

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION
"DECEMBER 1st 1918" UNIVERSITY OF ALBA IULIA
Doctoral School of Theology

THEODICY. GOD'S JUSTICE AND EVIL
(SUMMARY)

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Alba Iulia

2024

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This doctoral thesis, entitled "Theodicy. God's Justice and Evil", belongs primarily to the realm of dogmatics. The thesis shows that Orthodox theodicy – that is, the Church's confession of God's Justice and evil – clarifies why- and how- The Almighty allows evil and suffering, and it does this by way of a progressive systematization. Always seeking to articulate what "has been believed everywhere, always and by all", that is, what is required to be accepted by every Orthodox theologian, the thesis also argues that exclusive disjunctions such as Justice *or* Mercy of God, Old Testament *or* New Testament, eschatology as the outcome of theodicy *or* salvation are improper and even impossible. Regarding the question of defining terms, it should be noted that there is only one term that may be considered unusual: theodicy. (Other terms which are peculiar but not that unusual, such as naturalism – i.e. the requirement of "scientific" replacing God with "nature" –, are sufficiently clarified in the course of the argumentation). The term "theodicy" started to be used in theology, too, only after Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz – from the 18th century onwards, to be more precise. Its suitability as a concise name for the topic in question is something pointed out in a schematic fashion by the first chapter. Before this chapter, the introduction of the paper debunks the idea that theodicy necessarily consists of "rationalization." Indeed, such tendencies and such theodicies do exist, especially in contemporary times, but they distort the witness of the Church. Something to be also mentioned here, in the first paragraph of this summary, is that, despite all appearances, this study does not claim to settle this topic in a definitive and exhaustive way. For example, even the aforementioned contemporary theodicies and anti-theodicies need to be thoroughly parsed from an Orthodox perspective in the future and the same is true of the typical fashion in which theodicy has been understood within the historical christian confessions.

In terms of content, the introduction indicates the incompatibility between God and evil. And it indicates the unexpectedly refreshing ultimate role played by the stalemate in which the distortions of theodicy end up (be they rationalizing, be they skeptical). In these two points, the introduction anticipates the first chapter. At the same time, the introduction leads progressively towards the schematization of the Orthodox theodicy: In short, this classical theodicy (1) proceeds precisely from the perception of the said incompatibility, evaluates objections to the Goodness of God, (2) identifies evil as ἀδικία (unrighteousness, misdeed) that causes suffering, (3) confesses the Atonement and the Healing brought by Christ, Who is the fulfillment of Justice, and, finally, (4) calls for the personal and crucial assumption of Christ's Self-Sacrifice for everyone, in order to achieve the true union with

God. Second, by offering an overview of the recent, relevant previous Orthodox discussions of this topic, the introduction indicates all the details of theodicy. Formally, the introduction begins by specifying the purpose and the method(s) of study: *The primary purpose is to demonstrate that the theodicy of the Church is coherent.* The way is to unfold this theodicy in all its magnitude. It is a project that has been little attempted so far. Methodologically, the research undertaken throughout this paper sometimes proceeds in a demanding way, the reader being invited to carefully follow the ideational associations. On the other hand, the unfolding of the theodicy offered tries to always be attentive to the need to unite several horizons of understanding, past and present – in other words, to assume Holy Tradition in a judicious way. As for the scientific method, the work adheres to it, but improves it in the proper way of theology, namely by capitalizing on the fact that the supreme Truth is God Himself.

In its main part, the introduction primarily focuses on presenting the current state of research. The contributions of fifteen representative authors are evaluated, listed in the order of a "logical" connection between their contributions. Here are the main points: Constantin Pavel, in his work *The Problem of Evil in Blessed Augustine* (published in 1938 but defended earlier as a doctoral thesis), attempts to reclaim for orthodoxy this theologian that belongs to late antiquity. However, this is hindered by various inconsistencies of this author, such as the thesis of evil as a defect in all things created. Father Dumitru Stăniloae refers to Pavel's work in his article *Thoughts on the Problem of Evil*, where he criticizes this thesis. The dogmatician recalibrates the theological landscape by emphasizing human freedom and diabolical temptation. Unfortunately, he does not stop at affirming the classical testimony (that evil is not an ontological deficit of creation, but rather disobedience to God). In a manner later reproved by Father George Remete, Stăniloae even affirms an apparent positive character of evil. In his contributions – especially in *The Suffering of Man and the Love of God* – Father Remete contrasts the experience of suffering with God's Love. Overall, he bears witness to the Orthodox belief that in this relationship, one must take into consideration the original condition of creation, the fall, the Incarnation, and the final condition of being. The fall of the world caused suffering as an accident. Through His Incarnation as a man, the very Creator embraced suffering and death, overcoming sin through them, redeeming us, and opening through the Cross the Union with Him. The mentioned contrast and this Call addressed to us by God are subtly indicated by Father Florensky, starting from tensions and even contradictions that he observes between rationality and certain irrational tendencies in the structure of the world and of the human intellect. In *The Pillar and Foundation of Truth: An*

Orthodox Theodicy in Twelve Rational Letters, rationality is shown to be illuminated only by faith. This fact is demonstrated primarily by the theophoric minds of the Saints of the Church, themselves enlightened by the Person of Truth, Who Himself is God's Justice. Contributions such as those of the last two mentioned Fathers complement each other and balance out, forming a coherent whole of the Church's theodicy. Of course, certain tendencies like Florensky's apocatastical views have no place in this classical portrait. This type of views will be approached in the subsequent chapters of the thesis..

Other works, such as the Romanian one belonging to Father Bogdan Constantin Taifas, correctly complement the landscape of theodicy, although – in the case of the named author, e.g. – in a complicated way, and this even though (or precisely because) systematization is not attempted. David Bentley Hart, on the other hand, offers his readers an *apparently* essayistic but actually systematic contribution. Unfortunately, however, to the official position confessed by the Church, which he is clearly familiar with, Hart applies a personal imprint. This imprint is as original as it is risky. Thus, to his well-founded critique of naturalism and deism, but also of superficial apologetics and of the idea of a created deficiency, Hart adds the partial embrace of a different Augustinian slip, namely of the thesis that even after the Incarnation and Works of the Lord our will could not become free and rational. This lapse draws Hart to the defense of Ivan Karamazov and, subsequently, to apocatastical universalism. In contrast to Hart's daring spirit stands the healthy conservatism of Father Georges Florovsky. In his small text titled *Evil. The Darkness of the Night* (1948) he offered the most complete recent Orthodox theodicy. Alas, Hart's detrimental attitude has its predecessors. One of them is Father Nikolaos Matsoukas, who as early as 1975 blended Orthodox confession with heterodox elements in a personal style. Among these elements, one can mention the idea of the "necessity" of evil and of the "beauty" of the universalist heresy. The main disciple of Fr. Matsoukas, Father Athanasios Vletsis, is nowadays also moving away from the teachings of the Church. First of all, he tends not to differentiate between the non-fallen state of creation and the later fallen one. He does this in order not to contradict evolutionism. Further more, he adheres to the Western idea that theodicy is a disburdening of God, a forced attribution of meaning to suffering. However, Hart's valuable observations also have their predecessors: In 1980 Alexandros Kalomiros already criticized the distorted christian variants as well as atheism for their mistaken understanding of divine Justice, in a manner devoid of Evdokimov's slips. Kalomiros also takes a stance against Origenism and Augustinianism, along with the Western theologies they have influenced, and criticizes atheism for being ignorant regarding its own religious *pagan* heritage. The author offers a

correct portrayal of human freedom, of Christ's redemption given to us, and of the insufficiency of the theology which approaches the divine attributes in an anthropomorphic manner. Moreover, *The river of fire* presents to the readership which suffers from a distorted perspective the fact that the Lord is indeed *unjust* – but only in the sense that His reward is overflowing and undeserved. This work remains a valuable contribution, even though ultimately, for certain reasons stated in its description, it remains ambivalent regarding the acceptability of apocatastical universalism. Kalomiros' slight exaggerations have been tempered by His Eminence Nectarie Antonopoulos, Metropolitan of Argolis, in his *Beyond Justice* (2019). In its turn, this rather important dogmatic text also calls for an awareness that our enemies are not those who are commonly circulated around us, but rather our own sins, whose responsibility we must assume. Someone who furthers this message and who is representative of the rather pastoral, unsystematic approach to the same themes is Father Constantin Coman, with his *Dialogues about the Justice of God*, published in 2010. Diametrically opposed – as a representative of serious and systematic study of the theodicy theme – stands another recent publication, signed by a Russian Bishop and launched in Germany: It is about *Answers to Suffering – Aspects of the Theodicy Problem in the New Testament* (2022), the doctoral thesis of Bishop Iov Bandmann. The latter offers a presentation of the biblical perspective on theodicy, relatively accurate in details, but overall visibly influenced by Western views. The research undertaken within it is discussed point by point throughout the present thesis. Finally come two remarkable contributions: The first was published by Mother Magdalena from Essex, the second by Father Nikolaos Loudovikos. The former, stemming from 2001, is a commendable argumentative presentation of theodicy that perfectly fits the classical framework, while the latter, from 2005, is primarily a historical description of theodicies. Unfortunately, Fr. Loudovikos is influenced by the so-called "philosophy of religion". Nevertheless, he aptly criticizes naturalism and the legacy of Blessed Augustine, manifested for example in the image of God as a legalistic Judge, guilty of making humans capable of falling.

In its last part, the introduction provides additional bibliographic references and it briefly outlines the structure of the thesis. After the preliminary chapter, this structure becomes tripartite, as can be observed from the table of contents. The goal is the progressive deepening of the dilemmatic aspects related to theodicy, through an approach undertaken from a scriptural, a patristical and a dogmatical perspective, within separate chapters. In each case, the initial subchapters are dedicated to defining evil as wrongdoing and to identifying suffering as its effect. The subsequent subchapters address Christology and its related

domains. These final chapters testify about Christ, first as the God-man who has overcome the temptation of evil, and then as the Bringer of Salvation. We are expected to collaborate in this Work. Overall, their role is to deepen the understanding of the fact that our mission is the one to embrace the world and our purpose is to direct the eyes of our mind and of our heart towards the all-good and all-powerful Creator. One can furthermore indicate the places where several main and easily circumscribed classical themes are discussed: The Mystery of Baptism is discussed in subchapters 2.2.2.1, 2.6, 3.5.1, 3.6, 4.3, and 4.4, apocatastical universalism in 2.4, 3.4, and 4.2. The topic of theophany is approached in 2.2.2.2 and in 4.3, and the fall and transmission of ancestral sin in 2.5, 3.5, and 4.4. Each time, the dogmatic chapters present the results of the analyses.

The first chapter, *Historical and Terminological Preliminaries Regarding Theodicy*, complements the introductory discussion of the objections against divine omnipotence (a theme continued in 2.1, 3.1, 4.1, as well as in 3.5.2 and 3.5.3). However, this topic is placed in the background of the chapter, as it primarily offers central points of reference for the development and evolution of theodicies in philosophy and theology. In doing so, first of all it indicates the ancient anticipation of true Christian theodicy, especially by Plato. The famous philosopher recognized the essential connection between evil and injustice, as well as the fact that the *ideal state* (revealed by Christianity as the Kingdom of Heaven) should be governed by someone just and loving of Wisdom. If such a person were to appear on Earth, Plato writes, he would be lynched by the manipulated plebeians influenced by sophists. Unfortunately, the decline of this type of contemplation in classical antiquity has led to the emergence of Stoicism. Afterwards, from stoicism, or at least in its close ideological proximity, appeared and developed both naturalism (firstly Epicurean), promoting the idea of necessary evil, and Neoplatonism. The chapter indicates relevant connections in this sense, such as that between Proclus and St. Dionysius Pseudo-Areopagite. On the other hand, other connections are also indicated, such as the apologetic appeal to the "problem" of evil and the distortion of this practice until pre-modernity and modernity, a time in which atheism and anti-theism began to timidly assert themselves (as in the case of Hobbes). Leibniz is presented in this context as the last serious defender of theodicy in the West, to be later rewarded primarily with ridicule. An analysis of his *Theodicy* undertaken in this chapter indicates that it was commendable and shows that the term "theodicy" is justified for the set of issues raised by God's Justice and (the fact of) evil. The opposite pole to Leibniz is represented by Kant, the most influential advocate of distorting the Western perspective on theodicy. It is, thus, also shown how this philosopher replaced the Transcendent with the transcendental, and how he

essentially exiled God in the realm of ideas which only have a "regulative" significance for reason. The chapter indicates an important untranslated Kantian text in Romanian, titled *On the Failure of All Philosophical Attempts at Theodicy*. Through erroneous demonstrations, he claims to offer "the only true theodicy", stating the necessity of accepting that it is impossible to specify how God's Justice is reflected in the world based on experience. Kant's posterity embraced the understanding of theodicy as defending the Creator from human reason's accusations, in view of the evil present in the world. Philosophy thus arrives at antitheodicy. Later it was Schopenhauer who received and perfected these Kantian impulses first and foremost, providing a complete form of modern naturalism with aberrant consequences, together with a clear advocacy of resistance to nature. Antitheodicy becomes either militant-agnostic missiology, or it considers that it "demonstrates" 1. the Christian faith as delusion and 2. the fact that the existence of evil would prove that God is either weak or evil. Western theodicies, on the other hand, allow themselves to be strongly affected *both* by these challenges to which they try to respond according to human logic, *and* by Kantian anti-metaphysical arguments. In this way, the tradition of talking about the *problem* of evil was imposed. Contemporary theodicies either tend to treat the Reality or Nature of God as an open question, or – like Plantinga's theodicy, above all – effectively refute naturalism, nevertheless maintaining aberrant theses such as the one of the necessity of evil as a historical actualization.

The second chapter presents theodicy according to Holy Scripture, in a holistic manner. The Old Testament finds its fulfillment in the New Testament (Mt 5:17), and the entire Scripture is inspired (2 Tim 3:16). However, this fact is invisible if someone finds that God has anything to do with the human "logic" of anger and of taking revenge. The Church (through Holy Tradition) is the guide of scriptural interpretation. The principles of this interpretation are the Dogmas. The purpose of Scripture is the same as God's Will – that Christ be the Life of humanity. From the beginning of the Old Testament and up to the end of the New Testament, what has been sought was and is the guidance of the faithful remnant (Rm 11:5) and the formation of the Christian morality. Humanity's good is Parousia as an eschatological outcome. Goodness can mean for the rational creature in the world only the participation in the Holiness of God, i.e. true freedom, obedience. This is, in short, the message of subchapter 2.1. However, when the fallen intellect seeks clarification of this statement, contrast becomes necessary, *true freedom* requires specification of its opposite. Thus, the necessity of defining evil is noticed in this context and a first way to outline it is shown. The biblical perspective indicates that evil is sin (1 John 3:4) and that tolerance is only

required in the face of suffering from evil, never regarding its exertion. According to Christian morality, committing evil must be *hated*. Through the Law – both in its pre-Mosaic and Mosaic forms – God Himself calls for a rational hatred of evil acts. However, it is only through His incarnate Son that God the Father offers liberation from susceptibility to passion (Romans 7-8), i.e. from the slavery of sin. The mentioned hatred is participatory. It reflects the natural rejection of anything opposed to goodness, characteristic of the Divine. Regarding the absence of any connection between God and the logic of revenge, a crucial awareness is the one of the fact that *the retributive form of justice is the exclusive prerogative of the Supreme Judge* (Romans 12:18-21). It is also necessary to realize that our true enemy is not our fellow human (who often fights against us), but rather the sin that confronts us within ourselves. Subchapter 2.2, which begins with the relationship between Adam and Christ, continues this theme. Sin is depicted as humanity's choice to project evil outward. For instance, sin occurs when the ego feels unappreciated and chooses to obey the devil, who always presents reality on the edge of unreality. Instead of hoping, believing, and contemplating through natural revelation and devotion the fact that our own good is actually God's Happiness, in such circumstances one may fall into vain hopes, self-delusion, and disbelief. Need and suffering can invite despair or the idea of serving something or someone else within human self which feels unrewarded. Or they can invite the arrogant scrutiny of Providence, or the idea of testing God. These considerations help notice our affinity with sin by way of a context evidently related to our first ancestor. These observations continue in a first part of 2.5: In Adam's case, the impulse towards sin was not caused by need or suffering, but by the false horizon of a shortcut to divinity. The active pursuit of this impulse – ultimately a form of self-justification – has led to the inflation of the self and to the multitude of known and unknown sins, whose stream is flowing downward, until the end of time. This pestilential stream, along with illness, death, and the almost-definitive despair of humanity are effects alluded to in Psalm 21. They are transformed – as the same Psalm testifies – into the prophecy of the Church's Victory through the Resurrection of the One Who triumphed in all of the devil's temptations.

The discussion continues then (in 2.2.2) with the relevance of the Book of Job to theodicy. The most balanced and truthful interpretation among the orthodox interpretations of this Book is deemed to be understanding Job's attitude as *bold obedience* to God (cf Eph 3:12, Mt 21:28-32) and as an honest introspective search for his own mistakes. Job's drama lies in not realizing from the beginning that that which he possesses as his *private*, and for which the devil envies him, is actually meant to be *private* to all humans, and that the mistakes he introspectively seeks, also belong to all of us, in a mysterious way. That something for which

he is envied by Satan is the theandric cooperation toward God's ineffable and apophatic Happiness. Job fully understands this only through the final theophany. He understands that the question "Where were you when I founded the earth?" is directed at him in the sense of "You, human". The message of the Holy Scripture is that true human happiness does not mean joy in view of one's own benefit – especially not concerning earthly gain – but for the ineffable and apophatic Happiness of God. Reverence (θεοσέβεια, not just devotion) does not seek selfish rewards. Rather, detached from worldly vanity (John 12:25), the daring and the love connected with reverence demand nothing less than the Incarnated God Himself, offering total human surrender in return. The Incarnation – to which the Old Testament Saints participate in their own mysterious way – did not run late. God lets all who receive Him partake a measure of His Light and a disclosure of His Plan, which was and is *the best possible*. He reveals it even through the most sordid fibers of this painful world. For them, the world is shown in its original garment (though as if "through a glass, darkly"), as a foretaste and pledge of enabling them to contemplate the new world, in the eshaton (Revelation 21:1).

Seven identified senses of God's Justice are exposed in 2.3, arranged like the arms of the vigilant lampstand from Exodus 25 (cf. Revelation 4:5): Providence is like the spindle. God's Faithfulness and His Righteous Judgment are like the first pair of arms. The Guiding Justice and God's Justice in its *justifying, rectifying* sense (from ἡ δικαίωσις) are the second pair, whereas Participatory Justice and His Rectitude make up the third. All of them are equally important and stand in a complex relationship, similar to the relationship between Pauline theology and the life of Job. The main common point of the latter two is the testimony that God does not allow the devil to tempt humans beyond their abilities. Equally momentous in this connection is the fact that the Creator is patient with the discontented and wicked (only) until the end. From an eschatological perspective, natural and human disasters show, by analogy, the unhappy outcome awaiting those who choose perpetual rebellion against the Lord (Luke 13:1-9). God's Faithfulness (here also termed Retributive-Justice-in-general) is manifested through maintaining the vital Order in the world. His Righteous Judgment is reflected in the absolute Equity of the Judge who will reveal Himself in Glory. But the Righteous Judgment is also manifest in the participatory discernment required of us (1 Corinthians 2:16). The Guiding Justice aids our repentance and our receiving of God's Statutes (cf. Psalm 118/119:12). Justifying Justice bestows us Justification *through* Christ – i.e. the true Sacrifice of Righteousness (Psalm 50:20) – and *through* the alignment of those who live in Christ with God's righteous Will. By participating in this way to God, by becoming His co-workers, humans choose the Path that opens the Kingdom of Righteousness,

the Kingdom of God's adopted sons. This ultimate meaning reveals the essence of God's Justice as the convergence of His Righteous Judgment and Justifying Justice. The intimate name of this essence is the Name of the divine Person incarnate – Jesus (i.e. *the Savior*).

The fall of the world (2.4) was an attempt to usurp the Truth that reigned in the hearts of rational creatures. The next step in distorting their freedom was the amplification of the fall through an antichristian choice for impenitence and irrationality. It is committed by the soul that still enjoys rationality and it is specific to the might of the earth and to the deceivers. In addition to clarifying these aspects, chapter 2 recalls the first scriptural indications that reject apocatastical universalism. Made within 2.5, the next step brought by the second chapter is a deeper exploration of the process of the fall of the first humans and of its consequences. Relevant in this context is also the scriptural testimony about the tireless Providence, always active, despite humanity's deepening into sin. Entered hereafter is the theological path that surpasses the paradox of each and all of us being represented as a whole within Adam. A first approach to the Pauline theme of participation *in* Adam is made. The conclusion of this biblical study (2.6) describes God's descent to those who find themselves in free fall, in order to save them. God became incarnate to give humans a chance to turn from disobedience to the paradigmatic obedience of the Son of Man. Entry into His obedience is accomplished through the assumption of Baptism – or, in other words, through the assumption of the Cross. The Scripture shows that, for us, the participatory Cross means accepting suffering, striving for perfection, and living the Life of the Church – that is, it means engaging in theandric cooperation. This is the way in which we build ourselves as the Body of Christ adorned with Righteousness and faith (Romans 4).

The third chapter addresses the inheritance of the Holy Fathers, the Tradition of the One Church. Firstly, it indicates that participation in the Holiness of God and the struggle against sin for the Happiness of God are given through eucharistic union with Christ (3.1). This is what enables us to choose the divine Will and the Recapitulation of creation in Christ. It enables us to avoid evil deeds, to accomplish truly good deeds and to hate the devil and sin – to hate, that is, the collaboration with him. The chapter generally shows that suffering, sin, temptation, deception, and heresy are predilect themes of the Holy Tradition, whose purpose is the deification of man. In fact, their careful juxtaposition is nothing other than a confession of theodicy. Such a thematic roundup is found primarily in the works of Saint Irenaeus of Lyon – the author of the first extensive systematic theodicy – but also in the writings of Saint Basil the Great, Salvian of Lerins, and the Saints Gregory of Nyssa and John Chrysostom. While the first one of the latter two authors leans towards apocatastasis, the latter restores the

tempering so typical of the patristic theology. In doing so, St. John Chrysostom clearly affirms that evil is an *action* (whether through word, deed, or thought, willingly or unwillingly). After delving into the theme of Good and Evil in its first subchapter, chapter number 3 describes how, according to the Holy Fathers, evil takes root (3.2). Foremost, this happens through the temptation with the promise of total self-determination. The context in which this fact is elaborated is primarily set by mentioning the gnostic episode, that unfolded parallel to the history of the early, apostolic, and post-apostolic Church. The main patristic guide presented in this connection is Saint Irenaeus, who criticizes the gnostics and heretics which have succumbed to seducing and rationalizing narratives. The fact missed by these erring categories is the fact that *Truth is the condition of Salvation*. So on one side stands the worldly suffering *for-* and *in-* Truth, i.e. the choice of Life. On the other stands the choice of hell. Surveying the testimony of the early Teachers of the Church, reveals the fact that Orthodox theodicy has three dimensions – a doxological, an eschatological, and a personal-parenetical one. Saint Irenaeus impressively exposes its eschatological dimension, while Saint Basil, e.g. is representative for the personal-parenetical one. Doxology is an omnipresent trait: Gratitude for God's blessings is an act that protects against harm brought to one's nature and against (spiritual) *blindness*, in the words of Saint Irenaeus. It protects against that blindness which occurs in the case of blasphemers, when exposed to the Sun of Justice. Subchapter 3.3 (*The Meanings of God's Justice versus His Mercy*), which corresponds to subchapter 2.3, refutes the preconceived idea according to which the Holy Tradition would support the notion that Lord's Mercy is greater than His Justice. However, this fact does not deny, but rather supports and elevates the anagogic meaning of the personal Love relationship between God and creation: In His *Justice*, the Lord goes out to bring back those who risk complete alienation from Him, just as a good shepherd seeks the lost sheep. Later (in 3.4, *Hell as an alternative*), apocatastatic universalism is identified as confusion or as an effect of a confusion: It involves mixing up the Healing of ancestral sin (and prospectively of all, owing to Christ's first Coming and owing to personal theandric struggles), with a final, eschatological Justification. The latter can only be *hoped* for, not *affirmed* to be universal. St. John Chrysostom testifies that this eschatological Justification is already something we rejoice in, because God guides each of us in the most fitting way possible. However, the outcome depends on us and sufficient grounds do exist that show that the eschatological Justification will highly unlikely be a *universal* one.

The next step in this chapter (which takes place in 3.4) shows that, according to the patristic message regarding Adam's deviation from true freedom, after the fall man has

granted sin rights over himself, in an increasing manner. By sinking into passions and, when rejecting Salvation, even into the hell of demonization, man gave sin power over himself. In this context, several central points of the Holy Tradition's condemnation of apocatastical universalism as a heresy are also presented. Furthermore, the chapter expositis the manner in which the teaching of the Church deepens the doctrine of the fall of man and of the world. Subchapter 3.5 describes the patristic view of the fall as attachment to evil, loss of Edenic Grace, decay and corruption. According to the Fathers, the latter effects were determined in a perfectly fitting manner based on the data of the fall. It has balanced the passion caused by the degeneration of desire and has left a door open, so that man retains the good choice beside self-centered love or even self-worship. The One who was to fully actualize the good choice and to make it available to everyone was, of course, Christ. After these descriptions the text presents the ecclesial stance concerning ancestral sin, pointing out the theological positions of Saints Cyril of Alexandria, of John Chrysostom, and of Maximus the Confessor, most notably. The text comments the sinful tendency acquired because of the fall and reviews the discussions related to the moment, to the essence and to the transmission of the ancestral sin. The patristic question concerning this complex latter theme is the question about how death and corruption continually penetrate humanity's body. According to the Fathers, this transmission occurs through everyone's participation in our common human nature. Due to its mysterious unity, this nature has become a vehicle for corruption after the fall. Those who sin, sin together with Adam – because we sin *like* him. In an analogous fashion, we are *straightened* up, i.e. *justified* together with the human nature which was justified within Christ, because by truly repenting we live *in Christ*, we live like Him (according to our personal aptitude) and we take responsibility for the human sins.

Before his voluntary attachment to evil, man was indeed perfect, as man came into being through a perfect divine Act. No deficit existed. Subchapter 3.5.2 shows that patristics, especially through the works of Saint Irenaeus, rejects any questioning of the divine Act of Creation's perfection, or of the creaturely perfection of the first ancestors and of the world in general. The text points out to the fact that in his theology St. Irenaeus is aware of a quadruple homonymy of the notion of perfection. The text also indicates that the theology of this Holy Father subtly distinguishes between the Edenic state of initial maturity (which also meant being able to deliberate), the state of growth until reaching the measure of perfect man (reached only by Christ), and the state of the redeemed man, capable of receiving the work of the Holy Spirit and becoming one with Christ, becoming deified. Describing these things, St Irenaeus considers both historical and aeonic archetypal temporality, the temporality of

human nature's logos. The questioning of the perfection of the protoparents was historically brought forth by the Gnostics. St. Irenaeus dedicated his oeuvre to addressing these lost sheep. The same charge was later brought forth by the so-called philosophy of religion, starting with John Hick. Therefore, subchapter 3.5.3 addresses the thesis of evil being necessary as a path towards divinity, a false thesis, beloved or at least accepted in Anglo-Saxon contemporaneity. Attributing this thesis to St. Irenaeus, as Hick does, is abusive. The providential Act of transforming evil into good should not be blasphemed as a premeditated criminal intent that diminishes the gravity of the ancestral sin. The text shows the clear accusation brought by St. Irenaeus against the disobedience of the protoparents, which brought humanity to the brink of destruction. Finally, subchapter 3.5.4 shows that according to Holy Tradition, the Mystery that was hidden for ages is the central act of God's Economy: It is the Salvation bestowed by the One who, as a human, achieved likeness to God, crushing death through His Sacrifice, and who, as God, opened paradise, initiating the great Recapitulation. He recreates all creation that chooses Him from the very evil of death. It is our duty to personally embrace this Salvation.

This act of taking responsibility should discover, *in Christ*, the fact that suffering can be a weapon against the devil. Besides, it should bring about the perspective of the misfortune of our biological death as really just opening the Gate of the Kingdom. The rectifying *Justification* comes through the Cross: This is the message of the Holy Tradition, reproduced in subsection 3.6, with which the third chapter concludes. But the Church confesses that suffering is not a (legal) punishment – neither for us, nor for Christ. The Church confesses that *the Salvation given to us does not abolish suffering precisely because it can be and is a medicine for us*. Suffering is not inherently good, but neither is it inherently evil. God wants man to be healed from suffering in the Parousia. But He also wants man to overcome suffering before this, discovering its usefulness as a ladder to virtues and as a bridge over anything that separates him from God. On the other hand, suffering itself can become an occasion for the human distancing from God, unfortunately. Thus, suffering is not a condition sine qua non of perfection. Neither it, nor death, are willed (on an aeonic-archetypal level) by God, from eternity. But the focal point of Christian life is the Love of God, which for us is fleshed out primarily as the saving Passion of Christ. Both the suffering implicit in contemplating the Passion He endured for our sins, and the Power to resist evil can only be found by entering the Unity with Christ, in repentance. In orthopraxy, the necessary suffering is asceticism, which lays hidden in each person's intimacy. It is the only way one can become connected to God. The Cross of Christ is the balance of Justice, and its hidden nature is

eschatological. The duty of the baptized is to follow the calling to love their neighbor *in Christ*, so that this neighbor may become *every man*, and thus take responsibility for all earthly evil. This is the way to receive true Forgiveness and Adoption. In this context, Dostoevsky is presented as a vessel of the Holy Tradition. It is in this connection that we should understand our true human weakness – our "flesh": We must be able to live here with the well-deserved bitter herbs that affect it this "flesh" of ours. In this concluding step of chapter 3, a recapitulative view is offered lastly, before moving on to dogmatic theodicy.

The last chapter attempts to present Orthodox dogmatics as theodicy. In other words, it tries – especially with the help of clarifications provided by St. John Damascene – to order the polychromatic rays of Truth, reflected in heaven and on earth, in the spectrum of theodicy. The introduction of the chapter, which recalls the theological gaze confessed by Petre Țuțea, shows that Truth is bestowed to us through dogmas. It is given to the mind which opens itself to Christ in relation to the Mind of God (1 Cor 2:16). This is the attitude of the human person who really *lives* in the Church. At the same time, God withdraws Himself from the path of the mind that claims autarchy and begins to vainly try proving unrealities. The actual elaboration offered in this chapter begins in 4.1. Completing the previous discussions of 2.1 and 3.1, this last chapter succinctly outlines the doctrine of the Holy Trinity and the details related to the divine Attributes. It then proceeds with the exposition of Creation as the Work of the Father, *through* the Son and *in* the Holy Spirit. It emphasizes the categorical dissociation of preformal "nothingness" from evil. The fall of the angel who became the devil is described, along with his choices. Evil is shown to be not only an imperfect participation in God – characteristic, indeed, of the fallen world – but also *a voluntary departure from Good*.

In other words, a special connection between the world and God exists (4.2). The investigations carried out reject once again the ontological thesis of evil being necessary. This time, the text insists that evil depends inevitably on choice, and that it resides in a corresponding *act of will*. Creaturely freedom does not necessarily imply evil. In the case of humans (and of their world), evil began perpetuating itself with Adam's ἀδικία. More precisely, this consisted in his choice to "listen" to someone other than the One who created him. The text emphasizes the centrality of human freedom both before and after this act. The context of this discussion revolves around the purpose intended for humans and the voluntary perversion of their own nature. Being tied together to will, freedom also exposes the dogmatic teaching related to human will – to the natural one and to the sinful one, the one contrary to nature. And freedom exposes the role of will *within human life*, too. The natural will's role (restored through Union with Christ) is teleologically integrated into man's purpose, i.e.

becoming the medium through which the world is to be brought back to God. In this context, the fall is explained as the choice through which man yielded to unnatural, irrational pleasure. Here, a comprehensive analysis of this process and its consequences is offered, *painful consequences that have played a role throughout history*. But whilst "taking" this Measure intended for man's union with Him ultimately through Christ's own cross, God did- and does not prejudice human freedom in any way. Hell remains a possible choice. On the other hand, the text also shows the reasons why this Measure is no defeat of God, but an Act identical to the one of Creation and of exerting Providence. Not even hell itself represents such a defeat, for it is not a Punishment given or created by God, but a consequence of the free actions of creatures and an effect, consciously accepted by them. Hell is depicted as an infinite extinction from existence and form (R)emembrance, as a result of rejecting the Sun of Justice. It is an effect decided and allowed by Him personally. On the other hand, those who embrace God as the Source of Life rejoice in the Union of the Parousia. This is the way in which evil will be definitively separated from the renewed world.

Our rebirth began with- and through the Incarnation of Christ, who justified us, freed our will, and lifted us up in His Self. This zenith of the Divine Providence is discussed in subchapter 4.3, showing that this Act opened up for us the full battle with death and the real progress towards good, by way of the personal Baptism and of the Life within the Church. Through the Grace of the Sacraments, man and the world are part of the God-Man Christ. This same subchapter notes that to this day, the previously mentioned apex of the Divine Providence is also the manifest apex of God's Justice. In this context, an important clarification of the meaning of His Justice is offered, as well: *Firstly, the only appropriate understanding of the Wrath of the Lord is as a subjective cataphatic anthropomorphism*, while the Mercy-Justice dyad describes a unified whole within God's Attributes, a unity whose essence is God's Righteousness. With the purpose of confessing this fact, a short review of those important Orthodox dogmaticians is elaborated, who expound on the Justice of God as one of His Attributes. The analysis identifies deficiencies in the contributions of some theologians such as Father Mihail Pomazanski and Archbishop Ilarion Alfeyev. *Secondly*, the inherent Order of creation, its inner accord is also clarified qua sense of God's Justice, developed more fully in the later stages of Byzantine dogmatics. The close relationship between this sense of Justice and another – Providence – is also elucidated. In a final step, the spiritual contemplation of these two senses is indicated. In its truest meaning, this contemplation is nothing other than the awe-inspiring theophany – the highest source of devotion. In this context, another couple of theoretical deviations from the Truth are hinted to,

stemming from the influential Protestant theologian Rudolf Otto and from Carl Gustav Jung. Unlike the way in which they view things, through theophany, God invites man to participate not in His "*amoral*" Holiness, but in His *moral and supra-moral* Holiness.

The last subchapter, 4.4, shows that through the Sacrament of Repentance, a person actually assumes Christ-like responsibility for the fallen state of fellow humans and of the world. Any act of taking responsibility for sin is reaffirmed, cleansed, and elevated by the Son of God, who for us suffered unimaginable torments in the flesh. But human sins begin with the ancestral sin. Can ancestral sin be assumed by Christians? Yes it can and it must be – this is made clear within the first part of this subchapter, complementing the observations related to Dostoevsky undertaken in 3.6, as well as the observations related to the transmission of ancestral sin, from 3.5. The text discusses important details of these aspects. It also criticizes a theological tendency to theorize about our connection with ancestral sin, a tendency initiated by Fathers Isidor Todoran and Dumitru Stăniloae. *Firstly*, the text emphasizes here that according to the Church's confession of the doctrine of the Fall, the inherited ancestral sin is not understood as legal guilt, but as corruption. Still, the Mystery of Repentance brings a spiritually-evident Christian duty to assume responsibility *for all and for everything*, as Dostoevsky would say. *Secondly*, the text explains why the prerequisite for the spiritual state necessary for assuming such a responsibility is the voluntary participatory deepening into the Sacrifice of the Savior, the One Who takes (responsibility for- and takes away) the sins of us all. Thus, one last time the discussion brings back to the forefront the theme of Baptism, and it concludes it: This Mystery opens for us at a personal level the participation in God's justifying Righteousness – through His Cross and through our dwelling in the Body of the God-Man Christ. Through Him, the new world and the right Way open up to mankind – the world in which dwells Righteousness (2 Peter 3:13) and the Path to infinite epektasis towards the Love of the Holy Trinity.

The main conclusion of these theological surveys linked to the whole confession of the Church qua theodicy is, in short, that the Justice of God *is* Christ. This conclusion indicates that only this complex confession correctly conceives of creaturely freedom (for which evil was allowed as a *possibility*) and that only its contents correctly contemplate the Supra-Reality of God (who is not angry, but merciful and just). Within the Holy Mysteries of which we partake by taking responsibility for sin and cherishing our cross, the Gates of the Kingdom open their selves to us through our Union with Christ – a Union which *in Him* unites us with all those within the Church-world. This path stands as the absolute opposite to the one of the false and egoistic "absolute freedom". Within the concluding remarks, this is shown by way of

a final appeal to Dostoevsky. The *right* and *righteous* Way is Christ. He is the Truth of the dogmas that illuminate our steps. He is the Life that enjoys the Light of Father's Beatitude. Evil is and will be the evil choice of self-delusion. But evil, together with the death it causes, will be banished from the world – to hell. Nature is not evil, and *our nature* is not evil. Its negative alteration will be healed when it is renewed, and, until then it has been made our ladder – towards- and by- the Just One.