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# THE DISTORTION OF THE IMAGE OF GOD, THE FATHER, AND ITS RELATION TO PSYCHOPATHOLOGY

Meletis Meletiadis\*

*Hellenic National Health System, Kilkis Hospital, Greece*

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## Abstract

The meaning of father figure and its values for the development and mental-emotional-psychic maturation of children is self-evident. Two renowned stories, which emanate from the substructure of western civilization, are indicative.

In Telemachia, Telemachus tries to become a man through the quest of the absent father (Ulysses). During an initiation process, we attest Telemachus' passage from adolescence to manhood, from lack of will and a passive stance to action and a responsible attitude. The process culminates when Ulysses is revealed to Telemachus, a meeting which bears elements of a theophany.

In Oedipus, the king-servant of Thebes realizes that he is the cause of all the problems facing the city. He is revealed as the murderer of his father, husband of his mother. Oedipus assumes the responsibility of all his actions and searches the truth to the end. Departing this world, Oedipus keeps alive the image, the honour and self-value of the father.

With the New Comer, Christ, the Father is identified with the immense opening, love. God is not distant but present, always next to his creatures. We sanctify his name on earth in taking him as a Father, in showing ourselves by our actions to be his children.

These are some of the most important father figures in the legacy of the western culture. We have to revisit *self*, as the space of the paternal signifier and at the same time reinstate the paternal function of love in the community and the state.

*Keywords:* social aspect, initiatory passage, spiritual father, paternal and filial dimension, paternal significant

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## 1. Introduction

Every reference to the father is difficult, because when we refer to him we do not have a single, uniform figure in mind. The image of the father, as it has developed historically, differs both locally and nationally; it is a diverse and complex figure, but it still holds its firm roots in Greece, Rome, and Christianity. Nevertheless, our historic juncture, the technological era, has underlined or

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\* E-mail: meletiadism@ath.forthnet.gr

brought about the devaluation of this figure, a phenomenon known as ‘the sunset of the father’.

Therefore, when we refer to this ‘sunset of the father’, a sunset that concerns different disciplines, from Sociology and Theology to Psychoanalysis, we have to wonder what father figure we refer to. Does this sunset affect the image of the father in general or certain specific forms, and to what extent? We cannot ignore this question, because it is of paramount importance. If we are faced with the deterioration of dry forms, which have been degenerate from the very beginning, then we should let this deterioration proceed; but if we are talking about the decay of real and fictitious images, images of power and tenderness, then we need to be on the alert. Even more so, because the deterioration of the latter is accompanied by a huge growth of the former, as we can see in our clinical practice.

However, let us remember that the father is not just a closed, limited and limiting individual idiom, a ‘family’ or personal experience, and it has not been first discovered by Psychoanalysis. In one way or another, it still lies on the very foundations of our social structure, an undoubted anthropological central characteristic. It comes to us through our mythology and history, following us in our future dimension. At the same time, it constructs and leads our Theology to the revelation of the Divine Mystery in man and in the relation between the divine and man. In this perspective, Theology primarily, and Anthropology secondarily, ascribe to the Father our common mind, our common spirit.

Moreover, there can be no psychology without Anthropology, and the latter cannot be perceived outside Theology. And it would not be helpful to consider the latter two as mere projections of our psychic world, a depiction of our individual and collective dimensions. But beyond that, our tradition reminds us that our being comprises our individual dimension, our collective being and our divine origin and end.

But let us have a better look at the more general cultural context, which is relevant to our topic.

## **2. Social perception of the contemporary father figure**

While the old patriarchal world “was characterized by a restriction of individual responsibility in favor of the growth of collective responsibility personified in the public authority and represented by power, whose manifestation was the father” [1], presently the dominant morality is characterized by the exaggeration of the individual, family experience of the father. At the same time, we witness a contemporary depreciation of his social aspect, his image as carrier of group values, and the parallel underlining of his despotic aspects and his individual ‘de-responsibilisation’, which appear like his shadow. In other words, we have affirmation of what Alexis de Tocqueville had predicted with such clarity: “if a despotic power took possession of the democratic countries, it would certainly have different characteristics from the past: it would be more extended but more bearable and it would degrade men

without tormenting them. A system that could seem to be paternal, but which, on the contrary, would try to fix men in their childhood, preferring that they amuse themselves rather than letting them think. When I try to imagine in which kind of resemblance the new despotism will appear in the world I see an immense crew of men all alike that turn around without rest to find little and vulgar pleasures with which they feed their soul". [2]

So, let us start by bearing in mind these contemporary social images; Our methodological basis would be what anthropological and folk history, as well as Clinical psychology in our days, affirm: that the collective gives rise to and includes the individual, whose reflection it is; the family father is the personal experience of his social form, since each individual finds authorization and affirmation in his coexistence with the other, thus creating a common ground. We focus on common representation, common logos, without forgetting Heraclitus' words: "We should let ourselves be guided by what is common to all. Yet, although the Logos is common to all, most men live as if each of them had a private intelligence of his own" [Heraclitus 22β2 D.K–14A13. G.C.]. So, beyond common logos, the archetypal source of isolated logoi, there is only *individual*, untimely, and inappropriate logos. Out of the common emerges the power of the individual; this is what gives and takes this power and takes from it its reason for being, because as Heraclitus again reminds us: "Those who speak with sense must rely on what is common to all, as a city must rely on its law, and with much greater reliance. For all the laws of men are nourished by one law, the divine law; for it has as much power as it wishes and is sufficient for all and still left over" [Heraclitus 22B DK]. Thus, man, the individual (*idion*), cannot be interpreted by himself, and we cannot start from the individual to interpret the polis-city in the same way that the city means nothing by itself. The individual–*idion* and the city are a single two-horned and their analysis is *enantiodromous*: while studying one, you describe the other.

Therefore, we are talking about divine space, common space, private space; for Heraclitus, these seem to be three homocentric circles on a 'three-level presentation', not three autonomous, interconnected spaces. This latter perception belongs to a devilish work, which gives rise to a whole series of misunderstandings, distortions and a number of fixations. Thus, this is a single space, one unity, one unit with three 'hypostases': the theological, the anthropological and the psychological. And the description of each one moves into the narrative of the others, the definition of one enhances and recalls the others. At the same time, the language each one speaks springs from the labyrinthine, complex depth, thus each of their words apart from ambivalent is often poly-semantic and only rarely univocal.

However, our scientific model forces us to think in mono-semantic terms. It knows no beginnings or passages, it sees one-way roads. Its materialistic ideology is dominated only by determinism and ignores Teleology. And its spirit imbues a number of psychological theories. Regardless of whether they are correct or not, they often re-propose 'correct, mono-semantic models'. But psychoanalysis knows, because it experiences it in its practice, that opposites

coexist, like sickness and health; the correct and the distorted are modes of being, while patho-logy (logos of passion) primarily means the logos of emotion, the experience of suffering, pursuit and power. And Theology often reminds us that sin can become the road to salvation and not remain a curse; that is, it can mark the return to the love of God and not isolation in hell.

### **3. From the Son to the Father**

As Gregory of Nyssa says, and Giulio Maspero reminds us of in his speech [3], “the Son embodies the Father Himself. And the name of the Father means two persons, because the idea of the Son spontaneously follows the idea of the Father; thus when we say Father our faith compels us to think of the Father together with the Son”. And this acceptance holds both for the doctrine of the Trinity and for the earthly father, both for Theology and Psychology: because there is no Father without Son, the latter is his logos, his reason. So, let us begin from this theological basis and refer to the father by talking about the son.

Undoubtedly, the relation of the father with the character of the children and their mental-emotional maturation is more than self-evident: the participation of the father figure, individual or social, its isolation or even its coexistence with some distorted manifestation, can be found in many psychopathological expressions and the interpretative contexts of many theories. It is underlined that in psychosis we find absence in the maternal mental space of the father figure, the expulsion of the Name of the Father, while in addictions, mania, bulimia, a mechanism of complicity is established, either between father and mother or between father and child. The father is subjected to the desire of the mother, while the son undertakes the task of fulfilling the unfulfilled desire of the mother.

Let us take a look at two renowned stories, indicative of the common image we have for the father figure, and which emanate from the substructure of the western civilization.

#### **3.1. *Telemachia.***

##### *3.1.1. The quest of identity as the quest of the father and vice versa*

The myth of Telemachus is evidently familiar and contemporary; we identify with him and he speaks in our language. Telemachus is an ordinary young man ‘of a mono-nuclear, incomplete family’, near the end of his adolescence; he tries to cut the umbilical cord with his mother, and become a man through the quest of the father. This story is quite similar - in one way or another, at times successfully and at times not - with the stories of myriads of his peers.

Our hero, at the beginning of the *Odyssey*, appears as a twenty-year-old meek, immature, distressed young man, because of what is going on in the palace; moreover, he is in utter confusion, incapable of intervening or planning a reaction, while the suitors destroy his father's property, claim his mother and plan his end. He is a passive figure, taken over by a type of melancholic paralysis, whose only expectation and hope is the return of the father who will avenge (will satiate Telemachus' anger) and will restore order over the disorder that has taken over the palace and society.

These are his surroundings; the gap caused by the absence of Odysseus cannot be filled in by the order of Penelope, wife and mother. She can merely postpone the final decision, by expanding time. The shroud Penelope's weaving was also the plot, the extension of time until the appearance of the absent father. He is the One, Husband and Father, who has the task of prevailing over the suitors. Odysseus, conqueror of Troy, will enforce as king the justice of the Gods and people; he will restore the rules of common life that have been abolished by the primitivism of the suitors, people who Homer presents as fully undifferentiated beings who are stagnant in their vain narcissism and aim at the indirect satisfaction of their desires, without the passage to manhood, their metamorphosis into social beings, by becoming temperate and by adopting limits.

The sole support and point of reference for Telemachus is his legalization as his child, which is the gift of the Mother. And this is the central, important element: Telemachus' recognition as Odysseus' child is primarily the task of the Mother. She has the power of recognition, and not only because of the biological fact, but also because of love. By staying faithful to Odysseus, Penelope remains faithful to herself, to her love. By avoiding the take-over of the palace and her conquest by the Suitors, she makes possible, and necessary, the expectation of the Lover and Father. It is a type of engagement before the final outcome, the new wedding, by nature capable of balancing the gap and becoming a force of resistance. Penelope's love for her husband embraces the son: to the child she loves she offers the memory of her beloved lover. This is enough for Penelope and Telemachus to hope for his return and believe that he has either found obstacles in his return journey or that he has died, without ever thinking that he deserted them. In Telemachus' mind there is already stable father figure, ready to awaken at the first call.

Telemachus, as we have said, may be incapable of intervening in the disorder of the palace, but he is ready to hear, to discuss. He is only waiting for a fatherly figure to urge him, a friend of his father's. That is why he immediately accepts the urges of Mentor, in his double capacity, the external as one of his father's friends and the palace guardian that Odysseus had appointed, and the internal as Athena, a projection of desires, or better their material depiction. The urge is to undertake initiatives vis-à-vis the annihilating, painful waiting of the father. However, he should not act in a rush, overtaken by passion, a bulimic element characteristic of immaturity; his moves should be characterised by

careful planning. Mentor shows him the way: departure, trip, meetings with kings, return and intervention in the palace.

In anthropological and psychoanalytic terms, it is evident that Telemachus' trip has all the elements of an initiatory passage from adolescence to manhood, from lack of will and a passive stance to actions, to a responsible attitude and life planning. In the beginning, we have the sudden secret escape from the Mother, his wandering with comrades, the quest of the father, his reputation, his image, his collective appreciation, and Telemachus' recognition as heir to the throne and his father's name from his father's friends - Nestoras, the primeval father figure per se, and Menelaos. At the end of the trip, all that is necessary for the affirmation of his manhood before the beginning of his appearance in society will have to be accomplished: waiting for the father for one more year or dealing with mourning if the father is dead, cutting the 'umbilical cord' with the mother, cleansing of the palace, his patrimony, from the suitors.

This road to manhood marks two deaths: the death of the 'child' that is no longer, and consequently the death of Penelope who can no longer be the child's 'mother' and reacts to his folly, since she still wants to see him tied to her: "What business had he to go sailing off in ships that make long voyages over the ocean like sea-horses?" [Odysseia Raps. D 707] Penelope cannot accept this flight because it is not in her nature. She may know that it is the Father who cuts the umbilical cord, initiates the son to manhood, thus his physical absence means the impossibility of this initiatory passage, and can turn this initiation into a leap to a fatal chasm. However, Homer gives us a ritual that may have taken place in the absence of the father, but within his reputation, his name, his world, his spirit.

In brief, we can say that Telemachus' internal process starts with the flight from the Mother, neither a break nor a rupture but *the establishment of a new relationship with her*, at the same time, in the gap left by the old relationship, the son prepares to find and meet the Father, and enter society in a *new mental state*.

The trip has accomplished its double goal; on the one hand, it has brought forward or underlined Telemachus' passage to manhood, and on the other on his return to his Fatherland, his Father is revealed to him.

Here, this revelation and meeting does not have the characteristics of a simple, usual, given meeting. On the one hand, it bears elements of a theophany – "are you one or other of the gods that live in heaven?" [Odysseia Raps. P 183] - and on the other, it carries elements of an immense emotional tension – "Telemachus threw his arms about his father and wept. They were both so much moved that they cried aloud like eagles or vultures with crooked talons that have been robbed of their half fledged young by peasants. Thus piteously did they weep, and the sun would have gone down upon their mourning". [Odysseia Raps. P 213-220] This revelation is a closed relationship between father and son; it is a secret, initiatory fact. And in Homer it is not revealed to the wife-mother "let no one know that Ulysses is within the house - neither Laertes, nor yet the

swineherd, nor any of the servants, nor even Penelope herself" [Odysseia Raps. P 300-305].

### *3.1.2. The lover*

Telemachus and Penelope's quest and anticipation is possible because there is a parallel quest on Odysseus' side, the husband and father, from his trip to the multiple land: land of his father, land of his son, his own land as father and land of his wife. His decision to return, his love for his own people - child, wife and father - is limitless. He rejects immortalities offered by beautiful goddesses because he has only one desire, nostalgia for his people, which helps him overcome the laws of nature and men, by going down to Hades.

At the same time, the revelation to his wife has to come at the right moment. First, all dangers have to be eliminated, paternal order has to be established over the disorder of the herd. He is presented to her in phases, first as a stranger in rags, while in the evening in her shadow he confesses to her half truths. During the spontaneous confession of her feelings for her husband, he manages to hide his own ("and Penelope wept as she listened, for her heart was melted. As the snow wastes upon the mountain tops when the winds from South East and West have breathed upon it and thawed it till the rivers run bank full with water, even so did her cheeks overflow with tears for the husband who was all the time sitting by her side" [Odysseia Raps. T 205-213]). A little later, lying in the cloister, "he beat his breast and said, heart, be still, you had worse than this to bear on the day when the terrible Cyclops ate your brave companions; yet you bore it in silence till your cunning got you safe out of the cave, though you made sure of being killed" [Odysseia Raps Ω 318-321]. He will present himself to her at the end, but his recognition will come when he reveals from the depths of memory the couple's secrets, the bridal bed that was made over the olive tree, a sign of their loyal Jove. They remained faithful to each other, each faithful to him/herself. Instruments, executors and inspirers of the triple nature of love: Penelope did not have a lover for twenty years, but only the incarnation of her love: Telemachus. Odysseus, on his return, first meets the fruit of his love, Telemachus, and then his lover. Disguised as a stranger, he meets his father and despite his usual playful game of revelation to others, he becomes very emotional; faced with the father's mourning, he is turned into a son.

### *3.1.3. The inheritance of the father's name*

A father's duty is to leave his name to the son, as Eumaeus, the swineherd tells Odysseus whom he has not yet recognized. From his side, Achilles, in the kingdom of the dead, wants to hear news of Neoptolemos: "But give me news about son"; Odysseus' answer carries him from black despair to joy, "When I had told him this, the ghost of Achilles strode off across a meadow full of asphodel, exulting over what I had said concerning the prowess of his son". [Odysseia Raps. Λ 492]

And Hector wanted to leave a name in the world, torn between his desire to satisfy his narcissism – “but let me first do some great thing that shall be told among men hereafter” - and his love for his son – “Jove, he cried, grant that this my child may be even as myself, chief among the Trojans”. [Iliad Raps. Z 476-8] Like Achilles, his joy seems to spring from his son's heroic deeds, as if there has been a double game; the father leaves a memory to his son and the son's heroic deeds keep the father ‘in life’, a mutual affirmation of the father through his son and vice versa.

However, we give in to the temptation of a comparison between Odysseus and Hector, and the overwhelming superiority of the former compared to the latter as a father, husband, protector of his throne, his land. Everything in his life is coloured by this goal. Hector, absorbed in a fatalistic and at the same time narcissistic perception, cannot escape the role of the victim, the quest of glory for the Trojans, which he puts above his child and wife, ignoring Andromache's urges to return to his family role.

### **3.2. Oedipus**

#### *3.2.1. Filicide, the fatal embrace of the spiritless maternal flesh and the emergence of the paternal image from distortion to self-value*

Oedipus is the loyal King-servant of the city, its redeemer from the lethal embrace of the Sphinx and, as a reward, husband of *the* bride-queen of the city. At the time of its collapse, while trying to find the cause of its loss, he realizes that he is the cause; as the murderer of his father, husband of his mother, he has brought about the complete abolition of cultural rules (the social reflection of that is the biological epidemiological death of the Thebean citizens) and the return to a magmatic disorder which he describes in a most poetic fashion: “O fatal wedlock, thou didst give me birth, / And, having borne me, sowed again my seed./ Mingling the blood of fathers, brothers, children, / Brides, wives and mothers, an incestuous brood, / All horrors that are wrought beneath the sun, / Horrors so foul to name them were unmet”. [Oedipus Rex 1405-1408] He disobeyed, he did not trust Polybus, and left the man who had brought him up; later, when the truth was revealed, he accepted his physical parent as his only father, he rejected his spiritual father - the one who had brought him up and was his guardian - imprisoned in the tight embrace of the carnal event: “O Polybus, O Corinth, O my home, / Home of my ancestors (so wast thou called)” [Oedipus Rex 1394-1395]. His subsequent course was inevitable and led to a predetermined death: his revelation as murderer of his father, the causal substance or substantial cause, and lover of his mother, the life-giving source and embrace, marked his entry into total inexistence; as brother to his children, he annulled his paternal dimension, and as lover of his mother he annulled his filial being. At the same time, as father to his children, he annulled his brotherly relationship with them, and as son of his mother he annulled the paternal dimension toward his children. The collapse and ruin of Oedipus as child,



brother, and father is complete. And then, when the blasphemous marriage is filled with “woe, lamentation, ruin, death, disgrace, / All ills that can be named, all, all are theirs”, by laying on the ground the corpse of his suicidal wife-mother, he gives an end to action by blinding himself so that “No more shall ye behold such sights of woe, / Deeds I have suffered and myself have wrought; / Henceforward quenched in darkness shall ye see / Those ye should ne'er have seen; now blind to those / Whom, when I saw, I vainly yearned to know”. [Oedipus Rex 1271-1274].

Oedipus' initial victory over the Sphinx proved temporary and misleading: death reappeared in town when Oedipus was an almighty power. As if, by defeating the Sphinx he had incorporated in a movement of regression its fatal action causing to the city similar woes of human sacrifice. Moreover, the Pythian oracle is proved true: Apollo, with whose instrument - reason - Oedipus solved the fatal and at the same time apollonian riddle of the monster (about the nature of man), closed the circle by revealing to him empirically who he finally was and what he did, who man is and what he does; in what tangle of amorphous impulsive passions and swirl of monstrosity he is in danger of sinking at any moment. Oedipus experienced the wisdom of the far-shooting (ekivolos) god in all its facets: creation, destruction, conscious reason and unconscious ignorance.

It would be possible to accept that, from a psychoanalytic point of view, the trip of Oedipus from Corinth to Delphi, could be a trip of reaching manhood, and simultaneously an unconscious reciprocal movement to his physical family; but the lack of a spiritual guidance could have led him not to a regenerating maternal embrace, but to a paralytic maternal hug. This may be a critical point: no one can enter adulthood by ignoring, assassinating the Father - *son's deviation* - not even allegorically, but by turning to the Father. The Father is not only or so much a starting point, but a point of reference. In *Oedipus Rex*, we constantly observe an absence of the father-guide, a death of the father as exit from the family and opening to the world; Laius negates his paternal being from the beginning, and from a life source he turns into a harbinger of death. Instead of opening up to what comes of him, he closes within himself – *disruption of the Father*. He was afraid that, as Pythia said, the coming of the child would mark his change, his fall from the throne, the death of what he stands for; thus, in an extreme brutal action, he kills his child, as if by abolishing this carnal sign of his change, he would manage to stay eternally young. When these dramas come to light, Oedipus is faced with a father figure that is completely distorted; a figure, who did not welcome him, did not love him, did not wish to become his guiding point of reference. (The love and opening he found in Polybus, the guardian, the spiritual father.) When he killed Laius, he had killed a fake, paternal simulacrum, because Laius-Father had long been killed by Laius-young man.

And this reveals the magnificent and unique moral virtue of Oedipus. By taking the responsibility of this father's death, by accepting the accusation of a patricide, he liberates the Father from *filicide*, he underestimates his initial responsibility by relativising it, or rather by liberating it of any gravity, and at the same time by magnifying his own. Oedipus brings to life Laius absolved.

The son regenerates, keeps alive the image, the honour and self-value of the father. The Paternal authority could not have found greater affirmation and praise. Oedipus, an undesired and persecuted child, condemned even before his coming to the world to non-existence, rejects the carelessness of ignorance to which Jocasta, the life giver, urges him; he wants to know the truth to the end. And then, by transcending his story, his passions, he faces what he has done; he does not resort to madness - an outlet to the pain of truth - but forgives everything, and accepts the consequences: "the oracle was totally revealed to me, / The patricide, the scoundrel that I am, I must disappear" [Oedipus Rex 1440-1441].; he raises the paternal presence to a supreme principle, above the behavior of any specific father and child. Oedipus generates an undoubted Father, a Father – regime of nature, a Father – organic tissue and centre of society.

Oedipus stayed loyal to himself to the end, and his entire course was a hymn to paternity. The one who avoided by fate this vilest of all actions, filicide by the father, had been throughout his life the very incarnation and servant of paternal authority. Despite his doubts concerning Polybus' paternity, he does not return to Corinth, afraid of a possible patricide. As a king, he was a loving and wise Father: by saving the city from the fatal embrace of the Sphinx, he rules as father of the citizens ("Ah! My poor children ... I grieve at once for the polis and myself and you" as he tells the Priest and his suppliants in the beginning [Oedipus Rex 58, 64]). His laws are subject to the strictest judgment of man and god, above all. His first citizen is himself: "the murderers ... will be expelled from the land", he decides in his capacity as king, and when the truth is revealed, he asks for the enforcement of the law that he had instituted: "Forth from thy borders thrust me with all speed; / Set me within some vasty desert where / No mortal voice shall greet me any more". But not a blind impulsive submission to an abstract law, but to the law that is guaranteed by the gods, above all humans: "To follow still those laws ordained on high / Whose birthplace is the bright ethereal sky / No mortal birth they own, / Olympus their progenitor alone". [Oedipus Rex 863-869] He stands away from the conventionality of laws, and resorts to the archetypal source that brings them to life; he moves in the space of ethics and not formality or regulation.

Affirmation comes from the setting of Colonus.

Oedipus, peaceful now, but still a repulsive sight, reaches the sacred grove of the Eumenides in Colonus, in the outskirts of Athens: "a castaway, with you, / In a strange land, an ancient beggar clad / In antic tatters, marring all his frame, / While o'er the sightless orbs his unkept locks / Float in the breeze" [Oedipus Rex 1257-1260], as Polyneices says, he manages to find the strength and overcome the responsibility of what happened, patricide and mainly incest, and escape the suffocating enclosure of his cursed story and the implacable gaze of the city: "The State around / An all unwitting bridegroom bound / An impious marriage chain; / That was my bane", but "Nay neither in this marriage or this deed / Which thou art ever casting in my teeth- / A murdered sire-shall I be held to blame". [Oedipus Rex 1257-1260] His cutting off from the distorted family

marshes and the infernal attachment to the city has been established. Oedipus, who excuses all that has happened, distinguishes knowledge from ignorance, and associates himself with the former, is affirmed to be a wise man. In the 5<sup>th</sup> century, during the period of the birth of western rationalism, the citizen-person, Sophocles presents Oedipus departing this world as a righteous father, a primarily spiritual and social being. Beyond blood relations, which are material relations, beyond the emotional world of Lenience and Shame that Polyneices invokes, he speaks as the representative of “Primeval Justice [who] sits enthroned with Zeus” [Oedipus Rex 1381-1382], cursing the male “blood-imbrued” children and blessing his daughters, supportive and tender presences in his wanderings. A balancing response to what he says comes from the gods. In the most impure, vile of men, death is accompanied by theophanies, Zeus' thunder, and the most unheard of and untold honors by the gods: “It was a messenger from heaven, or else / some gentle, painless cleaving of earth's base; / for without wailing or disease or pain / he passed away-an end most marvelous.” [Oedipus Rex 1660-1665] Oedipus becomes a point of reference and stands between men and gods, that is between Anthropology and Theology.

#### **4. The long and difficult course of men to God**

##### ***4.1. From amorphous chaos to the revelation of divine grace: The quest of the paternal signifier***

The Europeans' historic heritage, at first sight, presents a quite uniform image of the Christian Father-God. But this image was built on the mystery of the Cross, and it also has a long quest by man: this double course, God's course to man and vice versa, *the descent of God and the ascent of man*, escalates at their meeting in the Annunciation, at the *Yes* of Virgin Mary.

The gods, such as Uranus and Cronus, from impulsive forces that give birth to and destroy their creations, are gradually - as Olympian gods - implicated in human affairs; in the beginning, as harsh and adamant “I know the heart of Zeus is hard, that he hath tied / Justice to his side”, as Aeschylus reminds us, but gradually while living with them, through the caring of men, they are forced to change their stance and masks, “But he shall be full gentle thus assuaged; / And, the implacable wrath wherewith he raged / Smoothed quite away, nor he nor I / Be loth to seal a bond of peace and amity”. [Prometheus Bound 186-188]

From Heaven, God requires from men, as affirmation of their difference, their first writings, and as a manifestation of their great distance, their firstborn. Jehovah demands Isaak from Abraham, Artemis demands Iphigenia from Agamemnon; and on Earth, the community, the group, the herd, whatever we call it, places Kaiadas and Tarpea rocks in an important place; the Father, in imitation of the Gods is fed with filicide, and as Cronus devours his children, Laius eliminates Oedipus.

The sacrifice of men to the gods, of the future generations to the former, finds its full reversal first with Dionysus and later, in our times, with the *New Comer*, Christ. The former is sacrificed to the perpetual growth of the world and the mental re-setting of men; he is completely given to his Mysteries, his Troupes, 'giving equally his divinity to all', good or bad, aristocrats and the working class, allow them to be immersed in the continuum of life and death. In the latter, the God, Father of all, 'is divested' of his divinity, without parting from it; he takes to himself all the sins of humanity and is sacrificed for them in the mystery of the Crucifixion of the one and only Son; he absolves man of his sin, so that he can be filled with divinity. Dominance is neither that of Olympian enforcement nor Promethean need, but absolute relationship, the immense opening, love...

Since then, in our conscience, God loves without reciprocal or second thought. The prodigal son wanted a share from his father's property, and when he returned, the father received him with untold joy, love without reason, without demand, love for joy. He offers it to all, the moment he is asked for it. As if God's omnipotence finds its limit in the joy man gives to him or withholds from him.

"God not outside the world", but as Maximus the Confessor says in his explanation to the prayer *Our Father*, "he initiates them into the mystery of the mode of existence of the creative Cause of things, since he himself is by essence the Cause of things". Not an abstract concept, but an active liberating being, "the kingdom of God the Father who subsists essentially in the Holy Spirit. ... 'May your Holy Spirit come and purify us'". And not in terms of temporality but eternity, because the Father indeed has no acquired name and we should not think of the kingdom as a dignity considered after him. For he did not begin to be, as if he had a beginning as Father and King, but he always is, and is always both Father and King, not having in any way begun to exist or to be Father or King. Not distant but present, always next to his creatures, to whom he leaves 'a kingdom prepared from the beginning', and shows the road to their divinity: "Further, we are also taught to speak to ourselves of the grace of adoption, since we are worthy to call Father by grace the one who is our creator by nature. Thus by respecting the designation of our Begetter in grace, we are eager to set on our life the features of the one who gave us life: we sanctify his name on earth in taking after him as a Father, in showing ourselves by our actions to be his children"; but also showing them the way, not letting them fall prey to their passions - a result of their distance from Him - but asking them to 'be transformed through them'.

These are some of the most important father figures in the legacy of the Europeans, and it is good to remember them in the era of globalization, spiritual stripping and mental disorientation. Two mental forms from secularized Christianity and atheist rationalist secularism carry on their backs the forms and powers of paternity and divinity that we mentioned before; these, apart from their historic verifiability, have always been present with an archetypal value

and they accompany us in every fantasy and thought, leading or carrying us to grand actions and untold shames [4].

It would not help to ignore them, hoping for days of carelessness, as has been proven by psychoanalysis; it has been revealed that what we put aside or ignore does not stop its activity, but often grows in a distorting way. And truth, recall to memory from oblivion all that we do not desire or do not manage to see and remember, does not 'facilitate' our life nor does it make it 'pleasant' (it remains a plague, as Freud used to say), but it merely makes it true.

Freud's attempt to half open the cauldron is scaring, because it opens a space from which we think we in the Western world had long escaped; but in this world, our alter ego is nesting and acting at any moment, our shadow, threatening and eternal. The previous century has given us holocausts, sacrifices of millions of people to Moloch and Votan, horrors of world and local wars, without any sense of mourning or need to *confess* and *repent*. And the new century has not started in very positive terms. As if our rationalism has not yet been fully established so that it can work instinctively, but needs to be on the alert constantly and uninterruptedly, vis-à-vis the bestial. Moreover, this is a double shamelessness from father to son, if we see that presently it is quite difficult, if not impossible, for the state, the authority-father, to call its citizens 'my children', as Oedipus had done; the present state considers its citizens obedient people, as Alexis De Toqueville had predicted. The change that has come over is overwhelming: the most incarnate of fathers is now at risk of being constantly circumvented and his image is imbued with the impersonal and abstract legalistic conception which interprets as it wishes, and it determines an individual's mode of being. Consequently, the initiation of children is not toward the historic father figure but toward the abstract legalistic web; the gap of the incarnate father is filled by isolated individual projections in a return of magmatic irregular forms of social initiation for children, whose toxicity is only one of its many epiphenomena.

If this conception holds, then we need constant exercise, for the passage from Christ to Antichrist, for the father-life giver to the father-filicide is imperceptible and invisible. Our opening up, *Love, both to ourselves and to the other; without which no son or father can keep their capacities*, seems to be at risk of collapse. Because, indeed, "If I speak with the languages of men and of angels, but don't have love, I have become sounding brass, or a clanging cymbal" [1 Corinthians 13.1], exactly as it happens with the father figure in so many conditions of 'psycho-patho-logy', individual and collective.

Coming back to psychoanalysis, we could recall that it proves to be the companion and outcome of the judgment of the humanities and as such it is at the same time a rehabilitating attempt a new paedagogical form. An attempt to bring back the repressed, to find the father, to be reconnected to the roots, as Freud did by bringing us back to the Greek cradle of our civilization when he wanted to interpret our psychic world, that is, the Oedipal myth. In this light, one of the messages that he sends is that the entire *education* has to reconsider its self, as the space of the paternal signifier. Its pedagogy as the spirit of the state

and the city as its incarnation, have to rediscover and resurrect their structure and teleology as a paternal function of love.

### **References**

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