From Barbarism to Freedom: Religious Discourse as Mediation between Theology and Philosophy

Adrian-Neculai LĂCĂTUȘ [1]

Abstract
Speaking about barbarism is probably a cliché. Man, once expelled from Paradise, fell prey to his biological instincts, forgetting the condition he had before eating the apple from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The expulsion from Eden, following the violation of God's Word, marked the beginning of all the sufferings that man would endure throughout his life, until he returns to the earth from which he was made: "by the sweat of your face you will eat your bread, until you return to the earth from which you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return" (Patriarhia Română, 2018, Facerea 3, 19). This loss of the Edenic status was not merely a divine punishment, but rather a fundamental rupture between man and the sacred order of creation. Since then, human existence has unfolded in a tense plane between memory and forgetfulness, between the need for transcendence and the fall into the biological, between the aspiration toward good and the recurrence of evil. Barbarism is no longer defined solely by violent acts, but by the continual reactivation of a fallen nature that ignores the spiritual and moral-ontological coordinates of being. In this sense, the barbaric human is not a figure external to civilization, but one that dwells in the very heart of the human condition, ready to manifest itself whenever reason is overshadowed by instinct and conscience is reduced to mere reaction. Thus, the fall from Paradise is not a concluded event, but a repeatable paradigm in the history of humanity.

Keywords: *barbarism, limits, good, evil, life.*

[1] PhD Candidate, Ștefan cel Mare University, Suceava, Romania, adrianneculailacatus@gmail.com.

1. Introduction: Outlining Barbarism

How might the image of the barbaric human be outlined? (Colang, 2018, pp. 25–77). Naturally, it is difficult to offer a universally accepted definition of barbarism, given that the term itself is complex and invites a range of debates not only at the academic level, but also within common understanding. One cannot speak of barbarism solely in a theological or philosophical sense (Colang & Vlad, 2020), as the human being can be approached from the perspective of multiple disciplines: history, psychology, sociology, anthropology, biology, economics, and so on.

Nevertheless, for the purposes of this paper, we shall focus on the philosophical dimension, and, insofar as it aligns with the subject under discussion, the theological one as well.

Barbarism represents a complex reality, deeply rooted in human nature and in the historical trajectory of societies. It is not merely the absence of order or a void of values, but a phenomenon laden with axiological significance, capable of generating meaning, reaction, and transformation. It involves a destructive energy that disrupts moral equilibria and creates fractures within the individual's identity constructs.

Therefore, barbarism cannot be reduced to an archaic stage or an isolated episode; it must be understood as a constantly present possibility, capable of manifesting wherever moral control weakens and ethical discernment is suspended. As Colang (2018) states, it is a reality that holds its own meaning, not simply a negation, but a form of expressing evil through subtle gradations, one that interrogates our moral sensitivity and exposes the limits of our capacity to distinguish between order and violence (Colang, 2018, p. 26).

The barbarian is the embodiment of evil, of vice and passion, of the inhuman, the one who uses every pretext to justify killing and tyranny. The first form of barbarism is represented by *Cain* through the murder of his brother. The human individual has evolved throughout the ages, striving to perfect himself and to emulate the divine work, seeking to abandon the state of barbarism that defines him through the lens of his animal instincts (Cioran, 2008, pp. 66–67).

Throughout history, the human being has been conceptualized in various ways, depending on the era and the theoretical context in which it was analyzed. Thus, scientific and philosophical discourses have outlined a series of defining typologies, such as: *Homo sapiens* and *Homo erectus* within evolutionary anthropology; Homo

symbolicum in the theory of signs and culture; *Homo faber* as an expression of technical and creative capacity; *Homo religiosus* in phenomenological studies of religion, and more recently, the figure of the *Übermensch*[2], as a philosophical ideal of transcending the human condition (Vlad, 2019). These forms are not mutually exclusive, but rather reflect complementary ways of understanding the complexity of human nature according to the dominant paradigms of each era.

The difference between the human being and other living creatures lies primarily in reason. Man possesses free will, an awareness of finitude, and articulated language. In philosophy, the idea of free will is present throughout all historical periods, beginning with antiquity. The existence of free will is explained in the context of the freedom to choose, of free actions connected to the idea of the common good (Sârbu, 2014, pp. 50-52).

By contrast, during the medieval period, it was believed that man sins by his own will, with evil being rejected by the Divinity and defined instead as the absence of good. Since God signifies Goodness, it would not be possible for good to be the creator of evil. In this context, the existence of evil is not attributed to the divine, but to human beings, as they possess free will. Thus, evil finds its mundane justification.

2. Reflections on Free Will

In the modern period, through philosophers such as Baruch Spinoza, Leibniz, René Descartes, and Immanuel Kant, attempts were made to resolve the issue of free will: “I call that thing free which exists and acts solely by the necessity of its own nature, and that thing constrained which is determined by something else to exist and act in a certain fixed way. For example, God exists freely and yet necessarily, because He exists solely by the necessity of His own nature… You see that for me freedom does not consist in free decision [*free will*], but in free necessity” (Spinoza, 1993).

Here, Spinoza denies the freedom of will, while also emphasizing that people believe they are free only because they know

[2] The *Übermensch* (German for “overman”) is a central concept in Friedrich Nietzsche’s philosophy, first introduced in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883–1885). It represents the ideal of a new type of human being who transcends conventional morality, embraces the will to power, and creates new values beyond good and evil. Far from being a political or biological ideal, the *Übermensch* is an existential and ethical model, opposing herd mentality and advocating for self-overcoming and spiritual strength. The concept has been widely debated and often misinterpreted, particularly due to its appropriation in ideological contexts foreign to Nietzsche’s intent.

their goals and desires. If they were to know the causes of these, they would realize they are under an illusion (Neagoe, 1970, p. 19).

Human freedom thus resides in the power of the intellect, and the perfection of the intellect leads to supreme happiness. However, in order to reach this state, the intellect must be transformed into passion, because only when truth becomes passion and love becomes an active affect is the human individual truly free (Neagoe, 1970, pp. 19–20).

The love for God becomes the supreme virtue, one that requires no external reward, because it exists in itself, being at the same time the highest form of happiness (Neagoe, 1970).

The human individual must be guided by reason, for by being rational, one becomes freer. Free will is considered the supreme perfection of man, yet freedom is also attained through morality, and the foundation from which we must begin is pure will, as it conditions human freedom: "The main perfection of man is to have free will, which makes him worthy of praise or blame. On the other hand, the nature of the will being in itself very extensive, it is of great benefit to us that we can act through it, that is, freely, so that we may be masters of our actions. We are worthy of praise when we guide them well (…) likewise, we must value even more the fact that we choose what is true when we distinguish [*truth*] from falsehood through a decision of our will, than if we were determined and constrained by some external principle" (Descartes, 2000).

Yet, it is certain that "divine grace and natural knowledge, far from diminishing my freedom, rather increase and strengthen it" (Descartes, 1997, p. 76).

Kant examines the issue of freedom starting from the concept of morality, arguing that the foundation of freedom is pure will. This will is not determined by external factors or subjective inclinations, but is grounded in respect for the moral law. In this context, man is truly free only when acting in accordance with a categorical imperative, a product of reason, and not out of interest or constraint.

Kant also highlights the relationship between will and purpose: "the end is an object of the power of choice of a rational being", whose thinking "associates choice with an action, in order to produce that object" (Hare, 1997).

Thus, moral freedom requires that the rational being set its own ends through reason and act autonomously, transforming the will into an ethical instrument capable of creating value through deliberate choice.

3. Considerations on Freedom

Within Christian thought, the concept of freedom is not equivalent to the absolute autonomy of the will, but is deeply connected to obedience to the divine will and the fulfillment of revealed good. Thus, freedom is not exercised in a chaotic manner, but involves the conscious orientation of the human will toward truth and holiness.

Friedrich Nietzsche, however, formulates a radical critique of this perspective. In his view, Christianity promotes a "weak will," specific to "slaves," characterized by submission, renunciation, and asceticism. This will, he argues, is the result of a psychological process of compensating for powerlessness, defined by the concept of le ressentiment – the resentment of the weak toward the strong.

In contrast, the "strong will" is affirmative, value-creating, and belongs to those who do not seek anyone's approval to define their own existence: "The aristocrat feels that he is the one who determines values, that he does not need anyone's approval in order to do so" (Nietzsche, 1991, p. 199).

Nietzsche argues that Christian morality, through its emphasis on sacrifice and self-denial, implies a mutilation of the spirit. In this view, the "Death of God" – as announced by Nietzsche – is equivalent to the end of Christianity and the awareness of the infinite horizon of human freedom: "From the very beginning, Christian faith means sacrifice: the sacrifice of all freedom, of all pride, of all self-awareness of the spirit; in addition, it is subjugation, self-mockery, and self-mutilation" (Nietzsche, 1991).

The idea of free will has been analyzed in theology since the creation of the world. Thus, from the moment of man's creation, God granted him the freedom to choose, an aspect that can be examined in the *Book of Genesis* in the Bible:

> *And God blessed them, saying: "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the sky, over all the animals, over every living creature that moves on the earth, and over all the earth!"* (Patriarhia Română, 2018, Facerea 1, 28).

Further, God gave man the power to decide how he would rule over the earth, the freedom to choose between good and evil. Since he was created in the image and likeness of God, he must preserve a state of harmony between body, soul, and mind (reason). This harmony is sustained only when the mind is continually elevated

toward God and not directed toward the biological aspect of man, which is often regarded as the animalistic side.

The darkening of the mind leads to sin and, ultimately, to death. From this perspective, one interpretation of the fall from Paradise is offered by Saint Maximus the Confessor: man's natural freedom is misused, the cause of the fall being the seduction of the devil, with the thorn of pleasure being what led him to ruin (Thunberg, 2005, p. 175).

In the vision of Saint Maximus the Confessor, evil is perceived negatively, as it has no "substantial existence" (Thunberg, 2005, p. 176), meaning a "non-recognition of the Cause of things" (Corpus Christianorum, 1955). The devil, fallen through pride, turns man's gaze toward other things and not toward the "Cause of all," appealing to man seduction and self-love. The fall from Paradise is, in fact, man's own error.

Free will is therefore closely linked to the concept of freedom in all its forms of expression, being understood as a capacity for action or volition (Schopenhauer, 2010, p. 8). If man is truly free to do as he wishes, then this freedom implies that his will is unrestricted, which presupposes the existence of a form of moral freedom (Schopenhauer, 2010).

However, Schopenhauer emphasizes that a clear correspondence cannot be established between the empirical concept of freedom and the original one. Empirical freedom refers only to the possibility of acting, while the deeper meaning of free will concerns the capacity to will independently of external causes. In this view, freedom is not defined by the absence of external constraint, but by the way in which the will constitutes itself as an autonomous inner force.

On the other hand, there is a fundamental distinction between voluntary and involuntary actions, with major implications for the concept of moral responsibility (Harris, 2019, p. 18). According to Harris, "a voluntary action is accompanied by the clear intention to carry it out," which implies awareness, deliberation, and control. In contrast, "an involuntary action is not," meaning it lacks intention and personal accountability (Harris, 2019).

This distinction lies at the core of defining free will, as only in the presence of conscious intent can we speak of choice and of ethical or legal responsibility.

The idea of free will arises and persists in the collective consciousness because people naturally perceive themselves as the "authors" of their own thoughts and actions (Harris, 2019, p. 20). This conviction stems from an intense subjective experience, from the feeling that the decisions we make truly belong to us. However, from a

philosophical perspective, this perception is insufficient to justify the actual existence of free will.

Conceptual analyses on the subject identify three major theoretical positions: determinism, libertarianism, and compatibilism (Harris, 2019). Determinism holds that all our actions are the result of prior causes and, therefore, that freedom is an illusion. Libertarianism, although opposed to determinism, admits the idea of a pure, unconditioned freedom, but remains difficult to support empirically. Compatibilism, on the other hand, proposes an intermediate approach, asserting that freedom and determinism are not mutually exclusive.

Harris explains that this compatibilist view has even been adopted in theology. For example, if a person wishes to commit a murder and carries out that intention, it is considered that "their actions demonstrate the freedom of the will" (Harris, 2019, p. 22). Even when individuals experience conflicting desires or pathological impulses, the distinction between conscious intention and external coercion remains relevant.

Ultimately, the "subjective experience of being a conscious agent" is replaced by "the conceptual understanding of man as a person" (Harris, 2019, p. 25), which shifts the discussion of free will from the level of individual experience to that of philosophical analysis of responsibility.

Harris explains that this compatibilist view has even been adopted in theology. For example, if a person wishes to commit a murder and carries out that intention, it is considered that "their actions demonstrate the freedom of the will" (Harris, 2019, p. 22). Even when individuals experience conflicting desires or pathological impulses, the distinction between conscious intention and external coercion remains relevant.

Ultimately, the "subjective experience of being a conscious agent" is replaced by "the conceptual understanding of man as a person" (Harris, 2019, p. 25), which shifts the discussion of free will from the level of individual experience to that of philosophical analysis of responsibility.

4. Religious Discourse

Religious discourse holds an essential place within theological communication, and one of its institutionalized forms is homiletics. This is an autonomous discipline with a long-standing tradition, whose roots can be found both in apostolic preaching and in ancient rhetoric.

According to Gordon (2001), Origen is one of the first Christian authors who significantly contributed to the development of homiletics, defining it as “the teaching and composition of beautiful speech.”

Although the term is today predominantly associated with Christian preaching, the structure and techniques of homiletics have their antecedents in the traditions of public discourse in Greco-Roman culture, where the art of persuasive speech was already systematized.

Ancient rhetoric, as illustrated by figures such as Demosthenes, Aristotle, and Cicero, laid the foundations for techniques of persuasion and argumentation that later influenced the structure of religious discourse. However, there are both similarities and significant differences between homiletics and ancient rhetoric. On the one hand, both disciplines involve a deliberate act of message construction and employ rhetorical devices to captivate the audience. On the other hand, their ultimate purposes differ substantially.

Classical rhetoric aimed to persuade audiences in the context of courts or political debates, regardless of the objective truth of the case: “to persuade courts of judges on human matters, even when the clients were in the wrong” (Gordon, 2001). By contrast, homiletics addresses an already converted audience, a public that accepts the revealed truth beforehand and is not called to choose between contradictory options, but rather to be strengthened and enlightened in faith (Gordon, 2001).

Ancient rhetoric, as illustrated by figures such as Demosthenes, Aristotle, and Cicero, laid the foundations for techniques of persuasion and argumentation that later influenced the structure of religious discourse. However, there are both similarities and significant differences between homiletics and ancient rhetoric. On the one hand, both disciplines involve a deliberate act of message construction and employ rhetorical devices to captivate the audience. On the other hand, their ultimate purposes differ substantially.

Ancient rhetoric aimed to persuade audiences in the context of courts or political debates, regardless of the objective truth of the case: “to persuade courts of judges regarding humanly motivated causes, even when the clients were in the wrong” (Gordon, 2001). By contrast, homiletics addresses an already converted audience, one that accepts the revealed truth beforehand and is not called to choose between contradictory options, but rather to be strengthened and enlightened in faith (Gordon, 2001).

Another aspect that differentiates the two disciplines concerns the origin and use of their methods. Rhetoric is considered to be an invention of the sophists, who used sophisms as intentionally flawed

arguments meant to persuade, whereas homiletics focuses both on the horizontal dimension of communication and the vertical one, since "its object is divine revelation, and its goal is salvation" (Gordon, 2001).

From this perspective, Saint Basil the Great best expresses the difference between the two disciplines, stating in his 22nd Homily that "Satan is the first and greatest sophist" (Sfântul Vasile cel Mare, 1986).

Attributing this title to the devil carries profound theological significance, since sophism - meaning the intentional use of deceptive arguments - is associated here not only with rational error, but with sin itself. Thus, homiletics not only distances itself from sophistic rhetoric, but is constructed as an antidote to it, proposing a discourse grounded in truth, spiritual enlightenment, and inner transformation.

Contemporary religious discourse contains elements of literary discourse, but even more so elements of pragmatics and rhetoric. If we are to consider a few examples, we will certainly turn to the discourse of Father Arsenie Boca, which has been shown to resemble the religious discourse of the seventeenth century (Lohan, 2018). A characteristic feature of religious discourse is the giving of advice, and as for emotional engagement, this is achieved through ethos.

Older religious discourse aimed at persuasion and was characterized by pathos (Lohan, 2018). Since priests in past times were often the only educated individuals, the audience was highly receptive to the way the priest delivered his plea.

In religious discourse, the first person plural is used in order to create a differentiation: us–them. Moreover, religious discourse appeals to the Divinity, but takes the form that the communicative actor wishes to assign to the message being delivered. The appeal to Divinity has a magical character, yet polemic elements are also present, reminiscent of discourse in Antiquity. The fact that a message is conveyed through speech ensures greater effectiveness, especially since attention is often captured by means of rhetorical questions.

The central idea of the discourse reinforces the speaker's position, while for the audience it represents "an argument of authority." The parable, used as an example of purification, is intended to persuade the believer. Furthermore, religious discourse aims to provoke reactions from the audience, who see themselves as an integral part of the religious community to which they belong. Through praise or blame, the act of advising "becomes, within discourse, a strategy for constructing deliberative speech" (Lohan, 2018), with the objective of being "projected into the happiness of the faithful" (Lohan, 2018).

The purpose of theological discourses is "to establish moral order through adherence to biblical commandments" (Lohan, 2018). Of course, theological discourse often contains logical errors (or sophisms, frequently found in flawed argumentation, especially in persuasive speeches, including political or religious ones), such as *argumentum ad baculum*[3], *argumentum ad populum*[4], *argumentum ad misericordiam*[5], and others.

In the absence of logical literacy, the believer is persuaded and ultimately convinced that disobeying divine laws leads to death and eternal damnation. However, to view theology purely through an epistemic lens would be a mistake in itself, considering that it unfolds in the realm of spiritual experience rather than argumentation - or at least, not exclusively in the latter. This is why doxa brings with it a spiritual relevance that cannot be filtered through epistemology alone.

Likewise, the idea that God is wrathful and punishes believers who sin is not new, as religious writings have changed over time. For example, the Bible has been translated many times, with significant differences between various editions, both in Romanian and in other languages (the Old Testament in Hebrew and the New Testament in Greek). The translations have varied depending on the historical period, and this is due to the fact that archaic words, which were difficult to understand, were replaced with synonyms in order to make the sacred text accessible to every believer.

[3] *Argumentum ad baculum* – "appeal to the stick" (force or threat)
Meaning: relies on fear or coercion rather than logical reasoning.
Example: "If you don't believe what I say, you will be punished."
In discourse: "Whoever does not follow the commandments will burn in hell." – this is a form of ad baculum, because it seeks to persuade through threat, not through argument.

[4] Argumentum ad populum – "appeal to the majority"
Meaning: this fallacy assumes that an idea is true or valid simply because many people believe it or practice it. It relies on social validation rather than evidence or logical reasoning.
Example: "Everyone believes this, so it must be true."
In discourse: "Believers throughout all ages have done this, so it must be right." – this uses tradition and collective agreement as supposed proof of truth, rather than offering real arguments.

[5] Argumentum ad misericordiam – "appeal to pity" (compassion)
Meaning: asks for the acceptance of a conclusion based on emotion (pity, sympathy), rather than on facts or logic.
Example: "Don't give me a low grade, otherwise I'll suffer a lot at home."
In discourse: "Think of how much your parents sacrificed for you - how could you not agree with them?" - an emotional appeal based on guilt and compassion, not on the merits of the argument.

> *"The translation of the Bible has encountered the most diverse and insurmountable difficulties and will continue to be hindered by numerous factors that will prevent any near-unanimous consensus, whether in terms of the letter, the spirit, or the translational conception and structure at its foundation"* (Gafton, 2010).

In order to interpret biblical texts correctly, preachers must analyze both specialized theological literature and the traditional commentaries developed over time on scriptural teachings.

For the community of believers, the priest represents the "moral authority," the representative of the Divinity, the one who helps people renounce evil and draw closer to God through the practice of good thoughts, moderate speech, and moral actions. However, throughout history, man has attempted to recreate the divine work and to become like God. Thus, even in ancient times, mystical, occult, or alchemical pursuits were known among those who were then called philosophers. The sons of Noah, Moses, and Democritus are just a few of the figures who came into contact with hermetic science (Du Fresnoy, 2017).

To support this statement, it is worth noting that, for example, Moses destroyed the golden calf made in his absence, which resembled the Apis bull of Egypt (Du Fresnoy, 2017, p. 26).

Hermetism and occultism have always fascinated humankind. However, as is still well known today, their teachings are not accessible to everyone, but only to certain "chosen individuals." In this context, Dionysius the Areopagite's exposition in *On the Divine Names. Mystical Theology* is particularly important, especially regarding God: "Concerning the cause of all things, which is above all, we say that it is neither being, nor lifeless, nor irrational, nor lacking in intellect; it is neither body, nor does it have shape, nor form, nor quality, quantity, or mass; it is neither in a place, nor is it visible […] for the perfect and unified cause of all things is beyond every attribution, and the preeminence of the one who is simply detached from all and beyond all is above every negation" (Dionisie Areopagitul, 2018).

Tyranny exercised under religious pretext can be clearly illustrated by the events that took place during the Inquisition, a painful chapter in the history of Western Christianity. Although it was carried out in the name of faith and revealed truth, this institution was often used to justify persecution, torture, and public executions.

In concrete terms, clerics invested with not only spiritual but also legal authority issued accusations of witchcraft against defenseless individuals, claiming, among other things, that the purpose

of the investigation was to uncover so-called gromovnices[6] (thunder spell books).

In that context, representatives of the Church held a significant role in leading communities, often being an integral part of the Inquisition tribunals. They not only participated in the judgment process but also influenced decisions, turning moral authority into repressive power. The official justification invoked for imprisonment or execution was that the individuals in question had violated the "holy laws of God."

However, the consequences extended beyond the legal verdict – the imprisoned person was also marked by social shame and excluded from community life.

In this regard, Llorente & De la Lama Cereceda (1995) observed a defining feature of this oppressive regime: "it was enough for a man to have been imprisoned by the Inquisition for everyone else to feel ashamed of his company. Even if he was ultimately declared free of any charges, the public, which judges only what it sees, would pass its own sentence - one he would never be able to escape."

Therefore, the stigma of incarceration became a lifelong social condemnation, independent of guilt.

This historical reality reflects the danger of instrumentalizing faith, when the mission of salvation is replaced by mechanisms of coercion and control over human conscience.

A deep understanding of Christian literature and sermons cannot be achieved solely through rational or external reading. It requires an inner, spiritual involvement that engages the whole person. Thus, the reception of this type of discourse implies a logic of contemplation and communion that transcends mere information or explanation.

As Chirilă (2012) points out, a logic of living participation is needed, "one that actualizes the ontological-iconic trinitarian nature of language," meaning a mode of understanding shaped after the communion among the Persons of the Holy Trinity.

[6] The Gromovnik (also known as gromovnic) is a popular type of astrological and pseudo-religious writing, especially widespread in Romanian and Slavic regions beginning in the Middle Ages. The name comes from the Old Church Slavonic word *gromŭ*, meaning "thunder," and these texts were regarded as "books of thunder" that predicted weather patterns, natural phenomena, agricultural calendars, or even personal life events based on the days of the week, months of the year, or meteorological signs. In the context of the Inquisition, texts like the gromovnice were sometimes mistaken for magical or witchcraft-related writings, which could lead to accusations of sorcery or paganism against their owners. This is the context in which they appear in some Inquisition trials: the search for and confiscation of gromovnice was an activity associated with identifying alleged occult practices.

This approach assumes that religious language is not merely a form of symbolic expression, but a space of encounter between the human being and God's work in the world. The sermon, as a form of liturgical and pastoral communication, does not merely convey information about faith, but calls for a living encounter with the Truth.

Therefore, meaning is not imposed but gradually discovered through openness, prayer, and personal reflection. This is precisely why one of the central purposes of the sermon and of spiritual literature is the refinement of meaning (Chirilă, 2012), that is, a continuous deepening of the understanding of sacred realities in accordance with the listener's inner maturation.

The way the relationship between God and man is presented, especially in patristic writings and traditional homiletics, is not rigid or doctrinal in an abstract sense, but allows space for a living and personal interpretation, without relativizing the truth. Although God is one and the same, people perceive Him differently, depending on the faith, tradition, and culture from which they come.

Thus, in various religions, the divinity is named differently: God, the Creator, Allah, the Universe. But for Christians, and especially in Orthodox spirituality, this encounter is not conceptual, but mystical, personal, and salvific, founded on right worship and the truth revealed in Christ.

Therefore, theological language is not merely a means of communication, but an act of confession and communion, and its understanding requires a living, personal participation in spirit and in truth.

5. Theological Teachings

In the early years of our era, Saul[7], a Pharisee "still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord" (Patriarhia Română, 2018, Fapte 9, 1), was traveling to Damascus (Eliade, 2011), when:

"*3. […] a light from heaven suddenly shone around him like lightning.*

4. And falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him: Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?

5. And he said: Who are You, Lord? And the Lord said: I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads.

[7] Later, Saint Paul the Apostle

6. And he, trembling and astonished, said: Lord, what do You want me to do? And the Lord said to him: Arise, go into the city, and it will be told you what you must do." (Patriarhia Română, 2018, Fapte 9, 3-6).

With this story from the Bible, which took place in the year 32 or 33 of our era, Mircea Eliade begins his chapter on the birth of Christianity. In this passage from the Acts of the Apostles, we find the conversion of the barbarian into a man of God, the illumination occurring instantly with the descent of the Holy Spirit. Saul, the barbarian (if we may call him that), persecuted the Christians and, moreover, his actions are believed to have been marked by cruelty and violence.

This conversion, which takes place after his encounter with Jesus Christ, is expressed through the term "return" and can be understood today as a spiritual transformation. The understanding of God and of existence itself required a change in Saul's values and in his way of relating to the world and to others. Conversion here implies a transcendence of the self, as Saul dedicates himself to the community and binds his entire existence to God.

Orthodox literature encompasses a wide variety of texts that describe the teachings of the Holy Apostles, the lives of the saints, as well as the sufferings endured for Christ. In our times, these models of behavior influence the believer both morally and socially.

A model for understanding the relationship between man and God is provided by Gregory Palamas, the saint who speaks of hesychasm and inner prayer:

> "*Those who truly pray with the mind must be free of passions and have renounced attachment to the things that lie between them and God, for only in this way can they attain undisturbed prayer; and those who have not yet reached this state of dispassion but strive toward it must overcome the passionate attachment to pleasure (sweet passion), in order to be completely freed from passion*" (Stăniloae, 1977, pp. 228–229).

Conclusions

Religious discourse, in its authentic and living form, remains one of the most important expressions of the human need for meaning, for communion, and for grounding one's existence on a foundation that transcends the ephemeral. It is not merely a form of theological expression, but a manifestation of the continuous search for truth and goodness in a world increasingly exposed to disorientation, relativism,

and desacralization. In a context where words are often emptied of meaning and used as tools of manipulation or coercion, authentic religious discourse becomes an act of restoring the word to its original dignity - that of being a bearer of grace and light.

The relationship between barbarism and freedom, as reflected in religious language, is not merely theoretical. It concerns a profound reality in which barbarism is manifested not only through violence or the rejection of spiritual values, but also through the distortion of the word, reducing it to mere rhetoric or slogan. Freedom, by contrast, can only be lived authentically in truth and in communion, that is, in harmony with human nature and with the vocation to be fulfilled in divine light. Any discourse that ignores this calling inevitably becomes trapped within its own limits, fails to encounter the other, and ultimately contributes to a culture of rupture and division.

Therefore, religious discourse is not merely called to explain, interpret, or argue. It must also heal, nourish, and elevate. Its strength lies in its ability to speak the truth without aggression, to call for conversion without coercion, and to offer hope without confusing it with illusion. In the face of contemporary challenges, where freedom is often mistaken for absolute autonomy and barbarism takes increasingly subtle forms, religious discourse must remain anchored in the truth that sets free, in the humility that heals, and in the love that unites.

This is perhaps the deepest challenge of contemporary theology: to keep alive this form of communication that does not merely speak about God, but makes Him present through the very transparency and purity of the spoken word.

References

Chirilă, I. (2012). Iosua și Iisus în discursul patristic și în literatura liturghică ortodoxă. *Revista Studia Universitatis Babeș Bolyai, 57*(1), 19-31.

Cioran, E. (2008). *Căderea în timp*. Humanitas.

Colang, G. (2018). *Dimensiuni și perspective etice asupra barbariei actuale*. Eikon.

Colang, G., Vlad, L. (2020). Transhumanism as Barbarism. *Logos Universality Mentality Education Novelty: Philosophy & Humanistic Sciences*, 8(1), 33-43. https://doi.org/10.18662/lumenphs/8.1/34

Corpus Christianorum. (1955). Series Graeca. In *ACW Sherwood, P., St. Maximus the Confesor: The Ascetic Life*. The Four Centuries on Charity.

Descartes, R. (1997). *Meditații metafizice.* Crater.

Descartes, R. (2000). *Principiile filosofiei*. Iri.

Dionisie Areopagitul. (2018). *Despre numele divine. Teologia mistică* (M. Vlad, Trad., introd., note, glosar de termeni și bibliogr., Ed. bilingvă). Polirom.

Du Fresnoy, N. L. (2017). *Istoria filosofiei hermetice*. Herald.

Eliade, M. (2011). *Istoria credințelor și ideilor religioase, de la Gautama Buddha până la triumful creștinismulu*i, volumul 2. Polirom.

Gafton, A. (2010). Biblia de la 1688. Aspecte ale traducerii. *Revista Text și discurs religios, 2*, 49-72.

Gordon, V. (2001). *Introducere în omiletică*. Universității din București.

Hare, R. M. (1997). *Sorting out Ethics*. Clarendon Press.

Harris, S. (2019). *Liber arbitru*. Curtea Veche Publishing.

Llorente, J. A., De la Lama Cereceda, E. (1995). *Discursos sobre el orden de procesar en los tribunales de Inquisición*. Eunate.

Lohan, P. I. (2018). *Divided Structure of the Religious Discourse. Ilie Cleopa. Arsenie Boca.* Journal of Romanian Literary Studies, 13, 975-984. https://www.ceeol.com/search/article-detail?id=742948

Neagoe, F. (1970). *Istoria filosofiei moderne de la Spinoza la Diderot*. Didactică și Pedagogică.

Nietzsche, F. (1991). *Dincolo de Bine și de rău*. Humanitas.

Patriarhia Română. (2018). Biblia sau Sfânta Scriptură. Tipărită cu binecuvântarea Preafericitului Părinte Daniel, Patriarhul Bisericii Ortodoxe Române Cu aprobarea Sfântului Sinod. Institutul Biblic de Misiune Ortodoxă.

Sârbu, C. (2014). Liberul arbitru – iluzie a minții umane. *Analele Științifice ale USM, Științe umanistice, 1*, 50-52.

Schopenhauer, A. (2010). *Eseu despre liberul arbitru*. Antet XX Press.

Sfântul Vasile cel Mare. (1986). Omilia XXII-a către tineri. În *Colecţia Părinţi şi Scriitori Bisericeşti, 17*. Institutul Biblic şi de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române.

Spinoza, B. (1993). *Etica*. Antet.

Stăniloae, D. (1977). *Filocalia sau Culegere din scrierile sfinților părinți care arată cum se poate omul curăța, lumina și desăvârși*, Volumul VII (traducere). Institutul Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române.

Thunberg, L. (2005). *Antropologia teologică a Sfântului Maxim Marturisitorul: microcosmos și mediator*. Sophia.

Vlad, L. (2019). *Umanism, transumanism, postumanism. Perspective filosofice*. Lumen.