



**The creation as gift- a manifestation on the outside of the  
intra-trinitarian love  
(Creația ca dar, manifestare ad extram a iubirii intratrinitare)**

**PhD. Vârlan Florin**

Faculty of Theology and Sciences of Education of the  
Valahia University of Târgoviște,  
ROMANIA,

E-mail: [varlanflorin@yahoo.com](mailto:varlanflorin@yahoo.com)

**ABSTRACT**

**English Abstract:** *The supernatural divine revelation shows that the world is the work of the love of God and is meant for deification. God has created the world out of goodness, to also share His intra-Trinitarian love to the others. Receiving the world as a gift, man is meant to get rich and get filled with light, and, through it, to enrich and to fill with light the whole creation. On the one hand, man uses the creation; on the other hand, the whole nature is waiting for man's return towards God. The fate of nature has always been closely related to man's fate. Today, man needs a new conception on the world and on the creation. The democratic freedom that any citizen of this planet enjoys should be used more wisely. The human activity needs to be guided by that responsibility which, although placing the person in the middle, is nevertheless related to the past and with repercussions in the future.*

**Romanian Abstract:** *Revelația supranaturală ne arată că lumea este opera iubirii lui Dumnezeu și are ca finalitate îndumnezeirea. Dumnezeu a creat lumea din bunătate, pentru a împărtăși și altora iubirea Sa întratrinitară. Primind lumea ca dar, omul are menirea de a se îmbogăți și de a se lumina, și prin aceasta de a îmbogăți și lumina întreaga creație. Pe de o parte, omul se folosește de creație, pe de altă parte natura întreagă așteaptă întoarcerea omului spre Dumnezeu. Soarta naturii a fost strâns legată dintotdeauna de cea a omului. Astăzi, oamenii au nevoie de o nouă concepție despre lume și despre creație. Libertatea democratică de care se bucură oricare cetățean al acestei planete trebuie folosită cu mai multă înțelepciune. Activitatea umană trebuie să fie călăuzită de acea responsabilitate care, deși plasează persoana în centru, totuși este legată de trecut și cu repercursiuni în viitor.*

**Key words:** the creation, the intra-trinitarian love, the gift of God.

**Introducere**

Even since the earliest times, the mind of man was hunted by the problem of the world's appearance and origin, different answers being given, some which attribute God a role in the creation, and some which do not. Many cosmological conceptions draw their inspiration from the old philosophical trends that tried to explain the great mysteries of the world through the philter of reason. Each of them had as a starting point a preexisting substance (water, fire, air, earth) or one or several supreme beings, which showed their greatness and almightiness through the creation. Saint Jean Chrysostom states that "some do



not allow this world to have a creator; others say that this world and the things in the world came by themselves; and finally others say that everything was made from a preexisting matter”.[1]

Starting from the quotation above, one can say that the diversity of the representations on the world can be rendered by means of four main patterns, each one with important consequences for spirituality and civilization, more precisely for man’s relation with the world. They are: pantheistic cosmology, dualist cosmology, materialism and panentheistic cosmology.

The supernatural divine revelation, from whose source the Orthodox teaching draws its sap, shows that the world is the work of God, created not from a matter existing from eternity and coeternal with God, but out of nothing. This means that God Himself has created the substance of the world, and from this substance, he created everything that exists. This truth was supported and deepened by the Holy Fathers [2] who, although they did not have modern means of studying nature at hand, relying on the truth of the Holy Scripture, answered the question: What is the mystery of this world?

### **1. The world and man ‘s creation – the first manifestation of the divine love**

God’s economy or plan concerning the creation consists in the world’s deification, which, after the fall, also involves man’s salvation. The redemption and the deification suppose, as a first divine act, the world’s creation.[3] God’s three manifestations (the world’s creation, salvation and deification) have their source in the great intra-Trinitarian love.[4] So, the world is the work of God’s love and is meant for deification.

According to the Christian faith, the world and man had a beginning and will have an end. If they had had no beginning, they would not have been out of nothing, and so they would not have been the exclusive work of God’s freedom and love. And they would not have been meant for an existence in God’s completeness but, on the contrary, the world’s relative, imperfect form would be the only fatal essence of reality. If God had created everything having at hand a matter modeled by Him, then He would not be an Almighty God, but a powerless God. Referring to the world’s creation out of nothing, Saint Athanasius says: “Some people, one of them being Plato, who is great among the Greeks, assure that God made the universe starting from a preexisting matter, a matter with no origin; that God could not have made anything unless matter had not preexisted, just as wood preexists for the carpenter to process it. Those speaking this way do not realize they are attributing God a weakness, as if He Himself is not the cause of matter, but forms things starting from a basic matter, He will be considered weak, unable to work something without matter, just like a carpenter who cannot make any necessary thing without wood”.[5]

God has created the world out of goodness, to have other beings share in His intra-Trinitarian love. It is God’s love that gives answers to all the questions; it is God’s love that is the cause of everything that exists. Love is the light that cannot be put under a bowl (Matthew 5: 14-15) but has shown itself giving life, because “life was the light of men” (John 1: 4). So, this light could not have remained unseen, as its role is to light and lead those who follow it to the Trinitarian source of irradiation.

In their works, the Holy Fathers highlight the fact that God created the world for man, for man’s joy, and man has received the task to lead the world to the goal of complete communion with the Supreme Creator. Synthesizing the patristic conception on the reason and the purpose of creation, Fr. Prof. Dumitru Stăniloae observes: “It is only man who can become increasingly more the witness of God’s glory and goodness shown in the world; it is only man that can consciously enjoy God’s love increasingly more, becoming His dialogue partner”.[6]



Despite these complex explanations, however, the creation remains a mystery of the Holy Trinity, still incompletely known, as “it is impossible for man to completely know God’s creation.”[7]

## **2. The creation as a transparent environment of the encounter between man and God**

The entire divine revelation shows that the world was created by God as a gift for men. “That everyone may eat and drink, and find satisfaction in all his toil--this is the gift of God” (Ecclesiastes 3: 13).

Characteristic for love and the mystery of this gift is the fact that what is given brings the persons so close together that the object of the gift becomes common and a transparent means for the communication between persons, its final goal being the complete knowledge of each other of the two partners of dialogue. This happens when we talk about a dialogue between persons having the same nature, having in common the same way of life, the same goal; yet, when we refer to the dialogue between God and man, the more unaware about his meaning in life man is, the more difficult his knowledge (of God) becomes.

God is calling man to reveal Himself to man and to show Himself to him, yet not in person, because “No one has ever seen God” (John 1: 18), but through His visible works, through the creation. The world appears as a book “showing and proclaiming its Master and Creator through its order and harmony, as through letters”, facilitating the “acquaintance with the Creator through the things of the creation.”[8] Just as the Holy Scripture itself confesses: “The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands...” (Psalms 18 (19): 1-4). The Church calls this way of knowledge the “natural” or cosmic way of God’s revelation. Trying to free themselves from the scholastic language and thinking, some of today’s Orthodox theologians[9] say that the divine revelation is one, yet its ways of development are two: the natural and the supernatural way.

Saint Maximus the Confessor, revealing the belief of the Church, shows that “both laws, the natural and the written one, are equally praise-worthy and teach the same things, and neither has more or less than the other”. [10] And also about the relation between these two ways, Father Dumitru Stăniloae writes that the world (the natural way) is an inbuilt Scripture, while the Scripture (the “supernatural way”) is an uttered world, the relationship between them being of mutual reinforcement: the “supernatural” one is anchored in the reality of creation, in the “natural one”, and the latter is made actual or explained in the first.[11] Saint Maximus says that “the written law is given in the cosmic law, and the cosmic in the written one”. [12]

The harmony and the beauty of the visible things help us know God. In everything, there is a mystery of God. In every flower, in every tree or every leaf of grass is written that mystery in which the loving soul feels, sees God’s presence, the creature is traversed by this presence.”[13] All of them talk about an “epiphany” (Romans 1: 20) and through all of them God speaks because in everything are imprinted the reasons or the thoughts of the Word of God, the Son of God.

This means that we have this power in ourselves, to enter in a dialogue with Him, not just through prayer, but also by means of nature. So, the world becomes the environment of our communion with the Creator of everything. To be a person is to be aware, to pass through the philter of your thinking what you see and what you do, to participate to all that is. To know a person is also to love that person. To meet God in His creation is to communicate with Him, is to answer His call through our love, through our word and our praise. Because it



is not just heavens that “tell the glory of God”, but also “all the creation glorifies God” (Psalms 150: 6, Psalms 148).

### **3. The creation – the gift entrusted to man**

The reasons of things are put into nature by God Himself as a ladder on which the human mind ascends. Their contemplation is an act of reason but also an act of faith, “of faith of our reason”, we could say, which starts from the heart and tends towards the Supreme Love. Love is the dialogue bridge between God and man; it is the call and the answer. Out of His great love, God gives man the entire nature, and man, also out of love, according to his limited power, offers his Creator all that he considers most valuable of all his possessions. In this continual communion, God makes us partakers of His divine love, through grace, and, as in God everything is a gift, our life needs to be a continual giving, being led by the reason of answering the divine call.

The act of giving consequently appears as a communication with God. God’s gift to us turns from us to God as an offering, as an expression of our thanksgiving and gratitude.[14] In this way, the sacrifice reveals itself as the way of communicating with God through grace. I give because He gives. The gift reveals in man something godly, something that was there in Him and was waiting to be discovered, something that makes him discover himself, as he was created “in the image of God”. Saint Maximus says that God “receives from us, as gifts, the things that he gave to us, as if He had not given anything to us before, considering everything that we give Him as coming from us”.[15] This statement shows man’s responsibility to the creation. God offers man the world as His gift, yet He receives it back as man’s gift, as something coming and belonging to man.[16]

Receiving the world as a gift, man is meant to get rich and get filled with light, and, through it, to enrich and to fill with light the whole creation. On the one hand, man uses the creation; on the other hand, the whole nature is waiting for man’s return towards God. The fate of nature has always been closely related to man’s fate; corrupt because of man’s sin, nature awaits for its healing also through man – “For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed” (Romans 8: 19), says the Holy Apostle Paul.

Yet, this condition cannot be reached without total selflessness, through sacrifice, on the cross. The cross is the renunciation to all selfishness, to everything in favor of others. However, it is not just a negative act, but also a positive one. It is love; it is giving yourself for the other, for God and for God’s creation. God’s goods as gifts serve for the consolidation of the love between persons. Given to the benefit of others, they destroy the walls separating people, and make people more transparent, more open to one another.

### **4. Responsibility and human freedom towards the gifts received**

The relation between man and God is realized in a permanent and free dialogue, the two partners, man and God, being two persons showing their freedom through the desire to communicate their love to one another. Characteristic for the person are freedom and responsibility, namely freedom to choose what to receive and what to give, and responsibility concerning the attitude towards the gift received and towards the gift offered.

As far as his relationship with the world is concerned, man has had the mission to rule over the earth (Genesis 1: 28), but also to guard it and to keep it (Genesis 2: 15), and by virtue of his freedom, he has had the possibility to do it or not. His responsibility towards this act can be seen in the fact that man will answer for it in front of God and, to the extent to which he takes into account this responsibility, God becomes more transparent and more impressive to him through His authority.



Choosing the fruit of creation as a way of accomplishment and giving up on his direct relationship with God, by disobeying God's commandments, man, from a master of God's creation, became its loyal servant, who no longer dared to take any more action without asking for the creation's consent or without sacrificing offerings to it, even out of his own fellows. In time, due to the evolutions of civilization and to the discoveries that took place in history (the appearance of fire and the discovery of metal), man's conception on nature changed. From considering it sacred, man moved on to an anthropocentric conception which gives back to man his freedom towards it, at the same time isolating God somewhere in the transcendence. "The exclusion of God from the creation leads not just to the separation between man and God, but also to a separation in man's being itself" says Fr. Prof. D. Popescu.[17] This has led to the replacement of God on earth by man and to man's desire to dominate the world in the Creator's name.

Some opinions justified this tendency making use of two biblical ideas: first, the one according to which the human being carries the image of God, which has allowed man to replace the Creator on Earth, and then the commandment God gave to man, namely to rule the Earth, invoked in support of the dominion of man over the visible world. So, the Bible would be responsible for the way the environment was treated and not man, a free being whose reason was darkened by the sin of pride, thinking that he might be like God, tasting from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 3: 5).

The thirst for knowledge and for scientific research, characteristic for the Renaissance man, transformed the world into an object to be researched and the world was no longer perceived as a part of a body. Nature was turned into a laboratory, in which the elements were like Guinea pigs used to give answers to questions that satisfied the unquenchable lust for power of the scientific man.

The Renaissance and its materialistic conception encourage man to see in nature just an immense store full of resources that he is supposed to turn into useful material things. So, nature becomes for him an "endless source of economic goods and the refined technology that he has created helps him exploit it unsparingly".[18]

In this way, man, proud of his scientific and technological conquests, of his rule over the visible world, has lost his inner freedom and has become a slave of irrational forces, spirits and sinful passions, which have turned his inner life into a nightmare.

The man of our modern civilization assures his welfare by pulling out by all means all the limited resources of the Earth, disfiguring the harmony of the Universe and darkening the beauty of Paradise. In the economic era, nature is nothing more but a huge economic reserve meant to satisfy man's material needs, which have become increasingly numerous, more and more refined and proving a constantly increasing greed.

The aspirations of today's society are far from the goal man should pursue: namely to know God. The goal pursued today goes against the Creator and also against man, because the latter has not just turned the environment into his enemy: he also made it toxic for his own life, menacing his own existence. This sin is all the more serious as it has affected his fellows' health condition.

A big question mark has arisen as far as the future of this world is concerned. State congresses, international conferences, different associations and foundations have looked for answers and solutions. The only answer whose truth remains valid until the end of the centuries has been given by our Redeemer Jesus Christ by means of a question: "For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" (Mark 8: 36). The modern man will not be able to reestablish the order of nature and to make his attitude towards the world right without changing the ethics of his relationships with his fellows. It is





in vain that the western countries have been trying to adopt a new policy concerning their radioactive waste, as long as this waste is being sent and deposited into developing countries. The fact that modern societies do not consume their own forests but feed on the reserve of other countries, which have no other possibility to prosper economically except by selling their own natural riches, does not mean conserving the natural environment. Nature cannot really be preserved as long as the polluting technologies and cars are dismantled from the industrialized countries and exported to countries eager to become industrialized.

Man needs a new conception on the world and on the creation. The democratic freedom that any citizen of this planet enjoys should be used more wisely. The human activity needs to be guided by that responsibility which, although situating the person in the middle, is nevertheless related to the past and with repercussions in the future. Between the generations of people there is a much closer relation than one could imagine. We receive as heritage a certain moral behavior and ethics from which we need to keep what is best, in order to have what to pass on, in order to prepare for the people coming after us physical and spiritual health.

It is not the relative authority of an earthly group (society, family etc.) that should guide our lives, but the conscience that we will answer to the Master of us all and we will be asked about the way we have used our talent profitably. The care towards the creation needs to be based on our faith in God, in the immortality of the soul and in our responsibility towards our calling.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Being absolute completeness, God would have had the possibility not to create, yet the characteristic feature of love is to share itself to give itself to others. The gift represents a means of dialogue, between two people capable of this dialogue. On the level of creation, the world is the area of communication between God and His reasonable beings, for who “He made everything”. Moreover, we can make the claim that the whole creation is intended to be „the mediatrix of the whole love of God”[19].

The world is the gift of God’s love; life is a gift of God and both the world and life can become gifts of man. More accurately, the world gives man the possibility of renouncing to something that, in man’s opinion, belongs to him, so that he may be able to live a life with a status of gift.

The gift reveals in man something divine, something that makes him discover himself as he was created – “in the image of God”. The world is a content of the dialogue between man and the Trinitarian God, or, through the world, man grows in the understanding and the divine love for our Creator. The Holy Trinity has given this world to man out of love, to have man by means of it as a partner in a dialogue of understanding and love. Nevertheless, this does not allow man to impose his own order and to destroy the harmony. Man’s role is to continue our Creator’s work, being himself a “creator”, showing his power of creation and generosity.

## **REFERENCES:**

- [1] Saint Jean Chrysostom, *Writings*, parte I, in **P. S. B.** vol. 21, E.I.B.M.B.O.R., București, 1987, p. 91.
- [2] St Jean of Damascus makes the following statement: “*The creation is the work of God’s will, so it is not co-eternal with God, as what is created out of nothing cannot be as*



what exists without origin and since always”, in Vladimir Lossky - *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, Ed. Anastasia, București, 1993. p. 69.

[3] Pr. Prof. Dr. D. Stăniloae, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, vol. I, E.I.B.M.B.O.R., București, 1996., p. 223.

[4] Jürgen Moltman states, in this sense: “The world’s idea is already contained in the Father’s love to the Son”, in *The Holy Trinity and God’s Kingdom*, Ed. REÎNTREGIREA, Alba Iulia, 2007, p. 143.

[5] Saint Athanasius the Great, *Writings – parte I*, in **P.S.B.** vol. 15, E.I.B.M.B.O.R., București, 1987, p. 91.

[6] Pr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru Stăniloae, *op. cit.*, p. 233.

[7] Saint Jean Chrysostom, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

[8] Saint Athanasius the Great, *op. cit.*, p. 105.

[9] See as well Pr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru Popescu, *Jesus Christ Pantocrator*, E.I.B.M.B.O.R., București, 2005, p. 47.

[10] Saint Maximus the Confessor, *Ambigua*, 26, E.I.B.M.B.O.R., București, 2006, p. 190.

[11] Pr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru Stăniloae, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

[12] Lars Thumberg, *Man and the Cosmos in the Vision of Saint Maximus the Confessor*, E.I.B.M.B.O.R., București, 1999, p. 40.

[13] Pr. Lector I. Stoica, *Image and Likeness in the Orthodox Theology*, in rev. “Lumină pentru suflet”, Rev. Arhiepiscopiei Târgoviște și a Facultății de Teologie, nr. 5, 1996, p. 9.

[14] To support our reasoning, we can remind of James the Patriarch, who, when receiving a gift from God, a discovery at Betel, in answer and as a sign of gratitude, builds an altar and sacrifices an offering to God (Genesis 28, 21-22).

[15] Saint Maximus the Confessor, *Answers to Thalassios (51)*, in *Philokaly* vol. 3, Ed. Harisma, București, 1994, p. 219.

[16] Părintele Galeriu, *Sacrifice and redemption*, Editura HARISMA, București, 1991, p. 73.

[17] Pr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru Popescu, *Christ, Church, Society*, E.I.B.M.B.O.R., București, p. 45.

[18] Pr. Prof. Dr. D. Belu, *On Love*, Ed. Omniscop, Craiova, 1997, p. 155.

[19] Pr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Creation as gift and the Mysteries of the Church*, în rev. „Ortodoxia”, Nr. 1/1976, p. 12.