(De)sign with Philosophers and Saints: Why Does Plato Appear on the Walls of the Orthodox Churches?

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Le texte entend développer et clarifier la connexion péremptoire qui existe entre la philosophie classique et la théologie chrétienne. Le prétexte et, dans le même temps, le point de départ de cette étape est représenté par la justification de la présence des philosophes païens qui sont peints sur les murs des églises orthodoxes - Socrate, Platon, Aristote, Plutarque, Thucydide, Solon, Hippocrate, pour n'en nommer que quelques-uns. Ils sont peints dans la maison d'un Dieu en qu'ils n'ont pas cru, car ils vivaient quelques centaines d'années avant la naissance de Jésus.

Mots-clés: *théologie chrétienne*, *héritage culturel grec*, *platonisme*.

For the Christian believer, the thought constructs belong to an inferior level of knowledge, any rational investigation being futile, because the mind, which is situated within the heart, discovers the truth directly and easily, and comes in communion with God. This is a fundamental theme of the mystical theology of the Eastern Church. Then, how comes that the great Christian theologians were interested in the profane philosophy, which deals with rationalization, defining, implementing ideas in discourse, troubling of the mind, therefore the act of thinking? The fact that Christians treasure classic philosophy cannot be doubted, and a sign of this appreciation are the pictorial representations of some heathen Greek philosophers on the walls of orthodox churches.

The Outside Philosophy

It is natural to ask ourselves about the explanation for this apparently paradoxical option, especially if we take into consideration the precautions and even the contempt manifested by the Holy Fathers towards the "knowledge of this world", which philosophy is associated with. Even though they were elitists, exquisite speakers, proved great erudition, and were familiar with ideas, concepts and complex syllogisms, those who practiced philosophy were named "so-called philosophers"[1] by the Christians, a less than flattering term, through which it was understood that there were, however, some true philosophers who had all the

[1] Sfântul Iustin Martirul şi Filosoful, *Dialog cu iudeul Trifon*, VII, p. 99.

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appreciation, and represented an ideal for all Christians. The phrase belongs to Saint Justin Martyr and Philosopher, who made the transition from profane wisdom (the outside philosophy – *e exogen [philo]sophia*)[2] to Christian thinking, and maybe he was the most appropriate to see the falsehood and deception the philosophers who didn't relate to God were living in. Saint Apostle Paul warns against the dangers represented by the intellectual elitist abilities: "See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces of this world rather than on Christ" (*Colossians* 2, 8).

Clement of Alexandria doesn't forgive the sophists, who limit themselves to the pleasure of skillfully combining words, noticing the differences between them, playing with them, of being formalists and chattering in vain, "being gabbier than pigeons"[3]. Saint Paul refers to them in a letter to *Corinthians*, recalling the words of the prophet Isaiah: "Therefore once more I will astound these people with wonder upon wonder; the wisdom of the wise will perish, the intelligence of the intelligent will vanish" (1 *Corinthians* 1, 19; *Isaiah* 29, 14).

However, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Plutarch, Thucydides, Solon, Hippocrates – to name just a few – are painted and placed with great honor on the walls of the House of a God which they did not believe in, as they lived some hundreds of years before the birth of Christ. Then, what would be the explanation?

Love of Wisdom

Here, a reference on what philosophy means to Plato – Socrates is imposed, as well as how it later came to become a single discourse. Pierre Hadot[4] talks about a "profound difference" between the *philo-sophia* of the ancient Greeks and its representation nowadays. It is the same difference[5] as between a theoretic discourse – this would be philosophy – and a silent, virtuous, spiritualized/moral lifestyle – which would be wisdom.

In *The Banquet*, *The Defense of Socrates* or *Phaedo* we notice that, where Plato is concerned, there is a cleavage between the philosophical discourse and the philosophical lifestyle, the latter determining the former. Because philosophy is not an assimilation of knowledge, and it is neither the acquisition of a skill, as it is the capacity of discussing yourself. Socrates tried, believing that he was doing a greater good, to convince every man that "he must look to *himself*, and seek virtue and wisdom before he looks to his private interests" (*Apărarea lui Socrate* 36b-c).

The oracle of Delphi says that Socrates is the wisest. This is because, as far as he is concerned, he doesn't believe he knows what he knows. And, anyway, people

[2] Vasile Adrian Carabă, *Un filosof în Bizanţ – istoria unui concept,* introductory study to Basile Tatakis, *Filosofia bizantină,* Editura Nemira, Bucureşti, 2010, p. 14 – 15.

[3] Sfântul Clement Alexandrinul, *Stromatele,* in Colecţia Părinţi şi Scriitori Bisericeşti, 1982, *Stromata I*, cap. III, 22.4., p 22.

[4] Pierre Hadot, *Ce este filosofia antică?,* Editura Polirom, Iaşi, 1997, p. 28.

[5] There are many considerations on this theme in E. Weil, *Logique de la philosophie*, Paris, 1950, p. 13.

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cannot access absolute knowledge: "I am called wise, for my hearers always imagine that I myself possess the wisdom which I find wanting in others: but the truth is, O men of Athens, that God only is wise; and in this oracle he means to say that the wisdom of men is little or nothing; he is not speaking of Socrates, he is only using my name as an illustration, as if he said, He, O men, is the wisest, who, like Socrates, knows that his wisdom is in truth worth nothing. And so I go my way, obedient to the god, and make inquisition into the wisdom of anyone, whether citizen or stranger, who appears to be wise; and if he is not wise, then in vindication of the oracle I show him that he is not wise" (*Apărarea lui Socrate* 23a-c).

According to these words, a philosopher seems to be the one who is aware that he knows nothing and he cannot obtain absolute wisdom/knowledge, which belongs to the divine, and he can only taste it as a gift from divinity[6]. The philosopher can only love and permanently aim for wisdom and Beauty practicing the virtues, thus becoming worthy of being "god-like" (*Theaithetos* 176b): "No one who has not studied philosophy and who is not entirely pure at the time of his departure is allowed to enter the company of the Gods, but the lover of knowledge only" (*Phaidon* 82b-c)[7]. The philosophical lifestyle is, therefore, the permanent attempt to live what can be truly lived only after death, in the company of gods: "No one who has not studied philosophy and who is not entirely pure at the time of his departure is allowed to enter the company of Gods, but the lover of knowledge only" (*Phaidon* 82b-c)[8].

Knowledge – which the philosopher loves – is not the fact of knowing something or having information[9] about something. Knowledge implies the identification with the "object" of knowledge, implies the participation at what is known, it implies involvement and love. This is why Plato, in *The Banquet*, names *philosophy* love of wisdom. It is not necessarily excluded that they could have taken into consideration Socrates' words in *Phaedo*: "No one who has not studied philosophy and who is not entirely pure at the time of his departure is allowed to enter the company of Gods, but the lover of knowledge only" (*Phaidon* 82b-c).

After Socrates' death, his disciples founded schools that would perpetuate the ideas of the one who Plutarch presents as being the model of the ideal philosopher, "going into the dungeons and drinking poison", he was "the first to prove that, in

[6] Also see *Apărarea lui Socrate*, 38a, 41b-c.

[7] In the *Banquet*, Diodima says that he who has been disciplined to this point in Love […] now arriving at the end of all that concerns Love, on a sudden *(exaiphnes)* beholds a beauty wonderful in its nature".

[8] Also see *Phaidon*, 66 e-67 a. The unknowable can become knowable only through revelation, in ecstasy – is an idea from *Scrisoare VII* 341 c-d, where we find out about the ultimate knowledge, which is the purpose of philosophical search. Also see *Republica,* 490b, *Banchetul,* 212a.

[9] "The notion of pure knowledge, in other words, of pure intellect, is foreign to Plato. The times of teachers hadn't come yet" (Whitehead apud A. Parmentier, *La philosophie de Whitehead et le probleme de Dieu,* Paris, 1968, p. 410, n.131). Also see Andrew Louth, *Originile tradiţiei mistice de la Platon la Dionisie Areopagitul,*Editura Deisis, Sibiu, 2002, p. 20 şi Pierre Hadot, *op. cit.*, p. 93.

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any time and place, in everything that happens to us and anything we do, daily life offers us the possibility to philosophize"[10]. Plato founded the Academy and wrote his *Dialogues*. As time passed, there appeared the concept of philosophy as discourse, as theory, even as "rant", separated from an assumed moral life. In other words, that kind of philosophy that the Christians incriminate.

Bios Philosophos

Therefore, the old Greeks understood through philosophy the love of wisdom. But the *Bible* too is love of wisdom, so the Christian and the heathen philosophy had to be separated. It doesn't surprise us at all that the term of "philosophy" is used in the 3rd century especially in the Christian theological backgrounds, but with a new meaning. If the profane philosophy is a kind of lobby teaching that gropes for God or, using Saint Gregory of Nyssa's words, is like a woman who is permanently in birth pains, but never giving birth, then, for the Christian thinkers (let's not forget Plotinus, 205-270, who was not a Christian), the object of philosophy is represented by the knowledge of the divine realities. Ascetic life will be considered similar to the philosophical life[11], *bios philosophos*, meaning life spent in retreatment, chastity, poverty, prayer, communion with God, but also the study of His teachings. Speaking about God, theologisation, and living according to this teaching can be considered, in John of Damascus' opinion, as "the highest philosophy"[12].

Gregory of Nazianzus announces Basil the Great with a high intellectual authority, not only moral, naming his friend "a philosopher among philosophers, even outside of the philosophical systems"[13], which makes his encouragement of the young not to neglect heathen Greek literature credible: "Now, then, altogether

[10] Plutarh apud Pierre Hadot, *op. cit.*, p. 67.

[11] Vasile Adrian Carabă, *loc. cit.*, p. 21. Sfântul Ioan Gură de Aur directly names it „monastic philosophy", in *Omilia la I Corinteni*, Editura Sopfia, Bucureşti, 2007, 6.3 (10. 48A).

[12] Just like Clement of Alexandria or Basil the Great (in his famous homily addressed to the young Christians), the same well-balanced attitude towards the significance and advantages offered by philosophy is displayed by John of Damascus, who writes a work that is entirely dedicated to "The Origins of Knowledge" (*pege gnoseos*), where he clarifies "what is philosophy?". Here is the essence of the six definitions: philosophy is 1. Knowledge of the nature of those who are; 2. Knowledge of the divine things (unseen) and human things (seen); 3. "The meditative exercise of death"; 4. "Man's resemblance to God", through wisdom (the true knowledge of good), through justice, through holiness (doing good to those who are unfair to you); 5. "The craft of all crafts and the science of all sciences. Because philosophy is the principle of any craft; because through it we discover any craft and any science"; 6. Love of wisdom. "The true wisdom is God; therefore, the true philosophy is the love of God". Under Plato's and Aristotle's influence, after these definitions, Saint John of Damascus also mentions that philosophy is theoretical and practical. Which means that the theoretical one concerns theology, the natural sciences and mathematics, and the practical one the ethics, economy and politics. "Theoretical philosophy is, therefore, the adornment of knowledge. Theology is the understanding of the intangible and immaterial, of God who is truly immaterial, and then of angels and souls" (Sfântul Ioan Damaschinul, *Capitole filosofice*, 3, text translated by pr. prof. Ioan Ică sn şi diac. Ioan I. Ică jr, în pr. Andrew Louth, *Sfântul Ioan Damaschinul. Tradiţie şi originalitate în teologia bizantină,* Editura Deisis, Sibiu, 2010, p. 448 - 450).

[13] Grigore de Nazianz, *Panegeric la Sfântul Vasile cel Mare*, EIBMBOR, Bucureşti, 2009, p. 82.

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after the manner of bees must we use these writings, for the bees do not visit all the flowers without discrimination, nor indeed do they seek to carry away entire those upon which they light, but rather, having taken so much as is adapted to their needs, they let the rest go. So we, if wise, shall take from heathen books whatever befits us and is allied to the truth, and shall pass over the rest"[14]. When things are different, the intellectual act becomes "foolish talking of arrogant philosophers"[15], and this philosophy is "the emptiness of the ones outside" who do not know God[16]. The excess and bad usage of the elements/knowledge acquired by the wisdom of this world seems guilty of inspiring different dogmatic deviations.

Platonic Christians

Platonism had a great influence on Christian theology, determining, up to a certain point, the thinking of the Holy Fathers[17]. Plato's principles were deeply cultivated in the Alexandrian school, founded in 180 A.D. by Pantenos, where the first efficient attempt to harmonize the new Christian belief with the antique philosophical systems was made. In Alexandria, the main intellectual center of the Roman Empire, capital of Hellenism and Judaism, crossroads for Oriental wisdoms[18], the interest for Plato exists even before this school was founded, especially from the Jews. We think it might be interesting to dwell on this matter to highlight why they were attracted to Plato's philosophy.

The Jews noticed a curious similarity between the doctrines of the Academy, whose validity could not be doubted, and the Law preached by Moses. But, as they were considering their Scriptures divine and sufficient, it went without saying that the authorship of the dogmas rested with Moses and not with Plato. The latter was almost accused of plagiarism. There have been many studies that tried to give justice to Numenios, who wrote: "What is Plato if not a Moses who speaks the ancient language"[19]. Philo of Alexandria (20 B.C. – 50 A.D.) is the representative

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[14] Sfântul Vasile cel Mare, *Omilia a XXII-a către tineri. Cum pot întrebuinţa cu folos literatura scriitorilor eleni*, in PSB, vol 17, p. 569 – 570.

[15] Idem, *Omilii la Hexaimeron*, PSB, vol. 17, p. 73 – 74.

[16] Idem, *Comentarii la Psalmi*, PSB 17, p 256; *Omilii la Hexaimeron*, p. 73.

[17] It was erroneously said by the Lutheran A. Nygren (1930) and the Roman Catholic A.-J. Festugiere (1959), that the eastern mysticism would be nothing but "a Platonism vaguely disguised in Christian garments" (Ioan I. Ică jr., *O sinteză de referinţă,* în Andrew Louth, *Originile tradiţiei mistice,* Deisis, 2002, p. 6). The statement is wrong especially because the Platonic mysticism is individualistic and elitist, while the Fathers' mysticism is deeply ecclesial.

[18] Tomas Spidlik, *Spiritualitatea Răsăritului creştin. Manual sistematic,*vol. I, Editura Deisis, Sibiu, 2005, p. 40.

[19] This formula is assigned by Clement of Alexandria to Numenios (*Stromata I*, ed. cit., cap. XXII,150. 4, p. 98), who lived in the 2nd century A.D. and who claimed that the Greek philosophy owed a lot to the Orient, and especially to Jews' holy books. But not only Numenios alludes to this idea, but also „Aristobulus, in his first book addressed to Philometor, writes in these words: *And Plato followed the laws given to us, and had manifestly studied all that is said in them. And before Demetrius there had been translated by another, previous to the dominion of Alexander and the Persians, the account of the departure of our countrymen the Hebrews from Egyps, and the fame of all that happened to them, and their taking possession of the land, and the account of the whole code of laws; so that it is perfectly clear that the above-mentioned philosopher derived a great deal from*

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of this group of Jews who wrote treaties about plagiarism trying to argue that the best ideas of the Greek philosophers were "stolen" from the Jews. It was an attempt of finding Plato in the Law and the Law in Plato[20].

The Christian theologians have always been fascinated with the Philonian thinking because he showed that, to the greatest extent, the Greek notions were inapplicable to the spirit of Judaism and, as such, they had to be resignified in relation to the depths revealed by the allegorical meaning of the biblical text. All the Philonian attempts to reconcile the biblical tradition with the philosophical one are based on the idea that the Greeks' wisdom, just like the wisdom of other peoples, expresses in its essence an original Jewish teaching, lost during the exodus, but which was transmitted through the Persians and the Chaldeans, eventually reaching the Greeks and the Romans[21].

The Uses of Philosophy

When the Holy Fathers were put in the position to shape their discourse and formulate the dogmas, they used Saint Paul's words as a guide, mark, warning. The practice of philosophy was not prohibited in a fanatic and undifferentiated way. But history proved that philosophy can be a dangerous and rich source of heresies. On one side, the least faithful were in danger because they didn't know how to move smoothly between ideas and make the difference between good and evil according to the Word. On the other side, the faithful ones were in danger because they abused this pleasure of the mind. The words of Clement of Alexandria come to strengthen this aspect: "For each soul has its own proper nutriment; some growing by knowledge and science, and others feeding on the Hellenic philosophy, the whole of which, like nuts, is not eatable […] wherefore the hearers are not permitted to apply the test of comparison. Nor is the word, given for investigation, to be committed to those who have been reared in the arts of all kinds of words, and in the power of inflated attempts at proof, whose minds are already pre-occupied, and have not been previously emptied. But whoever chooses to banquet on faith, is steadfast for the reception of the divine words, having acquired already faith as a power of judging, according to reason"[22].

Clement of Alexandria also says in the *Stromatas*[23] that this work is a kind of diary, a collection of the ideas and thoughts of the wisest predecessors, from whom he acquired knowledge. He shows great precaution in what he is about to relate,

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this source, for he was very learned, as also Pythagoras, who transferred many things from our books to his own system of doctrines." (Clement din Alexandria, *Stromata I*, cap XXII, 150. 1-3, p. 98). The text of Aristobulus, independent of Clement of Alexandria, also appears in Eusebiu de Cezareea, *Praep. Evang*, XIII, 12. 1/ XI, 10. 14. About this Numenios, also in Philon, *Viaţa lui Moise,*I, 1.

[20] Ch. Bigg, *Creştinii platonicieni din Alexandria*, Editura Herald, Bucureşti, 2008, p. 12.

[21] Sandu Frunză, Review of Ioan Chirilă, *Fragmentarium exegetic filonian*, Editura Limes, Cluj, 2002, p. 208.

[22] Sfântul Clement Alexandrinul, *op. cit.*, cap. I, 7.3; 8.1 ; 8.2. , p. 14.

[23] *Ibidem,* cap. I, 14.3 sqq., p. 16. Besides, the whole title in Greek is: "tapestries of notes for a [higher] knowledge according to the true philosophy" (see Vasile Adrian Carabă, *op. cit*., nota 6, p. 17).

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stating that some ideas cannot be passed on because there is the risk of not understanding them, and this would be similar with "reaching a sword to a child": "our book will not shrink from making use of what is best in philosophy and other preparatory instruction"[24]. It is, therefore, clear that philosophy is good as long as the one who cultivates it has enough faith and discernment to know when he puts himself in danger: "a man can be a believer without learning" – says the same Clement of Alexandria – "but at the same time […] it is impossible for a man without learning to comprehend the things which are declared in the faith. But to adopt what is well said, and not adopt the reverse, is caused not simply by faith, but by faith combined with knowledge"[25].

We could say that Saint Clement of Alexandria brings a true eulogy to Greek philosophy which, however, he compares to a nut that is not entirely edible[26]. To those who accuse him that he always turns to philosophy, he answers: "Philosophy is the clear image of truth, a divine gift to the Greeks; nor does it drag us away from the faith (…) but rather, so to speak, by the use of an ampler circuit, obtains a common exercise demonstrative of the faith. Further, the juxtaposition of doctrines, by comparison, saves the truth, from which follows knowledge." In brief, philosophy offered the tools of reason with wherewith the doctrines could be formulated[27].

In his turn, Origen knew how to obtain a balance between his sympathy for philosophy and his option for theology. He detects in philosophy an "idolatrous project"[28], this meaning that the fascinating work of the mind can reach the dimensions of an idol to the philosopher, who lets himself charmed by the depths of his own intellectual capacity *itself*, ceasing to receive the truth from God. The removal of God from the processes of the mind turns them into a "golden calf", as Origen says. But the complete refusal of philosophy – as it was attempted in different Christian circles – would condemn the one who loves Christ to remain poor "right in the middle of his riches, forbidding the use of the human faculties of reason and the expression to communicate them, defend them and explore them.[29]"

We have noticed, therefore, that there was an attitude of adversity towards the heathen culture, but also one of pragmatic sympathy, if we don't forget Saint Clement's encouragement: "to become also a Greek for the sake of Greeks, that we

[24] Sfântul Clement Alexandrinul, *op. cit.*, cap. I, 15.3, p. 19. Saint Clement insists a lot in his book on the advantages of learning philosophy with caution. We reproduce another idea based on the association of Greek philosophy with *the immoral woman whose lips are sweeter than honey*, but who "lubricates thy throat for the time" (Proverbs 5, 3). Or "be not much with a strange woman" (Proverbs 5, 20) understanding from this that you are advised – says Clement of Alexandria – "Philosophy, therefore, was a preparation, paving the way for him who is perfected in Christ" (*op. cit.*, cap. V, 29.6; 29.9, p. 26).

[25] Sfântul Clement Alexandrinul, *op. cit.*, cap. VI, 35.2, p. 29 – 30.

[26] *Ibidem*, p. 14.

[27] *Ibidem*, cap. II, 20.1 – 20.3, p. 21.

[28] Spidlik, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

[29] Cf. Henri Crouzel, *Origene et la philosophie,* Aubier, Editions Montaigne, Paris, 1962, p. 52.

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may gain all.[30]" The manifested ignorance of some monks suffered serious critiques from the great theologians. Because the spreading and the success the heresies recorded, as well as the conflict with various non-Christian systems, forced the Church Fathers to use a discourse based on an established terminology, but also to specify their relation with the Greek thinking[31]. Therefore, Christianity could not ignore the classical philosophical language to structure its own teachings. It must be specified that the Church Fathers have studied in philosophical schools in Athens, as in the case of Basil the Great and Gregory the Theologian, or in Antioch, as in the case of Gregory of Nyssa and John Chrysostom, which is something that cannot be overlooked. They had gained, therefore, the necessary tools to face confrontations of ideas which took various forms[32], from simple polemics, to public manifestations and even street fights.

The Completion of Dogmas

Plato's ideas enter Christianity, contributing to the completion of the Christian dogmatic and philosophy. The great theological construction occurs thanks to the philosophical inheritance, and it is on its field. Besides, we can talk about a mutual favor that the Greek philosophy and the Christian theology do to each other. It is the chance of the Greek philosophy to refresh itself, to begin a new history by infiltrating the structures of the new faith, while Christianity fulfills its historical destiny through Greek philosophy and through the recovery of the old culture that was in dissolution. Christianity is not only religion, but it is a dogmatic crossroads with philosophy. In brief, Christianity redefines Greek philosophy, gives a new interpretation to the classical thinking. Philosophy becomes a common good for Heathens and Christians, the latter understanding and being tributary to the classic philosophy in two aspects: philosophy offered the tools of discourse, the terminology, the concepts, the science of debate and reasoning; philosophers offered ideas, ways of understanding and knowing certain aspects or things. But the greatest merit of philosophy seems to be the one that Plato highlighted in *The Republic IV*, (424a), specifically that the soul is prepared with the help of spiritual exercise: "The preparatory training for the rest in Christ exercises the mind, rouses the intelligence, and begets an inquiring shrewdness, by means of the true philosophy, which the initiated possess, having found it, or rather received it, from the truth itself"[33].

Orthodoxy is the Greek conception of Christianity. Until it reached the form we know, it went through centuries of debates and fights, because the Greek nation of whom we talk about is the dignified successor of Plato's nation. It is passionate about dialogue up to heresy. The theological matters, especially the dogma of the

[30] Sfântul Clement Alexandrinul, *op. cit.*, cap. I, 15.3, p. 19.

[31] J. Pelikan, *Tradiţia creştină*, Editura Polirom, Iaşi, 2005, p. 268.

[32] For instance, during the reign of Emperor Justinian, ten thousand monks came to Constantinople invading the streets to make the emperor's representatives declare themselves against Monophysites and accept the four Ecumenical Councils.

[33] As we can see, Clement of Alexandria entirely accepts Plato's idea (*op. cit.*, cap. V, 32.4, p 28).

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Holy Trinity and of the Incarnation of the Word have attracted everyone. Such debates take place on the street, in the public bath, in the church. Therefore, we easily understand why in this society that is so passionate about theology, the pleasure of philosophizing ends up being considered an impiety[34]. Heresies contained elements of ancient Greek philosophy. Each heresy represented a new occasion to control and fix the theological doctrines. Yet, theologians risked by using the same Greek way to philosophize – as the heretics – and succeeded in making use of the elements of truth from the ancient thinking to support the exposure of the Christian truth. Thus, the Church Fathers made possible the synthesis between the ancient philosophy and the Christian experience of the world, synthesis that we now call theology[35].

A proper discourse was necessary to efficiently combat the heresies[36]. Greek philosophy offered theologians terms, thematic, and even the logical structure to build the essential message. We are not mistaken if we say that the heresies have been the engine in building the Christian discourse, because they forced the research, the study and then the elaboration of the theological doctrines. What is important and concerns us is the fact that there is a constant and visible call to philosophy, because both sides that are trained in this polemic make the effort to present a rational explanation of the supported doctrine.

Then, Plato's contribution to the concept of Christian mysticism is of such great significance that it cannot be ignored, nor argued. The master of Christian mysticism of platonic origin is Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite (the 6th century), valued exceptionally by Maximus the Confessor (the 6th century). Through them, but let's not forget Philo and Stephan of Alexandria, the Platonism will remain the philosophy of Christian mysticism "that does not prove the truth, but makes it be seen in pure state, through symbols, making the soul that is thirsty of holiness and light enter here without any reasoning"[37]. Thus, Plato proves to be, according to the words of a Byzantine from the 11th century, Michael Psellus, a prophet of Christianity. To Psellus, the Greek philosophy only reveals to the man the order that nature follows under the divine action. The appreciation that Plato received in those times (the 11th century) is so great, that one of the best poets of Byzantium, John Maoropos of Euchaita, Psellus' teacher, asks Jesus not to punish Plato and Plutarch who, through both their thinking and feeling, were close to the Law that He himself came to preach[38]. What Plato names idea, to Psellus is only the first notion after which God creates the world. The ancient culture is rehabilitated and

[34] Basile Tatakis, *Filosofia bizantină*, Editura Nemira, Bucureşti, 2012, p. 65.

[35] *Op. cit.*, p. 64; Endre V. Ivanka, *Elenic şi creştin în viaţa spirituală a Bizanţului timpuriu*, Editura Nemira, Bucureşti, 2012, p. 10.

[36] We only mention some heresies that had a powerful impact: Arianism, Nestorianism, Monophysitism, Monothelism, Iconoclasm.

[37] Dionisie Pseudo Areopagitul, apud Basile Tatakis, *op. cit.*, p. 67.

[38] Tatakis, *op. cit.*, p. 215.

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offered to Christianity, which examines it and takes from it freely, without any prejudice.

We notice this aspect even in the 14th century, when the great hesychast controversy takes place. Here, we are only interested to show the way in which each group perceived the debated issue, to reveal the dominant philosophical attitude and understand its interest. If we pay attention to Theodor Uspenski's observation, we notice that the battle is between rationalism and mysticism, in other words, between the adepts of Plato (the Palamites) and the adepts of Aristotle (the Barlaamites), to end up in a theological discussion. Uspenski is right, because, as Emile Brehier says, the Palamite doctrine about the uncreated light which emanates from God and sets the connection between the hesychast and God, is the supreme manifestation of the platonic emanatism[39].

Barlaam, indignant of the hesychast claim to see the uncreated light, says that any being that can be seen is created; the Tabor light is created and descriptive, and it is not different from the light that we perceive through senses. Another problem that Barlaam could not accept is that of the method of prayer practiced by Gregory Palamas, who believes that the body is the temple of the soul, and the road to God is the one that goes through the mind. According to Palamas, the place of the mind would be within the body, more exactly, within the heart, and according to Barlaam, outside the body. Thus, Barlaam proves that the arguments he needs must be based on reason; he considers any tendency towards mysticism a mistake. "Clearly opposing the objectivism of excessive reasoning and the neo-platonic ecstasy, Palamas tries to formulate a theory that wants the mind to be placed within the heart and be guided by it"[40], exceeding the intellectual faculties of the soul. Only then, says Palamas, light fills our heart, the true man sees the unseen and completely enters the miracle.

The Christian thinking intertwines with the Socratic thinking in the point when both address the invitation of knowing the dignity of human nature and building our entire life on it, but only through love and by having a theocentric vision.

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[40] Basile Tatakis, *op. cit.*, p. 331.

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