

## Doctrinal Aspects in Evagrius Ponticus

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### Abstract:

The study presents succinctly the spiritual and intellectual portrait of the great philocalist writer Evagrius Pontic, making a brief presentation of some doctrinal aspects of his teaching about God, the Holy Trinity, man, cosmos, angels, demons, sin, etc., all of which define his spiritual doctrine.

### Keywords:

Evagrius, God, Holy Trinity, man, cosmos, angels, demons, sin, world.

### 1. Short intellectual and spiritual portrait of Evagrius

Evagrius was one of the outstanding figures of monasticism and Christian thought in the fourth patristic century. A complex personality, famous Egyptian ascetic and spiritual father of the second half of the fourth century, a disciple of two great ascetics: Macarius the Alexandrian and Macarius the Great, his life and work remain a milestone in the history of Christian thought and spirituality and “a continuous spiritual exercise”<sup>1</sup>.

There are four main sources on his life, namely: Palladius<sup>2</sup>, Socrates<sup>3</sup>, Sozomen<sup>4</sup> and Gennadius<sup>5</sup>, who present us the elements of a complex character, in

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<sup>1</sup> Evagrius Ponticus, *Tratatul practic. Gnosticul (The Gnostikos)*, Introduction, file, translation and comments by Cristian Bădiliță, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Polirom Publishing, Iași, 2003, p. 11.

<sup>2</sup> *Lausiaca History*, 86, PG 34: 1190-1197.

<sup>3</sup> *Church History*, IV, 23, PG 67: 510-522.

<sup>4</sup> *Church History*, VI, 30, PG 67: 1382-1387.

<sup>5</sup> *De scriptoribus ecclesiasticis*, 11, PL 58: 1066-1067.

which the fruits of the grace are in perfect harmony with that of an intellectual force and of an exceptional spiritual experience. The sources which they referred to confirm and complete each other. There are in them reference points and details that could be put together in a “spiritual novel”<sup>6</sup>, his early connections with the brilliant minds and holy hearts of the time in Pontus, Cappadocia and Constantinople and his well known ascetic settlements in the Egyptian desert, where he learned from so many and taught so many through his writings. His work, of deep spiritual and pan-Christian authority, made and still makes of Evagrius one of the most valued jewels of the Church and Christianity.

Evagrius was born into a priestly family, in 345-346, at Ibora in Pont, hence the nickname of Ponticus. As noted pertinently by Cristian Bădiliță, “his life has been like a stream – Whirling and cloudy until the last years, appeased and clear at the end – from North to South, from Pontus to Egypt, stream which brought with it not only good, but also not-good, not only spiritual pearls, but also much mud «worldly one»”<sup>7</sup>. His education began in the parental home, then goes to Caesarea, where – although young – is noticed by Saint Basil the Great, who ordains him into lecturer (psalm reader), where he serves and teaches until his father’s death and that of Saint Basil the Great (on the 1st of January 379)<sup>8</sup>. The first contact with the writings and the method of interpreting the Holy Scriptures practiced by the great Alexandrian theologian was produced at Annesi, through the two Cappadocians: Saint Basil the Great and Saint Gregory of Nazianzus. In a letter he thanks God and Saint Basil because he gave him “the Holy Schema” and he established him in the clergy<sup>9</sup>. It is certain that the young Evagrius grew under the spiritual wing of the great Cappadocians<sup>10</sup>. Thus, after the death of Saint Basil, Evagrius heads to Constantinople where not St. Gregory of Nyssa, as specified by Palladius, but Saint Gregory of Nazianzus receives him and ordains him deacon, and then an archdeacon, collaborating and training himself all the time under the guidance of the great Patriarch, who – after the statement of Sozomen – “would have trained him in Philosophy and educated in the sacred science”<sup>11</sup>.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Fr. Prof. PhD. Ioan G. Coman, *Patrology*, vol. III, Publishing House of the Bible and Mission Institute of the Romanian Orthodox Church, Bucharest, 1988, p. 431.

<sup>7</sup> Evagrius Ponticus, *Tratatul practic. Gnosticul (The Gnostikos)*, p. 11.

<sup>8</sup> Palladius, *Lausiaca History*, 86, PG 34: 1188C.

<sup>9</sup> W. Frankenberg, *Evagrius Ponticus*, 21, Berlin, 1912 (Syriac texts with retranslation into Greek), in Justin I. Moisescu, *ΕὐαγριοςὁΠοντικὸς. Βίος-συνγραμματα-διδασκαλία* (diss), Athens, 1937, p. 23, n. 1.

<sup>10</sup> See: Hieromonk Gabriel Bunge, *Evagrius Ponticus. O introducecere (Evagrius Ponticus. An Introduction)*, introductory study and translation: deac. Ioan I. Ică jr, Deisis Publishing, Sibiu, 1997.

<sup>11</sup> *Church History*, VI, 30, PG 67: 1384C.

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During this period, Evagrius imposed himself through a remarkable dialectical force in the fight against all heresies by an amazing breakthrough in his studies, through a special talent of speech, as well as through the beauty of his face and the elegance of his garments<sup>12</sup>.

After his resignation from the leadership of the Church from the imperial capital and from the office of President of the Second Ecumenical Council following the artificial scandal determined by the Egyptian bishops who arrived late in Constantinople, Saint Gregory entrusted Evagrius to his successor, Patriarch Nectarios<sup>13</sup>. We note the fact that St. Gregory the Theologian, in one of his letters<sup>14</sup>, shows his gratitude for his disciple's progress in the field of theology and philosophy studies. Gregory's great care towards his disciple is shown in his very *Will*, where he provided that, after his death, Evagrius should receive a shirt, a Sticharion, two Pallia and thirty gold coins<sup>15</sup>.

His exceptional talents and the happy circumstances seemed that will get Evagrius to a successful ecclesiastical career. Armed with brilliant rhetorical and dialectical attitudes, with a pleasing appearance, even with a certain striking vanity expressed by a sumptuous apparel, all these soon made him the darling of the capital. In this context, not coincidentally the wife of one of the prefects of Constantinople was smitten with the young archdeacon, and Evagrius, who throughout his life had to struggle with an extremely sensual temperament, did not remain unmoved. Nevertheless, he defended inwardly against a misstep which, in those circumstances, could have even cost his life<sup>16</sup>. The origin of this detail, which we do not find at Palladius, is uncertain. However, this threat would have provided a very plausible psychological background for the trauma Evagrius had on this occasion<sup>17</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>13</sup> Nectarios was elected by the Synod Fathers immediately as Patriarch of Constantinople after the resignation of Saint Gregory, in spite of being secular and completely devoid of any theological training. Highly versed in ecclesiastical and theological matters, Evagrie was indeed, according to the testimony of Palladius, *Lausiac History*, 38, PG 34: 1101-1102), very helpful to this in his disputes with the Arians still present. The fame of brilliant orator, gained for good reason, would soon become fatal (*Cf. Sozomen, Church History*, VI, 30, PG 67: 1384C).

<sup>14</sup> *Epistle 228, PG 37: 372*.

<sup>15</sup> *PG 37: 393*.

<sup>16</sup> Sozomen gives the detail that in his anger, the jealous husband of the matron had planned even a criminal attack on Evagrius (*Church History*, VI, 30, PG 67: 1384C).

<sup>17</sup> Cornered, Evagrius has one night a dream: He sees himself bound in chains in prison without being informed about the reason of his arrest. But his conscience tells him that behind this action lies the jealous prefect. He falls into a terrible fright, until an angel with the face of a friend appears, and he promises to release him if he swears he would leave immediately the city. Evagrie swears by Gospel... and wakes up. Such dreams often had great importance in antiquity. It is tempting to compare our episode with the famous nightmare of Jerome and his attitude completely different

Evagrius escaped from the trouble and, perhaps, death by fleeing. He fled to Jerusalem. What prompted him to make this choice we do not know, we can only assume<sup>18</sup>. First we note that he did not flee to his native Cappadocia, as we might have expected, nor to Saint Gregory of Nazianzus. Perhaps the shame for what happened may be the reason that prevented him to do so<sup>19</sup>.

In Jerusalem was – even from 373 – Melania the Younger, and from 380, also Rufinus<sup>20</sup>. He had close ties of piety and theological and ascetic concerns with this superior woman, especially since Melania<sup>21</sup> adopted all Origen's ideas, which enjoyed Evagrius, who sympathized so much the great Alexandrian and who witnessed and contributed to the formulation of the Origenistic Philokalia, since the time when he did his apprenticeship with Saints Basil the Great and Gregory of Nazianzus. Melania was a famous Roman noblewoman, who after the death of her husband sold her immense wealth and fled first to Egypt, where she spent some time near the monks from the desert Nitria, and later on to come to Jerusalem, where, on the Mount of Olives, with the help of Rufinus founded two monasteries: one for monks and one for nuns<sup>22</sup>.

Evagrius found in Rufinus and Melania not only two educated Romans, who remained attached to him by a faithful friendship all his life, but also two exceptional connoisseurs of the great writings of Origen<sup>23</sup>. So in Jerusalem Evagrius found himself in the company of fine spirits, as attested by several letters<sup>24</sup>.

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towards the oath from the dream (Cf. Gabriel Bunge, *Evagrius Ponticus. O introducere (Evagrius Ponticus. An Introduction)...*, p. 30-31; J.D. Kelly, *Jerome. His Life, Writings and Controversies*, London, 1975, p. 41).

<sup>18</sup> Jerusalem was even then a center of international pilgrimage, but this is not enough for Evagrius (for more info see: Socrates, *Church History*, IV, 23, PG 67: 516A).

<sup>19</sup> Gabriel Bunge, *Evagrius Ponticus. O introducere (Evagrius Ponticus. An Introduction)...*, p. 31.

<sup>20</sup> F.X. Murphy, *Rufinus of Aquileia (345-411). His Life and Works*, Washington D. C., 1945, p. 52 a.f.; D.J. Chitty, *The Desert a City. An Introduction to the Study of Egyptian and Palestinian Monasticism under the Christian Empire*, Oxford, 1966, p. 110.

<sup>21</sup> F.X. Murphy, *Melania the Elder. A Biographical Note, Traditio*, 5 (1947), p. 59-77, and N. Moine, *Melania, Recherches Augustiniennes*, 15 (1980), p. 3-79.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Evelyn Whyte, *The Monasteries of the Wādi `N Nātrun, Part II: The History of the Monasteries of Nitria and of Sketis*, New York, 1932, p. 75.

<sup>23</sup> Rufinus shall devote later years of his life translating the writings of Origen into Latin, thus contributing along with St. Jerome, to the salvation and conservation of this inexhaustible source of theological inspiration (Gabriel Bunge, *Evagrius Ponticus. O introducere (Evagrius Ponticus. An Introduction)...*, p. 32).

<sup>24</sup> See: *Epistles 5; 7; 10; 19; 22; 32; 36; 44; 49* (to Rufin) and *Epistles 1; 8; 31; 35; 37* (to Melania) [See: A. Guillaumont, *Le Corpus de 62 lettres d'Evagrie le Pontique*, AEHESR, 80 (1980-1981), p. 471-472].

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But here, in Jerusalem, our author barely escaped from danger, forgot, however, first of all, his good intentions and plans, returning to social life. He changed his clothes twice a day and clogged through dialectic in vainglory<sup>25</sup>.

Against this superficial and vain life he unexpectedly received another blow, a long illness, manifested by a persistent fever, in front of which the doctors were impotent, and which bedridden for six months and threatened to consume his whole body<sup>26</sup>.

Wise and with a great grasp of reality, Melania realized that this disease had no common causes, and discussing with Evagrius, he confessed that he had left Constantinople thinking to change his life and that until then had done nothing in this regard. Melania snatched him the promise to become a monk, then she prayed to God to heal him. Evagrius agreed and after a few days he was healed.

Thus, on Easter Sunday of the year 383, he newly healed receives from the hand of Rufinus the monastic robe. We do not know if his original intention was precisely to become a monk and, more than this, an anchorite. Definitely that the monastic ideal was familiar through St. Basil and St. Gregory of Nazianzus, but it is likely for him to have considered a form of asceticism more unconventional, like the one to which Gregory aspired all his life and in which he ended his life after the complete withdrawal from church dignities<sup>27</sup>.

Evagrius – fresh monk – immediately leaves Egypt and settles in the Mountains of Nitria, the cradle of monasticism, a real “Athos” of the ancient world<sup>28</sup>. Again it is hard to know what prompted him to make this choice. Theoretically, he could have lived as a monk in Palestine or even on the Mount of Olives. It is plausible that Melania should have recommended Egypt, whereas after the previous experiences of Evagrius, Jerusalem did not seem to be the very best place<sup>29</sup>.

The second part of his life, Evagrius lives it in Egypt – sixteen years, two in the Mountains of Nitria and fourteen in the Desert of Skete, in the so-called *Chelii* –, practicing a severe asceticism combined with prayer. Thus, he ate half of bread a day and a little oil, he did one hundred prayers a day and worked writing and copying manuscripts only for the cost of food. For fifteen years he purified his mind, being found worthy of the charism of knowledge, wisdom and discernment<sup>30</sup>.

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<sup>25</sup> Fr. Prof. PhD. Ioan G. Coman, *Patrology*, vol. 3, Publishing House of the Bible and Mission Institute of the Romanian Orthodox Church, Bucharest, 1988, p. 432.

<sup>26</sup> Palladius, *Lausiac History*, 38, PG 34: 1190-1192.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. P. Galaxy, *La vie de Saint Grégoire de Nazianze*, Lyon-Paris, 1943, p. 212.

<sup>28</sup> Palladius, *Lausiac History*, 86, PG 34: 1193D.

<sup>29</sup> We must mention that Melania did not send at all his protege in Egypt as in an exile, because from her visit to Egypt (373-374) and her fearless intervention for the bishops and monks exiled to Palestine in 375, she has, in the wilderness, a network of good friends and acquaintances, holy spirits (Evelyn White, *Monasteries...*, p. 75-83).

<sup>30</sup> Palladius, *Lausiac History*, 86, PG 34: 1194AB.

There, in the Mountains of Nitria, Evagrius met monks who were great admirers of Origen, many of whom were followers of *Didymus the Blind*, renowned scholar, then at the School in Alexandria. During the sixteen years in the wilderness, Evagrius had connections with famous monks, whom he investigated spiritually and from whom he learned the wisdom, as were the two Macarius and the Long Brothers. Evagrius related the diet of the body with the spiritual asceticism, first, through prayer and releasing from the influence of bodily and spiritual passions, following the perfection, that is, the state of following the perfection, that is, the state of un-sinfulness. The aim was “to master pride and contempt in such a manner that no even the one rightly praised to fill himself with pride nor the insulted unfairly to get angry receiving insults”<sup>31</sup>.

The boundless admiration and appreciation of Evagrius for Origen, who aimed so much the perfection, his contact with the minds of the bright anchorites and his lengthy reading and personal meditations also created for him a personal conscience in the field of asceticism and theology, for these are inseparable in the field of high spirituality. It has been rightly said that Evagrius “was a genuine Greek and a speculative mind, adoring and loving wisdom”<sup>32</sup>. To these was added the chance to be initiated in the Christian thought and life of the great “pillars” of the Church of that time, as the Saints Basil the Great and Gregory of Nazianzus, and of the great spiritual fathers, as Melania, Macarius the Alexandrian and Macarius the Great.

During his stay in Egypt, Evagrius completed his theological and philosophical formation. In addition to Origen’s work and of the great Cappadocians, Evagrius studied St. Athanasius, Serapion of Tmeris and Clement of Alexandria.

In Alexandria, where he came sometimes and discussed with the philosophers, Evagrius met Didymus the Blind, ardent supporter of Origen. It seems that the meetings with this Master have earned him irrevocably for Origenism. Around 391 comes in the wilderness Palladius, who becomes his admirer and disciple and probably, around this time he is visited by St. John Cassian with his friend, Gherman, coming from the East, namely from Scythia Minor through Palestine<sup>33</sup>.

An important aspect of the work of Evagrius in the wilderness was drafting his written work<sup>34</sup>, rich and interesting in terms of spirituality. Evagrius was the most prolific writer monk and full of ideas from the entire Egyptian desert.

<sup>31</sup> Sozomen, *Lausiatic History*, VI, 30, PG 67: 1384A.

<sup>32</sup> Justin Moisescu, *op.cit.*, p. 29.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 30-32.

<sup>34</sup> In the connection with his work see: Palladius, *Lausiatic History*, 86, PG 34: 1194B; Socrates, *Lausiatic History*, IV, 23, PG 87: 516AB, and Gennadius of Marseille, *De scriptoribus ecclesiasticis*, 11, in PL 58: 1066.

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Through this work Evagrius remained in the consciousness of the Church as the creator of monastic mysticism, from which was inspired the Christian monasticism from everywhere.

Heir of the great Alexandrians Clement and Origen, He highlighted under the new form of the spiritual *centuria*, the principles of a rigorous intellectualist mysticism. Evagrius is at the forefront of one of the greatest currents of Byzantine spirituality, on whose line are falling also St. John of the Ladder, St. Maximus the Confessor, St. Symeon the New Theologian and the hesychasts writers.

## 2. God – The Holy Trinity

Although he did not write special works of doctrine, or dogmatic, we find references to the great dogmatic themes strewn from one end to the other of his work. He points out that God is *One* and *Only*. He is simple and simple essence; He is love, a monad or henad, not in number but in nature<sup>35</sup>. It is also emphasized God's omnipresence and ubiquity: God is everywhere and in everything that is happening through His extremely varied wisdom. Before creating the rational nature, God dwelt in His own essence, but after creating this (rational) nature He made it His home. The act of creation brought no change in the divine nature. God dwells in all and unites them all. God's work reveals itself through bringing the graces together, especially within the rational and holy natures<sup>36</sup>.

God works in the world through His Power and Wisdom, that is through His Son and Holy Spirit, Who are uncreated. The Son and the Holy Spirit are signs through which are designed the Father's love and the exact image and the brightness of the being of the Father. As the mind works through the soul in the body, so God through His soul, that is through the Logos and the Holy Spirit, works in His body – *the mind*<sup>37</sup>. As a simple essence, The Holy Trinity is unchangeable, since in it does not enter any synthesis of qualities, of inferiority or superiority as in the creatures. Consisting of three Hypostases – Father, Son and Holy Spirit –

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<sup>35</sup> The term of "*henad*" does not appear as technical term in the writings of Evagrius. The two concepts extremely important are: a) *henas kai monas* – always on campus, which designates, according to a specialist in the Evagrian writings "*The Trinity in absolute and non-numerical unity of Its essence*" – and b) *monas* – "*the state of non-numerical unity between creation and the Creator*". For details and more clarifications, see: G. Bunge, "Hénade ou monade", *Le Mouséon*, 102 (1989), p. 69-91.

<sup>36</sup> Details in E. Contreras, "Evagrio Póntico: su vida, su obra, su doctrina", *Cuadernos Monásticos*, 11 (1986), pp. 83-93; N. Gendle, "Cappadocian Elements in the Mystical Theology of Evagrius Ponticus", *Studia Patristica*, 16 (1985), p. 373-384; M. O'Laughlin, "New questions Concerning the Origenism of Evagrius", *Origeniana Quinta*, Louvain, 1995, p. 528-534.

<sup>37</sup> *Epistola către Melania (Epistle to Melania)*, at Justin Moisescu, *op.cit.*, p. 105, n. 9.

The Holy Trinity does not mean three Gods, because she's not a triad of numbers. The Trinity is of a unique one, otherwise it would be preceded by double, and this followed by a third. The essence of the Holy Trinity is being characterized as unspeakable peace and quietness, without beginning and without end and which does not dwell in one place, but rather works in the rational soul, also known as the temple of the Holy Trinity and to which is revealed<sup>38</sup>.

God the Father is unique, simple and spring, and end of everything. He is the existential cause of both Son and Holy Spirit. He is the Father by grace of rational creature, to which He gave His own image. The Son is only-begotten and first-begotten through Whom are all. He is the king of rational nature. He shown Himself to the human race “*from existential knowledge and from un-bodily and bodily nature*”, and made Himself the teacher of knowledge about God for all rational nature, created on His likeness. God according to being the Son alone knows Christ. Out of love for us, the Son made Himself our Savior, descending to earth in the flesh consubstantial with our body and with soul from the nature of our souls, and He redeemed us, through His death, from sin. His crucifixion means killing the old man within us, cancellation of the condemnation and forgiveness to restore our lives<sup>39</sup>.

There was a time when the body of Christ was not, but there was no time when God the Logos would not have existed in Him. After His resurrection, His body became incorruptible and remains forever united with His divine essence. The Son is lesser than the Father, not in terms of the divinity, but the humanity, as He died, to save us from death and make us partakers of immortality<sup>40</sup>. His Power, the signs, the wonders and healings performed by Christ show Him as Creator. Before the Incarnation, He appeared to people in different forms, concerned about His creatures. The Holy Spirit is consubstantial with the Father and the Son and is called the finger and wisdom of God and “the source of holiness”. His holiness is not acquired, but rather existential. The Holy Spirit doesn't have a changing essence. Through the work of the Holy Spirit, God is perfects *His image in us*<sup>41</sup>.

Evagrius – when referring to the Holy Trinity – penalizes the Trinitarian here-sies: “To those who reproach us that the faith in the Trinity is *tritheism*... we tell them that we confess one God, not by number but by nature. Because everything is said to

<sup>38</sup> Justin Moisescu, *op.cit.*, p. 102-107.

<sup>39</sup> W. Frankenberg, *Evagrius Ponticus*, p. 387, la Justin Moisescu, *op.cit.*, p. 108, n. 9.

<sup>40</sup> For other aspects of the Evagrian Christology see the excellent study by F. Kline, “The Christology of Evagrius and the Parent System of Origen”, *Cistercian Studies*, 20 (1985), p. 155-183.

<sup>41</sup> Justin Moisescu, *op.cit.*, p. 108-109; J. Driscoll, *The Mind's Long Journey to the Holy Trinity. The “Ad monachos” of Evagrius Ponticus*, translation and with an introduction by J. Driscoll OBS, College-ville MI, 1993.



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be one by number, is not one in reality, nor simple by nature; But God is confessed by all to be simple and uncompounded. Therefore God is not one by number”<sup>42</sup>.

Evagrius also combats also the Aryan “slogans”, stating that “The Son is neither «*asemănător*», nor «*unlike*» the Father. Because the terms «*asemănător*» and «*unlike*» refer to qualities and the Divine lacks quality. Confessing thus the identity of the nature, we receive also the «*consubstantiality*», but we run also from composition, as the One that is by nature God and Father begat the One Who is according to being God and Son. Because from this is proved their «*consubstantiality*». Because He Who is God by being is consubstantial with the One Who is God by being”<sup>43</sup>.

### 3. Creation and Anthropology

“Evagrius the wise” – surnamed also “a philosopher in the wilderness”<sup>44</sup> – marked through his spiritual teaching the entire Christian spirituality in both the East and the West beyond denominational boundaries, that rightfully should be spoken about a “*evagrian spirituality*”<sup>45</sup>.

In connection with the creation, Evagrius states that God created the world in time as “mirror of divine goodness”, of the whole Holy Trinity. The world composed of rational beings, alike among themselves and united with God by grace, was created in time by the creator without beginning. He says the world is endless, as it is united with Him who has no beginning and no end. Everything is the work of the wisdom and will of God, Who takes care of His creatures, organizing everything and enjoying all. The world was created perfect as far as rational creatures can comprise, reason for which Evagrius calls those rational with the qualification of “*divine*” and “*gods*”<sup>46</sup>. It is necessary to mention that we can not talk about a pantheism, because God created the world – he says –, not of His own essence, but out of nothing, by grace<sup>47</sup>.

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<sup>42</sup> *Epistula fidei de S. Trinitate*, II, the epistle is fully translated after the Greek text edited by J. Gribomont, in hieromonk Gabriel Bunge, *Evagrius Ponticus. O introducecere (Evagrius Ponticus. An Introduction)*..., p. 193.

<sup>43</sup> *Epistula fidei de S. Trinitate*, III, in *Ibidem*, p. 196.

<sup>44</sup> See: A. Guillaumont, “Un philosophe au désert: Évagre le Pontique”, *Revue d’Histoire des Religions*, 184 (1982), p. 29-56.

<sup>45</sup> Irénée Hausherr has the merit of emphasizing this aspect in his numerous studies, among which we mention: “Contemplation. D’Evagre le Pontique”, in *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*, t. II, p. 1775-1785; *Hésychasme et prière*, (*Orientalia Christiana Analecta* 176), Rome, 1996 (collection of 15 previous studies); *Études de spiritualité orientale*, (*Orientalia Christiana Analecta* 183), Rome, 1996 (collection of 22 previous studies).

<sup>46</sup> Justin Moisescu, *op. cit.*, p. 110, n. 13.

<sup>47</sup> Although Evagrius speaks about “worlds” or “aeon” as parts of the existing world: world of angels, demons’ world, the human world or the earthly world and the spiritual world in the Kingdom

Like Origen, Evagrius also considers that the souls preexist. He believes that although the soul was created by God, he pre-existed the body, in which then it was put as in a prison being punished for sins committed before. In each of us, the intellect has its natural state from the beginning, meaning it is an intellect “divine”, “pure”, as the image of God, but without His simplicity and without another quality and power than that given by the Creator by grace. The created intellects, spiritual through their essence and nature, have received from God as similar accidental gifts from those of His essence. These are qualities and powers obtained, no skills or basic forces of the nature of rational creatures. This force is directed by the free will and perfected by God’s power. The free will has the initiative of modeling the soul. Thus, the choice of virtue or sin lies in our willingness. God’s providence goes in tandem with our free will. First and foremost charism given by God is the knowledge of the Holy Trinity, or the union with It, which is the aim of rational creatures<sup>48</sup>.

Influenced by Origen he believes that the intellects, pure and happy by knowing the Holy Monad, became immovable using the gifts of God and the free will became still. But this happiness was extinguished by introducing the evil in the rational creatures. Regarding the *evil*, Evagrius considers that it can not have an hypostasis, that is its own subsistence, as God has His own essence. Evagrius suggests that “everything that is able to know God, but prefers ignorance instead of knowledge, this is called evil”<sup>49</sup>.

Despite the fact that it is insubstantial, evil exists in the world. Evil is the negation of good, the opposite of the existing power, it is that which *does not exist*, whose power although we do not have in our nature, we receive it as beings. Thus, because of the littleness shown in knowing the Holy Trinity, the movement entered in the intellect, which *in the conception* of Evagrius represents the key element in the development of evil. In its negligence, the intellect (*noûs-ul*) turn its face from the Holy Monad and, through this, causes ignorance<sup>50</sup>.

This negligence has brought the lack of the gift of knowing God or the loss of natural seeds, which maintain in us the knowledge of God. The fall resulted in the loss only of those seeds of knowledge of the deity, not the others. The harmonious union of wills created by God perished, and the world with happy life vanished.

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of heaven, still it is not, at him, about several worlds or series of creatures. At first, through the word of God, those existing both bodily, and immaterial existed and none of them was older than the other.

<sup>48</sup> God created us “*in His own image*” (Genesis 1:27). The idea of heritage plays an important role in the theology of Evagrius (Cf. “Kephalia Gnostica”, I, 18; III, 72; IV, 9, in Hieromonk Gabriel Bunge, *Evagrius Ponticus. O introducecere (Evagrius Ponticus. An Introduction)*..., p. 234, n. 79).

<sup>49</sup> *Epistle 30*, at Justin Moisesescu, *op. cit.*, p. 115.

<sup>50</sup> *Centuria*, III, 36, at Justin Moisesescu, *op. cit.*, p. 117, n. 1.

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The creatures began to be farther or closer to God according to the variety of the usage of the free will by the rational beings. Thus arose the world defined by Evagrius “as an organization of nature, which consists of separate units and contains different rational beings according to the increase of knowing God”<sup>51</sup>.

Evagrius considers that death is “something against nature”. It is the greatest evil. Because of the inclination to death, the rational beings were divided into three categories: one possessed by life, another ruled by life and death and another that is just under the dominion of death. Another consequence of the fall was that rational beings have acquired a certain thickness (a material consistency) through the four elements and, especially, difference in quality. The bodies are articulated not through the matter itself (earth, water, air and fire), but by its energies<sup>52</sup>.

*a) Angels and demons*

*The angels* are removed from the knowledge of the Holy Trinity through movement. Arguing sometimes between them because of their unrest and negligence, each worked according to their free will. The angels do good from their own will, but they differ only according to each step from which they choose to do the good. The highest ranking of them is *the Holy Powers*, whose intellects are pure and full of true knowledge, with bright bodies. Another ranking is *the Angels*, formed from essence and holiness. Compared with men are immaterial natures, but still with quick and bright bodies. The angels lead people, take care of their life and their virtue, some they change through words, others they make wise through fear, others through dreams<sup>53</sup>.

*The demons* are the opposite of the angels. They are rational beings who fell from heaven and are unapproachable for God. Through the free will, thanks to movement, they not only fell from knowing God, putting away the angel ranking, but they adopted the opposite state. The demons have reached a perfect malice.

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<sup>51</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>52</sup> *Gnostic Problems*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Centuria, in Justin Moisescu, *op.cit.*, p. 117, n. 6.

<sup>53</sup> Justin Moisescu, *op. cit.*, pp. 118-119. Evagrius states that “*the monk becomes through prayer equal to the angels*” (*Despre rugăciune [On Prayer]*, 113, in *Filocalia românească [Romanian Philokalia]*, vol. I, p. 87 and Evagrius Ponticus, *Scrieri alese [Selected Writings]*, translation and notes: Radu Duma, Herald Publishing, Bucharest, p. 151). Behind the idea that angels are pure minds, people and demons being fallen minds, it is clearly a Platonic and Neo-Platonic influence. As demons attack the soul, so the angels defend the soul against them: “*We know that angels calls us to prayer and are present with us, enjoying and praying for us*” (*Despre rugăciune [On Prayer]*, 81, in *Filocalia românească [Romanian Philokalia]*, vol. I, p. 81; Evagrius Ponticus, *op. cit.*, p. 142). He adds, stating that “The angel of God showing himself, stops with the word only the hostile work within us and moves the light of mind towards the work without wandering” (*On Prayer*, 75, in Evagrius Ponticus, *op.cit.*, p. 142).

They speak words of piety, but do not know godliness, as they do not feed with the contemplation of those that are. The demons are led by wrath (*thymos*) to many evils. In a lesser amount anger is also in people and becomes the toughest cause of sins. Evagrius believes that there is no malice grater than wrath. The demon is nothing but a man troubled by anger. The demons do everything they can to attract man to evil and enjoy the diminishing of virtue<sup>54</sup>.

b) *Man*

Evagrius considers that people are the most rational beings intermediate between angels and demons. Being between the best and the worst, they are capable of both good, and bad, whereas after the fall, they did not attach neither to good, nor evil. Children are not attached perfectly neither to good nor bad; that is why people are intermediaries between angels and demons. Not that people have not sinned, because the removal from God is a wrong of all reasonable beings, but in the sense that by their own free will, they did not set themselves neither in evil, that is neither in the world of angels or in the demons' world<sup>55</sup>.

As a result of the fall, human nature has lost its unity and the spiritual powers were troubled. In the nature composed of intellect, lust and wrath, initially chaired the intellect, the leader of the soul. After the sin, however, and the turmoil brought by it, people were led by lust, in which man has become superior to all other rational creatures<sup>56</sup>.

The souls – said Evagrius – were attached the fleshy bodies or the weights of the qualities of the four elements of the matter. Thus, man is composed of soul and body, essentially different from one another, the souls being created initially as pure intellects by God, and the bodies from our parents. Virtue and vice come from the heart, because the body does not receive the knowledge of of good and evil. Evagrius believes that the most precious power of the soul is rationality as one involved in the wisdom of God. The intellect is the essence of man. Created as image of God, the intellect (*noûs-ul*) is unintelligible (*akataleptos*) and somewhat infinite compared to the power of people, because of its direct report with God. Just as the ratio between body and soul is, so is the relationship between God and His body<sup>57</sup>.

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Called out of envy and malice a “*twister of words*”, Evagrius composed during the seventeen years of his monastic life a tremendous amount of extremely

<sup>54</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 119-121.

<sup>55</sup> *Epistle 57*, la Justin Moisescu, *op.cit.*, p. 121, n. 6.

<sup>56</sup> *Epistle to Melania*, in Justin Moisescu, *op.cit.*, p. 122, n. 2.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 23, n. 6 and 7.

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varied writings. They range from the ascetic treaty for beginners, passing through “centuria” larger or smaller with different content, Scriptural comments and letters, till the great works consisting of *Kephalia Gnostica* and *Epistula dogmatica ad Melaniam*, written for those “*experimented*”.

Going through and analyzing the writings of Evagrius, is proven that he is an innate master of the word; especially in highly concentrated and pervading form of the “capita” or aphorisms representing the fundamental elements of the grouping of one hundred “centuria” – a literary genre that he initiated.

Evagrius, obviously, is a born writer and as such is of course an exception among his contemporaries, whereas only a few monks have a solid secular culture. Palladius tells us how Evagrius came to write. For fifteen years he first cleansed his mind of all passions, making himself worthy of the charisms of knowledge, wisdom and discernment of thoughts<sup>58</sup>. Thus Evagrius came to write not as a scholar but as a connoisseur and dweller.

**Translated in English by Ana-Monica Cojocarescu**

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<sup>58</sup> Palladius, *Lausiaca History*, 38, PG 34: 1190-1192.