

Between *Stoa Poikile* and *Ecclesia* - Approach to an Evangelical text -

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Abstract:

The study makes a detailed analysis of the episode of St. Apostle Paul's encounter with the Stoic philosophers in the Athenian Areopagus, highlighting the subtleties of the Stoic and Judeo-Christian conception of God, cosmos, matter, world, man, etc. which confronted in the Apostle's short dialogue with the Athenian philosophers, described in Acts 17, 17-20.

Keywords:

Paul in Areopag, God, stoicism, christianism, matter, world, man, cosmos

Arriving to Athens to affirm and preach what the French philosopher Alain Badiou called *the personal belief-conviction-certitude in the Resurrection-event of Jesus Christ*, the Apostle Paul is in the position to resort, both in *Agora*, and in *Areopagus*, to a *kerygmatic* exercise which, in addition to being profoundly transcultural (Marcel Dumais), has to be, for the first and only time, one with explicit philosophical connotation or, rather, anti-philosophical as it is described by the same Alain Badiou. In other words, the scholar (former) Pharisee Saul of Tarsus of Cilicia, being called to address the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers (*Acts 17:17-20*) and, implicitly, to the dominant philosophies of the early Christian era, puts together for the first time in history, the Christianity freshly emerged from Judaism, that Christianity, for which the doctrinary element was still far from being decanted (academician Gheorghe Vlăduțescu), and the Greek wisdom, forcing them to interact, to confront in terms of ideational content and emphasizing their constructive dissonant fundamentals, in this case the anto-

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nymic binomial represented by the preeminence of supernatural revelation vs. the exclusiveness of reason.

Speaking in *Agora* about the Risen Christ, Paul did it, undoubtedly, as in Corinth (or in any other New Testament Apostolic lecture), that is beyond any speculative metaphysics, deliberately denying the position of “... *skilled speaker or wise*” (I *Corinthians* 2:1) and not being concerned of anything else but preaching Christ (I *Corinthians* 2:2), the Crucifixion, the sacrifice and the Resurrection, that is the ultimate essence of Christianity, the founding-event, of what eventually founds the divine constituent of the new religion. Precisely the apparent metaphysical poverty of the Apostle’s discourse gives it the anti-philosophical dimension alleged by Alain Badiou, obvious shortage for Hellenism, and which arises primarily from the programmatic withholding of Paul towards the attempts of reason to explain, itself alone, the divinity, the world, the man and his destiny. Given this approach, the reaction of the intellectual Hellenism could only be hostile: “*What will this babbler say? [the Greek spermologos, the Latin seminiverbius, the English babbler]?*” (*Acts* 17:18), so that in the end, the audience gathered on *Areopagus* to reject him categorically: “... *some mocked and others said: we will hear thee again of this matter*” (*Acts* 17:32).

In fact, the fact that the Epicurean and the Stoic present on *Ares’ Hill* rejected Paul may not be surprising, being, in some way, even predictable for that era, one in which Christianity was yet not speaking to philosophers. But just because it, Christianity, in just two centuries, became the normative faith and religious practice for Justin Martyr, Clement of Alexandria and Origen of Alexandria, makes us wonder: *why the laughing?*; why the Hellenistic philosophers “... *derided*” the apostle, why the extraordinary news of the Resurrection – simultaneously as suprarational potentiality and reality – caused, as a first response, laughter?

An immediate response – too soon to be fully comprehensible – is that, although “philosophies of consciousness in itself”, of a conscience which, as Hegel says, is reported in terms of intellectual Hellenism, more and more (just) to itself and tries to reconcile with itself¹, Epicureanism and Stoicism were edified based on solutions-options clearly different from the Judeo-Christian ones to the issue of man’s relationship with the transcendent, with divinity – relationship which consistently treated in simultaneous Christological and soteriological perspective, becomes the core of the Pauline discourse.

It is this interrogation, as well as the implicit ambiguity of *why*, will be the subject of our study, a philosophical answer to a theological question being, we believe, welcome.

¹ G.W.H. Hegel, *Prelegeri de istoria filosofiei (Lectures on the History of Philosophy)*, 2nd volume, translated into Romanian by D.D. Roşca, Bucharest, Academy Publishing, 1964, p. 9.

Stoic philosophers laughter

The testimony of the *New Testament* is indubitable: “*And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked – gelio*” (*Acts 17:32*). So, the Resurrection was that part of the Pauline discourse which irritated, firstly, the philosophers, even if, “a setter forth of strange gods”, the apostle “... preached unto them Jesus” (*Acts 17:18*) and was a direct reference to the God of Christianity.

Maybe, if he had limited to preach *Yahweh* as omnipotent divinity and ready to help man, Paul would not have provoked the unanimous laughter of the *Areopagus*, but only the determent of the Epicureans because they refused the gods the ontological superiority towards man and the willingness to interfere with the world; but not that of the Stoics, for whom the God was a living presence, who beneficially influenced man shaping their temporary existence, thus surpassing the indifferent attitude and the eternal un-disturbance of the Garden philosophy Gods.

Maybe, if he had acted only on the first impulse, the one caused by the many statues and temples of Athens – “*his spirit was stirred [paroxino] in him when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry*” (*Acts 17:16*) and, breaking the pattern of his speech, Paul had not addressed the question of Resurrection – knowing, however, its total incomprehensibility for the Greeks – insisting, for example, only on the subject of monotheism (especially since during the Hellenistic Age the choice of the worshiped gods was a strictly personal choice of the individuals), he would not have provoked laughter, but only the self restraint of the audience, annoyed that the god, the one they felt co-eternal to the matter, is the one that “... *made the world and all things therein*” (*Acts 17:24*).

Maybe, if he had not spoken about the reality of the Resurrection brought to the world by Christ, Paul would have been perceived only as a follower of some “... *strange gods*” and, maybe, as one of the many philosophers, an atypical one, it is true, but a philosopher as long as he speaks about the deity, the world, the man and his destiny. And yet, Paul preached the Resurrection as intrinsic potentiality of human nature, after the archetype of the Resurrection-event of the Saviour, that is after the resurrection from death of some immortal divinity, made human by his own will, assuming deliberately the risk of causing hilarity. Hilarity – therefore laugh as immediate reaction – because Zeno’s followers, even when they believed in the immortality of the soul, rejected beyond any doubt the one of the bodies. Anyway, the human soul does not have for the Stoics an “absolute immortality” even if it is in an “equality of essence” with the divine soul, Cleanthes of Assos, for example, believing that “... souls will last until ekpyroosiç”, that is until “the return of all things in the great divine soul”, whereas his contemporary Chrysippus of Soli consider that the return to the origins is only possible for the souls of the

wise, those of those “bad, little, insignificant – phauloi” irreversibly dying and “scattering” along with the body².

Preaching eschatological resurrection through Christ, Who, “has given assurance unto all men, in that he has raised him from the dead”, made possible the resurrection of the body, Paul calls “... to repent” those who listen to him (*Acts* 17:30-31), thus offering them an exercise of faith – *pistiç*, that is to believe, being confident, in an event that, not only went beyond, but it was completely impossible in terms of Stoicism (and even more so of Epicureanism). Let’s remember that not the act of faith in its religious determination was unintelligible to the followers of Zeno, but the actual content of what was the object of faith proposed by the apostle, that is the resurrection of the body; not the request rallying to a new form of religion was incompatible with the *Areopagus* up to arouse laughter, but what this religion involved – the resurrection of the bodies, going beyond the limits of systemic thinking of Zeno’s followers, although they cultivated religiosity, and not anyhow, but “... refusing idolatry and striving to seek the true God”³.

However, even if Stoicism as a philosophical system “was more than a worldview, was the project of another world”⁴ and was built in a quasireligious manner, especially on the relationship between man and divinity, the act of faith requested by Paul (wanting to induce the listeners his own intellectual conviction became certainty) forcing his limits down to the threshold of being interpreted and considered ridiculous. Resurrection is, in Christianity, the prerogative of another world (future, but which now exists), of another existential dimension, which for Stoicism, that proposed only a moral-ethical mundane project, was not acceptable. Lacking the rational-proving elements and because the apostle – being certain about the authenticity of the Resurrection down to turn it in intellectual certainty – disavows the very idea of proof⁵, Paul’s speech implicitly refers to different level of existence, to another world, unassimilable and foreign to his opponents.

The possibility of resurrection of the dead was therefore the decisive causal factor of Paul’s rejection, which provoked undisguised laughter of those loyal to the Portico. Laughter, as a manifestation of intellectual contempt, occurred amid recurring divergence between stoicism, as a system, and what Paul preached, that

² Wilhelm Windelband, *Filosofia elenistică și romană (History of Ancient Philosophy)*, translated into Romanian by Tudor D. Ștefănescu, Iași, Moldova Publishing, 1996, p. 41-42.

³ PhD. Constantin Preda, *Credința și viața Bisericii primare. O analiză a faptelor apostolilor (Faith and Life of the Early Church. An Analysis of the Acts of the Apostles)*, Bucharest, Publishing House of the Mission and Bible Institute of the Romanian Orthodox Church, 2002, p. 207.

⁴ Gh. Vlăduțescu, *Filosofia în Roma antică. Forme de gândire și evoluții (Philosophy in Ancient Rome. Forms of Thinking and Trends)*, Bucharest, Albatros Publishing, 1991, p. 158.

⁵ Alan Badiou, *Sfântul Pavel. Întemeietorul universalismului (Saint Paul. La fondation de l’universalisme)*, translated into Romanian by Ana Lazăr, Cluj-Napoca, Tact Publishing, 2008, p. 64.

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even though “... the entire Roman world status from then resembled [...] with the labor of another higher spirit”⁶, that is Christianity, and the very Stoicism “... leads on another path, its own [...], a possible Christianity, especially in moral determination, but not only”⁷. Basically, Stoicism and Pauline Christianity represented “... universes too distinct to be put in direct connection”⁸, state of fact created precisely by these disparities.

The God of the Portico vs. the Judeo-Christian God

Unlike the deities of the Epicureans, the god of the Stoics is part of human life, and not anyway, but as a fellow, just as Paul himself notes at the Areopagus: “For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring” (Acts 17:28) – which is nothing but a phrase from the poem *Phaenomena*⁹ of the Stoic Aratus of Soli (315-239 BC)¹⁰ – governing his destiny on the decisive criterion of justice, as it governs the world’s.

In the same spirit, of the divinity monarchy, wrote the scholar Cleanthes of Assos (around 330-232 BC) in “attempt to theodicy”¹¹ represented by *Hymn to Zeus*¹²:

*Most glorious of Immortals, mighty God,
Invoked by many a name, O sovran King
Of universal Nature, piloting
This world in harmony with Law, — all hail!
How great Thou art,
The Lord supreme for ever and for aye!
No work is wrought apart from Thee, O God,*

⁶ G.W.H. Hegel, *op. cit.*, 2nd volume, p. 303-304.

⁷ Gh. Vlăduțescu, *Filosofia în Roma antică. Forme de gândire și evoluții (Philosophy in Ancient Rome. Forms of Thinking and Trends)*, Bucharest, Albatros Publishing, 1991, p. 156.

⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 157.

⁹ *Phaenomena* is a didactic poem, with multiple connections with the traditional mythology, available on the website <http://www.theoi.com/Text/AratusPhaenomena.html>

¹⁰ Fr PhD. Sabin Verzan, *Sfântul Apostol Pavel (Saint Apostle Paul)*, Bucharest, Publishing House of the Mission and Bible Institute of the Romanian Orthodox Church, 1996, p. 135. Used by Aratus, the remark according to which “in Him we live and move and exist” was used in antiquity, apparently coming from legendary poet Epimenides of Knossos (VII-VI centuries BC) and representing a true dictum that wanted to point out the consistent connection between humans and the gods in Greek mythology.

¹¹ Gh. Vlăduțescu, *Mit și filosofie în Grecia veche (Myth and Philosophy in Ancient Greece)*, Bucharest, Romanian Academy Publishing, 2014, p. 147.

¹² M. Gramatopol, *Civilizația elenistică (Hellenistic Civilization)*, Bucharest, Romanian Encyclopedic Publishing, 1974, p. 136.

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*Or in the world, or in the heaven above,
Or on the deep, save only what is done
By sinners in their folly.
Oh, scatter it
Far from their souls, and grant them to achieve
True knowledge, on whose might Thou dost rely
To govern all the world in righteousness.¹³*

The divinity described in *Hymn*, reveals Cleanthes' choice – and, along with him, of the whole Stoic thought, from the founder Zeno of Citium, to Seneca and Marcus Aurelius – for “the existence of a being of the highest perfection”, of a powerful God in the Judeo-Christian sense, a *hegemonikon* of the world, against which man, faced with the specter of predestination of his own fate, may not relate appropriately other than through the exercise of pious prayer, as illustrated by the poet from Assos in *Prayer* bearing his name¹⁴:

*Guide me, Zeus and you Pepromene [Moria – personified destiny],
Along the road you have chosen for me
I follow without grumbling. Resisting
It's a shame and I have to go anyway.*

a) From a theological-philosophical perspective, Zeno and the philosophers of the Portico stood beyond traditional polytheism of the *polis*, whereas mythology gods are nothing but “... various manifestations of nature”¹⁵ of the “... immortal, rational, perfect Divinity [...], who gets nothing bad in it”¹⁶. The Portico “believes” in gods, honors them, just as it believes in the existence of the *tutelary genius* [anonymous secondary deities – *daimoneç*], “who sympathize with the people and watch over human affairs” and of the *heroes* [deities inferior to gods, with limited powers], “that is, those noble souls who survived their bodies”¹⁷, but, the fundamental object “of their faith” is God –Zeuç [from the verb *zen* – “to live”], the one who, unlike the gods (in the appearance of which he manifests himself), geniuses

¹³ Note of the translator – Official translation by E. H. Blakeney, published in 1921, found in here https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Hymn_to_Zeus.

¹⁴ Wilhelm Windelband, *Filosofia elenistică și romană (History of Ancient Philosophy)*, translation by Tudor D. Ștefănescu, Iași, Moldova Publishing, 1996, p. 48.

¹⁵ M. Gramatopol, *op. cit.*, p. 139.

¹⁶ Diogenes Laertios, *Despre viețile și doctrinele filosofilor (Original title – Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers)*, translated from Greek by acad. C.I. Balmuş, Bucharest, Academy Publishing, 1963, VII, 147, p. 371.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*. VII, 151, p. 373.

and heroes, “does not have human form” and, simultaneously, “wearing a provident care for the world and all that is in its content”¹⁸.

God, the authentic God of the Stoics¹⁹, is almighty – *hegemonikon*, providentially and essentially good – not knowing wrong (“... *apart from everything the wicked destroy in their folly*” – Cleanthes) and source of gods’ divinity, geniuses and heroes, divinity accepted but only in a conventional manner; placed ontologically beyond man, placing himself beyond the human anthropomorphism and the mortal condition, God is simultaneously *Father* of everything and all, “the shaper – demiourgos of the whole universe as if he were Father of all”, the One Who “at first existed in himself”²⁰, being efficient cause and being self sufficient, God who “... runs through all”²¹, eternal, ever-present and immutable.

The theonym used for Him does not matter, because God “bears different names, according to his various powers”. In themselves, “the powers” have obvious and actional existential connotations, because, besides *Zeus* – Ζηϋς [the Accusative for Ζευς], “since he is the cause of life or penetrates any life”, the god is called *Dia* – Δία [dia - *through*] “because all things exist through Him”, *Athena* [αἰθήρ - *ether*], “because his ruling reason – *hegemonikon* includes all the ether”, *Hera* [αἴρα - *air*], because “his power comprises the air”, *Poseidon* or *Demeter*, mastering the sea and land²².

Thus called, God is at the same time each and every one of *Zeus*, *Dia*, *Athena*, *Hera*, because each particular name nominates an attribute, a quality, existential and actional; the God is simultaneously *Zeus*, *Dia*, *Athena* or *Hera* and much more than each one of the individual gods, the “separate figures” of his own divinity²³; is the god *par excellence*, the god-archetype, the God who founded and supports the existence. At the same time, God – θεός is also *Hephaistos* [the god of fire], “the hot breath co-natural to fire – *pneuma*”, whereas “... includes the fire-artist – *tecnikon-pur*”²⁴. So far as it includes, the God is the fire-artist, a rational fire – *noeron pur*, that “creates and forms rationally, methodically, making life easier”²⁵; as active principle of the world and only in this way, the God coincides with the fire and he is the fire, ontologically superior to common fire, a fire-doer, supporter and shaper of life.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, VII, 147, p. 371.

¹⁹ G.W.H. Hegel, *op. cit.*, 2nd volume, p. 20.

²⁰ Diogenes Laertios, *op. cit.* VII, 136, p. 368.

²¹ *Ibidem*, VII, 147, p. 371.

²² *Ibidem*, VII, 147, p. 371-372.

²³ Wilhelm Windelband, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

²⁴ Diogenes Laertios, *op. cit.* VII, 147, p. 371.

²⁵ Wilhelm Windelband, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

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The fire-artist is, simultaneously, *pneuma*, *logos* and *God* – $\kappa\epsilon\omicron\varsigma$ ²⁶. The fire is the soul of the world, is the rational and ordering principle of the Cosmos, that is *logos* – $\lambda\omicron\gamma\omicron\varsigma$, It is simultaneously universal reason, global “intelligent soul”, divine providence–*pronoia* and superhuman destiny, necessity and important cause, the mythology gods being nothing but applied expressions of the providential $\lambda\omicron\gamma\omicron\varsigma$. Seen as $\kappa\epsilon\omicron\varsigma$, *the logos* is One that governs, masters, produces, is the substance and the efficiency, widespread in all, underlying all natural phenomena²⁷, generating cosmic order, order that constitutes, in itself, “... the proof for the presence of a superior being”²⁸, which is precisely the apologetical argument supporting the existence of the supreme deity.

b) On the other hand, the same Stoicism that assumed, as Christianity, an almighty and providential God, thought of a God who, in fact, confused itself with the cosmos, being in fact the Cosmos taken as ontological image, respectively “the whole world and the sky” as, since the very beginning Zenon, Chrysippos and Poseidonos (the one that in Rome, even Cicero listened to him)²⁹ taught, perspective transforming the Stoicism into a particular *pantheism*, generating thus a natural religion rationally built and structured³⁰. The theological and philosophical consequences of this vision are immediate and measurable, assuming at least:

(i) *the substantiality of the divinity*, respectively its Consubstantiality with nature, the cosmos as a whole, that is, inevitably, the materiality of the god, whether it is a constituent of air nature – *aeroeidehç*, ss Antipatros of Tarsus believed (2nd century BC), Athenian Stoic scholar, or the substance of the stars, that is the fire – primordial, genuine, unsullied pure, such as Boethus of Sidon opined, the successor of Chrysippos³¹;

(ii) *the corporeality of the god*, who, axiomatically³², “embraces the entire world, as the seed contains the germ”³³;

(iii) god’s valencies as *seminal principle of the world* – $\lambda\omicron\gamma\omicron\varsigma$ *spermatikoi*, imposing the cosmos their own regularities as it bears it from itself and remains

²⁶ Diogenes Laertios, *op. cit.* VII, 156, p. 374.

²⁷ G.W.H. Hegel, *Prelegeri de istorie a filosofiei (Lectures on the History of Philosophy)*, 2nd volume, p. 18-22.

²⁸ M. Gramatopol, *op. cit.*, p. 139.

²⁹ Diogenes Laertios, *op. cit.* VII, 148, p. 371.

³⁰ Wilhelm Windelband, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

³¹ Diogenes Laertios, *op. cit.* VII, 148, p. 371.

³² Mircea Florian, *Filosofia greacă (Greek Philosophy)*, in the volume ***, *Filosofie. Analize și interpretări (Philosophy. Analysis and Interpretation)*, Oradea, Antet Publishing, 1996, p. 40.

³³ Gh. Al. Cazan, *Introducere în filosofie. Filosofia antică (Introduction to Philosophy. Ancient Philosophy)*, Bucharest, Actami Publishing, 1996, p. 296.

identical with itself³⁴, the fire-artist “proceeding in order in generating the world”, whereas “... it has in itself the seeds of all things”³⁵;

(iv) *the non-personal character* of the divinity, the contrary option, respectively the personal God, being, as academician Gheorghe Vlăduțescu noted, an antagonistic one to the pantheistic vision itself³⁶; the impersonal God of the Stoics, “... the same as the rationality of the world [which] could not be more than natural order”, is, implicitly, void of “... consciousness and intentionality”³⁷ and, above all, love, because to the ordinator god is foreign what, in the Christian horizon, is firstly divine: love³⁸.

c) The ontological role of God, logos and soul of the world, which the Stoics confer the fire is likely to approach it to a signification specific to the pre-Socratic philosophy, in this case the *principle* – arce of life; in truth, Zeno’s the fire seen as noeron pur, is present in each constituent of the Cosmos, and not just a filler, but as the ultimate essence of each particular element, whether living or inanimate, rational or vegetative. The fire bases the world, both as ordering principle and as the ultimate constituent of it, “... working with pneumatic tension – pneumatikoç tonoc, preserving and modulating everywhere”³⁹ (as noeron pur pure in the stars, as phisuc in the inorganic world, a.s.o.), so that from a pre-Socratic perspective, its identification with the principle – arce is completely sustainable.

In this way, the “ontological” parallelism between Zeno and Heraclitus from Ephesus, who, two centuries in advance, saw in the fire “the Universal Logos”, eternal and forever recognizable⁴⁰ is looming explicitly, as noted by Mircea Florian: “... the Stoics revive Heraclitus’ fire-logos theory”⁴¹. Not as simple fortuitous similarities, but as reasonably-close way to unitary explain the world, Heraclitus’ fire is, like that of Zeno, “forever alive”, “the eternal and actual essence of the world, the one that is in all, generating them and giving them existence”, “*raison d’etre* of the world”⁴², the fire that “... penetrates everything, moves anything, leads the world following some plan, it is the providence”⁴³.

³⁴ Wilhelm Windelband, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

³⁵ Pseudo-Plutarhos, *Despre opiniile filosofilor* (Original title – *Doctrines of the Philosophers*), I, 7, in Gheorghe Vlăduțescu, *Filosofia în Grecia veche* (*Philosophy in Ancient Greece*), p. 410.

³⁶ Gh. Vlăduțescu, *Filosofia în Roma antică* (*Philosophy in Ancient Rome*), p. 178.

³⁷ *Ibidem*.

³⁸ Mircea Florian, *art. cit.*, p. 41.

³⁹ Wilhelm Windelband, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

⁴⁰ Gheorghe Vlăduțescu, *Ontologie și metafizică la greci. Presocraticii* (*Ontology and Metaphysics to the Greeks. The Presocratics*), Bucharest, Paideia Publishing, 1998, p. 98-108.

⁴¹ Mircea Florian, *art. cit.*, p. 41.

⁴² Gh. Al. Cazan, *op. cit.*, p. 134.

⁴³ Mircea Florian, *art. cit.*, p. 41.

But, besides Heraclitus, the thinking of *the Portico* would find itself another factor of continuity with the predecessors of the ancient great systems; it comes to the Ionian Anaxagoras of Clazomenae, who, noticing the disharmony – purely philosophical – of the report between the uniqueness of the principle – *arce* and the multiplicity of the qualities of the material world, He tried to make his cosmos comprehensible through the thesis of infinity of its last constituents – *the homeomerics*: “... such as the existences are endless, then the existence of this state lies in the infinite number of principles”. But to coagulate and give rise to the qualitative diversity of the world – for though uncreated and eternal, they are completely particular and non-convertible – the homeomerics must be animated by something outside them. Thus, Anaxagoras resorts to “the solution” represented by *Nous* – *Nouç*, universal reason and regularity of the Universe, ordinator actional principle “inoculated to the world”, recognizable in all the conglomerates of homeomerics as “pure, simple, unadulterated spirit”⁴⁴.

As a result, the cosmic reason – *Nouç* acts in the same formative sense as does the organizing principle – *noeron pur*, so that the similarities are, also in this case, measurable. For, besides the diversity of life forms and matters, besides the need to somehow explain – always perfectly intelligible – how observable world can be, both diversified and unitary, Zeno and Anaxagoras, as Heraclitus, deliberate, think, build autonomously, even if the answers can be, sequentially, close or similar.

d) Corroborating fire positioning as a principle of the world with its formal identity of God – *qeocç*, give a specific dimension to the Stoic pantheism; the Stoic god – the only true God, the others being only personalized actionable sequences, is confused with the cosmos, is the cosmos literally. It is not determining that in this way any material entity acquires divine meanings (being itself supported in ontological determination by the founding fire), as if the last constituent of the material world would *deify* itself along with the coming into existence, with its emergence, but the fact that, through the principle, *logos-soul* of the world-God, the world gains coherence as a whole, is unitary – being established by the founding principle, and, thus, perfectly intelligible. In fact, since Antiquity, Philosophy had operationalized the meanings of this pantheism, one somewhat different from that of the Eleatics, as philosophical foundation and construction, even if identical in terms of theological implications; from this perspective, Diogenes Laërtius gives three complementary meanings to the Stoics’ cosmos⁴⁵:

(i) the own one, determinant, whereby the universe is God himself, this “being indestructible and unborn”;

⁴⁴ Gh. Al. Cazan, *op. cit.*, pp. 144-146.

⁴⁵ Diogenes Laertius, *op. cit.* VII, 138, p. 368.

(ii) the cosmological one, when we talk about its internal harmony, about “the orderly settlement of the celestial bodies”;

(iii) the integrated one, defining the overall perspective of the world, the one that puts into consideration “the whole consisting of the two”, emphasizing the identity of the God with the Universe, in its every particle being recognizable, in the form of ultimate quality, the very god.

In this latter point can be heard the voice of Spinoza, who when he writes that “... without God there can not be and can not be conceived other substance” and “all that exists, exists is God and nothing can exist and can not be conceived without God”⁴⁶, gives content and also explanation to his own pantheism synthesized by the expression *Deus sive substantia*, perfectly valid in Stoicism, provided the correct reading, the one by which the terms *God* and *substance/ nature* will not be understood as autonomous through an artificial separation, them being perfectly interchangeable, up to involving perfect synonymy (no terminological but ontological), in the sense of *God that is the substance*, not *God vs. the substance*, as will be explained at one point by Acad. Gheorghe Vlăduțescu.

e) Seen (only) through the qualities and attributions which the Stoic scholars assign to, the God of the Portico – unique, eternal, good, all-pervasive, concerned towards man, etc. – should possess a profile strikingly similar to the Judeo-Christian God. Moreover, referring to Cleanthes’ *Hymn*, Clement of Alexandria points out that this includes a theological material, a “genuine theology”. In fact, Clement suggests that Cleanthes, as Sofocle, Tales or the legendary Orpheus⁴⁷, for whom “God poured [...] a divine emanation” so they “... confess that is God everlasting and uncreated”, that they had “felt”, somehow, the True God transcending the polytheism of mythology and the habits of the *polis*, so that, in substance, Stoicism “... guessed [...] something about God”⁴⁸. In itself, the convergence of philosophy with the monotheistic idea should not be regarded as accidental or surprising, despite the rhetoric of a part of the contemporary Western Christianity that denies sometimes vehemently, its compatibility with the theology, for, as noted by Paul Vayne, the accumulations of the Greek rationalism led implicitly to the formula of an unique and good god, even if this was (only) impersonal and forever surrounded by “many gods”⁴⁹.

⁴⁶ Baruch Spinoza, *Etica (Ethics)*, translation from Latin: prof. S. Katz, Bucharest, Antet XX Press Publishing, 1993, p. 12.

⁴⁷ Clement of Alexandria, *Cuvânt de îndemn către elini (Word of Exhortation for the Greeks)*, chapters 6-7, in *PSB (Church Fathers and Writers)*, volume 4, p. 126-130.

⁴⁸ Ph.D. Constantin Preda, *op. cit.*, p. 208.

⁴⁹ Paul Vayne, *Când lumea noastră a devenit creștină (Quand notre monde est devenu chrétien (312-394))*, translated by Claudiu Gaiu, Cluj-Napoca, Tact Publishing, 2010, p. 37.

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In fact, by virtue of natural revelation – therefore, natural theology – Stoicism exceeded, from the point of view of theology, many attempts of ancient philosophy, especially when it concluded the uniqueness of the god, but also when it guessed his eternity, which is equivalent to the complete suppression of the role and place of theogonies in philosophy. In fact, Zeno's thinking comes to certify in a relevant manner, the importance of natural revelation as a authentic means of theological knowledge and to highlight the role of reason in this context. It is perfectly sustainable because "... one can gain knowledge of God and the things which are seen"⁵⁰, natural revelation, although it may glimpse God, as well it may understand Him wrongly; deprived of its fundamental and natural complement, respectively, the supernatural revelation, it is likely to draw a misleading picture of the deity ("Lord is infinite and can not be grasped by the mind"⁵¹), which eventually can compromise even its (real) valences on teognosis level. To lead the philosopher to the True God, the natural revelation is required, imperatively, to be completed by the supernatural one, for "by both [forms of revelation] was revealed for us as through a veil [...], through the language of Scripture as the Word, and through the creation as Creator and Craftsman"⁵².

Despite the similarity of qualities and responsibilities, the pantheistic God of the deified Universe thought by Zeno, Seneca and Clenthes is not God – *qeoc*, the One Who "... dwells not in temples made with hands" (*Acts* 17:24) and unlike the God and gods, "Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed anything" (*Acts* 17:25) and Who, although called good or eternal, it is impossible to be circumscribed by "is attributes being infinitely superior to everything that is known not only by human nature, but also by the beings beyond nature"⁵³.

By virtue of its defining pantheism, Stoicism is constrained to operate with a God who, conceived to be corporeal, risks to be tributary to the mundane category of space; the Stoic god is a god circumscribed in space and restricted/ confined by it in total opposition to God, Who, "above and beyond all" (Eusebius of Caesarea) and profoundly incompatible with the idea of form, physicality, "... He can not be circumscribed by any place" (St. Cyril of Alexandria). The Stoic god possesses its own constitution with substantial consistency – be it air or fire – unlike God-*qeoc* Who must be pondered beyond any material determination, being *Spirit* (*John* 4:24) – as his own form of existence, ontologically superior to material world.

⁵⁰ St. Athanasius the Great, *Cuvânt împotriva elinilor* (*Word against the Greeks*), XXXIV, (PSB 15), p. 69.

⁵¹ St. Macarius the Great, *Cele cincizeci de omilii duhovnicești* (*Homilies*), Homily XVII, 13, (PSB 34), p. 182.

⁵² St. Maximus the Confessor, *Ambigua*, the 2nd part, 26, (PSB 80), p. 126.

⁵³ Origen, *Contra Iulius Celsus* (*Against Celsus*), the 6th Book, 62, (PSB 9), p. 424.

In these circumstances, the system of thought proposed by the followers of Zeno was built corseted by the gnoseologic limitations set by their own presuppositions. Even if, in line with the era's intellectual Hellenism, they were undoubtedly, "very pious" as Paul says (*Acts* 17:22) and, like all citizens of Athens, they related to the altar of *the unknown God*, whom, even not knowing, they did not cease to honor (*Acts* 17:23), the Stoic philosophers thinking remained stuck in immanent; not because it involved such as the Epicurean, a divinity completely isolated from the world, a god foreign by nature and alienated by his attitude towards people, but depriving itself, as stated by Ernest Stere, of "aspirations towards a supernatural beyond" and thus refusing to conceptualize and operationalize the transcendence⁵⁴. In fact, the very *idea* of transcendence is irrelevant in Stoicism, just because the whole – to pan that it alone sums up to itself and for itself the entire existence, cancels the ontological duality of the theistic systems.

Thus, the Judeo-Christian God remains a stranger to Stoicism from a complete ontological perspective. God – *qeos*, the One That Paul preached to the *Areopagus* – and implicitly to the ancient intellectual world – is an alien God because He is not part of the Stoics universe. He is not one of the gods that Zeno's God assimilates, not being thus different from them, but from an ontological perspective, another, one quite different. When the Greek genius, by virtue of natural revelation, otherwise perfectly legitimate, guessed somehow a God other than its own deities, a strange *daimon*, dedicating an altar to him out of fear, maybe, of not ignoring him (as write the geographer Pausanias, the second century AD, and the rhetorician Philostratus, second to third centuries AD), in reality it could not know him. Stoicism, taken as a rational attempt of unitary explanation of the world and communication with divinity, remain always far from God, precisely because, as Pascal says, "... we know God but through Jesus Christ. Without this Mediator, any communication with God is broken", man being compelled, at least from a point, to "improvise" endlessly about the divine.

f) Although good and, unlike the gods of Epicurus, bent over man, the Stoic god still "... lived above all for himself"⁵⁵, being away from the Christian idea of the divine-human Savior Who "was moved by the love of people in order to dwell in human flesh and show in Him"⁵⁶, bringing – precisely through His humanity – the possibility of eternal life for all people and for each individual separately, as the Christ preached by Paul at the Areopagus addressed simultaneously to the humanity and to man, as individual.

⁵⁴ Ernest Stere, *op. cit.*, p. 183.

⁵⁵ Paul Veyne, *op. cit.*, p. 39.

⁵⁶ St. Athanasius the Great, *Tratat despre întruparea Cuvântului și despre arătarea Lui nouă, prin trup (The Incarnation of the Word of God)*, (PSB 15), p. 39.

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Preaching “... *Jesus and the Resurrection*”, Paul suggested then to philosophy that his God is the God of love, just as his religion is, above all, the religion of love. Perhaps, as believes Paul Vayne, precisely in this – the love with which the divinity was coming towards man, respectively, the ongoing relationship and mutual of love, going as far as pathos, with which the God of Christianity embraced humanity – consisted “the superiority” of Christianity in relation to the surrounding polytheism, the determining factor in assuming Him by the population of the Empire⁵⁷. Knowing the “poverty” of the interpersonal relationship of the non-Christian believer with his god – unilateral relation and based rather on the fear of man towards his divine protector – Paul invoked the love of Christ, love archetypically shown through the sacrifice of God made man and materialized by the fact that, in it, made possible the resurrection of each individual man: “... like us, dying, to hope that we will certainly rise and we will live a perfect life apart from all death”⁵⁸.

Of course, in this way, the apostle gave response also to *thanatophobia* (*fear of death*) which challenged the existences and consciences as does now, formulating – under the loving ministry of the Saviour – a complete and definitive “solution” and which, teaching the resurrection of man as a whole body together with soul, surpassed the most optimistic hope of Greek antiquity – the Platonic thesis of the immortality of the soul by virtue of its con-substantiality to the divine. Thanatophobia preoccupied philosophers also in the Hellenism era, just as it had done with their predecessors, is shown – relevantly, we believe – also by the radical “solution” of Epicurus, who conceived his ontology precisely that, based on its theological and anthropological implications, “... *to overcome the fear of the gods and the fear of death*”⁵⁹, just as *The Fundamental Sentences*, drawn by his last Ancient follower, the Cappadocian Diogenes of Oinoanda (second century AD), învațau explicit: “*We have nothing to fear from the gods/ We have nothing to fear from the death/ Pain can be lived with/ Happiness can be achieved*”⁶⁰.

The Christian “solution” towards the challenge of fear in front of death is, however, of an entirely different nature also because it does not reduce itself mechanically, to revive the post-mortem individuals, because the spectrum of individual resurrection, which will lead Christianity to the coagulation of the eschatological expectation of the faithful, rests on much more. For “crushing the

⁵⁷ Paul Vayne, *op. cit.*, p. 39.

⁵⁸ St. Maximus the Confessor, *Ambigua*, the 2nd part, 112a, (PSB 80), p. 285.

⁵⁹ Jeanne Hersch, *Mirarea filosofică. Istoria filosofiei europene (L'illusion philosophique)*, Bucharest, translated into Romanian by Drăgan Vasile, Bucharest, Humanitas Publishing, 1997, p. 63.

⁶⁰ Andre Bonnard, *op. cit.*, p. 308-309.

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dominion of death“ as says St. Cyril of Alexandria, Saviour’s work aims exactly the existential foundation of human nature, recreating it along with all creation; a new man, “*born from above*” – another (*John 3:3*), together with “*a new heaven and a new earth*” (*Revelation 21:1*) will constitute the recreating of the world; a man other than people who descend from Adam, a man transfigured by the light of divine grace, a man – body and soul never separable.

g) Writing one of the oldest texts of his in such a way “... *That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.*” (*I Corinthians 2:5*), Paul then secures also the terms of what Alan Badiou calls the opposition between Greek and Jewish types of thought, between *Greek and Jewish discourses*, ultimately between *the rational order of the world*, perfectly understandable and totally predictable, based on philosophy and *the exceptional event*, supra-rational, non-explainable gnosiologically and non-predictable, based solely of faith and propagated by its instrument of force: the prophecy⁶¹.

Returning constantly to the preaching of the Apostle, one might think that this opposition was even more insolvent on *Ares’ Hill*, where, speaking of Jesus, will have made it just as he would write it to the Galatians and Corinthians no later than 3-4 years, that is preaching a Jesus – Son of God, “... *made of a woman*” (*Galatians 4:4*), a Jesus who is simultaneously “... *one God [...] by whom are all things, and we by Him*”, but also the Son of a “... *one God, the Father, by whom are all things, and we by Him*” (*I Corinthians 8:6*). In fact, speaking of Jesus, Lord and Son of God-Father, Paul pushed the boundaries of the systemic thinking of the Areopagus, which was unable to connect to the immeasurable mystery of Christians on the net (only rational) of their own milestones, unable to assimilate “the One Who was born and constituted a body of his own, namely this body that existed with the divine nature hidden in Him”⁶².

The Matter, the World, the Cosmos

Postulating the ontological identity between God and the world, leads in Stoicism – just like it was done and it will always do, in the pantheistic systems – to numerous theological and philosophical difficulties, such as the antinomies between the absolute determinism and free will (concept first used by Zeno himself, who did not see any contradiction in here, just as, over the centuries, would Spinoza do), between the kindness axiomatically postulated of the divinity and the quantifiable reality of the evil or between the rationality of the world and its dependence on God’s providential action, types of (apparent) contradictions thus

⁶¹ Alain Badiou, *op. cit.*, p. 50-51.

⁶² St. Basil the Great, *Epistole (Epistles)*, epistle 262, II, (PSB 12), p. 541.

affecting the philosophical sustainability of the system thought by Zeno: “... Pantheism could not possibly be a self-sufficient solution, it can not provide the necessary coherence to the steadfastness in a non-ambiguous concept; and, especially, there was hardly able to always approach the non-contradictory idea of rationality, that, also, providential”⁶³.

a) In addition to the dominant pantheistic dimension, The Stoic ontology is based simultaneously on the assumption of the eternity of the matter, matter which Epiphanes describes as “contemporary with the divine”⁶⁴. Zeno thinks about a amorphous matter, disorganized and lacking quality, but still, “ultimate basis” of the world as Hegel says⁶⁵, a matter that Seneca characterizes as inert and immovable⁶⁶, while according to Stobaios, “... it is eternal in its entirety neither increases nor decreases”, the eternity being exhaustive including from the perspective that it can not be suppressed. Not even the God can create it, he can not bring it into existence; creation out of nothing – *ex nihilo*, determinant in Christianity as the work of the Triune God, is not even possible to the god – *qeoc*. At the same time a crucial detail for the stoic interpretation on the primacy of the amorphous matter is given to us by Calcidius (the first translator into Latin of Plato – 4th century), who explicitly identifies the possibility that this vision might reveal the consubstantiality of the god with the matter: “... the god is what is the matter or even an inseparable quality of the matter”⁶⁷.

Although an ontology in which the matter is understood and described in terms of eternity, actually of the co-eternity with divinity, even if the matter does not have an internal rational structure and lacks the ability to move and, implicitly, to transform/ evolve by itself, it can easily be suspected as generating philosophical complications, the Stoics see it as a viable, functional and perfectly compatible with the idea of pantheism⁶⁸, so that the same Seneca can write that “... everything that emerges is from matter and divinity”, even if “... stronger and more valuable than the matter [...] is the god”⁶⁹. The amorphous matter and inert is permeable, so that, God, that is the *logoç* fire-artist, acts upon them as Demiurge – *Demiourgoç*, making it malleable, giving it form and giving it intelligibility and endowing it, as efficient cause, with the decisive quality represented by the ability to move, therefore to transform and

⁶³ Gh. Vlăduțescu, *Filosofia în Roma antică (Philosophy in Ancient Rome)*. p. 178.

⁶⁴ *** *Antologie filosofică (Philosophical Anthology)*, *Filosofia antică*, II, revised and enlarged edition by Octavian Nistor, Bucharest, Minerva Publishing, 1973, p. 81.

⁶⁵ G.W.H. Hegel, *Prelegeri de istorie a filosofiei (Lectures on the History of Philosophy)*, 2nd volume, p. 18.

⁶⁶ Gh. Vlăduțescu, *Filosofia în Roma antică (Philosophy in Ancient Rome)*. p. 169.

⁶⁷ *** *Antologie filosofică (Philosophical Anthology)*, II, p. 81.

⁶⁸ Gh. Al. Cazan, *op. cit.*, p. 296.

⁶⁹ Gh. Vlăduțescu, *Filosofia în Roma antică (Philosophy in Ancient Rome)*. p. 173

customize⁷⁰, taking specific forms with an existential consistency. Under the action of the God – in the sense of the Demiurge – the primordial eternally stagnant matter thought by Zeno takes the form of the observable Universe; the Logos-fire completely impregnates the matter becoming intrinsic, from the inorganic world to the human soul, modulating and shaping it, making it clear along with the imprint of the divine rationales – the formative *logoi spermatikoi*⁷¹. The meaning of the creation is therefore of a demiurgic work because the act of creation itself presupposes axiomatically the existence of a preexisting, because the Stoics believe that “there must be something from which is created and then something that creates”⁷².

It is less important the detail that, intervening on the matter, the God-Demiurge, shaping the matter, makes it emerge the four constituent elements – defining substance of the Universe, fire, water, air and earth⁷³, these generating the observable diversity of the world⁷⁴, here the fire-element being, ontologically, something else than the fire – *logoç*, as decisive are the valence of the God’s seminal reason – *qeoc*, formative and harmonizing reason, as, thesis specific to Stoicism, whereby the divinity “bends” over the primordial matter, transferring part of its own rationality. Thus, instituted as ontologically individualized topic, the world “... is characterized by order”, an absolute order given by a superior rationality, which goes to the impossibility of risk, of chance⁷⁵, inducing a specific providentialism “... conatural to the stoic pantheism”. But it is not about pre-determining the course of the world consecutive to a specific theology, as it is the Calvinist predestination, but one with physical causality⁷⁶, generated by the founding fire, which imprints. In fact, Zeno considered that “destiny is a force that moves the matter”, that “is no different from providence” [*pronoia*], so that “all things of the world, the world as a whole, would come up with necessity, and it would perish with necessity”⁷⁷.

b) In these circumstances, the Universe takes on a double meaning, one grounded on its incontestable materiality, given by “... the orderly settlement of the celestial bodies”, the other one of god, as divinity “unborn and creative”, as “... living being, endowed with soul and reason”⁷⁸; as a single whole material, the Universe is unique, and also unique can not be the God Universe. Being alive

⁷⁰ G.W.H. Hegel, *Prelegeri de istorie a filosofiei (Lectures on the History of Philosophy)*, 2nd volume, p. 18.

⁷¹ Mircea Florian, *art. cit.*, p. 41.

⁷² Gh. Vlăduțescu, *Filosofia în Roma antică (Philosophy in Ancient Rome)*. p. 169.

⁷³ Diogenes Laertios, *op. cit.* VII, 136, p. 368.

⁷⁴ *Ibidem*, VII, 136-137, p. 368.

⁷⁵ Gh. Al. Cazan, *op. cit.*, p. 296.

⁷⁶ Gh. Vlăduțescu, *Filosofia în Roma antică (Philosophy in Ancient Rome)*. p. 178.

⁷⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 179.

⁷⁸ Gh. Al. Cazan, *op. cit.*, p. 296.

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when it's seen as a god, the universe has a soul – pneuma, and a body – soma, characterized by a perfect rationality which is “transferred” also upon its material acceptations, so that the world of Stoicism – geocentric and spherical bordered by the infinite and incorporeal void – is “... perfectly ordered – diakosmesic”. As a living organism, the world has not only reason, but also feeling, the universal soul being thus able to embed in itself the souls of all people: “... our souls are broken bits of the soul of the world”⁷⁹.

Basically, anticipating Spinoza, the Stoics believe that God and the universe are confused: “... everything is divinity and the divinity is all”, so that the transcendent itself is excluded from the gnosiological zenonian horizon: “... Divinity is not outside reality and in reality there is nothing that does not belong to the divinity”⁸⁰, the phenomena of the world – which the Stoics do not deny, on the contrary, philosophically value it as we shall see, not being at all in contradiction with the immutability of the God.

Seen thus the God of Stoicism seems contradictory in himself as long as, under the two acceptations, can be seen, for example, both as immutable – when we put in the first plan the deity, and also as transformable – when pre-eminent is the phenomenal world. Basically, the god seems to oscillate, obviously depending on the perspective under which is seen, between the absolute transcendence – when evading the phenomenality of the world – and the complete immanence, when we insist on the identity with the material world; But the god should not be seen under the appearance of this apparent duality, because this is not the authentic meaning of the Portico's thinking. For Zeno, transcendence and immanence are, like Spinoza across two millennia, simple unique facets of the same deity, His god *the whole* – to pan, the whole “... divided-undivided, born-unborn, mortal-immortal, Logos-eternity, father-son”, and not as a simple pair of opposition within unity (within the meaning of oriental philosophies), but as expressions of a single existence: “... all are one”⁸¹.

Being perfectly transformable, this Universe material will be subject, regularly and indefinitely, to what was called by the classical cosmology *cycles of the world*. The universe is an entity “... perishable, [which] first is dried by burning and then, again, is transformed into water”⁸², which is nothing but an assimilation of the cycle thought by Heraclitus of Ephesus; for him also, the Cosmos being caused by the fire – arce “... will return to the same fire, through a catastrophic

⁷⁹ Diogenes Laertios, *op. cit.* VII, 143, p. 370.

⁸⁰ Jeanne Hersch, *Mirarea filozofică. Istoria filozofiei europene (L'illusion philosophique)*, translated by Drăgan Vasile, Bucharest, Humanitas Publishing, 1997, p. 70.

⁸¹ *** *Antologie filosofică (Philosophical Anthology)*, I, p. 21.

⁸² Diogenes Laertios, *op. cit.* VII, 141, p. 369.

burning, in order to reappear afterwards, alike the destroyed world, and so on endlessly”⁸³. The primordial fire underlies cycles, it is their cause and finality. The Fire-God is what makes regularly the world to perish and die through what, in fact, founds it, and him alone, the Fire-Logos causes each destruction to be followed by a rebirth, the reconstruction of the world, its re-foundation from the same primary amorphous matter – the everlasting passive principle subjected equally eternal “to the effective action” of God⁸⁴. Learning the destruction of the world and recreating it periodically – because, as Seneca said, “precisely because it is under the leadership of divinity”, the world must “to be born, to grow and perish”⁸⁵, the Stoicism adheres once again to Heraclitus, that speaking of an “universal fire”⁸⁶, keeping for the fire-*logos* the purifying agent regular role, performing a cleansing, purification – katharsis, of the phenomenal world, which, thus, “takes it back to itself again”⁸⁷ re-encompassing it, to reborn then, in a cycle which is multiplied infinitely.

c) Diogenes Laertios surprised the main feature of the Stoic ontology, namely the dualism: “The Stoics claim that there are two principles in the universe, one active and one passive. The active principle is a substance without quality, that is the matter, while the the active is the immanent reason of this substance, that is the god, for he is eternal and is the maker of everything from the entire matter”⁸⁸. So, the thinking of the followers of Zeno was constructed around two coeternal “principles” – God and the matter, excluding strongly the Judeo-Christian thesis of the creation *ex nihilo* and coming implicitly in contradiction with Paul’s speech who will point it out explicitly in *Areopagus*: “*God that made the world and all things therein...*” (*Acts 17:24*).

In itself, the simultaneously theological and philosophical problem of the relation between God and the matter was addressed back in the early centuries of the Church, when, especially in dealing with the teaching on the eternity of the matter professed and propagated by the Stoicism opponent of Paul, was finally adopted the conclusion of the impossibility of their coexistence as simultaneously eternal and uncreated, the matter being considered as a product of creation, creation reserved exclusively to God and not to a lower deity, a demiurge – organizer of a reality to which actually he should belong.

⁸³ Mircea Florian, *art. cit.*, p. 41.

⁸⁴ G.W.H. Hegel, *Prelegeri de istorie a filosofiei (Lectures on the History of Philosophy)*, 2nd volume, p. 21.

⁸⁵ Gh. Vlăduțescu, *Filosofia în Roma antică (Philosophy in Ancient Rome)*. p. 179.

⁸⁶ *** *Antologie filosofică (Philosophical Anthology)*, I, p. 22.

⁸⁷ Wilhelm Windelband, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

⁸⁸ Diogenes Laertios, *op. cit.* VII, 134, p. 367.

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Thus, since 204/ 205, Tertullian (around 150-230) fought against his compatriot Hermogenes (*Adversus Hermogenem*), who, in stoic sense, asserted the eternity of the matter, which he considered “neither born nor created, existing, like God, since always”⁸⁹. From the same perspective, Lactantius (around 240-320) categorically stresses that “ God never needed a pre-existing matter to create the world”⁹⁰, while St. Dionysius of Alexandria (around 195-265), questioning himself – in the work *Against Sabelius* – about the relation between God and matter, concludes the impossibility of their coexistence from all eternity, be it only because, unlike God, the matter is sinner, changeable, fickle and transformable⁹¹.

In fact, the opposition between Judeo-Christianity and the philosophies of *Areopagus* is explicit as long as they omit precisely the fact that God is “... the beginning of existences, source of life”⁹²; the description of matter, hence the created world, of the creation itself, in terms of coexistence and co-eternity with God, serves only to limit the deity, to circumscribe and, finally, to assimilate it to the creature. If the universe is eternal and uncreated, the matter “... would be the only fatal essence of reality”⁹³, fatal because “... salvation of the world by God assumes its creation by God” and at the same time generator of an insolvent soteriological pessimism, as long as “the person who created it [the matter, the world] is not its superior [to the matter], can neither save it”⁹⁴. *The Holy Scripture and Holy Tradition* reveals undoubtedly the ontological distinction between Creator and creature.

⁸⁹ Tertullian, *Împotriva lui Hermoghenes (Against Hermoghenes)*, in *Tratate dogmatice și apologetice (Dogmatic and Apologetic Treaties)*, bilingual edition, Introductory study, translation and notes Dionisie Pîrvuloiu, Iași, Polirom Publishing, 2007, p. 322 a.s.o. In fact, the teaching of the Carthaginian painter was around 200, strikingly similar to the one that, between 1835-1840, was formulated by the Mormons; thus Tertullian described the matter of Hermoghenes as one that “... [Hermoghenes] takes to with God, unborn, alike uncreated, eternal counted as without beginning and without end [...]. God is unborn; is not the matter unborn also? God exists forever; what about the matter? Both are without beginning, both are endless, both of them are unmistakably creators of the universe, The One Who created as the one who was created. For we can not but count as a creator of all also the matter from which are all constituted”. Hermogenes’ explanation can be found included in the Mormon contemporaneity: “ In fact, he says, even by the fact that the matter has this quality, is maintained the authority and being of God, Who is the first and only Creator and is considered Lord of all” (Tertullian, *op. cit.*, V, 1, pp. 343-345).

⁹⁰ Fr. Prof PhD. Ioan G. Coman, *Patrologie (Patrology)*, volume II, Publishing House of the Mission and Bible Institute of the Romanian Orthodox Church.

⁹¹ *Ibidem*, vol. II, p. 411.

⁹² Sf. Vasile cel Mare, *Omiliile la Hexamaeron (Homilies on Hexamaeron)*, Omily I, II, (PSB 17), p. 73.

⁹³ Fr. Prof. PhD. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Teologia dogmatică ortodoxă (Treaty of Orthodox Dogmatic Theology)*, vol. I, p. 226-227.

⁹⁴ *Ibidem*.

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God "... is the existence cause of all others"⁹⁵. He is the Creator, free from any necessity, He is "... the uncreated and eternal Cause, equal to Himself [...], not subject to increase or decrease [...], from the hand of whom the time and place went out"⁹⁶. Matter is only one of the constituents of the created world, a result of the creation *ex nihilo*; the emergence of the matter in existence coincides with the emergence of time in which the matter subsists; So the matter does not possess the attribute of eternity, it "... is not an eternal substance, coexistent with God. For in this case it would be equal in eternity with God and both Him and it would limit each other, neither Him nor it having the completeness. In this case, God would not be better than it and it could no longer be saved from its absurd relativity"⁹⁷.

In fact, God is not bound / limited by a coeternal companion: "... God [...] does not need anything else, but He is selfsufficient and complete in Himself and all subsist in Him and rather He Himself gives to all people everything"⁹⁸.

Given these issues, we believe that understanding the matter as uncreated and coeternal with God, *Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* only subordinates to it the Godhead itself, this since the Mormon god, limited by the matter surrounding it and from which it comes, can not be the God from *John* 4:24 ("*God is a Spirit...*"), the infinite God (*I Kings* 8:27), omnipresent (*Psalms* 138:7-10) or almighty (*Isaiah* 40:6-7).

The Man and the Divinity

a) For the Stoics, the constant reporting to the divine was a common good, they being "... worshipers of the gods, for they know those proper to the gods, and piety is the science of serving the gods. They bring sacrifices to the gods [...] and the gods love them because they are holy and righteous to divinity"⁹⁹. Thus, "... they pray and ask good things from the gods"¹⁰⁰, being aware that the pantheistic idea does not free them in the least from the exercise of worship¹⁰¹, following Seneca's sentence: "I met many people righteous to men, but none to the gods"¹⁰².

⁹⁵ St. Justin Martyr and Philosopher, *Dialogul cu iudeul Tryfon* (original title - *Dialogue with Trypho*), 1st part, III (PSB 2), p. 122-123.

⁹⁶ St. Gregory of Nyssa, *Despre pruncii morți prematur* (*About Babies Deceased Prematurely*), Preliminarii (Preliminaries), (PSB 30), p. 415.

⁹⁷ Fr. Prof. PhD. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Teologia dogmatică ortodoxă* (*Treaty of Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*), vol. I, p. 232.

⁹⁸ St. Athanasius the Great, *Cuvânt împotriva elinilor* (*Word against Greeks*), XXVIII, (PSB 15), p. 60-61.

⁹⁹ Diogenes Laertios, *op. cit.*, VII, 119-120, p. 363.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibidem*, VII, 123, p. 364.

¹⁰¹ Jeanne Hersch, *Mirarea filozofică* (*L'illusion philosophique*), p. 71.

¹⁰² *** *Antologie filozofică* (*Philosophical Anthology*), II, p. 102.

However, although they do not deny that “Divinity is the basis of everything [...] as a condition of existence”¹⁰³ and they are unanimous in accepting that “divinity exerts over everything a sovereign and absolute empire”¹⁰⁴, the meaning in which the Stoics worship the divinity differs from that of Christians, because for them, the supreme value is the virtue – the value that puts the lives of individuals in accordance with the will of god. The Stoics claim that the genuine purpose of existence “achieving a life in harmony with nature”, that is “virtuous life” in itself, virtue seen as supreme duty – merely kathkon beyond anguish, waiting or mundane or eschatological hope: “We choose virtue, not because we are afraid, nor for hope, but for itself”, to be “... [in] harmony with the principle of the world”¹⁰⁵. Thus conceived, the virtue “... is sufficient for happiness”¹⁰⁶, giving the measure of what the Stoics mean by “... for we are also his offspring” (*Acts* 17:28), by that which gives man humanity, the one according to “... the offspring of God” (*Acts* 17:29).

Through the worship of god, the Stoics therefore refuse to expect the favorable and mutual response of divinity; Worship is not a bilateral act, but a one-way practice, from humans to God. Man does not expect god’s answer, does not ask to be heard and understood aware that he, the God, wants and can do it, but limits himself, perfectly valid from the perspective of his own thinking, to what to do, to live according to the order of the universe, with the laws of life drawn by God¹⁰⁷, so that “obedience to the law of the world is the ethical principle of Stoicism that precisely with this gets, from the very beginning, the religious image”¹⁰⁸. With the construction of an ethic based on reason, on the idea of cosmic order, the Stoicism would understand the human condition under the spectrum of austerity whose origins go down to the cynic Diogenes, therefore essentially of Greek descent, but speculated by the God¹⁰⁹, which reveals the oriental-Semitic influence brought by the system of the Phoenician Zeno.

The Stoic virtue, “the natural human goal”¹¹⁰ would identify all the time with “... the right reason which pervades all things” putting itself in direct connection with “... that Zeus leader who puts everything into order”¹¹¹, so that the authentic sage, who assimilates it for guidance, “... will not know anything for fear or fear,

¹⁰³ Jeanne Hersch, *Mirarea filozofică (L’illusion philosophique)*, p. 71.

¹⁰⁴ Ernest Stere, *op. cit.*, p. 185.

¹⁰⁵ Gh. Al. Cazan, *op. cit.*, p. 296-297.

¹⁰⁶ Wilhelm Windelband, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

¹⁰⁷ Gh. Al. Cazan, *op. cit.*, p. 293.

¹⁰⁸ Wilhelm Windelband, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

¹⁰⁹ Gh. Al. Cazan, *op. cit.*, p. 298.

¹¹⁰ Wilhelm Windelband, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

¹¹¹ Diogenes Laertios, *op. cit.* VII, 88, p. 354.

compassion and forgiveness”, being himself “master of his destiny”¹¹². Death itself will not disturb the wise, because “it is a law of nature”, a simple “... moment of life”¹¹³; ultimately, death will not have to disturb man more than the care to “give up passions”, which “distorts man, torments and disturbs him”¹¹⁴. Master at his own destiny – one that excludes eschatological expectation of life after death brought by “... *Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness*” (I Corinthians 1:23), the man of Stoic philosophy, concerned by virtue, its touch, and who, still taking part to the life of the *polis*, “... will lead the way of life of the Cynics”¹¹⁵, will be totally foreign to the idea of judgment for justice invoked by the apostle: “*Because [God] decided a day in which He shall judge the world in righteousness...*”. It appeared as extraneous and redundant as long as man can not escape destiny in any way – “way of the world”¹¹⁶ or even bizarre as it was for “... *that man whom [God] has ordained [...], that He has raised Him from the dead*” (Acts 17:31), so to one the Stoics could not perceive but as one of the people and, in addition, to one that would have risen, would have been made alive by re-attaching the soul and the body.

In this way, although admitted as perfectly comprehensible the interference of the god with the humanity, the Stoics could not conceive its status as supreme judge, attribute that comes in immediate continuation of the thesis on deity who saves humanity renewing its primordial ontological data and gifts. Putting together the ideas of – both Christian – judgment and resurrection, putting together the attributes of Judge and Saviour of his Christ, Paul targets the obstacles of the Stoic thought to reveal its stiffness in immanent, its refusal to operationalize the transcendence. He does it simultaneously announcing the new momentum brought to the theognosis by the incarnation of the Word – essence of the supernatural revelation, but preached by God to philosophy and not randomly, but in the most direct possible form, the Incarnation of his Son. Paul will bring to the Stoic philosophers and through them, to all philosophies, the message of the incarnation of the sacrifice and resurrection, “*winking at the times of this ignorance...*” (Acts 17:30), asking them to look further above, even if, in front of the mystery of God made man, “the admiration power of the human mind feels totally exceeded...”¹¹⁷. He called them, for they, thinkers of the Portico, “did not go beyond the limits of human type of existence”, understanding likeness to God not as an ontological perspective like

¹¹² Wilhelm Windelband, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

¹¹³ Ernest Stere, *op. cit.*, p. 185.

¹¹⁴ Gh. Al. Cazan, *op. cit.*, p. 297-298.

¹¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 298.

¹¹⁶ Wilhelm Windelband, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

¹¹⁷ Origen, *Despre principii* (original title - *On First Principles*), 2nd book, II, 6, (PSB 8), p. 142.

the Judeo-Christianity, but in terms of a simple model with archetypal value for the idea of perfection and improvement in the practice of virtues¹¹⁸, but limited to the role of a simple ethical ideal, located outside the being and turned into intrinsic value in absolute referential.

b) By practicing virtue, the Stoics considered that they fulfill their purpose of existence; the meaning of life – equivalent to acquiring a state of happiness, the crowning of the existence – is precisely the practice of virtue, simultaneous purpose and pragmatic means of individual perfection, “... that deserves to be chosen for itself, not from hope or fear or any other outer reason”¹¹⁹. Through virtue beyond any external conditioning, from any existential interrogation, or subjective anguish of introspection, man fulfills his destiny “living up to” nature – physis, made intelligible by the universal reason “from which flashes in us a spark – the human reason”¹²⁰. By practicing virtue, the Stoic man reaches the good; good basically identical with virtue, and by extension, with complete shunning of passions, ie individual happiness – the ultimate goal of life. All the necessary means to achieve that purpose are closely connected to man and, thus, perfectly accessible; knowing that, under the immutable universal lawfulness, he will lose, at some point, the body (through death), the stoic man sees his destiny fulfilled in his own existence. He “... is master of his life; he fights to plant more intellect and virtue in life, and in this fight lies the sublime greatness [...] of the Stoicism”¹²¹. Stoicism sees the essence of evil in vice, so outside man, outside his being. Therefore, man can overcome evil with his own power, by simply abstaining “... from what could violate nature, the universe, their laws or common laws for all things”¹²². In this way, good and evil are under man’s dominion, obeying his mere election. The Stoic man is connected to good and rejects evil by a common act of choice.

But Paul’s message of Christianity is quite different, because the source of Good comes from the absolute transcendent, surpassing the simple the idea of choice, the man being unable to relate to Good beyond its existential horizon but by means of another Man, a Man of superior ontological condition, a Man who, “... not being distinguished from us with nothing in what the being of this body regards”¹²³, was at the same time, God “... descended voluntarily [...] to people from His kindness”¹²⁴,

¹¹⁸ Ernest Stere, *op. cit.*, p. 183.

¹¹⁹ Diogenes Laertios, *op. cit.* VII, 89, p. 355.

¹²⁰ Mircea Florian, *art. cit.*, p. 41.

¹²¹ *Ibidem*.

¹²² Gh. Al. Cazan, *op. cit.*, p. 296-297.

¹²³ Eusebius of Caesarea, *Istoria Bisericească* (original title - *Historia Ecclesiastica*), cartea I, II, 23, (PSB 13), p. 36.

¹²⁴ St. Maximus the Confessor, *Epistole (Epistles)*, 1^a part, epistle 19, (PSB 81), p. 153-154.

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that is our Saviour Jesus Christ. What was needed was the *kenosis* of the Son of God because, by Fall, man lost his own humanity, which preserved the image of God in order to gain likeness. What was needed was the incarnation of the Saviour in an act of profound humility because, otherwise, man, even insisting on virtue and its practicing, would have remained isolated and far from God, unable to overcome the handicap created by the fall, to regain the purity of its original and, in fact, authentic image. Redemption through Incarnation and sacrifice is a deeply ontological act, for otherwise "... the perversity of men [...] could not destroyed"¹²⁵; to man had to be redone the image as a prerequisite for acquiring likeness, so that, by grace, everyone to revert co-fleshly – *susswmoi* with the Son incarnate (St. Athanasius the Great).

The philosophy of the Portico lacked the transcendence dimension, so that the deep meaning of salvation was incomprehensible to it. The Stoicism could not conceptualize a human nature, a humanity, able to beat its condition, even if this potentiality would be due to the god himself. Nothing could suggest such a becoming of the human nature, Nothing of the Stoic thought would allow certain expectations beyond the consecutive happiness of practicing the virtue.

Conclusion

Having said the above, it is revealed the truth of what Saint Evangelist Luke wrote: "*And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked [Paul]*". Not Christ – the divinity preached by Paul – not the creation of the world *ex nihilo*, not the fact that the God does not let himself circumscribed to the temple and not even the idea of judgment, provoked laughter on *Ares' Hill*, but the Resurrection – the theme *par excellence* of any Christian manifest.

The Resurrection that Paul preached to the *Areopagus* and that was enough to provoke the laughter of the Stoic philosophers, sent to the transcending of the human condition sufficiently relevant to confuse the thinkers. It, the Resurrection, assuming man's movement – body and soul – in a teocosmic distinct space, was, from a conceptual perspective, profoundly incompatible both with the pantheistic thesis, of the god-universe implied by Zeno and propagated by his followers, and with the Stoic ontology and anthropology, unable to place man outside their meanings on cosmic cycles stretched to infinity. In fact, the laughter of the Stoic philosophers – maybe, a natural reaction of the intellectual superiority of the Greek spirit in front of the non-rationalism of the Judeo-Christianity – came from their difficulty to understand the Man Christ under the spectrum, apparently antinomic, of the work through which He dies to kill death, which turns death into the triumph over

¹²⁵ St. Athanasius the Great, *Tratat despre întruparea Cuvântului și despre arătarea Lui nouă prin trup (The Incarnation of the Word of God)*, chap. 2, IX, (PSB 15), p. 100.

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death and puts His own death on the basis of life without death, for “*For since by man [Adam] came death, by man [Iisus Hristos] came also the resurrection of the dead*” (I *Corinthians* 15:21). In fact, a deity who dies – and more so one who dies to resurrect, foreshadowing then the way up of the man born of water and Spirit toward becoming, himself, a son of God – is totally incompatible with the deepest vein of the Stoicism (and, of course, of the Epicureanism), where the God stood ontologically, beyond the transitoriness of the life of the Earth beings. By dying, Christ could not have anything to do with the God of the Portico; being crucified, the man Christ could not have anything to do with the Resurrection, for no body can rise from the dead to retrieve his soul; thus, the death and resurrection of a god could not be for the Stoics philosophers (powerless in understanding how “... although He became dead as a man, He remained alive through the divine nature”¹²⁶), but totally unfounded assumptions, worthy to cause laughter.

The Hellenistic philosophers laughter, the laughter of the *Areopagus* is, maybe, symptomatic for the so tumultuous dialogue of theology with philosophy, report that, unlike the subsequent eras, in the first Christian century, completely excluded cohabitation, both denying the natural interactions at least until the point where the supernatural revelation made them incommunicable. Coming up with the prerogative of his huge intellectual foundations, the Greek philosophy could look but condescendingly the Christian discourse, Paul’s rebuke (“...*we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man’s device*” – *Acts* 17:29) being more offensive to those who had come, by the effort of reason alone, of thinking, to the indisputable truth of the uniqueness of the God.

In fact, when the laughter of the *Areopagus* is seen as a reaction-attitude of the philosophical spirit, we capture pertinently, we believe, the paradoxical human condition, one that, yearning after exceeding its limits, after the entirety of the divine image that impregnates it, is then confined in its own telluric conditionality, proving incapable of truly rediscover itself in the lack of support – quantified by divine revelations – from the one whose image looks for unconsciously.

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¹²⁶ Saint Cyril of Alexandria, *Glafire la Facere (Commentary on the Book of Genesis)*, 2, (PSB 39), p. 229.