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Jacob's Struggle with "The Man" and Seeing the Face of God (Gen 32,24-32)

- PHD THESIS -

SUMMARY

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Human society has reached a remarkable level of development, no matter from which angle we look at the situation, which allows us to realise that the environment in which we live is a favourable one for most people, since we have access to varied opportunities and extensive resources, being able to fulfill almost all our desires in a quick and simplified way, and to note, with deep sadness, that humanity is undergoing an increasing desacralisation of fundamental values, in the axiological sphere the ratio is reversed by a visible hijacking of priority Christian objectives, so that the mundane takes precedence over the celestial, and the immanent takes the place of the transcendent, and we end up living in a hedonistic world in which living in God has long ceased to be the supreme goal, because satisfying bodily needs in an increasingly complex society is more important than acquiring divine grace, which introduces us, while still on earth, into the state of eternity, which is in fact the joy of meeting and living together with the True and Living God¹.

Against this background, the use of the term "struggle" is most appropriate to describe the efforts necessary to maintain and strengthen our connection with the Ungodly² and, at the same time, the most pertinent element when dialoguing about man's return to his origins as a creature of God, endowed with reason, feeling and will, all placed in the natural service of growth in the "luminous shadow" of the "Light personified"³. In this sense, the passage in the Book of Acts, chapter 32, verses 24-32, becomes paradigmatic for all of us, in as much as it brings to light a new notion, namely that of man's "overcoming" God through struggle, coming to see the Ungodly One as a result, and thus being able to speak of a "face to face" vision, not in a perfect way⁴ but gradually, through a synergy marked by man's perseverance in prayer⁵ and by repentance for his sins before his God, and finally by his full partaking of the true Light which is the Saviour Christ, Himself thus establishing a perfectly symmetrical relationship of return to the state of heaven⁶, that is, to the state of health and normality present before his fall into sin.

¹ Ioan CHIRILĂ, "The Knowledge of God in the Old Testament through Theophany and Anglophony," *AFTOC* 1 (1990-1992): 98.

² Eli LIZORKIN-EYZENBERG, *The Hidden Story of Jacob* (Chicago: Independently Published, 2019), 56.

³ Ioan CHIRILĂ, "Theosis - In-Godhood," in *Anuarul Episcopiei Sălajului* (Zalău: Ed. Episcopiei Sălajului "Faith and Life in Christ", 2009), 266.

⁴ Edmond JACOB, *Theology of the Old Testament* (Paris: Delachaux et Niestlé Neuchâtel, 1955), 62.

⁵ Ioan CHIRILĂ, *The Ladder of the Word - Homiletical Essays* (Cluj-Napoca: Școala Ardeleană, 2017), 77.

⁶ Hans von CAMPENHAUSEN, *The Greek Fathers of the Church* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2005), 180.

Thus, in the context of our world, the relationship between light and sight is intrinsically linked and interdependent. However, in the spiritual realm, the perception of divine light is not limited to our biological ability to see⁷, but rather is realized in the depth of authentic and complete faith⁸. This process, known as apophaticism⁹ in theological terminology, reveals that the sight of God is fully manifested when the human being delves into a search for God beyond the limits of human knowledge. Thus, once man begins to discover God in his dual or dichotomous structure, there is a union between the human and the divine, through man's descent towards the ascent of the Ungodly One into the human component of his being.

We have chosen this theme, of man's struggle for the sight of God, in the form of a direct "confrontation" with Him, as a result of which the created being can emerge "victorious", influenced by the context of the modern world, in which the idea of "son of God" is increasingly eclipsed by the increasingly prevalent materialistic mentality, thus necessitating a struggle against profane thinking and dehumanization, a search for the divine gnosis that gives meaning and vitality to human life¹⁰. In this way, man can become increasingly alienated and negatively influenced, secularised and unsacred thinking can transform him from a "son of God" into a "prodigal son". This situation, exclusivist and at odds with deep divine understanding, can lead to the loss of authentic spiritual awareness¹¹.

After careful investigation of the biblical structures associated with this topic and a theological synthesis, the proposed work aims to make a valuable contribution to the rediscovery of a God-centered perspective for contemporary man. It will provide essential tools for connecting and anchoring him in the transcendent dimension of existence. "If man today has lost his orientation, it is because he has lost the awareness of his own existence. He sees himself as the sole decision-maker in history and in the world, putting the divine factor in the evolution of life in second place"¹².

⁷ ST. GREGORY PALAMAS, *On the Holy Light*, in *Philocalia 7*, trans. Dumitru Stăniloae (Bucharest: IBMO, 1977), 336-7.

⁸ Constantin OANCEA, "The Use of the Term "Light" in the Old Testament," *RT 2* (2006): 117.

⁹ Paul EVDOKIMOV, *The Burning Roar*, trans. Teodor Dămșa (Timișoara: Ed. Mitropoliei Banatului, 1994), 33.

¹⁰ Ioan CHIRILĂ, "Entheosis - the goal of creation *new heavens and a new earth* (II Pt. 3:13; Mt. 19:28: *at the renewal of the world*)," *Studia B 1* (2009): 6.

¹¹ Claus WESTERMANN, *Elements of Old Testament Theology*, trans. Douglas W. Scott (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982), 103.

¹² BARTHOLOMEW I, *The Church and the Problems of Today's World. The Universal Vocation of Orthodoxy* (Iasi: Trinitas, 1997), 61.

Structure of works

This paper is structured in four chapters, preceded by an introductory part and followed by conclusions. Starting from the scriptural episode in the book of Acts, chapter 32, verses 24-32, we want to present, in a concrete way, the framework plan of bringing man closer to God through a direct struggle, which aims at seeing Him, precisely in the densest darkness, which seems to be the propitious environment, desired by God, for this intimate encounter of communication and communion¹³. It is certain that only after this "confrontation" can man experience a state of maximum intimacy with God¹⁴, this ecstatic experience causing him to renounce the pleasures, joys and fulfilments of the world, changing his outlook and way of thinking, so that transcendent and immaterial values will overtake material and transient ones¹⁵ and thus man will return 'home' to God's 'family', to His heaven, prepared from the beginning of the world for His children.

In the first chapter, which deals with the current state of research both nationally and internationally, the first step to be taken is to present in detail the specialist works used, such as commentaries by the Holy Fathers, Romanian theologians and those from abroad, on man's "struggle" with God, a challenge through which man "overcomes" God and enjoys the sight of His "face", using the essences of language, namely semiotic (signs) and semantic (meanings)¹⁶, in terms of revealing the semantic meanings of certain words or textual expressions.

In this regard, using the passages corresponding to our scriptural fragment from the BHS, LXX, LVB, etc. we sought to identify distinctive meanings, using biblical, historical, etymological and even logical argumentation of the text under analysis, making a clear comparison between the original Hebrew text and the versions of the basic translations in other languages, in order to be able to see whether certain terms or expressions have been translated or understood correctly over time, because otherwise it is not possible to speak of a correct exegetical analysis that is as close as possible to the real meaning or meaning of the Hebrew text, nor of a clear and truthful transmission of the message of the revealed text¹⁷.

Also, in the course of our research we have discovered, in the texts we have analyzed, besides the theological dimension of this biblical fragment, an approach to this Old

¹³ Henry Donald Maurice SPENCE-JONES (ed.), *The Pulpit Commentary: Genesis* (Bellingham: Logos Research Systems, 2004), 395.

¹⁴ Victor P. HAMILTON, *Commentary on Genesis* (Ada, MI: Baker Books, 2012), 71.

¹⁵ J. P. FOKKELMAN, *Narrative Art in Genesis* (Amsterdam: Van Gorcum, 1975), 210.

¹⁶ Emile BENVENISTE, *Essays on General Linguistics* (Coral Gables: University of Miami, 1971), 43-8.

¹⁷ Joel D. RUARK, *The Theological Significance of Light (אור) in the Old Testament: An Applied Cognitive Linguistic Study* (Stellenbosch University, 2017), 20-1.

Testament passage only from a strictly literary or sometimes even philosophical perspective, thus eluding the spiritual dimension of the text, because when the aim is only to "decipher" the vector of rationalist thought, through the grid of philosophical concepts and syllogisms, the exegetical approach will be irreverent, but, however, we were constantly concerned to maintain the congruence between the texts and commentaries of the Old Testament and the patristic monuments throughout the research, identifying the most relevant and best documented resources on our subject. As a result, in order to achieve a quality research we have combined in the section dedicated to the exegetico-theological analysis the Jewish interpretation with the patristic one and the exegesis of the critical school with that of Eastern origin.

In the second chapter we have made a punctual presentation of the life of the patriarch Jacob¹⁸, focusing our attention on a few essential episodes, precisely in order to better understand the context in which the event of his struggle with God took place, a crucial episode in which we speak of a metamorphosed person who understood God's iconomic plan with His people, a plan in which he was to become the fundamental ancestor of the people of Israel.

Thus, Jacob is one of the key personalities of the Chosen People, who drew attention to himself by grasping his twin brother Esau by the heel at birth, which a child would not normally have been able to do, by reaching out his hand outside the placenta, an aspect that clearly was a sign of the future. Thus, the book of Acts shows Jacob as having emerged victorious before his brother, then his father, his father-in-law Laban, and finally God, all of which was made possible by His will, who chose him, like his ancestors, as the fundamental element from which the Messiah would later be born.

Knowing that he was to be greater than his brother, according to the divine affirmation (Acts 25:23)¹⁹, he strove to obtain his father's blessing by his own strength and especially by deception, as if God needed his human help, and therefore, on the ladder of fundamental values, instead of placing God at the top, Jacob placed himself at the top, and thus ended up losing everything.

¹⁸ "James, who is full of wisdom, is both a citizen and a man dwelling in a house, that is, in virtue." PHILO OF ALEXANDRIA, *Works*, trans. Octavian Cocoş (Bucharest, 2017), 63.

¹⁹ "For he who is evil and without reason is by nature a servant in the sight of God; but he who is good and endowed with reason is regarded by Him as strong and free." PHILO OF ALEXANDRIA, *Works*, 73-4.

It should be noted that in Jewish culture the transmission of blessing was hereditary and was closely linked to the fulfillment of the divine promise²⁰, being extremely well founded in the communal form of the family, the father being the one who would bless his sons. However, the solemn blessing passed on from father to son, immediately before the death of the first son, was of particular value in that, in addition to giving the son the right to the property, it also transferred to him the authority of the head of the family, thus conferring on him the divine promise that he would become the patriarch of the people and the rightful heir of the promised land and, moreover, the one from whom, in the genealogical line, the Redeemer would be born²¹.

Basically, the promise made to Jacob, like the promise made to Abraham, is based on the foundation of God's own initiative and faithfulness to the covenant made, and not on the assumed merits of the patriarchs²². In this sense, at Bethel, God reveals to Jacob, through a dream, that the divine blessing poured out on him will be greater than that given to his grandfather and father, in that he will not only be blessed with children, but more than that, his descendants will become a blessing to all the peoples of the earth²³.

The third chapter highlights the fact that at first glance the idea of man's "struggle" with God is ephemeral and striking, but in reality it highlights a fundamental anamnestic characteristic, namely that on the basis of the image of God imprinted in man, he has the possibility of seeing the Undivided, unfulfilled One in this life and perfectly in the afterlife, in the course of his spiritual journey becoming more and more like his Creator and being metamorphosed in this process of transfiguration. Thus, man's 'struggle' with God is not intended to reflect man's autonomy with regard to his relationship with God, but rather represents a strenuous action of returning man 'home' to the state of heaven, where he can enjoy the light of God's glory in abundance, and should therefore be understood more as man's 'competition' with God, as a 'training', as a 'confrontation', whose main objective is not the destruction of the adversary, but his maturation.

Through the consistently constructed way in which the personal and place names highlighted in our scriptural passage through dense wordplay placed in a chiasmic arrangement (Jabbok/Iakob - Israel/Peniel) Jacob's struggle with God expresses the reality of a test of his relationship with God in the face of the threat to the patriarch's future by God Himself, which

²⁰ William David REYBURN and Euan McG. FRY, *A Handbook on Genesis* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1997), 617.

²¹ WESTERMANN, *Elements of Old Testament*, 105.

²² Kenneth A. MATHEWS, *Genesis 11:27-50:26* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2005), 559.

²³ LIZORKIN-EYZENBERG, *The Hidden Story of Jacob*, 29.

means that the events described are fundamental and concern the history of Israel, which is why Jacob does not give up on God until God blesses him, thus giving him the guarantee of a new future for his descendants.

The struggle between Jacob and God is illustrated by the verb "to dust" (אָבַק -- 'ā-bêq), which is related to the noun "dust" (אֶבֶק - 'ā-bāq)²⁴, which suggests the idea of a fight in which the 'opponents' are only aiming to destabilize and not to kill, thus making opponents dust themselves in an attempt to knock their opponents to the ground²⁵. We also point out that this verb אָבַק used in the imperfect form אֶבֶק is very similar to the name of the place where the fight will take place - "Jaboc" (יַבֹּק - yabbōq). As for the identity of the "man" with whom Jacob wrestles, the prophet Hosea states in his book, in chapter 12, verse 4, that he wrestled with God Himself, the explanatory notes of the Geneva Bible being cocludent in this regard, in that they clearly relieve that Jacob wrestled with the Ungodly One, He taking the form of a man²⁶. According to an allegorical interpretation by St Ambrose, James embodies the paradigm of the man who struggles to acquire virtue, thus not allowing himself to be overcome²⁷.

As for the change of Jacob's name²⁸, the Hebrew text is unclear, in that we can choose between two possible translations, by the name Israel we can mean on the one hand, "you have fought with God and with men and have come out 'victorious'", and on the other hand, "you have fought with God; and with men you will come out victorious". Even if the second version is less well known in Romanian, it is nevertheless the version supported by the LXX, a meaning that St John Chrysostom also uses when he says in his Homilies to the book of Acts: "because you have been strong with God, you will be strong with men"²⁹.

²⁴ Wilhelm GESENIUS, *Hebräisches und aramäisches Handwörterbuch über das Alte Testament*¹⁶ (Leipzig: F. C. W. Vogel, 1915), 103.

²⁵ *A Bible Commentary for English Readers*, vol. 1, ed. Charles John Ellicott (London: Cassell and Company, 1897), 121.

²⁶ *The Geneva Bible*, ed. Rowland Hill (Geneva, 1560), 15.

²⁷ ST. AMBROSE OF MILAN, *Treatises on Sacred Scripture*, in *PSB* 52, trans. Teodor Bodogae, Nicolae Neaga and Maria Hetco (Bucharest: IBMO, 2007), 280.

²⁸ "He was called Jacob, because he trampled under foot the enmity of the passions until he obtained a blessing and acquired his senses, which were in the power of the enemy. And when those were freed, he was called Israel, that is, the mind that sees God." WORD. ISAIAH THE HERMIT, *Twenty-Nine Words*, in *Philokalia* 12, trans. Dumitru Stăniloae (Bucharest: Harisma, 1991), 61.

²⁹ ST. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, *Homilies on the Creation*, in *PSB* 22, trans. Dumitru Fecioru (Bucharest: IBMO, 1989), 248. Regarding the etymology of the name Israel there are other translations, among which we mention the most often used: "God fights", "God reigns", "he who fights with God", "prince of God" or according to the Holy Fathers "he who has seen God".

It is also interesting that its new name, Israel, derives from the word "yasar", which means on the one hand "to cut" and on the other hand "to heal"³⁰. Thus, by changing his name, Jacob undergoes a spiritual metamorphosis in the fire of divine love, since the wound left by God in his body becomes a clear sign of God's permanent presence in his life, the name "Israel" representing, in practice, a blessing, "a name of honour"³¹, a "transfer of power" between God and humanity, through which Jacob assumes a new identity both as a human being and as a community in relation to God³², and not least, in Wenham's perspective, a "rebirth"³³.

The lameness is a common motif in myths and legends (the lameness of Oedipus, the Greek king of Theba), but in our case it symbolizes Jacob's maturation in his relationship with God, the True Lord of his life, as a result of which he becomes spiritually fulfilled and worthy, following the change in his character that favors his successful reconciliation with Esau³⁴, to become the rightful heir of the ancestral promise³⁵. To this day, Jews do not eat the muscle on the thigh of the hip, and although this dietary prohibition is nowhere mentioned in the Hebrew Testament, it is nevertheless found in the later writings of Judaism, so that if Jacob kept the wound in his body, the people of Israel kept it in their dietary practice as a perpetual reminder of their ancestor's fateful encounter with God.

The final chapter shows that this theme becomes intriguing not only in the informational and experiential age of the cutting edge, in which the struggle for the sight of God brings to the fore clearly defined perspectives and partially clarifies some of the unresolved questions of humanity throughout the ages, but also in the context of the Old Testament, in the patriarchal period and beyond, because at that time, the issue of the sight of the Ungodly One was not only difficult to understand, but also difficult to reach, given the breakdown of communion caused by the disobedience of the forefathers Adam and Eve. However, the subject becomes much more compelling as it highlights a genuine conjuncture in which man was being guided by the All One how to recognize Him in this extended sphere of vision precisely through struggle.

³⁰ W. F. ALBRIGHT, "The Names "Israel" and "Judah" with an Excursus on the Etymology of Todah and Torah," *JBL* 46 (1927): 168.

³¹ Gerhard von RAD, *Genesis - A commentary*, trans. J. H. Marks (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1973), 321.

³² BRUEGGEMANN, *Genesis: Interpretation*, 268-9.

³³ Gordon J. WENHAM, *Genesis 16-50* (Dallas: Word Books, 1994), 296.

³⁴ Victor H. MATTHEWS and Frances MIMS, "Jacob the Trickster and Heir of the Covenant: A Literary Interpretation," *PRSt* 12 (1985): 187.

³⁵ MATTHEWS and MIMS, "Jacob the Trickster and Heir of the Covenant," 193.

In this section, we will also emphasize the concept of sight and enlightenment through purification, pointing out that, like Jacob, the man who has come to see the Lord receives His blessing, thus becoming a son of the Almighty and receiving the divine seal as a signature of the heavenly Creator on his soul. Thus, in the present work, in order to scrutinize as well as possible the mystery that surrounds the divine being, in the context of the real possibility of seeing God by the human being, we have also analyzed other Old Testament passages, which illustrate and capture all the hypostases and stages of the spiritual ascent, with regard to the acquisition of the state of en-theosis, which favors and creates the favorable framework for man to see God.

Man's sight of God begins on earth, so those who have not seen the light of Christ in this life will not see it in the next³⁶. Therefore, if we were to look at the world not as an ultimate reality but as a means by which to perceive God, it would no longer be a barrier between us and Him, but a medium through which He reveals Himself³⁷, for the purpose of man's redeeming himself is the seeing of God in light, and when the Light dwells in man his eyes see the light through the Light, of course, to the extent of purity, the way of seeing and implicitly of deification, being so endless that we might have the impression that we are still at the beginning of it, that is, at the beginning of infinity, and hence the thirst of the created being for the uncreated light, since he cannot see and feel it perfectly on earth.

Thus, "at the end of the ascent, we find the beginning of the descent, darkness and unknowing, above knowledge and light, for divine transcendence hides from all light and knowledge"³⁸, which is also why "divine darkness" describes an aspect of darkness in a sense of transcendence or overcoming, being essentially equivalent to the superluminal light of the All One³⁹. As a result, we can say that deification "is not a mere actuation of some potential dimension existing in us, but is a supernatural gift given to man by God"⁴⁰ and therefore transfiguration should not be understood as a reward for our effort, but as "an ontological

³⁶ We must be careful about one essential point, namely that those who imagine that they have Christ, the light of the whole world, within them, but say that they do not see Him or that they do not always see Him, that they do not live in the light, that they are not enlightened, to be aware that their thinking has not been enlightened by the Saviour Christ, and also that He has not made His dwelling in their hearts, unclean of passions, and therefore not to think that they will be worthy to see His light in the afterlife. Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *Studies in Orthodox Dogmatic Theology* (Craiova: Ed. Mitropoliei Olteniei, 1991), 337.

³⁷ ST. SIMEON THE NEW THEOLOGIAN, *Hymns of Divine Love* (Bucharest: IBMO, 2017), 56.

³⁸ ST. DIONYSIUS THE AREOPAGITE, *On Divine Names. Mystical Theology* (Iasi: European Institute, 1993), 165.

³⁹ "God does not come out of His hiddenness, but from this unknowable depths endless lights spring forth. And the lights make known to us the transcendent One of knowledge". Stelian-Alin DUMITRU, "Saint Dionysius the Areopagite. Theology and the Iconomy of God," *AB* 7-9 (2013): 68-9. ST. DIONYSIUS THE AREOPAGITE, *Complete Works and Scolioses of St. Maxim the Confessor* (Bucharest: Paideia, 1996), 248.

⁴⁰ Stelian-Alin DUMITRU, "The Isistical Theology of St. Gregory Palamas," *AB* 1-3 (2013): 63.

restoration of human being, a dynamic advancement, by the help of grace"⁴¹ , in order to complete the process of human likeness to God.

As a result, in this dialogical relationship it is not enough just to have the light in us, but we must become, we must be "incarnate" light, so that our whole life, our deeds, even the smile of the human face, becomes a doxological song, an offering, becoming not what we have, but what we are⁴² .

Research objectives

1. First of all, the overall objective of our doctoral thesis is to carry out a thorough exegesis of the passage in the book of Acts, chapter 32, verses 24-32, with the help of biblical commentaries, dictionaries, encyclopedias, articles and topical studies, by elucidating certain terms or expressions, from a philological and theological point of view, thus carrying out an analysis of the semantic structures of the biblical fragment, taking into account the fact that there is no such theological treatise, focused on this theme, anchored in the perspective of the "victory" of God by man through struggle, in the space of Romanian or international biblical theology.

2. Secondly, representative Old Testament texts, which fall within the same thematic area, will be analysed, looking at certain syntagms used and establishing links of content or context between the relevant biblical episodes and characters, namely between James and Moses in particular, but also tangentially between James and other key Old Testament figures, positioned in the area of vision, in all these passages with similar thematic content in terms of our theme, the key link being God the Son Himself, in that these Old Testament fragments, typologically speaking, represent nothing other than what was to happen later, at the fullness of time (Gal 4:4-5), thus illustrating, in point form, the path of knowledge, vision and illumination to the climax of the spiritual ascent - the union in light of man with the Light.

3. The third objective captures a theological synthesis, anagogical in character, by revealing essential aspects of the connection between sight, light and struggle, in order to achieve the ultimate goal: God's sight, as a result of "defeating" Him through man's perseverance in his faith in Him and in his love for Him, in such a way that man does not miss the purpose of his existence, thus annulling himself, chance to make his being a holistic diaphanous structure, by dulling the source of his life, extinguishing the Spirit and reducing

⁴¹ CHIRILĂ, "Theosis - In-Godhead," 287.

⁴² Panayotis NELLAS, *Man - the animal of god*, trans. Ioan I. Ică jr. (Sibiu: Deisis, 2009) 68.

him to mere flesh⁴³, when, in essence, his spiritual and spiritual itinerary should be aimed at becoming an eternal being.

4. Another objective of the work is to present the evolution of the reception of the idea of the vision of God, through time, from the Old Testament to the present, and the effort made by man to achieve this telos, especially since until the coming of the Messiah into the world, the subject of the vision of God was a sensitive one, in that all the righteous of the Old Testament went to hell, as a repercussion of the deterioration of the state of harmony existing between God and man before the fall into sin; But we are nevertheless speaking of a historical period in which man did not fully enjoy the sight of God, even though they all wished to be granted a full view of Him Who is, which became possible through the kenotic act of the Messiah and the overcoming of death and the devil at the moment of the descent into hell and the transfer of all the righteous of the Old Law to heaven.

5. The last objective demonstrates that the prophetic structure of the treated episode, in a typological manner, reaches its paroxysm when the "defeated" God-man dies on the cross and the victorious God-man ascends to heaven. Basically, Jacob's battle with the "Angel" is nothing more than a foreshadowing of the confrontation "to the point of blood" that will take place much later, in the context of the Incarnation, between the divine and human natures in the Person of Jesus, with the human nature finally becoming deified, transfigured, through the willing assumption of the divine will, revealing the idea that it is always through struggle, through sacrifice, through the cross, that man will succeed in "conquering" God, an objective which also presents, also in a prophetic perspective, the "confrontation" between God and the people of Israel, the "struggle" constituting an act of divine pedagogy of maturation and fulfilment, not in the absence, but in the presence and assistance of God.

Thus, we want to carry out a research with a novel topic that will help to present a new and interesting aspect of our theology and to create bridges with other confessional spaces, exploiting its multiple valences.

Scientific research methodology and sources used

The research will include elements of both the inductive and deductive methods, narrative and descriptive passages, but it will be mainly based on the analytical method. The methodological plurality is partly due to the novelty of the research. At the same time, to the extent that we discover important elements that will facilitate interdisciplinary or even

⁴³ Paul EVDOKIMOV, *The Mystery of Love - The Sanctity of Married Life in the Light of Orthodox Tradition*, trans. Vasile Răducă (Bucharest: Christiana Christian Medical Philanthropic Association, 1994), 66.

trans-disciplinary research, we will also use methodological aspects that are characteristic of other research areas.

In our approach, we will resort to diachronic or historical-critical analysis, using scientific resources specific to this method. Thus, exploring its historical dimension, we must take into account social, political, religious, cultural and linguistic aspects that have influenced the content and meanings of the text in question. Then, by applying the method of historical-critical exegesis, we aim to make a critical interpretation, seeking to objectively analyse the relevant phrases and sentences. However, it is essential that we do not lose sight of the spiritual dimension of the sacred text, as illustrated so remarkably in the patristic writings, which reveal the depth and deeper meanings of the biblical teachings. In this sense, through the act of exegesis, all potential meanings can be brought out more clearly by deciphering the textual structures, thus bringing about an encounter with the Word revealed and made known, in a mysterious way, through words.

Also, any real and concrete exegetical work on scriptural texts must not only take into account the literal text itself, but also the multitude and complexity of existing interpretations that make up the biblical corpus. At the same time, any exegetical intervention on the sacred text must take into account the historical context of the time in question, as well as the historical-cultural context, which reflects Jewish thought, in order to identify the stereotypes present in the text, which will constitute a real interpretative key throughout the exegetical approach, often quite difficult, as the exegete has to refer both to the pre-Christian Jewish perspective and to its subsequent development, both to the patristic source and to heterodox interpretations, both to the theology of the Eastern Church and to interpretations from the Western world.

Another method to be taken into account is the symbolic-typological one, which opens the perspective of understanding the sacred text in a symbolic and typological note in which the Person and work of the Messiah constitute the essential element in which the link between promise and fulfillment, between *typos* and *antitypos*, is fully realized, the revelation of the Son of God being presented as a crescendo from His kenotic manifestation to the revelation in glory of His divinity, the symbol and the type being the landmarks of a much deeper existence or reality, by passing to a supra-textual stage of meaning, thus also arriving at a Christocentric approach, by means of which the unity of meaning and significance of the entire Holy Scriptures is revealed, as well as the gradual, progressive, gradual unfolding of

Revelation⁴⁴. With regard to the sources used in this research, we would like to mention that we have drawn on the patristic heritage, rabbinic literature, national and international biblical commentaries, as well as valuable studies that do not fall within the corpus of the commentaries themselves.

Conclusions and future openings

The theme of the vision of God has been one of the most debated themes throughout the ages, being a subject explored by many of the Holy Fathers, especially considering the fact that in the patristic period there is a transition from the philosophy of the profane, evinced very conclusively in ancient Greek thought, through the knowledge of things based on reason and the senses, to a higher thinking and understanding of the existence of this world and implicitly of man, which is based on the work of grace.

The book of Acts presents passages of remarkable beauty, true examples for contemporary man, among which the life of the patriarch James occupies an essential place. "The struggle" between God and Jacob is simply aimed at destabilising the latter with a view to his transfiguration, in the form of self-denial, so that the 'shackling' of the One who is, forever, in the depths of his inner structure, can be achieved by means of sincere love, as an artist puts his mark on his creation, so too the Unseen One, giving man the ability to see, imprints His "signature" on his soul, recognising him as His son, so that the self-forging of the Creator's creature constitutes an opening to the source of light and to the acquisition of the endless life of the One Who is, that is, the revelation of the purpose of one's existence and of life in Him. This means that God's "struggle" with Jacob is not to be interpreted as a "confrontation" aimed at the latter's injury or even destruction, but rather this struggle is to be understood as Jacob's "competition" or "contest" with God, the aim of this "confrontation" being the patriarch's spiritual maturation, even though God "touched" his thigh, causing him to be lame and thus lame.

Following this episode, God gives Jacob a new name, which is subject to a variety of interpretations, namely Israel, as He is the One who has the ability, authority and power to change a person's name, which represents an inner metamorphosis and the beginning of a new life for Jacob, in the light of His glory, since the name defines the human being, his character, his deeds and his identity, and therefore Jacob's pronouncement of his name was

⁴⁴ We also mention here that the citation and final bibliography will be done according to the methodological rules, in accordance with the Chicago Manual of Style, accepted in the international theological environment. *The Chicago Manual of Style*, according to www.chicagomanualofstyle.org.

the most honest testimony of his actions throughout his life and an acknowledgement of his true identity. Thus, through this "rebaptism" of himself as Israel, a "transfer of power" takes place between God and Jacob, which will have an ambivalent effect, on the one hand, through the blessing received during the battle by the patriarch in the form of a "victory" over the divinity, and on the other hand, by reminding his followers that they too as a people are destined to be invincible and triumphant in their struggle with the whole world, and when the need arises God Himself will be the One who will fight against them to set them on the path.

God does not want us to be quiet, passive and careless, but He wants us to be active and ambitious, able to do absolutely anything to be permanently close to Him; He does not want us to do whatever we are told, but He wants us to ask questions, to ask to be enlightened, because only those who ask are really interested in Him. God "yields" to man only when man, regardless of the impediments he encounters in his spiritual evolution, does not capitulate in any way to God's challenges. It is paradoxical this notion of challenges, but we must understand that all that we suffer is basically God's love burning within us.

Rabbinic interpretations highlight the fact that the "man" who wrestled with Jacob was the promised and long-awaited Messiah, and the Holy Fathers, in their works, illustrate that the Old Testament has a Christocentric character and a strong Christophanic valence, the Savior Christ being the True Light, Who in reality reveals Himself, in the course of time, sometimes even in human form, as in the case of the patriarch Jacob, precisely because he is the One who was to become incarnate and restore the bond between man and God, coming into direct contact with the created creature and showing his true identity only at the 'fullness of time' (Gal 4:4-5). In practical terms, the Saviour Christ makes himself a way for us and at the same time helps us to make our humanity an increasingly transparent environment of divinity.

In this context, Jacob's seeing God's "face" is a flashpoint in which God reveals to the patriarch a concise fragment of his complex plan for the people of Israel, who will eventually see the face of the Messiah after his Incarnation, because until that moment none of the people had seen God the Father, but only His Son, who was born as a man of the Virgin Mary, and therefore the use of the Hebrew expression 'panim el panim' (face to face) does not refer to Jacob's seeing the 'physical face' of God, if we were to use anthropomorphic language, but refers rather to the reality of his direct encounter with God.

Thus, in the case of the scriptural passage under our analysis, the image of God's struggle with Jacob can be interpreted in a prophetic note and, at the same time, in a kenotic key as the "struggle" between the two natures of the Saviour Christ in His one Person, the

victor being the human nature precisely through its deification by the divine nature, but without annulling it, thus shaping it of its own free will, through personal acceptance of the divine will in the context of God's eternal plan, human nature being left with a wound, especially in the context of the passions, but a wound which we know is a sign of God's immeasurable love, manifested in the form of a continuous present, where the One Who is accepts to descend into the depths of our human being in order to raise it in the light to the step of perfection. Thus Jacob's struggle with God may suggest a foreshadowing of the crucified One. Therefore, the "wound" left by God on Jacob's body constitutes the reward for the blessing and name received, becoming also a food taboo by prohibiting the consumption of this part of the body, the cholation being understood as a commemoration of the divine revelation and received as a national sign and cultic symbol.

Seeing the Ungodly is not merely capturing Him in the visual field, but involves encountering Him and being transformed in the process, and therefore man's seeing of God must be examined and interpreted in a figurative or metaphorical sense, signifying participation, feeling and experiencing, in other words, following Him to the point of being like God, in reality, a sign of the full vision of the future life, following the process of transfiguration of the human being in the light of Christ, which begins to work in man during his earthly life, showing itself in part in his soul and then extending to his body, so that at the resurrection of the body, the living God will become fully alive in the very body of man.

Analyzing the perspective of the battle in the context of the vision of the Ungodly One, it is evident that the experience of His vision by man is authentic and transcends the realm of imagination. However, being a divine gift, the ability to see Him is not given to all, but only to the worthy, to those who have become light and partaken of the true Light, that is, to those who have put on the bright garment of the divine image.

In terms of the register of biblical research, we believe that the present study could be continued in a more comprehensive research work, which would focus on a comparative exegetical analysis of the biblical places where the Savior Christ reveals Himself to man in a human face, because, paradoxically, various questions arise concerning the way in which these discoveries occurred and especially their effect on those who experienced them. It would also be interesting to analyse these Old Testament passages in relation to some New Testament passages, which are identical in subject matter, because in the New Testament too we identify the idea of man's "struggle" with God and, at the same time, the way in which Jacob's struggle with God, as a typological element, had repercussions on the people of Israel,

all these reflections and observations succeeding, we believe, in framing our thesis in a much broader theological area.

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și aleg să viețuiască în liniște și singurătate, sau despre purtarea, petrecerea și viețuirea lor și despre toate bunătățile ce le pricinuieste liniștirea celor ce se străduiesc cu ea, cu dreaptă judecată. În *Filocalia* 8. Tradus de Dumitru Stăniloae. București: IBMO, 1979.

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