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**THE THEORY OF SYMBOLS AND CHRISTIAN ANTHROPOLOGY
AN ANALYSYS OF PAUL TILlich'S AND NIKOLAI BERDIAEV'S THEORIES
ON SYMBOL**

- DOCTORATE THESIS SUMMARY -

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Keywords: theory of symbols, sign, symbol, language, theology, anthropology, knowledge, existentialism, the philosophy of religion, Paul Tillich, Nikolai Berdiaev, the meaning of life

The center approach that we have undertaken is the interest in creating a connection between elements of Christian anthropology and the theory of symbols, namely, the attempt to present these elements of the theory of Christian anthropology through the perspective of the symbols theory. In our approach one can always find the philosophical and theological reference to two important representatives of thought - Paul Tillich and Nikolai Berdiaev -

belonging to the two main areas of thought and feeling in which we usually divide the world, the East and the West.

The two thinkers are equally representative of both philosophical thought and for theological one, but also in terms of how to build their own systems of thinking as a bridge between traditional theological thinking and philosophical thinking of modern invoice. From this point of view, the systems of the two thinkers could be considered symbolic systems because, just like genuine symbols they succeed to put together two aspects or trends that seem different at first glance, but following a more serious study it becomes visible the referential character alternately of one for the other and with it, revealing their complementarity.

On the other hand, we opted for a presentation of conceptions about man and about symbols representatives for Paul Tillich and Nikolai Berdiaev in part because, from what I have seen, at least in our country these two theologians and philosophers perception of religion alike - and hence an eventual recovery of the innovations that both visions have proposed - was made with hesitations and that, we believe, on the one hand, because of the courage and audacity each of two thinkers made major issues in their teaching of religion and human culture and, on the other hand, because of overly broad area from which sources to synthesize each of the two perspectives . For this reason, one of the purposes of our work is to mediate and facilitate a rapprochement for interested contemporaries thought the two theologians and Christian philosophers, which results in a broader, more general approach without predilection for their concepts.

But, on the other hand, I tried a recovery in Christian anthropology of the notion of symbol of the conceptions of the two Christian thinkers in order to provide theological answers, solutions or suggestions for solutions to problems typical for our times because "theology is only important when responding to a concrete situation"¹.

For this reason, we intend to achieve during our work an analysis of the part the symbol has in the conception of the two thinkers, and on how this symbolic perspective on knowledge of reality as a whole, and human existence described in terms of symbols, it makes sense and can bring something viable for a Christian anthropology of present times.

I. SYMBOL: GENERAL CLARIFICATION

In this chapter we tried capturing as many aspects of the symbol, showing that, etymologically, the word symbol can reclaim from three main meanings of the Greek verb *syμβαλεῖν*, to symbolize, underlying the term's complexity, which is the root of a whole

series of concepts, as Lorenz Dittmann observes. In ancient times, two partners of an understanding, in recognition wore one part or one half of a piece torn in two, *the symbolon* representing the restoration of unity, reinstatement or validation of that alliance². Moreover, the knowledge resulting from direct human contact with things logically led to an increase in complexity and terminology used to communicate the knowledge gained through this development while realizing considerable extra complexity exhibited by the specialization of the terms which externalise the experience of the person who knows.

The chapter continues with some considerations on *I. 1. THE ORIGIN OF SYMBOLS*, from which it can be seen that the symbol is already a form of instrumentalization of human intuition to self-knowledge, knowledge of the world, the universe and, eventually or simultaneously knowing the reality of the inner being. In fact, any attempt to define a human being, a thing or a phenomenon is made using language, comparisons, analogies and references. Man, acknowledging himself as living in a more extensive and complex existence, shows his will to discover the world in which he lives, and to define it in order to understand it. For this reason, he is in a permanent search, so the symbols arising from the human need for knowledge and communication lead to knowledge encoded in a way parallel to verbal communication, language.

The next stage is approached on *I.2. THE SYMBOL'S MEANINGS*, which, as stated, are multiple. This may be because the symbol has a paradoxical structure and mode, which determines, on the one hand essential continuity, and, on the other hand, an existential discontinuity between expression and meaning. But what should be remembered is that symbolic meanings aren't created by every man in particular, but imposing them is made through convention systems and existing social practices, conventions and practices that one adheres to through the attitude towards ontological realities of a language, a language which "gives us a grasp on things", but a grasp which, in turn, gives man the ability to transgress the phenomena of things and elaborate later on this transgression another language accessible only to a group of initiates in that language³.

After symbol's meanings follows *I.3. THE SYMBOL'S FUNCTIONS* which are also multiple, as the symbols are. Jean Chevalier identifies nine of them, "the exploring, the substitute, mediation, unification, pedagogical and therapeutic, socializing, resonant, transcendent and the transformant"⁴. However, in spite of the symbol's polysemic, the unification function is the one most used. Why? Because the symbol unites, builds centers and which is in a central position takes part in perpetuity.

The next subsection is devoted to the theme: *I.4. THE SYMBOL'S HISTORICAL EVOLUTION*, followed by another one, entitled *I.5. THE SYMBOL IN CURRENT WORLD THINKING*. Here we showed that at the current level of perceived existence it is believed that there are two ways to insert the real into the world, the real or the human being belongs to what is told, narrated, say so, on the one hand, the events take place in a narrated world, while, on the other hand, the facts have effects in the lived world. What determines this double perspective is precisely that outlined plans - respectively narrated and lived world - do not have the same ontological consistency, because when one enjoys the living argument, the other can only rely on grounds of faith⁵.

What we know and what we have started to understand are things that the modern thinking uses with direct reference to communication and by practicing a denial of representativeness and mediation of the real or of the human being through signs, since the latter expose themselves as reality instead as an alternative to real or virtual reality. And this is all the more evident and more worthy of thought as they get closer to understanding that, "without a reference beyond itself, without sharing a real and profound reality, without communication skills, the image becomes its own reason: hits, attracts, submits, possesses, seduces and ends by denying freedom"⁶. How can any sense of existence subsists at the end of such a process?

The man thus remains the last symbol and mediation term between reality and the world, counting that the image itself, as contemporary world creates and wants it, no longer contributes to strengthening communication, but actually weakens it by assuming increasingly more subjective languages⁷. These subjective languages led in time to the loss of the symbol's spiritual values and, consequently, to desecration or secularisation. Symbols are not lacking at this stage, as probably will not miss at any stage of human development, just that, because of the empowerment of the image we were talking about earlier and due to acquiring a self referring character of the image, man fails to understand the symbols' connection with the reality they signify⁸.

II. THE SYMBOL IN CHRISTIANITY

For the orthodox christian, the way God is present into the world and manifests himself in the world is the man; the creature who represents him personifies God into the world because, of all the things that exists in the world only about man is said to have been created in God's image. This type of expression is specific for the Fathers of the Church. Through it, the Church has tried to define the way of reporting and representation of the human condition

as a mode of presence and representation of God in the world and the term proposed by iconological language of the Fathers was that of *participation*. The recognition of human participation in full is to recognize expressed human ability to know God, the Church's God, which is "being above all being", "Holiness above all holiness", "Nameless name", "principle above any principle", "mind that cannot be understood by the human mind", "unspeakable word", "The fit nothing can fit". In these circumstances, what man can know is that, by virtue of being created in God's image (Gen. 1:27), he can accede to "attend in what cannot be attended", the result being a science - Theology - that allows the truth to identify with the living or direct experience.

Depending on the issues involved in its definition or on the angle of which it is regarded the symbol may have different emphases, which we tried to underline in subsections: *II.1. THE SYMBOL IN THE ORTHODOX THEOLOGY*, where we show that, being appointed by God to decipher, he might read the symbols of creation, man receives the possibility of "to "name", that is to give a spiritual sense to everything he sees (Gen. 2, 20)". The iconic exclusivity of Christian tradition is based on understanding the human knowledge as analogical and symbolic approach of thought and expression of natural and supernatural realities. "Man, understands and expresses the mysterious, supernatural reality which he experiences in analogical and symbolic language as we humans are dressed in this thick body - as stipulated in St. John Damascian Dogmatics (I, 13) – we cannot understand and express the divine work without images"⁹. Concerning the icon, it must be said that this sensitive, real, existing representation, is not identical with its prototype. Between the two poles of the icon, namely between the icon and its prototype, two essential aspects or relationships are established, both of importance in the cult addressed to the icon. The first aspect is the similarity and refers to the fact that the icon "borrows its name, shape and appearance from the original or prototype, thus settling a resemblance which - after its consecration in the Church - determines the icon's veneration." The second aspect spoken about the relationship between image and prototype is that of contrast between them. This second aspect refers to the fact that the icon prototype differs fundamentally in nature. "The nature of the original cannot be represented visibly, only its form or image, and therefore the holy icon remains only a resemblance, a model or a representation of the original."¹⁰

In *II.1.1. THE SYMBOL'S DOGMATIC DIMENSION*, we show that the dogmatic size of the symbol is based on the unifying power of a symbol, as long as it can only exist for "someone or for a community whose members identify, in a certain respect, to establish a single center" around which the whole universe will be built. Totalizing experience becomes

the symbol's prerogative¹¹, just as the particular characteristic of a community identified by a common confession of faith also refers to the symbol's functionality that unifies and separates at the same time. The fundamental stake of the symbol as a confession of faith or confession for faith is the doctrine of the incarnation, teaching that, for the Holy Fathers, is clearly based on the iconic edifice of thought articulated in terms of iconomy in a way, "who denies icon, denies iconomy"¹². And iconomy denial is to deny "the possibility of the discourse about God and a certain knowledge of the Creator by the creature (...) in the context in which the iconomy acquires the status of a science of the internal structure of its object, respectively the science of relations between persons of the Trinity (understanding by seeing), but also the science of doctrinal enunciation of these relationships (to speak)."¹³

Another important aspect of the symbol in Christianity is *II.1.2. THE SYMBOL'S LITURGICAL DIMENSION*. We must keep in mind that within Orthodox Tradition "is called liturgical symbol, any form of worship which, by virtue of analogies, or an image suggesting a religious idea, a doctrine of faith, an abstract fact from salvation history or something that cannot be perceived". To the category of liturgical symbols belong words, gestures or sensitive materials that mean, but at the same time include, in a difficult to understand manner, certain spiritual realities. The "symbols are wrappers, more or less reasons for mysteries"¹⁴ and "sacraments and liturgical acts are imitative acts triggering ontological mutations based on participation through likeness seen to invisible archetypes."¹⁵

Thus, following a logical path we go further towards *II.1.3. THE SYMBOL'S MYSTICAL DIMENSION*. The Mystic dimension of the symbol is highlighted by the dynamic aspect of reality created by uncreated reality. Thus, the mystical dimension of the symbol finds its possibility of existence in the incarnation of Jesus Christ, through which 'it produces radical changes in human-God interaction, as Father Gabriel Herea states, and thus the means of such interaction, including symbol images". So, by *II.1.4. THE SYMBOLIC DIMENSION OF CHRISTIAN ART*, we note that, by its very structure, if it maintains its existence in the parameters established by God from creation, man is destined unifying namely, he is destined "to become a mediator between the world and God, to make its own existence hypostatic an icon of God and of the world, a cosmic liturgy in a temple."¹⁶ In the case of desertion from this vocation or for ignoring her art created and / or practiced by man will remain unable to symbolize the ultimate reality. In other words, art without mediation between human and divine will remain at a certain reproduction level of the existing reality or just to express the subjective content of the human spirit in meaningless forms and pictures without any connection to God's transfiguring action.¹⁷

At the end of this general part concerning various theories of symbolism and before addressing the thought of Tillich and Berdiaev we introduced a section called *II.2. Summary and Questions*.

The first question on the reality in which human life is conducted would be if somehow, following the presentation of Tillich and Berdiaev's thought, there are many levels of reality? If so, then, another question would be whether and to which of these levels can one define or find a sense of self-fulfillment? How could he find his way in life?

Another question is: Why is that man feels his own existence constantly threatened? Another one is: Why – in spite of having the possibility of acceding to faith - his existence would rather be influenced by the perish conditions imposed by the reality of the world and not to those being offered by the reality of the human being? Yet another one: What is the role of the symbol according to the statements of the authors whom we present below, in this respect?

Human situation in today's world, despite the rapid technological developments taking place under our eyes, remains far from satisfactory in terms of existential fulfillment, meaning that the man wants to identify with its own life. Where should one intervene in this regard? What else could be done so that the human life should have meaning in the circumstances? Why is the man missing on reality? Why it fails on its way to acquiring reality? Why the meaning he finds for his life is the one that is confined strictly to the reality of the world or, at best, an illusory symbolic reality that he himself creates. What solutions can the anthropologies of Paul Tillich and Nikolai Berdiaev offer to these issues? Are the solutions they offer viable for the modern man? Are they acceptable or more acceptable for the practical man of today than already known solutions? This we tried to find out from what follows.

III. Man and symbol in Paul Tillich's thought

The chapter begins with *III.1. Paul Tillich, bio-bibliographical landmarks* and continues into the *III.2. Aspects of Paul Tillich's thought*, which shows that what characterizes the thinking of Paul Tillich is its permanent desire to be able to achieve a unification of human knowledge areas to putting together a complete and true answer to the problems man has to face during his life on earth. Therefore, existentialist philosophy and theology, but also historical and political situation, found developing common ground in correlation method which Tillich proposed to find and formulate that response. A special

merit in the thinking of the twentieth century is conferred to Paul Tillich due to its orientation towards the secular sciences. This orientation gave him the opportunity to highlight through his work the real benefits of a dialogue between theology and psychology abysmal, between theology and culture.

The above assertion is remarkable if we follow *III.2.1. Paul Tillich's conception of God*. Here we meet with various aspects taken into consideration by Tillich, such as: *III.2.1.1. God, as the essence of existence or III.2.1.2. God as ultimate concern. III.2.1.3 and God as the Supreme Being or absolutely unconditioned.*

Advancing the presentation of Tillich's thought we addressed different *III.2.2. Elements of Paul Tillich's discourse about reality*, where it appeared that, among all existences considered in relation to membership of a reality whose essential feature is permanent dynamic creative potentiality transition from the current, there are dynamic connections. These connections generate within the created existence of certain particularities also dynamic and having the symbolic reflection in the area of God's design of creation, the Creator, that He alone is the ultimate reality cannot be customized, updated, but will update itself. But Tillich also speaks about *III.2.2.1. The reality as a dynamic relationship between essence and existence*, saying that the reality was and still is the main concern of man. Being in a close relationship with reality is all the more important for man as means of sharing this reality and reality/offering for his own being. This aspect is evoked particularly from the point of view of reality as it relates to issues of human quality to be creative namely, to bring itself into existence and to customize the new plane of existence. To Paul Tillich this means overcoming the potentiality towards updating into manifestation.¹⁸ But the reality resulting from the updated being can only be a symbolic reality, because its existence isn't absolute reality, it just symbolizes the absolute reality.

Analyzing the relationships between *III.2.2.2. Reality and belief*, Tillich says that man, because of his existential impossibility - as a being alienated from essential reality - to be located near or even in the middle of reality, does nothing but create reality through his design in all objects he touches, which ultimately has no other result than reality fragmentation, breaking the unity of reality in a multitude of realities. This constitutes a striking ambiguity in relation to reality, ambiguity that man feels as existential anxiety, for this reason Tillich talks about the need for a true "courage to be" found in *III.2.2.3. Reality, faith and limited freedom*. Thus, following in the footsteps of Schleiermacher and Schelling, but also Feuerbach - who talked about religion as human infinite consciousness that intuitively itself as infinite existence of consciousness, which cannot be limited as it is the sign of this

infinity¹⁹ - Tillich came to postulate a kind of freedom characteristic for limited human beings, freedom he called limited freedom. Limited freedom enjoyed by man is a freedom that facilitates Tillich's explanation of the transition from essence to existence as a result of polarized growth potential and the actual freedom. The result of this dynamic is that the man feels like updating his own limited freedom²⁰ and thereby his position in the sin's dynamic or in self-created existence. Reality resulting from this option is a fragmented reality, a reality selfishly reported to each individual part, so much so that it is possible that two or more freedoms should never overlap but be both claimed as ultimate realities, even if the latter aspect that it involves each is merely wholly subjective and individual. This is the only faith that can mediate for us humans the access to authentic and absolute reality. However, in this connection it appears a prerequisite: faith itself must be genuine and not idolatry. Only when faith is authentic, it may be the guarantee of its own foundation or, in other words, "the aspect of the reality that created faith. This reality, Tillich says, is the new being, conquering alienation and thus makes faith possible."²¹

In another subsection we showed that the association between *III.2.2.4. Reality, language and community* confronts us with the fact that through language man achieves a deep understanding of reality levels and also because of this freedom that language provides him, he can build imaginary structures over the real structures he is linked to.²² As we have seen in the introduction on the symbol, language has this quality. However, the language should be used very cautiously in order not to falsify the reality it speaks about or describes and that is precisely why we should consider the discussion *III.2.2.5. Reality and truth*, which is a tendency of man to transcend himself outwards, towards things and, after discovering the true faith, transcending its own inside to the interior of the things that comes in contact with. The surface of things is what gives man the possibility of a first contact, but does not provide certainty that the surface of things or people is real or true.²³ Passing it, searching for different levels of reality and from outside to inside, reveals the instability and essential insecurity of different levels of reality which otherwise appears each time differently and finding this instability becomes a route that provides human motivation to search further, until he finds the real essence. The reason that it lacks the depth of the truth is that no matter how long man searches for the truth he never finds it in objects because the truth is personal life centered on Christ, the new reality.²⁴

The possibility of salvation lies in the awareness of the produced, false reality and access to the true, absolute one, issues discussed in *III.2.2.6. Reality and salvation*. All human actions are governed by how he understands and / or represent their reality and how

they relate to reality, ie whether it relates to false reality as absolute or vice versa, in absolute as if it were false.

This brings us to speak *III.2.3. The symbol's place and role in Paul Tillich's thought*. The doctrine of "symbolic" nature of religious language is central and extremely important in Paul Tillich's thinking. Existence as a whole, is symbolic. Therefore, we approached *III.2.3.1. General characteristics of symbols, III.2.3.2. The characteristics of religious symbol, III.2.3.2.1. The negative theories of symbol III.2.3.2.2. The positive theories of symbol, then III.2.3.2.3. Types of religious symbols*.

A special chapter was devoted to the section entitled *III.2.4. The man in Paul Tillich's vision*. Man is presented by Paul Tillich as a "microcosm where all the cosmic forces are potentially present and participate in all spheres and at all levels of the universe. Through the man, Tillich says, the universe continues the creative process that produced him first as aim and center of creation. Now man has to shape the world and to shape himself according to what productive powers were given to him. In him, nature is fulfilled and the knowledge is seized and transformed into technical work".²⁵ For Tillich, the first three chapters of Genesis establish the general outline of the existence and the human condition in the world. He says that beyond the mythological dimension the respective chapters talk about setting the frame for existence. The existential alienation isn't just for an individual but a fact of freedom set in the universal destiny of existence. Understanding the human condition is possible only as an existence, which is rooted both in ethical freedom and in tragic fate.²⁶

In the fourth chapter we presented the thought of Nikolai Berdiaev, maintaining a certain symmetry with the chapter dedicated to Tillich, so that the succession of the issues addressed in this chapter is:

IV. Man and symbol on Nikolai Berdiaev's thought, which continues with *IV.1. Nikolai Berdiaev, bio-bibliographical landmarks* and then with *IV.2. Aspects of Nikolai Berdiaev's thought*. Nikolai Berdiaev declined any vocation of "systematic" and "scientific" thinker rather recognizing the position of creator of "paradoxical"²⁷. These paradoxical visions are the results of a "thinking - as Berdiaev used to say – antinomical, often oriented to extremes and too aphoristic". His thinking does not follow a laborious process, but it is the result of some "experiences" ranging from lighting to revelation.

IV.2.1. Nikolai Berdiaev's conception of God relies on the definition of God in terms of being and existence. He substantiates the existence of God as absolute spiritual reality. From the point of view of naturalistic metaphysics existence is being based. But Being is a static concept, which cannot heads scope if God, who is spiritual and personal reality. Being, says

Berdiaev, has no existence. Therefore, the person is older than Being. God is, but He is not a Being.²⁸ In other words, Berdiaev tried to clarify the issue of God's absolute transcendence from any ontological concept, although this it is beyond the means of human language. However, Berdiaev speaks of God as non-Being or super-Being. "God, he says, is existence, but it is not being".²⁹

For Berdiaev is logical that "if God exists, he must reveal himself, and show his existence. (...) There can be no knowledge of God, unless God himself does not participate in it actively. He meets the man." So we can talk about *IV.2.1.1. The possibility of knowing God*. Teandric aspect of revelation is of paramount importance for Berdiaev because it implies dynamism of both "partners" in knowledge of both the God who reveals Himself and of man, actively receiving revelation. So, Berdiaev says that when it comes to teandric aspect of revelation "we should never lose sight of it."

As in Tillich's case, we presented several approaches to Berdiaev's theological issues, speaking *IV.2.1.2. God as Truth and Reality*, *IV.2.1.3. God, Mystery and Life* *IV.2.1.4. God as Trinity of Persons*, *IV.2.1.5. God the Creator*.

Berdiaev speaks about creation about *IV.2.2. The creature reality of the world and creating / objectification of the existential reality*. Since the beginning of this section of our paper we have shown that, in Berdiaev, reality is a created gift and God is the one who created reality. The reality isn't this time a mere shift from one state to another state or to force a transition to another state of the Creator, but simply producing a new force, out of nothing, ie something that never existed before. Any creative act is thus in essence, a creation out of nothing, ie production of a new strength and not changing or reorganizing old one.³¹ We see as absolute reality Berdiaev push within divinity that creates the essence from nothing, because then this essentially created which is called force, other forces take birth or existence, through the same process of creation from nothing. But *IV.2.2.1. The reality (appears in Berdiaev's work as) dynamic and creative relationship between subjective and objective, between the inside and the outside*. Berdiaev always says that "the infinite is hidden behind the finite and is felt through clues and recognized based on the opposition subject / object". If ignorance or non-recognition indices in question, there is always the risk that represent itself as objective reality, which means nothing but alienation.³² In other words, to symbolize himself and not God, means to receive and do not correctly interpret clues as absolute reality indices and therefore you put on yourself - the objectification - instead of absolute reality, as the only true reality.

In *IV.2.2.2. Reality and faith* in connection with Berdiaev we show that he states the existence of several steps that need to be taken for the knowledge of the Truth. Thus, advancing on the way of knowing the truth, man must first acquire scientific knowledge, then philosophical knowledge, that through mystical religious knowledge or gnosis really reach the fullness of knowledge. The believer, when trusting he states fact. But Berdiaev believes that when, "from the depths of his conscience, an ardent atheist denies God, he ultimately admits his existence." And so, beyond a mere formal labeling, even atheism is, in Berdiaev's view, a form of faith.³³

Section linked to *IV.2.3. The symbol's place and role in Nikolai Berdiaev's thought* exposes the problem of symbol, which is particularly critical in the thinking of Nikolai Berdiaev and beyond. Basically, without symbol, all possibilities to create a discourse about God, the world and man are canceled. The symbol is the cornerstone of conceptual construction by Nikolai Berdiaev. Therefore, talking about *IV.2.3.1. Designation and objectification* we conclude that the objectification regards firstly the spirit. Spirit in the process of objectification, instead achieve it symbolizes. It is a case of falsification of the world of reality seen through as an absolute. What is symbolized in this case is a thing just as finite as the symbol itself. That symbol yet continues to point to an absolute reality is of course important, but in this equation of the symbol we don't see the man's participation to absolute reality but to one wrongly. But according to Berdiaev, there are other reports in real stages, such as *IV.2.3.2. Designation and realization*, *IV.2.3.3. Designation and idealization* or *IV.2.3.4. Christian symbolism*, which is, according to Berdiaev, a symbolism of the Logos and the soul of the world, of Christ and His Church.

Following the presentation of Berdiaev's thought we addressed the relationship between *IV.2.3.4.1. Symbol and Myth* or *IV.2.3.4.2. Symbol and dogma*; also *IV.2.3.4.3. Symbol and worship*.

In section *IV.2.4. The man in Nikolai Berdiaev's vision* one can notice Berdiaev's conception of man as "contradictory and paradoxical being", the explanation being that "man is a religious animal. He carries within itself an insatiable desire to love, to dedicate a cult to the sacred. Human desire to love often takes forms of idolatry or self-idolatry, but even worse, he does not love himself, but an ideal, an idol, he is able to sacrifice all these false images "so that, might say, "the human person is the victim of his own idolatry".³⁴ We talked further about *IV.2.4.1. Man as a person* *IV.2.4.2. Man as a symbol* *IV.2.4.3. Man, between inside and outside*, but also about *IV.2.4.4. The alienated man*.

We tried presenting a preliminary recovery of the two concepts discussed in the next chapter, Chapter V, which we entitled:

Paul Tillich and Nikolai Berdiaev, summary - synthesis

It is undisputed that the thought of the two religious philosophers has had significant positive influence on thinkers and philosophers that followed.

In Tillich and Berdiaev's work the man's search for the ultimate reality makes sense because man finds it in his path. It is important that the man seeks until acquires certainty that what he seek is really ultimate. So through symbol man participates to reality, but being aware that he participates in two worlds - one of objectification and of the spirit - man is in constant danger of duplicate and fail, says Berdiaev, in self-imaging and self-referentiality. Going forward, this self-referentiality cast man in the world dependence which he considers the ultimate reality.

The chapter continues with the presentation *V.1. The symbolic and dynamic particularity of man in creation plan embodied in the meaning of human life*, which means that man binds together different levels of reality, he is the only being who, by exceeding levels of reality and creative assimilation is able to create his own existence as a result of knowing the dynamics of the world's meanings. Communion aspect is very important in human terms, because, as Tillich says, there can be no individual existence without participation, but no personal existence without communion, people could benefit and grow only within the communion of personal meetings, so the interdependence between individualization and participation is visible at all levels of being.³⁴ In the personality resides the meaning of human life and human existence that cannot be seen outside this meaning. The person is both the problem and the ideal of man. "This is, says Berdiaev, perfect unity, completeness person who represents the ideal. The person is a continuous creation (...) the person is an axiological category, a category of value."³⁶

From the above it can be concluded that the symbolic thinking has gnosiological characteristics, *V.1.1. Gnosiological characteristics of symbolic thinking*, manifested in *V.1.1.1. Rational knowledge and belief*, *V.1.1.2. Intuitive or existential knowledge* *V.1.1.3. Symbolic knowledge*. About the latter we remark: the symbolic knowledge is made of all the elements of the world and each one with God, as the ultimate goal or final level of knowledge, but without mixing and at the same time without confusing. The essential condition or purpose of knowledge is, in our opinion, that of helping the human being to communicate meanings through the clear setting of universal symbols, symbols seen as

dynamic boundaries between the different levels of knowledge / reality or human / non-human existence and relating to existence or ultimate reality, through participation.

From all the above we understand that we must see *V.2. Man as existence who accedes to meaning by knowing different levels of reality*. For humans, each type of experience constitutes the reality of cognitive and symbolic level so that the meaning of human life is established by gradual accession, sequential and / or concurrent, at all different levels of reality, starting from the immediate ones, which are in close proximity to humans, and to the most subtle, the uppermost step standing, as we can see, "last thing" or sacred, according to which man gives meaning to all levels of reality.

We can thus talk about *V.3. Anthropological dynamism*, the meeting place for all the worlds dynamics and the recognized center where all the dynamics acquire meaning through human knowledge. Dynamism is both symbol and meaning. Man is the being who, through the use of symbols, gives dynamism and meaning to his existence and also understands the meanings of different levels of reality that he comes into direct contact with existentially. When looking for the ultimate reality, man exceeds or exhausts level after level of reality, trying, as he did at the beginning of his existence, "to give it name" (Acts 2:20), to express reality . The symbol remains the most appropriate form to express reality in which man participates through knowledge. But anthropological dynamism may fail in *V.3.1. Dynamics of "auto-aseizării"* situation that occurs because, *V.3.1.1. The dynamics of human existence as participating in the dynamics of cosmic existence* by virtue of which man participates not through his land dynamism to the dynamics of the world. He participates as a person, even in universal dynamism, as part of a microcosm. For, if participating in the world, the human person must not be confused with the world and get lost in it, because the human person "is an individual universe in a way that never repeats itself. It combines universal and infinite itself on the one hand, the particular and the individual on the other"³⁷. From the dynamism of *aseizării* it results *V.3.1.2 The final concern of the man living a meaningless life - himself*. From the moment man finds himself in the situation described meaningless, his only concern cannot be other than himself. How to avoid the vicious circle of insecurity, mistrust, fears about the condition of his worldly condition? This will, in fact be his last concern: preserving our being by stealing its existence from nothingness destructive dynamics, which he constantly feels threatened in the world. In such a state of affairs, the only approach that will be agreed by man will be that for personal success. Success is the ultimate human concern, being willing to sacrifice "all other values of life for the sake of a position of power and social superiority."³⁸ Paradoxically, but according to the Bible, *V.3.1.3. Loss of sense of his*

own existence, (done) according to biblical record: "He who wishes to save his life shall lose it" (Luke 9, 24). We believe that man feels that in the permanent dynamic he is involved into he misses something important, something that refers to the ultimate existence, and that concerns his own existence. Living with the feeling this loss, he feels vulnerable and feels he lives in a world of nonsense in a world where his life is constantly threatened from all sides. Therefore, he tries to save himself by isolating. He tries to recover the meaning of life recovering himself, not aware that he cannot save himself.³⁹

However there exists salvation manifested as *V.3.2. The dynamics of similarity*. One of the question raised during our work was referring to the limit that the dynamism of human existence can reach. We answer it now, setting likeness as the most advanced level of existence or reality that can achieved by the human, that authentic human dynamism has practically no end. Just an objectified, alienated, existence can be thought of in some limited and limiting frameworks, while authentic human existence, continually reported to the ultimate reality which has its existence and which symbolizes the existence in the world, can only be seen in a constantly advancing participatory dynamic.

The dynamics of similarity involves several aspects, such as: *V.3.2.1. The man's participation to God - the life of faith*. For both Berdiaev and Tillich, faith is a fundamental value. Man cannot exist without faith in a final work and also cannot exist without the meaning that the faith provides. The only source of faith in God, for Berdiaev, is the existence of the divine inside the man. It is on this that his statements of two types of believes relies on: faith in God and faith in man. Consequently, we are dealing with an opposition generated by the impossibility of co-existence of two last things that determine each one type of faith: in God and in man. The latter, says Berdiaev, corresponds to a moment in the dialectic of conscience "man understands that faith in God implies faith in man and faith in man, faith in God."⁴⁰

V.3.2.2. Levels and cosmic meanings of reality - steps towards God, the ultimate meaning. From this point of view faith is, in our opinion, the meaning of human existence. But faith is at the same time, a symbol of dynamic of meanings which man identifies on his way to the ultimate. Dynamic sequence causes multiple human concerns rising from one level of reality to another. Through successive symbolization concerns taking place at every level of reality man finally gets to truly ultimate reality that gives him a meaning. But we must not forget that "last thing" is not an object among others, but the basis for all the others, he is actually the basis for everything that exists.

V.3.2.3. *The effect of self-perfection as meaningful being - the spiritualization of the created reality.* The dynamic process of setting up the symbols by which man attempts to represent the last thing at certain levels of reality cannot remain, in our view, without effect on the human consciousness. In dealing with them not only to mere signs or objects to whose existence he becomes aware of, but as symbols involving personal engagement and participation, the man accesses to a higher spiritual reality, fulfilling his existence. The man may symbolize the ultimate thing or object through any element of reality. Reality is thus spiritualized in this human perfection dynamic process. Faith, however, should be exercised at all times, on each level of knowledge / reality with reference to ultimate reality.

Instead of conclusions: symbolic thought at the crossroads of East and West

Finally, we would like to show that there are several common ideas to the two analyzed ways of thinking that can sometimes go up to identity. In what follows we will identify some of these common perspectives which make a significant contribution to the enrichment of Christian anthropology.

1. A first common point of interest of the two thinkers is related to the problem of man and his existence in this world. Human existence in the world is marked by a state of almost permanent anxiety and depression. The cause for depression and anxiety is identified by Tillich and the Berdiaev in sin, perplexing practical man, so he is confused about his purpose in the world.

2. A second common concern, according to the conception of the two authors, is the existence of multiple levels of reality to which man participates levels and relates to, and each of these levels symbolically reveals another way of being of reality and, equally another way of being human.

3. Thirdly, both in Paul Tillich and Nikolai Berdiaev, we noticed a permanent caution in expressing themselves, in presenting and clarify things. The fact that at the center of conceptual thinking at of the two we notice denotes a particular sensitivity to the transcendent mystery of absolute and symbolic ways to show the world. Therefore, we thought that in addressing the two one needs an open mind and an attitude oriented towards harnessing elements of real value that reading the works of authors studied offers.

Regarding symbols and Christian anthropology theory, *we could even say that the theory of symbols opens up the way of the Christian anthropology to all fields of culture. We say this because, as seen in the particular culture of each area there is a symbolic dimension,*

from coding the individual experiences through language and / or collective and common coding to other forms of expression, nonverbal.

Another major contribution to the enrichment of Christian anthropology theory of symbols is the one referring to the relevance of the purpose of man in the world. Namely, we mean that the *theory of symbols highlights that man exists in the world with a meaning*. This is particularly important aspect for the world in which we live, because loss of meaning of life is a reality that, we face more and more from pastoral, missionary and spiritually therapeutic point of view. And that without knowing or without being able to understand and intervene where we are needed both as believers and as servants of the Church.

But what must be said with certainty is that the symbol of meeting with the other that we remember, manages to preserve both the other image at a time, and his choice of the time and context in which the meeting took place.

Christianity customizes all human choices but within a unitary symbolically totalizing framework. This framework becomes symbolic of ecclesial dynamics in which the likeness of God through life in Christ, is achieved. The theory of symbols thus brings to Christian anthropology a very important contribution concerning the meaning of life size. Man needs a life that has an important dimension of meaning. But without the symbolizing action we cannot talk about forming a meaning, be it about symbolization by words or symbols. The symbol fulfills the human life in that it enables him to participate in another world, more real, more true.

The principle of the Church is that of unity in diversity. The priest has a duty to give personal testimony that applying this principle in his life makes possible the presence of all people in the same space / a place of extremely diverse dynamics, of multiple personal choices, options that are unified during the same unique human aspirations that gets in Christianity aspect of salvation of the soul and God-likeness.

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