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## Milestones regarding the Value of Life in Pentateuch

### Abstract

Over all the centuries, humans have constantly tried to understand the meaning of their own existence, the reason for which they were born, they were living and they had to die, the mythological projections or the philosophical currents of the time trying to propose cosmogonies or valid reasons in this way. What was understood in general, in the common way, was the acceptance of the idea that the human soul comes from the exterior of the seen world, through a creational act which was external to humans, that is (for those who benefit from the supernatural revelation to understand better the truth), from God. The biblical perspective about the creation and, implicitly about life,



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is summed up in the pages of the Pentateuch. This perspective is totally different from the current perspective of man belonging to the post modernistic period, and his vision must be updated for the general Christian interest to save the lives and souls of those still preoccupied with the human's spiritual perspective, the religious ideal sown in him since creation.

Keywords

existence, life, soul, spirituality, immortality

## 1 Introduction

Following the mission entrusted to them by our Savior Jesus Christ (Matthew 28:19-20), the Holy Apostles spread out in the world and laid the foundations of a true Christian society, which is at the basis of the present modern society, slowly transforming the pagan world for several centuries.

The Christian society is now in the middle of a significant socio-cultural evolution, yet the effects of its desacralization can be noticed in a real process of transformation of the moral-spiritual principles that have coordinated it for many centuries, and this is happening especially now, during the postmodernist age. The changes are multiple, yet the main warning signal is the depreciative vision on life, which tends to be no longer understood as a true gift of the divinity but as consumption good, a biological product involved in the mechanism of the society only to produce and to consume, without any need of individualization of the human person. It is a world preoccupied by "*doing*" and "*becoming*" and not at all by the discovery of the simple meaning of "*being*", of existing for a superior spiritual purpose.

## 2 The Framework of Human Life

The biblical perspective on Creation and implicitly on life is summed up in the pages of the Pentateuch. This biblical perspective is totally different from the present conception of the man living in the postmodernism, and this vision needs to be rediscovered for the general Christian interest of saving the life and the souls of those still concerned by man's spiritual perspective, by the religious ideal sown in man even since his creation.

Thus, the biblical perspective testifies that life is the gift of God shared with His creation. The act of creation out of nothing is the bringing out of nothingness into being, out of inexistence to existence, involving the life offered to the world obligatorily related to the factor *time*<sup>1</sup>. And this creation took place because God, "*did not content Himself with Self-contemplation, but in the richness of His goodness, it pleased Him to create something to receive His blessings and to partake of His goodness*"<sup>2</sup>. The whole existence has its beginning in God, the first and supreme cause of Creation, because the "*Maker of all is Life by nature*"<sup>3</sup>.

God's Spirit was floating over the water on the first day of Creation (Genesis 1:2), because "*it was preparing the waters to bring forth life... the Holy Spirit is not devoid of the creative power*"<sup>4</sup>.

God's commandment of the third day that the earth should put forth: plants yielding seed and fruit trees yielding fruit whose seed is in itself, each according to its kind (Genesis 1:12) "*became a law of nature and remained a law of the earth, giving*

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<sup>1</sup> Sf. Vasile cel Mare, *Omilii la Hexaemeron*, Omilia I, 5, Ed. Sofia, București, 2004, p. 20.

<sup>2</sup> Sf. Ioan Damaschin, Dogmatică, Cartea II-a 2, apud Ieromonah Serafim Rose, *Cartea Facerii, Crearea lumii și omul începăturilor*, Ed. Sofia, București, 2006, p. 93.

<sup>3</sup> Sf. Chiril al Alexandriei, *Glafire la Facere, Despre Adam* I, 2, PSB 39, Ed. IBMBOR, Bucuresti, 1992, p. 10.

<sup>4</sup> Sf. Vasile cel Mare, *op. cit.*, Omilia II, 6, p. 51.

it in the future the power to give birth and yield fruit”<sup>5</sup>. A law determined and entrusted by God to the power of matter.<sup>6</sup>

The fifth day brought to life the animals in the waters and the flying birds (Genesis 1:20-23). They are “*swarms of living creatures*” (Genesis 1:20), because their main feature is existence, life and the possibility of its perpetuation through the will of God. The commandment received determined the water and then the earth, on the sixth day, to support the creative act (Genesis 1:24-25), God being also the One Who, by His great power, brings to life all the animals.<sup>7</sup> “The material form and the breath of life came into being at the same time... The same moment and the same creative power brought into being both the whale and the frog”<sup>8</sup>.

“God creates immediately and on the spot (...) His simple word is the one that brings the beings to life (...) the waters and the earth do not have the natural feature of giving birth to life”<sup>9</sup>. These did not bring out of them something already existing in a latent state in them. “But the divine Word is building what is being created. Let the earth put forth! Let it put forth not what had been put in it beforehand but let it acquire what it does not have, namely the power to put forth, a power bestowed by God on the land through the commandment”<sup>10</sup>.

“The soul of the animals did not come out as if hidden in the ground; it came into being along with their body, on the

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<sup>5</sup> Ibidem, Omilia a-V-a, 1, p. 101.

<sup>6</sup> N. I. Nicolaescu, *Misiunea socială a Bisericii în lumea Sf. Scripturi*, Rev. Ortodoxia, Nr.1/1951, p. 46.

<sup>7</sup> Sf. Chiril al Alexandriei, *op. cit.* 1, 2, p. 10: “And since the Maker of all is Life by nature, He also made the nature of the waters, the mother of the swimming creatures and of the creatures flying through the air. And He commanded the earth to yield the nature of many kinds of animals and beasts: and immediately everything was done according to the commandment and surpassing all understanding”.

<sup>8</sup> Sfântul Ambrozie cel Mare, *Hexameron*, 5, 1, apud Ieromonah Serafim Rose, *op. cit.* p.88.

<sup>9</sup> Ieromonah Serafim Rose, *op. cit.* p. 88.

<sup>10</sup> Sf. Vasile cel Mare, *op. cit.*, Omilia 8, 1, p. 176.

Creator's commandment. Their soul is the same in all of them and has the same feature: it does not have the gift of speaking, yet each animal stands out by a particular feature"<sup>11</sup>. Saint Basil the Great considers the animals' soul to be irrational.

### 3 The Origin of Human Life in God's Love

God made man on the sixth day of Creation in His image and gave him the possibility to attain His likeness<sup>12</sup> (Genesis 1:26-27). Man's life "*has the same beginning as man's soul*"<sup>13</sup>.

Man was formed from the dust of the ground and God "*breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being*" (Genesis 2:7). St. Basil the Great interprets the two aspects of man's creation as follows: "*God made the invisible side of man, and He formed the visible side of man. The forming is adequate for the clay, and the making is adequate for what is in God's image. Therefore the flesh was formed, yet the soul was made*"<sup>14</sup>.

The biblical text clearly indicates the fact that man's soul is different from the body and was breathed into him to bring man to life. What man received from God especially, different from the rest of the creation, is the rational soul which gives man the possibility to be a whole and complete being, a special being, a special entity, a superior being<sup>15</sup>. "*By this breath He gave the man formed from earth the power of life; this breath makes up the nature of the soul. (...) What does with a living soul*

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<sup>11</sup> Ibidem 9, 3, p. 204.

<sup>12</sup> Ieromonah Serafim Rose, *op. cit.* p. 98: "The Holy Fathers show that the image has been given to us fully and cannot pass away, yet the likeness has been given in the beginning only as potential, man having to work himself to attain its perfection".

<sup>13</sup> Mitr. Nicolae Corneanu, *Miscellanea Patristica*, Ed. Amarcord, Timișoara 2001, p. 203

<sup>14</sup> Sf. Vasile cel Mare, *Despre obârșia omului*, 2, 3, apud Ieromonah Serafim Rose, *op. cit.* p.106.

<sup>15</sup> N. I. Nicolaescu, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

mean? It means a working soul, having the limbs of the body for his tools, surrendering to his will"<sup>16</sup>.

Therefore, man's soul comes from God through a creation act. It is not a little part of God and consequently it is not divine<sup>17</sup>. It does not come from God's Being but from His work, which made both the human body and the rational soul animating the body<sup>18</sup>, in an instantaneous work<sup>19</sup>, namely what we call coexistentialism<sup>20</sup>.

The Hebrew expressions for *the soul* were:

- *nefes* (anima), for *life* and *the principle of life*, the same for man and animal; and
- *ruah* (spiritus), for the *breath of reason* or God's *spirit*<sup>21</sup>.

The fact that man was formed in his bodily side from dust (Genesis 2:7), shows his earthly origin, and through the soul created by God it is highlighted the heavenly part of the man brought to life, a creature "*combining*" two different worlds<sup>22</sup>. What gives value to man and differentiates him categorically from the rest of the life present here on earth in plants and animals is his rational and thinking soul, capable of profitably using the sacred gift of life to take man from the earthly world to the heavenly world, from a temporal living to an atemporal living<sup>23</sup>, where he is no longer implacably submitted to the

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<sup>16</sup> Sf. Ioan Gură de Aur, *Omiliile la Facere* 12, 5, Vol. I, Ed. IBMBOR, București, 1987, p. 145.

<sup>17</sup> Ieromonah Serafim Rose, *op. cit.*, p.107.

<sup>18</sup> Sf. Ioan Gură de Aur, *op. cit.*, 13, 2, p. 149

<sup>19</sup> Ieromonah Serafim Rose, *op. cit.* p. 108.

<sup>20</sup> Mitr. Nicolae Corneanu, *op. cit.*, p. 198.

<sup>21</sup> I. Rămureanu, *Conceptia Sf. Iustin Martirul despre suflet*, Studii Teologice, Nr. 7-8, 1958, p. 408

<sup>22</sup> Ieromonah Serafim Rose, *op. cit.* p. 109.

<sup>23</sup> Sf. Chiril al Alexandriei, *op. cit.*, p. 11: "And because man is a speaking animal truly wonderful and very similar to God, in order not to seem that he is the imitation of supreme glory, but in order to be by making partaker of qualities equal to those that are not from here, [God] honored this creature with anticipatory will and with the quality of

factor of time, which measures movement, transformation and, consequently, deterioration and death.

Man's supreme position within creation obligatorily leads to the conclusion of the special importance of his life, due to the possibility given by God to man to continually develop his intellectual and especially spiritual qualities.<sup>24</sup>

#### **4     The Decadence of Human Life**

The gift of life was not understood at its true value by the man fallen into sin, who considered it equally important to that of the animals', using it as he pleased. This aspect can be observed in Cain's attitude to Abel, as, full of meanness, Cain does not hesitate to kill his brother, without taking into account God's invitation to resist this temptation (Genesis 4:6-7). The peace with God, with the surrounding nature and with himself had been already lost through Adam and Eve's mistake. Fratricide indicates, nevertheless, the low level that people can reach in appreciating life, when they befriend evilness<sup>25</sup>.

Although the blood shed calls out from the earth to God for the injustice made (Genesis 4:10), which should inevitably lead us to the conclusion that man's life is an invaluable gift, that does not end with the death of the body, however, people have always practiced, throughout history, the same disdain for the

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work of His hands. Forming him in an earthly image, He made him a speaking animal, and in order to go beyond the reasons of his own nature, He imprinted in him immediately the incorruptible, life-giving spirit."

<sup>24</sup> D. Stăniloae, "Să nu ucizi", *temeiuri creștine despre pace*, BOR, 1-2/1964, pp. 81-82.

<sup>25</sup> Vladimir Prelipceanu, *Pacea mesianică la profeții Vechiului Testament*, S.T., 1-2, 1954, p. 4.

human life<sup>26</sup>, a blamable feeling expressed in the testimony of Lamech (Genesis 4:23).

Crime has gradually become a daily factor in a world drawing increasingly further away from God, where “*people’s meanness increased*”, due to the fact that “*all the thoughts and desires of their heart are turned to evil every day*”. What the people had lost was actually everyone’s peace with himself given by God to man at Creation, “*through the natural moral law imprinted in his being, a law meant to realize the moral good*”<sup>27</sup>. Consequently, “*the earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence. And God looked upon the earth and, behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth*” (Genesis 6:5, 11-12). Man’s natural way was actually his turning towards eternal life, through a correct appreciation of the gift of life and of the beneficial and wonderful relation with God.

Ignorance of this aspect made men consider their own life as an asset they can deal with freely, disregarding at the same time the life of their fellows. Such a generalization of the evil that had got hold of life had an effect on the whole creation, as well, triggering “*the corruption*” of the earth (Genesis 6:11), which generated God’s radical reaction. The words: “*The end of all flesh has come before Me, for the earth is filled with violence through them*” (Genesis 6:13) express God’s almightiness regarding the gift of life, which He can offer or withdraw.

The flood that followed cleaned the earth of meanness and offered a new beginning to life, which, for many generations, fully appreciated the human existence in the framework of the creation teeming with life that surrounds man. Since from now on man is allowed to also feed on the flesh of animals, God

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<sup>26</sup> Sf. Chiril al Alexandriei, *Glafire la Facere. Despre Cain și Abel*, 2, p. 22: “Cain made himself for the human nature a teacher on the way to homicide.”

<sup>27</sup> Vasile Prescure, *Iubirea de oameni și pacea*, BOR, 1-2/1964, p. 105.



forbids the “*flesh with life*”<sup>28</sup>, namely the consumption of the blood of these animals (Genesis 9:4), because in it there is life, which does not have an ephemeral existence and importance.

On the other hand, each man’s life is unique and particularly important, as each man has a goal, a calling and a mission to accomplish<sup>29</sup>. God is warning about the fact that causing a man’s death shall be punished by one’s own death, a natural consequence for the shedding of blood in which there is life (Genesis 9:5-6).

The oriental peoples of the Antiquity have preserved the idea of a revenge equal to the evil caused, by what they called <*the law of Talion*><sup>30</sup>, a rudimentary law<sup>31</sup>, the intention being not necessarily to adequately punish the wrongdoer but also to discourage any bad initiative. Yet, the Antiquity offers a negative image regarding the appreciation of life; the social atmosphere developed there is one in which life was protected only on the basis of family relations and, eventually, in order to profitably use its material importance. Wars and slavery testify to the disdain of human life<sup>32</sup>, in a development of history which, for most of it, is nothing but a development of conflicts within each people or at the contact with its neighbors<sup>33</sup>.

At the same time, the natural perpetuation of life was regarded as a merit of the female gender and a gift of the divinity (understood under various polytheistic forms, permitting and supporting the perpetuation of life, decisively contributing to the process of the fecundity of nature, of the animals and of the human being).

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<sup>28</sup> Athanase Negoită, *Istoria religiei Vechiului Testament*, Ed. Sofia, București, 2006, p. 37

<sup>29</sup> D. Stăniloae, *op. cit.* p. 83.

<sup>30</sup> Ovidiu Drîmba, *Istoria culturii și civilizației*, Ed. Științifică și Enciclopedică, București, 1985, p. 77.

<sup>31</sup> Athanase Negoită, *op. cit.*, p. 77.

<sup>32</sup> N. I. Nicolaescu, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

<sup>33</sup> Vadimir Prelipceanu, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

Therefore, the Antiquity viewed human life as a gift from the gods and a natural result of a concrete process of human interaction: appreciation or disdain, oscillating attitude depending on the interdependence of the people and on the aims pursued, forgetting the natural brotherhood of men given by their common origin<sup>34</sup>. The division of the society into social classes deepened the human antagonism, the result being a division still continuing to this day. Man expressed a blamable selfishness regarding the respect and appreciation of anyone else's life, unless that person came from his own descent, or in the absence of material motivations in the place of the sentimental ones. Crime, slavery, abortion or child abandonment constitute flaws of the world of the Antiquity in point of the appreciation and promotion of human life, flaws triggered by an exaggerate moral freedom, allowing the perpetration of any act considered sometimes virtue<sup>35</sup>.

## 5 Human Life in a Spiritual Vision

The biblical perspective on life is delineated in the books of Pentateuch, keeping the defining line of the origin and value of man, created by God in His image to attain His likeness, which expresses a profound note of sacredness in the understanding of the sense and of the existence of life on earth.

The life of the patriarchs of the Old Testament goes along this line, as they bear in their heart the divine promise of numerous and above all special descendants, on the basis of the covenant between God and Abraham (Genesis 12:2; 17:4). The Semitic social context has a certain vision on life, which it considers valuable only to the extent to which it does not breach the legal dispositions and the right to existence and property of one's

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<sup>34</sup> N. I. Nicolaescu, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

<sup>35</sup> Teodor M. Burcuș, *Aspecte sociale în predica profeților Vechiului Testament*, in: S.T. nr. 9-10/1966, p. 576.

fellow. The law of Talion constituted the main way of solving conflicts. At the same time, the feeling of unity and safety of the family was very important, an increased natality being appreciated, which made room for polygamy.

In the Orient of the Antiquity, children were regarded as a gift of the divinity for the continuation of the nation and of the name they were bearing. Procreation in the family was understood as a divine blessing giving sense to man's life and work, offering him the possibility of a virtual continuity even after death, through his descendants. The lack of children was understood as being forsaken by God, as a curse preventing the perpetuation of he who was no longer worthy to live, neither physically, nor virtually through the descendants of his blood. God reveals Himself here as a master of life, which He can offer or refuse. He is the one closing and opening the mother's womb (Genesis 15:4; 16:2; 17:22; 21:1; 30:2).

The desire to have children in the family drew the oriental practice of those times of using the wife's slave as a concubine. The slave gets pregnant with the wife's approval in the idea of understanding and supporting the appearance of life. The slave's son procreated with the master of the house is considered a legitimate son, heir of all the fatherly prerogatives, if there is no other legitimate heir, born of the wife<sup>36</sup>. The importance of life and the continuity of the human person through his descendants were considered more valuable than any selfish feelings.

The sign of the Covenant made with God will be, from now on, the circumcision of the men in the family and in the nation (Genesis 17:10). The family does not mean only the people with the same blood, but extends to all those under the roof of one's own house. Consequently, the circumcision concerns everyone in the house *"And every male in Abraham's household, including those born in his household or bought from a foreigner, was*

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<sup>36</sup> Dumitru Abrudan, Emilian Cornițescu, *Arheologia biblică*, Ed. IBMBOR, București, 1994, p. 128.

*circumcised with him.*" (Genesis 17:27). This involves an attitude of appreciation of life, of this sacred gift of God offered to men, through the fact that no one of one's house was supposed to be let out of the Covenant with God, which would exclude him from the future divine protection and blessing. The circumcision makes one think of the idea of procreation, seen equally as an obligation and a responsibility – the multiplication of the respective nation in the interest of the development of the Covenant<sup>37</sup>.

The gift of life made to men is sublime, yet it should not become a value in itself, broken apart from the Source of its existence. For this very reason, a demonstration of the authentic faith takes place, as a lesson for men, to make them understand that life with no connection with God means nothing on the level of human existence. Therefore, Abraham's faith was put to the test through the demand that he should offer his only son he had left with him, as an offer to God (Genesis 22:2). This demand is normal for the religious lifestyle of Canaan, where the population worshipped the god Moloch, a worship asking for a total devotion from the believers, proved through the offering, as a human sacrifice, of the children in the family<sup>38</sup>, which constituted an abomination for the true God<sup>39</sup>.

Abraham is asked to show his devotion to his Creator, to choose between the love for God and the natural love for his own son<sup>40</sup>, which constitutes a very hard test. He is ready to sacrifice his son, obeying the divine request, yet not out of disdain for his life, but suffering without avowing it for the imminent important loss of his soul. Abraham is ready to heroically prove his attachment to God<sup>41</sup>, whom He considers the source of life

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<sup>37</sup> Athanase Negoită, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

<sup>38</sup> Dumitru Abrudan, Emilian Cornițescu, *op. cit.*, p. 105.

<sup>39</sup> Athanase Negoită, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

<sup>40</sup> Sf. Chiril al Alexandriei, *Glafire la Facere. Despre Avraam și despre făgăduința prin Isaac*, 5, p. 80.

<sup>41</sup> Sf. Ioan Gură de Aur, *op. cit.*, 47, 2, p. 194

and, at the same time, the One Who offers eternal rest to the souls in *the abode of the dead* (Genesis 37:35). The sacrifice is stopped at the right moment by God, Who shows once again His quality of Source and protector of the human life, which He appreciates and respects due to his own eternal love, continually poured down over His creation.

Another lesson regarding the value of human life is provided in the “*negotiation*” episode that Abraham initiates and holds before God for the salvation of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah from their deserved punishment, due to the heavy sins perpetrated there (Genesis 18:20-33). Abraham insists in this dialogue neither out of curiosity, to understand the divine logic in a large-scale action, nor to save at least the family of his nephew Lot, present there, but because he loves life<sup>42</sup> and understands the importance of this divine gift and cannot accept the idea that the same God can take it back arbitrarily, without giving a possibility of salvation to the just, if possible. From here comes his insistence on increasing the divine love and mercy for those people, despite the fact that, analyzing numerically, the unjust before God are much more numerous than the just. Because God is holy, He cannot remain indifferent to evil<sup>43</sup>. Yet “*the virtue of the few can cover for the wickedness of the many, because God’s goodness is great and often for the sake of few just people, God saves the many*”.<sup>44</sup>

Another important aspect is the divine promise made to Abraham of multiplying his descendants as the stars of heaven and as the sand of the sea (Genesis 26:3-4). This promise does not constitute an arbitrary privilege from God, but has to be understood as a reward for virtues with the intention of proliferating them within the same nation, along several generations, for the gift of life on this earth to be used profitably from the perspective of its spiritual qualities. Moreover, these

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<sup>42</sup> Ibidem, 42,4, p. 126.

<sup>43</sup> Athanase Negoitã, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

<sup>44</sup> Sf. Ioan Gurã de Aur, *op. cit.*, 42, 5, p. 131.

virtuous descendants, exemplary for their way of understanding and living their own life, will become models to be followed as well by other peoples who, endeavoring to embrace this model, they, too, will receive the divine blessing, drawing the appreciation and merited reward of the unique God. Thus, man's life, in its spiritual side, acquires unimagined expansions, generating models and moral mutations of an unfathomable value in space and time, an extremely important aspect which does not bring anything new in the sense of the existence of life on earth, but, on the contrary, restores life to its true value and significance.

## 6 God as the sole Master of Human Life

Every man's life matters and manslaughter is not justified among people, and even less the disdain of our fellows to the point of considering them unworthy of living this life. Therefore Jacob condemned the revengeful action of his sons, which was typically oriental<sup>45</sup>, against the inhabitants of the City of Salem (Genesis 34:30), because life should not be disconsidered, and men should not be killed when there are other variants able to solve the existing problems. *"For neither did the killers temper their anger, nor did they think as sons brought up by a just father, compared to those that were not completely alien to all good. But they depopulated the city, killing those who decided to think the same as them and dared to believe in them"*<sup>46</sup>.

God offers life to the people and only He can apply the punishment of suspending it, if people do not understand the aim of their own existence in relation to the Source of their life (Genesis 38:7, 10).

For the good organization of a society, God has given the Jews also laws meant to form them in line with His expectations. The

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<sup>45</sup> Ibidem p. 50.

<sup>46</sup> Sf. Chiril al Alexandriei, *Glafire la Facere. Iarăși despre Iacob*, 4, p. 186.

sixth commandment of the Decalogue forbid any killing made with no justified motivation (Exodus 20:13). God is the One Who gives life to men and they cannot use it according to their own liking. Moreover, God had commanded them to love, each one of them, their fellow as themselves (Leviticus 19:18), yet what the Jews did not manage to do was to extend the notion of “*fellow*” to any man, reducing it only to the people of the same family, tribe, nation.

Another law foresaw the capital punishment for murder, for hitting or speaking evil of one’s parents, for kidnapping a Jew to make him a slave. If somebody caused someone else’s death by mistake, he could save his life by taking refuge in the altar, or in the shelter cities established later on. If he had killed with premeditation and had taken refuge in the altar, he was to be taken even from there to be punished (Exodus 21:12-17).

Yet, the mosaic legislation did not refer only to the conservation of life, which needs to be protected from the evilness of men or animals, but also had in view the corporal integrity of free men and of slaves, and even of pregnant women (Exodus 21:18-36). In the case of the latter, if “*she loses a baby not yet formed, let the guilty pay as much as the woman’s man asks, by judicial decision. If, however, the baby is formed, then soul for soul shall be given.*” (Exodus 21:22 -23)<sup>47</sup>, namely, the capital punishment should be received for having killed a man, a “*formed fetus*”, unlike in the case of an “*unformed one, with a face yet unformed*”, the difference between the two variants being given by the period of 40 days since the conception, when “*the human figure is not yet perfect*”<sup>48</sup>. The killing of the thief caught red-handed was appreciated differently depending on whether he was caught by night or by day, when he could be recognized and punished, which prevented any abuse against life (Exodus 22:1-3).

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<sup>47</sup> XXX, *Septuaginta*, Vol I, Ed. Polirom, Iași, 2004, p. 245.

<sup>48</sup> Mitr. Nicolae Corneanu, *op. cit.*, p. 195.

Just as sin can spread throughout the whole community, by copying the bad example, similarly the punishment for wrongdoers becomes a moralizing example for everybody (Numbers 15:32-36). Enmity was forbidden, yet it was necessary to reprimand one's fellow's sin in order not to become partaker to it by a tacit approval (Levitic 19:17). Physical death was understood as the consequence of sin (Genesis 3:17-19), and thinking about its unavoidability was meant to give wisdom (Deuteronomy 32:29).

The death penalty became a method to show the Jews in advance what was actually going to happen to them if they did not respect the law of God. *"For God made not death, neither has He pleasure in the destruction of the living. For He created all things that they might be"* (Wisdom 1:13-14). The physical death before its time actually represented an indication of the people's spiritual death, which was considered much more serious, because to die physically, when time had come, was understood as a normal act of joining one's forefathers already departed from this world (Genesis 49:33; 25:8, Deuteronomy 31:16) and awaiting, deeply asleep (Psalms 12:4), the Lord's day of reward and justice (Ezekiel 37:1-14), in Sheol, which means *"the abode of the dead"*<sup>49</sup> (Genesis 37:35).

To die in sin created a much more serious situation, considered as a breakup of the communion with God, which cannot bring anything good, neither rest, nor forgiveness of sins, nor communion with the forefathers who had been worthy of God's attention but only eternal punishment because the state of death can no longer be changed.

The Jewish people understood life as a gift from God and human procreation as an accomplishment of the divine commandment: *"be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth and govern it"* (Genesis 1:28; 9:7). In the spirit of respect for God's commandment, the Jews had to have children to accomplish the meaning of their

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<sup>49</sup> Athanase Negoită, *op. cit.*, p. 52.



existence<sup>50</sup>, which is why celibacy, in this people, just as suicide, was almost inexistent.

## 7 Conclusions

As a sort of conclusion we can say:

- Man has a soul; human existence does not end by death.
- Man has a rational soul, different from that of the animals; he has a soul working not just for the material benefits of the earthly life, but especially to reach resemblance of God, which represents a strictly spiritual perspective.
- Man's existential goal is his spiritual evolution, accomplished in the kingdom of heaven.
- Man has received as a gift the surrounding creation, of which he is absolutely responsible.
- Man's inner peace directly determines his exterior attitude towards the society and the creation.
- Man is responsible towards his own life, which should not be considered consumption good.
- Each man's life is unique, having its own value and a well-defined spiritual goal.
- The disdain of life by men will trigger the withdrawal of the gift of life by God, a measure demonstrated through the flood.
- Manslaughter is a crime, yet neglecting the perspective of spiritual life is a true suicide, an often unconscious yet perfectly guilty decision, in the context of the supernatural revelation in the human society.

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<sup>50</sup> Dumitru Abrudan; Diac. Prof. Dr. Emilian Cornițescu, *op. cit.*, p. 167.

- The Bible speaks about the fact that the gift of life is a divine gift, and man is totally responsible for its profitable use.

The biblical text presents the origin of life on earth, its Creator, but also the way of turning to good use, in the best sense of the word, our own earthly existence. Man has to understand the fact that life is a divine gift which he has to respect, because it involves not just the life of the body, but also the life of the soul. Life does not actually belong to man, because man has done nothing to receive it, but, on the other hand, the gift of life obliges man to look at his existence with responsibility, in the context of the continual and beneficial presence of the heavenly Father, giving equal attention to the body and to the soul.

St. Basil the Great warned about the evil represented by the neglect of our spiritual life saying: "Evilness is an illness of the soul, while virtue is the soul's health. Wonderfully have some defined health: balance of the natural energies. We would not be far from the truth if we were to define spiritual health similarly. Because the soul naturally and intuitively wants what is its own, which is why everybody praises chastity, approve of justice, admire courage and desire skillfulness. These virtues are more specific of the soul than health is specific of the body."<sup>51</sup>

Despite of the human spiritual potential, people have always practiced both manslaughter and physical suicide, and especially spiritual suicide, refusing to understand the true dimension of any crime, which in the end is nothing else but an offense against God. No one is master of anyone else's life, and not even of his own life, and everyone has to develop his life under intellectual and spiritual guidance until its end established only by God. Man's life continues to remain God's gift, involving joy but also Christian responsibility for a correct understanding and appreciation of it.

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<sup>51</sup> Sf. Vasile cel Mare, *op. cit.*, Omilia 9, 4, pp. 207-208.

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