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Faculty of Philosophy and Social-Political Sciences**

DOCTORAL THESIS

– Summary –

**Love as the Essence of What Is
Human**

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Introduction

Love is for us, contemporary persons, a feeling and a passion. If with Plato, Aristotle and Plotin, love meant ascension, because they could find the absolute Truth above love, Christians love nothing more than Love itself because there is nothing above love, since God is love. The assertion of love is the specific, normal way of living of any person; it is the connection with the divine manifested at personal level. It is visible, externally, via manifestations as social acts, as well as via manifestations of faith. The manifestation of religiosity involves feelings, reason, will and behaviours. Love becomes a real component in the existence of every human being, which produces effects in his or her psychological and spiritual life, which amplify his or her wish to know God and confess Him.

The concepts which I envisage in my research are: eros, philia, agape, friendship, happiness, pleasure, joy, Truth, Good, Beauty, adoration and contemplation of God, man's paradisiac state, the good and the evil, mystery, person, the Holy Trinity, love: the kenotic, restoring and all-powerful love of Jesus Christ, salvation, deification. Throughout this thesis each concept finds its meaning and significations.

The **research method** that I resorted to is historical and analytical; it consisted in processes of defining, distinguishing, clarifying and problematising the used concepts. The research is interdisciplinary because the concept of love can be found both in philosophy and in theology and psychology, and defining it as correctly as possible cannot be done from a single perspective.

The core topic of the thesis highlights the above-mentioned concepts and how they are essential for humans.

The purpose of the thesis is to awaken human consciousness to the fact that without love for God and for humans we cannot pass through the trial of fire through which we grow in love or collapse into spiritual death. The more man becomes God by union with God, the more he shows himself as a man, as God wants him to be.

Even though Jesus talks about judgment and punishment, His message is focused on love and not on fear. Man received love – the greatest gift – through His coming to the world. This is why he will turn love into a way of living not for what he will receive or not, but as a response to its actualisation which gives meaning to existence.

The structure of the thesis

The research on the topic of love in this PhD thesis unfolds over five chapters. In chapter I, *The topic of love in pre-Christian philosophy*, emphasis is laid on the topic of Platonic love, using the dialogues *Lysis* and *The Symposium (The Banquet)*. In ancient Greece love was a human passion (*eros*) and the friendship between persons who are alike in their virtue (*philia*). Yet the highest love, the one which could perfect them, was the spiritual elevation that humans could reach by the knowledge of Truth.

Pre-Socratics were hoping to cultivate the harmony between the good and the beautiful in man's soul and body so that they would form a cosmos. They reached the conclusion that the Universe represents perfect harmony. Harmony was conceived as proportion that was similar to the geometric one. Philosophy, up to that point, had been concerned with researching nature and it neglected man and his spiritual life. Hesiod's *Theogony* argues that there have been *three beginnings*: Chaos, Earth and Love. Chaos and Earth were in the beginning, but Love was not an origin but an end, the absolute towards which everything tends. Parmenides of Elea proposes that a philosopher receives the gift of contemplating the Truth, only if it is accompanied by the desire and the ascension of a spiritual life. Followers of Pythagoras and Parmenides agree that philosophical intelligence needs the ardour of love, in order to be able to search the Truth. In the absence of love, intelligence reaches a blockage because it cannot find the motivation to pursue its search for the Truth. Empedocles of Agrigento considers that the Universe is set in motion by two cosmic forces: Love or Friendship (*Philotes*) and Hatred or Enmity (*Neikos*). The former force unites the four elements of the cosmos: earth, water, air and fire, while the latter force separates them. Empedocles is of the opinion that the two forces take turns at

mastering the universe, as Destiny decides. When the universe unites, Love dominates, and when the universe is divided, Hatred dominates. Things emerge from the intersection of these two states. Hence, all things in the universe live and fight under these two forces, Love and Hatred. For Democritus, the fundamental elements of existence are formed according to the rules of geometry, and Pythagoras spoke about the sublime harmony of the spheres. Sophists understood individual and material man and they had the notion of immaterial spirit. They argued that if there is an immaterial spirit in the individual, this power is common to all, it is identical to all. If it hadn't been for sophists, it wouldn't have been possible for Socrates, Plato and Aristotle to elevate Greek philosophy to the summits which we know it to have today, with its vision on the world and on life.

Socrates marks the passage from the philosophy of nature to the discovery of man. Socrates appears sometimes overwhelmed by male beauty, other times he despises it. He did not say, nor did he do anything with the intention to suggest to Alcibiades that what he expected from him was physical love. He wanted Alcibiades to find out the Truth for himself, through himself. We see Socrates as being mysterious and ironic in the love that he cherished for Alcibiades, until the moment when the young man, one night, went to bed close to Socrates and found the answer of Socratic love. Diotima reveals to Socrates the vision of the Form of Beauty which the lover will have at the end of his search, when he comes to see in front of him the Form which he had perceived until then only in its manifestations in bodies, minds, institutions and sciences.

The dialogue *Lysis* retells that all youth were gathering around the most beautiful one among them. Lysis was different from the rest through the nobility of his beauty. Socrates was interested in what lay in Hippothales' soul, in how he lived love and in how he was behaving with his lover. Hippothales deifies his lover, which makes us understand that in fact he was praising himself. Socrates believes that to excessively praise one's beloved means to burden one's game. The object of one's love must be solely the object of one's love, not one glorified beyond the self.

Friendship supposes a relationship of equality. Only if one is useful to someone can one become the subject of friendship. What attracts one to the one whom he loves is: beauty, intelligence, skill and courage. Following Socrates' questions, Menexenus understands friendship as reciprocal attraction. Via questions, Socrates helps Lysis define friendship as the attraction between those who are alike in beauty, rank and fortune. *Philia* is love, attraction and aspiration towards perfection.

The second stage of friendship is for animated beings, things and moral values, which cannot reciprocate one's feelings. At this level, friend is not the one who is friendly towards someone else, but the one towards whom one is friendly, namely the loved one. Lysis is considered to be a friend, since he is loved, and does not have inimical feelings towards the other. Now Hippothales is considered to be the enemy because Lysis detests him. Lysis is loved by his enemy, while Hippothales is detested by his friend. This thesis, in its negative form, is grounded in a type of friendship.

The third stage of friendship is based on the criterion of alterity, when the opposed ends are mutually attractive. Each end desires its opposite and not its similar end.

In the fourth thesis the true friend is no one else but the supreme Good. The movement of friendship cannot be done from outside.

The fifth thesis comes to show that the movement of friendship is done from inside. Socrates says that friendship does not envisage the similar, as Lysis thought, but the close, the familiar.

Friendship, in its supreme hypostasis which Plato, nevertheless, does not define in this light of the dialogue *Lysis*, would consist in the attraction that man feels permanently towards the absolute and the eternal, towards a "beyond" which lends unity and equilibrium to life.

In the dialogue *The Banquet*, Plato presents several aspects of love and tries to discover the fundamentals of this ideal feeling. The dialogue traces the path from a lower level – the one who knows little and imprecisely, to the higher level - the possessor of Truth, a path driven by the force of *Eros*. The speeches of the five

characters: Phaidros, Pausanias, Eryximachos, Aristophanes and Agathon, are followed by Socrates' great speech, then his eulogy to Socrates done by Alcibiades. Socrates' speech uncovers what love is, and Alcibiades shows us how Socrates lives this state. For Plato, love is motivated by the value of its object. This is why it is not enough to determine Eros as love which aspires towards something, because there is also a love which pulls the soul down, towards the sensorial world, that is the sensual love. Unlike it, Eros is the soul's aspiration towards the celestial world of Ideas, the path of the divine man. Platonic love is the aspiration towards immortality, for man must become *similar to God*. It is that power which makes the transient being in us desire to become eternal, the master of the Good, the Beautiful and the True. And the means through which this ideal can be carried out is philosophy. Phaidros was glorifying love as an all-powerful goddess, one of the oldest goddesses that divinely inspires lovers towards virtue. Pausanias draws the line between *earthly* and *heavenly* love. Earthly love comes from necessity and it implies procreation, while heavenly love corresponds to Heavenly Aphrodite. He argues that there are two gods of love who give birth to two types of love. The former is Pandemian; it governs regular relations, as well as transitory relations, i.e. sex for sex. The latter is Uranian; its features are more elevating, as the Uranian deity brings benefits to both individuals and the collective and influences both the one who loves and the one who is loved, by guiding them towards virtue.

Plato discovers the fully sensual Uranian love in resonance, but he refuses its consumption by transposing physical excitement into creative and intellectual energy. On a higher-value level he places the love of the mind for the mind, hoping that this is more intense than the love of the beauty of the body, which seemed to him despicable. Socrates said that he had ignored what love is until he was initiated by the priestess Diotima and that from then on he would do nothing but repeat what he had received from her. Love can only be discovered through initiation.

Eryximach believes that Eros can abide in all beings. He admits that it is good to experience the lower Pandemian love, as long as one obtains pleasure without indulging into excess.

Aristophanes argued that originally, there were three sexes: the masculine, the feminine and the hermaphrodite sex. Each of these beings comprised the entire human nature. Bodily beauty is not admired because the soul loves the essence of the being that is found in the external Matter. The soul receives the image of this essence via sight. And because this image appears to the sight and to the soul, it is not corporeal because the image and the soul are not corporeal. The soul has the image of the body because it receives it spiritually, non in the body. What man likes the most is its non-corporeal essence, and what is pleasant is also beautiful. So love wants what is non-corporeal, i.e. Beauty, which is more of a spiritual image than of a bodily one.

The third sequence in the dialogue *The Banquet* features the Socratic speech which proposes a different Eros from the one presented by the other interlocutors of the banquet. Socrates believes that those who talked before him did not understand what Eros is: they glorified Eros as a perfect, happy and beautiful God; but Socrates denies that Eros is a God. For him, Eros means the aspiration and nostalgia for the Beautiful and the Good. Although Eros is neither good nor beautiful, this does not mean that it is ugly and bad. It is neither God nor man, but something in between. Eros is a daimon; something in between mortal and immortal, between wisdom and the lack of reason, which mediates between gods and men. Love is, therefore, a daimon whose role is to convey to the gods what comes from humans and to humans what comes from gods.

Agathon states that the most significant feature of Eros is justice. Eros also drives away loneliness from the soul, opens the path to pleasures, and is generous; for the wise it is an object of contemplation, and for the gods an object of wonder.

Eros is the offspring of poverty and richness. Poros (Abundance) and Penia (Poverty) procreated on Aphrodite's birthday. Eros is always poor because he remains forever connected to his mother. Although his father is the Avenger, he himself is not

an Avenger: over-resourcefulness is not love. Diotima says about him that since he has his mother's nature, he lives forever in the company of lacks. Since love is a desire, it will always offer, first of all, the consciousness of the fact that we lack something. Socrates must be tackled from the perspective of love; love – source of philosophy – engenders in us the desire to philosophise. There can be no philosophy without love, for the simple reason that love offers at the same time the sense of our poverty and of our true richness. Thanks to the fecundity of love, man cannot take time as a relevant measure anymore, either when we consider bodily fecundity or the spiritual fecundity which Plato terms *poietic*. Since love gives birth to the desire for immortality in humans, we understand how, according to Plato, procreation divides it. Love gives birth to the thirst for immortality in us, which makes us similar to the gods. This inner daemon engenders in us something which goes beyond us, as humans. Via love we are beyond time, we reach something which is divine. Beyond anything we can imagine there is something which attracts us and takes us in its possession. In order for us to be able to be attracted by Beauty-in-itself and by the Good-in-itself, an inner daemon must inhabit us. The latter makes us understand our capacity to reach the Absolute. Plato in *The Banquet* portrayed Eros as the true philosopher who is in love with wisdom.

Aristotle is sensitive to the friendship relationship; this is why he discovers love in the relation between two persons. In order to reach happiness and develop his spirit, man must practice the virtues. Friendship and contemplation are above all virtues. This is why Aristotle says that friendship is the flower of virtues. In *Nicomachean Ethics* he shows that friendship has to do with nobility and beauty, as it is an end in itself. We love our friend and live close to him, we love him for himself; this is love in friendship. Not anything can be loved, but only that which is susceptible of love, i.e. the good, the pleasant or the useful.

Friendship supposes mutual goodwill, each party wishing the good of the other. Love out of goodwill consists in loving the other for himself. It is a disinterested spiritual love that is capable of going beyond concupiscent love, the love which

always implies certain selfishness. Aristotle argues that in fact, this is not love but generosity. Love out of friendship cannot exist without reciprocity.

Perfect friendship exists between humans of spiritual nobility, i.e. those whose affinities spring from virtue. They wish each other's good. Virtuous men are friends due to their spiritual nobility, while the vicious are friends out of pleasure or interest.

There can be friendship in which one party is superior to the other: the friendship of a father towards his son, of an older person towards a younger one, of the husband towards the wife, of a person invested with authority towards a subordinate.

The aspiration towards honour makes most people wish more to be loved than to love.

Plato and Aristotle assigned a central position to *eros* and *philia*. Aristotelian happiness (*eudaimonia*) is impoverished by Epicurus' pleasure-happiness (*hedone*). Epicurus' vision has the advantage that it takes man towards a pleasure of the soul with the purpose of making it contemplative, after he first detaches himself from everything that could tempt him with worldly pleasures. All beings avoid pain in favour of pleasure in order to reach happiness. Epicurus believed that each pleasure is something good, and pain is something bad. Pleasure is the absence of pain in the body and of trouble in the soul. This is why pleasure is the highest purpose of the philosopher, while pain the only evil that he or she must beware.

The stoics contradict this conviction because man's instinct is not towards pleasure, but towards the natural purpose which reason prescribes, pleasure being a secondary fact which results from action in agreement with reason. The stoics had as an ideal the voluntary control of the moral life, as they thought that one's will can have power over passions and passionate love.

For Plotin love is not only of the one who loves and of the one who is loved; it becomes man's mystical union with the divine. It is only the mystical philosopher who can have the chance to be united with the Absolute. This union is accomplished individually with the one who is One and Good. For Plotin, God is love because He is

His love itself. Plotin does not mark the end of the evolution of ancient Greek philosophy, but only a historical closure. Now the spiritual mastery of Greek philosophy is taken over by Christian thinking. This vision of mystic love ends the ancient period of Greek thinking on love.

Chapter II, *Christian philosophers in search for love*, shows how Christian philosophers capitalised on pagan love by lending it a Christian value and by reaching the conclusion that Christian love, *agape*, is an essential condition for salvation.

In Blessed Augustine's *Confessions*, passion and drama are intertwined with mystical exaltations. The permanent search for tranquillity of the soul that is estranged from God turns Augustine into a seeker of the heavenly homeland. He feels the call towards a "beyond" because man wishes to be united eternally with God. Evelyne Underhill proposes three categories of symbols which resort to the three deep aspirations of the self, three great expressions of man's unrest. The first is the aspiration which turns him into a seeker and a wonderer. The second is the heart's longing after another heart, the soul's pining after her perfect fellow, which turns one into a person in love. The third is the aspiration towards purity and inner perfection, which turns one into an ascetic person and a saint. Augustine's wondering soul is consumed by his longing for God, a longing which He planted in the human soul, which awakens and maintains unrest and torment in his being until he *take[s] rest in Him*, until he tastes the happy life. After he has found God, Augustine can differentiate between the wandering before his conversion, when he did not know where the truth was, and stepping on His path. For Augustine, to descend into the soul is the same as elevating oneself to God. The love that Blessed Augustine talks about in the comments that he makes to the First Letter to John, has a double meaning: the love of God for humans and of humans for God. The comments to the letter show that compassion introduces us into the very core of Trinitarian life. Compassion makes God live in our heart and helps us reach perfection. John, Jesus Christ's disciple, recommends us to love because love has the power to erase evil and turns enemies into brothers. Augustine proposes us to drive away from our heart the love for

transient things and to fill it with divine love. A heart which is filled with God can spring forth only love. Augustine responds to John the Evangelist who says that “No one has ever seen God” (I John 4, 12): God is not further away than our heart; this is why we must search him with our feelings, not with our sight.

For Marsilio Ficino, *Eros* is a fundamental concept in his system of thinking and of living. He is inspired by the character Diotima in Plato’s dialogue *The Banquet*. Love can pull us down to the lowest degradation or it can elevate us to the highest happiness. It is divine because it urges us to love God. The angelic mind is the first world made by God; the second is the Soul of the Universe; the third is this entire edifice which we see. The angelic mind has received the divine Ray from God, to come close to Him and to His ideas. But before steering towards Him, its essence was dark and deprived of forms. We are sure that this essence which was still lacking forms is Chaos; and the first turn towards God means the birth of Love; the Ray’s penetration is the food of Love; the flame that is thus lit is called the growth of Love. Closeness to God is the upsurge of Love; the form that it receives is the perfection of Love; and the totality of forms and Ideas is called “world” by the Romans and Cosmos by the Greeks, which means a beautifully made adornment.

There are two types of Love: simple Love and mutual Love. Simple love is when the loved one does not reciprocate with the same love. Reciprocal love is when the loved one reciprocates with Love. The lover lives immediately in the loved one, while the loved one experiences the same feelings, reciprocates in the same way to the lover. Marsilio Ficino presents three benefits of love: The first takes us back to heavens, to the perfection that we lost when we were divided into two parts. The second is that Love pleases all in the division of the places that they are entitled to. The third is that Love kindles in us a new delight; it makes our soul be happy in a sweet joy. If until then it had been argued that there are two loves, now Marsilio Ficino says that in us, there are five loves. There are two extreme Loves which are called Demons and three middle Loves which are called Demons and feelings. Man’s Mind contains the eternal Love which wishes to see divine beauty. Another love,

which is eternal too, is that of procreation, which wishes us to impregnate on children the image of divine beauty.

René Descartes, in *Passions of the Soul*, builds an angelic vision on human being. The first part of the treatise defines the meaning of passions: what lies in the soul is called passions, while for the body, it is called action. He highlighted the fact that the soul performs its functions not in the heart or a part of the brain, but in the innermost part of the brain, in a quite small gland situated in the middle of the brain, and suspended above a duct through which spirits from cavities that precede the brain communicate with those from the subsequent cavity, so that the slightest moves produced in the gland can change the direction of spirits, and viceversa, the slightest changes in the movement of spirits can change the gland.

The first (primitive) passions which he names are: wonder, love, hatred, desire, joy and sadness. The other listed passions are special, and they derive from the former. Love is an emotion of the soul caused by the movement of the spirits which urges it to unite in its will with the objects which seem to agree to it. The effects of love are: good-will love, which urges us to wish the Good of the object which we love; and concupiscence love, which makes us desire the thing which we love.

Søren Kierkegaard, under the pen-name Johannes, in *Diary of a Seducer*, wishes to be Cordelia's seducer, but does not want to marry her as he thought that marriage would make her lose her innocence and naivety and turn her into a mature woman. He loves her immaculate and pure, which makes her interesting. Via marriage, the lover would destroy the very reasons and motives which caused his falling in love. The possession of the loved being leads to the loss of her power of seduction and to the disappearance of the charm that she exerts. We can classify happiness when we love. The first is a partial happiness of love, when a partner is happy, and the other one suffers. The second is the complete happiness of love, when the two partners are happy together. The third form of happiness is via the love offered by faith in God, when one of the partners finds his happiness in spirituality.

Johannes seduces without being the subject of seduction, but only its object. His inability to live his love places Kierkegaard in the first classification of happiness in love, i.e. when a partner is happy and the other one suffers. It was a year of psychological trials, a year in which either of the two wanted to prove how love must be lived. Kierkegaard is similar to Socrates, in that while the latter had been taught by Diotima, the former admits that everything good that lies in him is due to Regina. She is attached to him for ever, through a love which Kierkegaard wishes to be absolute, of another order, of the leap into faith. The renewal of their relation must unfold in another register, in the religious stage where unhappiness is absent. Kierkegaard's love is unidirectional; he wants to offer and to offer himself, but refuses to receive something in exchange. In his moments of jealousy, Kierkegaard wrote to Regina, that she would never reach his spiritual height, and their separation was in fact the official recognition of a break that existed between them. He had other expectations from her than erotic ones; he believed that he could detach her from carnal passions and guide her towards spiritual love. Between himself and his beloved, Kierkegaard interposes a third person: God. Kierkegaard believed that only he who reaches the stage of loving Jesus Christ understands that He is love itself.

Philosophical Fragments is a dialogue between Socrates and Jesus. Kierkegaard presents two forms of love: pagan and Christian love, via the two personalities: Socrates and Jesus. Socrates is for Kierkegaard his tutelary genius at the level of immanence, the martyr of the spirit and therefore of the Truth consumed in immanence, while Christ is the supreme martyr of the transcendent spirit which has descended into time out of love towards people. Kierkegaard wishes to unite the love for the truth to absolute love. The highest relation which exists among humans is that in which the disciple gives his teacher the occasion to know himself **and** the teacher gives the disciple the occasion to know himself, and neither considers that they owe anything to each other. After Socrates makes pupils discover the Truth themselves, he withdraws. The master's skill consists in making the disciple manage without him, after he has been taught. Christ is superior to Socrates because Christ is the Truth, i.e.

God. For this reason Christ does not disappear from among his disciples, after one has found Him, one never separates himself from Him. This is the dimension of faith and of love which Kierkegaard imagined.

Chapter III, *The topic of love in Orthodox thinking*, presents, first, man in his primordial state as a master of the entire creation and as a partner to God the Creator in the government of the world. The paradise was the appropriate framework in which man had to develop what he had good in himself, to make progress in his relation with the Creator, so as to bring his image to His likeness. First, he had to feel the Creator in the entire creation. Being the connection between God and the world, man was meant to contribute to the transfiguration of the world, not only of himself. By making permanent the link between God and the world, man's communion with Him would have become permanent too, in time. Yet he chose a different path, which is autonomous from God. By taking this path, he became estranged not only from God, but also from the creation. By falling into sin, man brought upon himself his own sinking into the lower spheres of necessity, and from the king of creation, he has become its servant.

In Christian thinking, love is a mystery, which has the power to turn us, humans, into gods. It covers all virtues and is contrary to all vices. The love relationship between the Persons of the Trinity is a model for inter-human love. The Trinity manifests its love to us because we are persons, and we respond back to him through love too, because this feeling can be shared only from one person to another person. Intra-Trinitarian love is the accomplished love which extends to humans through the secret work of each divine person.

Man's return to the dignity which he had before the fall could be done otherwise than by the embodiment of the Absolute Man, of the Son of God. Chapter IV, *The love of Jesus Christ for the restoration of human nature*, presents the Orthodox thinking about Jesus Christ, who became a man and not an angel so as to call man to his kingly role to continue creation. Jesus Christ's restoring sacrifice was a necessity because of the sin of the first humans and its aim was reconciliation with

God. He elevates human nature, strengthens it, perfects it and opens the path of perfection to humans through participation to the human nature assumed by Christ and deified.

Jesus Christ's human nature was directed towards deification, from the moment of His embodiment. Through His sacrifice, Christ embraces all humans so as to take them to the deification that His human nature reached after the resurrection. Jesus suffered as a man so as to stop the degradation and corruption of the human being. His human nature accepted death so as to destroy everything that had been evil until then, and through His resurrection, the entire humanity was brought back to the state that preceded the original sin. With Jesus' resurrection and ascension, His humanity is the means through which humans can share deification. Father Dumitru Stăniloae sees Jesus Christ's work under three aspects: prophetic, serving and sacrificing, and all-powerful, i.e. Christ is a Prophet – Teacher, Bishop and Emperor.

Jesus Christ's message was not social, the new law of universal love produced real changes at the level of the consciousness of the ancient world. Jesus' deeds and words show the mystery of the humble and all-powerful love of the Most Holy Trinity for humans and their possibility to take part in the eternal life of the Most Holy Trinity, not individually, in a communitarian manner.

Chapter V, *Interpersonal and mystical love*, insists on the Christian conviction that man is immortal and that he tends to comprise the infinite. His immortality is achieved in Jesus Christ. Christian spirituality talks about man's deification, which is the ultimate goal of a Christian's life, which is possible and can be accomplished through and out of mutual love, as an ontological feeling.

Conclusion

In Greek philosophy, metaphysics attempted to identify man's place in the universe and in the order of beings. Through the dialectic method and with the help of love, we can rise to the knowledge of the beauty of sensible things under its multiple forms, to Beauty itself. Plato's belief that the soul is immortal receives an ethical

grounding, because immortal are only those souls that accede to the knowledge of the Divine. The intuition of eternal Ideas: Beauty, Justice and Good, represents the true food of the soul. Socrates, the main character in Plato's dialogues, said in the presence of the other speakers, that Eros is the nostalgia which torments the soul and makes it rise to what is divine and become immortal.

Plato in *The Banquet* offers some original teachings on love. Love allows man to become immortal, to deify himself in his contemplation. We can say that there are several types of love, that love must elevate us towards spirituality and high aspirations. As in other Socratic dialogues, the fundamental lesson is that we can come closer to the truth via questions and the confrontation of opinions. Plato conceived an analogy between the search for wisdom and human love manifested as lack or need, via *eros* (erotic desire).

The concept of happiness (*eudaimonia*) that Aristotle talked about is nowadays associated to a good life quality, to certain virtues that only the educated share. Some think that happiness is identified with pleasure or with richness, others associate it to honour, to a way of living which is moral or contemplative, to some of these or to all of these, taken together. Some have suggested that *eudaimonia* should be translated as: blossoming, prosperity, fulfilment, happiness. The concept of happiness in Aristotle urges men to wish to be *absolutely happy*, but humans can only aspire towards such a state, because it is only God who is *absolutely happy*. The highest form of human *eudaimonia* is contemplative life.

Friendship is connected to love too. Authentic love includes sexuality, but sexuality does not make love intelligible; on the contrary, love makes sexualisation intelligible. No matter how paradoxical this could be for metaphysics, God, who grants us love, loves as we love, with the difference that He loves from the beginning and into eternity infinitely more than we love. Before we love Him, He already loves us. On the one hand, Platonic philosophy is the perfection of Socratic and pre-Socratic philosophy, and on the other hand, it goes beyond it.

Blessed Augustine said that love is the principle and force of the virtues and that it is included in any action. Happiness is identified with perfection, this is why whoever wishes to be happy must first be perfect from a moral point of view. Humility underlies all virtues, while vanity underlies all sins. Humility wishes to join God, while pride wishes to be separate from Him.

René Descartes wrote *The Passions of the Soul* so as to clarify how the soul and the body are united and form the human being. Descartes is sure that the soul and the body are thus united in man that throughout his physical life they cannot be unbound. This union is accomplished at the level of essences, the soul being an essence which is distinct from the body; it is united to it and together they make up a single essence. Therefore, it is futile to attempt to identify an anatomic organ that would be the abode of the soul, as the entire soul is united to the entire body. Descartes, known as a rationalist, declares to Elisabeth that the union between soul and body is clearly perceived by the senses and obscurely perceived by intelligence. Since we are talking about the passions of the soul, Gheorghe Brătescu states that passions are all phenomena produced in the psyche, as a result of impulses coming from the body.

The law of grace proposes a configuration of the paradigm of love, so that the *other*, be he a foreigner or not, who differs from me through his thinking, appearance, sex, age, historical, ethnic, social, political or cultural belonging, can be assumed to myself, through love, just as I myself, different or not from the *other*, can be assumed to him, into Christ, through the same love. If Jesus was a model of love that descended from God, through Him we can reach an elevating love and *agape* can be the reach of divinity, in comparison with the *eros* and *philia* of ancient Greek philosophy where one aspires towards God, but cannot reach the state of deification, of *face to face* sight of God, as it is the case in Christianity.

In the Orthodox thinking, the mystical man is the one who meets Christ in his prayer and meditations. The encounter with Christ starts in man's search for the meaning of his existence, a meaning which is carried out in the personal relation with Christ. Father Stăniloae uses Gregory Palamas' concept when he talks about man's

possibility to see God in the light. One can see God as light via asceticism. God communicates Himself through the non-created energies that spring from His being. Through these energies we participate to divine life, we know Him and we deify ourselves. The prayer of the heart is a restoration of the Edenic state and a synthetic summary of the entire spiritual life.

Love is a gift offered by God to human beings, but it is a gift that must be cultivated. This is why we have the duty to fight, in our life, against everything that could prevent us from accomplishing this ideal. Love is the spiritual fluid which runs from God to man, so as to return from man to God. It unites human beings to the maximum, without confusing them.

In order to have a better world we need unity and human solidarity, which can be accomplished in truth and love, envisaged as a single reality. Jesus, even though he talks about judgment and punishment, His message is focused on love and not on fear. Through His coming to the world, He has given man the greatest gift – the gift of love. This is why He made it a way of living not for what He receives or not, but as a response to its actualization which gives meaning to existence.

If nowadays hatred has been amplifying all over the world and love falls prey to fanaticism and perversions of all sorts, we can find in the work of the authors mentioned in this thesis the model that we must follow in promoting love and in the re-settling of the human being in its natural abode: love for humanity and for God.

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