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Theoretical and Practical Aspects of Good in Contemporary Society.

***Welfare and well-being in a Missionary and Interdisciplinary
Analysis***

- PHD THESIS SUMMARY -

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KEYWORDS

Good, welfare, well-being, happiness, fulfillment, McDonaldization, neuromarketing, addiction, depression, consumer society, charismatic economy, social affairs, positive psychology, neuroscience, wellness in God, deification.

MOTIVATION OF CHOOSING THE THEME

We live in a world of extremes and lack of meaning. The good almost does not say anything to man today. Contemporary life promises extraordinary living conditions based on economic and technological progress, but the reality is cruel and makes people feel no complete joy. Promised happiness and fulfilment turn into sadness, suffering and even sickness. The purpose of life is to satisfy pleasures and needs, but these pleasures are almost unlimited in the contemporary world, as they are increased to make profit. You can almost “touch” happiness, but you cannot feel it. Much distorted from deep understanding, good is seen in terms of the conditions and facilities offered, through the framework of equality and chances, through an efficient economic process and the freedom to choose from as many choices as possible to be happy. In short, “to be fulfilled” equates today with “allowing you to” buy and consume.

In the present context, good is viewed from an external perspective, depending almost exclusively on political, economic and social conditions. The tendency falls on institutional character and not on personal character. And institutionalized happiness becomes an illusion. You can live better, that is, free, allowing you to access many options, but they do not offer a full meaning. You can enjoy modern and state-of-the-art medical services, but they will not solve the inner-human problems. Man’s fulfilment and happiness are not so favorable to outside conditions, how he lives, how he feels, how he relates to the conditions of this life. A missionary approach is needed in order to be able to contribute theologically to an understanding of the good that really leads to a fulfilment of man.

Good does not only reduce itself to material welfare, it must also be a state of well-being. Not just on the outside, but also on the communal level, inside. Man is not just flesh, but also soul. So we come to the heart of the issue that we want to look at further. The fact that man’s happiness comes not only from the outside does not just draw on theology, but also on psychology or the economy, and even the latest neuroscientific research. The high degree of material welfare does not provide a guarantee of happiness, and the strictly materialistic reporting on life affects not only the inner state of the person - subjective, but also the professional or family life. The whole society feels that “breathing” only on the economic and consumer level produces “suffocation” and lack of meaning. Thus understood, good becomes a seemingly beautiful cargo, but which asphyxiates the human being in an almost insensible way.

The starting point of this work is therefore the tension that marks the modern society concerned with well-being, fulfilment and happiness, but which is exhausted in this process because it does not look where it should. Pleasures, desires, consumption, profit, but also technology tend to occupy the first option in human life. This tension also somewhat touches the lives of Christians, who can easily confuse good and happiness. Good moves slowly towards utopia, tends to confuse with the lesser evil¹, and all man’s effort becomes meaningless, regardless of the political regime and the laws passed in a state².

So the emphasis in our work falls on the two predominant aspects of the good that promise man’s happiness in contemporary society: materially understood welfare and well-being, showing

¹ Adrian PAPAHAGI, *Creștinul în cetate. Manual de supraviețuire (The Christian in the City. Survival Manual)*, Ed. Doxologia, Iași, 2017, p. 60.

² Cristian Bădiliță also speaks of the “good antichrist” proposed by the Communists, but not only, a good that perverts the message of Christ and completely reduces the life of man to the world plan, seen: “The Communists did not claim anything else but to complete what Christianity did not know or could only start. Communists (like Liberals, like Democrats) respect Jesus, but they feel more competent than Him”. See Cristian BĂDILIȚĂ, *Văzutele și nevăzutele (The Seen and the Unseen)*, Ed. Curtea Veche, București, 2004, p. 170. There is already a delineation between the good proposed by society and the good that Christ speaks of.

the limits of concern for materiality, and proposing a new strategy for the happiness of man at the base of the work of will. The fulfilment, happiness and perfection of the life of contemporary man are at the center of our analysis. The whole work is an invitation to profound research into the meaning of life: what good and happiness means, what is the purpose of our lives, what are the motivations that underlie our actions in everyday life, and how can we actually achieve a state of complete happiness. Especially in the contemporary world artificial intelligence - and technology in general - tends to take the place of human interaction, which leads to a decrease of the relational capacities, but also to the idea that man can approach (again) the new meanings of the world deciphering the mysteries of life.

Besides, we find that contemporary life is marked by illusion, falsehood and duplicity, lack of authenticity, pretence, is an inauthentic, “*counter-sense*” life that creates a harmful environment for the development and fulfilment of man, socially, psychologically and spiritually³. It is, therefore, necessary to find authenticity, what really fulfils us. The model of good status directs man towards a harmonious authenticity that takes into account the relationship of man with himself and with the other⁴, which he values, but full authenticity is the spiritual one, which, besides the fact that it does not leave room for “pseudo-religious”⁵ manifestations, makes man behave according to the image of God; this is because man was created for the divine purposes of creation, which all lead him to God. We therefore concentrate on giving arguments for a genuine, perfect life that guides everything to God, using “worldly goodies” to acquire “heavenly” ones⁶.

At the very basis of our motivation we can say that there is certain superficiality in the life of Christians regarding the living in Christ. “We have become angry because we often say one thing, we believe and do something else in practice”⁷, said Archbishop Anastasios Yannoulatos of Albania, referring to contemporary Christians. Beyond the analysis of the influences of a life-oriented material prosperity that promises a delusional happiness and beyond the benefits of a life balanced by self-control according to the state of well-being, our doctoral work comes to show what is perfect life, the true good, according to the “divine image”. It is a fundamental good for man, forever and forever. This reality gives meaning to the whole life of man, even to suffering and death. It leaves nothing in this world meaningless. “Orthodox ethos concentrates a unique wealth for the human race”⁸, says Archbishop Anastasios, deriving from “the life of the Trinitarian God”⁹. This is a life of love and kindness, being the source of ultimate fulfilment and full happiness of

³ Rev. Dr. Eugen JURCĂ, *Arta de a fi liber. Persoana în Analiza Existențială și în Psihologia Pastorală (The Art of Being Free. Person in Existential Analysis and Pastoral Psychology)*, second edition, Ed. Galaxia Gutenberg, Târgu Lăpuș, 2009, pp. 148-150.

⁴ Ibidem, p. 164.

⁵ Ibidem, p. 168. The author includes here: bigotry, pharisaism, magism (charms, strings, ties), rigorism, legalism, tabular mentality, authoritarianism, scrupulousness, feelings of culpability, ritualism, obsessions, formalism, dogmatism, fundamentalism, mysticism, obscurantism, hallucinations, hysterical behavior, sexual frustrations and aberrations, idolatry, obedience to disrespect, adolescent asceticism, egocentric religiosity (religion as a good consumer, personal advantages), passive and addictive religiosity, masochist (victim of excessive exigencies), self-defeating and self-destructive behaviors, etc.

⁶ † Metropolitan GREGORY of St. Petersburg, *O zi de viață sfântă. Sfaturi practice pentru organizarea vieții creștinului (A Holy Day of Life. Practical Tips for Organizing Christian Life)*, translated into Romanian by Laura Datcu, Ed. Cartea Ortodoxă și Ed. Sophia, București, 2007, p. 43.

⁷ † Anastasios YANNOULATOS, *Ortodoxia și problemele lumii contemporane (Orthodoxy and the Problems of the Contemporary World)*, translated by PhD candidate Gabriel Mândrilă and Rev. Prof. Dr. Constantin Coman, Ed. Bizantină, București, 2003, p. 55.

⁸ Idem, *Misiune pe urmele lui Hristos. Studii teologice și omilii (Mission in the Footsteps of Christ. Theological Studies and Homilies)*, foreword by His Beatitude, the Patriarch Bartholomew I, translation from Greek by deacon dr. Ștefan L. Toma, Ed. Andreiana, Sibiu, 2013, p. 221.

⁹ Idem, *Ortodoxia și problemele lumii (Orthodoxy and the Problems of the Contemporary World)*, p. 55.

man, and the authentic model of relationship with oneself, with fellow humans and with all creation, in which the world becomes a transparent environment between men and God¹⁰.

In essence, beyond the complex radiography of contemporary social reality in which Christians and not only them live their lives, the whole work seeks to show that the meaning of life is in God, that good cannot be outside Him, and that the Church is the place where happiness, fulfilment and human perfection is reaching maximum odds because God enters into direct and personal communion with man: “The Christian Church owes to offer what it possesses, which is humble, sincerity and profound respect for all, not just to help humanity towards a worldwide approach, but above all to reorient it to a higher level: to universal communion in love”¹¹. This reorientation is made taking into account the new conditions created by the material welfare model, as well as by the more recent neuropsychological research that actually sends a way of living to the philocalic fathers, “speaking” at the same time and to the meaning of those who do not have or do not even want to have “religious inclinations”, that the human being is called to deification and communion with God. “Mission is dialogue”¹² and theology has much to say in the light of new scientific discoveries that offer new opportunities for dialogue with the contemporary world¹³ which relates to God. Thus, we do not want to “Christianise legislation” or solve social problems through certain “Christian principles”, but to expose the “ontic core of the Church”¹⁴ to become contemporary man in God by grace.

STRUCTURE OF THE WORK

The work is structured in four long chapters which synthesize in an interdisciplinary way the relation on the axis of good - material welfare - state of well-being - deification.

Chapter I, Good as a measure of happiness and human fulfilment in contemporary society. Theoretical considerations come to capture the conceptual framework of the term “well”, its evolution in philosophy and the way it has been received in society over time to this day. Without understanding what good is, we cannot seize what happiness and fulfilment can represent for man. God is the only good indeed, Who only works to achieve the ultimate good, and man is called to participate in communion with God, the whole purpose of creation - man and the world - being this partaking of God by grace. But the good knows more forms for the contemporary man, the majority deviated from his meaning in God, taking the form of material welfare or well-being. Good things are only widely accepted values that can bring minimal happiness, or better, a minimal comfort of life, but that cannot fill the human life of meaning. Thus, in the name of the good, the material welfare model was particularly imposed as the one by which this good is maximized in absolute terms. Finally, the model of well-being begins to become more and more like another way of good, realizing that the orientation towards material wealth, even the highest performing, does not produce a real fulfilment. The state of well-being is thus a new understanding of good, but it is

¹⁰ Pr. Prof. Dumitru STĂNILOAE, „Chipul lui Dumnezeu și responsabilitatea lui în lume” (“The Face of God and His Responsibility in the World”), în *Ortodoxia (Orthodoxy)*, XXV (1973), no. 3, p. 361.

¹¹ † Anastasios YANNOULATOS, *Ortodoxia și problemele lumii (Orthodoxy and the Problems of the Contemporary World)*, p. 55.

¹² Stephen B. BEVANS, Roger P. SCHROEDER, *Constants in Context. A Theology of Mission for Today*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York, 2004, p. 285.

¹³ Pr. Gheorghe ISTODOR, „The Church’s mission in the face of great challenges that come from the sphere of modern and postmodern science”, *The 2nd Virtual International Conference on the Dialogue Between Science and Theology*, November 5-11, 2015, Research Center on the Dialogue between Science & Theology, vol. 2 (2015), p. 300.

¹⁴ Passim Ionel UNGUREANU, *Personalizarea socialului. Înțelegeri teologice ale realității sociale (Personalization of the Social. Theological Understandings of Social Reality)*, Ed. Doxologia, Iași, 2013, pp. 81-83.

also in the area of good understood without God. However, it has more similarities with the model of life in God and with the practices of the philanthropic parents, deserving a deeper analysis from missionary theology.

Chapter II, Good understood as material well-being: some current challenges from a missionary perspective, clarifies the influences of the exclusive orientation for the material good on human, social, professional and family life. First, the whole social-economic activity carries the trail of struggle for accumulation and profit, so that the man imbued with this state of search for material welfare becomes practically inhuman. Communion, joy, quality of relationships, rationality are negated and placed in a background register, almost insensible. Life does not matter in the face of material prosperity and economic power so that the facts become irrational but widely accepted. Moreover, a lifestyle based on consumption and accumulation leads to dependence and addictions, which are fine-tuned through elaborate processes of neuromarketing. Anxiety and depression are unstable and growing conditions in societies with a high degree of economic prosperity, not necessarily because of well-being as such, but of the lack of sense that surrounds it. In addition, this disease becomes a source of profit, the “happiness pill” being the supreme symbol of the failure of this model of life based on material well-being. Artificially created desires and pleasures to increase consumption and profit distort the understanding of the family, which becomes a simple “framework” to maximize the financial result by accentuating individualistic pleasures and economic exploitation of parent-child relationships, spouse or sexual orientation. Finally, work is devoid of vocation and highly valued in terms of income. All this leads to a good that does not bring any profound fulfilment to the life of man, being full of “traps” pleasantly packed.

Chapter III, Good as a state of well-being: a few characteristics and their practical and missionary implications in the person's and community's life, is devoted to well-being by directing life to deeper meanings that come from self-control and the work of virtues. First of all, new economic models are proposed that can ensure economic prosperity, but have the center of love for man and not for money. Charismatic economy and social affairs use the rules of economy, ensuring the well-being of those involved. Economy, but also contemporary man, needs humanization, awareness of the meanings of life, without which good and happiness are not possible. Then the emphasis falls on the concrete facts that can lead man to a fuller fulfilment in daily life through self-control, practice of forgiveness, love, gratitude and goodness. The research in this chapter concentrates neuroscientific results and psychological studies on the inner workings of man and the practice of these virtues in order to cope with the challenges of everyday life. Life does not have as its center the material well-being - which cannot be completely missed - but the way of understanding the influence of the various daily events on the organism. Happiness is not something to buy, but it requires sustained effort, education of the mind, education of actions, leading to both physical and mental health. Also, happiness does not mean to overlook the troubles or difficult moments, but also to overcome them by personal effort. We thus capture a model well suited to the Christian, which has the center of balance between material and spiritual, in order to communion with God.

Chapter IV, God, “Good Itself and Spring of Goodness”. The life of Christians in His Church as a perfect state and as contemporary missionary model highlights the essence of theology on the good and fulfilment of man, created by God for the purpose of deification. It is a missionary model for the contemporary man. Not only does life make profound meaning in God, but also sickness and death. For man, the complete model of good and goodness is God Himself, besides Him, speaking of relative issues produced by the human mind, without existential depths. For a state of well-being in God, it is necessary to obey and fulfil His commandments, to remove

ourselves from sin, to rely on God in all the actions of our life, a certain detachment from the material, and a sincere concern to gain communion with God. All of this is presented as a model of well-being since the writings of the First Testament. Then we have Christ as a model of human fulfilment, which offers not a worldly, fleeting pleasure, but eternal life and full joy. We do not propose a man broken by the world, society and others, but one that transfigures the relationship with nature, with creation and with others, through love in Christ. Virtues, which even if they bring benefits in the body, are not in themselves, but in the perspective of communion with Christ. Strengthening for good means directing thoughts, deeds, life to God, and their meanings to God-created meanings in creation. Everything calls for discernment, balance, and purposeful living, in complete harmony with the self, with the others, with the whole creation and with God. It is a state of well-being that leads to eternal deification. The virtues, the inner work, the relationship with the world, all centered on Christ, are thus analyzed in the philological key. As the “place” of goodness, where man practices deification, we propose the Church of Christ, where man visibly and truly participates in the mystery of union with the grace of God. And the saints, the people who taste the reality of grace and communion with God, are testimonies of the perfect state that comes from the relationship with God. It is a state that far exceeds the “joys” and pleasures of the material welfare model, but it is above well-being. It sends beyond the realities of reason or “microscope”, to the reality of grace, the real good to which every man ought to dare.

CONCLUSIONS

Aspiration for good is planted in human nature with a universal character. Whether we talk about material wellness or well-being, everyone’s desire is to be better. But without realizing that nothing outside God can be “better”, all the actions of men for this good become unconscious. We have shown that material well-being cannot bring the fulfilment of contemporary man, and can even be a basis for addiction and disease. Minimal material conditions are necessary, but they must not become a life goal. Accumulation, profit, utilitarianism and consumption “kill” man and transform him into an entity that no longer understands him or the others. There is no time and willingness to discern reality beyond these irrationalities that dehumanize and bring unhappiness.

Of utmost importance for man’s life and Christian mission is the way to understand what is good and how to achieve it. Therefore, it is very necessary to analyse these concepts of wellness and well-being that polarize the entire discourse of today’s man. We hope that we have succeeded in highlighting the influence of these models on human life, the first leading more to dehumanization, and the second bringing man to himself and seriously criticizing mercantile and irrational conceptions, underlining that fulfilment starts from one’s own person. At certain points, it can be seen that the well-being model confirms the truths of the Philocalic fathers about descent and virtues, but the differences are clear. Parents seek deification and communion with God, not a moment’s happiness. Not the consequences seen on the body are the concern of the parents, but the becoming of the person, her work for fulfilment in God.

On the other hand, the major concern of Orthodoxy, as emphasized by Father Romanidis, is for the man in this life, not the one after death¹⁵. Orthodoxy corresponds to God’s eternal plan because it does not necessarily seek to ensure good living conditions (marriage, business, exams, health, etc.) or a good place after death in heaven¹⁶, but all these must be centered on the

¹⁵ Rev. Prof. Ioan ROMANIDIS, *Teologia patristică* (Patristic Theology), translated from Greek, notes, bibliographical considerations and afterword by Ion Marian Croitoru, Ed. Bibliotheca, Târgoviște, 2012, p. 53.

¹⁶ Ibidem, pp. 50-51.

“*cleansing-enlightenment-deification* axis”, in which man seeks to become, acquire another state even from this world: “The Holy Fathers are not interested in what will happen to man after death exclusively, but what is of particular interest to them is what will become of man in this life. After death there is no cure of the mind, therefore therapy must begin from this life, because there is no repentance in hell. That is why Orthodox theology is not super-worldly, not just about the future, but is clearly *intra-worldly*”¹⁷. That is why our approach is based on the “breathing” of the moment in society, the new tendencies of the state of well-being, the models that promise the good, but also the problems that emerge from the promise of happiness through material welfare.

To grasp these things, we have entered into a dialogue with the science and culture of today's world, highlighting the essential message of theology: God's deification or the state of well-being in God, which must go through any contemporary theological, missionary theological as Father Radu Preda argues, emphasizing the need for a coherent theology that is concerned with the crises and dilemmas of today's world¹⁸. Thus, we believe that we have been able to present a living theological discourse with essential arguments to effectively help contemporary man to be attentive to what is bestowed upon us in this society, but also to deepen our lives in Christ, where the true fulfilment of man comes. Well-being is in God and is the purpose of our life. At any time and in any context, man cannot only stop at the acquisition of good material conditions, not even at the work of the “façade” virtues, but in their assumption in Christ. Only this assumption leads to a perfect life, fulfilled and full of the grace of the Holy Spirit, which makes possible eternal happiness in God.

The dialogue between theology and science is ultimately a dialogue between people, not between ideas or concepts¹⁹, theology wanting to bring forth the existential good, the good for all people. This good includes God, Who created them all for the deification of man. For the contemporary man, theology has a special role because it makes sense to all the efforts and pursuits of fulfilment of humanity. Its dialogue with other sciences is beneficial, practically for every age of humanity, sciences having the role of deepening the meaning of the world that actually leads to God. Newer studies of psychology and medicine show today that virtue is not a mere “demotivated” value, but brings a genuine state of well-being and creates the context of a fulfilled life independent of material well-being. Good does not just refer to accumulation and profit, but to inner work, personal becoming, mind work, transformation, and progress.

The economic aspect is summed up at calculations and profit when, in fact, it should be a resource of human communion and development. “The economy was alive and full of energy long before the mathematical approach became predominant”²⁰, says Sedlacek. But it seems that in the contemporary society everything – from what we eat, drink, learn, and live – bears signs of meaninglessness. The person does not really matter in these calculations, and the relationships become inhuman. In this context, resources that provide real fulfilment cannot be noticed. Family communication based on love, dedication and responsibility, becomes a contract with strict rules that will not exert too much effort in the event of a breakdown. The time spent working is strictly based on the “job description”, hence the elimination of the human being as much as possible formally. Faith in God is seriously questioned, being considered either inappropriate, or too profitable to some people.

¹⁷ Ibidem, p. 52.

¹⁸ Radu PREDA, *Semnele vremii. Lecturi social-teologice (Signs of Time. Social-Theological Readings)*, Ed. Eikon, Cluj-Napoca, 2008, pp. 26-28.

¹⁹ Wilhelm DANCĂ, *Fascinația binelui. Creștinism și postmodernitate (Fascination of Good. Christianity and Postmodernity)*, Ed. Sapientia, Iași, 2007, p. 100.

²⁰ Tomas SEDLACEK, *op. cit.*, pp. 533-534.

In such a context in which everything is for sale and nothing is of little use, good becomes an extremely abstract and subjective idea. Everyone sees their good, at most of their own family, understood only materially or “mundane”, palpable. It is no surprise that diseases, addictions and depression become a permanent presence in the atmosphere of contemporary abundance that sends itself to the “supermarket illusion”: everything is at your disposal, you can reach what you want but you cannot afford everything. Many are proposed, but not all useful.

Material well-being actually promises an illusion, and although we do this, we continue to choose the well-packaged illusion instead of the reality of communion with God. “The mission of the Church must be attentive to the attempts to offer those who are called to salvation by Christ alternatives – extremely attractive surrogates”²¹, says Father Istodor. Saint Ignatius Briancianinov points out that a man of whom “the fallen spirit has come” receives some “signs” of the removal from God: imaginations, hardening of the heart, arrogance, forgetfulness of death, boredom, exaggerated care of the earthly, and especially – anxiety and confusion²². They are present in a way too generous in today’s society. Generalized confusion about the way of life and fulfilment. Confusion over values, meaning and happiness. Confusion over good, welfare and well-being. We believe that we have succeeded in this doctoral work to describe in detail this illusion of today’s happiness – the surrogate of salvation – in order to move on to another type of search.

It is a search in which material welfare must be regarded with detachment, but not with ignorance²³. You are using the things and everything you have to at last touch salvation, deification, but through and with others. You are doing wonderful things knowing that all are gifts from God. Do not attach to them because then the soul closes to men and God. And neuroscience explains very clearly the mechanism of manipulation behind “simple” and short advertising spots, for example, or the messages that are delivered daily through state-of-the-art applications. Practically, almost everything we are proposing creates new needs and has interest in increasing consumption and profit, not happiness and human fulfilment. Even the better living conditions offered by advancing technological developments are not guarantees of human fulfilment. They help man, but he does not make sense. That’s why you cannot enjoy the new car, the new apartment, the new job etc., because they do not make sense in themselves. Stay in them with them, you get “penetrated” by them, and you do not understand where the imagined joy disappeared, why you did not feel the fulfilment you dreamed of.

From the moment when man wants to be happy and fulfilled, relying solely on himself, on his possessions, on the “goods” acquired, even on his qualities, on his relationships, producing the “good” after his own formation and conscience, ignoring the reality of God, then he is in a “self-exile” that only in appearance offers happiness. You may find a state of fulfilment and a joy of moment – shorter or longer – in what you do, in what you feel, in your feelings, to enjoy yourself with various entertainments or readings, but most of them become deprived of substance and sense if they are carefully analysed²⁴.

²¹ Rev. Prof. Gheorghe ISTODOR, *Misiunea creștină* (Christian Mission), p. 315.

²² Saint Ignatius BRIANCIANINOV, *Fărămiturile ospățului* (Crumbs of the Feast), translated from French by † Andrei Andreicuț, Ed. Renașterea, Cluj-Napoca, 2014, p. 228.

²³ For theology, it is not a goal, but a means of getting to know God. See Rev. lect. dr. Nicolae-Coriolan DURĂ, „Bunurile bisericesti – tentația vremurilor moderne” (“Church goods - the temptation of modern times”), in Lect. univ. dr. Georgică GRIGORUȚĂ (coord.), *Bunurile Bisericii: ieri și astăzi. Actele Simpozionului internațional de drept bisericesc de la Centrul Social-Pastoral „Sfânta Cruce” (Mănăstirea Caraiman)* (Church Goods: Yesterday and Today. The Acts of the International Church Law Symposium at the Holy Cross Social-Pastoral Center), November 16-17, 2014, Ed. Basilica, București, 2016, pp. 279-284.

²⁴ And in any case they are scattered and disappear before illness and suffering or death.

On the contrary, in the state of goodness as presented in the course of the work, man can attain to a certain point a deeper and lasting fulfilment. Because it is related to virtues and attention to spiritual life, to their own thoughts and deeds, and to the attention to others. It is an approach to happiness and fulfilment that provides more consistency and, from a missionary perspective, is closer to the reality of a Christian life. Of course, it does not surprise the essence of Christianity, but it fully exploits the benefits of a life oriented towards virtues and peoples. Today's people can more easily cope with situations in their lives by taking positive psychological counselling than advice from commercials on happiness through medication or consumption. This model of good offers theology a current basic language that penetrates into the heart of man, a language that has the same essential message from the beginning: man is called to become God by grace. It is not just a call for some or just in some difficult moments of life or for old age, but it is a call that needs to be answered at any time, because it brings maximum human fulfilment.

In a world of illusion and dependence, man is called to become a "God-dependent God"²⁵, as Father Stăniloae greatly emphasized. It is the only dependence that can lead to fulfilment and happiness. Life then becomes truly good, and everything we do gets meaning for eternity. There is no fixed recipe for this good, for this fulfilled life, but it is certain that there is in the Church and in authentic, profound, living theology, where God works continually. Consequently, the contemporary man has to seek, to inquire, to educate and to be educated by who is authentic²⁶. The First Teacher and the Best is Christ, and then the authentic parents and people who live the experience of grace and who have no hidden interests beyond the love for man and the longing for God. A man who has the experience of divine grace, who is in deep communion with God, sees beyond appearances and faces every experience in life, knowing to use God with discernment everything that exists in the world. Such a man who strives not to lose grace²⁷ is hardly deluded by fortunes and pleasures, consumption and mercantilism, even exposed by neuromarketing techniques. Such a man knows to distinguish good from evil and to choose the good, to have the "good judgment"²⁸ which sends to the profound meanings of the world, to God's divine purposes created by God in creation.

So, welfare or well-being? The answer is in God, who speaks to man especially through the experience of everyday life, through all the divided and categorized channels as diverse as the contemporary world, by fields of knowledge and research activity. Human existence is one and

²⁵ Rev. Prof. Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *Ascetica și mistica Bisericii Ortodoxe* (Asceticism and Mysticism of the Orthodox Church), p. 439.

²⁶ Father Stefanos Anagnostopoulos draws attention to the fact that at the Sacrament of Confession, for example, sins are forgiven and erased forever if there is true repentance, but "evil habits" remain within us. The spiritual counselor's guidance which directs our inner struggle depends on the transformation of evil habits into virtues. Through his authentic life and the experience of grace, the spiritual confessor must realize the best way for us to find the way to God, to the good deeds according to our nature and calling. See Rev. Stefanos ANAGNOSTOPOULOS, *op. cit.*, pp. 318-319.

²⁷ As Father Nathanael Neacsu confessed, in the theology of Father Sofronie Sakharov, there is even a "grace of forsaken", in which man is in a paradoxical state of being naked, but who leads man to perfection. Through this grace, man can discover the meaning of his existence, and thus he is constantly moving towards God, even when he may not feel the nearness of God. "If grace is a revelation of God in man, leaving is the discovery of man in God". See hieromonk Nathanael NEACȘU, *Întru lumina Ta vom vedea lumină. Conștiință dogmatică și viață duhovnicească în gândirea arhimandritului Sofronie Saharov* (We will see light in Your light. Dogmatic consciousness and spiritual life in the thinking of archimandrite Sofronie Sakharov), Ed. Universității „Lucian Blaga”, Sibiu, 2011, pp. 263-272.

²⁸ Saint MAXIMUS THE CONFESSOR, „A doua sută a capitelor despre dragoste” ("The second hundred of the heads of love"), în *Filocalia (Philocaly)*, vol. II, p. 90: "Three are the ones that move us to the good: the natural seeds, the Holy Powers and the good judgment. Natural seeds, for example, when what we want to happen to us, we do to others, or when, seeing someone in trouble and need, we naturally love Him. The Holy Powers, for example, when moving us towards a good thing, we find good help and succeed in this. And the good judgment, when, distinguishing good from evil, we choose the good."

shares simultaneously from everything it finds. But for sense and becoming, one must take into account a fuller and more complex image of existence. And a project of good cannot be outside of God, because we were created to be likened to Him, of love and kindness, in order to become gods by grace. Devotion thus surpasses altogether any happiness proposed by man and, nevertheless, depends on our freedom to choose it or not here and now in this life.

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