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## For a Paradigm of Spiritual Education

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## For a Paradigm of Spiritual Education

Emil LAZĂR<sup>1</sup>

### *Abstract*

*The spiritual paradigm is considered a “key-concept, with clarifying potential”. It can also be “candidate paradigm”, as it has to create itself a field/ a domain, to transit towards maturity. We can also speak of a “model, frame” which are/is subject to the articulation and specifications, in the new or more stringent conditions. This approach tries to reinforce the existence and implications of a psychology of spiritual education, by the argumentation coming through spiritual anthropology, given the close proximity of “spiritual psychology” and “spiritual anthropology”.*

**Keywords:** *paradigm; spiritual education; patristic anthropology; spiritual psychology; spiritual anthropology.*

### 1. Introduction

In the context of scientific knowledge, the concept of paradigm represented a (significant) step towards humanization of science.

The spiritual paradigm is considered a „key-concept, with clarifying potential” [8]. It can also be “candidate paradigm”, as it has to create itself a field/ a domain, to transit towards maturity. We can also speak of a “model, frame” which are/is subject to the articulation and specifications, in the new or more stringent conditions.

The quoted author sees the paradigmatic value of this concept, not only at the level of feelings/personal beliefs, but also as an operational extension at the level of “professional judgements”, giving it methodological attributes.

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Starting from the work of Th. Kuhn (The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, 2008), the following statements, are important:

- Achievements are new enough to attract a sustainable group of followers, sending them away from rival ways of scientific activity;
- Their achievements were sufficiently opened and unresolved as to leave the settlement of many types of problems in the task of the new group of practitioners. [5].
- There are three objectives for factual scientific investigation:
  - Class of revealing facts;
  - Facts that can be directly compared;
  - Empirical labour.
- They have conceptual, theoretical, instrumental and methodological options.

## 2. Theoretical Background

Spiritual anthropology, which deals with “the origin and exceptional position of human being/man within creation” [1], unlike profane/ unholy anthropology, emphasizes human transcendence in relation to the creation.

It must be said that a spiritual education paradigm is a qualitative and an observational one.

Methodological, (from the methodologic point of view), spiritual anthropology analysis, premise for a paradigm of spiritual education, sits/places itself between two models, promoted since Christian antiquity, (the fourth golden century of church): one of ascending knowledgement of God, of God’s anthropology (starting from human being, as Saint Augustin says) and the second one, of descending knowledgement, of man’s theology (starting from the prototype, as Gregory of Nyssa, says), [4].

## 3. Argument of the paper

This approach tries to reinforce the existence and implications of a psychology of spiritual education, by the argumentation coming through spiritual anthropology, given the close proximity of “spiritual psychology” and „spiritual anthropology”.

#### 4. Arguments to support the thesis

According to the Old Testament, the three functions/attributes of the soul (that theology holistically calls them „God’s image in man/inside human being”) are: reason, free will and feeling.

Reason is identified by patristic anthropology (as a result of) due to its functionality, on the basis of which, according to biblical paragraph, man was able to distinguish the living creatures of the earth, to categorize them and give them names (lower/inferior mental operations).

Free will helps man to choose between doing well or wrong, completing the profile of human personality.

Feeling (affectivity) was manifested before the fall into disobedience through love and trust in God, effects on the basis of which spiritual education based its methodology.

#### 5. Arguments to argue the thesis

A topic of discussion, theologically analysed, is the heart, considered to be “the river (source)/principle of life”, in that it hosts “The Spirit”, but also “organ of intelligence and knowledge, of contemplation and interiorization, as headquarters of attention and as regulatory framework of moral consciousness” [1].

In order to identify that „disciplinary matrix”, is useful to capture „the interdependence of soul functions from the perspective of an old-testament psychology” [1].

#### 6. Structure

The soul gets more accurate nuances in the light of The New Testament writings, being „not only a component/a part of the human being, but the training, unitarian and dynamic principle of personality, the substantial and rational element that gives personal and individual shape to the human being, through which is distinguished both from God and other creatures” [3].

Synoptic writings (the first three Gospels) define the soul („psihy) in terms of spiritual moods/state of mind, while Saint Paul considers this notion as „the animated principle of the body and the ground of emotional life” and Saint Peter represents the entire personality [1].

In other writing of the New Testament, the word „heart” denotes personality, the inner life or man’s character (Mark, VII, 21). At the same

time it is used to express man's „emotional life (affects), the volitional and intellectual one, too” [1].

The writings of apostolic fathers, who lived after the first Christian century, bring into discussion the longing for perfection, the adornment of the soul with virtues, man's obligations toward his own person, „the perfection” being understood as a full participation of human being, revealed in a „teandric” (god and man) process.

The culture and the preoccupations of the apologists moving away from the judeo-hellenistic environment, the philosophy which the apologists of the second century were familiar with, was an eclectic mix of platonic, Aristotelian and stoic ideas.

In patristic anthropology, is brought into discussion from this period of time, „free will” and Plato is called upon with his affirmation that „the guilt is of the man who chooses” (The Republic, X, 617e).

At the same time is taken into account the dual nature of the human being: body and soul („What is man but a rational being made up of soul and body? (...) what results from the combination of both, is called *man*”, *About the Resurrection*, [1]).

Man's self-improvement, proposed by some eastern parents, is seen through the discovery of the deposit of powers hidden in themselves (self-hidden powers) and their bringing to life” [2].

It is talked about reason, „the leading part of the soul” and about the subordination of body activity to that of the soul.

Free will is the expression of spiritual freedom, and the greatness of reason gives beauty to the human soul, equally with human dignity.

Due to the fact that „all the human qualities can be perceived more easily”, senses, intelligence, memory, thinking and expression, are rarely analysed in Christian anthropology. Reason manifests itself as inner speech /logos, but it can also be external through word. Inner reason is a movement of the soul that is realized in the act of reasoning without phonetic expression.

For the parents of the fourth Christian century, spiritual beauty is achieved by renewal, a continuous beauty, for the beauty and feeling of love have no limits. According to them, the soul has in it „the true reason increased with kindness, and through mind, man connects with those that are not noticed by the senses, of those who are not now present in front of the senses, but there have been some other time, through mind man thinks about an unlimited future (meditation lives in a wider circle)” [1].

At this point is made the connection between the rational judgements, specific to the human being, and the capacity to discern between right and wrong. It is spoken of „the capacity of the soul /souls’

capacity to think, to love, to want/desire”, movement/action intrinsically spiritual (Athanasius).

Alongside with rationality, the soul has other attributes such as free will (which had been spoken of in the second century) and possesses willpower, sovereignty, purity, love.

The relationship between body and soul is presented by the anthropology of this period in the light of compliance with the Divinity: „man as a being of body and soul, has the mission to make the matter/substance organized in the body, more and more transparent for the soul, (...) increasingly participant in the conscious human life” [1].

Customization of the human being means constant affirmation of man’s spiritual foundation and the affirmation of the communion with God and with (the other) fellow humans.

The human being is offered not only the horizon of perfection, but also the ways to succeed: vertically, in the relation with the Divinity and horizontally, with those he lives with and with whom he is in relation and in interaction. And, equally important is the fact that human perfection means *participation* (as personal effort - subjective salvation and in communion – objective salvation).

„The science is able and has the duty to study the substance/matter that man was made of, but any serious scientist knows that it is impossible to investigate with objective science the model on the basis/the basic model of which man was created. As the truth of the icon lies in the person painted on it, so the truth of human being lies in his model. All this because the model organizes, seals and configures the matter and, at the same time, it attracts it” [1].

A human goal is (re)establishing the inner harmony, following the path of virtue and breaking away from those that are harmful to spiritual life.

Patristic anthropology gives iconic attributes to the human knowledge, promoting a principle of antic thought, that of apophatic, the reality which allows the discovery of the divine Unknown in human ontology (Gregory of Nyssa). At the basis of this ignorance stand the soul immensity and human spirituality.

The human issue, the practical, realistic anthropology are concerns of the fourth century Christian anthropology. The main theme is that of the quality as a person of the human being: „man is mainly characterized by the mystery of love that pushes people from inside them towards a natural communion; personal existence conscious in time: inseparable psychosomatic unity, with immeasurable psychological depth; free, sovereign, creative, rational, knowing etc. – these are attributes that realistically reveals man’s true constitution” (Confessions, X, 17).

Man is understood as „a whole, perfect being”, has conscience (being taught by the law put in his nature”) and virtues („the beauty of the soul”), therefore he is moral, has humanity and trusts in reason.

The patristic anthropology asserts the ancient philosophical conception „nosce te ipsum” (know yourself), a vision of knowledge by retrieving the intention of the One Who created the human being: „noverim Te, noverim me” (knowing You, I know myself”, Augustine).

From the quality as a person of the human being it has reached to his singularity, with all the psychosomatic, in all its ontological rationality: „the whole spirituality of the human being has the source in his spirit, but understood as the source of contemplation and sensibility that particularly updates itself, especially through the matter of the body and from the meeting/encounter with it” [11].

It is spoken of „a function and an obligation of man within the whole creation” [6], having the principle of measure in „mastering nature”. Everything that happens inside the human being has a universal significance, his destiny determining the destiny of nature/cosmos. Man is the spiritual axis of every created being.

## 7. Conclusions

The patristic anthropology has implicit and explicit rules (even with a higher degree of generality), „that can be taken out and applied as research rules” [5]. We may speak, starting from the presented patristic anthropological preface, of an agreement to identifying a paradigm of spiritual education without agreeing with its full interpretation and rationing.

There are rules accepted and promoted within its carrying out and existence, although, as the presented opinions can be tracked across time, „the period before/ahead a paradigm is usually stressed by frequent and serious arguments about methods, problems and legitimate solving criteria” [5].

The methodology is accompanied by a new vocabulary and new concepts, the observation (as a research method) is followed by concepts, though „further development requests constructing/drawing a complicated apparatus, the development of a vocabulary, a refinement of concepts (...), a professionalization meaning a detail/breakdown of information and an accurate correspondence between theory and observation” [5].

Dogma and the deduction are two attributes that can be considered specific for spiritual education as a paradigmatic form (pre-paradigmatic stage). As a process, deduction starts from accepted findings and is led at the level of concepts by significant contributions and imposed in time. This is also the case with the conceptual system of spiritual education.

Dogma is the reality and the immutable/unchanging level of conceptual system, the unchangeable truth, transferred to the level of personal beliefs that give value of „*hic et nunc*”?

These two specificities offer a certain emergence to the conceptual system of spiritual education and „identify/legitimate and justify” those „crises” (within the meaning of valuable judgements) that give a fascinating, personal and an „*ex cathedra*” touch to the spiritual domain.

A final argument (decisive/undeniable) in favour of a paradigm (understood and accepted) of spiritual education would be the role, utility and functionality that it holds for institutions (the structure of some institutions) or individual, for the personal development of people. The presence of a spiritual education, structured performed as learning situations/ contexts in an educational curriculum system, alongside with personal transfer achieved by those who can participate in such didactic actions/ approaches, has many benefits.

There is certain circularity among the personal values promoted by spiritual education at the level of individuals/family (Miller, *The child and spirituality*) and at the moral level of society/community, as personal wellbeing mediates the progress of society [7].

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