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Apologetic approach on the dialogue between faith and rationality by the Oriental Fathers

1. The necessity of dialogue – 2. “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” – the specificity of theology – 3. Saint Maximus the Confessor and Saint John of Damascus

From the beginning, God blessed man with the virtue of knowledge and He endowed us with the gifts of wisdom, love and care for the environment, curiosity and intelligence to discover in our own mind the reality of life in which we live. As a synthesis between two realities, transcendental and also immanent, man, created in the image of his Creator, had always exploited the biblical urge through discovery: “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you” (Mt 7:7). Starting from these apostolic words we will try to develop in our present research the relationship between two of the most important realities of our existence: religion and science. There should not be any gaps or dialogical difference between both of them. Even if reality was not always like that, we must understand the perspectives of an honest relationship in dialogue and also the necessity of a mutual complementarity¹. This is why, over time, the insinuations of the atheistic organizations and anti-religious systems were always seen as outworn and dishonest².

¹ The relationship between theology and science, similar to the one it developed with philosophy over time, defines a natural and necessary collaboration and completion. From this point of view “apologetics should stay in close contact both with philosophy and science, or more specifically, with «the positive or exact science», terms that must be implicitly understood, every time we speak, here, about science in relation to theology”. I.GH. SAVIN, *Course of Apologetics*, vol. I: *Introduction*, Bucharest 1935, p. 50–51.

² Modernity consciousness distorted in a biased way man’s mystical and symbolic experience rooted in religious tradition. There is a shift from the register of eternal values determined by intel-

Therefore, the dialogue between theology and science has always existed, neither being excluded. Separately, each of them has its own purpose. Therefore, science aims at “life knowledge” whereas religion pursues “world’s destiny and happiness”. And yet, “no matter what the differences between religion and science were they face the same reality (...) The difference is that whereas physical reality is presented to us in time and space, spiritual reality is free of this kind of forms”³.

1. The necessity of dialogue

The necessity of dialogue rises from the rationality of creation which man undergoes along his personal way to eternal life. Without the oppression of selfish inclinations and autonomic implication, he uses the benefits of the environment in relation with his personal necessities, considering them gifts from God. In the light of the physical universe, man understands that

all the things created possess appropriate rationality. He sees the air and water in their chemical composition given to be of use for his life, sees the herbs nourished by the ground and the trees with their fruit for his food, and sees each breed of animals, fish, and birds, created again for his existence. But man can bring through his rationality his own contribution to make of his use nature’s different parts⁴.

However, man must always overcome the limits of the material world in order to understand completely the purpose of his existence. He unceasingly aspires to eternal life and this is why in all his mind’s search and curiosity “man sees in nature’s rationality and an Author’s transcendence who created him and all nature, the purpose of his preparing for an eternal life in unity with Himself”⁵. As a result, our entire existence and all the things that surround us happen in the divine oikonomia of the Holy Trinity. Therefore, Dumitru Staniloae states that

ligible models of the transcendental world to one dominated by immanence that proposes sensitive and perishing realities to human knowledge. If for the traditional man sire knowledge refers to transcendent realities, religious symbolism is mandatory to validate any epistemology, in the case of the modern man we witness a profound shift. A. LEMENI, R. IONESCU, *Orthodox Theology and Science. Basic references for dialogue*, Bucharest 2007, p. 18.

³ I.GH. SAVIN, *Faith defense. A treaty of Apologetics*, Bucharest 1996, p. 24.

⁴ D. STANILOAE, *Jesus Christ – the light of the world and man’s deifier*, Bucharest 1993, p. 6.

⁵ *Ibid.*

only God's consciousness can create the love for man and only the man's consciousness can create the wish for eternity and forwarding in the infinite and eternal light of God. Only a conscientious God can treasure man and only a conscientious man can treasure God. And only man's conscience can destroy his will to receive real life, from God, thinking that he can possess it in his own egoism⁶.

The question if theology could be considered in a certain way as a science arose over time, starting from the theoretical content of Christian teaching. Narrowly speaking, we can name theology the science about God (from *Theos* – God; *logos* – word). Moreover, there is not any equivalence between “general theology and scientific theology”, if we take into consideration that its concern is directly related to the religious feeling and this reality goes beyond definition and natural experiment. Taking into account the “limitation of theology to the scientific process”, an analysis – about the difference between

theology as the result of prayer and theology as the speculation of human intelligence on the different aspects of ecclesiastical life is more than necessary – since the latter aspect can be the result of some different scientific approaches like archaeology, history, philosophy etc. aiming at clarifying some objectives in the life of the Church⁷.

Scientifically speaking, theology asserts the existence of an object and also of a method based on which it can develop. Therefore,

the object is offered by the material dimension of theology; the method by its formal one. The “experience of the object” is what we call religion or belief; the manifestation or its knowledge is what we can call theological science or simply theology. In this way, we can say that theology is the science of knowing God.

In this process of manifestation, theology has always highly considered the “compliance to truth”. Therefore, its principal discovery source and valuing with this purpose is Divine Revelation. This is the starting point of the dilemma of separation between the two elements of our study. Since science “does not have any other criterion except the laws of rationality nor does it have any other purpose than finding the truth, coming out from the compliance with rational laws”, theology

⁶ *Ibid*, p. 15.

⁷ A. LEMENI, S. MIHALACHE, R. IONESCU, C. IOJA, (coord.), *Orthodox Apologetics*, vol. II: *The dialogue between contemporary sciences*, Bucharest 2014, p. 32.

doesn't give up Revelation to the detriment of rationality, preserving its faith, i.e. God's personal experience⁸.

This distinctiveness is stated by Dumitru Staniloae, who identifies three important elements in theology:

faithfulness to Revelation achieved in Jesus Christ; responsibility for the believers when the Revelation has been accomplished and the openness to eschatological future⁹.

On the other hand, science represents

a body of facts or truths, with a determined objective and also a specific method to develop information. It is a systematized branch of knowledge. It is the exact, universal and verifiable knowledge which can be tested by laws¹⁰.

In simple terms, science is “the processing of reality or experience information, according to necessary and general rules of human intelligence”¹¹. In the context of its manifestation we can distinguish also: “an object of knowledge (physical, natural universe), an intelligent subject (man) and also a method to develop knowledge (scientific method of knowledge)”¹². On the other hand, on the forms of reality that science approaches, it can assess by its resources: physical context (corporeal or material), historical dimension (related to some important events, facts or stories) and noological reality (mathematical science, logic, moral sentences, the law, theology etc.). Therefore, there are three tips of sciences: physical, historical and noological; or natural science, historical, philosophical and theological. Taking into account these aspects, the researcher preserves in his mind, as the theologian also, “the thirst for truth”. There were plenty of differences in this process over time. First of them relates to the name of Socrates

⁸ I.GH. SAVIN, *Course of Apologetics*, vol. I, p. 52.

⁹ Theology, states, the father teacher, should be, as the Church, apostolic, contemporary to every prophetic-eschatological epoch ... “By faith it remains faithful to the revelation achieved in the past, by hope open to future full participation to the goodies of Christ and leads to closeness to Him and by love it already supports the participation to these goodies through a deep communion with Christ and with the others. Through these three qualities, theology is both traditional and at the same time contemporary and deeply-eschatological”. D. STANILOAE, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, vol. I, Bucharest 2003, p. 108–109.

¹⁰ *Le Petit Robert – dictionnaire de la langue française*, Paris 2000, p. 2298.

¹¹ I.GH. SAVIN, *Course of Apologetics*, vol. I, p. 52.

¹² A. LEMENI, R. IONESCU, *Orthodox Apologetics. The dialogue between contemporary sciences*, p. 17.

who separates the man of science, from the philosopher, the lover of truth from the omniscient sophist, who trade rationality in exchange for some instant practical interests, or glory, or power. The man of science saw reality as it was, in the light of truth¹³.

Therefore, there is a methodological difference between theology and science. Although, both of them aim at finding out the truth, theology mainly focuses on its hypostatical and transcendental dimension. It is based on the Divine Revelation. Therefore, unlike science, theology remains within the transcendental field and is faithful to the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Saviour who is the same “yesterday and today and forever” (Heb 13:8). Thus, taking into consideration these aspects, we cannot speak about a competition between theology and science but rather about complementarity and dialogue. Dumitru Staniloae highly and accurately analyses the rank and importance of each field.

Men always ask themselves questions in a very original way. Furthermore, theologians must be in their service; to speak about God whose mercy is infinite and who seeks to meet man in an eternal original way (...) We must point out the value of person before God, firstly presenting God as a Person Who is passionately interested in human history. He is the only Person who can help man to save himself. Even today, the Divine Person proposes the human person to leave and flee his hell, to liberate himself from his own seclusion and achieve communion. But this divine Person also wishes to provide answers and solutions to the issues which human consciousness generates today in the context of the scientific development. These are the two major tasks of the theology today¹⁴.

In terms of theological research, there is no limit to knowledge. Prayer and faith are the only means which allow us to go beyond. Unlike scientific research, which reaches finality in a visible way,

the way to the knowledge of God through prayer necessary requires the existence of apophatism (...) These structural limits are also preoccupied with the Apologetics as a subject during its search process to discover the apologetic field of the Church¹⁵.

¹³ I.GH. SAVIN, *Course of Apologetics*, vol. I, p. 53.

¹⁴ D. STANILOAE, C. DE BEAUREGARD, M. ANTOINE, *Brief spoken dogma. Dialogues at Cernica*, trans. by C. Ica Jr., Sibiu 2007, p. 167.

¹⁵ A. LEMENI, S. MIHALACHE, R. IONESCU, C. IOJA, (coord.), *Orthodox Apologetics*, vol. II, p. 35.

Starting from this point, in order to get an overview as clear as possible on the dialogue between theology and science, it is essential first to analyse the biblical-patristic argumentation, since it is the most central and authentic issue in our research.

Based on this dialogical fundament, the Russian theologian, George Florovski, thinks that it is necessary “to regain the spirit and thinking of the Fathers”. In order to carry out this evaluation, we need “the patristic mind”, which it is “not a sheer acquaintance with ancient texts and extraction of relevant quotations for modern arguments; it is rather the possession of the theology of the Fathers from within”¹⁶. In this regard, having as justification the similarities from the pre-Christian ages, Florovski appeals to the return to a professing theology based on an emblematic urge: “back to the Holy Fathers”. Therefore, he asks himself how

our contemporary world, atheistic and ridden with unbelief, is it not comparable in a sense with that pre-Christian world, renewed with all the same interweaving of false religious trends, sceptical and anti-God? In the face of such a world, theology must all the more become again a witness. The theological system cannot be a mere product of erudition, it cannot be born of philosophical reflection alone. It needs also the experience of prayer, spiritual concentration, and pastoral solicitude¹⁷.

Based on this requirement, the dialogue between theology and science falls under a unitary merging purpose bearing eschatological importance. On this basis, on the one hand, two important coordinates are cleared up in this formula: fear or fright – accompanying laic knowledge and faith – as a way to overcome fear and grasp divine knowledge. Therefore, we understand why “fear always accompanies doubt and doubt examination, and investigation means, and means knowledge (...)”, states Saint Isaac the Syrian¹⁸. Moreover, the saint made a very clear distinc-

¹⁶ A. NESTERUK, *The Universe as Communion. Towards a Neo-Patristic Synthesis of Theology and Science*, trans. by M.-S. Chirila, Bucharest 2009, p. 26.

¹⁷ G. FLOROVSKY, *The ways of Russian Theology*, in: G. FLOROVSKY, *Aspects of Church History* (Collected Works of Georges Florovsky 4), Belmont 1975, p. 207. George Florovski’s ideas on the necessity of a Neo-Patristic synthesis in the dialogue between theology and science were presented in famous papers of well-known contemporary theologians such as: Ioanis Ziziulis, Christos Yanaras, Georgios Mantzatis or Panaiotis Nellas. See also A. NESTERUK, *The Universe as Communion*, p. 29.

¹⁸ “In modern parlance – Nesteruk explains – one can understand what Isaac meant by saying that knowledge is always associated with fear: a human being is living in an external world of nature which it can hardly comprehend and this uncertainty of living creates fear; the aspiration for knowledge of the world means the hidden and deep desire to understand nature in order to control life in it. Knowledge in this sense eliminates fear but the very impulse of knowledge comes out of fear. Science and technology acquire a cosmic dimension and links to the core of the human condition in which humanity always attempts to run away from fear of existence and in order to avoid an allegedly spir-

tion between “the knowledge which precedes faith and knowledge which is born of faith”. Taking into consideration all these, the Holy Father claims that “knowledge preceding faith is natural knowledge. And knowledge which is born of faith is spiritual knowledge”¹⁹. On the basis of this relationship, he claims that exceeding natural knowledge is possible only through faith with the purpose of eschatological fulfilment. Thus, he emphasizes the fact that

knowledge is not to be rejected, but faith is superior to it. And if we reject, we do not reject knowledge, far be that from us, but the distinctions in a variety of classes in which it moves itself in opposition to the glory of nature, so that it becomes cognate with the class of the demons (...) So it is measure for us to know that the degree of the service of faith is superior to that of knowledge. And knowledge is made perfect by faith, so that it acquires the power to ascend and to perceive that which perceptibility is above all and to behold the splendour of Him that is not attained by the mind or the knowledge of the creatures. Thus knowledge is the ladder on which a man ascends the height of faith, but which he do not use any more when he has reached faith. For now we know little out of much and we understand little out of much. But when perfection has come this little knowledge becomes useless. So faith shows us as it were before our eyes the reality of that future perfection. By faith we are instructed about those unattainable things, not by investigation and the power of knowledge²⁰.

This being the start point, we understand that faith becomes both: the core of detachment from the dust of the intelligible world and the basis of the knowledge of the hypostatic Truth. We somehow return to the simple question asked at the beginning of our research: What does science really mean? Therefore, if it really aims at man’s true destiny and his welfare, it must certainly follow the coordinates set by the Holy Scripture and the teachings of the Holy Fathers. Hence, this is the reason why we think that “science and technology must reach anthropological dimensions”. In this regard, “one needs to attempt to have such a new image of humanity in which the whole power of science and technology would enter, as part of its inevitable and also eschatological definition. Then science and technology could occupy their proper place in that spiritual body of humanity which, in its

itual crash of humanity by technology one needs faith to overcome fear.” A. NESTERUK, *The Universe as Communion*, p. 44.

¹⁹ ST ISAAC THE SYRIAN, *Words about the Holy Labors*, trans., introduction and notes by D. Staniloae, Bucharest 2008, p. 85, *The Word* XVIII.

²⁰ ST ISAAC THE SYRIAN, HOMILIES, in: A.J. WENSINCK (tr.), *Mystical Treatise by Isaac f Niniveh*, Amsterdam 1923, p. 246, *Homily* LI.

historical projection, can have even more new varieties; as a result the negativity in attitude to technology has sense only apophatically: technology cannot be grasped within that particular form of the human subjectivity which is responsible for its very emergence”²¹.

2. “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” – the specificity of theology

Apologetically speaking, it is more than necessary to bear in our minds a Biblical-Patristic assessment on the main rational coordinates of the dialogue between theology and science. This aspect is grounded on a historical basis: “the message of evangelic faith”, as a universal unitary element valid both in the Church and society. The victory of this kind of confession that Orthodox Apologetics achieved over the centuries goes beyond “human capacities”. Therefore, “despite the incidental use of cultural terms, the fundament of such a confession act is a pneumatological one (from gr.: πνεύμα)”²². In the words of our Lord, the disciples of Christian faith can always find renewal of the Pentecost: “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts. 1:8).

Only by virtue of his own rationality, man cannot either know or discover the mystical dimension of existence by himself. Therefore, the first word the Church lays grounds, as an addition of its own rational capacity, is “I believe” – πιστεύω. This is the key through which our act of confession goes beyond rational belief; it gets beyond usual thinking and above knowledge autonomy of inner senses. In other words, πιστεύω

can be applied only to that things which are inside me or outside me, which are unclear. Or, i.e., it is applied to only what neither the senses, nor the intellect or facts can clear up. Moreover, and here we get closest to the most important meaning, the word “I believe”, through its very existence, is compatible with something even if it exists only inside my own being is real and fully inner, since it does not need any external support. I say “I believe” only the moment I refer to something that I cannot see with my own eyes, hear with my own ears, cannot touch with my own hands, when “two

²¹ A. NESTERUK, *The Universe as communion*, p. 49–50.

²² R.A. IONESCU, *Orthodox theology and science: conflict, indifference, integration or dialogue? What shall be our attitude towards science?*, Iasi 2015, p. 123.

multiplied by two make four” all these are completely irrelevant. I believe in this and through this I know²³.

Rationality alone cannot guide man very far in the experience of the mystical knowledge; the real possibility to know God is a particular one, based on a spiritual dimension. This kind of experience is based on a personal reference to the Almighty God. For example,

the Hebrews begin to speak about God because of a concrete historical event: About nineteen hundred years before Christ, in the land of the Chaldeans (in a region in upper Mesopotamia, near the Persian Gulf), God revealed himself to a specific man, Abraham. Abraham answered God, as we answer a human person, an existence with whom we can converse and before whom we can stand face to face²⁴.

This interaction cannot be theoretically explained, since it is beyond any kind of inference and logical proof (Cf. Ps. 42:8-9).

Taking into consideration the two pillars of religious perception (reason and faith) we can distinguish two directions in knowing of God. Therefore, those who accept the existence of God based on personal rational beliefs, acknowledging God as “superior power” and “supreme Being”, even if they accompany this intellectual belief by “some religious habitudes (...) there is a profound agnosticism within them”. On the other hand, those who prove a type of faith-trust, based on historical realities, as “the faith of the Fathers”, “trust the historical experience of the revelations of God to accept one more intervention of his in the life of men, this time «in the flesh», in the person of Jesus Christ”²⁵. Therefore, if for rational thinking the concepts of Godhead and Incarnation cannot be logically understood, for faith these elements are essential and compulsory. Therefore, Saint Paul the Apostle states:

Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength (1 Corinth. 1:23-25).

²³ A. SCHMEMANN, *I believe*, trans. by F. Caragiu, Bucharest 2014, p. 60–61.

²⁴ CH. YAHARAS, *Elements of Faith. An introduction to Orthodox Theology*, trans. by C. Coman, Bucharest 2007, p. 16.

²⁵ CH. YAHARAS, *Elements of Faith*, p. 18.

As theological virtue, faith is defined through man's soul power and his capacity to understand the truths of faith which are beyond his rationality. These are the things Saint Paul speaks about in his Epistle towards Hebrews: "Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see" (Heb. 11:1). Christian faith is an essential condition for salvation. It stands for the centre of the act of collaboration between the divine grace and the instant feedback which man gives to the call of God. The great patriarch Abraham can be a very good example in this way, since for the forwardness of his answer his faith was considered by God uprightness:

So also Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness. Understand, then, that those who have faith are children of Abraham. Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: "All nations will be blessed through you (...). So the law was our guardian until Christ came that we might be justified by faith" (Gal. 3:6-8,24). Without the call of God, faith would not exist. It could no longer be a gift from heaven able to warm our heart: "How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?" (Rom. 10:14).

Being received as a gift of the Holy Spirit, faith is based on the relationship with God, as we can see in the episode with the lunatic child whom the Apostles could not heal without the help of the Saviour:

He replied, "Because you have so little faith. Truly I tell you, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, «Move from here to there», and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you (Math. 17:20).

The virtue of faith proved very important in the healings that our Lord performed. The example of the woman bleeding is highly relevant for our argumentation: "Jesus turned and saw her. «Take heart, daughter», he said, «your faith has healed you». And the woman was healed at that moment" (Math. 9:22). Together with hope and love, faith is an epicentre of our earthly life, but, even so, if not accompanied by deeds, it is lifeless and useless: "faith without deeds is useless" (James 2:20).

Therefore, through the introductory word of our Faith Confession ("I believe" – πιστεύω) we discover free and conscious membership to the love of God, rooted in each man from the very creation moment. Faith approval or rejection is up to each person, as a true and free act of our personal freedom. Through faith man can accept more easily the reality of the divine truths, and

if he progresses in a life without passions and full of virtues he reaches through the power of the Holy Spirit the experience of the divine things, which were brought to us by our Lord Jesus Christ²⁶.

One of the most known and important Christian apologies of the first centuries is the sermon of the Saint Apostle Paul in the Areopagus in Athens. His preaching is important, since the Apostle speaks in front of a multicultural and syncretic crowd, where

each person makes his own choice based on competition and personal interest. How therefore, could anyone speak about the absolute need of divine wisdom in front of the most elitist representative members of doctrines, philosophies or religions in Athens?²⁷

And yet, the Chief Apostle Paul did it. He spoke about the “unknown God” which a sinful mind cannot know and acknowledge as Creator and Father:

The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else. From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us. “For in him we live and move and have our being”. As some of your own poets have said, “We are his offspring” (Acts 17:24-28).

Inspired by the Holy Spirit, Apostle Paul makes an appeal to pagan philosophy and infers in his demonstration some quotations of Epimenides of Crete (7th century, BC) and Artos of Soli (3rd, BC). Therefore, he wants to emphasize the fact that Christian teaching is the achievement of an old research, exercised through philosophy and science. The Apostle’s way of thinking will be followed by all the apologists and Fathers of the first centuries. Razvan Ionescu sees these things as being possible through the consolidation of the divine grace.

²⁶ N. CHITESCU, *Dogmatic and Symbolic Theology. Course book for Faculties of Theology*, vol. I, Cluj Napoca 2004, p. 242.

²⁷ R.A. IONESCU, *Orthodox Theology and Science*, p. 128.

This cooperation between the divine grace and man's real senses, becomes, as the Apostle Paul says, a reading key for each action that wishes to clarify the possible relationships between theology, on the one hand, and philosophy and science, on the other hand. Therefore, it is more than clear that our Christian apologetics, together with the words of St Paul, will never simply accept to become science or natural philosophy; its true content will forever be the search of God through christening man's cultural preoccupation and will not be limited to the horizontal dimension of the created²⁸.

3. Saint Maximus the Confessor and Saint John of Damascus

The evolution of this relationship, in the context of the dialog between theology and science, is achieved at the same time with the emergence of the "representative methodological references" proposed by two saints of the Church: Maximus the Confessor and John of Damascus. Due to their writings, the Church succeeded in clearing up "the concrete bases" of the dialog with science, "outlining a possible context of the encounter between the two approaches"²⁹.

Saint Maximus the Confessor is the first of the Fathers of the Church who clearly makes "the distinction between the knowledge of created and uncreated". He speaks about a reason of creation, rooted by God in the essence of things. In this context, faith summarizes the first condition in any process of knowing. Based on experience, it is in fact the most suitable experiment, since its basis is on "indestructible principles". Above all things, faith is "the fundament of things above mind and ration". St Maximus states:

Created beings can be known rationally by means of the inner principles which are by nature intrinsic to such beings and by which they are naturally defined. But from our apprehension of these principles inherent in created beings we can do no more than believe that God exists. To the devout believer God gives something more than any proof: the recognition and the faith that He substantively is³⁰.

Translated and brilliantly annotated by Dumitru Staniloae, the Holy Father highly analyses the relationship between created rationality and supreme Ration-

²⁸ R.A. IONESCU, *Orthodox Theology and Science*, p. 133.

²⁹ *Ibid*, p. 159.

³⁰ MAXIMUS THE CONFESSOR, *Two Hundred Texts on Theology and the Incarnate Dispensation of the Son of God*, Bucharest 1999, p. 130.

ality. The closeness between the two is permanently renewed through knowledge and virtues, bringing love and rationality together. This is the only way, the Holy Fathers emphasizes we can understand the basis of

the link between creatures' personal rationalities and the supreme personal Rationality of God, Who acts upon them through the models of this rationality, which have an inclination to unify in the Person of the Word, together with the creatures themselves³¹.

The particularity of his thinking on this issue seems unique from this point of view due to the theology of “uncreated reasons”. Therefore, St Maximus considers natural revelation as complete argumentation for the confession of the glory of God. Starting from the words of the Psalmist: “the heavens declare the glory of God” (Ps. 18:1), he illustrates the fact that, firstly, in the uncreated things “the Creator did not put soul”. Yet, “through these he received in the hearing of the mind the reasons (the words) of the knowledge of God (theology) from the ones without soul and learned, as it was possible to the people, from the creation, the manners of the providence and judgment, although he did not reach the multiple reasons of the ruling of the universe which diverges individually”³². In his approach, Dumitru Staniloae distinguishes between three developing stages of understanding: 1. the research of the essence of things; 2. the search and unitary movement of the universe; 3. the difference between things.

The essence of things reveals God as Creator; the unitary movement and difference between things – the way in which God rules things and keeps them distinct. But nobody has ever had the capacity to know all reasons of the unitary movement of the things kept and distinctly created. This is a perpetual process and, at the same time, always new³³.

The synthesis of the dialogue between theology and cosmology can be found, as according to St Maximus the Confessor's thinking, in the unique person of the incarnated Word. In Him we can reach “the diversity of creation, a multitude of *logoi*”, which identify with the rationality of created things. He is the Reason par excellence, the Fountain of wisdom, from which all the reasons of universe drag their power.

³¹ D. STANILOAE, *Introduction*, in: MAXIMUS THE CONFESSOR, *Ambigua*, trans., introduction and notes by D. Staniloae, Bucharest 2006, p. 45.

³² MAXIMUS THE CONFESSOR, *Ambigua*, 19. Spiritual interpretation of the words: “The heavens declare the glory of God” (Ps. 18:1), p. 178.

³³ *Ibid*, note 114.

In fact, the created reasons cannot subsist in a distinct way within the divine Reason, but the divine Reason, infinite and transcendent, reveals itself and multiplies into all the things that exist out of goodness. The consistent images of creatures are also created through it, without any of their movements in other bodies or in other existences³⁴.

Therefore, the supreme Reason is the starting point by which God sorts out these reasons of creation with the purpose to preserve a relationship between Him and His seen and unseen world, being continuously present within His creation”. Therefore, this is the reason why, St Maximus thinks that the whole world, the transcendental reality of unseen things is also included, is characterized by a kind of dynamics close to God. In this way,

any thing has its own essence in the word that is in it and makes it participate to God; otherwise, the disruption from its word leaves the created being into a stage of nothingness. From this point of view, we understand that the created reasons appeals to the intellect and contemplation, creating in man the wisdom through which he can receive the divine truth³⁵.

In order to ground and diversify furthermore the dialogue between these two domains, we find another very important exponent in the person of St John of Damascus. Proving to be an excellent synthesizer, he is famous for “the distinctiveness and rigour of the terms he used, great joy to illustrate differences and his argumentation skills”. Always scholarly and open to learning and dialogue, the Holy Father highly valued rational argumentation in his defence of the truths of faith, seeking to bring into the service of theology “human means (in this case, philosophy and the other sciences) to understand, establish and express it logically”³⁶. He succeeds in bringing together science, philosophy and theology, creating a unifying system to the use of Ecclesiastical Apologetics. Several patristic researchers illustrated the fact that his thinking contained “the germs of late scholastic”. However, confessional spirit is undeniably illustrated by his theology.

His philosophical preoccupation makes him appear as the seeker of some original solutions to different issues that are to be found in Aristotle’s books, *Organon* and *Metaphysics*. Saint John uses syllogisms even in his Dogma, born out of his wish to

³⁴ I.I. POPA, *Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday and today and forever*, Craiova 2010, p. 412–413.

³⁵ *Ibid*, p. 417.

³⁶ B. TATAKIS, *Byzantine Philosophy*, Indianapolis – Cambridge 2003, p. 156.

offer a modern theological evaluation (...) He is the heir of all theology of the east, developed since the end of the second century in Cappadocia, Edessa, Jerusalem, Caesarea of Palestine, Antioch and Alexandria³⁷.

The first topic he is interested in his apologetic approach is knowledge or gnoseology. On this subject, St John of Damascus developed a very interesting debate in his work *The Fount of Knowledge*³⁸. The argumentation on which he bases his ideas on this problematic issue is clearly illustrated in his *Dialectic*. This chapter starts with a tribute to knowledge, emphasizing the fact that “nothing is more estimable than knowledge, for knowledge is the light of the rational soul. The opposite, which is ignorance, is darkness”. Therefore, from his point of view, knowledge always refers to “those that are”, in other words, he deals with the issue of existence. Any reference to something that does not exist is useless and has no value. Therefore, Saint John advises us:

let us approach that Teacher in whom there is no falsehood and who is the truth. Christ is the subsistent wisdom and truth and in Him are all the hidden treasures of knowledge (Cf. Col. 2-3). In sacred Scripture let us hear the voice of Him who is the wisdom and power of God the Father (Cf. 1Cor. 1:24), and let us learn the true knowledge of all things that are. Let us approach with attention and in all sincerity and proceed without letting the spiritual eye of our soul be dulled by passions, for even the clearest and most limpid eye will hardly enable one to gain a clear view of the truth. “If then the light that is in us (that is to say, the mind) be darkness: the darkness itself how great shall it be!” (Cf. Math. 6:23). With our whole soul and our whole understanding let us approach. And since it is impossible for the eye that is constantly shifting and turning about clearly to perceive the visible object, because for clear vision the eye must be steadily focused upon the object observed, let us put aside every anxiety of the mind and approach the truth unhampered by material considerations. And let us not be satisfied with arriving speedily at the gate, but

³⁷ R.A. IONESCU, *Orthodox Theology and Science*, p. 160.

³⁸ ST JOHN OF DAMASCUS, *The Fount of Knowledge* (PG 94,521–1228) is one of the last works of John of Damascus, and surely his greatest. It was written at the request of his good friend and former fellow monk at mar Saba, Cosmas of Maiuma, who has been made Bishop of Maiuma in 743 and consequently, the work could not have been composed before 743. Given the complexity and versatility of its content, the work was rightly considered as the first *Summa Theologica* of the Christian East. Regarding the content it develops, the whole work is not a mere compilation, but rather a genuine synthesis. The division of the *Fount of Knowledge* is as follows: there is a short introduction to the entire work addressed to Cosmas of Maiuma, then follows the philosophical introduction, entitled *Philosophical Chapters*; the historical introduction, called *On Heresies in Epitome*; finally the main part of the work, of which the full title is *An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox faith*. See: ST JOHN OF DAMASCUS, *Writings*, trans. by F.H. Chase, Jr., *Fathers of the Church*, New York 1958, p. XXV–XXVI.

rather let us knock hard, so that the door of the bridal chamber may be opened to us and we may behold the beauties within³⁹.

In the third chapter of his *Dialectic*, the Holy Father analyses the principal coordinates of rational knowledge, endowing philosophy with quality of science. Firstly, he shows that

philosophy is the knowledge of things which are in so far as they are, that is, a knowledge of the nature of things which have being. And again, philosophy is knowledge of both divine and human things, that is to say, of things both visible and invisible.

Through philosophy, Saint John analyses the relation between life and death, making the man who is attached to it be “as God in wisdom and in the knowledge of truth”. Already, but not yet, we should be aware that the kind of rationality on which Saint John bases his argumentation has a Christological finality. For him, “the histologic teaching is beyond human logic and reaches mystery where antinomy is transfigured”⁴⁰. In the context of the restoration of creation, St John is rest assured on the fact that the Incarnation is “the newest of all the new things, the only new thing under the sun”⁴¹. Therefore, in the same way as his predecessor (St Maximus the Confessor), St John points out the rationality of creation in the light of the Holy Spirit and under the protection of Pantocrator.

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As a conclusion, only our Lord, Jesus Christ, the incarnated Word of the Father, made us, due to his quality as Pantocrator, to “overcome the autonomy of the natural world” and liberate us from the power of irrational forces⁴². Therefore, the dialogue between theology and science is very important for our natural existence. Without science, the modern man cannot exist within his earthly environment and

³⁹ ST JOHN OF DAMASCUS, *Dialectics*, chap. 1, p. 8.

⁴⁰ I.I. POPA, *Jesus Christ is the same*, p. 696.

⁴¹ A. LOUTH, *Saint John Damascene: Tradition and Originality in Byzantine Theology*, Oxford – New York 2002, p. 216.

⁴² The theology of the Pantocrator is indeed, a Christological synthesis of natural theology, providing valuable clarifications in the dialogue with science. In the preliminaries of his Treaty of dogmatic theology, *Jesus Christ Pantocrator* Dumitru Popescu clearly highlights the role and importance of the presence of Jesus Christ in the Church’s life and creation, emphasizing that “He is the One who watches from the height of His heaven seat to the world he has built at His right hand and heads it to the final achievement, according to the will of the Father in the power of the Holy Spirit” (p. 38–39).

without theology he is not given the possibility to enjoy eternal communion with God in the Kingdom of Heaven. This being the case, the Holy Scripture and the Holy Father also, unite the two elements; this unity being sheltered by faith, which is beyond reason and any type of autonomy.

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Abstract: Only our Lord, Jesus Christ, the incarnated Word of the Father, made us, due to his quality as Pantocrator, to “overcome the autonomy of the natural world” and liberated us from the power of irrational forces. Therefore, the dialogue between theology and science is very important for our natural existence. Without science, modern man cannot exist within his earthly environment and without theology he is not given the possibility to enjoy eternal communion with God in the Kingdom of Heaven. This being the case, the Holy Scripture and the Holy Father also, unite the two elements; this unity being sheltered by faith, which is beyond reason and any type of autonomy.

Keywords: theology, science, religion, cosmology, apologetic, Orthodox vision of Pantocrator.

Streszczenie: Apologetyczne podejście do dialogu między wiarą i rozumem u Ojców Wschodnich. Jedynie Jezus Chrystus, wcielone Słowo Ojca, dzięki Jego jakości jako Pantokrator uzdolnił nas do „przezwyciężenia autonomii świata naturalnego” i wyzwolił nas z wpływów irracjonalnych mocy. Stąd dialog między teologią i nauką jest ważny dla naszej doczesnej egzystencji. Bez nauki współczesny człowiek nie może żyć w ramach ziemskiej rzeczywistości, a bez teologii nie jest możliwe radowanie się wieczną komunią z Bogiem w królestwie niebieskim. Potwierdzają to Pismo Święte i nauczanie Ojców Wschodnich, którzy jednoczą te dwa elementy; jedność ta jest chroniona przez wiarę, która jest ponad rozumem i wszelkim typem autonomii.

Słowa kluczowe: teologia, nauka, religia, kosmologia, apologetyka, ortodoksyjna wizja Pantokratora.