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# Economics and religion – a personalist perspective

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**Abstract:** Traditionally, the reaction of many mainstream economists to the effort to integrate theology and economics demonstrated the difficulty of doing so in a way that could be broadly recognized as legitimate. This state of things is simply an indication of a broad consensus within the field of economics that methods, norms, and even concerns construed to be related to religious belief have no place in the scientific study of economics.

Recently, the situation seems to be changing, however. A decade ago, a group of Christian Catholic social thinkers engaged in dialogue with free-market economists concerning the morality of market activity. As a result, this interdisciplinary exchange inspired the conception of a new subdiscipline that sought to synthesize central aspects of theology and economics, thereby giving rise to a new body of scholarship termed economic personalism. The general idea is to promote a humane economic order that benefits from market activity but does not reduce the human person to just another element in economic phenomena.

This paper suggests that, under such circumstances, the Christian-Orthodox contribution to further development of this new field of investigation could consist in bringing forward the teaching of the Holy Fathers of Eastern Tradition. It is argued that, in this way, the moral dimension which dominantly defines the Catholic vision of the human person could be surpassed and even transfigured by the spiritual dimension which fully inform the Orthodox vision. Moreover, this pre-eminence of the spiritual determinants of the human person is expected to result in a number of significant changes concerning the way economic personalism is currently conceived (in terms of its subject matter, basic conceptual principles, and general mission).

**Keywords:** religious economics, economics of religion, theology of economics, economic personalism

## Introduction

Many of the nowadays scientists think that religion can never come to terms with science. The main cause that makes them share such an opinion is the fact that, apparently, religion cannot directly demonstrate the truth of its ideas, while science can. Actually, the issue is, these scientists assert, that the religious ideas seem unfeasible to be experimentally tested, while science can do this. In other words, religious ideas elude, to all appearances, the strictness of public examination, whereas science puts its ideas to open scrutiny. In the case that an empirical analysis shows that a scientific assumption is wrong, then science drops it and further searches for alternatives, putting them, also, to thorough scrutiny. Moreover, the same above mentioned scientists maintain frequently that religion is based on “a priori” assumptions or on “faith”, whereas science takes nothing for granted, without making sure of it. Besides, religion is too much based on an unlimited imagination, whereas science limits itself to noticeable facts. In addition, religion attaches much value to emotion, affective commitment and subjectivity, while science strives to stay disinterested, realist and unbiased (see Haught 2002, pp.21-23).

Given the situation, especially during the latest two decades, we are all the same confronted with the advance of a new concern that some of the nowadays scientists have, the one of reviewing the sphere of problems specific to the domains of investigation they are involved in, *with the face to the themes that are usually addressed by the theological thought*. This fact is valid especially for the quantum physics that, through the revolutionary concepts it proposes – undeterminism, unlocation, antinomy etc.-, seems to commence on the way of giving legitimacy to a number of concerns common to the theological thought. Roughly, the same thing can be said, however, regarding the present-day cosmology (which has defined and developed the anthropic principle), or about the new direction of the mathematical epistemology (through Gödel's theorem on incompleteness), but also about the research work in the field of information technology (the problem of artificial intelligence and the limits of the computers faculty of reasoning) and those of the cognitive sciences (the limits of neurobiology to explain the human mind and conscience).

On this background, we wish to specify that, despite the fact that the importance of religion for economics is seldom recognized by contemporary economists, the economic science proves itself to be however the most advanced human scientific

discipline, taking into account its openness to debate matters that are common for the theological thought, too. And, this matter is due, first of all, to the fact that, as the current reality shows, economics and religion are intertwined at many levels (see Oslington 2003, Vol.I, p. ix). A first level of relationship is economic policy itself. Illustrative examples can be contemporary debates in the United States over faith-based welfare programs or tension over the economic regulation of the church and its agencies.

A second level of interference is represented by the influence of religion on economic behavior. In this respect, one can call up, here, Max Weber's well-known argument about Protestantism and the rise of capitalism. One can also bring into discussion, the numerous modern regression studies of the determinants of economic growth, studies that point out the importance of certain variables such as culture and religion.

Thirdly, the deepest links are between economic theory and religious thought. It is of interest to show, we believe, that the conceptual-type relationships between economics and religion have been studied, along time, either at the economists' initiative - circumstances under which different economic theorists discussed, in their works, matters of theological nature, but connected with the economic activity -, or at the theologians' one – condition under which certain theologians showed their interest for the study of different matters of economic nature, but relevant to the theological thought. In this context, we wish, however, to underline the very important fact that, from their epistemological point of view, the “cross” analyses of these economists and theologians have been accomplished at a double scale, namely:

- either as individualistic-monodisciplinary research, meaning that, one by another, they were isolated, each author individually – economist or theologian – starting and developing his research “on his own”;
- or, under the form of collective-interdisciplinary team research initiated by theologians; under these conditions, theologians and economists have gathered into common research projects, having as an ultimate outcome the emergence of a new interdisciplinary field of investigation, placed at the crossing of the two disciplines under dialogue.

Section 1 of our paper concentrates on the monodisciplinary-type analyses initiated by economists. It is explained that the economists' study of the

relationship between the economic theory and the theological thought took the form of two fields of investigation inside economic science: religious economics and economics of religion. In section 2 it is shown that, while most of the theological mono- and interdisciplinary investigations undertaken to date do not represent anything else than repeated failed attempts to synthesize central aspects of moral theology and economics, a new gradual and hesitant process of configuring a possible sound synthesis of theology and economics already went through its first stage. Termed liberation theology, the output of this first-stage process represents a monodisciplinary attempt, individually-initiated by some Latin American theologians, with the aim to combine a Marxist-inspired empirical analysis in economic matters with moral theological reflection in a normative social theory. Section 3 explores the specific features of the current Catholic-inspired version of economic personalism, as representing the second stage, in full running, of the above mentioned effort to develop a proper epistemological frame to a sound synthesis of theology and economics. It is suggested that, in its attempt to achieve this synthesis, the Catholic version of economic personalism holds an outstanding epistemological potential: the theologically-inspired transfiguration of individual-based economic analysis into a person-based economic analysis. The conclusion formulated at the end of this section is that the theological vision of the person applied by the Catholic version of economic personalism succeeded only partially in developing this potential. In the final section of our paper some preliminary ideas are presented regarding the impact that the implementation of a Christian-Orthodox theological perspective could have on the present-day epistemological status of economic personalism. In this respect, it is considered that, by bringing forward the teaching of the Eastern Holy Fathers, the moral dimension which dominantly defines the Catholic vision on human person could be surpassed and even transfigured by the spiritual dimension which fully inform the Orthodox vision. Under these circumstances, it is argued that the Orthodox-inspired economic personalism could be better positioned to achieve the desired transfiguration of the individual-based economic analysis into a person-based one.

### **Monodisciplinary research initiated by economists**

Regarding the monodisciplinary-type analyses initiated by economists, it can be said that, till now, the study of the relationship between the economic theory and the theological thought took the form of two endogenously-generated directions of

research within the economic science, namely *religious economics* and *economics of religion*.

In connection with the *religious economics* researches it should be shown that, generally, these argue that economic theory is not theologically neutral and has to be evaluated theologically. In other words, religious economists consider that the economic theory is not independent from the religious beliefs of the economist that develops it, these beliefs representing actual epistemic entities that take part in the conceptual-methodological body which frames the research of the economic reality.

The outcome of this approach is triple. Firstly, value judgments are considered as legitimate components of the economic analysis, the religious economists recognizing the influence of the ethical and moral considerations on their theoretical endeavour. Secondly, it comes to the development of a critical vision on both the methodological and epistemological commitments of secular economic analysis. In this respect, it is considered that the religious economic analysis worked out by the religious economists (be they Christian, Jewish or Muslim) is built up on another set of fundamental conceptual suppositions and analytical methods than in the case of secular economic analysis. Finally, the third important consequence takes into consideration the fact that the religious economists begin to use, in their analyses, conceptual, terminological, and methodological devices imported from theology. In this way, they try to achieve an epistemological strengthening of economics itself through theological infusion.

The second direction is illustrated by *researches in the field of the economics of religion*. In this context, it is worth to specify the fact that, while religious economics studies, as already shown, the influence of the theological thought on economic theory, the economics of religion tries to study precisely the reverse relationship : giving certain explanations of economic nature for the religious activities.

In his survey on the economics of religion, Iannaccone (1988) considers that the roots of the recent growing interest of the economists for the religion problems lies in Adam Smith's comments on the church in the *Wealth of Nations*. In contrast with this opinion, Oslington (2003) suggests that probably more important in this respect has been Gary Becker's work extending the economic approach to crime, suicide, the family and so on. In any case, the idea we would like to stress is that the literature on the economics of religion so far has tended to take a relatively

small number of models from different areas of economic inquiry (such as rational choice model, public choice theory, rent seeking models, or game theory) and apply them with little modification to religion.

As a consequence, the scenery of the economics of religion literature is not homogenous, so we can notice the existence of more strands of this literature. These strands follow, in fact, the conceptual apparatus offered by those different patterns and models of economic investigation applied for the study of the religious activities, we mentioned above.

On the whole, it can be said that some of the analysts involved in the field consider that the economics of religion works published till now contributed in a certain degree to a better understanding of the religious phenomenon, but they brought about, also, a number of controversies. That is why, these analysts share the opinion that new approaches and perspectives are necessary, such as that of Brennan and Hamlin study (1995)–which deals with the issue of the regulation of the religious markets, or Fogel's comments (1999) regarding the non-scarce nature of the spiritual assets, or Akerlof and Kranton's research (2000) on problems of religious conversion and identity. All these are to explain, in our opinion, why the promoters of the economic investigation of religion believe that „the single and subtle challenge of modelling of religion lies not only and not in the first place in the contribution brought to the illumination of some aspects connected with the religious life and activities, but mainly in the enrichment to the economic theory itself” (see, again, Oslington, *op.cit.*, p.XV).

## **Monodisciplinary research initiated by theologians : Liberation Theology**

We have pointed out, at the beginning of our study, that the conceptual-type links between economics and religion have been studied, till now, either at the economists' *monodisciplinary* initiative, or at the theologians' one. We have also shown that the research initiated by theologians embodied either the form of *individual-monodisciplinary* works, or the form of *collective-interdisciplinary* team works.

Most of the theological investigations undertaken to date – be they mono- or interdisciplinary based - do not represent anything else, in our opinion, than repeated failed attempts to synthesize central aspects of moral theology and

economics. This is not a surprising development, as far as this attempt proved to be an enormous and risky undertaking because it involved two methods, two sources of knowledge, and two types of reasoning. Examining previous Catholic and Protestant attempts at synthesis could be quite illuminating in this respect (cf. Gronbacher 1998, pp.16-27). On the Catholic side, each traditional school of social thought – Distributism, New Deal and Solidarism – have failed to achieve a sound integration of markets and moral principles. As was the case amongst the schools of Catholic social thought, the success rate of integrating morality and economics was negligible within the branches of Protestant social thought (Lutherian, Reformed, Methodist).

However, more recently (beginning with the 1960s), a new gradual and hesitant process of configuring a possible sound synthesis of theology and economics has emerged. Its first stage, that of the incipient configuration of the new epistemological frame, has already come to an end. The output is termed *liberation theology*, and represents *a monodisciplinary attempt, individually-initiated* by some Latin American theologians (such as Gustavo Gutierrez, Jose Miguez Bonino, Juan Luis Segundo, Clodovis Boff, Jose Porfirio Miranda or Ignatio Ellacuria). The aim was to combine a Marxist-inspired empirical analysis in economic matters with moral theological reflection in a normative social theory.

Nowadays, a second stage is running, and it represents the maturation phase of the desired epistemological frame. It took the form of a *collective-debating interdisciplinary research*, initiated by a group of North-American Catholic theologians who have engaged in dialogue with some Western free-market economists. This interdisciplinary exchange inspired the conception of a new subdiscipline that sought to provide a synthesis of free-market economic science and the science of moral theology grounded in a personalist anthropology, thereby giving rise to a new body of scholarship termed *economic personalism* [1]. Further in this subsection we shall bring up, in detail, the research achieved in the field of the liberation theology, and then, under the next subsection, we shall study thoroughly the research in the field of economic personalism.

The liberation theology tries to put in relationship God's Kingdom with people, from the prospect of their own culture and social conditions, especially from the point of view of the poor and marginalized members of the society (Schubeck 1999, p.69). Following the analysis developed by Schubeck, we wish to briefly present its main characteristics and outcomes to date, namely :



- liberation theology relates scientific economic knowledge with religious knowledge as it constructs a new normative social theory;
- it is aimed at the „lightening” of God’s Kingdom presence or absence in the conscience and soul of human communities under specific historical conditions, through the subordination of the social analysis to the divine revelation (found in the Holy Scriptures and Tradition);
- it has produced insights about sin as a social reality and salvation as a multidimensional, liberating process;
- it has created a distinct socio-normative principle, „the preferential option for the poor” (adopted, as a matter of fact, by the Roman-Catholic Church). The principle operates as hermeneutics for the interpretation of the Holy Scriptures and Tradition; as a principle for the solidarity with the poor people, it brought about even an idea for the Romano-Catholic Church, named „base community”, through which the poorer and more marginalized members of the society become active participants to the social life. It is aimed that, by enabling the poor and marginalized people to take part in the politic and economic life, the preferential option for the poor could help society to contribute to the benefit of „all”, and not only of the „individual”.

On the whole, the overall perception about the success of the liberation theology to construct the above-mentioned epistemological frame is somehow mixed. Thus, some of the analysts (see, again, Schubeck, *op.cit.*, p.84) consider that „The method of liberation theology is solid (...)” but „(...) theology’s social analysis needs more scientific explanation and empirical evidence. The method would also be strengthened by including as part of the process a third mediation, theological ethics, that would serve to overcome the present gap between liberation theology’s scientific analysis and its theological-ethical conclusions”. In addition, making a direct reference to the shortcomings of an individual-monodisciplinary research effort, it is said that „Perhaps by seeking more assistance from economists as collaborators, liberation theologians may more successfully relate the analysis of economic systems and theological reflection”.

There are also some more radical critics of conceptual and methodological achievements of liberation theology (see, in this respect, Gronbacher, *op.cit.*, pp.20-21). Mentioning that liberation theologians „attempted a synthesis of moral theology with Marxist economics”, these critics advocate that „Marxist socialism is proposed as the Christian economic alternative” and, as a consequence „The

spiritual and otherworldly aspects of the Christian worldview are downplayed in favor of the material and the temporal". In this way „The attempted synthesis of Marxist economics with moral theology ends by reducing the Christian message of eternal salvation to mere material concerns". This is why, radical critics come to the conclusion that „Liberation theology is the most recent failure to synthesize market with moral principles. It failed because it did not offer a true synthesis. Rather than embodying sound economic principles, liberation theologians have been mostly concerned with raising the rethoric of victimization against patriarchal Western society".

## **Interdisciplinary research initiated by theologians : Economic personalism**

The economic personalism represents, as we showed earlier, the second stage, in full running, of the present-day efforts to develop a proper epistemological frame to a sound synthesis of theology and economics. In contrast with the individualistic-monodisciplinary approach promoted by liberation theologians, the supporters of economic personalism, theologians and economists alike (we shall further call them economic personalists) succeeded to engage themselves in a collective-interdisciplinary research team exercise. In fact, what in the case of liberation theologians were both its major epistemological vulnerability (namely, the isolated, „on his own" monodisciplinary research) and its most important theoretical constraint (that is, the lack of sound economic principles as they utilized the principal elements of Marxist economics) are, in the case of economic personalism, just the opposite (interdisciplinary research teams and, respectively, free-market economics).

And even more than this; the most important epistemological asset that economic personalism brings in is *the theological vision of the person applied to economic realities*. What, actually, do we mean by this? As it is nowadays widely recognized „much policy disagreement among managers, scientists, policy makers, and citizens derives from substantial, though usually implicit, differences in the way we think about human nature – about the strengths, frailties, intelligence, ignorance, honesty, selfishness, generosity, and altruism of *individuals*" (emphasis added) (Jensen and Meckling 1994, p.4). It comes out that, according to the dominant conventional wisdom, human being is understood and approached as *individual*. This holds true for every single social science. In this context, the true novelty

economic personalism proposes is the understanding and approaching of human being as *person*. In other words, this new interdisciplinary field of investigation holds an outstanding epistemological potential: *the theologically-inspired transfiguration of individual-based economic analysis into a person-based economic analysis*. Provided this would be the case, than the outcome would be the achievement of the (long time) badly desired true synthesis of theology and economics. Accordingly, we shall further investigate in the following pages how the current state of economic personalism answers (or not) this unique potential.

The name economic personalism was developed in 1996 by Gregory Gronbacher to refer, as we have already mentioned before, to the union of two distinct areas of investigation: free-market economics and philosophical personalism (Zuniga 2001, p.151). The initiators of this interdisciplinary exercise relied on the fact that, regarding the economists, such a dialogue would offer them– through their opening towards a vision given by the Christian social ethics – a more complete image on the human being. In turn, economic science would have something to offer moral theologians who were concerned with human interaction in the socioeconomic sphere (Gronbacher, *op.cit.*, p.1). In accordance with its supporters (see, especially, the analyses developed in the works of Gronbacher, *op.cit.*; Zuniga, *op.cit.* ; Schmiesing 2001 or Woehrling 2001), economic personalism represents a science of morality of markets, an attempt to analyse the moral ramifications of the economic activities in the light of the Catholic theological vision on the human person. This implies a detailed exploration of economic theory, history and methodology, as well as of the market practices, all considered from the prospect of the recognition of human person dignity and of the concern for the human justice, derived from such an acknowledgement.

In doing so, economic personalists seek „to provide a holistic account of personal existence and thus supplement genuine economic science with a science of morality for the marketplace” (Gronbacher, *op.cit.*, p.2). Taking this course of action – it is sustained – „economic personalism does not attempt to reformulate economics in the image of moral theology. Nor do we desire to reduce moral theology to market analysis. We strive to maintain the rightful autonomy of these disciplines while endeavoring to develop a science that can fully utilize the insights of both”. In other words, they aspire to offer „a nuanced synthesis of free-market economic science and the science of moral theology grounded in a personalist anthropology” (Gronbacher, *op.cit.*, p.3).

For the supporters of the economic personalism, the achievement of such a synthesis is possible because of the fact that the economic theory and the moral theology have a common field of investigation, namely the human action: economy is the study of the human action under the market conditions, while the moral theology is the study of the rightness or wrongness of human action in general. In this way, the two disciplines cross each other in the area of the study of the human person and that of the systematic analysis of the human action. That is why, if it would be to resume the fundamental conceptual assertions of the economic personalism—as it is nowadays professed (see Zuniga, *op.cit.*, pp.151, 165; Schmiesing, *op.cit.*, pp.176-177, 180-182; Gronbacher, *op.cit.*, pp.1-3, 10, 29)—we could say the following:

- economic personalism does not call into question the epistemological foundations of economic science (that is, its empirical and mathematical character);
- instead, it tries to ensure a more comprehensive image within the economic investigation field, bringing into the economists' memory that the economic agents are, after all, human persons;
- in other words, economic personalism wants the economic discipline to enlarge its sphere of investigation so that, alongside the current concern with mathematical models and statistical analyses, it deals also with anthropology and morals.

However, a brief comment on the way economic personalists currently conceive the epistemological foundations of their field of investigation is needed, in our opinion. Thus, their concern „to maintain the rightful autonomy of these disciplines while endeavoring to develop a science that fully utilizes the insights of both” does not mean that the contribution of economics and theology to the new emerging science should be even. No doubts, inside the field of economic personalism, the component of economic analysis is not affected in its epistemological stance, as we already have noticed. But, we must not neglect, on the other side, that economic personalists simply want the economic discipline to broaden its scope, so that morality and anthropology (that is, theology) can enter the picture. In other words „(...) they seek nothing less that a fully Christian economic science, one that takes full account of the truths of productivity in the market along with the truth about the human person” (Gronbacher, *op.cit.*, p.3). The problem is that the truths of productivity *are already there*, in the market, while the truth about the human person involved in market activities *is still*

*missing*. So, if an adequate synthesis of theology and economics is intended to be achieved, we then have to accept this implies that the theological component of economic personalism should be legitimately conferred *an active and dominant role* in the process, in comparison with a passive and dominated role which should be naturally attributed to the economic component.

Summarizing, we can say that economic personalism, in its actual version, appears to be *an asymmetric composite scientific discipline* having as an active component the *personalist theology*, alongside a passive one, the *economic analysis*. We shall try, in the following pages, to investigate in more details each of these two components, hoping to truly identify, as much as possible, the specific features of the current Catholic-inspired version of economic personalism. In this respect, our working assumption will be that, in this way, we shall be better positioned to discuss, in the final section of our paper, some preliminary ideas regarding the impact that the implementation of a Christian-Orthodox could have on the present-day economic personalism.

### *The active component - Personalist theology*

The main objective of our analysis within this subsection is to clarify the specific features of the theological vision on person is critical for current economic personalism. The importance of this investigation derives from the fact that, due to its presumed active and dominant role, the nature of the theological vision on person applied is critical for the success of transfiguring the *individual-based* economic analysis into a *person-based* economic analysis.

The accepted opinion among the commentators is that economic personalism has precise intellectual sources that inform its vision of the person. According to them, „economic personalism derives mainly from its current Polish definition” (Gronbacher, *op.cit.*, p.4). The Polish personalism has its roots in a group of intellectuals and clerics, mostly Catholic, who offered varied but overlapping visions regarding the human nature based on different existent theories of the philosophic personalism. The unifying element to all these thinkers was represented by the philosophic methodology of the phenomenological realism, developed by Edmund Husserl as an answer given to the Kantian idealism: „By demonstrating the intentionality of consciousness and the ability of the mind to intuit essential structures of reality, Husserl provided a new foundation for escaping the solipsism of the idealists.” (Gronbacher, *ibidem*)

Among the Catholic theologians influenced by the philosophic phenomenology and anthropology developed by Husserl's followers it was also the young – at that time – Polish priest Karol Wojtyła, the future Pope John Paul II. Wojtyła discovered in Max Scheler's philosophy (a prominent disciple of Husserl) a new method of understanding the human being, focusing his attention on the human action and experience. In this way, using the phenomenological analysis, Wojtyła accomplished an ample reexamination and reassertion of many of the essential characteristics of the human being, unlike the manner of analysis that based itself on the classic tomistic anthropology, that prevailed the Catholic theology at that time. In this way, we can consider the former Pope John Paul II – in consensus with the most qualified analysts of the domain –, as the founder father of the Polish theological personalist doctrine, the doctrine which informs the vision of the person of the current Catholic-inspired version of economic personalism (see, again, Gronbacher, *op.cit.*, pp.27-29). Later, taking John Paul II as a model and source of inspiration, other thinkers have contributed to the development of the new interdisciplinary field (among them we can name Michael Novak, Rocco Buttiglione, Kris Mauren and Rev. Robert Sirico, the last two being also among the founders of Action Institute for the Study of Religion and Liberty).

The vision of the human person proposed by Polish theological personalism is part and parcel with some basic principles, namely: centrality of the person; subjectivity and autonomy; human dignity; person in community; participation and social solidarity. Following the analytical lines developed by Gronbacher (*op.cit.*, pp.5-10), we shall further examine them, briefly, each one, in order to obtain a better understanding of the way the social Catholic theology addresses the problem of the human person. It is our hope that such a procedure will allow us, later on, to better emphasize, in comparative terms, the specificity of the Christian-Orthodox theological vision of the human person.

*The centrality of the person.* The personalist thought considers the human person as the ontological and epistemological starting point of the philosophical reflection. For the personalists thinkers, the personalist philosophic meditation represents a metaphysical investigation regarding the constitution, statute and dignity of the human being as person. The person's dignity and value lay in the centre of the personalist philosophy and form the basis for the entire subsequent philosophical analysis.

*Subjectivity and autonomy.* From the personalists point of view, subjectivity refers to the conscious inner life of the human person. The persons, while living their inner life, remain still open to the surrounding world. In line with this idea, the personalist philosophers think that the human beings have a kind of intuitive awareness, in the sense that they cognitively, emotionally and psychologically connect with their external environment. Thus, the subjectivity of a person is an external characterization of that person. This is understood as something dynamic, since it changes constantly as an answer to the occurrence of new circumstances, new needs and values. But, the personalists consider, at the basis of this dynamic structure it always remains the same human subject. There is a real, personal „ego” („I”) that lays at the foundation of any human action. This „ego” is a personal conscious oneself, it is the person that really exists and acts. The subjectivity is, therefore, the connection between to be and to act (Wojtyła 1979, p. 36 apud Gronbacher, *op.cit.*, p. 6).

In the same way in which, by conscience, a person becomes aware of his subjectivity, through subjectivity he reaches on to understand the particular nature of his own existence, that is the autonomy (independence) of his own living. However, this autonomy cannot be separated, the Polish personalists argue, from the person's subjectivity and his own nature.

*Human dignity.* In accordance with the Polish personalism perspective, notes Gronbacher „the incarnation of Jesus has elevated human nature into a position of utter uniqueness by being raised into the unity of the divine person of the Son of God. Every human person is somebody unique and unrepeatable” (Gronbacher, *op.cit.*, p.6). The personalist philosophers think that this assertion regarding the huge dignity attributed to the human being has a profound significance, as it shows the greatness God has given to him. Therefore „The value of the person is not derived from an individual's contributions, talents, or achievements but has to do with the ineffable ontological significance of their being. Human existence is endowed with dignity, the dignity of a conscious, free, and creative being” (Gronbacher, *ibidem*). In this way, centered on the outstanding importance of human dignity, Polish personalism has as its climax the idea that *each person ought to be affirmed for his or her own sake*. Following this line of reasoning, it is further maintained that „Acknowledging and respecting a person's dignity entails the following: (1) the obligation to respect another person's sense of value, (2) positive affirmation for work performed, and (3) what von Hildebrand and Wojtyła have called „value response”, or the possibility for self-transcendence in

love insofar as the subject conforms himself to the preciousness and worth of the person for his own sake" (Gronbacher, *op.cit.*, p. 8).

Let us note that this centrality attributed to human dignity issues reflects the quasi-absolute attention paid to moral and ethical dimension of the human person. What is surprisingly missing in the analytical discourse of Polish personalism is the lack of proper references to God, namely to transcendental (and spiritual) dimension of the human person. In fact, Polish personalism seems to operate in a „half-measures manner". On the one hand, it is emphasized that the human being was created in the Image of the Person Jesus Christ, and in this way he is called to be a person itself: „Christ not only reveals God's salvific will for all humanity but (He) is a revelation of man, of what man was intended to be at creation and is, by reason of incarnation of the Son of God and by reason of the Crucifixion, Resurrection, and Ascension of the God-Man Jesus Christ (...) In this respect, Jesus is *the* revelation of what humanity now is – a unique refraction of the divine image" (Williams 1981, pp.265, 279 apud Gronbacher, *op.cit.*, p.7). On the other hand, however, there is no reference to human being's response to this lovingly calling of Christ. To say that human person's dignity relies on „the possibility for self-transcendence in love insofar as the subject conforms himself to the preciousness and worth of the person for his own sake" is equal to implicitly saying that there is no response at all, as „the possibility for self-transcendence in love" refers exclusively to fellow-creatures, not to Christ. In other words, *what is actually missing is the crucial dimension of interpersonal communion between man and God*, the genuine transcendental and spiritual dimension of human person. This dimension instead is the culminating insight of the Orthodox vision of the human person (as we shall see soon).

*Person within community.* The Polish personalists think that the flourishing of the human person cannot be achieved but in relationship with the others. Persons, say these thinkers, are born in and for community. For this, their personal existence is, pre-eminently, a relationship existence, and the term of community does not mean an aggregation of individuals but an union of persons. „Any investigation of an aggregate of persons cannot simply posit an objective reality that affects every member equally, but must make a point of focusing on the consciousness and personal experience of the members individually. Only by taking this approach do we perceive the reality of a community and begin to grasp its essential meaning" (Wojtyła 1981, p. 25 apud Gronbacher, *op.cit.*, p.9).



Accordingly, the hallmark of the Polish personalist method seems to be the conviction that the potential to participate is essential to the self. Here the debates in the literature raise the question of individuality and individualism. In this respect, the promoters of the Polish personalist theology recognize that „the human individual is a unique, substantial self. In this sense, *the individual is the building block of the social order*” (emphasis added) (Gronbacher, op.cit., p.9). However, the supporters of Polish personalists maintain that the recognition of individuality is not the same as that of individualism: „Individualism is an attitude that isolates the person in an atomistic theoretical construct (...) It is possible *to recognize individuals as the ontological foundation of the social order* without becoming individualistic” (emphasis added) (Gronbacher, ibidem). Person, on the other hand – elaborate further the personalists – has freedom of action but does not maintain an unrestricted liberty to act immorally.

The reason we insisted on these aspects is our intention to draw attention to the fact that Polish personalist theological thought does not operate with a clear-cut conceptual distinction between individual and person. Rather, they are considered as interchangeable notions, despite the fact that „individual” is endowed with a predominantly ontological dimension, while „person” with a predominantly moral one.

*Participation and social solidarity.* For the personalist thinkers, the achievement of a human social order is conditioned by the preliminary adequate understanding of the nature specific to a human person in relationship with the society. As we could see, their basic postulate is that, due to the inherent dignity and immeasurable value of human being, each person ought to be affirmed for his or her own sake. The requirement that results from here, the above mentioned philosophers maintain, is that of the affirmation of a person's right of social participation. In their view, participation means both the orientation toward the others and the option for the involvement in all the spheres of the social life – political, economic and cultural :”Participation helps individuals attain self-realization through interpersonal and social relationships” (Wojtyła, op.cit., p. 29 apud Gronbacher, op.cit., p.10). A correlated aspect of the social participation – our thinkers further develop – is the fact that the application of the personalist maxim – each person ought to be affirmed for his or her own sake – in all social situation has, as an outcome, the affirmation of the authentic, social solidarity, understood as being that state of the social relationship that makes possible the full social participation of all persons.

In sum, the essential principles that Polish theological personalism affirms are as follows :

- the dignity and value of the person resides at the very center of philosophical reflection and provides the foundation for all subsequent analysis;
- each person is an original, unique, and unrepeatable expression of human nature;
- both the dignity and uniqueness of human person are fully reflected in the maxim that each person ought to be affirmed for his or her own sake. This means that there is a recognition and response to the value of each and every person. The consequence is the requirement that persons never be treated as means to an end;
- persons are born in and for community, so personal being is relational. The person lives and acts with others not only because it is his nature to do so but because he matures as a result.

Let us remind here that the main objective of our analysis within this subsection was to clarify the specific features of the theological vision of the person applied by current economic personalism. The idea was that the nature of the theological vision of person applied is critical for the success of transfiguring the *individual-based* economic analysis into a *person-based* economic analysis. In this respect, the message the Polish theological personalism sends is rather misleading:

- on the one hand, specific to Polish personalism is its recognition of the dignity of human person and the concern for justice that stems from this recognition. Consequently, its vision and understanding of the human person *are limited to moral and ethical considerations only*;
- on the other hand, specific to Polish personalism is its recognition of the fact that „the individual” represents the ontological foundation (the building block) of the social order. Its main concern in this respect is to formulate a clear-cut distinction between „individuality” and „individualism”. Consequently, *it operates instead with a flawed distinction between „the individual” and „the person”*.

For this stage of our analysis, the overall conclusion is that the theological vision of the person applied by the current economic personalism - as the active component in the process of achieving an adequate synthesis of theology and

economics - is not yet properly equipped to successfully facilitate the challenging task of transfiguring the *individual-based* economic analysis into a *person-based* economic analysis.

In the next subsection, we intend to clarify to what extent the passive component of the process, that is the economic analysis applied by the current economic personalism, tells us a different story.

### *The passive component - Economic analysis*

Economic personalists made, from the very beginning, a clear choice regarding the schools of economic thought that have the greatest affinity with the personalist approach. There are three schools of interest here: the Austrian school, the Chicago school, and the Virginia school. The defining characteristic that draws these different thought schools near is their strong defence of human liberty, in particular economic liberty. Because of this fact, the literature put them together under the name of free-market economics. As a modern conceptual approach, that found the absolute expression during the 20th century, free-market economics examines the market activities from the consumer point of view, fighting against the governmental interventionism in the economic activities and considering this interventionism as a disruptive and disturbing force.

Taking into consideration the above-mentioned facts, one can infer that economic personalism lies on sound economic principles. Our assertion is supported by the fact that free-market economics schools match the philosophical vision and conceptual discourse of economic personalism due to the fact that the unconditioned attachment of these schools to the principles of the economic freedom and private property is *organically linked* to major principles that define the essence of the Polish theological personalism, namely: (i) person's subjectivity and autonomy, (ii) person in community, and (iii) human dignity.

(i) Economic personalists consider that economic freedom (assiduously professed by the free-market economics schools) is nothing more than a fundamental aspect of the subjectivity and autonomy of the human person (so much advocated by Polish personalist theology). Personalists argue that, if personal self-determination is taken seriously – as theologians actually do -, then as much as seriously should also be taken into consideration the way this self-determination affects the economic life. In this respect, infer they further, the

ontological freedom of human person (studied by Polish personalist thinkers) proves to have doubtless effects on person's participation and integration in social life; in its turn, this determines, as a logic consequence, the emergence of some forms of political, social and economic freedom.

(ii) Economic personalists share the opinion that „natural resources and goods are not naturally allocated in equal abundance. Some individuals, due to their proximity to resources, creativity, or labour, have more while others have less (...) Natural inequality and the social nature of human person require exchange and cooperation for survival. Absolute self-sufficiency is impossible to attain”. That's why „persons require the community to flourish and survive”. All these are arguments for concluding that the market, in a sense, spontaneously arises from interpersonal relationships inside communities (Gronbacher, op.cit., p.12).

(iii) Economic personalism followers declare that the imperative of the economic freedom and that of the private property (as basic principle of the market economy theory) come inevitably from the necessity to understand the central objective of any responsible economic policy – namely, the growth of the life quality of individual citizens and communities – under the conditions of the preservation of the human dignity (as a fundamental principle in the Polish personalism view). In such a natural position of things, the economic personalists argue, the markets are able to develop a number of „natural” indicators (mainly, the prices) that signal out to the participants in the market how to act for maximizing the resources they have. That is why, our thinkers believe, the market principles (as such the demand and supply law) can perform only on the basis of the human free action logic. Under such conditions, when the political structures step in the market using coercive measures (excessive taxes, price control, industrial regulations), their interference disturbs the natural principles of market (by limitation of the free exchanges and restriction of the property rights) and distorts the prices, so that they can no longer provide accurate information regarding the real state of business in the market.

We believe that it is important to specify that, in spite of those above-mentioned, the economic personalism promoters are not the supporters of the idea of markets entirely unrestricted. On the contrary, they declare themselves in favour of the market restriction, only that the means of restriction that they take into account differ a lot from those advocated by statistis (Gronbacher, op.cit., pp.14-15). More precisely, the market restrictions that the economic personalists aimed at are

moral restrictions. The personalists take, thus, into consideration only uncoercitive measures aimed at persuading and strengthening of the individual behavior in accordance with the revealed truth about the human person. As a consequence, rather than to give credit to the policies in favour of the market regulation by the governmental authorities, the economic personalists are in favour for the creative use of the cultural and moral institutions of the free societies with a view to influence the individuals that act in the markets. Under the conditions where the moral education, access to culture and socialization take place primarily in the family and church communities, our thinkers consider that the best promotion of a moral code aimed at encouraging the self-regulation and co-operant social behavior can be carried out by voluntary associations as the family, church, general educational institutions, and local communities structures.

### **A Christian-Orthodox perspective of economic personalism**

As we already have repeatedly mentioned in our paper, the most important epistemological asset that the current economic personalism brings in is its Catholic theological vision of the person applied to economic realities. The culminating insight of this vision is contained in the maxim that each person ought to be affirmed for his or her own sake. This means that there is a recognition of the dignity of the human person and a concern for justice that stems from this recognition. Consequently, the current economic personalism focuses upon adjudicating economic arrangements which promote or denigrate human dignity.

At the same time, as we already have also repeatedly mentioned in our paper, in its attempt to achieve a true synthesis of economics and theology, economic personalism holds an outstanding epistemological potential: the theologically-inspired transfiguration of individual-based economic analysis into a person-based economic analysis. The conclusion we came at is that the theological vision of the person applied by the current economic personalism is not yet properly equipped to successfully fulfil this challenging task.

In any case, there is no doubt that economic personalism is at present a relatively obscure system of thought, untested in many respects, and by no means comprehensive in scope or expertise. On the other hand, however, it is in its nascent stages of development, and so it remains open to enlargement, realignment and refinement. Under such circumstances, the Christian-Orthodox contribution to

further development of economic personalism could consist *in bringing forward the faith-teaching of the Holy Fathers of Eastern Church regarding the human person*. In this final section of our paper we shall try to formulate some preliminary considerations in this respect.

We think of outmost importance to mention from the very beginning that, according to Holy Fathers, „the person” is a mysterious supernatural Revelation, revealed to us in the Person of Our Saviour Jesus Christ, the Son of the God. The patristic Orthodox theology shows that The Holy Trinity, from Whom both the order of creation and the order of redemption proceeds, is an infinite communion of self-giving love. And so the Person of Jesus the Saviour is the Image of the Father. As being created in Holy Trinity’s Image, the human being is an icon of the Image of the Person Jesus Christ, and in this way he is called to be a person itself. In other words, each human being is called to achieve the perfection of his own personhood by entering into interpersonal communion with Christ. At the same time, Holy Fathers say that Christ is the Head of the Church, while we are members of the Christ’s Church. It comes out from here that each human being is also called to enter into interpersonal communion with his or her fellow-creatures.

This central and critical importance that Orthodox theology attaches to human person’s interpersonal communion with God and with others, shows us explicitly the importance it attaches, at the same time, to the distinction between „the individual” and „the person”. In this respect, let us recall that Saint Maximus the Confessor speaks about the distinction between man’s „*natural will*” and „*gnomical will*” [2]. Natural will is the expression of human nature (character) created by God, which is oriented, by the act of Creation itself, towards the communion with God. This will is an attribute of human nature created in God’s Image so that natural will (energy) implies *natural liberty*, that is natural inclination towards God, the genuine liberty. At the same time, gnomical will is the expression of the man’s fallen hypostasis ; it is the „free will”, that is hypostatical liberty, man’s possibility to choose without any prohibitions (see also Susanu 2001, p.12). The Orthodox theologian Vladimir Lossky says: “However, following Saint Maximus the Confessor’s approach, this freedom to choose (that is, gnomical will – our addition) is already in itself a non-perfection, a limitation of the genuine liberty. A perfect (human) nature does not need to choose, as it knows innately „the good”: its liberty is founded on this knowledge. Our free will shows the non-perfection of the fallen human nature, the losing of our resemblance to God” (Lossky 1995, p.111).

In accordance with these considerations, the Romanian Orthodox theologian Fr. Dumitru Stăniloae shows that man has the capacity to consciously look at, and to freely tend to what is „beyond” the created world – in other words, beyond himself and even beyond his state, his condition of creature -, that is towards his Creator. Consequently, when man chooses, in accordance with his gnomical will, to separate himself from his natural will - the will that guides him towards the interpersonal communion with God –, in this case he *remains in the condition of individual* (Stăniloae 1991, p.30). To put it differently, in his condition of individual, man rejects his communion with God and chooses autonomy in relation to Him. As individual – further elaborates Fr.Stăniloae – man remains an existence which is closed, imprisoned both in itself and in this earthly world; he remains imprisoned within the created order level of existence, actualizing in this way the possibility to part from the God and his fellow-creatures. As individual, he remains just a mere exemplar among many others of his species; his uniqueness derives exclusively from his individuality as an exemplar of his species (Stăniloae, *op.cit.* pp.98, 119). He is dominated by mere material concerns, while the spiritual and otherworldly aspects of his life are downplayed in favour of the material and temporal. As individual, he consequently remains in a *fallen* condition of existence: being *primarily* concerned with fulfilment of his material needs, he conceives of social relations as tension-filled exercises in the claiming and limiting of rights, isolating himself in a self-centered attitude that views all the life as directed inwardly toward the self.

On the contrary, when man chooses to accord his gnomical will with his natural will, in this case *he elevates himself to the condition of person*. As person, man actualizes his potential capacity to consciously look at what is beyond himself and his condition of creature, that is towards his Creator. As person, man is always in interpersonal communion with God and with others. As person, man is *primarily* concerned with fulfilment of his spiritual needs, thus deepening his interior life and experiencing an inner transformation as expressions of self-giving love to God and to others.

Trying to capitalize on what has been said above, we would like to underline that, in our opinion, the culminating insight of Orthodox personalist thought appears to be the idea that human being is called to enter into interpersonal communion with Christ and with others. Depending on the answer offered, a clear-cut distinction between man's fallen condition of individual and his elevated condition of person is made. This means that central to Orthodox thought are

*spiritual values*. Accordingly, as part of our preliminary considerations, we would like to say that by bringing forward the teaching of the Eastern Holy Fathers, the moral dimension which dominantly defines the Catholic vision on human person *could be surpassed and even transfigured* by the spiritual dimension which fully informs the Orthodox vision.

This pre-eminence of the spiritual dimension of human person could generate significant changes in the way economic personalism is currently conceived as an emerging interdisciplinary domain. These changes are expected to occur in relation to the subject matter of the domain, to its basic conceptual principle and also to its general mission. In the following last few pages of our paper, we shall try to elaborate a little bit more along the mentioned lines of analysis, applying a comparative approach.

#### (a) Subject matter

As far as the *current Catholic perspective* is concerned, economic personalism proves to be an attempt to analyze economic activity in terms of its *moral significance*. This includes a detailed explanation of actual market structures and practices in the light of the Catholic theological vision of the human person. Specific to Catholic theology is its recognition of the dignity of the human person and the concern for justice that stems from this recognition. In accordance with the moral stance adopted, Catholic-inspired personalism focuses upon adjudicating which economic arrangements promote or denigrate human dignity.

With reference to *expected contribution that the Orthodox perspective* could bring new into the picture, we would like to underline that economic personalism should analyse economic activity in term of its spiritual significance. In this sense, the Orthodox theology is particularly preoccupied with the humbleness of the human person (Saint Siluan the Athonite, Saint Ambrose of Optina) and the gentleness that crowns the humble person. Saint Basil the Great says that gentleness is the “unchanged judgment on the things that God is pleased with” and Saint John Chrysostom explains that the gentle person is that who “inherits the Earth”. In accordance with these views of the Holy Fathers of Eastern Tradition, it results that an Orthodox-inspired economic personalism should accordingly focus on the spiritual content of the interpersonal relations in marketplace and, as such, it should be concerned with promoting virtuous economic behaviour.



## (b) Basic conceptual principle

The basic conceptual principle adopted by *Catholic perspective* postulates that each person ought to be affirmed for his or her own sake. This means that there is a recognition and response to the value of each and every person. This also means that people should never be treated as means to an end.

In its turn, according to its spiritual stance, *the Orthodox-inspired* economic personalism would advocate that human person ought to comply with the principle of minimum action. This principle was originally developed by the science of physics (Feynman 1970) and postulates that a physical entity (a body), while moving from one point to another, follows that trajectory—out of a multitude of possible trajectories—which implies a minimum action, that is a minimum consumption of energy differential (kinetic energy minus potential energy) multiplied by time. Bringing this reasoning to its logical consequences, it follows that the entire Creation of God complies with this principle. For this reason, one can infer that a person obeys the will of God provided his or her actions comply with this principle.

Under these circumstances, it is expected that the Orthodox approach will suggest that the principle of minimum action lies at the basis of any human action (be it economic or spiritual). Therefore, one can further infer that human economic actions (that is production, exchange, distribution, and consumption activities) comply with the minimum action principle provided the consumption of economic (material) resources is minimized (economic efficiency). Likewise, human spiritual actions that accompany interpersonal relations in the marketplace (that is, personal feelings, thoughts, emotions and so on generated during, and due to, a particular business transaction) comply with this principle provided the consumption of useless soul energy (that is sins and passions) is also minimized (spiritual efficiency).

It comes out that the humble and gentle person, the “poor in spirit”, is exactly the person who acts in accordance with the principle of minimum action. And, it is important to make clear that, in this way, the “poor in spirit” reaches spiritual efficiency. And even more than that; reaching spiritual efficiency first will consequently be followed by reaching economic efficiency, too. Says Saint John Chrysostom (1994, p.178): “Since it is believed that the gentle one loses all that he has, that is why Christ promises the opposite, saying that the gentle man, the man

who is not bold, nor proud, holds in complete security his possessions, while the one lacking the gentleness loses in most cases even the wealth inherited from his parents, and loses also his soul". Patristic writings teach also that the humble and gentle person has peace (as the Saviour says), has true devotion, "sees creation as eucharist" (Zizioulas 1999), and he considers himself – as should do any economic agent who opted for acting as a person in his business and personal life alike – a steward of God's wealth (likewise the priest is the steward of Christ's Mysteries – according to St. Paul the Apostle). Humble and gentle person considers his fortune as a talent that he has to use as a good servant. He "does not consume more than it is absolutely necessary" (Saint John Chrysostom, *op.cit.*, p.178) and the remainder of his fortune considers to belong to God, the overall goal being that the entire creation (therefore any wealth, too) become Christ's Church.

### (c) General mission

The general mission assumed by *Catholic perspective* aims at promoting a human economic order that benefits from market activity but does not reduce the economic agent to just another element in economic phenomena.

In terms of general mission likely to be assumed by the *Orthodox perspective*, we share the opinion that it should aim at preventing the extinction of the religious faith in modern and post-modern societies either due to increased material welfare in times of prosperity or due to increased poverty in times of crises.

## Some concluding remarks

Since more than a hundred years a separation of economics from theology has been accepted by most economists and not quite as many theologians. As a consequence, the importance of religion for economics is seldom recognized by contemporary economics. However, economists who have rejected the separation have argued for different forms of religious economics on the assumption that economic theory is not theologically neutral and has to be evaluated theologically. More recently, an upsurge of interest by some economists in extending the economic approach to religion has stimulated the emergence of a new field of investigation called economics of religion. Both religious economics and economics of religion have provided valuable contributions in helping to illuminate religion as well as to enrich economic theory.

Replicating these inquiries, theologians went into more depth with their investigations on relationship between theology and economics as they aimed at achieving a conceptual synthesis of the two disciplines. A first important step in their endeavour was the attempt to combine theology and economics in a normative social theory. The outcome, liberation theology, could hardly be considered a success having in view its major epistemological vulnerability (namely, the isolated, „on his own” monodisciplinary approach) and its most important theoretical constraint (that is, the lack of sound economic principles as it utilizes Marxist economics). The second important step is represented by a recently initiated interdisciplinary effort to synthesize Catholic moral theology and neoclassical free-market economics under the name of economic personalism. Its most important contribution is the application of a personalist theological vision to the study of economic realities. In this way, economic personalism affirms an outstanding epistemological potential: the theologically-inspired transfiguration of the individual-based economic analysis into a person-based economic analysis.

Centered on moral values (dignity, justice, participation), Catholic vision of the person proposes the idea that human beings never be treated as means to an end, that is as a mere economic resource in a production function (along with capital, technology, or information). Its culminating conceptual insight is reflected in the maxim that each person ought to be affirmed for his or her own sake. In accordance with the moral stance adopted, Catholic-inspired economic personalism focuses upon adjudicating which economic arrangements promote or denigrate human dignity.

Taking into consideration the shortcomings of its theorizing performance (the vision and understanding of the human person is limited to moral and ethical considerations only, while the critical distinction individual-person is flawed by the erroneous supposition that „the individual” – and not „the person” - represents the ontological foundation of the social order), it comes out that the current Catholic-inspired economic personalism succeeded only partially in developing the outstanding potential we have mentioned above.

Under these circumstances, an Orthodox-inspired version of economic personalism promises to contribute to further development of this potential. Centered on spiritual values (humbleness, gentleness, compassionateness), Orthodox vision of the person proposes the idea that human being, in order to elevate himself or herself to the condition of person, has to bring into accord his or her gnomical

(free) will with his natural will. Its culminating conceptual insight is reflected in the urge that each human being freely and consciously chooses to enter into interpersonal communion with Christ and with others (fellow-creatures). In accordance with its inherently spiritual stance, an Orthodox-inspired economic personalism would focus on the normative imperative that economic activities are to be governed by criteria that take full account of both economic efficiency and spiritual efficiency, as each business transaction implies not only an exchange of tangible and intangible material (earthly) goods, but it simultaneously implies an exchange of spiritual (heavenly and otherworldly) goods: altruism vs selfishness; moderation vs greed; cooperation vs competition; generosity vs envy; care vs indifference; forgiveness vs revenge; love vs hate. All these appear to indicate that the Orthodox-inspired economic personalism could be better positioned to achieve the desired theologically-inspired transfiguration of the individual-based economic analysis into a person-based one.

## Endnotes

[1] Let us note the distinction in epistemological terms between the two stages: liberation theology is an attempt *to combine* theology and economics in a *new theory*, while economic personalism represents an attempt *to synthesize* the two disciplines into a *new interdisciplinary science*.

[2] For an extensive presentation and analysis of Saint Maximus's teaching see J. Meyendorff, *Teologia bizantina*. The relationship between the natural will and the gnomical will is similarly debated in Saint John of Damascus, *Dogmatica*, chapter XXII, pp.79-83 (apud Şuşanu, *op.cit.* p.12).

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