

Man – mystery of the world and of life

Rev. Ioan Cristinel TEȘU*

** "Al. I. Cuza" University, "Dimitru Stăniloae" Faculty of Orthodox Theology,
Closca Street, No. 9, 700066, Iasi, Romania
E-mail Address: tesu_i@yahoo.com*

Abstract

Nowadays there are intensified attempts at exploring the mystery of the human life, with its paradoxical features, from the 'hell of passions' to the serene heights of Christian virtues. Explorations by Orthodox spirituality focus particularly on highlighting the apophatic side of human makeup and man's character as "theological mystery". This paper aims to analyse the fundamental issues in anthropological apophatism, as reflected in the writings of Eastern Fathers.

Abrégé

L'époque actuelle se caractérise par l'approfondissement du mystère de la vie humaine, dans ses aspect paradoxels, de l'enfer des passions' aux sommets sereins des vertus chrétiennes. Les propres des explorations initiées par la spiritualité orthodoxe c'est de souligner l'aspect apophatique de la constitution humaine et le caractère de l'homme comme 'mystère théologique'. L'étude présent se propose d'analyser les aspects fondamentaux de l'apophatique anthropologique, tel qu'il est reflète dans les écrits des Pères Orientaux.

The theological constitution of the human being

The present age is also known as "the PSY age" due to the incessant analysis of the human being and its complex life. It is an age marked by more intense and scientifically applied interest in man, in his physical and spiritual constitution, in the human being with his positive and negative sides, from the pathological aspects of human personality to the ultimate heights that he is able to attain.

Man is an open universe, as attested by the entire human culture. The limits of this universe have always been the same:

the tenebrous abyss of the fall, of sin and of the passions, on one hand and the serene heights of virtue, on the other hand.

Once glorified and regarded as the measure of all things, man is known increasingly better. With few exceptions, yet lethal ones, man's physical constitution has been deeply probed. So has been his spiritual life. It is infinite spiritual life that remains a mystery, whose richness and beauty are highlighted by theology.

That is why the mystery of man ultimately is confined to the mystery of his soul and of the rich universe it circumscribes, that is the mystery of the relationship between the soul and God, which, as the Venerable Theognost states, secretly occurs between the soul and God.

The Orthodox teaching on the creation of man "in God's image and likeness" (Genesis 1: 26) gives life a great significance and a deep meaning. It justifies and supports man's struggle towards perfection, towards holiness or "the passion of godlikeness", as the spiritual Fathers of the *Philokalia* prefer to call the spiritual state of accomplishment of man's life, when at the end of his struggles, man becomes "created god", "god through grace and endeavor".

To the extent of his spiritual improvement, by following the path of ascetism and contemplation, of *praxis (action)* and of *theoria (vision)*, man discovers his self, his purpose and role in this world and life and realizes the higher reasons or meanings of his existence, of the world and of time, as place and time of personal salvation, which is a foretaste of the "new heaven and the new earth" (II Peter 3: 13).

The world, time and man are increasingly the object of the analysis and the reflection of descriptive, natural, physical and exact sciences. However, the conclusions that this type of approach lead to are not particularly satisfactory for the philosopher or the moralist. The reduction of the inner act to the physiological sphere and of evolution to dissolution can perhaps satisfy only scientific curiosity, but not one's moral effort. Space and time are viewed only from a physical perspective, on the basis of their interaction, while man, within this framework, feels solitary and aloof.

The language of the "exact", descriptive sciences is rational, physical, geometric, and operates with quantitative

units of measurement unlike those of theological discourse. The scientific language describes mostly in terms of quantity such realities of the existence of the world and of human life such as: creation, time, man, soul, reason, conscience, affections, feelings, etc. This scientific discourse tends to equate the quantities and qualities that are terminologically demarcated, the inner, moral concern being only tangential if not often altogether absent. The human psyche is thus shown to be wholly dependent on the biological life; quality is associated to quantity and its structure, to its manner of organization and interaction.

However, what predominates in theological thinking and constitutes the essential contribution by which Orthodox teaching can complete the experimental, scientific facts, is the ontological, metaphysical and theological perspective, the inner, ascetic and spiritual view of all these spiritual realities.¹

All these systems or manners of understanding the human persons, from heathen Antiquity to the 20th c. scientific rationalism or the abstract idealism, the existentialism, the modern individualism and the “philosophical personalism”, despite various intricate attempts to maximize or minimize the value of the concrete human life and of its fundamental value in the light of eternity, are not apt to provide a satisfactory and a fully convincing answer to the human mystery. The mystery of human life and of man himself, from a mechanistic perspective, is just a point on an axis, framed by rigid coordinates.

The mystery of man is not comprised and enclosed in him, it relates rather to the Archetype upon whom man was created and towards whom he strives – God. His ontology is iconic, i. e. it guides us to God, whose imperfect icon, in a continual state of expectation, is man himself.

Essentially, in his mystery, man does not exist only for and through himself, but through the will of his Creator and for his peers. The dependence on God – his heavenly Father – and on his peers defines the two fundamental aspects of human life.

¹ For further details, see Christos Yannaras, *La foi vivante de l'Eglise. Introduction a la theologie orthodoxe*. Translated from the Greek by Michel Stavrou. Les Editions du Cerf, Paris, 1989, pp. 83-89.

Man is not even a centre for himself, he is not self-sufficient, but permanently interrelated with his peers, progressing, by the law of love, towards God and towards his fellow human beings.

Amid an abundance of anthropologies and psychologies, the theological solution completes all the other elements of the anthropological discourse, in an ontological, profound and optimistic manner, at a time when, due to the luciferic egocentrism, it seems ill-advised, outmoded and anachronistic to resort to the inspired words of these genuine spiritual Fathers.

The crisis or the drama of the modern man and of the world he lives in, as was rightly pointed out by a Romanian moralist, is that "he is lost and fails to realise what caused his perdition. He blames economic, social and political crises, regarding them as the ultimate and single causes of the evils that afflict him, yet he ignores the true cause of all evil: sin".²

The cause of this drama or tragedy of contemporary man is the flawed anthropology upon which the explanation of the mystery of the human person is based, in terms of its origins and final purpose. "One has failed to understand that man is a natural being, yet, at the same time and in a certain sense, also a supranatural being, corrupted and without grace, but with a supra-natural purpose. Man has been considered only in the natural dimension. Having broken the link with God and being reduced to his own natural powers, man has become a slave to desires and pleasures. Lacking the spiritual assistance of religion, there is nothing that can defend him against chaos. The anthropocentric humanism does not, as one might think, lead to an affirmation but to a negation of man ...".³

Our conviction is that Christian anthropology alone can restore to man and to the world the long sought peace, a peace that comes from God's love and that man - the "crowning of creation" - shares with the world.

² Constantin C. Pavel, *Problema răului la Fericitul Augustin [The Question of Evil Viewed by St. Augustin]* the IBMBOR Publishing House, Bucharest, 1996, p. 9.

³ Idem, *Tragedia omului in cultura modernă. [Man's Tragedy in Modern Culture]*, Edition coordinated, prefaced and annotated by Marilena Andrei, Anastasia Publishing House, 1997, pp. 49-50.

Anthropological apophatism, negative anthropology or anthropo-theology

The idea that Eastern spirituality constantly emphasises is that *man, as a whole, however thoroughly explored and understood, beyond all partial definitions, which apply to one aspect or another of his life, without ever succeeding in fully covering it, remains a depth that seeks his ultimate, existential Depth – the divine; it is an enigma to himself, a mystery of the world and of life, a “theological mystery”*.

Of all the terms referring to the human being, the Orthodox spiritual writings have given preference to *mystery*. In the foundation of his constitution, man is a “*theological mystery*”, in the image of the infinite Mystery, God.

The spiritual Fathers of Christianity have thoroughly demonstrated like no one else the mystery-like character of the human being like the spiritual Fathers of Christianity. Between the limits of the fall (the hell of the fall) and the heights of virtue (the serene summits of the virtues), there is an infinity of forms and nuances of the life of man’s soul, and the Holy Fathers give extremely penetrating insights in this respect. For this reason, the thought and experience of these “earthly angels” and “heavenly people” cannot be surpassed and will forever arouse interest and constitute a path towards the further knowledge of the life of man and of the world.

Man is a *theological being*. That is why the theology is the science that reveals the most about the human mystery itself. The experimental sciences analyse the structure; the humanities analyse the different links within or outside the same structure, yet man is not just for himself an element of unity and synthesis for himself, but is connected with God, his Creator. Explaining the foundation of life and the operation of this connection, of its mystery, in as much as it is possible is the task of theology.

Man has a *theological constitution, he is built theologically*. His own experience is not autonomy or autarchy, but theocentrism. For life has meaning and real value not from his own finite, anthropological perspective that can be reduced to a given moment on the axis of the history of salvation, but from the infinite perspective of his dependence on God, from

the perspective of eternity, a perspective that is theological and Theo-centric. This is because *man's ontology is not enclosed in the self but in what is beyond the self and deeper within the self, above the self, in the Archetype to which he aspires and whose icon he is.* For this reason, the real field of the understanding of man is *metaontology* and *theology*.

Man's ultimate purpose or ontological truth is not inside him or within his self, regarded as autonomous, in its natural features, as taught by the materialistic theories; nor in the spiritual side of the soul: the soul, the mind or the heart, as the ancient philosophers or certain Church Fathers of the first Christian centuries believed; nor even in man's person, as advocated by the contemporary person-centred philosophical systems; but in his Archetype, the Model, towards which he strives incessantly.⁴

Theognost in his work *On existence, contemplation and priesthood*, says that between God and the soul there is a mystery that unfolds in secret. Its basis is "the higher bonds", that is perfect love, faith and purity.⁵ Having been created "in the image and likeness" of the heavenly Father, man or human nature cannot be defined exhaustively or accurately nor can they be confined, limited and circumscribed to an exact definition. God is beyond all definition, He is the "Mystery of life" and so becomes the human being, when sharing in this supra-essential, supra-natural Mystery.

The most appropriate definition of the human being, that could capture the mystery and the dynamism of human life, is that of being that interconnects two worlds that unceasingly and ardently seek each other. It is like a link between the material world – which longs for sense and spiritual meaning and carries the aspiration of spiritual accomplishment – and

⁴ Panayotis Nellas, *Man – a Deified Animal. For an Orthodox Anthropology*. Introduction and translation into Romanian by Deacon Ioan I. Ică jr., Deisis Publishing House, Sibiu, 1994, p. 15.

⁵ Teognost, *On existence, contemplation and priesthood*, in *Filocalia sau culegere din scrierile Sfinilor Părinți care arată cum se poate omul curăți, lumina și desăvârși [Filocalia or a collection of the writings of the Holy Fathers on how Man Can be Cleansed Enlightened and Accomplished]* Translation into Romanian, introduction and notes by Rev. Prof. Dumitru Stăniloae, Ph. D. 2nd ed., Harisma Publishing House, Bucharest, 1994, volume 4, p. 293.

the spiritual world – of elevated, intelligible essences, in a permanent kenotic state, of sacrifice, of sharing and of offering its endless and unfading joys to the material world and to the human being.

The human being is, as has been magnificently demonstrated in Eastern spiritual literature, *a being in a constant state of expectation*, in constant spiritual progress towards perfection, holiness, towards the resting in the infinite ocean of divine love, in the intimacy of the Trinitarian love, the perfect model for any type of love.⁶ That is why one can rightly state that “about the human person one can only talk using paradoxes and antinomies. A complex being, always moving and progressing, struggling with his self and everything around him, man has been and shall always be a question for man”.⁷ Man is for himself a mystery and a problem.

Just as God is infinite in his actions or through his being,⁸ his reflection in material world, man, is a infinite in powers and constantly renewing and developing. And just as *theognosis*, our knowledge of God, does not have a final point, but every end marks the start towards something even higher, so is our understanding of man never-ending.

We cannot define exactly the human being as we do not know and have never experienced the totality of its existence, that is, we never fully know its abysmal falls and perfect ascents. “We do not know what heights human nature can reach, for we never can fully know God, in whom it constantly partakes. The only reason of the human nature is to become increasingly like God. And we are able to know God with every new step to the extent that God can be grasped by the human nature when it takes that step”.⁹

The union or the synthesis between the soul and the body is an “ineffable mystery”. The heart is considered in the Orthodox

⁶ See Rev. Prof. Dumitru Stăniloae Ph. D., *Sfânta Treime, structura supremei iubiri [The Holy Trinity, the Structure of Supreme Love]*, in “Studii teologice” [*Theological Studies rev.*], XXII, (1970), no. 5-6.

⁷ Rev. Mihai Mocanu, *Aspecte ale apofatismului antropologic [Aspects of Anthropological Apophatism]*, in “Teologie și viață” [*Theology and Life rev.*], II (1992), no. 8-10, p. 55.

⁸ Rev. Prof. Dumitru Stăniloae Ph. D. *Natură și har in teologia bizantină [Nature and Grace in Byzantine Theology]*, in “Ortodoxia” rev., XXVI (1974), no. 3, p. 396.

⁹ *Ibidem.*

spirituality to be an endless and unfathomable abyss of mysteries, while the richness and infinity of form and content of the life it expresses cannot be comprehended. "It is a mystery indeed the union between the soul and the body, between cells in the organs, between the various organs of the body, between the body and the whole world. And yet this mystery can serve to explain a lot. The acknowledgement of mysteries is itself a recognition of a transcendent God".¹⁰

The human being has potential powers and resources that only an intense ascetic work can enhance and expose. From this perspective, it seems that the modern man has a deeply flawed understanding of the infinite richness of his spiritual life, precisely because of his ignorance and inability to discover it. The contemporary man knows himself less than the universe that his life produces and sets in motion, he is more prone to researching the powers that come to him from outside than those that are in the infinite depth of his soul, which he fails to even imagine or intuit. "Within the human being there are powers that we have yet to discover and it seems that the modern man knows himself less than the man of the Christian classicism. Modern man partly ignores his faculties, which bring him, by their own powers, to heights of expression that he fails to anticipate".¹¹

God is a mystery, and everything that draws life from this mystery, even fragmentarily, in this mysterious universe, has a mysterious, apophatic character. In Orthodoxy, God is experienced as infinite mystery. Apophatism is the basic character for the whole theology, for the Orthodox world and the ascetic literature in particular.

As a result, there is theological apophatism or negative theology, regarding the mystery of the divine life and of His loving outpouring in the world and in man's life. Yet, concerning man, who has an "iconic" composition,¹² is a

¹⁰ Idem, *Studii de Teologie Dogmatică Ortodoxă [Studies in Orthodox Dogmatic Theology]*, Mitropolia Olteniei Publishing House, Craiova, 1991, p. 178.

¹¹ Nichifor Crainic, *Sfințenia - Împlinirea umanului. (Curs de teologie mistică) [Holiness - The Accomplishment of the Human] (1935-1936)*. Edition coordinated by Ierod. Teodosie Paraschiv, Mitropolia Moldovei și Bucovinei Publishing House, Iasi, 1993, p. 209.

¹² See Leonid Uspensky, *Teologia icoanei în Biserica Ortodoxă [The Theology of the Icon in the Orthodox Church]*. Introductory review and

fragment of the divine mystery and constantly tends towards it, one can also speak about *anthropological apophatism* or *anthropo-theology*. Yet between the two forms of apophatism, the theological and the anthropological, the same distinctions are preserved, as between God and man, the infinite and the finite, the uncreated and the created. The divine apophatism or the negative theology regarding God's mystery is infinitely superior or infinitely more unfathomable than that of the human life, no matter how high man ascends on the hierarchy of perfection or how much progress he has made in the likeness, in virtue, with God.¹³

Similarly, with regards the human person, several steps or stages of anthropological apophatism can be highlighted, in connection with the steps or stages of human knowledge and knowledge of the human person, up to its inscrutable heights.

There exists a *physical, experimental knowledge* of the composition of the human being, by means of scientific methods. This is a first step or stage in the discovery of the mystery of the human person and of the realm of mysteries that surround it.

The second step is the *attempt to discover the rich life of man's soul*. This facilitates a deeper descent into the enigmatic universe that is human life and a fuller experience of the ineffable and secret character of human life.

And on a higher level, fragments of this mystery attempt to express the *knowledge of the infinite spiritual life*, of the

translation into Romanian by Teodor Baconsky, Anastasia Publishing House, Bucharest, 1994.

¹³ Fr. Dumitru Stăniloae refers to several steps of *apophatism* or of *negative theology*: the apophatism of that which is experienced but cannot be defined, and the apophatism of that which cannot even be experienced. See *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă [Orthodox Dogmatic Theology]*, volume 1. 2nd ed, Publishing House of the Biblical and Missionary Institute of the Romanian Orthodox Church, Bucharest, 1996, p. 87-88. In *Spiritualitatea ortodoxă. Ascetica și mistica [Orthodox spirituality. Asceticism and Mysticism]*, IBMBOR Publishing House, Bucharest, 1992, p. 196-197, Fr. Stăniloae further refines the classification and refers to *first-degree apophatism* – of negative intellectual silence; *second-degree apophatism* – equal to the realization of one's inability to comprehend God; and *third-degree apophatism* or the apophatism of the heavenly light, the apophatism of the most intense silence or feeling.

constant ascent towards the “mystery of theosis” or towards what St. John Climacus called “uncompleted perfection of the perfect”.¹⁴

One can refer, by analogy, to a *first-degree* or a *first less intense anthropological apophatism*, as concerns the mystery of the soul and the human person, starting from the physical existence and the abyss of the unconscious towards the surface, to the conscious, organised and intricate psychological life of the soul and the spirit. One can also speak of a *negative theology* or an *anthropological apophatism of higher intensity*, which refers to the inexhaustible richness of the spiritual life. Finally, the human mystery or abyss finds rest in the mystery of the infinite ocean of the divine life, in the “peace of the mind”.

The human being is even more a mystery as he actualizes these high potentialities of his life and the apophatic character becomes more profound as he becomes more spiritualised.

Anthropological apophatism is related to the quality or attribute of the human person as created “in the image and likeness of God” (Genesis 1: 26). The apophatic character of the human life is proportionally dependent on the manner or the extent of the actualisation or the transfer from living “in the image of God”, to a new elevated life “in His likeness”, according to every person’s ascetic and contemplative work.

The knowledge of the self and love – two means of exploring the mystery of the human person

Despite all these efforts to broaden the scope of human knowledge, the “mystery of the human person” can never be exhausted. “No amount of objective information can ever exhaust the uniqueness of the person or fully reveal the person. No matter how many and detailed descriptions we may use, how much we would insist on nuances, traits and features (physiognomical features, attributes of the soul or the character, etc), our findings will necessarily correspond to several persons, as it is impossible that by objective formulations using our daily language we could ever signal the uniqueness and distinctiveness of a certain person”.¹⁵ The special reason why man

¹⁴ St. John Climacus, *The Ladder. Step XXIX: Concerning Heaven on Earth, or Godlike Dispassion and Perfection, and the Resurrection of the Soul before the General Resurrection*, in *Filocalia...*, volume IX, p. 419.

¹⁵ Christos Yannaras, *Abecedar al credintei. Introducere în teologia ortodoxă [Elements of Faith: An Introduction to Orthodox Theology]*,

is and shall remain a mystery for science is that he is “beyond the frontiers of science, as in his core, by grace of his own constitution, he is a theological being (*ho theologiko*)”.¹⁶

The person is not infinite in his own being, but tends towards infinity, as he is an “image of God”. The awareness of infinity, linked to its nature and life, that the human person gains to the extent of its efforts towards spiritualization, demonstrates that the human person is not a moment or fixed, rigid state, on the axis of becoming, but a virtuality, a potentiality or a goal that must be attained. “By its inexhaustible character, the human person proves that to be a never-ending existence. It can never stop its growth; it can never halt its always new exchanges, the reception and imparting of ever new contents and states of mind, its introspection and its expanding knowledge. It never reaches the infinite yet it cannot stop advancing on the way towards infinity or communicating with it. It lives constantly within infinity, but experiences it as a goal that it must attain”.¹⁷

It is precisely this mysterious side that Orthodox spirituality constantly strives to place against a spiritual background. It is orientated towards the “inner man”, towards the “spiritual”, it constitutes an anthropo-theology, a “theology of actualising the image in the likeness”, of “the godlikeness through grace and action”, yet, as the Fathers that have written the teachings about God, only “to the extent of man’s own capacities”.

The essential interest of spiritual writings in the human person is aimed not so much at finding its faults or progresses, but at pointing to ways of improving one’s spiritual life. That is why the hermit Fathers constantly teach that man penetrates the mysteries of his own life and of the others, depending on the extent of his purity and repentance. The knowledge of man and the knowledge of the self are linked to repentance because God, who has been in our soul since Baptism, becomes effectively present as his laws are being fulfilled.

Translated into Romanian by Fr Constantin Coman, Ph. D., Bizantina Publishing House, Bucharest, 1996, pp. 43-44.

¹⁶ Panayotis Nellas, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

¹⁷ Rev. Prof. Dumitru Stăniloae Ph. D., *Studii de Teologie Dogmatică Ortodoxă [Studies in Orthodox Dogmatic Theology]*, Mitropolia Olteniei Publishing House, Craiova, 1991, p. 175.

The awareness of our own sinfulness, a source of permanent repentance, is proof of self-knowledge, of genuine knowledge of the self. Self-knowledge or the knowledge of the self is one of the deepest forms of knowledge that man is capable of. In the initial stage, the knowledge of the self means the acknowledgement of our state of sinfulness and spiritual imperfection. It identifies at this point with the awareness of one's sinful nature. At a higher level, this objective knowledge acquires a deeper moral sense, a desire to be liberated from passions and restore one's virtues in order to reach the true knowledge and experience God.

At the highest level of spiritual life, the knowledge of the self means being aware of the depth that the human being represents, and also discovering the Kingdom of the Lord within oneself, in the secret depth, as these spiritual authors prefer to call the heart. However, to detect, grasp and experience the charismatic presence of God who dwells, as writes St. Mark the Ascetic, in the depths of our soul, ever since the Baptism, means to experience the infinity of senses and meanings, the abyss of divine blessings in our soul, that sin can only conceal, and to actualise these potentialities.

That is why one who achieves true knowledge of one's self is granted the knowledge of everyone else. This happens to the saints who, due to their improved lives, gain extensive knowledge, as an instance of the knowledge and inspiration bestowed by the Holy Spirit. Saints are fully aware of the heights and depths of their souls, they know the others as they do themselves and also have a certain type of foreknowledge.

The knowledge of the self of the spiritual person is not a bodily, external knowledge, material, unilateral and limited, but an inner, spiritual knowledge of the richness of senses of human life. It is an experimental knowledge, through the participation and union with a known reality which, at the highest levels is God Himself, the source of any type of knowledge, including self-knowledge. The knowledge of the self is, in the case of spiritual persons, enlightened by God, for we can genuinely know ourselves only in God and through God. Only God's grace can lead the human nature to the accurate, inner realisation of the realities of the soul.

Self-knowledge is always an act of repentance because, as we progress on the path to knowledge, besides the spiritual drive, we are constantly aware of our flaws or failures, not so much of the intellectual or rational ones, but the moral and spiritual ones. True knowledge of the self begins in repentance and is never accomplished, being forever more engulfed in the depths, in the ocean or the abyss of repentance.

The knowledge of the self means, for the spiritual Fathers, the acceptance of humility, just as in humility man finds true self-knowledge, for humility strengthens knowledge. At the highest levels, the knowledge of the self means the complete awareness of being a creature in relation to the loving creator.

As has been noticed, when defining man Eastern spirituality calls him a “theological mystery”. Similarly, his whole life or the whole dynamism of his spiritual life, at whose centre lies the compound heart-mind, is a mystery. For this reason, theology has a better, more profound understanding of the elements of this mystery. The attempts of the natural and experimental sciences to express it, using the terminology of closed, structuralist concepts, collide with the shortage of the research tools and methods and the inability of the mind that is weakened by sin.

The issue of life and of the richness of its spiritual meanings has not been completely covered or at least solved until today by experimental psychology and by abyssal psychoanalysis. The attempts at rationalising or conceptualising the mystery of human life, expressed by the spiritual human existence, and to explain by means of limited categories and scientific methods and demonstrations its ineffable mystery have failed. It cannot be dealt with completely using the ordinary methods of experimental and logical science or circumscribed to the limited framework of scientific knowledge. Any such approach of the mystery of the human soul provides only apparent and partial knowledge.

Just as God is infinite and the ascent towards Him resembles a permanent state of expectation, certain traits of the Christian at different stages on the way to perfection can

be outlines, without however providing a complete explanation. The human person cannot be reduced to arithmetic or quantitative calculation, as its mystery is an inexhaustible universe of mysteries. Orthodox spirituality emphasises this mystery dimension of life and its spiritual world.

For the Eastern spiritual Fathers the attempt understand man means trying to understand the human efforts made out of the incessant desire to progress towards the Archetype. Otherwise the knowledge can only be partial, fragmentary, and an expression of the human relativity in an unequal proportion to what it is not – the divine Absolute.¹⁸

Thus, the essential element or trait that the Orthodox anthropology highlights or points out with reference to man, is his being a theological mystery. However thorough the explorations, man rises above the examinations and anamnesis and remains for ever an enigma or a mystery, a secret, an *agnostos*,¹⁹ an “unknown being”,²⁰ the greatest unknown, secret, enigma and mystery of the world and of life.

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¹⁸ Paul Evdokimov, *Mystère de la personne humaine*, in "Contacts". Revue française de l'Orthodoxie. XXI, No 68, 4th semestre, 1969, p. 280.

¹⁹ Tomas Spidlik, *La spiritualité de l'Orient chrétien. Manuel systématique*, Pontificium Institutum Orientalium studiorum, Roma, 1978, p. 88.

²⁰ See Alexis Carrel, *Omul, ființă necunoscută [Man – The Unknown]*. Translated into Romanian by Lia Busuioceanu, Tedit F. Z. H Publishing House, Bucharest, 2004.

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