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DOCTORAL SCHOOL "ISIDOR TODORAN"**

**"WHAT IS MAN?" (מַה-אֲנוּשׁ) (Ps 8:4; 143:3) -  
ANTHROPOLOGICAL LANDMARKS IN PSALMS**

**- PHD THESIS -**

**- SUMMARY -**

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## Summary

**Keywords:** psalms, exegesis, isagogy, theology, anthropology, man, salvation, God, angels, ephemerality, vanity, greatness.

Known as one of the masterpieces of Holy Scripture, the Book of Psalms is a selection of hymns, prayers and poems that capture the diversity of human experiences, from moments of joy to moments of sorrow. In this broad spectrum of feelings and situations, a complex picture of man and his relationship with God is revealed. Anthropology in the Book of Psalms is both introspective, as it explores the nature and situation of man, and relational, highlighting the interaction between man and God. In this paper, we will explore the anthropological landmarks in the Book of Psalms, that is, the aspects of humanity and human experience reflected in this collection of sacred hymns.

In my bachelor's thesis and later in my research during my master's studies, I was constantly preoccupied with this fundamental question "What is man?", a question that led me to formulate this research theme, beautiful and unique in my opinion, "*What is man?*" (שׂוֹנֵי-קִי / *ti, evstin a;nqrwpoj*) (Ps 8:4-5; 143:3-4) - *anthropological landmarks in the Psalms*, which I intend to deepen in this research, with the aim of giving the reader a broad (primarily biblically grounded) perspective on the definition and purpose of man, which is quite evident in the contents of the Book of Psalms.

Through this broad exegetical and theological exercise we aim not only to examine the texts in which the Psalmists define man, but we want to show first of all the most important purpose of their teaching: *the salvation of man*.

So our goal is to understand and apply this truth. The theological message concerning man's salvation is based on the conception that man is a personal and immortal being, destined to enter into an inexhaustible communion with the Divinity, until he reaches the state of divinity. In this paper, we aim to develop this idea in detail, placing it in the broad context of Orthodox anthropology.

In the face of the question "What is man?", the answer becomes coherent only when we correlate this entity with the Supreme Entity, with its Creator - as, in essence, it should, for the term "man" - *ανθρωπος*, carries in itself this meaning: a being oriented upwards, towards heaven. Thus, by outlining these "truths" of Orthodox anthropology as revealed in the psalms, we will attempt to discover new and profound theological insights into the variety and

complexity of the theme of theological anthropology, which is of the utmost relevance both for academic theological study and for ordinary believers.

First of all, with this new anthropological breath in this paper we aim to present how theology today must respond to the concerns of contemporary man and his problems, offering him an answer anchored on the scriptural text to the question: **what or (rather) who is man?**

In this paper, we aim to address a new anthropological concept. We will explore how contemporary theology can respond to the concerns and difficulties of the modern individual, offering a scripturally grounded answer to the essential question, "**What, or more correctly, who is man?**"

In a context where anthropology seems to be increasingly detached from ontology and where the concept of "soul" is less and less recognized in the scientific sphere, we believe that a theological approach to this question could provide some clarity. The motivation for our paper may lie precisely in this need. As for the research we propose, it aims to serve as a genuine guide in this direction, although it does not seek to treat the subject exhaustively.

I have also chosen this theme of presenting the anthropological-psychological perspective, believing it to be extremely relevant in order to provide today's man with more answers to questions related to his identity and the purpose of his existence. In the elaboration of the paper we will highlight the concrete meanings that define man as a person/individuality, based on the expressions and places identified in the Book of Psalms, which speak of both the greatness and the smallness of the human creature in comparison with God and His creation.

I have chosen this topic not because I am convinced that it will bring an unexpected innovation to biblical study as a whole, but rather as a challenging opportunity and a starting point for future debates within the field of Old Testament biblical theology, with a special focus on the Romanian context. This is due to the importance of the topic and the lack of extensive research devoted to it.

This research aims to provide those of faith, and those in search, with a possible answer to the fundamental question of our identity. By analysing how the Psalmists have shaped the human concept, it opens the way to rediscovering a God-centred vision for the contemporary individual. It thus provides resources for relating to and orienting oneself towards the transcendent sphere by moving from a strictly material perspective of life to a spiritual one.

Undoubtedly, the question of the meaning of our existence is of major importance, since it touches the deepest human enigma: what is the purpose of life on this earth? A proper and personal interpretation of this crucial question can enable man to position himself

correctly in relation to the daily challenges of life, whether they are related to interactions with others, education, profession, marriage or the upbringing of children.

In contrast, an inadequate approach to this question can expose the individual to the risk of failure even in personal aspects of life. Indeed, what meaning will individual goals have if a person's entire existence as a whole is meaningless?

Given that the psalms contain, in symbolic or explicit form, "the fundamental patterns of the spiritual life, the stages and transformations that [man] undergoes in his ascent", examining the verbal constructions and words found in the Book of Psalms that directly allude to the person can form the foundation of introspection for every individual exploring questions about their own existence.

After analysing the key expressions in the psalms related to this subject and synthesising the theological content, this paper aims to contribute to the elucidation of why man should be perceived as an entity of perpetual value, going beyond a strictly biological or animal existence. It also aims to help in becoming aware of and experiencing an eternal dimension and expressing witness to the living God within our united bond with Him.

According to the content of the psalms, God cares for man from conception (Ps 21:9; Jer 1:5) until the end of his life. By analysing the terms and expressions in the psalms, which define man as a person/individuality, we discover the main elements and characteristics of the person.

The theme of anthropology in the psalms is important and topical, especially in Romanian biblical theology, where there are few studies on the subject. The present work aims to fill this gap, completing the framework of specialized studies. It aims to be a relevant guide in the enigmatic exploration of human nature reflected in the content of the psalms, although it does not aim to address the subject in its entirety. Addressing the theme of anthropology in the psalms is particularly significant as it provides essential insights for anchoring theological discourse in biblical texts.

The paper begins with a chapter of preliminaries in which we deal with the general problems of orthodox anthropology, presenting the main stages of the anthropogenesis account, followed by an overview of psalm anthropology (chapter 2).

Given that the present research focuses on two main texts from the psalms, the places that will be analyzed exegetically and theologically (where we find most elements of anthropology) are:

- Ps 8:4-5: "What is man, that you remember him? or the son of man, that you search him out? You have made him small for a moment below the angels, and crowned him with glory and honour."

- Ps 143:3-4: "Lord, what is man, that you have made yourself known to him? or the son of man, that thou hast taken notice of him? Man is like vanity; his days are passing away like a shadow."

These two texts will be treated from an isagogical, exegetical and theological point of view in the two main chapters of the work (chapters 3 and 4).

In the fifth chapter we will develop a "mystical anthropology" in which the focus will fall exclusively on the theological decantation of the anthropology of the other texts identified in the psalms, which refer to the greatness and nothingness of man, the content being structured in several small sub-chapters, each preceded by a theme of anthropological-psalmological theology.

The main objective of the doctoral thesis is to carry out a detailed analysis, from both exegetical and theological perspectives, on the topic "**What is man? - Anthropological landmarks in the Psalms**". This will be done by carefully examining the contents of the book, with a focus on the way in which the question of human nature is addressed. It is worth mentioning that such research is lacking in both Romanian and international biblical theology.

**The specific objectives of the thesis are:**

- **To make terminological and semantic delimitations** that will provide the premises of the present research and will contribute to deepen the meanings of the definition of man.
- **To carry out an exegetical analysis of the places where the term "man" appears in the Book of Psalms, as well as** of the expressions related to it, an objective which implies an exegetical approach to understanding and offering answers to the question of our theme, as illustrated in the psalms.

The method adopted will involve a thorough examination of the lexical and semantic meaning, as well as a systematization of the theological-ideological content present in the central and parallel texts of the psalms that are relevant to our topic. The aim of this approach is to provide as accurate and comprehensive a definition as possible of the concept of man/person. By approaching the Hebrew text of the psalms, we aim to identify passages in which the term "man" and its associated expressions appear. We will then proceed to interpret these terms and expressions using resources such as biblical commentaries, dictionaries, encyclopedias, scholarly articles and contemporary studies.

- **To produce a theological synthesis** by highlighting some important aspects concerning the theology of the person, which emerge from the main texts of the psalms.

Given that our project involves exegetico-theological research, the methodology applied corresponds to the current rigors of scriptural interpretation, both diachronic and achronic. Thus, in the approach we combine the spiritual method of interpretation with the critical one in order to achieve a pertinent scientific work. Nor do we neglect the rigours of the critical school of scriptural interpretation, but the main emphasis is on the achronic mode of interpretation because it better serves our objective of identifying a benchmark, a paradigm for theological answers to the question: **What is man?**

In our research approach, we will use the method of diachronic or historical-critical exegesis, valuing the scientific aspects it implies. First, we will look at the historical dimension of this method in order to interpret the text of the psalms in its historical context. Thus, we will take into account the social, political, religious, cultural and linguistic conditions of the period in which the passages we are analysing were written. In parallel, we will use the tools of historical-critical exegesis to provide a critical interpretation of the text. In doing so, we aim to analyse the phrases and verses identified in the psalms in as objective a manner as possible. It is important to point out that "the critical study of the scriptural text is called upon, moreover, to specify which are the additions to the original text and to show which of the textual variants are authentic".

It is important to emphasize that in Eastern theology, the exploration of biblical texts is not purely scientific. Indeed, the exegetical interpretation specific to this theological tradition is based on a consensus found in the patristic tradition, combined with a deep spiritual dimension. Therefore, in our exegetical analysis process, we will adopt the rigorous methods of interpretation specific to the Eastern Christian tradition. After completing the historical and critical interpretation of the text, we will endeavour to highlight the **spiritual perspective** that emerges from the texts analysed. This particular dimension is most often illustrated in patristic writings, giving us essential guidance. In addition to the rigours of Eastern exegesis, we will also explore Jewish interpretations of the texts we are analysing. This is because the Jews were the first recipients of sacred texts in general and the psalms in particular. Therefore, we cannot underestimate their contribution to enriching our understanding of the sacred text through the interpretations and explanations offered from the perspective of their tradition.

In this paper we have set ourselves the objective of carrying out an exegetical-theological analysis in order to highlight the theological meanings of the question of human identity and dignity. Our approach started from the realization of terminological and semantic delimitations of the key terms in the statements of the psalms in question, then continued with



the exegetical deepening of the two main places in the psalms proposed for deepening, where the expressions appear:

- Ps 8:4-5: "What is man, that you remember him? or the son of man, that you search him out? You have made him small for a moment below the angels, and crowned him with glory and honour."

- Ps 143:3-4: "Lord, what is man, that you have made yourself known to him? or the son of man, that thou hast taken notice of him? Man is like vanity; his days are passing away like a shadow."

At the end, we presented various biblical perspectives on the theme of anthropological theology in the context of the psalms.

The anthropological perspective in the Book of Psalms is very complex and profound. Man is presented in various dimensions: as part of the great creation, as a suffering being, as an entity in search of meaning, but also as a creature intimately familiar with God. All this not only provides a complex view of human nature, but also an understanding of man's place and role in the divine plan of existence. At the heart of this biblical tradition, therefore, man, with all his frailty and ephemerality, occupies a central place in dialogue with God.

The subject of anthropology attracts distinct interest in the context of these sacred songs. For this reason we will assert here that of all the OT writings, the Psalter gives us one of the clearest pictures and ideas of what man is. The weak and helpless man by his very nature can be compared to a flower, which by evening is already withering. Man, who would die quickly if he were not sustained by God's mercy and help, which are eternal and unchanging.

Reflecting on the question "What is man?", the Psalmists give us a deep and complex picture of human nature. They do not shy away from stressing the fragility and transience of our existence, but at the same time, they strongly affirm the value and dignity of each person in God's plan. This is an invitation to humility, recognition and hope, encouraging each reader to seek his or her purpose and value in relationship with the Creator.

In most of the psalms, man is presented in contrast or in relation to the rest of creation. For example, in Psalm 8, man wonders about his own significance in the context of the vastness of the universe, expressing amazement that, despite his apparent smallness, God gives him special attention and honour.

Thus, anthropology in the Book of Psalms offers a multi-dimensional picture of man, ranging from frailty to dignity, from agony to ecstasy, and from isolation to intimate communion with God. This complex perspective serves as a reminder of human nature,

highlighting both the potential and inherent limitations of man in the context of a fallen world, but also the hope and comfort found in relationship with God.

Overall, therefore, the Book of Psalms gives us a complex overview of the human experience from a spiritual perspective. This poetic collection retains essential anthropological landmarks, reflecting the human search for meaning, spiritual connection and understanding of various aspects of life. From moments of joy and praise to moments of sorrow and lament, the psalms remain relevant as a mirror of the diversity of human experience and humanity's constant search for connection with the divine.

Thus, the results of our research aim to provide potential answers and approaches for restoring lost human dignity in the context of everyday life by examining and analyzing human issues more deeply.

Therefore, we can deduce that the dialogue about human nature can only be sustained through the concept of personhood. In contemporary times, the individual is aware that he has become a robot, a mere agent of production and consumption. This is why he often feels the need to reflect on his own existence. We believe that by addressing this essential question, "What is he?", modern man can discover his answer, especially for those who perceive individuals not as "just a creature" but as the ultimate creation: the foundation and purpose for which other creatures were brought into existence.

Detailed examination of this topic, in addition to its relevance to biblical theology, points us to the deeper meanings of human existence. From the beauty manifested in the surrounding world, therefore, we should infer the presence of the Supreme One, who surpasses any concept of beauty, "and from the greatness of what falls under our senses and from these limited bodies in the world let us take our minds to the boundless One, to the One above greatness, who surpasses all mind with the multitude of His power. It is true, we know not the nature of existence; but it is so wonderful that it falls upon our senses, that the keenest mind is powerless before the smallest creature in the world, either to describe it properly, or to give due praise to the Creator."

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