

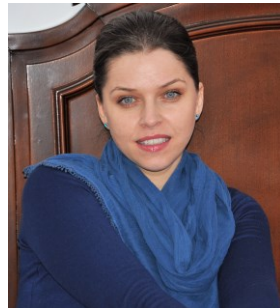


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## Power and Grace. Is the Human Being an Extension of God's Arm?

### Abstract

Ivan the Terrible, Tsar between 1547 and 1584, was one of the cruellest rulers in the history of Russia. In 2009, Pavel Lunghin directed the film "The Tsar", in which Pyotr Mamonov successfully interprets this character whose name is full of meanings. The scene most representative for the movie and which seems to justify the essence of the tsar's politics is the one where Ivan visits a prison to see several men convicted of treason. The metropolitan bishop Phillip the II<sup>nd</sup> of Moscow who accompanied him asked the tsar to show mercy to those criminals and set them free, thus letting God punish them instead. Ivan the Terrible's answer is hallucinating:



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„God, you say?! God is merciful! But who will be the one to accomplish deeds of blood and sweat? Who will claim revenge for Russia's having been betrayed? If there is no one else up to this task, then I shall do it!”

These words are representative for what we consider to be a form of violence sophisticatedly justified and which conceals its seeds of evil under the intention of setting things back to their place. Sometimes, just like Ivan the Terrible, man wants to consider himself an extension of the arm of God, the weapon with which he imagines God punishes.

Although Christianity, like other great religions of the world, is based on love and pleads for peace, now and then in history, it came into contradiction with the actual use of means to enforce love. The church itself instigated to violence, either directly or indirectly. Suffice to remember the heretical conflicts in the centuries IV<sup>th</sup>-VIII<sup>th</sup> in the East. The causes that led to these acts of violence and generated so much pain and death were diverse and are centered upon the participants' attempts to defend themselves against the aggression against the dogma, their principles or property. In equal measure, the state itself confiscated God's name and used religion in political projects, causing wars. Even in the XX<sup>th</sup> century, the conflicts that had a religious component (not necessarily Christian), totalised half the number of those registered internationally between 1945 and 1960<sup>1</sup>, 75% in the period 1960-1990, and the percentage of the civilian victims soared to 90%, 30% more than during the Second World War.

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<sup>1</sup> See R. Scott Appleby's statistics, *Ambivalence of the Sacred. Religion, Violence and Reconciliation* (Rowan-Littlefield, 2000), p. 58

## Keywords

Power, Grace, Violence,

### 1 Violence, a Matter of Power, not of the Truth<sup>2</sup>

We notice that violence seems like a matter more related to power than to the actual truth. Starting from here, we wish that, through religion, we find an explanation for the violence that is not explicitly a manifestation of the evil itself (as in the case of the Nazi concentration camps, Communist prisons or the Soviets), but it is made legal in the idea that it represents the solution towards the good, justice and truth.

Should violence be allowed when the cause is sacred? What cause can be considered sacred enough so as to allow, require even that human being fight and kill in its name? In other words, "could violence itself, in principle, be a moral means towards just goals?"<sup>3</sup>.

It is important to mention here Max Weber's remark on the right to use violence via the institutions that the state claimed for itself: „Yet, today we must say that the state is that human community that (successfully) claims the right to have, within the borders of a certain territory, the monopole over legitimate physical violence. That is because what is peculiar to the present times is that, in the case of all other groups, as well as individuals, the right to retort to physical violence is granted only to the extent to which the state itself gives them this right, as it constitutes the only source of the „right” to exert

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<sup>2</sup> Jan Assmann, *Monoteismul și limbajul violenței* (Cluj Napoca, Tact, 2012), p. 22.

<sup>3</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Critica violenței* (Cluj, Idea Design & Print, 2004), p. 7.

violence"<sup>4</sup>. If we are to analyze these words from a secularist perspective, we should understand that today, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the individual, the citizen, has no right to act on his own using violence to defend himself. That happens for one reason alone: he is a citizen, that is „*a supreme invention of modernity, the invention of the evolved humanity, that never raises the fist and on whom all societies of the world that are called civilised are founded – namely because their foundation is the citizen himself, that meaning a civil and civilised being*”<sup>5</sup>.

Gabriel Liiceanu considers that nowadays „the degree of civilization of a society is measured accurately according to the success it obtains in educating *resistance to the provocation* of each member of the society. An individual is the more civilized, the more he manages to repress aggressive response efficiently”<sup>6</sup>. Moreover, he is right about that, as the violence of a person is detrimental to everybody else.

Even since the middle of the XVIII<sup>th</sup> century, in his *Leviathan*, Thomas Hobbes came up with this theory of the evil generated by the natural uncontrolled and uneducated aggressiveness, because it gives birth to interminable, unsolvable conflicts. Hobbes considered that the society as a whole would attain peace and be able to offer each and every individual a sense of security only when its citizens accepted „to deliver in the hands of the state their share of the collective violence. Via its specialised institutions, the state collects the amount of violence each of us is capable of, thus becoming the only entity entitled to apply justice and to designate by appointing (that is providing them the costume, the uniform of the function, *in-*

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<sup>4</sup> Max Weber, *Omul de știință și omul politic* (București, Humanitas, 2011), p. 81.

<sup>5</sup> Gabriel Liiceanu, „Un papă care dă cu pumnul?” (*A Pope that raises his fist?*), în *Contributors*, 19 ianuarie 2015  
<http://inlinedreapta.net/monitorul-neoficial/gabriel-liiceanu-un-papa-care-da-cu-pumnul/>

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

*vestio*), the individuals who, in the name of applying the laws, will make use of violence (mainly the army and the police)”<sup>7</sup>. It appears this lay project is successful, at least for the mere e fact that an individual who behaves violently is automatically punished, without the judges experiencing any dilemmas on the matter, because it does not put the deed in context and therefore, does not justify it.

We have mentioned that the lay project regarding the behavior of citizens is successful. The problem here is that we would like to view all of this from the perspective of the Christianity, that deals with people, not with individuals. From the standpoint of an individual who loves Christ, the punishment by civil law is added to the moral law. The fact that he considers himself a Christian will automatically add punishment from his consciousness. „For nothing is more wretched than o conscience that accuses you and nothing bolder than a consciousness that protects you” (St. Maximus the Confessor)<sup>8</sup>. This is the secret of true freedom. If a Christian is not guilty according to the laws of the state, he will feel free anyway<sup>9</sup>,

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> St. Maximus the Confessor, *Rel. mot.* XI, PG 90, 121, A, *apud* Ioan I. Ică jr., *Sfantul Maxim Marturisorul (580–662) si tovarasii sai intru martiriu: papa Martin, Anastasie Monahul, Anastasie Apocrisiarul. „Vieti” — actele procesului — documentele exilului (Sibiu, Deisis, 2004)*, p. 129.

<sup>9</sup> Jan Assermann operates a difference between the informative and performative use of the written text in relation to the formative and transforming writing religion uses. Informative is, for instance, the warning on a packet of cigarettes: „Smoching can kill”, which provides us with a very important piece of information. It is your problem if you smoke despite the effects about which you have been informed. Performative is the sign „No Smoking”, that conveys an interdiction that you know that, once broken, you will get some punishment. But breaking God’s commandments means sin (*Monoteism and the Language of Violence*, Cluj Napoca, Tact, 2012, p. 43). This does not mean that you are automatically sent to prison but that you have cancelled your freedom that only an authentic bond with God may guarantee.

even when in prison, because all that matters to him is how he relates to God, Who can grant him authentic freedom.

## 2 Why the Eastern Space?

As far as our approaching method is concerned, an important element we would like to clarify, as we are aware of the risks involved when we are tempted to make exhaustive approaches, is that we shall limit ourselves to the Orthodox spirituality, to the Eastern space, that we are more familiar with and in which religion is understood not only as a form of cult and a set of dogmas or rituals, but it represents a full, personal involvement with multiple effects in the community. It is not in our intention to make an evaluation or an analysis of the wars or of the violent events that have religious grounds in this geographical space of Eastern Europe, but rather to understand violence by appealing to the Christian-Orthodox spirituality. In this regard, our approach will most benefit from the support provided by the ideas of some of the most prominent Eastern Christian thinkers and theologians: Nikolai Berdiaev (information on each shall be provided later on) Dumitru Stăniloae, Panayotis Nellas and others.

We opted for the Eastern Orthodox space not only because we are more familiar with, but because in the west, there has always existed this current of opinion that states that, because of the Orthodox faith, the easterners would interiorise with greater difficulty the democratic attitudes, and that is what makes them be considered „different”. The fall of the Communism and, subsequently, the war in Yugoslavia (1991-1995) stirred a great deal of debating on the problem of the „democratic calling” of the „Orthodox countries.” In 1994, Jacques Le Rider<sup>10</sup> cited Krystof Pomian (a Polish philoso-

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<sup>10</sup> Jacques Le Rider, *Mitteleuropa*, Polirom, Iași, 1997, pp.23-24.

pher, historian, and essayist), who talked about a Byzantine Europe that should comprise Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, Roumania, Bulgaria, Serbia, Macedonia, and Greece. In the same manner, it is interesting that, in 1996, Samuel P. Huntington<sup>11</sup> publishes a book that has become famous – *The Clash of Civilizations and the Re-establishment of the World Order* – in which he introduces the idea that the borders of Europe go as far deep as to where Christianity and Islam start and that the expansion of the European Union and NATO should take into account only the Western countries, whereas Bulgaria, Roumania, Moldova, Belarus și Ukraine should remain within the area of influence of Russia, that belongs to another kind of civilization, the Orthodox one!<sup>12</sup>.

In this order of ideas, numerous intellectuals and politicians have interpreted the violence of the conflict in Yugoslavia by applying the orientalist paradigm. By Orientalism we understand what Edward W. Said defined, that is a way of thinking based on the ontological and epistemological

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<sup>11</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, Simon&Schuster, New York, 1996.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 1996, pp. 159, 161-162. We have cited only two authors who dealt with this aspect, but we can equally mention: Milica Bakic-Hayden and Robert M. Hayden, „Orientalist Variations on the Theme *Balkans*: Symbolic Geography in Recent Yugoslav Cultural Politics” in *Slavic Review* 1, Spring 1992; Stjepan G. Mestrovic with Slaven Letica and Miroslav Goreta, *Habits of the Balkan Heart: Social Character and the Fall of Communism*, College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1993; Andrei Georgiev and Emil Tzenkov, „The Troubled Balkans”, in Hugh Miall (ed.), *Redefining Europe: New Patterns of Conflict and Cooperation*, London, Pinter Publishers, 1994; Adrian Hyde-Price, „The System Level: The Changing Topology of Europe”, in G. Wyn Rees (ed.), *International Politics in Europe: The New Agenda*, London, Routledge, 1993; F. Stephan Larrabee, „Washington, Moscow, and the Balkans: Strategic Retreat or Reengagement?”, in F. Stehan Larrabee (ed.), *The Volatile Powder Keg: Balkan Security after the Cold War*, Washington DC, The American University Press, 1994.

distinction between the East and the West<sup>13</sup>. We also find as appropriate the definition of Sorin Antohi: „Orientalism is a discourse (in its Foucauldian sense) of the West's expansion and domination, according to which the East is reconstructed as a passive and uncivilized fantastic space that, even though unconsciously, calls for the civilizing west-European action, in the name of which any sort of abuse was permitted.”<sup>14</sup>.

We have insisted on justifying the selection of this geographical and spiritual space in order to make clear that, in the first post-Communist decade, there was this idea that the Orthodox countries (this opinion was uttered even within the very borders of those countries!) got this Byzantine spirit that hinders the understanding of the democracy in the same way the westerners do. An association with these countries would have brought along the risk of stagnation or even regressing. Recent history proved this opinion wrong. Roumania has been successfully integrated into the Euro-Atlantic structures and the European Union, and that would mean that it *does* have an organ able to process the values of the democracies. Yet, if it still shows some skepticism towards these values, it means that it also has another organ– *the image of God* – that, being alive and active, makes that all gestures and deeds be „extended into eternity”<sup>15</sup>, makes it permanently look into the Beyond, makes it have a transcendent view on life. Obviously, these aspects give the Orthodox countries a particular manner of thinking and acting in life. Our wish is to express our opinions even from the inside of this environment.

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<sup>13</sup> See Edward W. Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient*, London, Penguin Books, 1978, p. 2.

<sup>14</sup> Sorin Antohi, *Exercițiul distanței: Discursuri, societăți, metode (The Exercise of Distance: Discourses, Societies, methods)*, Nemira, București, 1997, pp. 310-311.

<sup>15</sup> Dumitru Stăniloae, *Cultură și duhovnicie (Culture and Spirit)*, vol I, Basilica, București, 2012, p. 864.



### 3     **Goodness Under the Pressure of Law**

In our opinion, the origin of the decisions that lead to violence is of the axiological order. We believe that, at least in the case of the Christians, the difficulty<sup>16</sup> appears when the idea of Good is imposed as a supreme idea, thus establishing itself as a natural consequence, it requires normative și juridical character. Essentially, the idea of good is an abstract idea, and Christianity sets the man, the concrete being, the creation of God, his life above any other idea. One cause of violence comes from this confusion or lack of capacity of the leaders, politicians or common citizens to attribute meaning and proper significance to each value. This *good law* camouflages envy, cruelty, fear, etc., for which reason the violence that protects it is most perverse and full of perils, as it feeds itself from the idea of good, the same way pride feeds itself from virtue.

The Gospel shows us just how hideous and hypocritical the human being can be when it loves only the good that derives from the necessity to obey the law and thus, lets his fellow human be neglected and burdened with grief. We (the Christians) often forget that Jesus set things right and freed us from the burden of the Law: „Then he said to them, “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.” (Mark 2, 27)! That is why praying, the Holy Mysteries, the ascesis, as well as the good deeds, may easily become purposes in themselves, chores, a sort of Sabbath unless they are seen as instruments and means that open channels of communication first with other humans, then with God, channels through which man receives transforming abilities when confronted with life and death. The perspective of praying as a norm might limit its power. Therefore, the option of the Christian man is to see the

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<sup>16</sup> Obviously, many a time, religion is only the pretext and not the actual cause of wars. That means religion is the screen behind which are hidden geo-political, geo-strategic, economical, technological and military interests.

fellow man everywhere he turns his eyes and then the law, the rule, and then, it is the law, the rules and the values that set him apart from other faiths and make him have a personal view on all aspects of life, in the center of which he brings the Christ.

It is this vision that makes a Christian person unique. People nowadays find unexpected, unimaginable explanations for the choices they make. Their dilemma has ramifications of the most bizarre and reflects parallel moral and ideological realities. In commenting the attack at Charlie Hebdo, on the 7<sup>th</sup> of January, the Roumanian writer Mircea Cărtărescu wondered how it was possible that we may have difficulties in answering promptly to the question "If you found yourself in a house on fire and you could save only one thing, what would you save, a baby or a Da Vinci painting" or "If pressing a button would get you a fabulous amount of money but, at the same time, kill a person in China, would you still do it?"<sup>17</sup>.

Denis de Rougemont<sup>18</sup> makes a profound analysis of the way the devil as a vector of evil manages to make its way into the very core of our ideals and to hide inside the image we consider to be the gods of our times, in the beliefs we have besides the revealed faith. The man has come to a point where he invented gods in accordance to his conscious or unconscious self. It is in this way that, in a century of individualism, the bourgeoisie invented the god of reason, for the rationalists, the „god of success for the robust Puritans, the philanthropist God, for the cheap and coy.”<sup>19</sup>. Later on, that is today, they have raised the Nation, the Class, the Race, the human rights, the taxes to the level of religions, the elements aforementioned acting like gods because they turned themselves into criteria of any truth. That

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<sup>17</sup> Cristina Foarfă, *Anchetă: scriitori români despre Charlie Hebdo și "Je suis Charlie"*, in <http://www.bookaholic.ro/ancheta-scriitori-romani-charlie-hebdo-je-suis-charlie.html>, accessed on 2015 January 12.

<sup>18</sup> Denis de Rougemont, *Partea diavolului (The Devil's Share)*, (Bucuresti: Anastasia, 1994), pp. 97-98.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 98.

is why Mircea Cărtărescu says that the majority of us would more likely go for the Da Vinci painting or press the button than save a baby's life or that of a Chinese person out of the billions of Chinese people out there. The perversity of evil comes from the ease it introduces itself with, as something different from what it is and from the confusions it inspires. Today's man cannot be defined in any way else but using these gods as a reference, gods that – according to Denis de Rougemont – are devils and never forgive<sup>20</sup>.

#### 4 The State Under the Pressure of Law and the Human Being as protected by Grace

In certain circles of reflection of this secularized world, religion would only be needed by the weaker individuals who need to believe in something or someone and are incapable of trusting their forces. An intellectual who would share his religious option today risks being considered obsolete, a tributary to a system of thinking that is primitive, fundamentalist, egotistic and lacking in objectivity. He restricts the revelation within a framework of scientific data, although religion does not deny science *per se*, nor its competences. Surprisingly enough, if an intellectual becomes a politician, he will use excessively the name of a God to have electoral success. From this exact reason, that he is not a true believer, it is highly unlikely that he would integrate into his state policies at least some of the Christian values and principles that relate everything to the *person*.

In a Christian's perception, the state is only one of the elements that define the world after the Fall (the banishing from

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<sup>20</sup> Not only does it not forgive, but betrays too, creating big confusion, Satan is „split in itself”  
 Rene Girard - *Țapul ispășitor (The Scapegoat)*, București: Nemira, 2000), p. 238 - says that Satan is divided in itself, contradissects itself and stirs big confusion. His constructions are not lasting.

Heaven); it belongs to its times as a consequence of the Fall and is a product of sin; it could never attain a form ideal in a moral sense because it „necessarily represents a kind of domination of man over man; or, since the principle of this domination is the product of sin, it knows no other relations than those of love”<sup>21</sup>. It is thus in the order of things that the politician/state pursue power; „force is primarily the principle of the state that is preferred over the law, justice or the good. Increasing its power is its destiny”<sup>22</sup>. That is why the state, on sheer principle, is and will always be in opposition to the interests and wishes of the citizen.

In Nikolai Berdiaev's opinion, the fundamental ethical problem of the state originates in its relation with the person. This happens because „the state is subordinated to the law,”<sup>23</sup> while the person lives under the protection of grace. Our entire investigation holds this aspect essential because it refers to the way the state is created as an entity and to its inner mechanisms. The political leaders who have not grasped the secret meaning of the state in this decayed world (we shall discuss this matter in the following lines) are the authors of failed attempts to associate the „empire of Caesar” with the Kingdom of God, as their wish is to give the state a sacred, theocratic character. They asked the state to take upon itself the responsibility of redeeming its people, which is, in effect, a work of the church. Those Christian monarchies are a testimony to a „monstrous confusion,”<sup>24</sup> which ended in inevitable failure, whose echoes are still present today whenever the parties that mingle nationalism and religion try to push the envelope to get to power.

As entities, man and the state seem in a perpetual opposition. From the state's perspective, the mere fact of pursuing its goals

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<sup>21</sup> Nikolai Berdiaev, *Despre menirea omului*, (Oradea: Aion, 2004), p. 262.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 260.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 262.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 261.

(its permanent tendency is to transgress its limits and become absolute) by making use of any means conceivable; violence included, comes naturally, it is ordinary, even. Dmitri Merejkovski is right to say that „violence made legal by law is almost imperceptible to us because it is not very common. We cannot breathe; we breathe and make laws; we breathe and commit acts of violence, we spill blood<sup>25</sup>.

## 5 War, a Problem of Consciousness

In Nikolai Berdiaev<sup>26</sup> opinion, political power represents the area of „everyday social life where a devilish thirst for power steals in”<sup>27</sup>. Nevertheless, the Russian thinker admits that the state also has a positive component in this bleak, sinful environment. Therefore, it should not be viewed as an absolute evil. The state is the way it is because it is a part of the world dressed in „skin clothing” that it received after the Fall. The power, just like hierarchy, is necessary in this world.

In addition to the Gospel arguments that support the validity of the political act (Romans 13, 1-7; 1 Timothy 2, 1-3), Panayotis Nellas<sup>28</sup> sees the state as „a legitimate effort necessary to people so that they might organize and rule their social life, a gift from the seminal Logos, a heritage that man took along with him when the excited Heaven”;<sup>29</sup> likewise, as a „positive, good remainder, an altered yet real image of the paradisiacal communion that, even though incapable of turning society into an actual paradise, can however not let it turn into a hell”.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Dmitri Merejkovski, *Rusia bolnavă*, (Iași: Fides, 1996), p. 35.

<sup>26</sup> N. A. Berdiaev, *Despre menirea omului*, pp. 262-263.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 263.

<sup>28</sup> Panayotis Nellas, *Ortodoxie și politică*, (Sibiu: Deisis, 2013), p. 243.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>30</sup> *Ibidem.*

Father Dumitru Stăniloae comes with a vision that diminishes the negative dimension of the state and the political power. The goal would be not to ensure the rule of some over the others, but to ensure a maximum of right and order for everybody. The Orthodox Church considers that the ones that rule do not do that with a view to satisfy their „pleasure to be rulers the same way the ruled are not slaves who live so that the rulers grow more powerful; the rulers are in the service of the ones they rule over”<sup>31</sup> and are guided by the spirit of self-sacrifice. A Christian politician knows that progress and social peace are guaranteed if the state, the city, the village and the family are ruled by the most capable people. „Between two pathological extremes, the individualism and the despotism, – two faces of the same sinful selfishness –, lies the tendency of the Orthodox Christianity towards national solidarity, hierarchically organized, where ruling and love meet in a harmonious synthesis.”<sup>32</sup>

According to the Gospel, God is the only source of authority (John 19, 11; Romans 13, 1), and Jesus Christ holds all power in heaven or on earth (Matthew 28,18). The Christian man is advised to obey the earthly political authority, for God permits it (Romans 13, 13, 7; Matthew 6, 33). The Savior himself offers a model of relating to the matter: „Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's; and to God the things that are God's.” (Matthew 22, 21). This means that it is good to fulfill our duties to the ones ruling over us, but to our souls, too. The true believer must find a balance between the two, but he often finds himself facing a huge dilemma. The moral law considers murder a sin. On the other hand, as a citizen, one must respect the rules of a state that has a war to fight and which will send its men to kill, for this is the natural activity of a warrior. It may

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<sup>31</sup> Father Dumitru Stăniloae thinks that liberalism is inspired by the individualist protestant spirit that, essentially, promotes selfishness that is so detrimental to the poor (*Cultură și duhovnicie*, p. 877).

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*, p. 880.

be that, for the politician who decides to start a war, the inner conflict is even more dramatic, as he carries out moral acts in his double quality; that of a person, one of God's creations, and that of a citizen in a certain position in the hierarchy of the state.

Things are the more complicated, the more we consider that the world we live in is not ideal, pure, untouched by evil. On the contrary, it is the world after the Fall, where the absolute good cannot manifest itself and where man is forced to relate himself to the wrong, to this generator of universal diversity and relativity that complicates all of the person's actions and moral evaluations. Starting from the awareness of such a kind of reality, Nicolai Berdiaev came to the conclusion that „if from the point of view of the norms and in the absolute, war is evil, from a relative point of view, it may prove a lesser evil, due to the sinful environment in which absolute moral principles operate. The deepest ethical paradox results from the fact that the distinction between good and wrong is related to the Fall, the good never acting in its pure form in this decayed world. The absolute Goodwill only manifest itself in the next world, that is beyond good”<sup>33</sup>.

War is an evil that caused chaos but, in equal measure, it allowed the civilisation to take one step forward: paradoxically, although it has been the source of ferocity and of unleashing inferior instincts, it revealed supreme virtues such as courage, faithfulness, honour, chivalry, nobility of the spirit. „it is what makes war a moral phenomenon of pre-eminent complexity”<sup>34</sup>. It would not be as such if not for the problem of consciousness in the mind of the individual taking part in the act of violence. However, this complexity emphasizes once more the paradox and the unmeasurable dimension of the freedom of the Christian spirit. Paradoxically, obedience to the ruling authority (that also involves breaking a moral law – you shall not kill – in

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<sup>33</sup> N. A. Berdiaev, *Despre menirea omului*, p. 266.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 266.

favor of another moral law – „obey your rulers”), offers inner freedom, and not slavery. Both Nikolai Berdiaev<sup>35</sup> and Panayotis Nellas<sup>36</sup> agree in this regard. Man attains inner freedom when he places the Christ in the center of his life, thus claiming victory over his ego. The sinful man is slave to his weaknesses and slave to the ones who have power. However, the one who loves Christ is truly free, for Christ was victorious over the world. Even during some of the fiercest dictatorships, such as Communism, the Christian person knew how to find peace of the soul, if the only fight he mobilizes for is „the fight aimed at continuous con-formation with Christ, faithfulness to the integrity and transforming the energy of the Gospel.”<sup>37</sup>

Earning inner freedom – which is also a solution to gaining peace – is based on the words the Paul the Apostle: „I wish you, brothers, to be free from worries, for the world in its present form is passing away (1 Corinthians 7, 31-32).

When called to war, the Christian has to face his being, his self and is forced to think his position over. In the metaphysical realm, he becomes a subject because he is called to be, and objectively, in a concrete history, that is, confronted with the laws, man is forced – as Kant puts it - to conceive *something other* than nature<sup>38</sup>, to act one way or another, to be more responsible. That is why the problem of evil as a source of violence is also a matter related to freedom, that is a man is capable of recognizing it, fight it or live with it. He somehow has to relate to it. It is impossible for him to circumvent it because, according to the Fathers of the Church, the evil itself does not constitute a material entity, an element of the world, it is not a thing, yet its effects are visible at every step. Paul Ricoeur speaks of evil as „something-that-occurred-once-and-for-all-

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<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 158 – 159.

<sup>36</sup> P. Nellas, *Ortodoxie si politica*, p. 248, 249.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 248, 249.

<sup>38</sup> Pierre Gisel, *Foreword* to Paul Ricoeur, *Răul* (București: Art, 2008), p. 12.



times”, and about it, man’s freedom is invoked, called and provoked to exist<sup>39</sup>. Quality mutations occur when one takes a distance from God (who is the Good itself) and are a consequence of the free will (decisive in the appearance of evil), that indicating the fact that choice is a matter of the soul and not a material one.

## 6 What is Evil?

The appearance of evil has to do with a mystery that transcends time and space. We consider that it is very important to insist on this subject because, according to the Christian belief, evil represents the source of sin, which, in its turn, is the cause of violence. In trying to find an answer to the question „Where does evil come from?”, Paul Ricoeur<sup>40</sup> finds support in Augustin’s ideas that the problem is one of strictly moral nature as evil has no substantiality. Thus, to the French thinker, the question „Where malum?” loses any ontological significance. On the other hand, when we try to find the answer to the question „Why do we retort to evil?”, We shall be led to the area of free will, which is guilty of the original sin for which man has to undergo all of the suffering in life. Paul Ricoeur is not at all pleased when Augustin mentioned the pre-existence of evil before the sin and of man’s weakness when faced with demonic power because this explanation leaves unanswered the cry of protest against undeserved suffering<sup>41</sup>.

To the matter of evil, Saint Gregory of Nyssa<sup>42</sup> provides an answer that is equally profound and veridical, and that can

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<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> P. Ricoeur, *Răul*, pp. 31-33.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33.

<sup>42</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory of Nyssa, *Ecclesiasten*, in: P.G. XLIV, col. 725 AB, homilia VII; col. 733 A, homilia VIII; idem, *Comentarium in Cantaticum canticorumii*, in: P.G. XLIV, col. 796 CD, homilia II; col. 797 A, homilia II; idem, *Oratio catehetica magna*, in: P.G. XLV, col. 23 D, cap.

clarify to us as to the way we should look at our contemporary world with its problems related to violence. The demon is the fallen angel. To Gregory of Nyssa, the cause of this demon's appearance is envy, born from the inner sentiments of the angel that closed up himself to God and refused the right. It is the lack of communion with God. Moreover, it is not a mere lack involved, but the absence of everything that needs to be present<sup>43</sup>. The evil was born once the angel fell. In other words, we are not talking about an evil existence but, of a transformation of an angel whose existence became evil. Saint Gregory says that the demon invented the evil in the created world, thus becoming the vector of evil, the „father of deceiving and enemy to all those whose purpose of freedom lies in a tendency towards good.” The fall of the angels became an opportunity for the sins of man, who now has the freedom to choose which way to go, that is either on the path dictated by their nature, towards God or on the unnatural one, towards evil.

## **7 Pious Caution and the „Drama of the Landlord”**

The evil in the world is growing bigger and wider, more ramified and makes its presence known through suffering, diseases, hunger, hatred, violence, wars. The force evil acts with, through the choices humans make, leads to such great amplification of it that we tend to say that it has gained consistency, materiality, substantiality. In the spirit of the words of Saint Gregory of Nyssa, we believe that evil is so

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V; col. 28 CD, cap. VI; col. 29 AB, cap. VI; col. 32 CD, cap. VII; idem, *De anima et resurrectione*, in: P.G XLVI, col. 93B; idem, *De infantibus qui praemature abripiuntur*, in: P.G. XLVI, col. 173 BC.

<sup>43</sup> Vasile Răducă, *Antropologia Sfântului Grigore de Nyssa. Căderea în păcat și restaurarea omului*, (București: Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, 1996), p. 176

strong because of the ambiguity of the subject he has to evaluate in these terms, of good or evil.

The most striking example in this respect comes from a dialogue in the Gospel of Matthew, 16, 15-23. The fact that Peter expresses his faith in Christ as "Christ, the Son of the living God" is proof that he speaks inspired by God the Father. That is why the Saviour promises that it is him He will build His church on. Just a few more lines after this, though, after He tells His apprentices that He is to go through suffering, die and resurrect, cautious and affected, Peter asks Him to show mercy to Himself and not let all of this happen. "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns". It sounds shocking, does it not? Moreover, it is one of Savior's favorites we are talking about, not just any believer; a while before he had been praised for speaking "of God's," and now, he is called a "Satan"!.

Denis de Rougemont<sup>44</sup> interpretation is as brave as it is blunt and clear. The head of the earthly Church takes measures of caution, he, „wants to make sure of support from the heavenly ruler to secure the new institutions against the risks of the spirit.". This is, according to the Swiss thinker, the „drama of the landlord" that has repeated itself individually or collectively, for centuries. For when he does believe, Peter IS the Church. However, when he starts seeing himself the owner of the good he has received, he takes a distance from the will of God. In the order of Christ's *oikonomia*, Peter's cautious is despicable, because he seems to treasure order more than the sacrifice. „Satan whispered that advice to caution"<sup>45</sup>. On the day of the Passions, Peter shows weakness again, defends his skin by apostatizing Jesus. René Girard thinks that this act of betrayal has nothing to do with Peter's psychology, but, in the same way,

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<sup>44</sup> Denis de Rougemont, *Partea diavolului*, (Bucuresti: Anastasia, 1994), p. 99.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 100.

as with the other apprentices, he proves unable to resist the scapegoat effect, and that fact „reveals the almightiness of the representation of the persecution of man by man”<sup>46</sup>.

On the other hand, Peter failed to understand that neither the life of the world, nor the justice or the morality was the things he was called to defend and cherish through Church, but „the mystery and the practice of sacrifice, the sense of spiritual risking and of the catastrophe that saves”<sup>47</sup>. The Saviour came in the flesh for the same reasons that Peter wanted to cancel: the assuming of evil and death, so that He later might resurrect. By listening to the devil's whispers, Peter is one of the first Christians to have slipped into this trap of pious caution. The message of evil is ambiguous; it creates the impression that it means good. This is the reason why the Christian mysticism is focussed on *nepsis*, on the alert attention on the trains of thought, on the permanent dialogue with God, in order to train the inner eye that can distinguish good from bad, and the ear of the soul, the one that can separate the whisper of God from that of the devil.

## **8 Sin as Cause of Violence**

We might think that the arms of diplomacy of communication have gotten refined so much thanks to the experience and to the wisdom acquired in centuries, that we could use dialogue alone to solve any political dissension in a state or among states. Nowadays, we should find no excuse to the decision of starting wars in which soldiers use weapons to kill their fellow men. Moreover, yet, in Syria, Ukraine, Ireland, Israel, and Palestine – that is to name only some areas of conflict on the Globe–violence is currently in full progress. This means that we

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<sup>46</sup> R. Girard, *Țapul ispășitor* (Bucuresti: Nemira, 2000), p. 137.

<sup>47</sup> de Rougemont, *Partea diavolului*, p. 100.

are not to blame the immediate causes (the limits of diplomacy, the obvious economical interests or the expanding tendencies of some states, etc.) for the tragedies that we are forced to either be part of or spectators to. By everything we have described in this text, we believe that sin is the cause of all evils; violence included, irrespective of the form it takes (from domestic violence to wars). The sin of each separate person, state leaders or rulers – vanity, lust for power, pride, greed, etc. – generate disasters in this world. That is because of the sin, as a manifestation of evil, is what we do and that comes into contradiction with the natural state that God set us in, it is what destroys, corrupts and hinders the right<sup>48</sup>.

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<sup>48</sup> Vasile Răducă, *Antropologia Sfântului Grygorie de Nyssa*, p. 172. Whenever we witness gruesome events such as wars, it is only natural that we wonder what the explanations are for the pleasure, the desire, the attraction of man to fanatical fury, to blood, slaughter, fighting and killing, that means how to understand the dark, savage side of ourselves. One answer and a common approach in our secularised contemporary culture would be the detachment, the scientific „objectifying”. Namely, it may be that the tendency towards violence is “wired into us” and may be understood in biological, evolutionary terms. (Charles Taylor, *Secular Age*, Massachusetts, London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), p. 657. In the attempt to seek an explanation for the violent behaviour of humans when the land is at stake, Charles Taylor analyses carefully the results of some strictly scientific endeavours. He noticed that sex and wars may be analysed in a number of cultural matrixes of understanding that differ from one society to another. The differences derive from the moral and religious perspectives of different societies but, there still remain some common traits about which the author wonders whether they may not represent some common evolutionary heritage. Charles Tayles tells us that this is the perspective of the secularist world, which rules out the religious component of life. But it is precisely this aspect that we do not lose track of, as we strongly believe that the religious perspective does not in any way minimise the scientific approach and understanding of the matter. On the contrary René Girard draws our attention on the arrogance science proposes itself with. He considers a reconciliation of terms, even though the Illuminism came with the ideas that adherence to Christian religion

Therefore, it is also here that we must search and find solution of peace. However, in order to understand this way, we must set correctly the frameworks that Orthodoxy proposes, that does not speak of a philosophy or an ideology but of a true history where divine and human realities can survive without contradicting one another, can have a dialogue without contradicting one another, can create synergically without destroying one another. We believe that the deterioration of the way a man thinks of himself today comes from the cleavage between the historical and transcendent, ephemeral and eternal, earthly and heavenly<sup>49</sup>. At the origin of all helplessness and moral chasm lies the idea that eternity and time, the

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obliterates the capacity to think rationally and scientifically; that means that science and religion, the *logos* and the *mythos* are opposed to one another. No matter how hard they might try to see the similarities between man and other species that are proven to be intelligent, capable of feelings and of strategic thinking, we cannot ignore an aspect of uttermost importance: the difference comes from the ontological gifts from God to man, gifts that make him „in His image, in His likeness“. Among them are the *reason*, *logos*, that do not only mean the ability to perform mathematical operations (one experiment in the 70's showed that chimpanzees are capable of adding and subtracting ) or to make the distinction between good and wrong. It is more than that. the *Logos*-ul offers man the power to transcend the world and this space, it is the divine seed in him, it is what gives him the opportunity to answer God's invitation to become holy, to become a god himself „the same way Holy God is“. When man denies his *logos*-ul, he becomes an animal indeed, and acts as such. It is this man devoided of *logos* and his descendants that Darwin studies. In the case of such a person, Girard's theory on mimetism can be applied: „The basis for violence and aggression is imitation or mimicry, which is common to both – animals and man“.

<sup>49</sup> For instance, Will Self, professor at Brunet University, tells in a interview offered to Cathy Newman from Channel News on January 9, 2015 after the terrorist attack in Paris January 7: "The notion suggests that freedom of speech is some kind of absolute right, and that's exactly the same as a religious point of view".

afterlife and the present, God and the contemporary man are antagonistic couples.

The Greek theologian Panayotis Nellas<sup>50</sup> agrees that theologians and— our addition — intellectuals as well as politicians ought to speak the language of time, to adapt their speech to the rigours of the present times; yet, it appears that what they understood from this adapting has been to obliterate the core of Christianity, that consists in Christ's existence in history, that is the living belief that the Logos truly came to Earth from Heaven, embodied Himself from the Holy Ghost and Virgin Mary, was born, cured sick men, brought dead people back to life, was convicted, died and resurrected, thus offering us the chance to Eternal Life, maintaining His concrete presence through the Sacred Eucharist. This is the key that the Orthodoxy provides so that we could understand the world we live in and find solutions not to lose ourselves. That means to have a dignified passage through this world, to feel free, even when under the authority of a tyrannical regime and apparently lacking any opposing reaction.

Our analysis follows a path established since Plato, who chose the city/the state as his model for the soul. We are very much aware that Plato's *Republic* is based on the idea that there are certain similarities and connections between the city/state and the human soul that — if we can identify them — allow a deep understanding of the mechanisms that make them work. Because, as Justice is a virtue of the soul, so can it equally represent a social, community and political one. In this order of ideas, if every soul gathers its individual peace, after a personal effort seen as a virtue, then the city, too (that is the sum of its citizens) has a chance to peace. If Christian teachings tells us that peace is the fruit of justice (Isiah 32, 17), it is the gift of God (John 14, 2; 16, 33), it is the heavenly state of the human soul freed from sin and, last but not least, the gift of the Holy Ghost

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<sup>50</sup> P. Nellas, *Ortodoxie si politica*, p. 50.

(Romans 15, 13; Galatians 5, 22) to those who respect the commandment of love then, in order that we no more lose our way among ideas, all that's left to do is to dig deep into the core of the matter that preoccupies us, after having building fences around the frameworks of the following message of the Gospel: love- alongside all its immanent values (the good, justice, the truth, mercy, freedom, attention generosity etc.) – has peace as its direct consequence.

## **9 The War Against one's Self, as a Solution Towards a State of Peace**

The Roumanian theologian Dumitru Stăniloae<sup>51</sup> believes that the sin inside humans explains many social problems such as poverty, disease, sadness but it is also the cause that explains violence, irrespective of the form it manifests itself in. That is why „the fight for a better social order must start from no other point than the sin itself. The fight against the sin in humans is the only efficient fight to attain a better social order.

This idea may be considered idealistic or, at least, lacking in the sense of reality, but it is based on the fact that, for a Christian, Orthodoxy is not a philosophy of life, a psychological support, one religion preferred at the expense of others „it is not an area of life detached from all deeds or natural conditions of man. It does not only mean going to church, nor does it mean some universalist bookery or a system of crystalline spheres floating over the waves of life, untouched by them and not interfering with it. It is a power that pervades the totality of human facts and situations, redeeming man not because it takes him out of them, but because they work inside of them, according to its holy meaning”<sup>52</sup>. Orthodoxy is life itself, so that every man – be

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<sup>51</sup> D. Stăniloae, *Cultura si duhovnicie*, p. 880.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*



it a common citizen or, especially, a politician – live in this spirit and must rely on virtue, which is not an abstract principle but life itself in communion with God, where the coordinating principle – the commandment – is only a formal means to achieving this communion”<sup>53</sup>.

Therefore it is necessary to live a life in communion according to the Orthodox Spirituality, i.e. to get the chance to be redeemed here, on Earth by leaving a good mark in history and by promoting successful peace on Earth.

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<sup>53</sup> V. Răducă, *Antropologia Sfântului Grygorie de Nyssa*, p. 175.

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