideologies seek an absolutisation of a form of organisation that can remove evil from the world. The starting point is therefore an erroneous anthropology. To give a concrete example, the philosophical ideologies that have also manifested themselves politically in Europe and the world over the last few centuries are usually based on the historical development of errors found in Western Christian anthropology. For example, the relationship between nature and grace: grace is perceived as superadded to human nature and not intrinsic to it. At the same time, with regard to the consequences of the fall into sin of the first humans and the primordial state, it is believed that human nature is as good before the fall as after the fall. From these conceptions, it is concluded that the meaning of history is fulfilled in the recovery of grace that has been lost and not in the healing of the human person. At the same time, scholastic theology emphasizes the natural moral law as the source of truth. This led the Enlightenment to take from the natural moral law only reason as the source of truth³⁶.

In this way was born what we generally call modernity, which puts forward concepts such as „the death of God”, „the disenchantment of the world” and, at the same time, the renunciation of values such as the Kingdom of Heaven, providence and the transcendent. The social edifice, built

34 Pr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Iisus Hristos sau Restaurarea omului (Jesus Christ or the Restoration of Man)*, Editura Omniscope, Craiova, 1993, pp. 371–372, 374–375.

35 Ernest Bernea, *Criza lumii moderne (The crisis of the modern world)*, Editura Pre-dania, București, 2011, p. 28.

36 Pr. Lect. Univ. Dr. Sorin Bute, „Creștinul în cetate” (“The Christian in the city”), p. 180.

on Christian values until then, has lost its transcendent foundation. At the same time, whole masses of people, who had lost their faith but not their religiosity, turned to totalitarian ideologies, which placed absolute value on the immanent and which, wishing to bring about the preached utopias and based on resentment, wanted revolution to change the social order. In this way, absolutist ideologies created false gods: the god-state, property, pan-sexism, etc.³⁷

So ideologies are systems that draw seemingly correct conclusions, and that are appealing in the image of an ideal world, but which actually start from wrong premises. Ideologies reduce the complexity of man and the world to a few broad outlines. These are at best poorly understood, but they claim to explain reality exhaustively. Such theories are characterised by self-sufficiency and a one-sided view. Those who put ideological precepts into practice strive to shape reality exactly according to the model they have subscribed to. They try to bring the world up to the utopian ideal, to 'sanctify' it and transform it into the image of the deformed paradise described by utopia. To this end, they „preach”, „excommunicate heretics” and „ordain disciples” to carry their mission forward. They behave exactly like priests, but like idolatrous priests with the wrong target. If the Christian priesthood is, par excellence, doing the work of shaping the cosmos according to Truth, the ideological priesthood is doing its best to accommodate the world to the utopia it mistakenly believes and calls Truth.

The attitude is therefore quasi-religious. In fact, what is an ideology? It is a system of ideas that behaves like a religion devoid of the transcendent, but still has universalist pretensions. If we look at the ideological movements of the modern period, we see that they parasitize Christian values. Marxism, for example, preaches compassion towards the underprivileged. This is nothing more than a distorted image of Christian love. In communism it was clothed in the garb of compassion for the working class, and in today's neo-Marxism we recognise it as tolerance for oppressed minorities. While Christian love seeks to help the oppressed, its ideological usurpers seek to annihilate the so-called oppressors (in the case of communism, the bourgeoisie, and in the case of neo-Marxism, the majorities).

In this context we understand why totalitarian ideological movements (Marxism, neo-Marxism) have a hostile attitude towards Christianity. They promote another religion, which demands absolute devotion

37 Ernest Bernea, *Criza lumii moderne (The crisis of the modern world)*, p. 47.

and whose authority no god can question. Moreover, since their values are a parasite on Christian ones, the latter would see them as false and weaken their claim to universality. At the same time, utopian ideologies are diametrically opposed to the Christian view of the origin of evil. While Christianity believes that evil comes from within man and that it is through man that it can come out of the world, ideologies believe that evil comes from bad social organisation: „Some of the responsible parties believe that raw materials are not well distributed, others that they do not have markets, and others believe that wealth and comfort do not correspond between social classes, and all together they believe that the solution must be found in the economic and social order”³⁸

It is, to some extent, a continuation of Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s conception that humans are good in a pre-cultural state. The bad ordering of society’s settlements is to blame for evil. This is why, in Rousseau’s view, changing them would bring about the solution of the crises of humanity and the messianic salvation of mankind.³⁹ We know that only a genuine change in man can remove evil. The origins of evil are not to be sought in the disorderliness of society, but in the free will that man misuses when he relates to the world. We know that the world is ambivalent: on the one hand it nourishes us and on the other it opposes us. This entered the cosmos with the fall of man into sin, which changed the structure of the whole of nature: „ (...) cursed shall the earth be to you! With toil shall you feed on it all the days of your life! Thorns and thistles shall it gnaw, and you shall feed on the grass of the field!” (Genesis 3:17-18) Faced with this reality, man has two options: he can take hardship as something meant to broaden him, to help him evolve, or he can treat it with resentment. Resentment builds up and erupts in acts directed against others, against the world, against oneself or even against God. This is how evil arises. A telling example is the scriptural episode in which Cain accumulates resentment because his sacrifice is not pleasing to God. This resentment soon turns into hatred for his brother and then into action. Thus Cain commits the first murder (Genesis 4:3-15).

38 Ernest Bernea, *Criza lumii moderne (The crisis of the modern world)*, p. 45.

39 Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discurs asupra inegalității (Discourse on inequality)*, in *Discurs asupra inegalității și Contractul Social (Discourse on Inequality, in Discourse on Inequality and the Social Contract)*, trad. N. Dașcovici, Editura Institutul European, Cluj-Napoca, 2006, pp. 79–80.

In the same way, ideologies accumulate resentment based on the hardships of living in society. Resentment breeds hatred towards those they believe are guilty of the harm that has befallen them. On this reactionary basis they build philosophical systems that they believe would solve problems. The idolatrous „priests” of ideologies put their vision into practice and transfigure society according to the distorted image of truth to which they subscribe. This leads to totalitarian regimes that disfigure the world, even though their intention was to remove injustice and bring paradise.

Conclusions

In the above I have tried to show that truth is not merely a concept, much less is it reducible to concepts or abstract philosophical principles. Truth is a reality. In our faith it is the Person and Trinity of divine Persons. He is the constant according to which the world was created, He is the finality, the consummation of all existence, and He is the Way that leads the world to perfection.

Priesthood is the key by which the world can be harmonized to the Truth of Christ. It has the mission of uniting man with the Logos made man through the Holy Mysteries. Man, being a cosmic priest, continually sets his seal on nature, by ennobling it, by uniting himself with Christ through the priestly ministry, he will sanctify with himself the whole of creation. In this way he moves the world as a train together with himself towards the Absolute Truth.

Such a transformation of the world according to a certain principle is also made by the promoters of utopian ideologies. That is why I have also called them priests, but idolatrous priests. The difference is that they accommodate the world to a distorted truth in order to arrive at a surrogate of the Kingdom of Heaven. This approach has always led to the establishment of hell, to mass murder. The reason is that this approach starts from false premises. The most obvious one is the idea that the evil in the world comes from bad social organisation. The Christian Church maintains that, on the contrary, it springs from the human heart, and that is why her approach is linked to the healing and sanctification of the human person, not to the installation of so-called perfect social statutes.

In conclusion, the meaning of the cosmos is to move perpetually towards the Truth of the Kingdom of Heaven. This is done through man's

priestly ministry and not through a social organization with utopian pretensions.

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