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**- SUMMARY -**

**Prayer - Ladder to living in Christ and the  
Psychological Implications on Human Behaviour**

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Prayer, Living in Christ, Servant of God, Son of God, request prayer, Religion Psychology, Neurotheology, dialogue with God, Communion of Communication, perfection through Prayer.

## **MOTIVATION FOR CHOOSING THE TOPIC**

The topic of this research set out from the necessity of finding and offering an answer as adequate as possible to the questions: “Why should I pray? How to pray correctly?”. Thus, the research started from the urge of Saint Apostle Pavel, that of praying without ceasing (1 Thessalonians 5:17), because “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ lives in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me” (Galatians 2:20). This way, Saint Apostle Pavel, though considers himself “a servant of Jesus Christ” (Romans 1:1), nevertheless speaks about “our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 2:4). For this, the working hypothesis, that is analysing the prayer from this perspective of slavery that sets free, and of prayer, as a way of spiritual ascending through which God’s slave reaches the state of Christ living in his being, and therefore of son of God. Double major, theological and psychological and the permanent interest in interdisciplinary analysis and explanation of the religious phenomenon, has created the second part also, about the influence of prayer at psychosomatic level.

The present paper aims to present, in an interdisciplinary perspective, the nature and role of prayer in human life, with emphasis on spiritual and psychological implications. The analysis has as a premise the prayer as a dialogue of man with God, respectively as a means of reaching the creational purpose of humanity, the deification (theosis).

The importance of the theme therefore concerns both the personal and communautaire dimensions of people. It is enough to remind ourselves the famous phrase of avva Evagrius Ponticus: “If you are a theologian, you will pray truly. And if you pray truly, you are a theologian”, to understand that there is no authentic theology without prayer, just as there is no authentic Christian life without prayer. In fact, praying depends on the being of the spiritual life of any Christian, no matter time and place.

Prayer is therefore indispensable on every stage of spiritual life. It initiates man in “life in Christ”, it sustains man along his ascent towards the ecstatic union with God, constituting also the means of perfect knowledge, apophatic, “beyond words”, of the stage of enlightenment. As a result, none of those interested in christian theology and spirituality, in general, both patristic and orthodox, especially, cannot exclude the nature and the role of prayer in human’s life.

## TOPICALITY

In one of his writings, the one considered “the father of modern anthropology”, Claude Lévi-Strauss, asked himself a series of questions related to “the end of the cultural supremacy of the Occident”, about the connection between cultural relativism and moral judgement. “In our modern societies - he wrote - relations with others are based only occasionally and fragmentarily on this global experience, on this concrete understanding of subjects by others... We are no longer tied to our past by an oral tradition involving contact with some people, but by books and other documents piled up in libraries... And today we communicate with the vast majority of our contemporaries through all sorts of intermediaries - written documents or administrative mechanisms - which vastly multiply our contacts, but at the same time it gives them a non-authenticity”<sup>1</sup>. Claude Lévi-Strauss then went on to ask whether “the ideological explosions that have been occurring for almost a century and continue to occur - those of Communism and Marxism, that of totalitarianism that has not lost its power in the Third World, and the more recent Islamic integrism - are not rebellion reactions in the face of living conditions that differ bitterly from those of the past.”<sup>2</sup>.

This paper seeks to provide some answers to the serious existential problems that the anthropological problem opens today. Thus, the working hypotheses from which our research starts are: the contemporary human crisis is determined not only by “horizontal” factors - interpersonal relationships - but also “on a vertical scale” - the men’ rapport with God-the Creator; the rediscovery of authenticity according to Claude Lévi-Strauss involves the revalorization of prayer as a means of establishing a climate of normality on the two existential axes mentioned, on “a vertical scale” and on a horizontal scale; finally, this rediscovery claims

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<sup>1</sup> Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Antropologia și problemele lumii moderne* (Original title - *L'Anthropologie face aux problèmes du monde moderne*), translated by Giuliano Sfichi, Polirom Publishing, Iași, 2011, pp. 48-49.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 68-69.

recentering the (post)modern culture on the values of the past, in this case of a Christian past, but not intrinsically contradictory to the values of the man of today.

It is true that we “live in an era of anthropology.”<sup>3</sup> It is not by chance that one of the goals of knowledge regards finding a “common language” about: what is man? Biologists and philosophers, jurists and sociologists, psychologists, physicians and theologians have been concerned about the answer to this question, focusing on the main goal of today's scientific and spiritual efforts.

## **METHODOLOGY**

It is no less true, this holistic approach is still not fully realized. In the theological perspective, the premises of the research refer to the following aspects: 1) Man's opening towards the world presupposes a reference to God (transcendent perspective). 2) The disclosure of human existence is not yet deeply-understood if one only speaks about the cultural mission of man. 3) Animal's environmental dependence is not the same to man, nor to the relationship with the natural world, nor to the familiarity with the cultural world, but to his infinite dependence on God. “What the environment is for the animal, is God for man: the only target in which he can find his peace of mind and where his purpose would be fulfilled”<sup>4</sup>.

Therefore, naturally, our research methodology is one inter-and trans-disciplinary. Thus, the current doctoral project represents the completion of the studies of the undersigned, studies completed by the two degrees obtained, one in Theology, the other in Psychology. We confess that we have always sought the points of complementarity and antagonistic points between these two perspectives, which, we are sure, is also reflected in this paper.

## **THE STAGE OF RESEARCH**

Concerning the theological literature, there are many volumes, books and studies on prayer. These were analyzed from historical, patristic, moral, spiritual perspectives. We will mention here just the most important contributions of some contemporary theologians: Here we will only mention the most important contributions of contemporary theologians Paul

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<sup>3</sup> Wolfarth Pannenberg, *Ce este omul? Antropologia actuală în lumina teologiei* (original title - *What Is Man? Anthropology in Theological Perspective*), translated by Ioan Milea, Herald Publishing, Bucharest, 2012, p. 5.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 17-18.

Evdokimov, *The Prayer in the Eastern Church*, John Breck, *The Power of the Word: In the Worshipping Church*, Gabriel Bunge, *The Prayer in Holy Spirit and Truth*, Vasile Citirigă, *Knowing God through Prayer*, Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh, *The Living Prayer*, Stefan Anagnostopoulos, *Prayer in the World*, a.s.o.

From a psychological point of view, the bibliography regarding the prayer is enframed within the larger point of research about religiousness: Fuller Andrew Reid, *Psychology and Religion: Classical Theorists and Contemporary Developments*; Hood Ralph W., Hill Peter C., Spilka Bernard, *The Psychology of Religion: An Empirical Approach*; Moldovan Ioan, *Introduction into the Psychology of Religious Life*; Newberg A. B., *Principles of Neurotheology*; Paloutzian R. F., Park C. L., *Handbook of the psychology of religion and spirituality*; Spilka, Bernard; Ladd, Kevin L., *The Psychology of Prayer: A Scientific Approach*; Koenig H.G., McGullough M.E., Larson D.B., *Handbook of Religion and Health* and so on. In our research we will base on the diversity of the opinions regarding the prayer's influence on the psychosomatal state of the human being.

Regarding the theological approach, which is a priority in our research, he focuses on the analysis of prayer as a means of authentic communication of man with God. Prayer is the way and the event of the encounter between humanity and divinity in the course of history. The Savior Jesus Christ is the teacher of prayer by the fact that He Himself prayed, through the teachings of the way and pattern of prayer, and through people's prayers to Him. The novelty of Christian prayer is rooted in the biblical tradition of Jewish prayer. The early Christians were from the Jews, and it was to be expected that the prayers of the early Church would also be a human response to the divine words. But the strict boundaries between Jews and peoples have been eliminated in the essence of prayer. Patristic literature broadly reflects the concerns of Fathers of the Church - such as the Cappadocian Fathers, John Chrysostom or Maxim the Confessor - for the clarification and succinct expression of the teaching of faith, the building of a functional and canonical system, and the organization of an own education system, to capitalize and fulfill divine revelation. In their turn, the most notable modern Orthodox theologians were on the same line (see Dumitru Stăniloae, Georges Florovsky, Vladimir Lossky, Paul Evdokimov or Alexander Schmemman).

In the vision of the Fathers of the Church, prayer has an ascendant meaning. It is not just an appeal to God to overcome temptations, or to fulfill the demands of moral life. It is "dialogue with God" or "life with God" (St. Gregory of Nyssa). The intimate closeness of God the Father,

through the Son, in the Holy Spirit, allows man to dwell spiritually at the level of divine purposes and prepare the heavenly life. With all its values, prayer always has a deifying effect on man.

In Christianity, most of the prayers are revealed, so that the link between *lex orandi* and *lex credendi* is constantly underlined. Enzo Bianchi stated an idea related to this fact: “One religion in which faith and prayer do not live together, does not bring any benefit in promoting man’s high pursuits, does not contribute with too much to his moral recovery, being detrimental to his redemption. Our christian religion is the religion of the prayer.”<sup>5</sup> Orthodoxy is in fact doxology, grace brought to God, cult and confession of faith simultaneously. Dorin Opreș adds to those above that “from the beginning to the end of the New Testament, the prayer appears as leit-motif, thus the reading of the Holy Scripture becomes itself a prayer.”<sup>6</sup>

Regarding the approach of our research from a psychological perspective, we will point out that the relationship between faith - expressed by prayer - and human behavior at psychological level has not yet been fully analyzed. Thus, there are studies that do not recognize any positive effect, or that even speak of a negative one of religiosity about health. Belief in an Almighty and Loving God provides emotional safety and supports physical and mental health, but faith in a cruel God who punishes can cause fears, depressive states, and psychosomatic disorders.<sup>7</sup> On the other hand, we find studies that have highlighted the positive effect of religiosity on the quality of human life, especially on the state of health. In the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, more than 2,000 studies were funded on this topic.<sup>8</sup> Most demonstrate the positive role of religiosity on health<sup>9</sup> in the prevention of illnesses, in healing processes, in the approach of suffering from chronic diseases, in the field of palliative medicine, etc.

By underlining the powerful positive effect of religiosity on health, the magazine *Psychologie heute*<sup>10</sup> makes the following remark: “the difference in health condition between a believer and a disbeliever, is similar to that between a non-smoker and a smoker.”

As an example, in the case of old people it has been proved empirically that the religious resources (religious experiences, the beliefs, the religious knowledge and the membership to a religious community) can play a positive role in keeping the wellness and quality of life. Hence,

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<sup>5</sup> Enzo Bianchi, *Cuvânt și rugăciune* (Original title - *Pregare la parola*), translated by Maria-Cornelia Oros, Deisis Publishing, Sibiu, 1996, p. 91.

<sup>6</sup> Dorin Opreș, *Dimensiuni creștine ale pedagogiei moderne*, ed. a III-a, Didactică & Pedagogică Publishing, R.A., Bucharest, 2012, p. 228.

<sup>7</sup> D. Navon, *Resources – a Theoretical Soup Stone?* in *Psychological Review* 91, 1984, pp. 216-234.

<sup>8</sup> A. Büssing, H.G. Koenig, *The Duke University Religion Index (DUREL): A Five-Item Measure for Use*, in *Epidemiological Studies Religions* 2010, pp. 78-85, here p. 79.

<sup>9</sup> Holger Eschmann, *Spiritualität und Heilung. Überlegungen aus theologischer und humanwissenschaftlicher Sicht*, in *Theologisches Gespräch. Freikirchliche Beiträge zur Theologie*, 3 (2013), p. 107.

<sup>10</sup> Theresa Maria de Jong, article in *Psychologie heute*, 3/2005, p. 2.



old people with positive religious conceptions and that run religious activities (praying, going to church), in comparison with the ones who are not religious, have a better health condition, they perceive themselves subjectively as being healthier, they recognize generally a better state of mind, they are more content with life in general, they adapt better emotionally and they are less depressive and fearful, they know rarely physical functional disorders<sup>11</sup>.

Not just the elderly, but everyone aims at a better life. But what is a good life, or a “better” one? Psychological studies have shown that there is a connection between the quality of life, the health condition and the needs for services. The empirical data seem to justify the comprehension of health as a dimension of the quality of life, after some authors the first indicator of the quality of life. Getting ill leads to the most serious problems regarding the old person’s quality of life. The lack of health has some repercussions on many aspects of life.

The quality of life can be conceived even as a desired result of the practice of promoting health or as a determinant of the health condition among the services, making a differentiation between the pathologic, normal or optimal functionality. If before just the macro-economical statistics have been used for measuring the well-being, now the researchers admit that the data supplied by these types of statistics offer only a partial perspective and that there are many other factors, of another nature rather than the economical one, which count in establishing the quality of human life. One requirement of completion of the well-being is the satisfaction of the human needs, some of them being essential (being in good health).

Human needs refer to those resources that people need to survive and function properly in the society they live in. The needs pyramid developed by Maslow comprises six categories of human needs<sup>12</sup>: physiological, security, love, affection and affiliation, self-esteem, self-actualization. Maslow’s original idea is that a need from a higher level can motivate human behaviour only if the needs from the low level have been partially satisfied. It results that they are not separated, but they coexist, they generate each other, they stimulate or they inhibit each other. The big default from Maslow’s hierarchy is the lack of the spiritual needs: An approach of social assistance that does not take into consideration the spiritual dimension of man, of society, of

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<sup>11</sup> E. Idler, *Religion and aging*, in R.H. Binstock, L.K. George (eds.), *Handbook of aging and the social sciences*, San Diego, 2006, pp. 277-300; H.G. Koenig, M.E. McGullough, D.B. Larson, *Handbook of Religion and Health*, New York, 2001; N. KRAUSE, *Religion and Health in Late Life*, in J.E. Birren, K.W. Schaie (eds.), *Handbook of the psychology of aging*, San Diego, 2006, pp. 499-518; K.W. Schaie, N. Krause, A. Booth, *Religious influences on health and well-being in the elderly*, New York, 2004.

<sup>12</sup> Elena Zamfir, *Psihologie socială. Texte alese (Social Psychology. Selected Text)*, Ankarom Publishing, Iași, 1997, pp. 78-79.

creation itself, is meant to remain incomplete and just partially and temporary efficient”<sup>13</sup> Virginia Henderson classifies the elderly’ needs (fundamental needs) as many as fourteen. One of these the spiritual one is defined as: “the need to act according to one’s own beliefs and values, of practicing religion.”

The researches show that the spirituality is a resource against stress. Practicing a sport is situated in the second position and family in the third position. Dürr applied questionnaires in a psychiatry clinic and to the control groups and he noticed that both the strong religious faith, and the strong non-religious belief, atheist is related with a low rate of depression. The lowest was in the case of strong religious persons. The most depressive were the persons with a medium religiousness.. Anette Duerr started her study with the biblical verse from the Revelation 3:15 a.s.o.: “I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot: I would you were cold or hot...”

By analysing the relationship between the religiosity and health condition and mortality (the length of survival-longevity), the conclusions of many studies would be that religiosity correlates positively with: low frequency of cardio-vascular diseases<sup>14</sup> and cancer<sup>15</sup>, less frequently hospitalization and even shorter, as well as a quicker recovery after the surgical interventions and use of less painkillers. It is also signed a better reaction to unhappy events in life, that lead often to depressions, a lower rate of suicide, a bigger life expectancy - longevity<sup>16</sup> and reducing the mortality and that of general morbidity<sup>17</sup>. Religiosity has a positive effect and determines the existence of a better, more efficient immune system, a higher level of T-helper cells, a greater number of white blood cells and of lymphocytes<sup>18</sup> a better answer of the

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<sup>13</sup> Emilia-Maria Sorescu, *Asistența socială a persoanelor vârstnice (Social Assistance for the Elderly)*, in Radu Buzducea, *Sisteme moderne de asistență socială. Tendințe globale și practici locale (Modern Social Assistance Systems. Global Trends and Local Practices)*, Polirom Publishing, Iași, 2009, p. 361.

<sup>14</sup> E. Idler, *Religion and Aging*, in R.H. Binstock, L.K. George (eds.), *Handbook of Ageing and the Social Sciences*, San Diego, 2006, p. 81.

<sup>15</sup> E. Idler, *Religion and aging*, in R.H. Binstock, L.K. George (eds.), *Handbook of Ageing and the Social Sciences*, San Diego, 2006, p. 81.

<sup>16</sup> D.B. Larson, S.S. Larson, *Spirituality’s potential relevance to physical and emotional health; a brief review of quantitative research*, in *Journal of Psychology & Theology* 31 (1), 2003, 37-51 (This was demonstrated in 42 empirical studies with a total of 126,000 respondents and under the control of other variables, which could contribute to longevity.) See also M.E. McCullough, W.T. Hoyt, D.B.Larson, H.G. Koenig, C.Thoresen, *Religious involvement and mortality; a meta-analytik review*, in *Health Psychology* 19 (3), 2000, pp. 211-222.

<sup>17</sup> D.B. Larson, S.S. Larson, „Spirituality’s potential relevance to physical and emotional health; a brief review of quantitative research”, în *Journal of Psychology & Theology* 31 (1), 2003, 37-51 (This was demonstrated in 42 empirical studies with a total of 126,000 respondents and under the control of other variables, which could contribute to longevity.) See also M.E. McCullough, W.T. Hoyt, D.B.Larson, H.G. Koenig, C.Thoresen, *Religious Involvement and mortality; a Meta-analytik Review*, in *Health Psychology* 19 (3), 2000, pp. 211-222.

<sup>18</sup> T. E. Seeman, L.F. Dubin, M. Seeman, *Religiosity/Spirituality and Health: A critical Review of the Evidence for Biological Pathways*, in *American Psychologist*, 58 (1), 2003, p. 63.

hypothalamus-pituitary gland-suprarenal axis to stress<sup>19</sup>, as well as a bigger capacity of coping to the old age.

The prayer for thanking, for veneration, for request, or for confession of faith is a powerful way of personal expression of religiosity. Poloma și Gallup design the differentiation between the ritualic, colloquial, conversational prayer and the supplicant or meditative one<sup>20</sup>. The differentiation of different types of prayer reflects into the capturing of the effects of praying: the existential welfare (conversational prayer), happiness (meditative prayer), overcoming the depression (ritual prayer)<sup>21</sup>.

In most of the studies about age and health it is mentioned about the frequency and the effect of the prayer on a series of parameters of health and of quality of life, as for example: the subjective well-being, the attitude to the acute and chronic illnesses, physical symptoms and sicknesses. Starting from the beneficial aspects of prayer on health, the researches show that the use of religious resources is made separately, according to age. Hence, the elderly over 65 years use a larger specter of types of prayer and have more positive experiences of praying (for example, living the presence of God), rather than young people<sup>22</sup>.

The prayer of God's worship multiplies the joy and intensifies it, through it people open, they are no longer centered on their own person. Actually, the whole relationship of man with God sets the man free from autonomy, selfishness, and places him in the space of co-operation, of communion. But the same effect is also in the prayer for the fellows, being considered a type of social support.

Referring to the importance of prayer in human life, we will recall about a small but admirable study written by C.S. Lewis<sup>23</sup>. This has shown that it is impossible to ever reach a proof of an empirical type, restraining, of the types from science in order to demonstrate incontestably that a miracle has taken place as a consequence of prayer. Also, by simply uttering requests does not mean praying, as much as the fulfillment of a demand addressed to God by a person does not transform this one in a “favorite of the Divinity court”. A possible answer could be found in the sentence spoken by Pascal: “God ordained prayer to give to his creatures the

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<sup>19</sup> T. E. Seeman, L.F. Dubin, M. Seeman, *Religiosity/Spirituality and Health: A critical Review of the Evidence for Biological Pathways*, in *American Psychologist*, 58 (1), 2003, p. 63.

<sup>20</sup> M.M. Poloma, G.H. Gallup Jr., *Varieties for prayer: A survey report*, Philadelphia, 1991, p. 83.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 83.

<sup>22</sup> The figures come from Allbus 2002 Germany, edited by the central archive for empirical sociological research, University of Koeln, Koeln 2002), study of religion and social formation (Bildung), 1999 Switzerland (compare RJ Campiche, *The two faces of religion. Fascination and Disenchantment*, Zuerich 2004). ALLBUS data may be downloaded online.

<sup>23</sup> C.S. Lewis, *Eficacitatea rugăciunii*, in Idem, *Ferigi și elefanți și alte eseuri despre creștinism*, translated by Emanuel Conțac, Humanitas Publishing, Bucharest, 2011, pp. 112-120.

dignity of causality”. Indeed, man is created by God and needs Him as the fountain of eternal life. The prayer is the mean par excellence between the source and the ones forever thirsty. The consequence: “The prayer is not a mechanism. It is not magic. It is not a piece of advice offered to God. Our act, when we pray, more than all our other acts, separated by the continuous act of God himself, the only one in which all the limited causes operate”<sup>24</sup>.

## THE STRUCTURE OF THE PAPER

This work is structured therefore in two large parts, one that analyzes the nature and the role of the prayer from a theological perspective, and another that analyzes the prayer from the perspective of his psychological overtones.

The first chapter seeks to demonstrate the defining element of prayer in God-man’s communication, analyzing its necessary role for salvation both in primordial state and after man’s fall into sin. The nature of prayer is related to the iconic condition of man, who has received the rationality and the power of speech from his Creator, God-Holy Trinity. Created “in the image” and aiming for resemblance, man reveals his Christological and pneumatological character of his existence. The restoration of the image takes place through the Incarnation of the Everlasting Logos, which establishes a new existential and communitaire framework, that of the Church. The prayer in the Church therefore possesses another quality, being sacramental-haric. Thus, in the first sub-chapter of the first chapter, it is discussed about the constitutive elements of man, that certifies the natural state of communion between face and Archetype, as well as the process of recovery of this communion after man’s fall, insisting on continuing the dialogue, until obtaining the Edenic state. In the second subchapter, there is a Christological argumentation of the need for prayer as a dialogue that was initiated by God and interrupted by man by falling, but updated by and through Christ. Thus, Christ is the Word of God who incarnates in order for the bearer to reposition himself in the state of the son of God, and therefore in the position of interlocutor in the dialogue with God. By this, Christ is an example of the word, of the prayer that is accomplished through deed. In the third subchapter, the perspective of concentrating prayer not on something outward, but on the inside, toward the center of being, to discover God in Himself, as St. Gregory the Theologian says: “in quality of earth, I am tied to the after - life, but being also a holy little part, I carry within myself the will for the next life”<sup>25</sup>, hence following David the

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<sup>24</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 119-120.

<sup>25</sup> St. Gregory the Theologian, *Poeme dogmatice (Dogmatic Poems)*, VIII, in PG, volume 37, alin. 452.

Prophet's psalm: "Lift up your heads, O your gates; and be you lift up, your everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in." (Psalm 23:7), Christ being the one who: "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me" (Revelation 3:20), for "Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love" (Ephesians 3:17).

The last subchapter of the first chapter treats the problem of the requests within the prayer. Thus, it is discussed about the "low demands" and "high demands", patristic arguments have been brought and they are related to the benefits of each type of demand and why both requests are necessary in the spiritual practice, for the man to get used to the prayer, in order to reestablish the communication with God and so that one can come into contact with the most profound meanings of the prayer.

The second chapter begins with the argumentation of the idea of a dialectical structure of prayer and ends with the completion of this act through the spiritual ascension of the rediscovery of the self and of God, and thus the assumption of prayer not as a ritual act but as a permanent dialogue between the persons involved, between God and man. Through this status, man redefines prayer as the pre-condition of living with Christ, as Saint Apostle Pavel says in the Epistle to Galatians (Galatians 2:20), in the Kingdom of Heaven. This demonstration is rounded up with the Saint Parents' outlook (especially Clement of Alexandria, avva Evagrius Ponticus, Saint Isaac of Syria, St. Maximus the Confessor, St. Gregory the Theologian), who present a dynamic stage on three steps-slave, servant, son. These steps are analyzed through the confessional ascent, through reference to the self, to the fellow man and to God. Hence, in the first subchapter of the second chapter, the treating of the first step is followed, that of God's slave, through which the supplicant concentrates on himself, on the clearing of the soul and of the body, so that the unity body-soul is being remade. The second chapter concentrates on the second step, that of God's servant, in which the supplicant is the one who is discovering himself, he feels the necessity of communion with God and with the fellow, in order to reach the natural state of perfection. The third state, that of Son of God, or as Saint Apostle Paul "the state of the perfect man" (Ephesians 4:13) is that of the perfect communion on both axes of reference and communication. This step is reaching wisdom in Blessed Augustine's vision, in which man is not just "purifying so much the eye of the heart («oculus cordis» - the interior eye, sight from inside acc.Solil. 1,6-«because the senses of the soul behaves accordingly as some eyes of the mind»)" "through which it can see God."

„This saint will therefore have such a simple and clean heart, tht he will not deviate from the truth not even from the wish to be liked by men and neither from the care of avoiding many inconveniences that hinder his earthling life. A certain son of God rises to wisdom ,that is the last one (...) that, reconciled and peaceful, enjoys to the full”<sup>26</sup>.

Thus, in the second chapter we are offered details about the nature and role of prayer from the perspective of “life in Christ”. To pray possesses not only personal relevance - to attain the individual saving purpose - but also the communitarian, more precisely communitarian-ecclesial”, “for ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:26). The Holy Mysteries are the ones that share with the man the grace of God, because the role of the word - according to Father Dumitru Stăniloae - is to become a mystery. Without practising the prayer the epectatic deifying process is excluded.

The third chapter analyzes prayer from a psychological perspective, taking into account the chronology of research, presenting the oldest to the newest, on the influence of prayer on the psycho-somatic state of man. Firstly, the theories regarding the human behavior (psychoanalytic, behavioral, cognitive, humanistic, respectively Piaget's theory of cognitive development and Erikson's psychosocial development theory) are dealt with in the first subchapter, and it is difficult to define unitary the human behavior, observing the complexity of this construct.

After which one has in view the psychological theories regarding the human behaviour in relation to religion (belonging to L. Kohlberg, J. Fowler, Scott Peck or V. Frankl). These theories have been developed by referring to the religious dimension of the human being,so that the approach touched by the researchers is an integrative one. A special subchapter is dedicated to neurosciences and the psychic processes involved in the behavioral change.

One special relevance for the topic of this paper is given to the presentation of some research studies that had as a subject the analysis of prayer within the psychology of religion and its influence on the human behaviour. These researches are analyzed and presented in order to show the capacity of psychology to observe the healing qualities from a scientific perspective as well as those of harmonising the psychic life but especially of people’s behaviour. Thus, this work tries to dismantle the false idea according to which science is in contradiction to religion and that there is present a war between the two domains that study the human being. The psychology of religion and implicitly neurotheology are the products themselves of the collaboration between the two domains.

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<sup>26</sup> Blessed Augustine, *De doctrina christiana*, translated by Marian Ciucă, Humanitas Publishing, Bucharest, 2002, p. 123.

## CONCLUSIONS

Christianity is defined as a religion of the book, and this book is nothing other than the Bible or the Holy Scripture. Just as there is no human being without reason, no logos, so we can not talk about the Christian faith without the Word *par excellence*, the divine Logos incarnate (John 1:1-5).

The words acquire value only if they are underlain on real and on truth, which confers an authentic meaning. To talk about the religious text implies a double requirement: on the one hand, we rediscover the same prerequisite as any other text written by a human, but on the other hand, the revealed text also cracks another perspective, that crosses beyond the human being. For that purpose the theologians speak about the revealed word as about a dual reality, one divine-human; without being able to perceive the background, its hidden meaning. From a religious point of view, there is no neuter word, and this is where the great responsibility for the spoken or written words arises (see Matthew 12:36).

The words of the prayer show fundamentally that man utters sometimes words in order to express even what it cannot be expressed. Of course, an antinomy is here obvious, but not a logical contradiction. The famous Evagrian apothegm “the one who has a pure prayer is a true theologian, and the one who is a true theologian has a pure prayer” shows the close relation between knowledge and glorification. Aware by the danger represented by the temptation of separating one from the other, the theologian Vladimir Lossky said about the theological thinking: “But we must beware of it to become an escape from the necessary «constraint» of the prayer and to replace the mystery lived in silence with mental schemes, for sure, easy to apply and whose use can thrill, but who are, on final analysis, barren”<sup>27</sup>. In other words, *the reality* of the prayer is not connected just with reason, but with the living relationship between the man and God.

By reaching the end of our research, we underline the following aspects from a theological-spiritual point of view:

From a pure theoretical approach, in his primary and elementary form, the prayer can be defined as an act of cult through which man enters a communion with a superior being, holy, suprasensitive, which, in a certain way, conceives and perceives personally, as real and present and on whose power he feels dependent. This superhuman power must be generated by a

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<sup>27</sup> Vladimir Lossky, *Introducere în Teologia Ortodoxă* (Original title - *Orthodox Theology: an Introduction*), translated by Remus ndb Lidia Rus, Enciclopedică Publishing, Bucharest, 1993, p. 14.

personal being, capable of governing the world and the universe through an act of will. The man's prayer, no matter if it contains words, gestures or attitudes, is in essence a communication between "I" and "You", no matter whether it is verbal or gestural. Or as in the words of the Psalmist: "Deep calls unto deep..." (Psalms 41:9).

The prayer is the food of the soul in search of fulfillment. "The words and the food are made from the same matter. They are born from the same mother: hunger" said Rubem Alves, and Jesus Christ „was thirsting after an absent food, its only proof was the Word”, added the same author. By paraphrasing Feuerbach, "man is what he eats", in as much as he is what he "utters".

One important aspect of the prayer is formed by the differentiation between the proper prayer and the magic formulae (the prayer of faith versus the prayer of the superstition), a widely spread differentiation in the Romanian mentality even by its disregard. Whereas in prayer the man tries through his power of convincing to touch the divinity to have his wish accomplished, the reciter of the magic formula tries to constrain the divinity, or to force the effects of the prayer by the words themselves of the magic formula, which are given an immanent and infallible power. The researchers of the history of religions have not found obvious evidence in favour of the temporal priority of magic and of prayer, both of them coexisting from the start<sup>28</sup>. Hieromonk Gabriel Bunge was talking about the prayer as like an "inner work" "*Tell me how you pray, and I will tell you what you think*", we could say, by changing a well-known proverb. In the prayer, more exactly in the practice of the prayer, the essence of the fact of being a christian becomes obvious, the way in which the believer relates to God and to his fellows"<sup>29</sup>.

In the spiritual life, the prayer could be the bond that converts the theoretical knowledge in a life fact, and the crucial moments from life in rational sacrifice brought to God, after the eucharistic model, as Saint Isaac of Syria teaches us: "Because we see that the Holy Spirit comes down over the bread and wine brought on the shrine, the moments when the priest is ready and is praying and asks for mercy from God and he gathers his thoughts in this request. And it is to Zacharia that the angel was shown while praying, and foretold John's birth. The same, to Peter when he was praying in the house, in the sixth hour, it has been shown the vision that led him to the calling of the nations through the cloth dropped from the sky with the living animals in it. Also, it is to Cornelius that the angel was shown and he told him of the written things about him,

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<sup>28</sup> R. Arbesmann, *Prayer*, in *New Catholic Encyclopedia* (NCthE), Volume XI, Pau to Pyx, McGraw-Hill Book Company, New York, 1967, p. 667.

<sup>29</sup> Gabriel Bunge, *Practica rugăciunii personale după Tradiția Sfinților Părinți sau Comoara în vase de lut*, translated by Ioan I. Ică jr, Deisis Publishing, Sibiu, 1996, p. 17.



when he was praying. And to Jesus, the son of Navi, God has spoken while he was sitting down at the prayer. The same, the priest was listening next to the altar, over the shrine, God's words ;and that is where he was mysteriously receiving from God the visions for everything that was useful along time; there where the priest entered once a year in the scariest of all the periods of the prayers of all the peoples gathered by Israel, the priest heard God's words by an unspoken, dreadful vision, when he entered the Holy of Holies and he would lift himself up... Thus, all the visions shown to the saints take place while praying. Because what other time is so holy and right for the holy receiving of the gifts (charisms), as the time of the prayer, in which someone talks to God?"<sup>30</sup>.

We cannot forget about the tradition of the prayer in the Church. The prayer cannot be separated from paternity. The community of those that have prayed even from the beginning of the Church up to the present discover their unity and continuity through the prayer, affirming at the same time the unity between *lex credendi* and *lex orandi*. "What is meant by Orthodox Tradition to the present day is how to do, think, pray, read the Bible, organize Christian communities, a way that was specific to the old Church and to those we call the Holy Fathers. There is a fundamental continuity between the Tradition of the Holy Fathers and of the Church of the first age and the Orthodox Church today. This constitutes the context of our prayer" stated Marc-Antoine Costa de Beauregard.<sup>31</sup> There are so many ways of praying, as many as spiritual states of mind of the ones who pray. A theoretical classification is just the generalization and the reduction to schema of prayer modes. "Depending on the variety of gifts, the very forms of prayer are innumerable. St. John Casian said that: Their number is so great that they can be found in a soul, or rather in all souls, states and dispositions", the same father quoted<sup>32</sup>.

From the point of view of the other perspective from which we have studied the prayer, the psychological one, the following aspects are to be considered:

Psychology has thus tried to investigate this reality of religiosity so as to see to what extent and how the human being is influenced. For this, a new psychological department has appeared, and that is the Psychology of Religion, that suggests just the study of the entire religious phenomenon and its influence on human being. Along history on this department one has tried to conceptualize and to formulate a study hypothesis, that would comply with both the scientific rigors, and also the human interest, thus some have considered it as being a science of

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<sup>30</sup> St. Isaac the Syrian, *Cuvinte despre nevoiță*, XXXIII, in *Filocalia (Philokalia)*, volume 10, translated by Dumitru Stăniloae, Humanitas Publishings, Bucharest, 2003, p. 178.

<sup>31</sup> Marc-Antoine Costa de Beauregard, *Rugați-vă neîncetat (Pray without Ceasing)*, translated by Rodica Buga and Nicolai Buga, Ed. I.B.M.B.O.R., Bucharest, 1998, p. 21.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 248.

the soul, that studies the relationship between the human being and divinity, others have centered on the psychic processes involved in the religious manifestation of man. Other theoreticians have considered that the psychology of religion is a department of psychology that studies the psychic experience oriented towards religion.

Among these definitions, but also through the studies done until present, it is shown that the psychology of religion does not try to answer the human torments related to divinity, neither to verify the religious reliability, but it wants to analyze the religious torments and their dynamics from the human perspective.

Along with the conceptualisation of psychology and its proposal as a science through the experimental method, the religious phenomenon was debated by the exponents of the science of psychology. Among these ones Freud can be found, who thought as it has already been told, that religion is not something else than a neurosis. Alfred Adler, though a supporter of a psycho-analytical approach, does not agree with his mentor and he formulates a new theory of conflictual causality. This was suggesting the concept of inferiority complex, as being the reason of the conflicting states. Thus, Adler builds up his theory by introducing life duties, that he concentrated in five categories: society, work, love, self and the search for the meaning. Next to Adler is also Krankl, who focuses on the last working duty, conferring, as it has been shown before, the central position in the new approach built by him.

Jung, being interested in “homo religiosus”, psychology, tries to show that psychology studies the human being’s revealed facts, for this, any psychic experience must be analyzed because through its shown presence, this proves its truthfulness, “such experiences, not at all rare, make us hardly to believe that the psychic is nothing or is not than an imagined fact. But it is not there where a short-sighted mind seeks it. It exists, but not under a physical shape. Indeed, the only form of existence that we know directly is the psychic one.”<sup>33</sup>.

Jung considered that religion as being a psychic function, because not just the adult person manifests religiously, but even since birth, man is endowed with this religious dimension, fact that makes Jung believe that in case of eliminating religiosity from the personal life, this can lead to a series of psychic disorders that are not beneficial to the human being.

The concept of religious behaviour is one intensely studied by the psychology of religion, because this science can analyze just the empirical things of the religious, an issue that makes that the central element to be occupied by the religious behaviour. Religion and the religious behaviour are considered by some researchers as being the dynamics between language,

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<sup>33</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 21.

emotional states, measurable reactions, symbols, values, which are related to a supernatural being. Thus, psychology concentrates on studying these psychic actions, of the behavioural systems, and of the specific psychic states of mind, so that the religious phenomenon can be described as much as possible, which must be connected with the thoroughness of life and of its acts. The human behaviour is seen as reaction of the human being to certain stimuli from the environment as well as it is part of the inner, psychic conflicts, thus, the religious behaviour can be defined as being the reaction to the religious stimulus, to divinity. The reaction regarding the religious stimulus, conceptualizes through feelings, experiences, motivations expressed both at a communicational level, and at a behavioural level. By implementing this idea that the values, the motivations, the will, the psychic states of mind, behaviours, influence a person's life, one can tell about the religious person that his life is influenced by his faith.

The psychology of religion tries therefore to understand religion from a psychological point of view. Its purpose is to understand the way in which faith operates both personally, socially, and culturally. Psychology aims to understand the human being by studying human motivation, cognition, and human behavior. Also, psychology is interested in the influence of religious behaviors and beliefs on other mental and behavioral processes in order to be able to define the human person as real as possible.

On the other hand, the limitation of psychology of religion is that it does not study religion directly, hence it cannot discuss about God or the religious truths, but only about the religious aspects seen in the studied persons, persons in relation to their faith and how faith can influence certain aspects of those persons' life.

Nevertheless, this fact does not signify that the studies on prayer from psycho-sociological perspective would not be valid or would be worthless. On the contrary, they are relevant for the implications that prayer has on the contemporary man. From the numerous studies presented in our work, we finally bring into question some significant research for both the scientific community and the theological community, such as that undertaken by Galanter Marc and his collaborators<sup>34</sup>, study about prayer and people with alcohol dependence. Researchers have observed that many people who have alcohol dependence once enrolled in the Anonymous Alcoholics Association, the desire to drink has decreased with the passage of time within the association, and one of the presumptive factors of this behavior are the specific prayers within the Association's programs. The objective of the research was to define all experimental

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<sup>34</sup> Marc Galanter și colab., *An initial fMRI study on neural correlates of prayer in members of Alcoholics Anonymous*, in *The American Journal of Drug and Alcohol Abuse*, 2016, p. 173.

and neural correlations of the decrease in alcohol appetite after the prayers spoken together with the members with long-term abstinence. Galanter and colleagues carried out measurements on 20 members of the Association, who managed to refrain from drinking for a long time. A self-assay measurement was used, and a functional magnetic resonance imaging measurement of differential neuronal response to images of alcoholic appetite was obtained under three experimental conditions: after reading the prayers, after irrelevant news have been read and after passive watching. The results showed that in the condition experienced with prayers, compared to the other two conditions, less desire was self-reported; increased left anterior middle gyrus, upper left parietal lobe, bilateral preconvex, and intermediate mid-temporal bilateral gyrus. The results showed that the prayer of the members of the association is associated with a relative reduction of the self-reported desire for alcohol and the concomitant involvement of neural mechanisms that reflect the control of attention and emotion.

Linardakis and his collaborators<sup>35</sup> conducted a cross-sectional study examining the relationship of religious and spiritual beliefs with the adoption and presence of many behavioral risk factors in 16,557 adults in Europe aged 50. The results of this study showed that those who benefited from religious education and use prayer presented fewer risk factors.

An increasing number of empirical studies, as well: Bearson and Koenig<sup>36</sup>; Cronan, Kaplan, Posner, Blumberg, and Kozin<sup>37</sup>; Hank and Schaan<sup>38</sup>; Saudia, Kinney, Brown and Young-Ward<sup>39</sup>; Sutton and Murphy<sup>40</sup>, indicates that private prayer is used as a coping mechanism by a significant number of people in health-related contexts. Studies have also been carried out as well like that of Koenig<sup>41</sup> or Carlson, Bacaseta and Simanton<sup>42</sup> who studied prayer as a coping mechanism in relation to anxiety and associated states, identifying positive effects. Positive

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<sup>35</sup> B. Linardakis & Co., *Are religiosity and prayer use related with multiple behavioural risk factors for chronic diseases in European adults aged 50+ years?*, in *The Royal Society for Public Health Journal*, Elsevier Ltd., 2015, pp. 436-443.

<sup>36</sup> L. Bearson, H. Koenig, *Religious cognitions and use of prayer in health and illness*, in *Gerontologist Journal*, no. 30, 1990, pp. 249–253.

<sup>37</sup> T.A. Cronan, R.M. Kaplan, L. Posner, E. Blumberg, F. Kozin, *Prevalence of the use of unconventional remedies for arthritis in a metropolitan community*, in *Arthritis and Rheumatism Journal*, no. 32, 1989, pp. 1604–1607.

<sup>38</sup> K. Hank, B. Schaan, *Cross-national variations in the correlation between frequency of prayer and health among older Europeans*, in *Research on Aging Journal*, no. 30, 2008, pp. 36–54.

<sup>39</sup> T.L. Saudia, R.M. Kinney, K.C. Brown, L. Young-Ward, *Health locus of control and helpfulness of prayer*, in *Heart and Lung Journal*, no. 20, 1991, pp. 60-65.

<sup>40</sup> T.D. Sutton, S.P. Murphy, *Stressors and patterns of coping in renal transplant patients*, in *Nursing Research Journal*, no. 38, 1989, pp. 46-49.

<sup>41</sup> H.G. Koenig, *Religious behaviours and death anxiety in later life*, in *The Hospice Journal*, no. 4, 1988, pp. 3-24.

<sup>42</sup> C.R. Carlson, P.E. Bacaseta, D.A. Simanton, *A controlled evaluation of devotional meditation and progressive relaxation*, in *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, no. 16, 1988, pp. 362–368.

effects were also observed in psychological recovery in people with cardiac problems, studies conducted by Ai, Bolling and Peterson<sup>43</sup> and Ai, Dunkle, Peterson and Bolling<sup>44</sup>.

In the research led by Anselmo Ferreira Vasconcelos<sup>45</sup> it is demonstrated that convergence between rational and non-rational decision-making can be optimized by integrating more religious principles.

Baldwin focuses his studies on depression because he thinks depression is a global problem, and if it finds its roots in childhood, then it is very complicated to treat. His studies have shown that prayer is effective in reducing depressive symptoms.<sup>46</sup>

Some of the most interesting psychological research on the religious dimension of man is those of Lindeman and his collaborators, who have conducted two researches in which they wanted to analyze how people who declare atheism react when they are being asked to provoke God to do wrong both to them and to their close relatives. The results showed that atheists, in their verbal reports, did not consider that the phrases that provoked God were unpleasant, as did the faithful. However, the level of skin conductivity has shown that the task in which people ask God to do terrible things was as stressful for atheists as for religious people, and that atheists were more affected by phrases with God than the other two types phrases. This implies that atheists' attitudes towards God are ambivalent, in the sense that their explicit beliefs are inconsistent with their affective response. For this, the results indicate that even the atheists have difficulty provoking God to injure themselves or their loved ones. Researchers point out that these results do not necessarily mean that atheists do not speak seriously when they say they do not believe in God, or that the emotional reaction of atheists is similar for the same reasons as believers when provoking God but studies suggest that reactions affective relationship to God and explicitly expressed beliefs of an atheist, have opposite valences.<sup>47</sup>

These studies prove that the presence of faith and its manifestation through prayer is beneficial to the human being, creating a balance and communion between body and soul, such as the paradise, as shown in the first chapter of the present doctoral research. Thus, this thesis

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<sup>43</sup> A.L. Ai, S.F. Bolling, C. Peterson, *The use of prayer by coronary artery bypass patients*, in *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion*, no. 10, 2000, pp. 205–220.

<sup>44</sup> A.L. Ai, R.E. Dunkle, C. Peterson, S.F. Bolling, *The role of private prayer in psychological recovery among midlife and aged patients following cardiac surgery*, in *The Gerontologist Journal*, no. 38, 1998, pp. 591-601.

<sup>45</sup> Anselmo Ferreira Vasconcelos, *Intuition, prayer, and managerial decision-making processes: a religion-based framework*, in *Emerald Journal of Management Decision*, vol. 47, no. 6, 2009, pp. 930-949.

<sup>46</sup> Philip R. Baldwin, *Neural correlates of healing prayers, depression and traumatic memories: A preliminary study*, in *Complementary Therapies in Medicine Journal*, no. 27, Elsevier Ltd, 2016, pp. 123–129.

<sup>47</sup> Marjaana Lindeman, Bethany Heywood, Tapani Riekkii, Tommi Makkonen, *Atheists Become Emotionally Aroused When Daring God to Do Terrible Things*, in *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion*, volume 24, no. 2, 2014, pp. 124-132.

seeks to relaunch the collaboration between religion and science in order to produce as many results as beneficial to the person. What this work proposes is the continuation of research on religion and, in particular, prayer at national level, as there is a major deficiency in the psychological studies of the Romanian population and on the particularities of Orthodox Christianity in Romania, which began with a both qualitative and quantitative research of the psychological implications of prayer on believers in Romania, but which could not be completed, for which it could not be included in this paper, but will be published at its completion so as to provide arguments specific to the Romanian population related to the religious dimension and its psychological implications.

As regards the theological part, we consider that this research offers a clearer picture of prayer as a spiritual journey, from simple act to state. In future research, one can analyze in detail each of the three stages and, together with the psychology of religions, analyze the content of the prayer so as to provide a deeper image of the experience of the prayer at the moments of speaking the words of prayer.