

---

# BODY CLOTHED IN IMMORTALITY

## THE ANTHROPOLOGICAL PROBLEM IN

### NEAGOE BASARAB'S TEACHINGS<sup>†</sup>

**Dorin Ștefănescu\* and Dumitru Mircea Buda**

*'Petru Maior' University, str. N. Iorga, nr.1, Târgu-Mureș, 54008, Romania*

(Received 6 December 2011, revised 6 March 2013)

---

#### **Abstract**

The article argues that Neagoe Basarab's *Teachings* are erroneously considered to be carrying a direct, doctrinarian influence of Bogomilism since the text is remarkably animated by Christian Orthodox dogmatic features. As they are revealed, these elements are organized around the symbolic representations and meanings of the asomatism versus the immortal human body, mirroring Neagoe's writing in some of the most influential Orthodox dogmatic texts.

*Keywords:* body, Orthodoxy, hesychasm, Bogomilism, asomatism

---

#### **1. Introduction**

One of the major early landmarks in Romanian cultural history, upon which there has been significant debate over the years (including a certain degree of controversy), is found in the writings of 16<sup>th</sup> century Voivode of Wallachia and Christian scholar Neagoe Basarab. Considered by most literary historians to stand at the foundation of Romanian literature (although critics like Nicolae Manolescu have recently disputed its status, viewing it rather as a cultural breakthrough than a genuine piece of Romanian literary writing, since Neagoe had written in Church Slavonic), the *Teachings to His Son Theodosie*, a set of didactical approaches to issues regarding religion, Philosophy, diplomacy and Ethics seem to encrypt, nowadays, a sort of mythical world. The author himself has a historical reputation built from legendary stuff: embracing the Byzantine tradition of Church patronage, he erected several Orthodox monasteries, among which the outstanding *Curtea de Arges* monastery (1517) - attributed to famous symbolic craftsman *Mesterul Manole* (*Master Manole*), who was placed by literary critic George Călinescu among the four 'fundamental

---

<sup>†</sup> An early short version of this text was presented at the second edition of the International Conference 'European Integration – Between Tradition and Modernity', 'Petru Maior' University, Târgu-Mureș, 20-21.09.2007.

\* E-mail: dorin\_stefanescu@yahoo.com, phone: +40 763067858

myths' which define Romanian national specificity. But it was more than four decades ago that Edgar Papu was emphasizing the connection between Neagoe's *Teachings* and the religious context of late Humanism, during which (particularly after the Council of Trent held between 1545 and 1563) Byzantine theological thinking penetrates the Western spirituality of the times. In Papu's words, "we are dealing with a gnomic writing, comprising a genuine treaty of Politics, Didactics, Morals and Theology and at the same time an undoubtable work of art" [1]. Another literary historian, Dan Zamfirescu, was also impressed by the way Neagoe had nourished his works from the *Weltanschauung* of his epoch, offering "a relevant space particularly to the systematic transmission of the dominant ideology in which Romanian medieval society was living", a society where "the religious element played an essential role", to such an extent that "the ascetic ideal was pictured as supreme". Thus, Zamfirescu concludes that Neagoe's text is "a work of religious and moral instruction and education, a breviary of Eastern Ascetics and mysticism, an anthology of didactical texts selected and structured in accordance with the main purpose of the writings, a treaty of political theory from the perspective of divine-right Byzantine monarchy" [2].

The myth of the Byzantium represents a defining cultural *ideologeme* for Western memory, an unmistakable *paideuma* or a fertile *archetype* of the collective unconscious. Since the beginnings, a timeless Byzantinism nourishes the Romanian cultural works, on their spiritual, Christian side, as well as on the level of their esthetic sensibility. It is the case of Neagoe Basarab's *Teachings* [3], in which a still functional Byzantine *topos* is found, knitting two tendencies: one that may be called *aulic* and another that is best designated by the term *popular*. Whether they express a monastic and popular type of art or a hieratic and dynamic one, these tendencies essentially bind the religion and secularism that continue to prove the authority of an original model. Nevertheless, it should be emphasized, in the terms of W. Iser's theory of the aesthetic effect, that the text's repertoire (e.g. the text's dominant ideology), initially imposed as a first rank theme, is wheeled into the background by a competing theme (e.g. the interferences of popular literature), therefore becoming the horizon of a new context. M. Muthu remarks that "the dominant ideology, without possessing a granitic structure, but cast into the established pattern of Christian preaching, joins the magical world of popular 'novels', therefore materializing the essential duality of the *aulic* and the *popular*, the sacred and the terrestrial, the hieratic and the dynamic – a type of duality featured for millenniums by the Byzantine culture" [4]. This suggests that the *unity* of the work of art is not determined by the sum of the two themes seen in consecution, but by their double interweaving relationship: the secularization of theological thinking and the active contribution of secular sensibility to the issues of religion. As it is impossible to imagine a distinctive opposition, Neo-Platonism, filtered through Origenian and Evagrius Christian teaching, may be regarded as a common denominator. But even in such case – as we shall point out – it would be impossible to agree that "the anthropocentrism of the *Teachings* derives in a higher degree from the

theological interpretation of the world than from the process of secularization” [4, p. 27]. If Neo-Platonism converts into a religious system (through what was coined as the Christianizing of Hellenism), the issue of the human being also undergoes a simultaneous shift of horizons, from anthropocentrism to a theocentric anthropology focused on the deification of man. “And this *theosis* – as J. Meyendorff puts it – is diametrically opposed in Byzantine theology to the Neo-Platonic return to that impersonal One” [5]. Speaking about the human being implies the definition of a specific perspective which enlightens the object of research. “It is only from this point forward that Anthropology appears: not from the plain description of the human being, but by a detachment from the self, a discovery of a genuine type of transcendence through which the human being would be embraced and not dismembered. (...) This is the very sign of its religious status, the proof of the fact that one cannot understand the human being otherwise than by starting from what is superior and at the same time essentially structural to it, like the absolute relationship with God. Thus, it becomes explainable why the theme of Anthropology itself, as a philosophical discipline, was put, during its entire existence, only in terms of religious sensibility and in religiously structured times. (...) Therefore, the anthropological doctrines also operate as epochal documents: they express and manifest the spiritual moment of the human being’s position towards God, which also determines the positioning in the respective world and time.” [6] In Neagoe’s case, like in the whole Byzantine theology, “one may find the very strong Christian aspects of a type of Anthropology able to recover the profound human being, in the uniqueness of its presence in front of God and in the uniqueness of its presence in the world” [6]. Nevertheless, the re-postulation of the double nature of Christ by Hesychasm and, therefore, of the possibility of man’s conversion into God, suppresses rational seeking, intellectual effort, the development of Aristotelian ‘categories’ (this is the core of the polemics between Saint Gregory Palamas and Varlaam, regarding ‘the teaching from the exterior’). “The most outstanding feature of Patristic Anthropology, later accepted by Byzantine theologians all throughout the Middle Ages, is the concept according to which the human being lacks autonomy and yet gains true humanity only when the man lives ‘in God’ and possesses God-like features.” [5, p.186]

## **2. Theos-Psyché–Soma: the body-as-clothing**

Throughout the first part of his *Teachings*, Neagoe brings out “the divine mysteries of Christ, which truly are the saint body and blood of the Son of God”, mysteries which resonate, for the man, in the Eucharistic act through which all the gifts we are meant to receive “have raised our human nature higher than all the heavenly forces have” [3, p. 7]. The real touchstone in the understanding of the Byzantine context that supports the ruler’s reflections is precisely the theocentric anthropology mentioned above, grown – in a patristic and a hesychastic descendance – in the spirit of Saint Symeon the New Theologian, for instance, as for him the series *theos–psyché–soma* forms a unitary whole [7]. If

“God had been in the heavens and not on the land and yet complete in both”, that same completion is imprinted through grace on human nature: “Akin He prepared the nature of our human being and gave us mind and words and soul *clothed* in the body”. Let us keep in mind, for now, the image of the body-as-clothing, the meanings of which should be clarified as we proceed. When Neagoe enumerates the body parts given to us, he subordinates each of them to their *common* purpose: the exaltation of their creator. Thus, the body is not given to us for tainting and perishing, but for cleanness and safe-keeping: “if you will strive to guard your body (...) in cleanness (...) you will make yourself be, *with your body and with your soul*, the church of the Holy Spirit”. In an obvious hesychastic tradition, the body participates to the divine non-suffering (*apatheia*); the divinized man – believes Saint Symeon – “is ignited by the Holy Spirit, becomes all fire in his soul, sharing his radiance with his body (...) and the soul becomes, for the body, what the Lord became for the soul”, “the man created by God according to His face and worthy to be the lord is the Lord, *body and soul*” [7]. “The pure praying” that Neagoe speaks of, uttered “with the body and with the soul”, is that of the man who is “pure with his heart and with his soul”, purified of his sins, whose needs are only the treasures of immortality of which “he will become worthy through charity”: “For where your treasure is, there your heart will also be”, as Neagoe quotes from *Luke* 12.34. “The pure heart, as A. Scrima underlines, is the heart that has fulfilled all that, in man’s very nature, might be impure, soiled, not in a moral sense but existentially, ontologically” [8].

Some paragraphs from a chapter entitled *Parable from the Gospel* [3, p. 82] seem relevant for our purpose. Speaking about the fact that, through sin, “we have defiled our spiritual clothing, which was knitted for us by the Lord”, Neagoe iterates a common reference from Byzantine theology. Saint Maxim the Confessor differentiates between inner shirt, that of virtues or the nature of the non-carnal and spiritual (“our right thinking, that is appropriate to the Word or the grace of new man, of the one who resembles Christ”), and the outer shirt or the carnal nature (“the sensible world”, “the visible creation”, broken during the crucifixion) [9].

Similarly, Neagoe suggests that everyone should “judge and consider the spiritual clothing”, since “it is not the clothes that shine on the outside that will be of use to you, but those from inside” [3, p. 85]. “The garment defiled by the flesh” (*Jude* 1.23) is the soiled shirt of the body that has been cut off from the divine face: “the stained shirt is the life that was muddied by the many mistakes of the flesh”, as Saint Maxim also believes [9, p. 62]. On the contrary, “the clean shirt is that of non-depravation” of the soul, as the soul cannot be divided; only the body may work as opened and crucified clothing. Just like, in the crucifixion, Christ’s tunic “was without seam, woven from the top in one piece” (*John* 19.23).

### 3. Body and soul: (Neo)Platonism versus Byzantine theology

Asking a similar question, Plato started from the same premises, but his solution was totally different to that implied by the Christian issue, according to the anthropological dualism of the Greek philosophy, whose anteriority is not only chronological but also logical. Guarding oneself (*tò epimeleisthai*) means for man to protect his soul, midwifing its accomplishment, supervising its feathering. Socrates' urge to his disciples, prior to his death, is "take care of yourselves" [Plato, *Phaidon*, 115 b]. But from another dialogue emerges the question: "How could we take care of ourselves?" [Plato, *Alcibiades*, 132 b], Socrates' answer refers to the safe-keeping of the soul, by undressing it of the body, as "everything in the soul becomes visible after it is undressed of the body" [Plato, *Gorgias*, 524 d]. In *Charmides*, Plato suggests such an initiating 'anatomy': "let us rather undress his soul and watch it *ahead* of the body" [Plato, *Charmides*, 154 b], which means that only the body belongs to this world, while the soul is guarded from the other side. Watching the soul *ahead* of the body might be the equivalent of benefiting from the view of the transcendent in a real 'ahead' that is at the same time a spiritual 'above'. The undressing of the soul is synonymous to its awakening, its opening of wings and entrance in "the field of truth" [Plato, *Phaidon*, 248 c]. We employed this short example in order to point out the enormous difference to Neagoe's Byzantine theological vision. "There is no other doctrine – remarks J. Meyendorff – that has ravaged Christian piety more than Platonic duality, since it conceived man as a spirit (or a soul) incarcerated in matter, obviously immortal, striving towards a super-material existence" [10]. We are, in fact, dealing with two opposite types of Anthropology: one offered by the Greek Philosophy (conceiving reason as the essential basis of man, which leads to the naturalization of human existence and the exclusion of the possibility of miracle) and another that is specific to Christianity (stating that "the man's nature lies in the very fact that it is not strictly natural, but, on the contrary, it the ability of accomplishing a rupture in the world, an absolute novelty by the act of creation") [6, p. 165]. If for the (Neo)-Platonism undressing (the soul of the body) means rebirth and salvation, for the Christian doctrine – as Neagoe believes – 'the dressing is life', embodiment, location of the soul in the house of a *pure* body: "And if only you could open to yourself the door of the mind to see their thoughts and souls and their inner garments, you would fall to the earth, for you would not be able to endure the sight of their soul's beauty and the light and shining of the garments, brighter than lightning" [3, p. 86]. Thus, it is not just the undressing of the body from the soul (which only provides the soul's immortality) that counts, but also the undressing of the body from its sins. "How could the mortal being achieve the clothing of immortality other than by undressing from the clothing of death?" wonders Nicholas of Cusa. "As if he were dressed in divinity and had taken its face", he answers [11]. Not "a man clothed in soft garments", for "life is more than the nourishment and the body more than the clothing" (*Luke* 7.25), but the one who is aware of "how the Lord is crucified and stripped in

ourselves” [7, p. 218], who understands with his heart (*John* 12.40), dressing himself in the glory of the redeemed and resurrected Body; that man – says Neagoe – “will live in union with the one matching completely his own body” [3, p. 88].

It is a union that is corrupted by the original sin, which has generated the fall and the reward of death. Because a person that is completely determined by nature, fallen from his or her original meaning and orientation, is in fact the sign through which the created human being surrenders to death. “Adam, as a proto-parent, gives the being, by not following God’s command, a different destiny in comparison to the original one, a destiny of pleasure but ending in death by suffering”, “the translation of the being from un-corruption to corruption”, “the changing of the being into suffering, corruption and death” [9, p. 313, 150, 152]. In this context, “the skin clothing” (*Genesis* 3.21), given by God to the proto-parents after their falling into sin, does not represent the material bodies – which would lead to the idea of the soul’s preexistence – but the alteration of the created nature, the decaying into the sphere of the senses, into the form of the psychological body. Therefore, “the biological-animal feature, symbolized by the skin clothes, appears to be strange to the real nature of man” [12], while the return to the spiritual body (which is deiform and theoforic) marks the ascent through which nature finds again the unity of its supernatural truth. If the man “clothed in mortality, in the dying and rudeness of the body – since these are the aspects symbolizing the dressing in skins” is under the rule of death [13], the ritual of the un-dressing, as it is shown, for instance, in the baptismal renewal, means “giving up the skin clothing, in order to return to the imperial clothes” [12, p.110]. As it is obvious, in Neagoe’s view the dressing in the greatness of the Body reflects the theocentric feature of Patristic Anthropology: the sharing in God as the basis of an Anthropology subdued to the person (a notion that was ignored by Greek Philosophy), person which is not determined by nature but comprises nature in itself [12, p. 71; 14; 15]. Thus, as Vladimir Lossky emphasizes, “the being is the content of the person, the person is the existence of the being”, and this represents “the every basis of Christian Anthropology”. Or, in the terms of John Meyendorff, “the concept of person or *hypostasis*, irreducible to nature or to any part of it, represents a central notion to either Theology or Anthropology”, and the man’s relationship with God is comprehended as “a communion of the human person with what lies *above nature*” [5, p. 190-192]. As a conclusion, “in order to understand Biblical Anthropology, we must first of all abandon completely the classical Greek duality of body and soul” [12, p. 69], according to which the body is the tomb of the soul (*soma - sema*) [Plato, *The Republic*, 588 c; *Gorgias*, 493 d; *Phaidon*, 62 b, 82 e, 92 a; *Phaidros*, 250 c]. According to Christian Anthropology, the body and the soul are complementary, so that surviving “is not seen as ‘liberation’ from the body in a Platonic meaning. The separation of the soul from the body in death is just as contrary to ‘nature’ as death itself, and the final and eternal survival of the soul is only possible if the whole man is risen from death, at the moment of resurrection.” [5, p. 189] Unlike the alienating relationship between

soul and body, as it is thematized in Platonism [16], referring to the unshakable unity between soul and body, Saint Maxim the Confessor states that God “is shared completely to everyone and comes into the soul as the soul into the body, and, by the means of the soul, in the body, as only He knows. By this, the soul gains its un-changeability, and the body its immortality, while the whole man becomes divine (...) remaining a whole man, according to body and soul, to the being and becoming a full God according to soul and body, due to the God-like gift and shining of the blissful glory.” [17]

#### **4. A spiritual anatomy**

The immediately following chapter of the *Teachings*, entitled *Story of Barlaam and Josaphat* [3, p. 91], is inspired by popular literature. We shall reveal how the issue interpreted above follows its unabated course, focusing on the same themes, although this particular time the stress falls on exemplary aspects of the existence rather than on purely theological abstractions, as they are more easily comprehensible. The theme of clothing (of dressing and undressing) converges once more with that of the relationship between exterior and interior, as well as with the role played by the body – not only in connection with the soul, mind and heart, but also with its components – so that the result is what we may call a genuine spiritual anatomy. The appearance of men ‘dressed in broken and stained clothes’, ‘for their bodies had melted and withered’, as opposed to the ones ‘dressed in shame’, proves the apophatic criterion according to which all that is offered to mundane vision appears only in order to eclipse the light of the graceful existence. The threadbare clothes are the clothes of a world ruled by sin; those who wear them should be uncomely, unseen to the world. On the contrary, what does not appear to mundane vision, but offers itself to the vision of the inner eyes, is the unapparent clothing, invisible to the world, shining only on the screen of the darkened world (cf. *James 2.2-5*) referring to the difference between the ‘fine clothes’ and the ‘filthy clothes’, the chosen ones being ‘the poor of this world to be rich in faith’. “With the inner eyes you should see those from the inside”, Neagoe advocates, “knowing with the inner eyes of my mind the cleanness of their souls and their shining” [3, p. 93]. The interiority is not actually visualized; it offers itself to vision, makes itself visible, in the invisibility of the exteriority, in this effective secularization of the mundane. “To see with the body”, as Saint Symeon the New Theologian puts it [7, p. 238], means lagging in blindness, in the un-vision, or in the false vision of the apparent exteriority, where there is actually nothing to see. Therefore, carrying some ‘broken and weak rags’ means that man ‘should neither seek for, nor take into consideration those on the outside’ and “guard (...) the clothing that has been cleaned without rottenness, keeping it clean and unbroken” [3, p. 96]. ‘The faces from the outside’ are nothing more than images lacking any resemblance to their souls, deceiving reflections of the evanescent world. In this particular context, we may extend E. Papu’s note on the stylistic distinctions between the common elocution (‘foul words’) and the subtle elocution, with obscured

features, which is transparent in addressing the ruler “not with words of mystery and words that are hidden, but with foul words” [18]. Beyond the purely rhetorical aspect, the ‘foul’ words translate, in the discovered language, the same improper bond with the code of mundane appearance as the ‘foul’ rags, as opposed to the words of ‘mystery’, hidden in the inner truth of the covered message. “Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day” (2 *Corinthians* 4.16) What never goes away is the clothing worn underneath, “the clothing of virtues”, which in Byzantine theology designates the light of grace, “the dressing of glory”, according to Saint Symeon who, speaking of accomplished men, tells us they “are all clothed (*Galatians* 3.27) with their whole body in Light, Which is Christ the Lord Himself, and see themselves garnished with an unspoken glory and a shining divine clothing” [7, p. 215]. Saint Paul’s urge (“Put on the whole armor of God”, *Ephesians* 6.11) is revealed not only in theological Hermeneutics but also in the wider environment of religious spirituality, penetrating the cultural context of the epoch. Therefore, it is no wonder that when he speaks of “the formation of the body” from four elements, Neagoe not only draws, from the angle of popular literature allegory, the Pauline soteriology according to which “this corruptible must put on incorruption and this mortal must put on immortality” (*I Corinthians* 15.53), but he also iterates a dogmatic theme that had been debated and explained as follows by Saint Maxim the Confessor: the exterior clothing, “with four corners, just as the world consists of four elements, shows that we must put on the natural contemplation, so that we no longer see those that are seen” [19]. “The outer clothing, as the Byzantine Saint adds, is the sensible world, divided into four elements, and it is broken, like Jesus’ tunic, into four pieces by those who spiritually crucify the Lord in us” [9], the visible creation of the four primordial elements – the one being broken from its intimate unity with the inner, not decayed and immortal clothing. In Neagoe’s view, this represents ‘the face wrapped in beautiful clothes’ of the world.

## 5. Hesychia and the accomplished man

It is what leads us to a different illumination of the body itself. On one hand, the body represents ‘the outer face’, the exteriority of the visible appearance which must ‘melt’ and ‘sear’, so that it may no longer be visible, and join the world in its passing to the true state, the state of nothingness, of non-appearance, unremarkable and therefore ignorable to the eye; on the other hand, if it reaches this state, having been cleared and emptied of any trace of visibility, the body is pure, prepared to receive salvation, since, as Neagoe writes, “God has no other place and no other home dearer than man’s body” [3, p. 111]. “Your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit” (*I Corinthians* 6.19) only after it becomes impoverished, denuded and emptied, as it is united with the soul. For the pure souls are ‘conjoined with the bodies’, and the work of grace is meant ‘to illuminate and sanctify the souls and the bodies’. Therefore “man is made up as a being of body and soul, and their separation is death”, believes Nicholas of

Cusa, the detachment from temporality. During the moment the soul is detached from the body, that is the moment of death, the soul and the body are not joined together in the same time and space, but stand “united into eternity” [11, p. 431]. “It is compulsory, thinks Saint Gregory Palamas, to calm those senses that are moved by the outer ones, when we turn towards those on the inside”, and the body “when it rebels we must stop it, but when it allows itself to be guided as it should, we must welcome it” [20]. Undressed from “the royal clothes” which represent the power of time, the king in *Parable for those who provide, and for the life of this world. From the book of Varlaam* [3, p. 138] discovers the meaninglessness of this world. To save ‘the pure bodies and souls’ means not only to put on light, but also the participation of the bodies to the divine non-suffering. It is, according to Saint Symeon, the body which is dead for the world, “unmovable for sin”, “stranger to foul desire” [21]. It’s a body that is already in communion with the soul because “the soul should council with the body about common salvation”, as Tertullian advises in *To the Martyrs* [22]. This is the body that has *resurrected* as flesh, according to the essential distinction between *body* and *flesh*, in the phenomenological thematization performed by Michel Henry [23]. If resurrection is accomplished, says Nicholas of Cusa, by “the unifying union of the body and soul, above everything that happens in time”, man resurrects – just like Jesus – “not with the burden-body (*in corpore gravi*), which is corruptible, darkened, subjected to sins (...), but with the true body (*in corpore vero*), the glorifying, sinless, living and immortal one” [11, p. 431, 435]. In this “super-temporal” body, the mind is emptied of thoughts, “like one who has risen to the communion that is beyond understanding and rests where there is no more work of the mind. (...) And that rest is the repose of merry unawareness.” [21, p. 53] It is what Neagoe calls ‘the body’s repose’, the state of total non-sensibility to the irrevocable mundane evanescence, as opposed to the ‘the fatigable body’. Therefore, world’s death is consumed in “the death of the body that enslaves us” [7, p. 213]; the body no longer acts as a shield between the Lord and the soul, it ceases to belong to the visible world, melts, becomes transparent, a flimsy clothing interwoven with the soul that may be foreseen. This is a phenomenon of absorption that represents precisely the resurrection of the body, described by Saint Gregory of Nyssa as its re-clotting due to the action of the soul: “when the soul drives towards it scattered elements, all the blend of the body will contain, in itself, everything belonging to it and, by the soul’s power, its own elements will rejoin in the former carnal structure”; “this carnal wrapping, now decomposed by death, will once again be woven of the same elements, but not in this brutish and heavy composition, but in a more refined and etheric tissue” [24]. It is the rested and tranquil body that has been unwrapped of the world and clothed “in silence and in lack and in poverty, in purity and in the entire mind, into the humble wisdom and tranquility”. It is the very *joy* of tranquility (*hesychia*), “the feeling of the mind and of the soul’s illumination”, according to Saint Symeon [7, p. 386], *theoria* and *met’hodos* at the same time: “the compassionate light” and “the path of eternal life” as Neagoe calls them, also stating that “there is no good or truth among men while no one

devout and pleasant to the Lord may be found” [3, p. 108]. According to the Palamitian teaching, “the divine conversion of man” does not eradicate his humanity, but as a matter of fact broadens it consequently [5, p. 105]. “*Hesychasm* – clarifies John Climacus – is an uninterrupted adoration and homage of the Lord. A hesychast is that who wishes to circumscribe the Uncarnal into a carnal bower” [25]. He is the *accomplished* man who, “rejoices as if he were in Heaven, with heavenly joy, and prays to the Lord and humbly worships Him with a ceaseless voice, day and night”. If, as Neagoe believes, ‘man’s true head is the soul’ and ‘the full mind’ (acting as ‘the head in the soul’, according to Saint Maxim) descends and ‘replenishes the hearts’, then the human being as a whole – including the body – lies ‘in the nature of the heart’ and gathers in ‘the vessels of the heart’. “For the ascetic tradition of the Christian East, the heart is the centre of the human being, the root of the active faculties - intellect and will – the point where the whole spiritual existence starts and returns” [14, p. 181]; without heart, mind is powerless, and without mind, the heart stays blind. Thus, the heart, connecting the person to nature, “leads to the central notion in Anthropology: ‘in the image and likeness’” [12, p. 84]. The man ‘with a pure heart and a full mind’ seeks peacefulness, ‘the peaceful place’, according to Saint Symeon, which is conceivable due to a change of perspective, to the transgression of the mind from the visible to the invisible. What “the snake’s wisdom” (from *Parable with the snake*) [3, p. 145] renders is the very exhibition of this teaching. While he wishes to see a human face, “for the human is and carries the Lord’s adornment”, the snake refuses to be seen by the human, “offers his whole body for killing and crushing, and guards his head”. The one who is theophoric (carrying in himself the divine adornment) cannot be seen by the other, who also passes, unseen, guarding his soul while sacrificing his body. This is due to the fact that the sacrificed body turns into an unseen body, resting in the flowing adornment.

## 6. Hasdeu’s theory regarding the Bogomilian influence

Regarding the likely Bogomilian influence that had coexisted with hesychasm and influenced the spirituality of Neagoe’s times, only an interpretation that is applied to the text may prove capable of revealing it. And this is in spite of the fact that, as we have shown, the assumed Bogomilism of his *Teachings*, springing from popular literature, cannot be supported with decisive arguments. This is due to the fact that, on one hand, the only Bogomilian Apocrypha proven to be genuine are *Interrogatio Johannis* and *Isaiah’s Vision* [26]. For instance, Hasdeu considers the chapter *Story of Barlaam and Josaphat* to be “a popular book that is widespread all over Europe, where it was equally employed by the heretics and by the Christian church”, the word “heretics” referring here especially to the Bogomilians [26, p. 494]. On the other hand, researches have established that there was no spread of Bogomilism in the Romanian countries. Referring to the attempts to interpret these ‘Balkanic legends as expressions of Bogomilian beliefs’, Mircea Eliade recollects Dem.

Russo's criticism of Hasdeu's hypothesis and his underlining of prior instances and parallel patristic texts that were considered heretic and Bogomilian by Hasdeu [27]. Hasdeu makes a direct reference to the last chapter from Neagoe's book: *Prince Ioan Neagoe's prayer, performed when his soul emerged* [3, p. 237], suggesting it represents the proof of Bogomilism's spreading (and, through it, of Gnostic ideas) in the mentality of the times [26, p. 316]. In the text he calls forth, the basic matrix of Christian themes we have already mentioned remains unchanged, proving loyalty to the hard nucleus of the dogmatic corpus of works considered to be canonical by Byzantine theology. Furthermore, what a short view over it would reveal is rather the hesychastic substance.

"For now I had entered the memorial of death, and had fully dressed myself carefully", laments the one who is about to depart. The *entrance* to 'the path of sorrow', where the worldly things fade, means the *wrapping in* the concern of salvation from the love for this world, for the nothingness of the living death that defeats the weak, faithless spirit. "I only care for my soul and for how I shall pass through the frightful customs." [3, p. 237] But the entrance is not a warrant of the return to divinity, it only certifies the *passing*; in order to pass unharmed and pure, the soul should be carefully clothed and set itself free of those that are uncreative in man, giving up the nothingness of those unguarded and therefore concerning. Worrying about the world (*the concern*) proves to be enchaining into a world representing the death of Lord's face, 'the deception of this misleading world', as Neagoe calls it, 'this mendacious world'. On the contrary, *the care* about salvation is the attainment of this Face, the safekeeping of the unaltered work of grace, the purity and cultivation of faith, the cleanliness of the body and of the soul ("your souls must be clear, together with your bodies" [3, p. 241]). Man – believes Saint Maxim the Confessor – was made by God from soul and body, so that the rational soul "by the knowing care for what submits to it, (...) would support the body with balance, making it rational and proper to God" [17, p. 136]. Guided by reason, the body works with the soul in 'the unbreakable bond of immortality'. In a 'Bogomilian' text quoted by Hasdeu, this particular feature is asserted in a similar way: "merry the one who carries his body in cleanness and with his heart prays to the Lord, as the Holy Spirit provides him with rest and in his heart lies the chair of Christ! For church is what that body truly is." [26, p. 335] As it is viewed here, the carnal condition questions the defining asomatism claimed by the dualistic gnosis. "It is the first concern that man should get rid of, states D. Staniloae, in order for him to become available to the Lord. When he gets rid of it, he evades passion, he achieves impassion. Purification aims at this escape, not at the escape of the care of the Lord." [28] So that Christian existence is not synonymous to an evasion of the world (like in the Neo-Platonic or Gnostic-Bogomilian ideologies) – since it is in the very nature of man to exist in the world – , but an inner *distancing* or *detachment* from the worldly passions and from the manifestation cycle, from everything one may call the mundane aspect of the world, as the body of sorrow or the evanescent appearance of all things: "I used to look upon the passing things and the futile glory of the world (...) but behold, now they have all set

and I achieved a new sight” [3, p. 241]. Now, on the verge of passing towards the unworldly, the world fades away in its own futility, according to the eschatological meaning of the *setting* (*twilight*). It is precisely in the sight that a new horizon is revealed, a new light, as the inner eye opens to see the unseen offered to it. But in order to see, the soul must first detach from the body and from the body of the world, impose a phenomenological distance between it and what does not appear in itself: “my soul now separates from you”, states Neagoe, “my soul yet goes to where it has prepared its path”, that is “with great longing (...) feathered towards the Lord” [3, p. 243]. ‘To where it has prepared’ its path symbolizes the entrance into preparation, the passing through ‘the tightening door’, on the narrow, scarcely visible path of separation between body and soul. “Because narrow is the gate, and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it” (*Matthew* 7.14). “In its tightening” – just as in the abasement of King Manasseh of Judah (*II Paralipomena* 33.12) – the soul abases into tranquillity, wearing the good care of salvation, “always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body” (2 *Corinthians* 4.10-11), in the recess of its impassionate passing towards eternal wellness: “and you will pass into tranquillity well and gently, where your bodies will be smeared, (...) and your souls will achieve the eternal wellness”. A paragraph from a ‘Bogomilian’ text quoted by Hasdeu illustrates exactly the hope for the simultaneous salvation of the body and of the soul: “Abraham said: Lord, tell me, who are you? The Archangel said: I am Michael the Archangel and I am sent to take your soul. Abraham said: Lord! May I be taken to the Lord with my body, Lord! And then the archangel climbed to the heavens and fearfully spoke to the Lord. And the Lord ordered him to take Abraham with his body” [26, p. 157]. But before the soul that prepares the purifying smearing of the body, “the clear mind climbs above the heavens and announces the righteousness of the soul and of the body” [3, p. 243]. This refers to ‘the awoken mind’, the ‘good mind’ that is meant to guard in us all that is beyond us. We have seen that nature “designates what is – due to creation – different from God. But nature (the being) may and should be surpassed; this is the privilege and the function of *free mind*, created ‘after the face of God’” [5, p. 192]. As a principle of freedom, “mind, in the human being, mostly corresponds to the person; one might consider it to be the centre of the person, of the human *hypostasis*, containing in itself the being in its integrity: mind, soul and body” [14, p. 181]. “The focusing of the mind into itself represents its self-guarding, and the ascent through itself to God works its premises by prayer, but a very focused type of prayer”, to the point where – by acting, knowing and contemplative praying – the “accomplished, genuine, stable cleanliness of the heart and of the mind is achieved” [29]. To guard the mind is, therefore, an uninterrupted winding of God’s name in the mind, seeking for the heart, focusing the mind on itself. It is a moment of super-conversion or of a return that provides salvation, of praying worship, just as the same King Manasseh bends his ‘heart’s knees’, praying for divine grace (*King Manasseh’s Prayer* 11), a moment which, as Neagoe sees it, was meant ‘only for this return’.

## 7. Conclusions

Following the analytical paths from above, we reach two conclusion. First of all, although the issue we have approached might still seem disputable, there is a certain outcome: one may no longer argue the direct influence of the strong, doctrinarian nucleus of the heresy in question, as (like any other Gnostic dualism operating through the Cathars) [30] it couldn't have penetrated a text that is animated at each step by the Christian Orthodox dogma, at least as the *Interrogatio Johannis* textual corpus proves in the symbolism of the asomatism. This is the thesis we have tried to support throughout this approach. However, if we consider a possible competing lode, it is rather of aesthetic nature, irrigating the structure of the text with valences and themes that belong to popular literature. This is the main argument that supports – in Neagoe's *Teachings* – the impression that the predominant hesychastic rhetoric is too 'humanized' by a popular tradition that had undergone the saturation of Bogomilism but is by no means profane, and controversially secular. Nevertheless, and we stress this aspect, the hypothetic stage of the statements may only be surpassed through a substantial hermeneutical effort, aware of I.P. Culianu's remark about the intellectual (not popular) origins of Bogomilism [30, p. 257]. Secondly, as we have seen in the case of Neagoe, "for the East, the basis of Anthropology lies, beyond any doubt in the *divine element* of the human being", therefore "Orthodox Anthropology is not moral, but *ontological*; it is *the ontology of the deification of man*" [12, p. 64, 103]. The particular phenomenological condition of the body clothed in immortality, as well as its relationship with the soul, underlying the access to the status of person, shows on one hand that the 'natural', formal distinction between soul and body may be surpassed towards the ontological revelation of "the way in which the human nature is double-formed as unitary personal existence", not ignoring, as such, the existential relationship between person and nature: the person as related synthesis of nature, nature as the content of the person [31], and, on the other hand, the fact that an 'Orthodox' Anthropology should be rooted beyond the Philosophical Anthropologies, "in the hidden man that sits well and listens well and fearful in front of the hidden God" [6, p. 170], where *homo absconditus* answers to "*Deus absconditus* and the apophatic Anthropology to the Apophatic Theology" [12, p. 73].

## Acknowledgements

For Dumitru-Mircea Buda, this paper is a result of the project 'Transnational Network for Integrated Management of Postdoctoral Research in Communicating Sciences. Institutional building (postdoctoral school) and fellowships program (CommScie)' - POSDRU/89/1.5/S/63663, financed under the Sectoral Operational Programme Human Resources Development 2007-2013.

## References

- [1] E. Papu, *From Our Classics (Din clasicii noștri)*, Eminescu, București, 1977, 22.
- [2] D. Zamfirescu, *The First Monument of Romanian Literature, introductory article to the edition Neagoe Basarab's Teachings to His Son Theodosie (Învățăturile lui Neagoe Basarab către fiul său Theodosie)*, Minerva, București, 1971, 18.
- [3] Neagoe Basarab, *Neagoe Basarab's Teachings to His Son Theodosie (Învățăturile lui Neagoe Basarab către fiul său Theodosie)*, Minerva, București, 1971.
- [4] M. Muthu, *Romanian Literary Balcanism (Balcanismul literar românesc)*, vol. I., Dacia, Cluj, 2002, 35.
- [5] J. Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, E.I.B.M.B.O.R., București, 1996, 11.
- [6] A. Scrima, *Apophatic Anthropology (Antropologia apofatică)*, Humanitas, București, 2005, 159-161.
- [7] Saint Symeon the New Theologian, *Ethic Discourses (Discursuri etice)*, in *Theological and Ethic Discourses. Writings I (Discursuri teologice și etice. Scrieri I)*, Deisis, Sibiu, 2001, 257.
- [8] A. Scrima, *Spiritual Experience and its Languages (Experiența spirituală și limbajele ei)*, Humanitas, București, 2008, 72.
- [9] Saint Maxim the Confessor, *Answers to Talasie (Răspunsuri către Talasie)*, in *Filocalia*, vol. 3, Humanitas, București, 1999, 47.
- [10] J. Meyendorff, *Saint Gregory Palamas and the Orthodox Mysticism (Sfântul Grigorie Palamas și mistica ortodoxă)*, Editura Enciclopedică, București, 1995, 139.
- [11] Nicholas of Cusa, *De docta ignorantia*, III, 7, Polirom, Iași, 2008, 427, 429.
- [12] P. Evdokimov, *Orthodoxy (Ortodoxia)*, E.I.B.M.B.O.R., București, 1996, 99.
- [13] Saint John of Damascus, *Dogmatics (Dogmatica)*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn., Scripta, București, 1993, 95.
- [14] V. Lossky, *The Mystic Theology of the Eastern Church (Teologia mistică a Bisericii de Răsărit)*, Bonifaciu, Bucharest, 1998, 107-110.
- [15] M. Tenace, *Byzantine Christianity (Creștinismul bizantin)*, Cartier, Chișinău, 2005, 126-127.
- [16] Y. Brès, *Plato's psychology*, Humanitas, București, 2000, 211-220.
- [17] Saint Maxim the Confessor, *Ambigua*, 7 i, E.I.B.M.B.O.R., București, 2006, 132.
- [18] E. Papu, *Eternal Lights (Lumini perene)*, Eminescu, București, 1989, 229.
- [19] Saint Maxim the Confessor, *Answers and Questions (Întrebări și răspunsuri)*, in *Filocalia*, vol. 2, Humanitas, București, 1999, 238.
- [20] Saint Gregory Palamas, *Word to Those Who Settle with Piety (Cuvânt pentru cei care se liniștesc cu evlavie)*, in *Filocalia*, vol. 7, Humanitas, București, 1999, 233.
- [21] Saint Symeon the New Theologian, *Theologian, Gnostic and Practical Heads (Capete teologice, gnostice și practice)*, in *Filocalia*, vol. 6, Humanitas, București, 1997, 63.
- [22] N. Corneanu, *The Actuality of Ancient Christian Literature (Actualitatea literaturii vechi creștine)*, Înviearea, Arhiepiscopia Timișoarei, 2007, 29.
- [23] M. Henry, *Incarnation. A Philosophy of the Flesh*, Deisis, Sibiu, 2003.
- [24] Saint Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Soul and Resurrection (Despre suflet și înviere)*, Herald, București, 2006, 56, 75.
- [25] John Climacus, *The Stair of Heaven*, in *Patrologiae Graeca*, vol. 88, Migne, Paris, 1864, 1097 AB.
- [26] B.P. Hasdeu, *Words of the Elders (Cuvente den bătrâni)*, vol. II, Editura Didactică și Pedagogică. București, 1984, 536-537.

- [27] M. Eliade, *From Zamolxis to Genghis Han (De la Zamolxis la Genghis Han)*, Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, București, 1980, 99.
- [28] D. Stăniloae, *Ascetism and Christian Mysticism or the Theology of spiritual Life (Ascetică și mistică creștină sau Teologia vieții spirituale)*, Casa Cărții de Știință, Cluj, 1993, 104.
- [29] Saint Gregory Palamas, *The Virgin Mary and Peter the Athonite – Prototypes of the Hesychastic Life and Other Spiritual Writings (Fecioara Maria și Petru Athonitul – prototipuri ale vieții isihaste și alte scrieri duhovnicești. Scrieri II)*, Deisis, Sibiu, 2005, 250.
- [30] I.P. Culianu, *The Dualistic Gnosis of the West (Gnozele dualiste ale Occidentului)*, Nemira, București, 1995, 261-267, 293-296.
- [31] C. Yannaras, *Person and Eros*, Anastasia, București, 2000, 68.