

## THE BEGINNINGS OF CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHY “Fides et ratio”, Chapter IV

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**Abstract:** In the twentieth year of his pontificate, on September 14, 1998, on the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, Pope John Paul II reads the Encyclical Letter on the Relationships between Faith and Reason “Fides et ratio”. The concept of “Christian philosophy” takes on meaning and receives new contributions to the definition of the phrase. Chapter IV of the Encyclical Letter emphasizes the significant stages of the encounter between faith and reason, the drama of the separation between the two, and the eternal novelty of St. Thomas’ thought. Christian philosophy can only be a realistic philosophy, and as philosophy approaches moderate realism, it is Christian. A philosophy of the self has nothing to do with the Christian philosophy. Many consider philosophy to be something indifferent to Christianity and to Christians; they do not want to understand that the meaning and fate of Christianity stands or falls with the philosophy that adopts it; and because apart from Thomism, the other philosophies do not agree with Christianity, without compromise on one side or the other, they say: not only in reality, but also in theory, Thomism is Christian philosophy; the others are more or less philosophical, because they are more or less Christian. The “dark cloud” of mystery that separates believers from unbelievers will help to develop a balanced and communicable level of understanding Christian philosophy, useful to both. In this first part we will focus on: the presence of St. Paul in Athens; the cautious attitude of Christians towards gnosis; the role of Saint Irenaeus and Tertullian.

**Keywords:** being, faith, reason, philosophy, theology, gnosis, Scripture

### **Status quaestionis**

The relationship between philosophy and faith should not be seen as the saving binomial of the modern conception of the philosophy of religion in the modern thinking. There are many Christians today who consider the interest in philosophy oppressive, as long as philosophy has often been the source of heresy. There are also famous philosophy thinkers who expressed their deep reservations about the honest nature of the approach to religious faith. Under these conditions, we are convinced that we are facing a fragile relationship, sustained most of the time by provocative encounters

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of suffering. The place of the philosophy of religion, according to “philosophia perennis,” is standing up with the other philosophical sciences which converge on what we cannot rationally justify. In the philosophy of religion *the religious phenomenon* in its essence will be questioned. This phenomenon will be explained by the function it fulfills for man, as well as for society. In many cases the philosophy of religion will have to critically relate to this “phenomenon”, i.e. *religion*. We will analyze the historical perspective, the beginnings of the thought of Christian philosophy, as well as the significant stages of the encounter between faith and reason following the structure proposed by Pope John Paul II in the encyclical letter *Fides et ratio*, chapter IV, entitled: “The relationship between faith and reason”<sup>1</sup>. The comments around the encyclical, developed in “Vatra Magazine Survey” were also of real use to us<sup>2</sup>. The fact that we will work within the religious philosophical discourse will bring into discussion relevant theological problems, for this reason the philosophical language will be intertwined by both scientific and theological accuracy. In the encyclical “Fides et ratio”, Pope John Paul II resumes the notion of *Christian philosophy*, guaranteeing its *legitimacy* from a philosophical point of view. In order to compose a philosophical discourse on Christian philosophy, it will be necessary to introduce the notion of *epoché* (putting in parentheses) the faith and the *philosophical renewal* of theology<sup>3</sup>. We will be able to accomplish such a philosophical approach by following and developing chapter IV of the previously mentioned encyclical. Such a reflection can be achieved through a state of double focus: internal focus (self-understanding of Christianity) and external focus (heterocomprehension of Christianity).

### 1. The presence of St. Paul in Athens

We naturally ask ourselves: what was St. Paul doing in Athens? The answer to this problem is found in The Scripture:

While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, his soul was filled with indignation, seeing that the city was full of idols. He talked in the synagogue with the Jews and with the God-fearing, and in the marketplace every day with those he met. Even some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers spoke to him and said, “What does this talkative mean?” Others: “He seems to be a preacher of foreign deities because he preaches about Jesus and resurrection.” They took him to the Areopagus, and told him, “Could we also know what this new doctrine is? For you bring foreign things to our ears. So we want to know what they

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<sup>1</sup> IOAN PAUL AL II-LEA, *Fides et ratio*, trans. Wilhelm Dancă, Presa Bună, Iași, 1999, n. 36-48.

<sup>2</sup> *Fides et Ratio în dezbateri*, Viața Creștină, Cluj-Napoca, 2002.

<sup>3</sup> A. DI MAIO, *Oaia în gura lupului*, Galaxia Gutenberg, Tg. Lăpuș, 2006, 38.

mean.” In fact, all the Athenians and foreigners living there spent their time with nothing but talking or listening to something new (*Acts* 17: 16-21).

From what we read we learn that Paul was passing through Athens and was waiting to continue his journey. Originally a Jew, he spent his time in the synagogue “with the God-fearing,” and as he walked through the squares, he talked to the people “whom he met.” He had been in the city for some time, so the atmosphere he met aroused deep feelings of indignation in the apostle’s soul, which provoked him to a *different* attitude. But who were the interlocutors of the one saddened by the cruel reality of idolatry? He who used every opportunity to preach “about Jesus and the resurrection,” who happened to be in the Areopagus, was approached and questioned by none other than the *philosophers of the time*, the “Epicureans and Stoics,” whose occupation was nothing than to waste their time through the market. Born in Tarsus, a Hellenistic city with a remarkable cultural level, St. Paul studied in Jerusalem, where he was trained as Gamaliel’s disciple, in the tradition of the Fathers (*Acts* 22: 3). Moreover, he lived for almost ten years in a Hellenistic atmosphere, after his conversion, and before his first mission, in cultural centers such as Damascus, Tarsus and Antioch. The Greek atmosphere cannot be easily neglected and the conclusion that this *didactic reality* suggests is that Paul was no stranger to the philosophical environment of the time<sup>4</sup>. But the knowledge acquired by revelation, on the road to Damascus, which he enjoyed, separates him from the status of the “unproductive” sages and makes him aware that such “disputes” had no constructive end. As Greek philosophers “sat” and wondered what place to assign to the gods in a philosophically intelligible world, Paul had already found God destined to answer the major questions of existence. He was not a God imagined by poets or discovered by any thinker as the ultimate answer to his metaphysical problems; he was a God who revealed himself, who spoke his name, who explained his nature, insofar as nature could now be understood by people<sup>5</sup>. How does the Areopagus dialogue end?

When they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked him, and said, “We’ll hear from you another time about this.” So Paul denied them. However, some of the men joined and believed him. Dionysius the Areopagite, a woman named Damaris, and others with them were among them (*Acts* 17: 32-34).

We notice that the attempt to get out of the “dialogue” was not easy at all. Neither the believer Paul nor the unfaithful philosopher can do this

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<sup>4</sup> R.E. BROWN – J.A. FITZMYER – R.E. MURPHY, *Introducere și comentariu la Sfânta Scriptură*, vol. I, Galaxia Gutenberg, Tg. Lăpuș, 2005, 1022.

<sup>5</sup> É. GILSON, *Dumnezeu și filosofia*, Galaxia Gutenberg, Tg. Lăpuș, 2005, 47.

without being accused of intellectual obscurantism. As we know, philosophy is an intellectual subject that is interested in the nature of reality. Although the apostle does not seem interested in analyzing reality together with the philosophers encountered, the Christian faith will inevitably raise philosophical questions that will test the foundations on which it supports its statements: what are the ways of knowledge? Why do we believe in God? What is the nature and logical significance of religious assertions? How is Christianity compared to other types of faith and other theories about world and life?<sup>6</sup> At the same time, philosophy that is interested in truth and the reality of existence will not be able to give up religious debates.

### *1.1. Who were the Epicureans and Stoics Paul met in the Areopagus?*

From the passage presented by the Acts of the Apostles we see that St. Paul was not interested in knowing a particular philosophical school or its representatives in particular. Why this fact? We must not forget that the revelation near Damascus gave the apostle an ineffable intuition of “the mystery of Christ.” More than his Pharisaic “culture,” or even his Hellenistic cultural roots, that revelation of Jesus made him deeply understand the value of the novelty of a new *era* in the history of mankind’s religious thought. That is why Paul’s speech lacks interest in a particular philosophical school. However, it is not difficult to specify that philosophical environment. For this reason Diogenes Laertius shows us how some of the philosophers of the time were named after their cities of origin, as Eleates, Megarians, Eritreans and Cyrenaics, others according to the place where they professed, as academics and Stoics, while some according to their teachers, as Socrates, Epicureans and others<sup>7</sup>. It is important to note that in this already-mentioned philosophical environment, St. Paul insists on the *power of the natural knowledge* of God and on the moral conscience of every human being:

“For that which is known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. In fact, his invisible reality or his eternal power and divinity can be known through the mind from the creation of the world, in His deeds, so that they cannot excuse themselves” (*Rom 1: 19-20*).

When the Greek philosophers began to make distinctions, the gods already existed, and philosophers only inherited them from those who were called theological poets. A Greek believer considered himself an instrument in the hands of untold divine powers, the first characteristic of these powers

<sup>6</sup> C. BROWN, *Filosofia și credința creștină*, Cartea Creștină, Oradea, 2000, 10.

<sup>7</sup> D. LAERTIOS, *Despre viețile și doctrinele filosofilor*, Polirom, Iași, 1997, I, 17.

being life. A Greek god is never an inanimate thing; he is a living being. The Greek philosopher, to whom St. Paul addressed himself, used the word “god.” This was a cause that was more than just a thing. Taking the world as a given reality, the Greek philosopher wondered only what “nature” is, in other words, what the essential substance of things and the hidden principle of their actions are. In the light of what has been said so far, we see that the Greek philosopher of that time understood the nature of things by means of one or more principles. But the Greek philosophy will end because it will meet the necessary progress of natural theology. The evolution of human thought felt the urgent need for metaphysical progress. Such progress will be made later only under the influence of religion<sup>8</sup>. In the presence of the Apostle Paul in Athens, we recognize the historical moment favorable to the meeting of faith with reason. The fact that this event happened *then* should not make us overly curious: *Why then?*, *Why there?*, *Why Paul?*, *Why Athens?*. Thus, like most people today, we admit and profess as an act of faith the real presence of God in human history. Therefore, I consider that event with all its subsequent implications, as a historical “selection” favorable to the encounter between faith and reason. And in St. Paul we see the academic “pioneer” who proposed us for study and debate what we will later call the *philosophy of religion*.

## 2. The deliberate attitude of Christians towards gnosis

The history of philosophical and religious thought was at one time confronted with an insurmountable fact on the part of the Fathers of Philosophy. The non-philosophical statement “I am,” which has since made an epoch in philosophical thought and which came from the Jewish religion, had to be accepted and considered a real ontological event. We remember the historical moment between Yahweh and Moses, described in the Old Testament (*Ex* 3:14). Moses’ mission will henceforth be read as God’s answer to the covenant with the patriarchs. “I am who I am,” Moses proclaimed to the Jews, that is, he proclaimed the existence of a single God. The whole people received the news, and they never thought that their Master might be a thing. Obviously, their Master was a person. Here, sublime in our eyes, the saving situation of the personal name of the Creator unfolds. Moses committed to the people in profound metaphysical meditations to discover the true name of God, but answered them short, as short was the Lord’s answer: “He who is called *I am* has sent me to you.” Intuitive faith, which does not explicitly know the reasons for which it believes, is the most common, the most widespread among believers. On the other hand,

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<sup>8</sup> É. GILSON, *Dumnezeu și filosofia*, 46.

rational faith is born of the ordinary experience of one's deep self, but with the control of the reason of external facts, thus proving that God is the origin of both the spirit and the external world. The Greeks represent for the culture of many peoples the foundation of their philosophical thinking. The Jews also represent the religious foundation for the religious culture of the same peoples. Now comes the great historical novelty, which forces us to capture and understand it correctly: by preaching the gospel, the God of the chosen people ceased to be the "private God" (Gilson) of a nation and became the universal God of all. Any convert to Christianity, whether Greek or Jewish, or of another race (cf. *Acts 2: 9-11*), who was not at all familiar with the Greek philosophy, could not fail to recognize the *meta-physical significance* of his new religious belief. In the natural evolution of human thought, the step of emphasizing the connection between reason and faith was taken. Man's attempt to understand the origin of the gods and, through them, of the universe, materialized through the development of critical consciousness about what was believed.<sup>9</sup> For the Christian, no matter what culture he came from, the first philosophical principle had to coincide with the first religious principle, and:

since the name of his God was "I am," every Christian philosopher had to postulate "I am" as the first principle and supreme cause of all things, even in philosophy. Using our modern terminology we can say that Christian philosophy is "existential" in all its power<sup>10</sup>.

The fact that I accept to understand my faith represents the great existential turn that has taken place in my being. The new age of thought, emerging from the ancient local traditions, entered a new development that corresponded to the needs of universal reason. Up to this point we see how well reason and faith go together. And then, where does the deliberate attitude of Christians towards gnosis come from?

### 2.1. *What do we know about gnosis?*

We must see it as a religious movement based on the knowledge of divine mysteries. We know that it asserted itself in the Christian cultural spaces of the second and third centuries. Here is how we read in *Fides et ratio*: "In reference to this movement to bring Christians closer to philosophy, we must also mention the cautious attitude that other pagan cultural elements aroused in them, such as gnosis"<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> *Fides et ratio*, n. 36; henceforth I will quote: *FR*.

<sup>10</sup> É. GILSON, *Dumnezeu și filosofia*, 49.

<sup>11</sup> *FR*, n. 37.

The Coptic texts in the library discovered at Nag Hammadi, Egypt, as well as the rejection writings of Christian teachers of the respective centuries who knew the heresies, as well as from some philosophers among whom Plotinus stands out, refer to this cultural movement. Gnosis, as a cultural movement, has taken various literary forms over time, such as the Gospels, deeds, letters, apocalypse, (Gnostic) confessional speeches, and prayers. The final technical meaning is that of superior, secret knowledge, which guarantees the salvation of the “spiritual” (pneumatikoi)<sup>12</sup>. As with any type of knowledge, *gnosis arises* from the contact with the known object itself, God or the world that emanates from it. Gnosticism is marked by a series of characteristics that can be found in various Gnostic schools with various keys and intensities: 1. the dualistic contrast of the divine element (also called pneumatic) with the world-matter; 2. the presence in man (corporeal, material) of the divine spark and the need for it to be awakened by its divine correspondent in order to be finally liberated from the body, this being pessimistically considered by the Gnostics as an oppressive obligation; 3. gnosis, as a source of religious knowledge, whose object is the true spiritual reality of man, having a nature and a substantiality common to the divine, mediated by a confessor-savior and guaranteed by a special esoteric tradition, able to save him the one who receives it; 4. salvation as resurrection-liberation not of the body and creation, but of the body and creation of the divine spark that is in captivity<sup>13</sup>. But what we must capture is that elitist knowledge, that is, intended for a small group of “enlightened” individuals, who stand out from the community. Within this historical and cultural religious environment St. Paul proclaims the following:

Therefore, as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving. Be careful not to be subjugated by philosophy and meaningless speculation by human tradition, by the basic principles of the world, and not by Christ (*Col 2: 6-8*).

The next step in the progress of the argument was to indicate the existence of God. St. Paul tried to do this by laying the foundations of one of the most daring projects of knowledge. Let us follow in the following how the particularity of the message of the encounter between faith and reason will be outlined.

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<sup>12</sup> F.E. PETERS, *Termenii filozofiei grecești*, Humanitas, București, 1993, 112.

<sup>13</sup> *Enciclopedie de filosofie și științe umane*, All DeAgostini, București, 2004, 399.

## 2.2. *Introducing the real gnoseological project*

The real gnoseological project is brought and supported by the demarcation line between the Greek and Christian thought, that is, between the Greek and Christian philosophy. The following sentence from *Fides et ratio*, namely: “On this basis the Church Fathers opened a fruitful dialogue with the ancient philosophers, opening the way to the proclamation and understanding of the God of Jesus Christ”<sup>14</sup>, makes us emphasize the philosophical genius of Pope John Paul II, who, through this “they opened a fruitful dialogue with philosophers” reminds us how the philosophical approach is not a collection of various conceptions, which fight each other. The critical philosophical consciousness, in connection with what was believed, of the early Christians, did not present itself to universal rational history as a natural rejection of all that the human mind had hitherto experienced. The critical spirit that the apostle Paul suggested to us does not mean at all the rejection of the scientific heritage acquired by men until then. The concept that one philosophy fights another dates back to Antiquity, and Paul knew the working method of the skeptics, who were in constant search. What was the skeptic’s search attitude based on? Precisely on this multiplicity of contradictory or opposite opinions which can be sustained and developed indefinitely. Christianity itself was not proposed as a philosophy, but as a doctrine, essentially religious, of the salvation of man through Christ. Christian philosophy appears here and now, at the crossing between the Greek philosophy and Judeo-Christian religious revelation. Greek philosophy presented the technique of a rational explanation of the world, while the Judeo-Christian revelation provided religious faith of inestimable philosophical significance<sup>15</sup>. The keystone of the entire history of Christian philosophy is that, starting with the second century AD, people were forced to use a philosophical technique to express ideas that would never have crossed the mind of any Greek philosopher<sup>16</sup>. Since the beginning Christian philosophy did not fight the philosophical patrimony but ennobled, perfected it. This was not an easy task at all. But by postulating as the supreme cause of all that is, someone who is and can only be said to be “He is,” the Christian revelation consecrates the *existence* as the deepest level of reality, as the supreme attribute of divinity. The choice made in this way meant the choice of *logos* against any kind of *mythos*, it meant the definitive demystification of the world and of religion<sup>17</sup>. All

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<sup>14</sup> *FR*, n. 36.

<sup>15</sup> É. GILSON, *Dumnezeu și filosofia*, 50.

<sup>16</sup> É. GILSON, *Dumnezeu și filosofia*, 50.

<sup>17</sup> J. RATZINGER, *Introducere în creștinism*, Sapientia, Iași, 2004, p. 96.

subsequent theological-philosophical influences will be anchored in Holy Scripture. If the works of the “Fathers” often had an authority comparable to that of the Bible, it is precisely because the sacred text has been *the keystone* in history for understanding the whole way of thinking and living life.

### 3. The role of Saint Irenaeus and Tertullian

The first idea we must remember is that we are still in the Gnostic framework and during the elaboration of bold theological systems, with several philosophical tones, in the footsteps of St. Paul, when Christian thinkers strove to adapt Christianity to the thinking of the time.

“In the footsteps of St. Paul, other writers of the first centuries, especially St. Irenaeus and Tertullian, also raised reservations about a cultural way of posing the problem that claimed to subordinate the truth of Revelation to the interpretation of philosophers”<sup>18</sup>.

Out of the desire to capture as well as possible the philosophical, historical and religious environment, we will make some brief historical references about the Church Fathers; I am inspired by the work of Adalbert Hamman<sup>19</sup>, and the scientific documentation regarding the works of the Church Fathers was made according to the *History of Ancient Greek and Latin Christian Literature*<sup>20</sup>.

#### 3.1. Saint Irenaeus the writer

The events that led to the establishment of Irenaeus’ main work<sup>21</sup> were: the spread in the Lyon region of the Gnostic doctrines of Valentin’s disciples

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<sup>18</sup> *FR*, n. 37.

<sup>19</sup> A. HAMMAN, *Părinții Bisericii*, Sapiientia, Iași, 2005.

<sup>20</sup> C. MORESCHINI – E. NORELLI, *Istoria literaturii creștine vechi grecești și latine*, I-III, Polirom, Iași, 2001.

<sup>21</sup> During the persecution of Marcus Aurelius, who had also struck the community of Lyons in 177, Irenaeus was in Rome. He was carrying a message to Eleutherius, the bishop of Rome. He was going to intervene in favor of peace, divided by the Montanist movement, which had a great echo in the Lyon region, especially among the confessors of the faith. When he returned home, he found the old bishop dead, as a martyr. Being a priest, Irenaeus follows them to the episcopal see. His assiduous work will now be carried out on two fronts: he will devote himself to the evangelization of the Galician population, especially those in the country, whose language he spoke, and will carry out a strong writing action to defend the integrity of the faith against Gnostic innovations. It is important to emphasize how he will understand the capacity of ecclesial unity in diversity and not in uniformity, and how peace requires all people to give up on details. Thus, around 180, St. Irenaeus will make a conciliation effort with Pope Victor, who wanted to impose in Asia, the heiress of the primary tradition, the Roman custom of celebrating Easter not on the day of the anniversary, but on the following Sunday. It is the last known historical fact about Saint Irenaeus. He probably died at the beginning of the third century. Jerome gives him the title of martyr, but he

and, especially, the deeds of Mark the Magus. The main work to which we will refer, whose full title is *Elenchos kai anatropê tês pseudonymou gnôseôs*, is provided by Eusebius in *The Church History*. It is commonly known and quoted under the shorter title *Against Heresies* or in Latin *Adversus haereses*<sup>22</sup>. We did not have a direct access to this work. The full text has been preserved only in a Latin version attested to the year 420. In 1904 an Armenian translation of books IV and V was discovered, dating from the 4<sup>th</sup> century. These were published in 1910, arousing real interest among specialists. Let us briefly follow the structure of the work, from which we will be surprised that at the beginning, the represented gnosis, as we have seen, is a reflection on the data of faith. Dissatisfied with the religious content of Christianity, however, the Gnostics used revelation as the foundation of religious knowledge, mixing it with the pagan philosophical theories and elements from the Eastern cultures. Thus, bold theological systems were developed, with several keys, trying to adapt Christianity to that historical thought.

*The first book* opens with an extensive account of the system of Ptolemy's disciples, followed by an exegesis to the prologue of the *Gospel of John*. After a critique of the exegetical method of the Gnostics and a passage on the unity of the Church's faith, which carries a unique tradition, Irenaeus will dwell on the divergences in the systems of the Valentinians.

*The second book* is a condemnation based on reason, on the doctrines set out above. Irenaeus proceeds as in the case of the first book and declares that the rejection of the Valentinians can be applied to all other Gnostics. The author therefore rejects the doctrine of *Pleroma*, that is, of the divine world (showing that it cannot be external to creation and cannot contain it), the doctrine of eons or divine hypostases, the exegesis and eschatology of the Gnostics.

In *the third book*, Irenaeus aims to fight the Gnostics starting from the Holy Scriptures. It begins by discussing the authority and truth of the Christian Scriptures, which faithfully reproduce the teachings of the apostles. The notion of *recapitulation* is approached, understood as a resumption of the man created by God and defeated by sin – Adam – in the humanity of Christ, bringing salvation<sup>23</sup>. The book ends with the lament of the heretics, who, being excluded from the Church, they are separated from the truth in order to believe in a God who is useless and indifferent to the world.

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does not talk about the manner of his death. He is, however, one of the greatest fathers of the Church.

<sup>22</sup> C. MORESCHINI – E. NORELLI, *Istoria literaturii creștine vechi grecești și latine*, I, p. 260.

<sup>23</sup> E. FERENȚ, *Isus Cristos, Cuvântul lui Dumnezeu întrupat pentru mântuirea omului*, Sapientia, Iași, 2004, p. 419.

*The fourth book* aims to combat heretics based on the words of Christ. St. Irenaeus shows how Jesus recognizes the Creator as Father, who is also the author of the Law; that Jesus obeyed the Law; that between the Law and the Gospels there is not a relation of opposition, but of continuity, which is expressed in the correspondences *image-reality, prophecy-fulfillment, promise-fulfillment*, and that one is God from which both come. The gospel is the perfection of the law, imposed on the Jews not because God needed them as its executors, but to educate and restrain people who have always been inclined to idolatry and disobedience. God who cannot be known in himself, appeared to creatures through his Logos and Spirit, through the elements of God's saving plan – *Economies* – and through the mysteries by virtue of which one day man will be able to see God first in Jesus, then in His kingdom.

*The fifth book* promises to be a complement to the rejections of heretics. In reality, it is dedicated to precise themes, the first of which is the salvation of the body, denied by the Gnostics and Marcion. The identity between the Creator and the Father of Jesus is demonstrated by the exegesis of the biblical passages concerning the end *times*<sup>24</sup>.

### 3.2. *Brief considerations and an excerpt from Adversus haereses*

In the work of St. Irenaeus, the prayer transcends the text. It was the spontaneous outburst of his soul. His mystical zeal springs from his living faith that humbly expresses itself before God. He does not write to destroy heretics, but to help them find the Christ of faith. The book was written in the presence of God and is primarily a testimony of faith in the God of Abraham and the God of Jesus Christ, for whom he is ready to lay down his life. In many other respects, the Bishop of Lyon is a witness of the Church. It elaborates the principle of *tradition*, which will become the source and the rule of faith in the Church. What strikes at Irenaeus, as much closer to us, to Cardinal Newman<sup>25</sup>, is the unity achieved between the intimate personality and the doctrine. Irenaeus is the master of ecumenical dialogue, in all its authenticity. For our time, which calls everything into question, he is the prophet of the present<sup>26</sup>.

<sup>24</sup> C. MORESCHINI – E. NORELLI, *Istoria literaturii creștine vechi grecești și latine*, I, 261.

<sup>25</sup> J.H. NEWMAN, *Apologia pro vita sua*, Librairie Bloud et Gay, Paris, 1939<sup>2</sup>, 275. We refer here to the text of the fifth chapter, which arouses the reader's interest when Newman, after 1845, becomes a Catholic. We must also mention the study of Newman by P. GAUTHIER, „John Henry Newman” in F. NIEWÖHNER – Y. LABBÉ, *Dizionario dei filosofi della religione*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Città del Vaticano, 2001, 390-393. Cf. IOAN PAUL AL II-LEA, *Fides et Ratio*, n. 74. Cf. H.R. PATAPIEVICI, „În marginea enciclicei *Fides et Ratio*. Comentariu la o absență”, in *Fides et Ratio în dezbateri*, 70.

<sup>26</sup> A. HAMMAN, *Părinții Bisericii*, 45.

Fools are those who despise God's economy in regard to the world, who deny the salvation of the flesh, laugh at the new birth, and believe it incapable of reaching corruption. Can't the body be saved? Then the Lord did not redeem us by his blood, does not the cup of the Eucharist make us partakers of his blood, nor the bread that we break, of his body? [...] We have no life of our own; let us not be proud, therefore, and not rise up against God with an ungrateful heart. We know from experience that only his goodness, and not our nature, will give us eternal life; let us not be mistaken about our nature. Let's not be wrong about the true nature of things, I mean God and man<sup>27</sup>.

### 3.3. *The first apologetic writings of Tertullian*

At the beginning of his literary activity<sup>28</sup> there is a corpus of works dedicated to the defense of Christianity – *Ad nationes*, *Apologeticum* and *Towards the Pagans*.

Probably written in 197, *Apologeticum* is the most important work of its kind, written in Latin and one of the most significant works of Tertullian. An important element of this *scientific work* is considered the importance given to the defense of Christianity, based on the antiquity of Jewish principles and the purity of the new religion, based on the rigorous morality that characterizes its followers. There is talk of a constant attitude in Tertullian's works, namely – *controversy* – accepted as a fundamental *formamentis*, but we are wrong if we limit it to that mere tendency towards contradictory discussion. The instrument and vehicle of his new personal ideas closely united with Stoic philosophy<sup>29</sup> were controversial for Tertullian.

<sup>27</sup> IRINEU DE LYON, *Adversus haereses*, V, 2: PG 7, 1123-1128.

<sup>28</sup> In the third century, the Church intensified its activity and expanded to the West. Along with Alexandria, Carthage becomes a center that shines throughout the Church. The progress of the Church urgently requires the effort of organization. Candidates for Baptism are now subject to a period of didactic preparation. Schools are being set up to train them. The church now enters the cultured layer of society; in the East, philosophers, and in the West, rhetoricians. Their philosophical training will allow them to use all the human sciences to understand the word of God. Tertullian is concerned with the creation of theological language, using legal terms for this purpose. The law will allow him to plead before the Empire for the cause of Christians. Conversions affect all strata of society: the intellectual elite, business classes, civil servants and workers. The quality of education, on the other hand, does not keep pace with the increase in the number of believers. The life of Quintus Septimius Florens Tertullianus is extremely unclear. Apart from the fact that he was born in Carthage, we know nothing certain about his life or death. Only some chronological clues have been deduced from his works; to these were added information from Jerome, which dedicates to Tertullian, in *On Illustrious Men*, part of chapter 24 and chapter 53. His date of birth could be around 160. "He lived to an advanced age," concludes Jerome, which led researchers to set the date of his death around 230.

<sup>29</sup> E. FERENȚ, *Isus Cristos, Cuvântul lui Dumnezeu intrupat pentru mântuirea omului*, 425.

The letter of encouragement *To the Martyrs* (*Ad martyros*) can also be linked to the *Apologeticum*, in which Tertullian uses the literary genre of the *protreptic* to designate a new reality, that of martyrdom. The writer will use many traditional elements and arguments taken from the Stoic philosophy, to urge martyrs to endure torture and death. An unusual treatise is that in which Tertullian investigates the nature of the soul – *De anima* –, the certainty of the immortality of the soul being essential for the Christians. He will deepen the topic, because what interests him is precisely the problem of the essence of the soul. From here, he will later defend and support the theory of *the rational soul of Jesus*<sup>30</sup>. For this purpose Tertullian will resort to very ample information, extracted not only from philosophy, but also from the pagan medical literature; he argues with Gnostic and Platonic doctrines, because, in his opinion, the soul is not a reality different from the body to which it is connected. According to his stoic background, he will claim that the human soul is material (in fact, even God is material, because everything that exists must have a “body”, although *sui generis*, he says in *Against Praxeas* 7, 8)<sup>31</sup>. Because it is material and closely related to the body, the soul comes from the soul of the one who generates it (*translationism*), just as the body of the newborn is the product of the body of the parents. In this way the Carthaginian brings an argument to support and consolidate his doctrine on the resurrection of the dead; the body and the soul are a unique and indissoluble whole, in the present life, as in the afterlife. Concerned about the fate of the soul, Tertullian summarizes some considerations based on the interpretation of the passage in *Matthew* 5, 26 – you shall not leave prison until you will be given the last penny – to be understood as a first attempt of the purgatory doctrine<sup>32</sup>.

We also mention the works *On Patience* (*De patientia*) and *On Repentance* (*De paenitentia*); in the first treatise we have a Christian transposition of the Stoic motives, in the sense that patience is the force to bear misfortunes, and for the Stoics this is the virtue specific to the sage. In the second work he allows us to learn about the practices of penance in a very distant period of Christianity. It should be noted that Tertullian considers the redemption of grievous sins possible, which he will reject instead at the end of his life, after joining Montanism.

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<sup>30</sup> E. FERENȚ, *Isus Cristos, Cuvântul lui Dumnezeu întrupat pentru mântuirea omului*, 428.

<sup>31</sup> C. MORESCHINI – E. NORELLI, *Istoria literaturii creștine vechi grecești și latine*, I, 370.

<sup>32</sup> C. MORESCHINI – E. NORELLI, *Istoria literaturii creștine vechi grecești și latine*, I, 374.

### 3.4. *The relationship with the Montanism*

Montanism was also called the “Phrygian heresy” because Montanus was the originator of Phrygia, the initiator of this movement of enthusiastic ascetics. The first evidence of Tertullian’s adherence to Montanism dates back to 207-208, when the first book of *Against Marcion* was published. He brings to mind, however, another important reference to Montanism, where the author talks about the new millennium and the descent of the heavenly Jerusalem to earth. According to Tertullian, an *allegorical interpretation* of the future rebuilding of the Jewish Kingdom was necessary, which the Jews literally understood<sup>33</sup>. Strongly emphasized is the ascetic component, especially related to fasting and matrimonial practice: the condemnation of a second marriage. This rigor, less and less human, was expressed through the very skillful use of sophistry. Although by adhering to Montanism he had come to adopt ideas often opposed to those of the Carthaginian Church, to which he belonged, and despite the fact that he had disagreed not only harshly, but even with violence and too little restraint, Tertullian would impose a domain in which he can use the new prophecy: that of practicing Christian ethics. But, despite these doctrinal contributions, Tertullian will reach a real separation from those he contemptuously called *psychics* that is, by taking Pauline terminology, those who remained at a lower level of the Christian life, not recognizing its spiritual reality<sup>34</sup>.

### 3.5. *Tertullian’s philosophy*

From what we have seen so far, we see that the encounter of Christianity with philosophy has not been easy at all. Tertullian will have major reservations about the cultural mode that claimed to subordinate the truth to the revelation of the interpretation of philosophers. For him, as for all the Church Fathers, the primary duty was the proclamation of the risen Christ, which was to be presented in that intimate meeting which led the participant to the conversion of the heart and the request for baptism<sup>35</sup>. St. Jerome, who saw in Tertullian’s works “the whole wisdom of the world,” wondered, “Who is more erudite than Tertullian?” Knowing Greek and Latin, Tertullian made, through his writings, to revive the glorious past, Latin and Greek, giving birth to that rhetorical-literary culture called “the second sophistry”<sup>36</sup>. Surprising to some researchers is the fact that he showed no trace of interest in the local language, Punic, spoken by the

<sup>33</sup> C. MORESCHINI – E. NORELLI, *Istoria literaturii creștine vechi grecești și latine*, I, 376.

<sup>34</sup> C. MORESCHINI – E. NORELLI, *Istoria literaturii creștine vechi grecești și latine*, I, 378.

<sup>35</sup> *FR*, n. 38.

<sup>36</sup> C. MORESCHINI – E. NORELLI, *Istoria literaturii creștine vechi grecești și latine*, I, 381.

people, which will appear so alive, a few centuries later, to St. Augustine. Tertullian will use the culture acquired during his previous training, which he mastered mainly as a rhetorician, to use later in his disputes against pagans and heresies. The church had adopted, from the beginning, two positions on secular culture: one of separation, opposition and refusal, the other of willingness to take from it all that could have served it. The first of these two attitudes was expressed, as we have seen, by St. Paul in *Col.* 2, 8. The other position, held as we shall see by St. Justin, did not in any way regard Christianity as separate from the wisdom of men, for human wisdom also comes from to God. However, Tertullian will criticize philosophy, because he saw in it the presence of an *unacceptable curiosity*, essentially summarizing the radical opposition between science and religion, between human and divine. Curiosity unites philosophers and heretics; it proposes to the intellect questions in essence, because the concrete and profound ones had been posed by Christianity. The condemnation of curiosity will tend to turn in this case into a condemnation of science and rationalism. Tertullian will take this step as well, even if the Carthaginian's alleged irrationalism has often been insisted on without an exact knowledge of the real facts, repeating only a banal and preconceived "*credo quia absurdum*"<sup>37</sup>. Whatever the situation, it is more likely that behind the provocative attitude of this statement (which, moreover, he never formulated in precise terms), the Carthaginian would not have wanted to say anything other than that *faith implies an unintelligible reality* and therefore you must believe, not reason. The last and perhaps most important reason why Tertullian had a sense of distrust of philosophy is that he saw in it an ally of polytheism and heresy. He knows that the Stoics developed an allegorical interpretation of traditional religion, seeing in it the material form of their philosophical truths (Zeus is the sky, Hera is the air, etc.). He is acquainted with the *henotheism* of his time, that is, he knows that among the pagans many worshipers believe, under the influence of Platonism, that there is a supreme god, but that he does not in any way prevent the existence of smaller ones, whom Christians call idols or demons. In Tertullian's opinion, philosophy offered the Gnostics all the conceptual help and all the tools with which they elaborated their bold and absurd constructions. Valentin had been a Platonist, Plato was the "patriarch of heretics," Hermodogenes' heresy had its origins in the pagan philosophy. Such a belief, in fact, even if modern critics do not consider it correct, was common to all ancient heresologists and, especially, was supported by the Carthaginian

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<sup>37</sup> C. MORESCHINI – E. NORELLI, *Istoria literaturii creștine vechi grecești și latine*, I, 382.

who represented an authority in the field, namely Irenaeus of Lyons<sup>38</sup>. However, Tertullian will also use doctrines that came from pagan philosophy: the critique of polytheism, the demonstration of the existence of a demonology, the belief in the immortality of the soul, the reward or condemnation in the afterlife. In the *Apologeticum* the writer will refer to the Stoic conception of the Logos, creator of the universe, to persuade his pagan readers to accept the Christian doctrine of the all – *creating Word*. In this way, his almost total opposition to philosophy, in theory, will be erased in practice, giving rise to levels of interpretation. He will resolutely state that God is a corporeal (even *sui generis*) and rational entity, that he is not an impossible God to know, as the Platonists postulated, but accessible, if we take into account the beauties and harmonious order of nature. We rely on the teachings of the soul on the existence of God, teachings that are innate in the soul. The fact that God is spirit, according to the Scripture, fits into this conception. Thus, according to Tertullian, the word “spirit” does not indicate something immaterial, as the Christians inspired by Platonism had understood, but is a more subtle body than the others, but material anyway. Of course, the same can be said of the soul. Hence, the use of the term *substantia* probably derived to primarily indicate the material substrate of any individual being, a use that will become fundamental in Western theology. By researching the Christian hypothesis of the uniqueness of God, Tertullian will make a rigorous distinction between *unitas* and *unio*, the last word meaning singularity, uniqueness in terms of number; *unitas*, on the other hand, would mean a single whole in which the parts would be distinct but not separate. Platonism had a relatively small echo for Tertullian, who would often express some distrust of him. God conceived as a person will not be the “abstract divinity” of philosophers; His “anger” was read and understood in a concrete sense; the creation of the world really came from nothing: all these were unacceptable doctrines for the Greek philosophy and for the contemporary Gnostics with Tertullian<sup>39</sup>.

## Conclusion

In the conceptual approach presented above, the philosophical-theological thinking of Saint Paul took place. From here began the debate on the interpretation of the Scriptures, during which the *Christological exegesis*<sup>40</sup> was defended. This was difficult for the Jews to understand, because they

<sup>38</sup> C. MORESCHINI – E. NORELLI, *Istoria literaturii creștine vechi grecești și latine*, I, 383.

<sup>39</sup> C. MORESCHINI – E. NORELLI, *Istoria literaturii creștine vechi grecești și latine*, I, 384.

<sup>40</sup> E. FERENȚ, *Isus Cristos. Cuvântul lui Dumnezeu întrupat pentru mântuirea omului*, 392.

did not believe in Christ and lacked the key to understanding. This brief fresco, this vision of a key moment between the encounter of faith with reason, contains a special significance. Many thinkers, such as St. Augustine, will initially develop it later. What is it? “No one believed Socrates until he died for what he was learning. But for Christ, the craftsmen and even the ignorant despised the fear of death.” There are words that we will discover later, curiously reading chapter IV of the Encyclical Letter on the Relationships between Faith and Reason “Fides et ratio”.

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