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# THE DOGMATIC AND MARTYRICAL CONSCIENCE OF THE CHURCH IN THE POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY OF EARLY CHRISTIANITY

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## Abstract

In this study we aim at restoring a paradigmatic model (the dogmatic and martyrical conscience of the Church), as a matrix, as concerns the contents of the concept of Christian suffering through a specific method (political Theology). The need for such an approach appears under the increasingly aggressive impact of the trends that destructure the theological meaning of suffering, among which the trend of secularisation or the intra-ecclesial emphases that regard man's salvation as obligatory only through suffering or implicitly, the justification of death.

Keywords: martyrdom, suffering, political theology, Christian political philosophy

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## 1. Argument: political theology and secularisation

Secularisation is the trend according to which social and individual values exist by themselves and are declared autonomous to the metaphysical space of religious thinking. Secularised civilisation regards human realities in the concrete aspect of their functionality; it does not regard the ontology of things, only their functional aspect, because it approaches the topic of the world from the perspective of strictly technical thinking. It asserts the structural autonomy of science in relation to God, creating the premises for a methodological atheism [1]. The secularised system does not have a unitary and systematic theology, it has a composite character attempting to adapt to modern culture. Secularisation tries to loosen religious factors from their divine determinant, materialising in different modalities and gradualities that are all extremely aggressive to Christianity.

Secularisation, as an expression of dechristianisation, challenged humanity to conceive a different sacredness, a recomposition of contents, with a long and stormy history. The encounter of instrumental reason in the Enlightenment and the scientific relativism dislocated the religious symbology into a series of microgroups with a particular spirituality. Although it fascinates

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by its variety of topics, modern culture risks moving in a tautological horizon, finalised in the process of the politisation of values. This is the reason why the restoration of the revelational act as a modality of communicating the depths of sacredness can be a chance for the human conscience to overcome the existential crisis [2].

The secularisation of political power was one of the recurring ideas in the veterotestamentary prophecies, until the instauration of royalty. At another level, the Enlightenment caused the same change, with the qualification that it gave up any relation to the idea of divinity. Later, the twentieth century sublimated this pseudo-sacrality in totalitarianisms such as fascism and communism.

This process of secularisation leads to the *necessity of a methodological and theological system*. What is urgent in the first place is acquiring the knowledge of the secular realities and intuiting the values or non-values; individualising, analysing, and relating them to the biblical message. In this situation, a great role falls on patristic experience. Relating the situation to the spiritual heritage of the Church (Holy Scripture and Holy Tradition) will guide the theologian towards a viable solution. “*There is another modality of the presence, of the relation to the secularised society, that of a prophetic partnership, which is situated more in the spirit of the Gospel.*” [3]

We made this short excursion in order to identify the necessity of a methodological and theological system capable of offering a viable solution determined by the pressure of secularisation. We consider that an essential element in this direction is *political theology*.

The syntagm of *political theology* denotes the reference of the Christian conscience to the political and imperial manifesto of authority and to the connected realities that derive from or largely depend on the reference to this imperial authority, or state authority in a modern sense. The issues discussed are grouped around the theological foundations of the Christian conception concerning the person of the emperor, and his political and religious practice, but also concerning the political philosophy of the Empire regarding Christianity in general and the Church in particular (the emperor seen as *mimesis*, the attributes of a Christian emperor, the personal relation to God; the emperor and the Church; the connections with the heretics, Judaism, and paganism; the Empire and Christianity). Other works define *political theology* by using the specific method and its formal principle as *politics* in a broad sense [4], or as the theological and religious perspective of politics and the political perspective of religion [5]. Another group of researchers defines *political theology* by considering its purpose, evaluating it as being the theological justification of a political system [6, 7]. Other researchers grouped around Andreas Marxen consider that Christianity has no political theology, as the term that defines best the attitude towards the problems of the *polis* is the term *metapolitics*. The latter attitude raised many sociological issues in Christianity, because one risks the transfer of the elements that define the affiliation and involvement of the Christians in society to a metaphysical and contemplative level, irrelevant for concrete responsibilities [8].

In a broad sense, the term *political theology* refers to the critical relation between society and faith, seen as a social dimension of the religious act, or the application of the Christian message to all areas of human life. In a restricted sense, *the Christian political theology* refers to relating the Christian conscience to the political manifesto of authority, theology determined by the political philosophy of a governing system.

Another absolutely necessary differentiation for the comprehension of the meanings of political theology consists in delimitating *the old political theology* from *the new political theology*. In a chronological sense, the old theology refers to the research developed until the first half of the twentieth, in the context of the specific topics. The epithet *old* does not mean depreciation or disregard equivalent to the social and religious irrelevance of political theology, but only the separation from the new sense of the syntagm after 1960. In the second half of the twentieth century, when the trends of liberation theology developed, the school of Karl Rahner, through his disciple Johann Baptist Metz, coined a concept called *the new political theology* [9]. The attribute *political* appealed to the sensitive part of the contemporary conscience, which made it the object of numerous debates. At the same time, this direction is different from *the classical political theology*; it is not considered as a science in the field of theology, whose object of study is politics, neither is it a way of professional therapy for those categories of researchers that want to create new consciences revolted by the corruption of the political act in itself. As a reaction to the Enlightenment, *the new political theology* had a new program centred on the idea of public manifesto of the religious act. Actually, it is a separation from the individualist space of some religious experiences, to the benefit of its public and social side. Political theology appears as a critical relation between society and faith, accepting the Church in her dimension of public testimony of the freedom offered by faith [10].

In the Romanian space, the issue began to be approached from different angles. Theologians, philosophers, historians, and sociologists strove together to understand, classify, and apply the real possibilities emerging from such an analysis [11]. The necessity of such debates was identified in the fact that Europe could no longer rely on the economic factor as a unique transnational element or as a unity factor. From this point of view, the interest in this issue is fully justified. The concerns of the Romanian researchers are original in that they are a synthesis of the two types of political theologies. The Romanian originality lies in approaching the issue from the point of view of classical political theology, as well as in elaborating a critical project on the relation between the civil conscience of humanity and the Christian conscience. The preoccupations follow at least two main directions. The first consists in the enumeration and the critical presentation of the main economical, financial, and work policy problems in Europe, with a direct impact on the responsibilities of the European religions and confessions, and the second in identifying some spiritual models for a European religious portrait. In the context of the communist bloc, the concerns of the Romanian researchers integrated in a

responsible way the new realities and necessities at the level of the Church, so that one covers the differences East-West both at the level of the local policies and at the level of the euroregional ones. The list of the challenges the European Union has to face is long: the deep economic crisis of the majority of the European states, difficult to balance with the apparent stability of the unique European currency, the excessive taxation encouraging financial fraud, high production costs, the exodus of private capital from the continent towards Asia and, consequently, the diminution of the number of jobs in Europe, the state's financial incapacity to fulfill its obligations, the painful economic reforms of the insurance systems and of the social solidarity measures, the increase of the number of people losing out in the race of globalisation, the lack of political motivation and the weakening of the civic conscience, the accentuation of the lack of democratic legitimacy of the supra-national European organisms, the conflicts caused by the lack of integration of the religious and ethnic allogene groups, the lack of European unity in the central issues of foreign policy [12].

## 2. Primary bibliographic foundation for the political theology

The concept of political theology has not been analysed in extenso either by Western or by Eastern theology, despite being a major concept for both civilisations. The first work that stands out as having a thorough understanding of the political, religious, and cultural dimensions of the Byzantine political theology is that of Erik Peterson, entitled *Der Monotheismus als politisches Problem: Beitrag zur Geschichte der politischen Theologie im Imperium Romanum*, published in Leipzig in 1935. Other contributions of researchers appeared six years later, through the studies of Kenneth M. Setton [13], complemented in 1947 by Hendrikus Berkhof [14] and in 1966 by Francis Dvornik [15]. The same problematics became the object of interest for other researchers whose conclusions were published in specialised journals. The main idea of the studies concerning the early stage of development of Christianity, although not unanimous, was that *renovatio constantini* was the extension of the monarchic typology of Hellenist origin, a typology based on the parallelism between monarchy and monotheism. Some researchers consider that Eusebius of Caesarea contributed a great deal to the *christianisation* of the Hellenist concepts, and, later, the Greek fathers extended the interpretations to large conceptual areas. The researcher Michael Azkoul [16] partially agrees with the previous assertions. The corrective added by Azkoul is the following: the method of a group of modern researchers, restrictive and positivist, does not take into consideration the Christological context of the patristic political theology. In his thinking, the Christological doctrine is definitive in establishing the theoretical foundations of the Church, which constitutes a basis for discussing its relation to the civil conscience. Azkoul's corrective to a historiographical line is that one fell into a state of ignorance as concerns the epistemological and metaphysical evaluation of dogmas. This very *docta ignorantia* created the premises of a hermeneutics that engendered the idea that *renovatio constantini* is the continuation of a theocratic Hellenism. The return to the pagan Hellenist

concepts and the evaluation of the new Constantinian monarchy from this perspective cause a state of confusion that annihilates the novelty of Christianity, in favour of its interpretation as a conglomeration of philosophical ideas with specific ethics, a system that absorbed local beliefs and practices syncretically, that is, Christianity would be at this level the historical resultant of more faiths, a historical mimetism.

The Greek Fathers did not develop a political philosophy *stricto sensu*, but converted the Judaic theocracy into a Christian concept [17]. Starting from these premises A.V. Kartasheff, professor at the Orthodox Theological Institute Saint Serge from Paris, considers that the possibility of understanding the Byzantine Christocratical system lies in understanding the mystery of the Incarnation of the Saviour Jesus Christ, more precisely, accepting the Chalcedon Christological formula: *One and the Same Christ, Son, God, without beginning, known as two natures not intermingled, unchanged, undivided and undistributed, the separation of the natures not affecting the union* [18]. This dogmatic formulation was at the basis of the Byzantine symphony during the period of Justinian, a political extract from a dogmatical concept, a norm with a very clear political component: “*maxima quidem in hominibus sunt dona dei a superna collata clementia sacerdotium et imperium, illud quidem divinis ministrans, hoc autem humanis praesidens ac diligentiam exhibens; ex uno eodemque principio utraque procedentia humanam exornant vitam. Ideoque nihil sic erit studiosum imperatoribus, sicut sacerdotum honestas, cum utique et pro illis ipsis semper deo supplicant. Nam si hoc quidem inculpabile sit undique et apud deum fiducia plenum, imperium autem recte et competenter exornet traditam sibi rempublicam, erit consonantia (symp̄hōnia) quaedam bona, omne quicquid utile est humano conferens generi*” [19]. In other words, the Christian kingdom is manifest *Imperium* and *Sacerdotium*, for which there are two essences, two natures in the unique Hypostasis of the Saviour Jesus Christ. If one establishes an order of priorities, the primacy belongs to *sacerdotium*, in virtue of his supranatural character. After this century, political theology separates into two branches, one from Byzantine sources, the other from Western, Latin sources.

The relation between the Empire and the papacy, between *regnum* and *sacerdotium*, constitutes a crucial issue, being one of the essential keys to understanding the Middle Ages. The Western religious element elaborated a theological-political strategy, able to correspond to the new European structures grouped first of all around the Franks of Charles the Great, and later in the Holy Roman Empire of the German nation of Otto the Great. This religious correlative defined and supported a monarchy in which the principle of power was organised as centred on Roman universal theocracy. In this context, there appeared the conflict between *regnum* and *sacerdotium*, between the power of royalty, eager for autonomy, and the theocratic papacy, especially under pope Gregory VII. At the end of the XIV<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the XV<sup>th</sup> century, the main protagonists of this conflict were the king of France, Philip IV the Fair, and pope Boniface VIII. Both had strong personalities and were the source for some disputes that presaged the beginning of the long crisis in the XIV<sup>th</sup> century. Moreover, they engendered a polemic literature in which clerics

and laymen got involved, both sides forwarding arguments and justifications. A special role was played by the doctrinal movements specific to the Middle Ages (the school of Chartres, for example), which elaborated a series of programs with theological content, or about the philosophy of politics, aiming at the revival of antiquity in a new medieval thematic. The frequent appeals to classical antiquity brought again into discussion the principles of Aristotelian naturalism or the objectivity of Plutarch's political thinking, bolstered by explanations based on Holy Scripture. It was a time in which the main documents attesting an alleged imperial filiation of papacy (*Donatio Constantini* etc.) were attacked, recovering the clear image of the Western episcopacy. From the equilibrium of John of Salisbury, manifested in *Polycratus*, to the categorical tone of Joannes Quidort in *De potestate regia et papali*, from Marsilio of Padua to Machiavelli, we find the same tension, the same problematics, we find the suggestion of a way to solve the relation between *regnum* and *sacerdotium*, thus coming into possession of a key for interpreting a whole epoch.

The situation is different in the evolution of the Byzantine political theology. The political sensitivity of the Byzantine world acquires a flexibility determined by an approach from the perspective of a biblical and patristic realism. Until the appearance of Christianity, the matrix of Eastern politology was made up of elements of Hellenistic thinking in a vivid symbiosis with other trends of the Middle East, developed in a superior way in the Greek *polis*. The character of such a space is a sacred one, which is why philosophers such as Socrates, Plato, or Aristotle did not just place interhuman relations in an ethical context, but especially elaborated a politology that integrated the leader of the *polis* in a system of moral becoming. Syntagms such as *the philosopher-king*, obliged to follow a certain way of virtue (*αρετης επεργεια*) in the Socratic unity of conscience, towards the accomplishment of *human good* were frequent in the Eastern regions, enough to place the whole concept of *authority* in a space of idiocracy. Plato in *Republic*, Aristotle in *Nicomachean Ethics*, and Socrates through his famous ethical intellectualism challenged humanity to identify an ethical component of the *polis* and of the philosopher-king. On the one hand, the highest organism concentrating *authority* would be the manifestation of the natural right; on the other hand, one mentions the transcendental origin at the level of idiocracy.

Political theology uses this sacred space of authority, but not in a pagan way, deifying the omnipotent Hellenistic ideas, but placing them in the biblical identification: *I am the Way, the Truth and the Life* (John 14.6). In the East there was an intimacy between the ecclesiastical and the imperial structures, and one referred to an imperial church with a specific Constantinopolitan code. The Eastern political theology had a common theoretical background with the Western one, separating from the latter at the moment of symbiosis with the Empire.

### **3. The dogmatic and martyrical conscience of the Church: the architecture of the concept**

Some researchers argue [20] that, due to a system of protectorate of the state, the Church fell into an integrative apathetic state, a state specific especially to the Constantinian epoch, thus denying the dynamism in the epoch of the martyrs. Contrary to the pacifist vision considered by some critics of the period of the New Testament concerning the relation between the Empire and Christianity, the Church did not find in her specific structure, relations really fruitful with the civic conscience neither factual, as it was continuously persecuted by this state, nor principled, as the Church still felt as a heroic and intransigent community of the citizens of heaven, who do not serve two masters and as *the third nation* and *the new people*, introducing a mystical political conception in the deteriorated structures of the Roman Empire. The most certain proof of the instinctive adversity of the Romans towards Christianity lies in the evaluation of the Christian community as a ghetto space, with all the obscure political and social systems it involves, from the remark of Tacitus *the odious of humanity*, to Celsus' more systematic formulation that understood the Christian community as state in state, causing disunity: “*they suffered from the adherents of Jesus, who believed in Him as the Christ, the same treatment they had inflicted upon the Egyptians; and that the cause which led to the new state of things in either instance was rebellion against the state*” [21].

The theological attitudes elaborated in the epoch of the martyrs regarding this issue established a sort of matrix for ulterior developments and allow us to understand the closeness between the Christian and the civil conscience in the subsequent evolution. We name this reality and this new theoretical and pedagogical construct using the syntagm *the dogmatic and martyrical conscience of the Church*.

The Christian conception of Empire, which is found in the testimonies of the early Church from Tiberius to Constantine, may be presented in the context in which the Church accepted or refused the message coming from the Empire. The Church never answered the state through a rigid refusal determined by an unjustified mysticism, nor did she say yes on the basis of an acceptance promoted by a political indifference. In contrast, the Church of the martyrs, relying on a political instinct illuminated by divine grace, was able to find the equilibrium between Yes and No; thus she could say No to the absolutist state manifested by imperial despotism, in order to find a Yes uttered with dead lips to the same state oppressing Christianity. This type of affirmation achieved a great progress in the history of humanity and especially in the history of Christianity. We start with that No said by Christians to the despotic state. This type of No seems to pertain to the very essence of Christianity as a *kingdom which is not of this world*, a negation of the political despotism that starts with Nero, goes through the great persecutions, resists absolutisms and totalitarisms, and remains in history as a constant for non-compromise and verticality [20, p. 31].

The Church opposes a constant refusal to any type of state that wants to be a purpose *in itself*, a purpose that admits eternisation only through terrestrial socialization, or that defines the juridical element of the state as the ultimate element of accreditation of a religious conception. The politicised religion of late Judaism reinforced this negation, so that later the Saviour Jesus Christ made the prudent distinction between God and Caesar. Through “*Give therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s*” or through the phrase addressed to Pilate, “*you would have no power at all against me, unless it were given to you from above*”, a conceptual dualism is introduced into Christian thinking, which attracts a double evaluation: a negative part and a positive one. The negation, which restricts the competences (the Church with her specific problems and the state with the ones in its field), was taken over by the holy Apostles who supported it not only against the Judean theocracy, but also against the persecuting Roman Empire.

The harsh words of the Christian apologetes and exegetes addressed to the Romans reinforce the idea of hostility and mark the premises of an autonomous political conscience, as is shown by the whole epoch of the martyrs [22]. This attitude requires a series of specifications: if one regards this reaction only as a late echo of a long expectation of the first Christians, a reaction determined by the political crisis at the beginning of the third century during the reign of the Syrian kings, we discover here the first example of Christian courage to assume state responsibilities (which would change the meaning of Christianity and the vocation of the Church); or, in the second sense, the hostility would be based on the experience of the martyrs, Christians that accepted their existence as a cross, leaving this life through the confession of the universal Church’s creed: the uniqueness of the living God, the One Who was dead and resurrected for mankind. However, the term hostility does not best reflect the deep content of the experience of martyrdom, its justification; the Christian does not die only to manifest his hostility or to manifest hostility in itself, but aims at something much deeper, a confession that has to do with the deep experience of the Living God. In the vision of the Church, martyrdom is a new birth, a baptism in order to acquire eternal life, the remission of sins, a suffering in which man becomes like the bread in the oven: “*he appeared within not like flesh which is burnt, but as bread that is baked*” [23]. In this respect, in his poem-book *To Vitilian from his sons*, Saint Gregory the Theologian mentions three types of births: “*coming into flesh and blood, from whose corruption men being made, soon end; this is the first birth; then follows the birth into the pure Holy Spirit, when those baptised in water are illuminated. And the third birth, in our tears and pains, cleanses the divine image tainted by evil through the vileness of sin. Out of these births – the first man aquires from his parents, the second from God, and in the third he is his own parent, revealing himself to the world as benefic light.*” [24] Consequently, the last birth is that of perfection. Its understanding is a conscious and willing embrace of the divine good, being our profound dissatisfaction of our spirit with the things of the earth, a longing for God, a fervent pursuit of Him [24, p. 98-99]. Therefore, the first meaning of martyrdom is not that of hostility, but of an experience based on the love of God, the attachment to spiritual things.

We admit the appearance of an early political Christian conscience to be a mundane reflex of martyrdom.

#### **4. The dogmatic and martyrical conscience of the Church expressed in the apologetic literature of the first centuries**

Up to this introductory point, the internal architecture of the dogmatic conscience of the Church is to be found structured in a biblical way (from the perspective of the New and the Old Testament) and in a patristic way. In the following lines we identify the internal elements of this type of conscience, as they appear in the apologetical literature of the first centuries, from such relevant sources as Quadratus, Aristides, Theophilus of Antioch, Justin the Martyr and Philosopher, and Saint Ignatius of Antioch.

The oldest apologete of Christianity is Quadratus [25]. His name is connected to a letter addressed to Emperor Hadrian (117-138), unfortunately lost. The only one who makes reference to the content of this work is Eusebius of Caesarea, who renders a few passages from the original text in the fourth volume of his ecclesiastical history: “*the work of our Saviour was always present with us because it was still alive: the ones He had healed or raised from the dead could not be seen only as long as the Saviour cured or resurrected them, but they could be seen always present. This is how some of them are even alive today*” [26]. The apology was written on the occasion of a visit that Hadrian made to Greece around 124-125. Attracted by the famous mysteries of Eleusis, Hadrian wished to be the subject of an initiatic ritual. This is the moment when Quadratus intervened for a really initiatic ritual, through a plea in favour of the true faith. From the passages rendered by Eusebius, one notices the philosophical character of the apologete in his attempt to prove to the emperor that the true Saviour is not the *Eleusinian Demiurgos*, but Jesus Christ. The Eusebian text conveys in this synthetical manner the organisation of the ideas of Quadratus. One finds here the open opposition between the mystagogical character of Christianity and the Eleusinian ermetism, the former offering the authentic virtues necessary for salvation, whereas the second includes the ignorance and the vice among magic components. The importance of Quadratus lies in opening, through his work, a Christian apologetical line that enriched theology through the issues raised out of the impact of a decayed conservative Roman culture with the genius of the Christian world. Another extremely important component is that through which such works began the theoretisation of the impact between Christianity and the empire at a political level. It refers to the formulation and thoroughness of a political philosophy of the Christian world. Here we distinguish a first component of the Christian political theology, its dogmatic and martyrical dimension. By assuming this dogmatic and martyrical conscience, the Church of the first centuries separated pointedly from ancient Hellenism, and martyrdom became the conscience of the Church, so that Christians could strongly assert: ‘*non eloquimur magna, sed vivimus*’. The primary foundation of the Christian political philosophy is consequently determined by this type of dogmatic and martyric conscience.

Besides Quadratus, one can mention the apology of Aristides of Athens [25]. Considered lost for a long time, this work, also quoted by Eusebius in the same context as the first apology [26, p. 164], was reconstructed based on translations from partial Syrian and Armenian versions. Eventually, J.A. Robinson identified a Greek copy added to the hagiographic work *Barlaam and Joasaph*. The text was published for the first time after the original variant in 1891 in Cambridge. The Greek text underwent some changes because of an informal translation, which is the reason why the comparative method was applied; a fragment preserved in the Oxirincus codex was used for comparison [27]. Aristides organised the whole discourse on the topic of faith in God, using references to natural philosophy very frequently. As a result, some critics regarded it as containing theses of the stoic philosophy or direct determinations from Philo rather than biblical argumentation. According to Aristides, the world is divided in four categories: the Greeks, the barbarians, the Judeans, and the Christians. For him, Christians stand out through the superior vision on life, through their high moral and doctrine: "*the Christians...have come nearer to the truth and genuine knowledge than the rest of the nations. For they know and trust in God, the Creator of heaven and earth, in whom and from whom are all things, to whom there is no other god as companion, from whom they received commandments which they engraved upon their minds and observe in hope and expectation of the world which is to come...they do good to their enemies, ...and whenever one of their poor passes from this world, each one of them according to his ability gives heed to him and carefully sees to his burial...Such, O King, is the commandment of the law of the Christians. And since they know the loving-kindnesses of God toward them, behold! For their sake the glorious things which are in the world flow forth to view.*" [28] The whole text of the apology transmits the simplicity of the theology of the first Christians, based on faith in God. It is the one that *denies the fallen world of pagans*, opposing to it the holiness of life. Christians admit that the whole world is a gift from God and they are thankful for this. Aristides manages to individualise the community of the Christians, separating it from the rest of the world through its own vocation. In this sense, Christians are a space, a time, a way of being that derives from their quality of citizens of heaven. Hence, they belong to an order different from the terrestrial one, a divine order that offered them the whole universe in order to be saved. The expression *for their sake the glorious things which are in the world flow forth to view* has first the role of singularising the Christian experience, and second that of presenting it as the unique reason of existence of the world. For the pagan mentality it was a rather hard expression. The existence of this community that claims the reason of existence of the world exacerbated even more the intolerance of the Romans, who started to group more and more around the concepts that established penalising the Christians. In such conditions, in their quality of *new people* with the vocation of universality, Christians introduced *a mystical political conception* in their relations to the Roman empire. Such a mystical political structure, organised on two antithetical components, is also visible in the epistle to Diognetus [29].

Along with the crystallisation of the elements of ecclesiastical organisation, a Christian political conception of great clarity stood out in relief. “*We, Christians, do not implore the emperor as a god and we do not make vows on the genius of the emperor*” are two phrases that mark a great deal of difference, clearly understood in the testimonies of Donata of Scilium and of senator Apolonius: “*I glorify the emperor because he is an emperor; veneration is addressed only to God*” [20, p. 44] and “*Jesus Christ taught us to obey His law, to glorify the emperor, to worship only the immortal God, to believe that the soul is immortal*” [23, p. 101]. Christianity regarded gods as demonic manifestations, spirits contrary to God, and the genius of the emperor was considered a dangerous demon: “*What harm is there in saying, Lord Caesar, and so make sure of safety?*” Polycarp of Smyrna is asked, for example, by the irenarch. The same Polycarp prudently differentiates the reign of a tyrant and the rule established by God: “*to you I have thought it right to offer an account [of my faith]; for we are taught to give all due honour (which entails no injury upon ourselves)*” [23, p. 34-35]. The Christian Speratus, together with five confessors, refused to obey the judge who obliged them to swear by the emperor’s genius: “*I know not the genius of the emperor of this world; but I serve the God of heaven, whom no mortal man hath ever seen or can see*” [23, p. 86].

Along with Christian martyrdom there appeared new creations of the apologetical literature concerning the differentiations we mentioned before. The first attitude of this type is attributed to Justin Martyr, the Philosopher [30], who in about 150 wrote a work in defense of Christians, addressed to the emperor Antoninus Pius and to his son Marcus Aurelius. There are three Justinian works, whose authenticity was not denied. Two of these are apologetical works, and there is also a dialogue with Trypho the Jew. The first apology is larger, containing 67 chapters on various themes. The introductory part presents the motivation of this apology: to illuminate the emperors and to protect Christians against defamation. The first part exposes the injustice of the persecutors when Christians are accused of atheism and murders, Justin showing that a Christian prefers death to denying Christ. The second part is a doctrinal one, on the great christological theme of the Incarnation. Based on the presence of the Logos in the world, the distinction is made between Christianity and the philosophical systems, any resemblance between Christian dogma and the pagan mysteries being the work of demons. The second apology is addressed to Lollius Urbicus, urban prefect between 146 and 160. The ground of the apology was the condemnation to death of a group of Christians by Urbicus. Justin used this moment to mention the presence of evil in the world and the reason why God allows evil [22, p. 26]. Justin’s whole discourse is organised around the great theme of the Incarnation of the Lord Jesus Christ, regarded in certain situations, where it was necessary, as seminal logos. The closeness between Justin’s teaching and philosophy is too obvious in this situation, but as we have already mentioned, it is conjunctural, determined by the intellectual-stoic formation of the addressee. In the very prologue of the apology one glimpses the author’s character, a personality who fights unflinchingly for a holy cause: “*I, Justin, the son of Priscus, and grandson of Bacchius, natives of Flavia Neapolis in*

*Palestine, present this address and petition in behalf of those of all nations who are unjustly hated and wantonly abused, myself being one of them*" [26, p.155]. The information given by Eusebius concerning the person and the activity of Justin are included in the fourth book of his Ecclesiastical History. After he presents the prologue of the Apology, Eusebius inserts a text on the martyrdom of Saint Polycarp of Smyrna during the reign of emperor Verus, after which he goes back to information on Justin. The idea in which he interposed Polycarp's martyric act in describing the personality of Saint Justin is inscribed in the larger theme of the heroism of martyrs, presenting the common creed in an ample way. There is a resemblance of attitude between Polycarp and Justin. Both were *imitators of Christ*. Eusebius of Caesarea, in his work *Martyrs of Palestine* affirms that "*in the body of the martyrs suffered Christ Himself, working wonderful deeds, for crushing the enemy he showed others through his example that nothing was to be feared where there was God's love*" [26, p. 184]. The apology, to which was later added Theophilus of Antioch during the reign of Commodus, categorically criticises the tendencies of some provincial governors or other apparitors at the imperial court, who influenced negatively the emperor's decisions regarding Christianity [31]. What separates Justin's work from the writings of Quadratus or Aristides is the appeal to the christological background that he uses in a particular manner. Justin's apology is the first document of this type in the Christian literature that brings the Saviour's words as first argument: "*Give therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's*". After words in defense of the Christians through which is shown their loyalty to the empire and towards the leader, the author of the text uses apocalyptic images to invoke the final justice, the supreme justice that punishes sin and rewards virtue: "*And everywhere we, more readily than all men, endeavour to pay to those appointed by you the taxes both ordinary and extraordinary, as we have been taught by Him; for at that time some came to Him and asked Him, if one ought to pay tribute to Cæsar; and He answered, 'Tell Me, whose image does the coin bear?' And they said, 'Cæsar's.' And again He answered them, 'Render therefore to Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's, and to God the things that are God's.' Whence to God alone we render worship, but in other things we gladly serve you, acknowledging you as kings and rulers of men, and praying that with your kingly power you be found to possess also sound judgment...every man will suffer punishment in eternal fire according to the merit of his deed, and will render account according to the power he has received from God, as Christ intimated when He said, 'To whom God has given more, of him shall more be required'* (Luke 12.48)." [32] Justin's political theology asserts the power of prayer in order to discover the emperor's *sound judgment*. At first glance, the text seems rather to have a laudatory function of protocol, respect, acknowledging in the person of the emperor a certain kindness. Justin appeals to this human imperial background in order to sensitise him. But this text is complete with Justin's last words before the martyrdom. Even then, in front of the prefect Rusticus, he finds the necessary resources to expose the essential doctrinal and apologetic foundation of Christianity, "*That according to which we worship the God of the Christians, whom we reckon to be*

*one from the beginning, the maker and fashioner of the whole creation, visible and invisible; and the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who had also been preached beforehand by the prophets as about to be present with the race of men...and I, being a man, think that what I can say is insignificant in comparison with His boundless divinity, acknowledging a certain prophetic power, since it was prophesied concerning Him of whom now I say that He is the Son of God. For I know that of old the prophets foretold His appearance among men.”* [32, p. 575] Not having been convinced by the prefect Rusticus to sacrifice to gods, not having been intimidated by the threats of cruel torture, Justin accepts martyrdom as a means of reaching God and acquiring salvation.

In the Justinian discourses we find a political theology structured on at least three main concepts out of which comes the power of martyrdom and the transformation of this experience into an act of ecclesial conscience: there is an important *christological component* (Justin sees the work in the world of the unique Trinitarian God through the Unique Son, the Logos full of power and truth, through Whom everything was made. If God is One, the experience of the Christian singularises in relation with the pagan polytheist cults, hence the impossibility of sacrificing to gods. Humanity’s engagement towards the Son-Logos is an ontological, complete one, dynamised by the very inward presence of the Son in its creation); second, Justin discusses *the transfiguring power of prayer* (prayer is an active state in which man partakes of the illuminating power of the Word. This prayer can have effects on others, too, in order to reveal to them the discernment of wisdom or the wisdom of the discernment); the third component revealed in the theology of Saint Justin lies in *the affirmation of the prophetic power of the Church* (the prophets of the Old Testament announced future events, which were fulfilled. The Old Testament has a continuity through prophecy in the New Testament, and the Church, partaking of this internal memory in its prophetic side, is already anchored in future events, regarding the future as fulfilled already, according to God’s will).

The thinking of Saint Ignatius of Antioch follows the same line [33]. In his martyric act we see the soul of a man who waits eagerly to depart from this world in order to receive the Body and Blood of the Saviour. “*Grant that we may more perfectly partake of Thee in the unending Day of Thy Kingdom*” is the leitmotif of the thinking of Ignatius. In his whole work, he fathomed the Christian faith as life experience. Thus, he formulated the conscience of integrating a local Church in the larger experience of the Universal Church, founding an ecclesiology which was important for the following years. However, in his last words, a testament for posterity, he claimed unbendingly the fundamental role of the Eucharist. The conscience of the early Christian was determined by the experience of the Eucharist as the real presence of the Saviour Christ in the world and in people: the Eucharist manifests the Incarnation as an ontological change of mankind. The experience of life and death in the case of Christians is built on the immediate presence of the Person of the Saviour. The importance of this conception helps make the separation between the Christian God and the divinities of the gnostic world, which are presented more at the impersonal level of a *summus Deus*. For Ignatius, God is not an abyss in which

man loses himself, but is the Father calling through the Son and waiting for him. Actually, here we recognise the confession of the Christian tradition in the apostolic times, '*they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to the prayers*', repeated as a martyric experience. The Christian community defines itself through continual reference to the Eucharist. Only such a community could be the possessor of a spirit so strong as to defeat death. The Eucharistic conscience confessed at the same time ecclesiastical universalism. The experience of the martyrs in the local churches is related to the Universal Church as a common experience.

In conclusion, through the method applied by us as political theology, the elements integrated in ***the dogmatic and martyric conscience of the Church*** are grouped around great themes: they are based on the reality of the Incarnation and Resurrection of Christ the Saviour, on the prophetic and apocalyptic manifesto of the Church, on the transfiguring power of prayer, and on the eucharistic profile of the Christian experience.

## 5. Conclusions or the modulations of the concept of suffering's content

The theological background offered by the dogmatic and martyric conscience of the Church in the sense of defining the concept of *suffering* has been partially ignored along history. This type of oblivion ended in identifying certain deviations and the appearance of some behaviour that were no longer in the spirit of the orthodoxy of the spirit and of the teaching.

The *Augustinian paradigm* on man developed a legitimacy of the existence of suffering, starting from the premise of the engraftment of original sin in the human being. The conclusions of such an approach led towards the concept of the guilt of all, which can be redeemed only through suffering and death. Christianity appropriated this approach in a more or less explicit manner, facing an impasse when it was asked for a scheme of resistance, a support through which one could overcome the fear caused by suffering.

Soteriology underwent perception changes at the level of the acceptance of Christ's saving work on human nature. One of these was determined by the integration of the medieval theories, particularly that of Anselm of Canterbury, through the theory of the *vicarial satisfaction*, in the soteriological paradigms, highlighting a stress on the Passion and Crucifixion of the Lord Jesus Christ. From this perspective, the valorisation of the Saviour's life reduces to the moments of suffering, of assumed suffering, of transfer of the Christian's experience from the *anastatic* side to the *passio* one. Ever since this moment, when they established, therefore legitimised the theological theoretical construct, there has been an avalanche of responses to this attitude in the field of arts. The pietist sentimentalism found in this approach an emancipation of the religious imagery, dramatising and reconstructing an experiential romanticism.

Another dimension of suffering is to be found in *the popular devotion* centred on the worship of the suffering of the Christ Who suffered. From this perspective, suffering was not only accepted, but even chosen as a way to salvation, according to the conviction that it either leads to the remission of sins

or that it is claimed as the highest form of union with Christ. This direction falsified the Christian asceticism through the appearance of the *dolorist* trend, developed especially in the XVII-XIX centuries in the Catholic traditional backgrounds or the marginal phenomenon of the stigmata.

Quoting B. Vergely, J.C. Larchet denounced the insistence of Christianity in the following terms: the fact that in the West Christianity glorified suffering in a certain moment of its history, and sometimes glorifies it even now, is a real spiritual catastrophe, which today, just like in the past, can only lead spirits to despair and revolt [34]. Vergely confirms through this affirmation the existence of some inner tensions of the people, delineating the framework of a collective mentality affected by a virtual acceptance of suffering. This attitude's leaving the virtuality is materialised in the Freudian criticism (it favours frustration), criticism at an economic level (Marx – resignation to poverty) or at the level of Nietzsche's existential philosophy (the cult of weakness). In an approach from Christian bioethics, Tristram Engelhardt Jr. places the understanding of suffering as an encounter with human finitude, with the finite, but especially with sin and its consequences. Therefore, the answers or understandings of the meaning of suffering are not to be found in a space of medical assistance, but rather in the spiritual meaning of existence, and in order to be satisfactory, it is necessary to be expressed in personal terms, from person to person. How can we look for such a durable meaning? Can we pursue with success such a metaphysical search for a profound meaning of suffering? How can we proceed without following Immanuel Kant and his scepticism concerning the ability of reason to reach beyond this world? Kant establishes the context of the temporary questions concerning the ultimate meaning of our life, suffering, and death, reminding us that discursive reason is restricted to the horizon of empirical experience. In these terms, searching for a profound meaning is wrong! [35]

In terms of these points of view, we identify the imperativeness of an undertaking recovering the primary meanings of *suffering*. The method we used is that of political theology. Our objective was to identify the internal architecture of the dogmatic and martyric conscience of the Church in early Christianity as a source for defining the content of the concept of suffering and its relation to collateral intersecting fields. Consequently, the elements integrated in the **dogmatical and martyric conscience of the Church** are grouped around the great themes: they are based on the reality of the Incarnation and Resurrection of Christ the Saviour, on the prophetic and apocalyptic manifesto of the Church, on the transfiguring power of prayer, and on the eucharistic profile of the Christian experience, elements which, conjoined in a real way with the spiritual heritage of the Church, offer the possibility of putting forward valid answers to the attempts to define *suffering*.

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