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Challenges to the Orthodox Mission from contemporary scientific atheism. Missionary evaluation

Summary

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Introduction

The mission of the church is on the one hand represented by the universal proclamation of the Gospel, and on the other hand it refers to the universality of the Gospel that it proclaims. That is why missiologists speak of a clear distinction between *mission* and *missions*, in the sense that the mission refers to the revelation and love of God to the world (*missio Dei*), and missionary works are particular forms of participation to it.

The real understanding of the Christian mission is represented by the awareness of its theological bases and, at the same time, by their transposition into practice. Firstly, the mission cannot be separated from the *Trinitarian theology*. Christ sent the Apostles into the world, but He was sent by the Father through the Holy Spirit (In. 20,21-31) to reveal to the people the communion that exists in the Holy Trinity. In other words, the mission of the Church has its foundation in the Father, the work of the Son, and the fulfillment in the Holy Spirit. To this divine premise, the human one (by synergy) is added, i.e. the work of man with the supernatural work of God.

Secondly, the mission must have a Christocentric nature, i.e. it should be *centered on the person of Savior Jesus Christ*. As a divine-human person, incarnate for the salvation of man, He is the source that creates and generates the human-God dialogue and the human-human dialogue, without interfering with any identity confusion, which gives us the right to speak of a divine foundation of the mission.

Thirdly, the mission also has a *pneumatologic, sacramental and synodal dimension*; it is an integral part of the Church nature and makes it visible to the world. In Greek, the term used is *ecclesia*, and it has precisely this sense of gathering God's people, as a sign and manifestation of the eternal kingdom. The coming and renewal of the Holy Spirit is a permanent gift that permanently makes the Church alive; it is a reality always visible in the Holy Mass, the Holy Mysteries, the cult and the prayer of the Church. This aspect was neglected and even denied by the new "missionaries" of sects, and places them in the sphere of false mission.

However, the dynamics of mankind has experienced many transformations in the first two millennia of Christianity; we can speak of a new context in which the church carries out its mission. Nowadays, we are talking about atheism that is not like a false knowledge of divinity, as paganism, but, on the contrary, a real denial of it. Atheism is a great challenge to the Christian mission today because the atheist does not admit the existence of God and let us

not forget that atheism was born in a Christian country (France), then it was imposed by another country that, in the past, gave many Orthodox saints (Russia).

Since the eighteenth century, the Christian mission has been experiencing a serious new challenge, i.e. secularization, which meant confiscating and nationalizing church goods and giving up or slowly moving away from evangelical principles. The twentieth century brought about the phenomenon of globalization which, under the pretext of fluidizing the free movement of people and goods, seeks to unify humanity in a way other than the communist one. This phenomenon in full swing today. As a consequence of secularization, phenomena such as desacralization, decrementation, and religious indifference have been emerging as a result of the spiritual experience of the contemporary man in the West in general, and in Romania in particular.

I. The Orthodox Mission in the Contemporary Postmodern Context. General Landmarks

The Church carries out its mission in the society, the Church itself representing, among other things, a religious-moral society; however, it is more than that, it is a society of people who believe in the revealed God, where there is a human experience with God. In a consecrated way, the Church – "the Body of Christ" – is an institution enlivened by the spirit of Christ. Therefore, it has, on the one hand, an immanent, visible dimension, and on the other hand a transcendent, invisible dimension¹. Since the Church participates in Christ's life, it is eternal and aims at salvation, perfection, and happiness in Jesus Christ. The Church is also an institution that works in society and history; thus, it is influenced by society and history and, moreover, the latter (i.e. history and society) also influence it. The unseen and seen aspect of the Church are united, because the seen ones works the unseen. Therefore, in terms of the visible Church aspects, we can distinguish the permanent aspects from the changing aspects, the latter being conditioned socially and historically.

The mission involves sending the Church into the world, in order to extend the kingdom of God brought by the incarnate Son of God. The mission of the Church is based, on the one hand, on the Savior's explicit order to the Holy Apostles to preach His Gospel to all

¹ Alexei V. Nesteruk, "The problem of faith and scientific knowledge in Russian religious thought of the nineteenth-twentieth centuries", in *Nature and Scripture in the Abrahamic Religions: 1700-Present*, volume 37, Edited by Jitse M. van der Meer and Scott Mandelbrote, Brill, Leiden, 2008, p. 400

nations, to bring people to repentance and to baptize them in the name of the Holy Trinity, and on the other hand, it is based on sending the Son and the Holy Spirit by the Father in order to redeem the fallen man (John 20:21). Thus, the Mission of the Church has its starting point in the intimate life of God itself, in the intra-Trinitarian love, and in God's care for the world.

The internal mission of the Romanian Orthodox Church today is confronted with many cultural factors that represent a real defiance of its teaching and spirituality. We are primarily talking about the atheism process of the Romanian people, promoted by several media institutions, NGOs, etc. which repeatedly attack the Church and its leaders. This is part of the secularization process which, for centuries, has been a real challenge to Western and Eastern Christianity. In general, secularization has turned the man's gaze away from spiritual values, from the righteous teaching brought by the Savior, guiding him to the world's ephemeral values. In support of secularization, the supreme argument was that it favored the development of science, technology, and the improvement of man's social life; however, it has led directly to a profound spiritual crisis in which the contemporary man has been severely affected by atheism in general, and scientific atheism in particular².

Sermon and catechesis are two complementary aspects of the liturgical act in general and of the Divine Liturgy in particular. The catechetical and sermon activity of the Church, understood as the teaching of the eternal life, which involves the transformation of man into "*a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ*" (Ephesians 4:13), is closely related to worship and is fulfilled within it.

The sermon, catechesis, and pedagogy are fundamental elements of the church's internal mission in its work in the contemporary society. The challenges posed by philosophical, ideological, and scientific atheism to the contemporary man are serious because they affect man's religious being and, in many instances, it removes him irreparably from God. Part of the new Western and Romanian society is declared atheist, unbelieving and aggressive towards the Church. This is only the result of the educational system imposed in most countries that do not see God as the Creator of the world; this system professes that the world is the result of hazard, evolution, and governed by natural, physical, chemical laws, etc. Thus, the sermon and the catechesis in the ecclesial environment, as well as the pedagogy in the educational environment are essential for the contemporary man to understand that there is a transcendent and immanent God, as a first step in his journey to salvation.

²Kaustuv Roy, *Limits of the Secular: Social Experience and Cultural Memory*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2016, p. 74

The confessing nature of the Church's internal mission is obvious because the preaching of the Gospel is primarily grounded on the confession of Jesus Christ as the Son of God, the incarnate logos. This can be noticed from the apostolic period until today. We can not speak of the Church's mission without confessing the faith in Christ's saving acts, i.e. birth, preaching, crucifixion, death, resurrection, and ascension to heaven, given that the purpose of the Church's mission is the salvation of the believer.

Today, more than ever, the internal mission of the Church faces a series of challenges from an ideologized, atheistic and far removed society from what the Savior preached during His work and what the Church has been preaching for 2000 years. In this case, we are talking about secularization, a process that began many centuries ago and which is at its peak, the religious indifference inoculated in the mind of contemporary man, the de-Christianization as an inevitable consequence of secularization and the pseudo-religious syncretism promoted more and more nowadays.

Secularization is the phenomenon whereby God as the Creator of the world is taken out of the social and personal life of man, and He is no longer a fundamental part of his existence. The use of this term reveals, on the one hand, that it is polysemic. "The vicissitudes of the word secularization – so frequently used today in religion – and its circulation between French and German managed to give it an apparently recent and borrowed meaning. Moreover, this alleged neologism, i.e. Anglicism or Germanism, is accompanied by a polysemy [...] which gives oppositions, exclusions or doctrinal recoveries. It may designate the passage of the property belonging to churches or monasteries to the state patrimony, but also the transition from the status of priest or monk to the layman"³, in the sense of a non-practicing Christian.

Religious **indifference** is a form of unreported and non-militant atheism. In recent years, we have witnessed social indifference demonstrated by the weak interest of the contemporary man, especially young people, in terms of historical, cultural, even political values.

De-Christianization is the process whereby the state – which is underlain by Christian values and principles – is transformed into a secular, anti-Christian and anti-religious state. On the assumption that man can live without God or at least without preaching God (by the Church), the high tech and secular civilization proposed, as an inevitable

³ <http://www.universalis.fr/encyclopedie/religion-la-secularisation/>, accessed on 13.06.2018

consequence, the de-Christianization of the world but not the end of religion, which will be manifested in other ways⁴.

This paradigm shift in the secularization process has favored the emergence of **pseudo-religious syncretism**. Syncretism is the mix of religious doctrines taken from different religions and systematized in such a way as to create a more or less obvious similarity with one or more religions. The purpose of religious syncretism is to offer a so-called alternative to the Church, either with the pretext of returning to the origin of faith, or by presenting the "true path" of salvation lost or falsified by it.

The Orthodox missionary research in recent decades has shown different approaches to the Christian mission and its theology: on the one hand, there is a very broad understanding of the mission, and on the other hand, there is a very narrow and even fundamentalist explanation of the missionary purposes. However, even if the Orthodox external mission can have many similar or even identical aspects to many Western perspectives of the mission, yet the Orthodox theology and the ecclesiastical practice behind it has a specific, Christocentric and anthropocentric approach.

Any approach to the Christian mission includes clarifications about what Christianity is, what the Church is, and what Christians do in fulfilling the missions and tasks of the missionary service in their lives, as Christ's faithful followers. Making disciples of all nations and baptizing men in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit needs a greater understanding of the external mission and of what the Church is than the simple conclusion: the external mission is about sending it to the world and transforming people into Jesus's followers.

The Church's external mission must take into account these essential foundations without which it would turn into a mere proselytizing activity. We will see that the missionary activity of the Church towards peoples is not easy to do, because it faces several challenges. The conversion is closely related to the proclamation of Jesus as the Son of God. In this context, there is a connection between God's role in the conversion experience and His command of conversion and repentance. Not only is there a spiritual change, but there is also a transformation gained in motivational wishes. As human life is characterized by Christian virtues, the main preoccupation of the convert becomes God's love and the love of one's neighbor, especially the one who needs it. Therefore, the experience of Christian conversion is not just a legal fact; rather, it is a spiritual experience that takes place in the context of a

⁴*Ibidem*, p. 202.

special religious tradition, which is marked by the acquisition of virtues with internal and external significance.

Regarding inter-religiosity, the Orthodox mission and theology, as well as the present society, need solutions and dialogue, not confrontation or dispute. From the perspective of the Church's mission, the inter-religious dialogue must take into account the religious identity of a people, the national particularities and, last but not least, the perennial values of genuine religious traditions. The inter-religious dialogue must under no circumstances include negotiation and compromise. The Church's mission emphasizes that the religious differences that today are a reality must not be relativized but uniformized. They must be managed through fundamental virtues in theology: spiritual discernment.

The Church's external mission certainly takes into account the dialogue with Christian heterodoxies and with non-Christian religions, respecting their religious and national characteristics, participating in this type of dialogue, and presenting itself as a religion of peace and love for the world, with the declared purpose of having a considerable and consistent contribution to the peaceful coexistence between the believers of these religions, respecting the commandment of Savior's love.

II. The atheism as a way of thinking and living of the contemporary man

The atheization was brought about by the paradigm shift in the context of culture and social life; however, this refers both to the powers of the soul and to the somatic level. Thus, the man's somatic dimension, his feelings were no longer guided and enlightened by the work of the Holy Spirit; on the contrary, they perverted and affected the body that ceased to be considered "the temple of the Holy Spirit" (1 Corinthians 6:19), a reality in which the most repulsive passions, which led to the man's degeneration, manifest themselves.

The century of lights changed the sense of the autonomy that the creation had in the theology of the Roman Catholic Church, transforming it into a sort of autonomy that denies God's existence, as well as His role of Creator and Savior, thus becoming a deep atheization process. It has also been assumed that "any intervention of the supernatural order in the natural order is a violation of the latter, thus laying the foundations of the secularization

process which closed the human being in his/her own immanent sufficiency, with all its corollary of negative consequences for his/her moral life"⁵.

The autonomy and atheism of the human being in the postmodern era, compared to Christian freedom, are explained by the writer, philosopher and theologian Nichifor Crainic: "Self-sufficient there, human reason is insufficiently recognized here. The exercise of Christian freedom begins with this recognition of individual insufficiency and continues, consequently logical, with its fulfillment in divine perfection. Let us note that even in the field of autonomy, the deficiency of reason, if not proclaimed in principle, is actually acknowledged. In order to establish an agreement between the variety of individual thinking ways, Neoplatonism had an over-individual intelligence, and Plotin practiced, beyond dialectics, the intellectual ecstasy in order to reach a more essential knowledge... But in modern thinking, often at Kant, Hegel, Marx, or Bergson, is not that the same? And what is the authority of each of these philosophers, acclaimed by some, rejected by others, nothing more than the sign of the painful relativism in which autonomous thinking is struggling?".⁶

The contemporary human being lives a deep state of religious crisis. Ever since the end of the seventeenth century, when religious wars took place and modern science arose, we have been speaking of a crisis of the European consciousness⁷. The approaches to religion, which began to emerge in this sense during the seventeenth century, amplified in the next century, when reason began to replace the idea of God, in order to become the supreme court, offering its own certainties as the foundation of European culture, which had been once deeply Christian.

The Church's mission plays an overwhelming important role in the authentic Orthodox religious life. The challenges faced by it help us to become aware of the difficulty of being "on the way", i.e. the narrow path that the Savior speaks of (Matthew 7:14) as the way to acquire the kingdom of heaven. Challenges require missionary solutions to the phenomenon of man's alienation from God, manifested through pseudo-religious indifference.

Philosophical atheism is a great challenge to the mission of the Orthodox Church and spirituality because it deeply affects the religious life of the contemporary human being and, more specifically, the spiritual aspect is no longer taken into account when analyzing and living one's life. God is no longer in man's life, He is replaced by doctrines and atheist philosophies, on the one hand, and material pleasures on the other.

⁵Priest Prof. Dr. Dumitru Popescu, "Cosmologia autonomă și cosmologia teonomă", in "Autocefalie, Patriarhie, Slujire Sfântă", Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al BOR, București, 1995, p. 423

⁶Nichifor Crainic, *Modul teandric*, în "Gândirea", anul/ year XIX, no. 1, 1940, p. 4

⁷See Georges Cottier, *Questions de la Modernité*, FAC Editions, Paris, 1985, pp. 29-32.

Rationalism and empiricism are two types of positions that have been taken in epistemology - the branch of philosophy dedicated to knowledge theorization - and also in psychology (including linguistics) and the philosophy of psychology. In epistemology, rationalism and empiricism are positions that have been adopted with regards to the sources of knowledge, especially with the sources of justification or with the mandate necessary for a state to be considered as knowledge.

The result of deism, i.e., the concept of human autonomy, has made the human being to reproduce infinitely, by ego, the sin of Adam's disobedience, of the continual and increasingly deeper breaking from God, the source of authentic life. In a theology colloquy, it was stated that we need to recognize that today there are the symptoms of the dissolution of the religious universe. The result of such a process is the practical closure of the contemporary human being in his/her self-sufficient providence, without any openness to the transcendent.

The knowledge of, and attachment to God became strictly intellectual matters without spiritual and moral consequences for the believers' lives, thus contributing to the secularization process of the society. People *know* and *agree* with God's existence, without getting closer to, and knowing Him. The difference between *knowing* and *becoming acquainted with* God is all the more evident in the secularized living of Christianity.

The autonomy of creation – as a result of amplifying God's transcendence – has inevitably led to the autonomy of the human being and human reason in relation to God. This autonomy of reason is theologically grounded on a questionable fact, from a biblical and patristic perspective, i.e. that the human being, through his/her own reason, without the intervention of divine grace, can raise to the knowledge of God.

Philosophical atheism has inevitably led to a war against God, which proclaimed the reign of nonexistence, and which means the triumph of incoherence and absurdity. In short, this is the thesis and meaning of Nihilism, whose "illustrious" representative was Nietzsche. However, the human being cannot live with such vulgar denial; unlike Satan, it cannot even wish for its sake, but only by mistake, considering it positive and good. In addition, in fact, none of the nihilists – except for several moments of anger and excitement, or perhaps despair – saw its denial as anything but a means to a higher end. Unfortunately, nihilism promotes its satanic purposes through a positive program.

Bonhoeffer's main theological interests undoubtedly referred to the doctrines of church and ethics; however, for him, both were nothing but applied Christology. How did Christ take shape in the church and in the world was the leading question of his dissertation, and it

remained so even in his letters sent from prison. "What bothers me unceasingly is the question of what is really Christianity or who is Christ for us today"⁸.

Luther's expression, i.e. "God's death", was important to Bonhoeffer. "God kills the Son of God", he says in Discipleship, "and with the Son, God kills everything that bears the name of earthly flesh"⁹. Bonhoeffer liked the phrase "The Scriptures proclaimed how death ate another death in the Lutheran hymn¹⁰. This phrase expresses the cross of the vicarial representation of Christ even to death: it is a matter of our deliverance from sin and death. Later, in prison, Bonhoeffer composes these lines. For him, Luther's teaching of Christ represented in His death for us has always remained an indisputable and central point of reference for his thought and belief.

III. Scientific atheism. The confusion between science and ideology

Both in terms of ideology and manifestation, atheism denies the divinity and attempts to show its inexistence through various methods and means. Atheism is not a religion, nor a way, but it is a philosophical system and an ideology. As a state, it can manifest itself when a member of a religion – individually – casts doubt on the existence of divinity and denies categorically it at the affirmative-behavioral level, and tries, by various arguments, to "scientifically" demonstrate his/her belief. In the Orthodox Christian environment, however, we speak of people who have received baptism, chrismation and communion in childhood, but who have then given up their faith in God.

The relationship between ideology and science, as well as that between theology and ideology must be seen "in the broader context of the relationships between theology, science, philosophy"¹¹. The search for wisdom and knowledge by philosophy after the incarnation of the Creator Logos, the Savior, and the Providence is one of the most serious problems in the theological assessment of philosophy.

We have previously seen that **materialism** first overwhelmed philosophy, then science through formulations that were predominantly ideological rather than philosophical. The most

⁸Larry L. Rasmussen, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Reality and Resistance*, Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, Kentucky, 1972, p. 72

⁹Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Meditation and Prayer*, p. 220

¹⁰Renate Bethge, Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Brief Life, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, MN, 2004, p. 76

¹¹Priest Prof. Dr. Gheorghe Istodor, *Dialogul între știință și teologie*, p. 367.

important ideologies that have parasitized and still parasite scientific research remain materialism, naturalism, scientism and atheism.

The new postmodern scientific approach shows that the researcher, the contemporary scientist, and implicitly the scientific research can get rid of the atheistic ideological constraints of materialism, but the naturalistic ideological dimension cannot be eliminated, naturalism becoming an integral part of the structure of the contemporary scientist.

In addition to this naturalistic philosophical implication, we can also discuss positivist rationalism that eliminates the authentic reason for the pursuit of science. "By positivism, scientific activity has begun to be guided by what could be called idolatry of the facts, context in which experience has a decisive role in studying natural phenomena. The primacy of the act reveals the primacy of material things to any spiritual reality and experience, the atheistic materialist ideology being confused with the scientific attitude (which favored the emergence of communist regimes)"¹². In the nineteenth century, "the scientist adopted a reductionist position, refusing any reality that comes out of his/her viewpoint, believing that only his/her empirical research can explain the mysteries of the universe; in this secularized framework, religion was denounced as retrograde to the scientific discoveries of the moment"¹³.

Scientism was the most damaging ideology that has parasitized and that still influences scientific research. As early as antiquity, Plato spoke of the exigency of a general city of philosophers; however, scientism changed the paradigm, but not the intention, affirming and promoting a society dominated by new heroes of civilization, i.e. the scientists.

Scientology is not a quasi-religion, but a new religion whose ingredients are pastoral ministry, religious brotherhood, and followers. It is a neo-gnostic syncretistic religion, where the knowledge of causes and the laws of all things represent the supreme law. **The Christian science** proposes a syncretism of Christian teachings with elements from Hegel and Berkeley's philosophy and mental therapy from Franz Mesmer and Quimby and pantheistic elements. **The divine science**, the third Scientology sect, brings with it a process of de-Christianization of the "New Thought". The sect was founded by Emmet Fox, "great admirer of A. Kardec, a Rosicrucian, adept of spiritism and leader of a Christian science temple. The emphasis on the idea of reincarnation is essential in the doctrine of sect"¹⁴. This makes this group acquire a profoundly syncretistic nature. By its main leaders, i.e. Ernest Holmes of Los Angeles, **Religious science** or "the Church of Mental Science" presents the "New Thought"

¹²Priest Prof. Dr. Gheorghe Istodor, *Dialogul dintre științe și religie din perspectiva Misiunii Bisericii*, p. 85

¹³As. Dr. Adrian Lemeni, *Ideologizarea științei*, în „Ştiință și teologie”, Editura Eonul dogmatic, București, 2001, p. 62

¹⁴Priest Gheorghe Petraru, *op.cit.*, p. 291

doctrine on "scientific"¹⁵ bases so that anyone, wherever they may be, and regardless of their religious beliefs, can obtain infallible results using the universal mental law; "religious science" is also known as "practical spiritual psychosynthesis"¹⁶, as called by the French August Berg.

IV. The danger of scientific atheism within matter sciences

The secularization of the contemporary society favors the development of arts, technology of matter and life in the ideological-atheistic direction, and not in the direction of dialogue and communion with God and His Church. Thus, the arts, technologies and sciences no longer bear witness to the presence and work of God's inspiration in these areas, but on the contrary, they base their autonomy towards the religious authority and sphere. The consequences of this approach are not favorable to the human being; on the contrary s/he is condemned to confusion and lack of religious identity. Hopes for normalizing the dialogue between theology and these domains come from the sphere of the new anti-ideological scientific paradigm and from the reality of the limits of secular scientific knowledge.

These paradigmatic changes – beyond giving a chance to the dialogue with theology – show that science is in constant change and that we must agree with the honest scholars who state that scientific knowledge has its own limits and that we should not absolutize sciences, as it happens in ideological scientism. The limits of scientific knowledge have been shown with clarity and competence by the great Christian scholar and academician Alexandru Mironescu¹⁷; this is also acknowledged by scholars today. In order to celebrate the birth of the twentieth century, Lord Kelvin (who will give his name to the absolute temperature scale) held in 1900 a famous conference in which he stated that physics explained everything except for two "small black clouds" that still darkened the clear sky of science: Michelson and Morley's experience and the radiation of a black body when heated¹⁸. It turned out that these

¹⁵ Richard Bergeron, op.cit., p. 155; Priest Gheorghe Petraru, op. cit., p. 292

¹⁶Ibidem; Priest Gheorghe Petraru, op. cit., p. 292

¹⁷See Alexandru Mironescu, *Limitele cunoașterii științifice*, Editura Harisma, București, 1994

¹⁸The first "black cloud" consisted of the structure of a black body when heated. To explain the experimental results, it was necessary to resort to the hypothesis that energy was emitted in elementary particles in packets (quantum) and not continuously. It was a first rupture with the concepts of classical science. The second "black cloud" was represented by Michelson and Morley's experience and was related to the speed of light that is constant in vacuum. It was again a reference to quantum mechanics as a totally intuitive scientific revolution that mistakenly grasps classic concepts. – apud Jean Staunne, *Știința și căutarea sensului. Întâlnirea dintre cunoașterea cea mai recentă și intuițiile milenare*, în Basarab Nicolescu și Magda Stavinschi, *Știință și religie*.

little "black clouds" turned into two storms that devastated the vision of classical science on the world and that, crossing areas such as general relativity and quantum mechanics, contributed to the creation of the "new scientific paradigm"¹⁹.

The scientific masterpiece "A Short History of Time" seems to fall into the speculative category of his research. In fact, I think it is fair to say that the scientific center of "A Short History of Time" was not considered one of Hawking's most important works before the publication of the book in 1987. We refer to the "No Boundary Proposal" that Hawking published in 1984 in collaboration with James Hartle, a professor of physics at the University of California, Santa Barbara. With a very simplified picture of the universe, corroborated with an elegant vacuum fluctuation pattern, Hartle and Hawking have been able to provide a mathematical rationality for the whole universe that began to exist at the beginning of time. This model was also called "the universe as a wave function" and "without a starting point". While such mathematical exercises are very speculative, they can eventually lead to an understanding of and the depth of the creation event²⁰.

Hawking strongly denies he is an atheist. When he is accused of atheism, he feels offended and says that such statements are not true. For example, Hawking said: "I thought I had left the question of the existence of a Supreme Being completely open... It would be perfectly consistent with all we know to say that there was a Being who was responsible for all the laws of physics". Hawking is probably an agnostic or a deist (a believer in an impersonal god) or something between these two positions.

V. The danger of scientific atheism within the "life sciences"

The modern period, beginning with the Renaissance, would have to make radical changes in Western societies regarding religion, religiosity and the Church. The very Christian, Living and Personal God, Himself involved in the life and salvation of the human being and the world, has come to be denied and condemned to "transcendent" marginalization, and religion and the Church began to be considered as belonging only to the private sphere, to human subjectivity, not validated and recognized as institutions worthy of

Antagonism sau complementaritate, Editura Noua Reprezentare a lumii XXI Eonul Dogmatic, Bucureşti, 2002, pp. 196-198

¹⁹*Ibidem*

²⁰Karl Giberson, Mariano Artigas, *Oracles of Science: Celebrity Scientists Versus God and Religion*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2007, p. 109

public activity. Modernity was aggressive to God and the Church, desiring the destruction of the Christian God of the Middle Ages; on the other hand, postmodernity was tolerant of the Christian religious phenomenon, but this tolerance was offered as a poison "gift" that actually encouraged religious syncretism, relativizing and uniformizing the Christian faith and the Christian axiological system.

In addition, in the sphere of modern and postmodern philosophy, we have Nietzsche's famous theory of "God's death"²¹, which shows that the desacralization process and even the de-Christianization process in the West have already begun, the theory being only a symptom of these anti-Christian processes. The worse is that – and now we are going to the ecclesial part as an element that outlined the "old scientific paradigm" – this theory appears as a reaction to the declaration of the pope and of his "ex catedra" decisions as infallible. In this regard, St. Justin Popovici speaks of the connection of the two events, a causal link that explains why the theory of "God's death"²² appears just twelve years away from the Vatican Council I (1869-1870). The idea is clear: God is "dead" as long as He has a substitute on earth in the person of the pope as Christ's vicar, receiving Godlike attributes, such as infallibility. The Catholic Church contributed to this connection through the confusion created between God's transcendence and His absence from creation – an absence that is substituted in the western consciousness by the infallible Pope – a confusion generated by the rejection of the Palamite teaching of the uncreated energies that could have explained both God's transcendence and immanence in a convincing way, as revealed foundation. The cataloging of this Palamite teaching as "the greatest innovation accepted by the Orthodox Church"²³ made it possible to implement the "old scientific paradigm" based on "the world's desolation" with direct reference to the religious age, as a pre-scientific age marked by ignorance.

The old scientific paradigm affected life sciences by its ideological determinism. Hilbert's "Daimon" and "final solution" in life sciences correspond to Changeux's "neuronal man"²⁴, which eliminates the spiritual in human being's life, so that the s/he no longer has will and free will but was at the discretion of decisions of his/her own brain. However, biology and genetics represent by far the greatest challenges in "life sciences", in the "old scientific paradigm". Thus, the Darwinian evolution was based on the struggle for survival, natural selection and adaptation to the environment. These were based on the "belief" that the

²¹Friedrich Nietzsche is considered to be the philosopher of the transition from modernism to postmodernism, see "Aşa grait-a Zarathustra", Editura Humanitas, Bucureşti, 2012

²²See Iustin Popovici, *Omul řidumnezeulom*, Editura Deisis, Sibiu, 1997

²³See Priest Prof. Vasile Mihoc, PhD *Predică la Duminica a doua din Postul Mare*, in "Predici exegetice la duminicile de peste an", Editura Teofania, Sibiu, 2001, pp. 279-283

²⁴See Jean Pierre Changeux, *L'homme neuronal*, Odile Jacob, Paris, 2004

Universe is eternal, just as time and space. All this led – unfortunately – to the totalitarianism of the 20th century (Nazism and Communism) and social Darwinism²⁵.

In Dawkins's "Illusion of God", he exhibits his most violent criticism against monotheistic religions, especially Christianity. Dawkins's argument in "The God Delusion" is that the religious people covered God's inexistence with a false faith that had to prove the existence of an irrational interventionist God. This erroneous belief has caused a wrong impression of reality among religious adherents, insofar as they carry out immoral activities in society. Thus, Dawkins concludes that subscribing to the irrational belief that an interventionist God exists is the cause of society's evil.

Dawkins's main purpose for writing *God's Illusion* was to raise high-level atheism²⁶. He identifies the notable achievements of renowned atheists. From these examples, he claims that he does not have to hide. He claims that atheists can live a better life. Consequently, he adopts a militant stance against religion in general and Christianity in particular²⁷. He describes religion as delusional, involving two or more people caused by negative thoughts and behavioral patterns²⁸.

Although Dawkins refers to religion as a whole, Christian religion receives much of his denigration. For example, he suspects what Christians refer to by using the term "God." For him, God refers to an irrational explanation that Christians give to other natural and scientific events in real life situations²⁹. He sees the "faith in God" as a cloak that Christians and other religious people use to excuse their non-apologetic ignorance of reality. Finally, the madness of such a childhood perspective of reality manifests itself when unbelievers question Christians and other religious people about their faith. Instead of answering lucidly, religious people react with much contempt and intolerance, which is not even characteristic of their interrogators. Dawkins pursues the logical deployment of this fundamentalism largely from the evils that society supports and concludes that the faith in God is the cause of many mischiefs in our society³⁰.

VI. Missionary methods and means for counteracting scientific atheism

²⁵See E. O. Wilson, *Sociobiologie*, Le Rocher, Monaco, 1987. Social Darwinism was popular at the end of the nineteenth century, until the end of the Second World War. The Social Darwinists used it to justify social inequality as a meritocratic source.

²⁶R. Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, Houghton Mifflin, Boston, 2006, p. 33

²⁷*Ibidem*, p. 21

²⁸*Ibidem*, p. 5

²⁹*Ibidem*, p. 92, 94

³⁰*Ibidem*, p.263

Although it is a challenge of the present times, atheism is not at all a novelty of our day; even the early Christians were considered atheists by the religion of time, i.e. paganism. St. Gregory of Nyssa affirmed in his time that the human being who is not moved by (God) the Holy Spirit is a species, a special humanity. "He is only right in part because the Spirit works in a totally unpredictable way, with the heart of the man whom the wise man says is guided by God, where he likes, just like a stream of water; thus, we should be indulgent even with the unbelievers, as God is indulging in our weaknesses, and He revealed Himself in history, but He did not force Himself even on His preferred people, but left them and still leaves all human beings to do as they please. Therefore, it is possible that some will discover God sooner, others later, and others never"³¹.

Catechesis is a solution at the priest's fingertips through which he can explain to believers the teachings revealed by Christ the Savior, teachings underlain by God, one Being but Triune, opposed to the atheist teachings and concepts. It is absolutely necessary for the priest as a catechist to consider the framing of all believers in the mysterious Body of Christ - the Church, sharing their spiritual and salvific teaching and explaining the difference between it and the scientific atheism that is so damaging to the contemporary human being. This can only be done through the priest's effort to be connected to actuality and by updating the sermon and catechesis to society and to the lives of the Christians who, at present, are subjected to a rapid and continuous firing from atheism promoters. The reactivation of the catechetical dimension in the above-mentioned paradigm is an important element of the mission in the fight against scientific atheism.

A statement of the anthropic principle would be that there are several fundamental constants (e.g. the mass of the electron) or derived scientific parameters (for example, the dipole moment of the water molecule), which, if we changed them as little, would make the Earth uninhabitable by human beings. In this respect, a fundamental book is "The Creator and the Cosmos," written by Hugh Ross. Ross substantially discusses about the anthropic principle and demonstrates why many physicists and astronomers have considered the possibility that the universe was not only caused by God but actually divinely conceived.

Everything that exists is produced by the interactions of the fundamental constituents of the Universe that, over the course of billions of years, have slowly aggregated with each other under the influence of known physicochemical laws or laws that we will soon discover. In this

³¹Prof. Priest Petre Semen, PhD, *Atitudinea Bisericii față de problemele sociale actuale; integrare, globalizare, ateism, secularizare, trafic de persoane - o mare provocare pentru Biserică și societate la început de mileniu III*, in Analele Științifice ale Universității „Al.I.Cuza” din Iași (Serie Nouă), Teologie Ortodoxă, Tom XIII, 2008, Editura Universității “Alexandru Ioan Cuza” Iași, p. 175

regard, Jaques Monod said that "Man finally knows that he is alone in the indifferent immensity of the universe from which he has appeared by chance"³².

"Darwinian evolutionism has succeeded through its representatives, i.e. Wilson, Dawkins and Monod, to impose a vision in biology that tries to "unravel" the world and shows that evolution is a blind process that has no meaning, cannot be the vector of any project. Today, classical secular concepts – already removed from the science of matter – are still at the basis of biology. More and more biologists oppose such conceptions and are about to make a new Copernican revolution in their field. Thus, Cristian de Duve and Michael Denton state against Darwinism that life is an inevitable phenomenon, enshrined in the laws of the universe - "a cosmic imperative" as Duvei says, "not an unlikely accident as Monod thought"³³.

The original biblical perception of temporality was the one that allowed Western science to adopt the evolutionary image of the universe. According to the pattern of irreversible continuity, evolutionary (not evolutionary) ideas could come to life.

The central idea of Theistic religion is that the Infinite flows in the form of love to the finite universe. This means that the universe, linked to God's endless love, must be an evolving universe.

Conclusions

The right, correct and true Orthodox teaching is not limited to intellectualism, rational knowledge, conceptualizations and dogmatic formulas, established and proposed by the Church. In addition, in Orthodoxy, theology is not only an intellectual discipline that formulated the first faith confessions in a systematic way, which would be alien to the Bible and primary Christian literature; it is predominantly encountered by God, Who constantly communicates to His Church, in the name of love, and offers the communion with the Holy Trinity. In the theological, dogmatic, spiritual structure of Orthodoxy, there is both an exercise of a theological, rational conceptualization, but also the space of an existential spiritual experience, of a genuine (personal and community) encounter and communication with God in prayer, asceticism, Divine Liturgy, in the Spirit of Christ. Orthodox theology and spirituality are not the expression of metaphysical meditation whose object are the principles,

³² Jean Staune, op. cit., p.193.

³³Priest Lect. Gheorghe Istodor, PhD, art. cit., pp.113-114.

ideas, abstract and impersonal truths; they are the treasure of a constant experience, understanding and experience of the God revealed in Christ, the transcendent mystery, but immanent through the uncreated energies, through His infinite grace and love given to the human being, called to the saving and deifying relationship with His/ Her Father.

Not only does Orthodoxy represent a historical sequence or a rigid tradition, but it is also a supreme and sublime expression of sincere fidelity, whereby the believer opens and communicates with God as a Trinity of Persons, with Christ the Savior through the grace of the Spirit who transfigures it into the confessional community. "Orthodox teachings are the living memory of the Church, and they update the Church in its fullness as a spiritual and historical dimension of the living, loving and joyful relationship with the Trinity, understood and experienced as supreme love, which calls and waits for love"³⁴. God's love for the world and the human being's love for God reveals the ultimate sense of human existence, without which the mission is nothing more than mere information.

The Orthodox mission, founded and infused by God's absolute and eternal love, is a call to God's love, experienced both in private and within the community, just as an inter-human transfiguration relationship that signifies and opens to God-love (1 John 4: 8).

³⁴Priest Gheorghe Petraru, *Ortodoxie și Prozelitism*, Editura Trinitas, Iași, 2000, p. 47