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Theological and Moral Principles as a Foundation for a Christian Education. The Vision of Paul Evdokimov (1901-1970)

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Abstract

This study aims to present the vision of Paul Evdokimov (1901-1970) on the religious and the moral principles that are necessary for a holistic Christian education, as it follows from his course of Moral Theology (published posthumously). In the first part of the study we will outline the bio-bibliographical data concerning Paul Evdokimov. In the second part we will present the orthodox characteristics of a vision on the moral life, respectively the theological principles that govern the latter. Finally, in the last part of the study we will underline the relevance of these principles for achieving a Christian education today. Thus, we will better understand the role that Evdokimov understood to assume as a “son of the Russian exile” in the West. It will also highlight the relevance that the theological principles have in reflecting a divine pedagogy, absolutely necessary to cover “the ages of the spiritual life” of a man.

Keywords

Christian education, religious and moral principles, Russian diaspora in the twentieth century, Paul Evdokimov

This study aims to present the vision of Paul Evdokimov (1901-1970) on the religious and the moral principles necessary for a holistic Christian education, as it follows from the notes of his Moral Theology course kept by his son Michel Evdokimov¹. Published in French they are entitled “An orthodox vision of the moral theology”², they are practically unknown to the Romanian public. (Not being published either in English, we will devote much of our study to the exposure that Evdokimov himself made to the principles of moral life.) But at the basis of our research, there still is an issue: the work of Evdokimov is unfortunately somewhat in the shadow³

¹ Continuing the “tradition” established by the Russian diaspora in the twentieth century, we speak of “the theological family Evdokimov” - along with other theological families such as “Lossky” or “Meyendorff” - as Paul’s son, Michel Evdokimov, assumed the theological call, becoming a priest, too. See for example: *L’Orthodoxie*, Mame, *Pèlerins russes et vagabonds mystiques*, Cerf, *La Prière des chrétiens de Russie*, *Le Christ dans la tradition et la littérature russes*, Desclée, 1996, *Une voix chez les orthodoxes*, Cerf, 1996, *Ouvrir son cœur. Un chemin spirituel*, DDB, «Spiritualité», 2004, *Petite vie du père Men*, DDB, 2005, *Les Chrétiens orthodoxes*, «Domino», Flammarion, *Deux martyrs dans un monde sans Dieu. Dietrich Bonhoeffer et Alexandre Men*, Salvator, 2015 In Romanian: *To pray fifteen days with Antonie Bloom, Metropolitan of Suroj*, translated by Măriuca Alexandrescu, Sophia, București, 2015; *Russian Pilgrims and Mystical Vagabonds*, translated by M. Mărculescu-Cojoceași E. Soare, Pandora, Tîrgoviște, 1999.

² Paul Evdokimov, *Une vision orthodoxe de la théologie morale*, préface de Michel Evdokimov, Cerf, Paris, 2009, 189p.

³ The main works and studies dedicated to Paul Evdokimov are: Olivier Clément, *Orient-Occident, Deux Passeurs, Vladimir Lossky, Paul Evdokimov*, “Labor et Fides”, 1985; Jean-François Roussel, *Paul Evdokimov: Une foi en exil*, Montréal-Paris, “Médiaspaul”, 1999; Peter C. Phan, *Culture and Eschatology. The Iconographical Vision of Paul Evdokimov*, Peter Lang, New York, Bern, Frankfurt/M., 1984; Michael Plekon, *An Offering of Prayer: The Witness of Paul Evdokimov (1900-70)*, “Sobornost” 17, no. 2, 1995; Idem, *Le visage du Père en la Mère de Dieu: Marie dans les écrits théologiques de Paul Evdokimov*, “Contacts”, Vol. 47, No 172, 1995. pp. 250 -269; Idem, *Paul Evdokimov, A theologian Within and Beyond the Church and the World*, “Modern Theology” 12 (1996), no. 1, pp. 85-107; Michael Plekon, *Interiorized monasticism: A reconsideration of Paul Evdokimov on the spiritual life*, “The American Benedictine Review”, Vol. 48, No. 3, 1997. pp. 227-253; Plekon, Michael, *Le frère du Sacrement / fromsoeur et dans la vie de Paul Evdokimov in Pensee et de Mère Marie Skobtsova*, “Contacts” no. 205, 2004. Jean-François Roussel, *Evidence et dans l’indicibilité apologétique Paul Evdokimov*, “Contacts”, Vol. 47, No. 172, 1995. pp. 287-307; Lars Thunberg, *Paul Evdokimov, théologien œcuménique*, “Contacts”, Vol.

compared with other colleagues of him from the Russian diaspora, such as Vladimir Lossky (1903-1958). The paradox, however, makes that many of his writings have been translated into Romanian, some books already in the third, fourth or even the fifth edition. What does this mean? That, although somewhat neglected by “the experts” from us, the theological style of Paul Evdokimov has appealed the public. Of course, one reason would be the simplicity and the clarity of handling some difficult dogmatic themes *per se*; on the other hand, Evdokimov demonstrated an amazing ability to synthesis, that integrates not only the thinking of the Fathers or the Orthodox theologians contemporary with him, but also the great theologians, philosophers and artists of the twentieth century that marked the cultural and the religious life of the West.

In the first part of the study will outline the bibliographical data concerning Paul Evdokimov. In the second part we will present the orthodox characteristics of a moral life, respectively the theological principles that govern it. Finally, at the end of the study we will highlight the relevance of these principles for achieving a Christian education today. Thus, we will

47, No. 172, 1995. pp. 270-286; Michael Plekon, *The God Whose Power is Weakness, Whose Love is Foolish: Divine Philanthropy in the Theology of Paul Evdokimov*, “Sourozh” 60 (1995), pp. 15-26; Michel Stavrou, *Notes sur l'œuvre bio-bibliographique P. Evdokimov* “Contacts” LXIII (2011), no. 235-236, pp. 267-275; Frère Richard, *La sainteté selon élargissement P. Evdokimov et comme liberté* “Contacts” LXIII (2011), no. 235- 236, pp. 276-286; André Lossky, *Le sacerdoce royal selon des fideles P. Evdokimov* “Contacts” LXIII (2011), no. 235-236, pp. 287-294; *Leplay Michel Le mariage Sacrement de l' amour* “Contacts” LXIII (2011), no. 235-236, pp. 295-305; Bertrand Vergely, *Paul Evdokimov et la Théologie moral* “Contacts” LXIII (2011), no. 235-236, pp. 306-316 ; Michel Evdokimov, *L'social engagement d'un contemplatif* “Contacts” LXIII (2011), no. 235-236, pp. 317-326; Jean Breck, *Exégèse modern herméneutique patristique et chez P. Evdokimov* “Contacts” LXIII (2011), no. 235-236, pp. 327-339; Joost van Rossum, *La restarted à Job: Evdokimov comme Jung lecteur* “Contacts” LXIII (2011), no. 235-236, pp. 340-358; Michel Stavrou, *La place de l'œuvre dans l'Esprit Saint P. Evdokimov* “Contacts” LXIII (2011), no. 235-236, pp. 359-374; Françoise Jeanlin, *La Mère de Dieu Figures dans l'œuvre P. Evdokimov* “Contacts” LXIII (2011), no. 235-236, pp. 375-387; Alexandre Musin, *On Theologos P. Evdokimov chez l' Icône* “Contacts” LXIII (2011), no. 235-236, pp. 388-400; Stavros Yangazoglou, *La Beauté from Théologie* “Contacts” LXIII (2011), no. 235-236, pp. 401-416; Peter C. Phan, *P. Evdokimov Théologie Catholique et la contemporaine* “Contacts” LXIII (2011), no. 235-236, pp. 417-429. Also, to commemorate 40 years since the death of Paul Evdokimov, Saint Serge Orthodox Institute in Paris organized on 10 and 11 December 2010, a conference whose program is available at: <http://ogлинданet.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/Affiche-Evdokimov.pdf>.

Theological and Moral Principles as a Foundation for a Christian Education

better understand the role that Evdokimov understood to assume as a “the son of the Russian exile” in the West⁴.

The biography of Paul Evdokimov Life.

Paul / Paul Nicolaevici Evdokimov was born on August the 2nd, 1900 in St. Petersburg, the most europeanized city in Russia. His father belonged to the military nobility, and his mother belonged to the old aristocracy. In 1907, Colonel Evdokimov was assassinated by a terroristsoldier. This drama marked deeply the child Paul, who will be brought up under the influence of the mother. She will initiate him in the inward life and she will stimulate his theological inclinations. The sensitivity and his boundless gentleness have the same origin. As the custom of the time required, he, the son of an officer, will also have to attend the military school. The beginning of the revolution found him in Kiev, where he had begun his theological studies but he interrupted them after a few months, being enrolled in the White Army. Almost two years he takespart in cavalry battles against the Bolsheviks, but the defeat will force him into the exile. He leaves first to Constantinople / Istanbul, where he works as a taxi driver, then in a restaurant. In 1923, he comes to Paris where the whole exiled Russian “intelligence” had taken refuge⁵. He passes successfully his de-

⁴ Olivier Clément term used is “Passeur” difficult to translate into other languages. He takes the role of “bridge” the mediator that some members of the Russian diaspora and they assumed sec. XX West to make Orthodoxy known not as something exotic but as the Church of Christ that preserves and continues the biblical-patristic Tradition true. See Olivier Clément, *Orient-Occident: Deux passeurs Vladimir Lossky et Paul Evdokimov*, “Labor et Fides”, Genève, 1985.

⁵ Regarding this period Evdokimov wrote: “To be a young emigrant in the West marks a turn in a life, a cut in the conditions of existence without breaking the spiritual continuity. As a teenager, I was passionate by the genius of Dostoevsky, and I fed with him. Stepping in France, on the pavement of the streets of Paris, stopping at the shadow of the old churches, reverently reciting the words of the writer: «For the Russian, Europe is as precious as Russia ...». The exile offers a pilgrimage to the shrines. I was eager to know as quickly as possible the Western Christianity, its treasures, its miracles, its saints. “Hence the fate of the Russian emigration, as a providential happening in the history of Christianity: «... The Russian emigration represented a providential fact, which should see his deep spiritual meaning, to decipher.» Through an active presence of a brilliant elite of Russian religious thinkers, Orthodoxy was suddenly removed from its secular isolation and manifested in all countries of the world.” See

gree in philosophy at Sorbonne, working at the same time, at night, at Citroën, or washing wagons in the stations. In 1928 he takes his degree in theology at the Institute Saint-Serge, newly established in Paris, through the initiative of a pleiad of Russian theologians and thinkers, headed by the priest Sergei Bulgakov⁶. In 1927 he marries Natasha Brunel and has two children: Nina, in 1928 and Michel in 1930. During the occupation, the family will take refuge in Valence.

During this period, Paul Evdokimov sustains his PhD thesis at the Faculty of Letters Aix-en-Provence on “Dostoevsky and the problem of evil.” His wife died in 1945. Paul Evdokimov totally undertakes in the service of his fellow, being part of the French Resistance movement against the Nazi occupation. He leads various companies for helping those in need, for the exiles or the poor, until 1962. He takes part from the beginning in the works of the Ecumenical Council of Churches and he is part of the committee of studies at Bossey, where he also teaches as a professor at the Institute Saint-Serge. In 1954 he marries Tomoko Sakai, the daughter of a Japanese diplomat married to an Englishwoman. Tomoko Evdokimov urged him and helped him through her devotion to reveal the immense theological work that he kept in his soul. The titles start appearing very fast: *The woman and the salvation of the world*, *Orthodoxy*, *Ages of the spiritual life*, *The art of the icon - A theology of beauty*, *Gogol and Dostoevsky*, *Christ in the Russian thinking*, *The holy Sacrament of love*, *The Crazy love of God and so on*. In 1967 he was invited to teach at the Higher Institute of Ecumenical Studies in Paris.

Since 1962 and until his death he will teach as a professor of theology at the Institute Saint Serge in Paris.

Paul Evdokimov died on September 16, 1970 at Mentone. His troubled life since childhood, an open heart to contemplate the love of God and for the man made his life to stop at the lower limit recalled by the psalmist: he dies at 70, leaving behind a piece of the brightest work ever possible. Those who knew him testify that he was of a rare kindness and universal friendship⁷.

Paul Evdokimov, *The Burning Pyre*, trans. Theodore V. Dams, Ed. Metropolitan Bantam, Timisoara, 1994, p. 18.

⁶ That is all about N. Berdiaev and about father Bulgakov, Evdokimov said that each “one a free philosopher, the other a priest and professor of dogmatic theology, ... talked about orthodox freedom, about the prophetic mission of Orthodoxy in different terms, each one understood the «institution» by «event», each put a greater emphasis on the Holy Spirit.” Paul Evdokimov, *The Burning Pyre...*, p.19.

⁷ See the numerous testimonies in this sense, recorded in the reverential number of “Contacts”, numéropécial, Vol. XXIII, 1973-1974: Témoignages sur Paul Evdokimov

Work. The work of Paul Evdokimov registers among the Russian theology from exile. This theology has continued the Orthodox tradition, next to George Florovsky, Vladimir Lossky and others like them. To the late 1950s begin to appear his first works, which will make him famous. We mention some of them: “The mystery of Love”, Paris, 1942; “Orthodoxy”, Paris, 1959; “Gogol and Dostoevsky or the descent to hell”, Paris, 1961; “The ages of the spiritual life,” Paris, 1964 “Prayer of the Eastern Church”, Paris-Mulhouse, 1966 “Knowledge of God in the Eastern tradition,” Lyon 1968.

Other works have appeared posthumously. Among them we can mention: “Christ in the Russian thinking”, Paris, 1970; “The art of icon – A theology of Beauty”, Paris, 1970; “The crazy love of God”, Paris, 1973; “The novelty of the Spirit”, Abbaye de Bellefontaine, 1977; “Dostoevsky and the problem of evil”, Paris, 1978; “Woman and the salvation of the world”, Paris 1978.

Here are the books published during his life or posthumously, under the name of Paul Evdokimov (because over the years these have known numerous editions in French, being translated into other languages, we offer only the first edition, being later reissued): *Dostoevsky et le problème du mal*, publishing house du Livre français, Lyon, 1942 (reissued Desclée de Brouwer, 1978); *Le Mariage, sacrement de l’amour*, publishing house du livre français, Lyon 1945; *La Femme et le Salut du monde*, Casterman, Paris-Tournai, 1958 (reissued Desclée de Brouwer, 1979); *L’Orthodoxie*, Delachaux et Niestlé, Neuchâtel, 1959 (reissued Desclée de Brouwer, 1979); *Gogol et Dostoevski ou la Descente aux enfers*, Desclée de Brouwer, Paris, 1961 (reissued at the same publishing house, in Paris, 1984); *Le Sacrement de l’amour. Le mystère conjugal à la lumière de la tradition orthodoxe*. Paris, Éditions de l’Epi 1962 (reissued Desclée de Brouwer, 1980); *Les âges de la vie spirituelle: des pères du désert à nos jours*, Desclée de Brouwer, Paris, 1964 (reissued at the same publishing house, in Paris, 1980); *La connaissance de Dieu selon la Tradition Orientale* Xavier Mappus, Lyon 1968; *L’Esprit-Saint dans la Tradition orthodoxe*, Editions du Cerf, Paris, 1970 (reissued under the title *Présence de l’Esprit-Saint dans la tradition orthodoxe*, the same publishing house, in 1977, the collection “Foi vivante” no. 179); *Le Christ dans la pensée russe*, Editions du Cerf, Paris, 1970; *L’art de l’icône: Théologie de la beauté*, Desclée de Brouwer, Paris, 1970; *L’Amour fou de Dieu*, Editions de Seuil, Paris, 1973; *La Nouveauté*

de l'Esprit. Etudes de *spiritualité*, Collection Spiritualité oriental no. 20, Bellefontaine, 1977; *Le Bouisson ardent*, Collection Bible et vie chrétienne, Lethielleux, Paris, 1981.

Paul Evdokimov published numerous studies in various western periodicals. Some were reunited in volumes, thus resulting *L'Amour fou de Dieu*, *La Nouveauté de l'Esprit* or *Le Bouisson ardent*⁸.

An orthodox vision of the moral life

Published in 1992 with the above title, Paul Evdokimov's course of moral theology is the synthesis of the lessons held by him at the Institute Saint-Serge in Paris between 1950 and 1970. The editor of the volume, and at same the time the author's son, Michael Evdokimov wrote in the preface: "The work presented here provides a path along the work of a man who never ceased to reflect at the mystery of faith and his destiny in the great human adventure."⁹

If we were to summarize the original contribution of Paul Evdokimov to the development of the orthodox moral theology of the twentieth century, then we should point out the following: starting from the text of the Holy Scripture and of the Holy Fathers, it should be reminded to *today's man* that the ethics of love goes beyond the ethics of wishes and obligations. Moral obligations, good in themselves, must be overcome. But this with the condition to see the religious life not starting from the Good, an abstract category, but from God, a living person, in communion of life that transforms the man. It is not about a collection of virtues, but of the practicing of the evangelical *metanoia*, of a total transformation, of converting and of the metamorphosis of life and of the human being.

In the introduction of the course, the author makes some terminological clarifications regarding the notion of "moral theology"¹⁰.

By the eighteenth century, moral theology was part of the systematic exposure of the dogmas and presented their practical aspects. Since the

⁸ A bibliographical list can be found at Olivier Clément, *Orient-Occident: Deux passeurs, Vladimir Lossky et Paul Evdokimov*, pp. 191-196. Most of Paul Evdokimov books have been translated and published in Romanian.

⁹ Paul Evdokimov, *Une vision orthodoxe de la théologie morale*, p. 9

¹⁰ See Paul Evdokimov, *Une vision ...*, pp. 13-19

Theological and Moral Principles as a Foundation for a Christian Education

eighteenth century, first in the West and then in the East, moral theology becomes an autonomous science with its own object of study and its own methodology: unlike *theologia theoretica*, moral theology is *theologia practica*. The term "theology" -*Theos* = God and *Logos*= science –it meant the science of God. Moral theology does not deal with this science and the term "theology" in our case designates the divine source that is the transcendent norm of the human being in life and in his moral deeds.

The terms *morals* and *moral science* derives from the Latin noun *mos* (custom, use); the adjective *moralis* means being according to the custom, usage, something stable, permanent. On one hand, *movis – moveo* (to move, to act) means the psychological reaction of the judgment of the human spirit towards the various actions and events of existence. After the customary expression, the most simplistic judgment, instinctive: "what it is to be done" and "what is not to be done".

The Greek term *ethos* means the same thing as a tradition, custom, habit, meaning a stable and permanent work, a behavior that became a habitamid the changing forms of life.

In this whole, the moral sense can be defined as an axiological function of the human soul: an assessment, a judgment, a qualification of the events and of the beings leaving from the inherent moral conscience. This dynamic reaction conditions the moral acts of the human subject even if the concepts of Good and Evil are not clear; there is a spontaneous intuition of what is good or bad, likable or unlikable, attractive or repulsive.

The Russian term *nрав* has two meanings: *nрави* (custom), a permanent element, and the verb *nрави́та* (to like), an instinctive attraction, intuitive, irresistible and infallible: what is good, is nice, a spontaneous sympathy, irrational or on the contrary, a spontaneous antipathy. "The light of Christ enlightens every man who came into the world" - even at pagans resonates the deep voice of the moral conscience. When Christ said, "you will know them by their fruits" in the image of the tree and of its fruit, He appointed just this immutable instance of the discernment between Good and Evil, and at the same time, the source of adynamic power in committing the deeds. This judgment does not prejudice the free choice of the good or the bad conscience, "A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is evil" (Lk. 6 45).

Also, the prefix *co* from conscience (conscience in Greek is *syneidesis*; *sin* has the same meaning as the Latin *cum*, (to know with) shows how the conscience is not subjective but communitarian and belongs to the man, as his heart chooses, in the family of the good or of the bad.

The Russian verb *nravița* “to like”, indicates the deep ardor of the soul toward Kindness, Good, Truth - meaning a certain inherent ethical *eros*. The word of the Gospel mentions it: “where your treasure is, there is your heart”; it is a criterion both personal and objective of the moral conscience. The same text speaks of “the eye of the soul” (Mt 6.21 - 23):

“The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light but if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness?”

What is the goal of the ethics? To this question, P. Evdokimov pointed out that the formal, abstract ethics, has no value. At the foundation of the ethics is the moral experience. It is not limited to gnoseology, to the knowledge of ethics, but it is above all a spiritual act, knowing it possesses a liberating action of the human soul. It is not limited either by soteriology or either by the search of ways of salvation, as it is the man’s creative energy, the creator of ethical values. The man is not only a being who seeks salvation but also a creative being. It has to be overcome all the normative ethics of the rules of conduct, the ethics of needs, of laws and of prohibitions, it has to be overcome the moralism. (This is an “aretology” the science of virtues and vices, of rewards and punishments, of permissions and prohibitions.) There is nothing more upsetting, more discouraging than the three categories of the classical systems of moral theology: *obligations* to God, to self and to the fellow and to the society. How it might apply the category of obligation or of the need of life in God, to participate in the liturgical mystery, to the communion with angels or the dead ones, we could say that love is an obligation or a necessity? In the Sermon on the Mount, the Lord said: “And the Gentiles do not do this? Be perfect, as your heavenly Father perfects?”

To the human ethics Jesus Christ opposes the ethics of the God’s kingdom, the ethics of the Eighth Day. It is not about collecting virtues, but about the evangelical metanoia, about the total converting, about the metamorphosis of life and of the human being. St. Seraphim of Sarov, commenting on the parable of the wise and foolish virgins noted with a certain touch of humor that the foolish virgins remained virgins, fulfilling the moral vir-

Theological and Moral Principles as a Foundation for a Christian Education

tues, but their bare lamps showed they were not concerned about receiving the *gifts* of the Spirit. The man is not a museum of virtues, but the temple of the living presence of God. At the same time, ethics is not just axiology, appreciation and discernment but also ontology, the transfiguration of man with the gifts of the Spirit, which are a source of creative energy and gives him a prophetic element. The moral conscience must be liberated from the sociological, biological, psychological categories where ethics is defined as “critique of pure conscience.” Its problem is the man and his destiny, where he lives, and where he will go and fulfill his vocation.

Pure conscience, in a perfectly balanced synergy between freedom and the gifts of grace, builds the moral subject, the spiritual man, “the new creation” who passes through different ages until perfect maturity in the perfect stature of Christ. The dogmatic truth of Divine Revelation and of liturgical and sacramental life roots the man in the Church to the extent that it makes him a member of the Body of Christ and it makes him Orthodox.

The word “orthodoxy” means both the right teaching and the right glorification, doxology. Likewise the man, through all the manifestations of his life, is the liturgical being of Sanctus that sings and praises God properly, in an orthodox manner, right, perfect. Thus can be explained the exact place of moral theology. Dogmatic Theology studies the divine revelation of the truth, it preaches all constitutive aspects of the Orthodox faith, teaches the art of believing in God. Moral theology teaches the incarnation of the dogmatic truth in the human life, it is the science or the art of the orthodox life, the application of dogmas in existence.

Paul Evdokimov exposes the orthodox vision of moral theology not as a closed system. On the contrary, he does not hesitate to make a comparison between this vision and other ethical systems, older or newer. Thus, in his course, large areas can be met: natural morality, the ethics of the ancient world (Hellenistic, Buddhist) and the moral conscience of the modern systems (Kant, Marx, existentialism); anthropology (both of the Fathers and of the psychology of depths); the issue of law and grace and of the evil and so on. It also analyzes the ethical-spiritual implications of liturgy and of worship, of the holy sacraments, of the unseen battle of asceticism, of the confrontation with passions¹¹.

¹¹ Here are the 16 topics that can be found in the course: Chapter 1: Natural moral: its elementary forms in cosmic nature; moral instinct at humans; The trans subjective character of Good; man is determined by Good; the trans subjective nature of con-

In the same introduction, Michael Evdokimov shows that these lectures are not only for specialists in moral theology who will find here an orthodox approach, but also for a large public, eager both to inform and to “form” in the light of a meditation on the Word that illuminates various aspects of life in its universality. The author’s desire was to create a bridge between Christians, between believers and unbelievers, to make them all sensitive to the realities presented.

As far as we are concerned, it is obvious that a detailed presentation of the course would far exceed the space of a study like this one. At the same time an exhaustive presentation ought to be doubled by a kind of “critical edition” of the book, in the sense that Paul Evdokimov offers a multitude of quotes but without indicating the exact sources. This is true both for the cited Fathers, as for other contemporary Russian authors or even philosophers and western theologians. We believe it is useful asynthetic presenta-

sciousness; the judgment of the consciousness is the function of the image of God in man; the plurality of moral systems and the unit of moral theology. Chapter 2 Theeithic concept of good and the natural reactions of the human soul: the three planes; asceticism; eros; compassion for your fellow; solidarity of the destiny; the doxological feeling of veneration. Chapter 3 The ethics of the ancient world: Hinduism and Buddhism; Greek morals of the ancient world; China; Japan; the synthesis of the Greek and Hindu spirituality in the living Cross. Chapter 4 The origins of the moral consciousness after various philosophical systems: classical systems; Kant’s ethical categories; marxism; existentialist philosophy. Chapter 5 The theory of value: the criteria of value; absolute values and relative values. Chapter 6 Anthropology: Fathers of the Church; psychology of the depth; the human person. Chapter 7 Law and grace: law; freedom. Chapter 8 The problem of evil. Chapter 9 The ages of the spiritual life. The pedagogical action of history. Chapter 10. The ethical aspect of ecclesiology: the man after the image of God; an Trinitarian ecclesiology; Christological aspect; Pneumatological aspect. Chapter 11 The concept of sacred, space and sacred time, temple: sacred time; sacred space; and the vision of the temple and of the icon; initiating the in icon. Chapter 12 Liturgy and worship. Chapter 13 The Holy sacraments: Baptism; Confirmation; Sacrament of Reconciliation; Sacrament of Matrimony; Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick; Sacrament of Holy Orders. Chapter 14 The Eucharist mystery, the mystery of the Church: Eucharistic miracle; Epiclesis; Sacrificial aspect of the Eucharist; Eucharistic ecclesiology; Eucharist –the source of priestly hierarchy; Eucharist and eschatology. Chapter 15 The spiritual life, passions, unseen war of asceticism: The components of spiritual life and its itinerary; rupture, acceptance; war; inner monasticism ; the progress of spiritual life; passions, guilt and confession; the charisma of spiritual life; passions. Chapter 16 The weapons of the war: prayer; the mystery of death and the charisma “Joy to die”; the prayer of the Lord.

Theological and Moral Principles as a Foundation for a Christian Education

tion of those chapters that we consider fundamental in building a religious and moral education with a great impact in the contemporary world.

The ethical aspect of anthropology and of ecclesiology

The creation of man after the God's image suggests a certain accordance between celestial and terrestrial¹². This allowed St. Peter to place the goal of human life in the divine participation, fundamental category that leads the entire Orthodox vision.

Thus, speaking of the divine truth, this vision is built on dogmas, on the unshakable foundation of Revelation, with very concrete applications of the dogmatic truths in the personal and the social ethics of human life. The leading principle, "the image of the leader" is not in the human wisdom, as in *Plato's Republic*, but in the human will that puts the truth as the stone of the human existence. From here the whole importance of the ethical aspect of ecclesiology, whose structure is made after the image of all dogmas: trinitarian, christological and pneumatological.

It should be noted the inherent organic nature of the Eastern concept: the absence of rupture and the autonomy of the various planes of human existence is cosmic. Theology, philosophy, science, ethics and aesthetics, as well as the gnoseologic functions of the human mind: intellect, intuition, feeling, are not put simply one next to the other but they are integrated into an organic unity and they represent the different stages of a single stair leading into the kingdom of Logos and to the divine Wisdom.

This unity between word and life, dogma and liturgy was kept in the East by the various forms of *devotiomoderna* that, at the end of the Middle Ages in the West, atomized the ecclesial conscience in a lot of forms of individual piety, which broke the link with the theology and the dogma. On the contrary, the East never accepted the existence of neutral, natural, profane spheres (the art or the philosophical knowledge of natural reason). On one hand, there is only the sacred being, sanctified, deified, and on the other hand, what it opposes, the being not profane and desecrated, demonized. St. Gregory of Nyssa said clearly: "the man is the image of God, his icon, or the mask of Satan" and there is nothing between the two, only different degrees of participation in one or the other. The East does not know

¹² Paul Evdokimov, *Une vision ...*, p. 113 sq

the distinction between the advice and the commandments of the Gospel, its absolute addresses to every man, monk, priest or layman, everyone has the duty to equate the evangelical absolute with his personal call¹³.

The Organic character finds its all importance in gnoseology, where the East is different from the West. From the beginning the church has assimilated the values of the ancient world. Science and philosophy were baptized by integrating them in the *theognosia* of the Fathers, thus building a vast Christian culture.

The Eastern never accepted the autonomy of the natural reason, *lumen natural rationis*. The natural reason may have brilliant results in the scientific field; but when it departs from “physics” and seeks “metaphysics”, it loses its ability. Philosophy depends not only on theology, its fundamental category is to think always in relationship with the Absolute. It must be illuminated by attending the Absolute. The contemplative intuition reaches the metalogic plan, inexpressible in concepts, the level of the apophatic consciousness, the indeterminable abyss of the infinite. “Science becomes love” (St. Gregory of Nyssa), creator of communion. This is perhaps the only effective response offered to Robinson and Bultmann by the vision of the Eastern Tradition. “Docta ignorance” is not agnosticism and the negativity is not negation. The apophatic theology is not simply a call for caution, but an authentic theology with an epiphanic content, “generator of unit” in the evidence of the Presence and on this plan, logics no longer apply. Thinking expressed entirely in word never reaches its own depth. The more the thinking deepens the more is inexpressible, as the last depth is always apophatic, it is above the discursive logic and it takes the form of the absolute evidence discovered by the revelation.

Faith is the essential condition of any knowledge, as faith transfigures intelligence. An atheist can be a very intelligent man, but his intelligence collects knowledge without reaching the pneumatic wisdom. Dostoevsky knew everything that Nietzsche knew, but he also knew what the faith revealed to him. The philosophy of loneliness opposes the philosophy of communion. The human subject of the knowledge is not an isolated individual but a person who is a member of Christ, as the Church is the collegial subject of the knowledge of God. The conscience and the knowledge show the communion of catholicity, of *sobornost*. It is always knows the others, and this act is not isolated, schismatic, but catholic. The

¹³ Paul Evdokimov, *Une vision ...*, p.114.

Theological and Moral Principles as a Foundation for a Christian Education

true subject of knowledge, of freedom, of immortality is the ecclesial subject, member of the Christ by collegial participation at the divine Absolute. Where the claim of the slavophiles (Kirievski): *the value of the philosophical thinking depends above all on the knowledge of the Holy Trinity*, as in the light of the Trinitarian dogma each one's uniqueness is fulfilled in the symphonic agreement with the others and only in the Eucharist "the sacrament of the brother" is done.

The Trinitarian principle

Paul Evdokimov grasped the application of the Trinitarian aspect of ecclesiology in human life¹⁴. He shows that the crucial issue of all time was the agreement between one and many, between personal and social. The anarchist solution (the black flag), the solipsism of the human self of M. Stirner's type and the collectivist solution (the red flag), the dissolution of the person in the collectivist aggregator, can never find the solution only by moving the human condition into the gracious state, in the sobornicity or the catholicity of the Church "no longer I live, but Christ lives in me," said St. Paul as a fulfilled person thanks to the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The presence of Christ is communion with all the members of his body. The ultimate truth of human being is his theandric nature. In the face of the natural forces, it is the image of God One and Three that presents a uniqueness. Christianity, or the royal priesthood, is called to build its life according to the principle of the Trinitarian dogma: unity in multiplicity, in diversity.

This call means to reproduce the structure of the divine life in the human existence. "Man was ordered to become God by grace," said St. Basil, and after St. Gregory of Nyssa "Christianity is an imitation of the divine nature". In this way, the apostolic practice (Canon 34), speaking about the structure of the Church, specified its norm. "So (in nature itself) are glorified the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit". This is the unity of the multitude of the human hypostases in the unique human nature recapitulated in Christ, "the community of mutual love" unity in multiplicity. The remarkable icon of Trinity of Andrei Rublev's the "leading image", the earthly Church of people is built after the image of the absolute heavenly

¹⁴ Paul Evdokimov, *Une vision ...*, pp. 117-119.

Church of the Trinity. At Pentecost, the icon of the Holy Trinity is placed in the middle of the temple for veneration, the people contemplates it to build after its face and image. As Alexei Khomiakov said, “Church is life in God,” in revealing mutual love.

Thus, the truth of the Trinitarian dogma poses as a canon, a truth of the human existence that each one is called to realize in his personal and social life. Father Pavel Florensky has eloquently demonstrated that between the being and the nothingness there is no other principle of existence than the Trinitarian one¹⁵. But this principle is radically transcendent to any philosophical concept. God “identically monad and triad” is above the mathematical numbers: the divine persons cannot multiply or divide. The divine Triad is “non-quantified” as Evagrius says. Symptomatic fact: among heresies, just the Trinitarian heresies were punished most severely by the Church, as they attacked the very foundation of the Truth and compromised the human salvation. The natural reason would have wanted to reduce the mystery either to the modalism of the three modes of manifestation of a single essence or to the three gods of the polytheistic tritheism. St. Gregory of Nazianzus refused the judaization or the hellenization. He stated the existence of God, one and three at the same time, a fact beyond reason.

Christological principle

St. Paul saw the Church as “the fullness of The One who fulfills all in all.”¹⁶ Precisely to enhance the resistance of this structure, Christ is not a member among the others but the Head in the most powerful sense of the integration principle. The term body is obviously of Eucharistic origin. (1Cor. 10:17). The Members integrate into an organism where the life of God flows into people. But the Head said St. John Chrysostom, will be entire only when the body will be perfect when we will be co-united and joined together. By the extension of the Incarnation, Christ the God-Man goes to Christ God-Humanity, the Church.

¹⁵ To see Pavel Florenski, *The pillar and the ground of the Truth. An essay in orthodox Theodicy in 12 letters*, translated by Emil Iordache, Iulian Friptu și Dimitrie Popescu, Polirom, Iași, 1999, p. 39 sq

¹⁶ Paul Evdokimov, *Une vision...*, pp. 119-120.

Theological and Moral Principles as a Foundation for a Christian Education

“Christ the whole in Head and in Body” - *totus Christus*— is He and us, said Augustine, and in the Eucharist the Church is already achieved, showing the unity and the Christ. Nicholas Cabasila noted that you cannot add anything, nothing can enhance this fullness. Christians are not only united among themselves, but they are one in Christ. Thus, the “unity of brothers” - Christophers - spoken in Acts presents a genuine christophany, Christ’s visible manifestation. Or the opposite, Origen warned, “only in the community of believers can be found Christ, and this because he lives only among those who are united”. Similarly, Christianity is eucharist, synaxis, community, body, Church. Being a Christian, at the beginning, consisted essentially to belong to the unity of the brothers, to be integrated into the community of the 12 Apostles, the apostolic *koinonia* of the Church of God in Jerusalem.

The text in Acts 2, 42 is eloquent in this sense. The apostles’ teaching is the unanimous testimony of the dogmatic truths and hence the unity of faith; the breaking of the bread is the unity of the liturgical and sacramental life; the prayer is life where everything becomes uninterrupted doxology and existence under the gaze of God. The church is in the world, but it is not from this world. It is a sacramental community - here you enter through baptism and complete through Eucharist. It can be found at the absolute limit of any sociological formations. The church is a “divine society” - that brings a new existential dimension and a new quality of life. As Nicholas Cabasila said, the mystical transfer identifies the altar of the temple with the Eucharistic heart of Christ. The pauline image of the Head makes place to the mystical body of Christ. At the moment of ordination, the priest puts his head on the altar, imagining the beloved disciple, who placed his head on the chest of the Lord. Father Sergei Bulgakov, in the memory of his ordination, said that when he passed for the first time through the royal doors he felt like someone who would go through a wall of fire, “the one who is near me, is near the fire,” said an old agraphon. The Mystery of the Church is to be simultaneously “the Church of the penitents, of the sinners,” said St. Ephrem, and *communio sactorum*, “the communion of sinners to the holy things”, the deifying participation in the “only Saint”. The theandric unity of the body, the Christology, postulates the holiness, the Pneumatology¹⁷.

¹⁷ Paul Evdokimov, *Une vision...*, p. 120.

The Pneumatological Principle

The Son came in the name of the Father to make Him known and to do His will¹⁸. The Spirit came in the name of the Son to testify and to fulfill, giving them the gifts of Christ's work. If the human nature recapitulated in Christ is one, if "Christ is the center where all lines meet" (St. Maximus) and the one that "makes from some and from the others one body" (St. John Chrysostom), conversely there are the hypostases, the human persons. These are multiple. The analogy with the body must be nuanced. The person must not be exposed; the unity postulates the union of those unique. It is the work of the Holy Spirit that relates to people and gives them the instruments of grace in a unique way, personal, to each of them. The biblical text of the Pentecost states: "The languages were shared, and put one on each of them." St. Cyril of Alexandria commented: "We are built as one body, but divided into personalities". Within the unit, the Holy Spirit diverse. The two aspects are inseparable. "embraced by the Spirit, we drink the Christ," said St. Athanasius. St. Cyril warned us that "the Spirit was given to the first living man". The grace was involved in the act of creation. After the fall, the work of the Spirit became external to the nature and only at Pentecost, at the personal descent of the Spirit in the world, he began working within nature. Henceforth, the essential category of the spiritual life is to be filled with spiritual substance. Christ receives the Spirit, Maria is *gratia plena*. St. Stephen was filled with the Spirit, Christians, after St. Ignatius, are filled with the Spirit. Lord blows Spirit over the Apostles; The Church and each one are temples of the Holy Spirit and glory of God - Savaoth fills the heaven and the earth.

The sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit - required at the epiclesis - it always precedes any Christological act where the spiritual is embodied. In the moment of creation, the Spirit "covers" the abyss from which the world sprang, the place of the incarnation. The spirit speaks through prophets and afterwards comes over the Virgin and makes her Theotokos. On the day of the Epiphany, he descends on Jesus Christ and makes Him - "the anointed one". At Pentecost it manifests the tongues of fire that give birth to Church, the Body of Christ. At Baptism makes the man a member of the Church, and from the bread and the wine, the body and the blood of Christ. Joel's prophecy shows the Spirit throughout the history, that makes from the world the "new earth", the glorified body of the Kingdom. The Ascen-

¹⁸ Paul Evdokimov, *Une vision...*, pp. 120-122.

Theological and Moral Principles as a Foundation for a Christian Education

sion of the Saviour is a divine epiclesis: “I will pray the Father and He will send you a Comforter¹⁹”

Following the Fathers, we could say that Christ is the great forerunner of the Holy Spirit, the one that prepares his work. “Christ took flesh for us to receive the Christ’s power,” said St. Athanasius. “I have come to bring fire on the earth”; this “devouring”, fire, which purifies the World and the History, designates the eschatological action of the Spirit. In the soul of each baptized being, he introduces the Kingdom, as St. Seraphim of Sarov said. Thus, our life lifts to the Spirit and reaches the state of deification. Saint Seraphim also said that the goal of the Christian life is to acquire the Holy Spirit, because “he makes it shine, mysteriously, in souls the nature one and the Trinity”, as the Church sings. The Mystery covers the Person of the Spirit, that shows only through His gifts. “Your name is so desirable, no one knows what it is,” wrote St. Simeon the New Theologian. His image is the glorious Church, *communio sanctorum* crowned by the Theotokos, which is the ultimate mystery of the Kingdom. The mystery of salvation is Christological, but not pan-christic. The epiclesis remains the indispensable work in preliminary condition and to be received. St. Basil highlighted the universal role of the Spirit “the creature does not possess any gift that does not come from the Spirit; He is the sanctifier that unites us in God”. The active principle “giver of life and the treasure of graces”, It enables the participation at the deifying energies of salvation. The spirit is in us because we are in Christ, being adopted in the Son by the Father. The personal principle in the unity of the Body emphasizes a *catholic* being, transparent to all. Any sociological form: society, family, love, friendship, corporations or brotherhood, are nothing but different aspects of the image of the Trinitarian God, unity in multiplicity “one in Christ” and “unique in the Holy Spirit.”²⁰

The ages of the spiritual life

Perhaps the most important contribution to the articulation of an education in the Orthodox Christian spirit was brought by Paul Evdokimov in the chapter from the above-mentioned course, entitled “Ages of the spiritual

¹⁹ Paul Evdokimov, *Une vision...*, p.121.

²⁰ Paul Evdokimov, *Une vision...*, p.122.

life.” Here it is eloquently illustrated how the theological principles listed above are embodied in the course of human history. (For this reason, although this chapter precedes the other in the course, we decided to reverse the order of them in our study, taking into account its purpose.) We’re talking about a true divine pedagogy centered on the journey of the man from the “image” to “likeness ”

St. John, in his letter (1Jn 2.13-14), wrote:

“I am writing to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning. I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. I write to you, children, because you know the Father. I write to you, fathers, because you know Him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one²¹.”

At the age of maturity it comes the deep knowledge of the divine mystery α and ω , the alpha and the omega, the beginning and the end, God Himself, one and Trinity at the same time. This maturity assumes a *fight* when unchaining the forces and the energies of the human being. And finally, it gives confidence to an infant who at the sunset of life is looking and is finding his heavenly Father. These words belonging to John designates the progressive evolution of the religious conscience. Along with the physical ages of the body there are the spiritual ages of the soul. And so the very frequent distinction of the three states at Fathers and at father confessors. In *The ladder of the divine ascent* of Saint John Climacus there are the beginners and the advanced and the accomplished, also the carnal, the psychic and the spiritual. St. Gregory of Nazianzus deepened this scheme in the attitude of man to God: the type of *slave* who serves the fear of punishment, the type of *mercenary* who expect reward, and finally, of the *son*, seeking to please his Father and whose unselfish joy is the highest reward given free as a gift of paternal love. Hence the love of Good for he - himself and at the top of the ladder, the love of God for He-Himself. It is about the recognizing of the supreme Good, absolute, of God, without no return to oneself, to his needs, a selfless joy, quite simple, because God exists and shines everything with His light, and covers everything with His love. You might recall the famous discussion between Bossuet and Fénelon on the absolute selfless love, respectively of the attraction

²¹ Paul Evdokimov, *Une vision...*, p. 107-112

Theological and Moral Principles as a Foundation for a Christian Education

towards God as the Source of our salvation. Each has his own *reason*, but the conflict arises from the separation and hence the rational opposition, of the elements that only unite in the meta-rational experience of God. His evidence is expressed in the words: "He who will retain his life he will lose it; and the one who will lose it because of Me he will win it; here "because of Me" signifies the total dedication of oneself through a selfless love, and "he will win" means salvation. The union of admiration and of self-sacrifice without sharing and of the power that saves us, their synthesis places at level of love where the categories of interest and disinterest no longer apply, and this is the *divine* one, of the experience, of the astounding meeting between God and man ²².

The image of the ladder states the progressive ascension, without breaks or jumps and the distinction of the spiritual ages is fundamental in *the pastoral practice* of guidance, of confession, as in all marital problems. Here every age, as far as its spiritual maturity, finds its own solution, appropriate to its given level and moment. Similarly, in history can be discovered how a pedagogical action is exerted on the progressive faith of human conscience, the maturation of his idea of God and the relationship between God and man. Thus, as St. Ap. Paul said "the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ" (Gal. 3:24). But, alongside the normal belief, in this development we can see delays, impasses and deviations from the advanced ages. The Christian religion has betrayed the freedom charter that St. Ap. Paul proclaimed and it became the religion of law, of punishment and of legal satisfaction. Victory over hell and death gave way to the truly obsessions of infernal suffering and the idea of a Vigilante God, the redoubtable Jehovah of the Old Testament. Similarly, the erotic obsession in the extreme forms of asceticism deforms the notion of marriage and falsifies the relation between soul and body.

The history of Israel shows that the Law itself is capable of maturity, to understand and to respect it, waiting its fulfillment through Messiah that gives it fullness and openness to grace²³. Clement of Alexandria spoke of the two Testaments: The natural testament at the pagans, contemplation of the glory of God in His creation (Rom. 1.20), "in His works"; and the revealed testament which makes it clear that "their feet are swift to shed blood" (Romans 3:15) and that "For therein is the righteousness of God is

²² Paul Evdokimov, *Une vision...*, p. 108.

²³ Paul Evdokimov, *Une vision...*, p. 108-109

revealed from faith to faith, as it is written:” And the just shall live by faith” (Rm. 1:17). Thus, the two Testaments, natural and revealed, educate and cultivate the moral and the spiritual consciousness, and when the fullness of time, when the human spirit is mature enough, sounded the kerygma of the Christian sermon, which addressed to those able to understand the Christian truth: “he who have ears to hear, let him hear”. It is about acuity, fine ears, sensitive; on the contrary, atheism is a spiritual deafness. The Athenians, the wise philosophers, listening to St. Paul, with a subtle irony, they said, “let us talk about it another time”. Or, St. Paul had come to make the balance sheet of the ancient wisdom and to show the world that “the unknown God”, whom the Greeks built a monument, bearing the name of Jesus Christ. But as St. Paul (2 Cor. 4:2 - 4) said, for those blind and those deaf “our gospel is foolishness”, inaccessible, it opens only to the conscience that is capable to judge in the absolute.

The reason seeks for the meaning of life, the sense seeks justice before the suffering of the innocents, the will searches a lever to make a reform, to change the history with it. Such an aspiration, more intuitive than conscious, strong but not absolute, becomes religious and conscious after the meeting with God, the personal and the alive one. If the research of God is the same everywhere, its actual content is different and it depends on the religious belief. The ethical principle of Good has its own laws, which we can *respect*, but we cannot *love them*.

Love requires a living object and therefore all religions are centered on a specific person: Buddha, Confucius, Lao Zi, Muhammad, that are superior human types, but remain mere humans.²⁴ The Christian faith is the religion of the incarnate God, the religion of the God-man. Such a personalism explains the veneration of saints, who, each in its own way, also embody the spiritual principles: the Easter joy of St. Seraphim of Sarov, the cult of the poor Lady to St. Francis of Assisi, the theological genius at St. Gregory of Nazianzus; other principles are added, such as misericordia, justice, humility, asceticism, which present a rich variety of different categories of holiness and their liturgical celebration.

Thus, natural ethics can, in *formal* terms, coincide with the Christian ethics in affirming the positive value of altruism, of justice, of the moral fundamentals of social life, of love and of truth. On one hand, in History, tragically echoes the words of St. Ap. Paul: “I want to do the good

²⁴ Paul Evdokimov, *Une vision...*, p. 109

Theological and Moral Principles as a Foundation for a Christian Education

and I do the evil”, and on the other hand, the universal History appears as a monstrous history of crimes and injustices. The pedagogical significance of History after the Old Testament is in the experience of a totally helplessness of the people’s natural forces: “From the depths I cry, Lord, to you, help my helplessness.” It is the cry of the one who sees himself lost, the call to the Lord in the experimental knowledge of the Lord’s words: “Without Me you can do nothing.” Thus, we can formulate two principles of the existential pedagogy: on one hand, the infallible and irresistible testimony of the moral conscience that postulates the absolute sense of existence, meaning the *nausea* before the absurd at Sartre, the diabolical vaudeville at Dostoevsky, the history told by an idiot at Shakespeare, and on the other hand, the experience of universal helplessness that arousesthe condition of salvation. The Old Ecclesiastes (5.1) notes: “You, Lord, are in heaven, and you, man, you’re on earth,” the infinite distance is beyond any solution, where the cry of Isaiah (64.1): “As the fire burns brushwood, as fire cause water to boil, to make Your name known to your adversaries, that the nations may tremble at Your presence.” In response to this cry, God left the silence of transcendence and “the Word was made flesh”²⁵.

Man’s salvation in Christ means to restore the image and the likeness, the gift of the spiritual life in God. If the voice of conscience resounded enough to distinguish formally the good from evil, in revenge the victory over the Evil, by creating the Good, it was possible only in Christ, when the formal freedom became real. The known truth gives freedom, but this redeemed freedom remains fragile and requires an endless receiving of gifts of the Holy Spirit, as the freedom of choice and therefore the possibility of the fall remains possible even at the greatest saints. God fully penetrates every human being, but protects the royal dignity of His person, this is the miracle of Divine friendship: “I no longer call you servants ... instead I called you friends” (Jn 15:15). This is the plan of “the One completely the Other”, completely different, “the new creature” who, among us, to lift up to Transcendence, has two wings, freedom and grace²⁶.

The reflections in this chapter were, moreover, developed in a book that has the same title, *Ages of the spiritual life*, and it is presented as a dialogue with the modern man. It does not address to specialists in theology, neither to those who believe. It is not always easy for the reader, believer

²⁵ Paul Evdokimov, *Une vision...*, p. 110

²⁶ Paul Evdokimov, *Une vision...*, p. 111

or not, to agree with Evdokimov. But what is certain is that he is offered a sincere dialogue. He understands that his speaker is open to all contemporary world realities, the philosophy, psychology, art; he has a deep knowledge of all fields. "Above the uproar in the world, if we know to listen, the meaning of things asks us questions. More than ever, the human existence involves the need of an unavoidable clarity, it puts the only serious question that could be addressed to every man. Beyond all catechetical literature or propaganda, at the conscience level free of any prejudices, the believer of the twentieth century is invited to say what God is and the atheist, who denies it, to state the object of its negation.²⁷"

It is always easy to notice that his word carries a large biblical and patristic treasure, and a compelling personal experience. An ocean of knowledge in all fields and in all times filtered through an experience and personal vision:

"From eternity, God thinks only at the salvation of the man, and the man must leave this care to God, to even forget it, not to seek it first of all; he has to think about the salvation of the divine love, because God first loved, and we do not know why. God's attitude illuminates if we understand the innermost core of love: all love is always mutual. Love is only possible because it is a miracle, because it conceives reciprocity, even if the latter is acknowledged, it is refused or perverted. That is why every great love is always crucified. It conceives an identical gift with its own greatness, a royal gift but, because it is devoid of constraint. Waiting for a *fiat* of an equal immensity, love can only suffer and be pure offering until death, until the descent into hell²⁸"

Ages of the spiritual life is one of the best fruits that the orthodox theological thinking has given up to now in its effort to create what can be called "the neo-patristic synthesis", synthesis that began to emerge after the meeting with the great thinkers and Orthodox theologians in exile (Berdyayev, Bulgakov, Lossky, Afanasiev, Florovsky and so on.) with the Western spirit, with the reality of Western civilization, in the area of the West. The volume carries an universal message; it is a message that inaugurates the dialogue of the free and mature men, orthodox and non-

²⁷ Paul Evdokimov *The ages of the spiritual life*, translated by Ion Buga și Anca Manolescu, Humanitas, București, 2006, p. 9

²⁸ Paul Evdokimov *The ages of...*, p. 48

Theological and Moral Principles as a Foundation for a Christian Education

orthodox, believers or unbelievers, but honest and sensitive to the deepest problems of existence. The great tragedy of our times is neither suffering nor poverty, nor fear, but the feeling of a huge absence. People, especially young people looking for “something” often descend into dangerous lands. Paul Evdokimov is a new “voice of the one who cries in the wilderness” of the twentieth century and calls for “the true light” of the patristic orthodoxy, for the clear springs of eastern spirituality full of living presence, of the Spirit bearing life, full of the Trinity.

“The Father’s image takes the Son’s appearance and his cross shadows inside. Our own cross outlines plainly and there is no possible to return to the simple, childish faith as it was once. The painful dissonances tear our soul, as it has a clear vision of the evil and of the sin; an extreme tension between the two states that mutually exclude. The brutal experience of the falls and of the helplessness can throw on the edge of despair. [...] Man is never tempted more than he can handle. God watches us in this decisive moment. He expects from our faith a powerful act, the full and the conscious acceptance of its own destiny; He requires us to assume it freely.”²⁹

Conclusions

We conclude our study with the previous reflections. Before this, we wish to point out the main contribution brought by the work of Evdokimov in general, and in particular by his course of moral theology to build a holistic Christian education, based on religious and moral principles of biblical and patristic nature.

The Russian diaspora represented a challenge for its members. Thus, life in the West was not without some difficult moments, culminating with the conflict between the Patriarchate of Moscow and the Church founded by the Russians left into exile. On the other hand, however, we must be aware that the exile has brought an unprecedented wealth of theological creation, at least among the Russians in exile. The possibility of founding of Orthodox churches in the West opened the path to extraordinary conversions, some even proved providential as it was the case of the current Met-

²⁹ Paul Evdokimov *The ages of...*, p. 70.

ropolitan of Diokleia, Kallistos Ware, or of the talented French theologian Olivier Clement³⁰.

Regarding the Russian diaspora, along with other important religious philosophers and theologians as Sergei Bulgakov, Nikolai Berdyaev, Georges Florovsky, Vladimir Lossky, it registers the name of Paul Evdokimov. All these have made a decisive contribution to the promotion of the Orthodox theology in the new environment they lived and worked in, the West one. Their testimony is more valuable as the conditions that contributed to the formation of emigration were tragic ones, the confrontation with the atheistic communist regime.

The theological levels that Evdokimov used to create, are extremely varied. If we had to summarize the original contribution of Paul Evdokimov to the development of orthodox moral theology of the twentieth century, then we should point out the following: 1) leaving from the texts of Sacred Scripture and of the Fathers, it should be remembered to the man of today that the ethics of love is beyond the ethics of desires and of obligations. 2) Moral obligations, good in itself, it must be overcome. But this with the condition to see religious life starting not from the Good, an abstract category, but from God, a living person in communion of life that transforms the man. It is not about a collection of virtues, but about the practicing of the evangelical metanoia, of total transformation, of conversion and of the metamorphosis of life and of the human being. 3) The biblical and the patristic sources are the source and the criterion of moral life in Orthodoxy. The course of Paul Evdokimov is another example in this regard. However, the attention given to the Tradition is not equivalent with the neglect of religious - cultural products of humanity. Moreover, between theology and culture it must be a dialogue, especially on moral issues that constitutes "the big questions" of man's today. In other words, Evdokimov's traditionalism is neither isolation nor spiritual archeology, but fidelity to evangelical kerygma.

³⁰ To see Ciprian Iulian Toroczkaï, *Teologia rusă din diaspora. Context istoric; principalele reprezentanți și originalitățile lor teologice*, "Agnos", Sibiu, 2005; Antoine Arjakovsky, *The Way. Religious Thinkers of the Russian Emigration in Paris and their Journal, 1925-1940*, Translated by Jerry Ryan, Edited by John A. Jillions and Michael Plekon, Foreword by Rowan Williams, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame", Indiana, 2013; Tomas Spidlik, *The Spirituality of the Eastern Christianity: IV The Man and his destiny in the Russian religious philosophy*, translated by Maria-Cornelia Icăjr., "Deisis", Sibiu, 2002

Education based on Christian principles must have as a model the divine pedagogy. Thus, in the human history the principles we find embodied the triadologic, christological and pneumatological principles of the perfect life. The trinitarian model, defined by the filial love, it ought to be followed, as the creational potentialities, of humanity in general and of every human being in particular. This process is not an easy one, being sprinkled with ups and downs, of different stages that mark the “the ages of the spiritual life.” Any teacher of Christian inspiration should therefore take into account the “age” of the one is taking care, so that he can achieve the target of his life, salvation or deification (*theosis*).

In conclusion, the course of moral theology may be - although it was published posthumously - an opportunity for the Western reader to discover the values of Orthodoxy. His reading can provide a good opportunity for the Orthodox reader to rediscover his roots and how they can become relevant in today’s world.