

The Interdependency between the Destiny of Humankind and that of the Creation According to Romans 8: 18-23

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1. Preliminaries. The supreme reason and the creation's reason to be

One of the major questions that have always troubled man has been whether there was a relation between his own destiny and that of the creation, of the nature he lives in, or whether he had a responsibility in the process of the creation's advance towards reaching its telos. However the question may be formulated otherwise: is there a connection of interdependence between the man's destiny and that of the creation? The answer to these questions is obviously affirmative and strongly supported and motivated by the Holy Scriptures.

The basis of the solidarity between man's destiny and that of the creation is found in the Creator Logos, and later within the embodied Word of God. God has placed a sense and a reason of being within every reality, and the reasons of all things are closely connected to the supreme reason, the Word or Logos of the Father.

The author of the fourth Gospel clearly states that the world was created through the divine Logos, who is none other than the Son of God, Jesus Christ: "through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made" (Joh 1:3). In his epistle to the Colossians, St. Paul confesses the same thing: "For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him." (Col. 1:16).

Through this act of creation the entire created world received His seal as Son and Word of God, the seal of a filiation and reason from above¹. The man in particular was created after "the image of the Son and Word", Who is also the image of the Father, and the cosmic nature is a present and potential extension of the man as an image².

¹ Cf. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Chipul nemuritor al lui Dumnezeu*, vol.II, Bucuresti 1995, 52.

² Ibidem.

discover faster and clearer not only its exhaustless resources of senses, but also the fact that this is the point from which his responsibility towards it ensues, thing which finally amounts to the growing discovery of the senses of the entire world, and last but not least, of those of the human existence.⁶

Hence, the world's rationality is for the man and it climaxes with him. Using it knowingly, through a responsible reference to it from his status of "crown of the creation", the man rises to a life of spiritual communion and to acknowledging senses and purposes of creation which are a great deal higher to him⁷. Between these senses of the existence of the creation and the man's reason of being there is an interdependence of purpose and sense, which all eventually are identified with Christ, the supreme completion of all things and persons, the origin and final point of the whole creation, as their Alpha and Omega (Revelation 21,6; 22,13). He thus incorporates in Himself all the beings, restoring them to their eschatological orientation and finality⁸. Therefore, the unity of destiny of the entire creation and man's responsibility to its advance towards the purpose embedded in it by the Creator follow as a consequence of the presence of a reason common to all things.

2. The relation between man and nature from a Pauline perspective. The hope of the creation

The Christians of the early Church were deeply aware of the sufferings of their "present time", so it is not surprising to discover that the Church Fathers paid great attention to Romans 8:18-23. They genuinely wanted to leave the temporal sphere and be united with the eternal, and they looked forward to the day when the transitory would give way to the permanent, the shadow to the real. As to the pericope of Rom. 8:18-23, it seems to be an answer given to Christian hope which awaits a day when suffering and imperfection will end. The Apostle goes even further and states that the entire creation sighs for the deliverance from suffering. The Church Fathers were not of one mind about how to interpret "the creation waits with eager longing." Therefore, Apostle Paul seemed

⁶ A developing of these ideas, see St. Maxim Marturisorul, op. cit., 170-171.

⁷ Cf. Dumitru Staniloae, *Teologia Dogmatica Ortodoxa*, Bucuresti 1978, I, 345.

⁸ Olivier Clement, *Le Christ terre de vivants*, Coll. „Spiritualité Orientale”, Ed. Abbaye de Bellefontaine, Maine et Loire, 1976, 102.

to be personifying the *irrational creation*,⁹ as it happens in the Old Testament. Other exegetes thought that the Apostle was referring only to the rational creatures, since they alone would benefit from the revealing of the sons of God. As for the Church Fathers, some of them viewed creation as *human creation*, while others viewed the “*whole creation*” as the *natural order* grieving over sin, groaning by analogy with human groaning.¹⁰ The difficulty which the patristic exegesis encountered was linked to the interpretation of the word “ματαιότης” (8:20), which according to certain Fathers would refer to *sin*, according to others to *death*, or to others to the *corruption* or the *futility* which are present within creation. That which traverses the whole of the patristic conception of this interpretation is the fact that the corruption in its essence is only temporary and that at Christ’s Second Advent, when He will reveal Himself completely, in His divine-human person’s wholeness, every imperfection in the creation will disappear in the overwhelming perfection of the eternity.

The classic text in which the Apostle Paul speaks of the “sigh” of the creation and of the relation between man and surrounding nature is the one in the pericope mentioned above - Romans 8:18-23: “¹⁸ For I consider that the sufferings (τ | παq»mata/) of this present time (toâ nân ka...rou) are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. ¹⁹ For the creation waits with eager longing (¹ g|r ϕpokarad...a τÁj kt...sewj) for the revealing of the sons of God. ²⁰ For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope ²¹ that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. ²² For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. ²³ And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, *the redemption of our bodies*”.

The paragraph is introduced by the verse 18 which defines the theme of the entire pericope 8:18-23, namely „the present suffering and the future glory of the man and of all

⁹ Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistle to the Romans*, in “*A select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*”, Translations of the Writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325, Logos Roman Catholic Edition, Containing Only the Words of the Fathers and Translator’s Notes compiled from the American Reprint of the Edinburgh Edition, Vol. XI, 595, note 1424.

¹⁰ Cf. *ROMANS*, in “*Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture*”, New Testament, VI, Edited by Gerald Bray, Intervarsity Press, Downers Grove, Illinois, SUA, 1998, 596.

creation, or the interdependency between the man's destiny and the one of the creation": "For I consider that the sufferings (τῶν παρῶντα) of this present time (τοῦ νῦν καιροῦ) are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us". Here the Apostle Paul contrasts the sufferings of this time with the future glory. Iosif Olariu¹¹ believes that the future glory can be understood as referring to the state of the spiritualized body which will be revealed by God's Parousia, and which will be manifested as opposing the present state, one marked with the passions and the sufferings of a body submitted to decay.¹² The eschatological future containing the perspective of the glory does not bear comparison to the imperfections of the present time. The Apostle clarifies as nowhere else in his writings the meaning he yields to the word *doxa*: the absolute transcendence of an event which will be revealed to us and which we will witness; it will be the perfect revelation of God's transcendence in its last ultimate manifestation towards His creation. As Christians, we have God's glory in us and we experience "the first fruits" (8, 23), though His glory is not yet fully revealed. Making a comment on the Apostle's statement referring to the future glory, St. John Chrysostom says: "*For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared*» and he does not say, with the rest that is to come, but what is much greater, *«with the glory which is to come»*. For it does not follow, that where rest is, there is glory; but that where glory is, there is rest, does follow: then as he had said that it is to come, he shows that it already is. For he does not say, that which is to be, but *«which shall be revealed in us»*, as if already existing but unrevealed. As also in another place he said in clearer words, *«our life is hidden with Christ in God»*. (Col. 3: 3.4).¹³

In the Orthodox Church the icon of the Incarnation of the Son of God (Blessed Mary and her Child) is placed on the left side of the altar. The icon of Christ as a Ruler

¹¹ Romanian exegete (1859-1920), the author of one of the first Romanian commentaries of the Epistle to the Romans. (Cf. Iosif Olariu, *Epistolele Sf. Apostol Pavel catre Romani, I Corinteni, Galateni și Efezenii*, Caransebes 1910, 121).

¹² Vasile Gheorghiu, Romanian exegete (1872-1959), the author of a good commentary of the Epistle to the Romans, understands the glory to which St. Paul refers to as materialized within the same event, God's Parousia (*Epistola catre Romani, cu introducerea și comentariu scurt*, Cernauti 1923, 64-65). See also an emphasis of this idea in Heinrich Schlier, *Der Römerbrief*, Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament, Band VI, Freiburg-Basel-Wien, 1977, 257: „Aber all dies, sagt Paulus, bedeutet nichts, ist nicht vergleichbar an Gewicht und Tiefe mit der Glorie des Eschaton, der Glorie Gottes in Jesus Christus, die auch die unsere sein wird“.

¹³ Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistle to the Romans*, 596.

on the throne in glory is on the right. We are thereby taught that we live in a tension between our present and future experience of the Kingdom. We live between Christ's first and His Second Coming.

The term **τὴ παq»mata** refers to all kind of suffering (disease, unfulfillment, catastrophe, persecution for Christ's sake, etc.)¹⁴ suffering that applies to the entire creation acquiescent to sin and death¹⁵. For the Christians these afflictions gain value, if compared to the future glory, only if they are endured in Christ and with Christ. The previous verse is explanatory to this meaning: "... Heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with Him in order that we may also be glorified with Him (sump£scomen tna ka^ sundoxasqîmen)". Therefore, suffering and glory are associated, only if related to Christ. In other words, St. Paul the Apostle understands suffering as a meaning of salvation only if it is related to the hope of getting beyond it in Christ. From this point of view, the future glory appears as the mirror or the reflection of the beginning of the relationship with Christ, in the present time (toâ nân ka...rou), also expressed in the suffering endured with the hope of surpassing them through His power and His authority. The present time (nân ka...rou) is the time of relationship with Christ between His first and second coming. Following this point of view, Heinrich Schlier correctly states in his commentary: „Die Gegenwart – und das ist für ihn (Apostle) die Zeit zwischen Jesu Christi Sterben und Auferstehen einerseits und seiner offenbaren Ankunft in Herrlichkeit – ist voller Leiden. Die Gegenwart ist die „Jetzt-Zeit“ von Röm 3:21.26; 5:9.11; 6:21; 7:6 und weiter 11:30.31; 13:11. Sie ist der durch das Heilgeschehen in Jesus Christus characterisierte jetzige Äon (Ð nân a,,èn I Tim 6:17; II Tim 4:10; Tit 2:12); dieser Äon dem der a,,èn mšllwn entgegengesetzt ist; der Äon, dem mit Christus das Ende begegnet ist (I Cor 10:11) und der, immer wieder vor dieses sein Ende im Evangelium gestellt, bis in die Tiefe seiner Selbstbehauptung aufgestört wird.”¹⁶

¹⁴ Ibidem.

¹⁵ Cf. *Romans*, The International Bible Commentary (An Ecumenical Commentary for the Twenty-First Century), Editor William R. Farmer, New Delhi 1998, 1662.

¹⁶ *Der Römerbrief*, 257.

From this point of view, the suffering itself already involves, anticipatively, the icon of the future glory which is seen as a reward reserved for those who suffered with Christ (*sump£scomen*) (I Pt 1, 4-5)¹⁷.

But the interdependence between man and the physical creation (in which he lives, as a part of it) is also defined by the conviction adjudgment against Adam, after the original sin: “And to Adam he said, 'Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, «You shall not eat of it», cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return'." (Gen. 3:17-19).

The curse against the ground shouldn't be seen as a punishment from God, but as a more prominent testimony man's breaking from a certain type of relationship with the creation – a relationship which, until the sin occurred, had meant delight, as God was continuously reflecting Himself in the creative act of His love - and his reaching of a different relationship with it, one defined from now on more by the reflection of sin and its constant recall. This will be the meaning of the toil and effort in which man will work the earth that he had been named master of, but now became its servant.

In the Epistle to the Romans, St. Paul the Apostle proves that the relationship between man and nature also has the features of a reality with the relevance of a *future event*, when related, first and foremost, to God's redemptory plan for the world. To this meaning, the Apostle states that creation (*kt...sij*) is waiting with an ardent longing for the revealing of the sons of God: “For the creation waits in eager expectation (¹ *g|r* *¢pokarad...a tÁj kt...sewj*) for the sons of God to be revealed” (8:19).

As for the meaning of the word *kt...sij* in the Pauline thought, the opinions of the exegetes are divided. Some believe that man should be included here; others think that the Apostle was implying only the animated creation, except for the man; others

¹⁷ See Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, (The New International Commentary), Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1996, 512.

believe that the Apostle means the whole creation - animated and unanimated - suffering the consequences of sin¹⁸.

If on the one hand we take into account the fact that the transition from verse 22 to verse 23 where St. Paul uses the expression “we ourselves”, plainly excludes Christians from the scope of creation in 8:19-22 and, on the other hand, Paul’s insistence in 8:20 that the “vanity” to which this creation was subjected was not of its own choice appears to exclude all people, not just Christians. According to the modern commentators it might state that here the term “creation” denotes the “subhuman” creation.¹⁹ It seems here that Apostle Paul, like the psalmists and prophets who pictured hills, meadows and valleys “shouting and singing together of joy” (Ps 65:12-13) and the earth “mourning” (Isa. 24: 4; Jer. 4:28; 12:4), personifies the subhuman creation in order to convey to his readers a sense of the cosmic significance of both humanity’s fall into sin and the believers’ restoration to glory.²⁰ St. John Chrysostom explains this aspect in the following words: “And so his discourse becomes more emphatic, and he personifies this whole world as the prophets also do, when they introduce the floods clapping their hands, and little hills leaping, and mountains skipping, not that we are to fancy them alive, or ascribe any reasoning power to them, but that we may learn the greatness of the blessings, so great as to reach even to things without sense also.”²¹

The term ἀποκαραδοκία is used only once in the New Testament (Phil. 1:20 – “my eager expectation”) and it is the statement of a hope which awaits for something, an unappeased pining for something that is due to happen, an impatient awaiting with one’s eyes looking up high.²² According to the Apostle, the thing after which the whole being yearns for, waiting to be its possessor is “*the revealing of the sons of God*” (8:19). The verb ἀπεκδέχομαι which means “to expect”, is used seven times in the New Testament (Rom. 8:19.23.25; I Cor. 1:7; Gal. 5:5; Phil.3:20; Heb. 9: 28; I Pt. 3: 20) and each time it

¹⁸ See more details in this sense, A. Schlatter, N. Walter, *Gottes Zorn und das „Harren der Kreatur“: Zur Korrespondenz zwischen Römer 1,18-32 und 8,19-22*, in „Christus Bezeugen: Für Wolfgang Trilling (Ed. K. Kertelge, T. Holtz and C.P.März; Freiburg-Basel-Wien; Herder 1990, 220-223; Douglas J. Moo, op.cit., 513-514; Heinrich Schlier, op. cit., 259.

¹⁹ κτ...σις occurs with this meaning in Wisdom of Solomon 2:6; 5:17; 16:24; 19:6.

²⁰ More details on this subject, see P. Stuhlmacher, *Erwägungen zum ontologischen Charakter des kainê kt...σις bei Paulus*, in EvT 27, 1967, 10-20.

²¹ Chrysostom, *Homelies*, 597.

²² See Gerhard Delling, *Apokarad...a*, in Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament, Band I, Stuttgart-Berlin-Köln, 392

is used it refers to Christ's Second Advent and to the eschatological expectations of the Christians.²³

The expression "*the revealing of the sons of God*" does not only refer to a future eschatological act but also to a permanent and dynamic manifestation of the Christians as children of God here, on earth, through the deeds which must confirm this status. The forms through which a Christian manifests himself in his deeds are an active presence and influence on the entire creation and it is towards this state that the entire creation always longs for. But, the complete revelation of this status of the Christian will take place on the Day of God's Judgment. From the perspective this vision offers, the act of the revelation of the Christian as children of God presents itself as a continuous, dynamic process that has two different phases: an *incomplete* one – on earth, and a *complete/plenary* one – in the Eschaton.²⁴

Thus, the plenary revelation of the children of God will take place at Our Savior's second coming when, according to the Apostle they will take part in His glory (cf. Rom 8:18; Col 1:27; 3:4; Heb 2:10), being transformed in an instant from the state of perishable, transient matter into an unspoiled, immortal one (Rom 8: 23; I Thes 4: 17). Therefore, as son of God, man will show himself as perfect only then, when, on the Day of God's Judgment, he together with the entire creation will be overwhelmed and filled with the eternal glory of the time of the Eschaton. Therefore, „the revelation of which Paul speaks is not only a disclosure of what we have always been but also a dynamic process by which the status we now have in preliminary form and in hiddenness will be brought to its final stage and made publicly evident”.²⁵ That will also be the moment in which the truth will be revealed, the truth according to which the destiny of the being, of the creation is closely connected to the destiny of man; thus, making the reason for which it awaits so impatiently, so anxious the revelation of the man's glory as son of God, unexplainable.

An additional modulation of the motif of this expectation is presented in verse 20 where it is shown that “the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of

²³ Cf. *Comentariu al Noului Testament*, Editori: John F. Walvoord, Roy B. Zuck, Ed. Multimedia, Arad, 2005, 464.

²⁴ See Douglas J. Moo, op. cit., 515.

²⁵ Ibidem.

him who subjected it, in hope ...” The Greek word *mataiòthj* (futility, weakness, lack of purpose, etc; Cf. Eph 4: 17, II Pt 2: 18) describes the change and the “decay” (Rom 8: 21) which affects all things, the entire nature, but independently from its will or reason of being.²⁶

As far as the meaning of the phrase “*but because of him who subjected it*” (ϕ111 | di | tōn øpotfxata) is concerned, the opinions of the scholars are divided when they must say who the person that the Apostle had in mind was when he was speaking of “*who*” *subjected it* - tōn øpotfxata. Some scholars think that by “*who*” we must understand Adam²⁷ whose sin brought a curse upon nature. St. John Chrysostom believes that by “*who*”, the one that subjected the created being to decay, we must understand Adam, or man, in general. To this respect he asks himself: “What is the meaning of «the creation was made subject to vanity?» Why that it became corruptible. For what cause and on what account? On account of thee, O man. For since thou hast taken a body mortal and liable to suffering, the earth too hath received a curse, and brought forth thorns and thistles”.²⁸ Some scholars think that it might refer to Satan²⁹, the one who played the decisive part in the fall of our Forefathers, and others think that through “*who*” we must understand God³⁰, He Who, through the way in which He judged Adam’s sin, he defined the being’s path. Most biblical scholars opt for the third opinion, in the sense that only God, the author of the creation, could have decided the consequences of the original sin on his work. The passive form of the aorist øpetfgh – has been subjected – (Rom 8: 20) justifies this interpretation especially if we corroborate it with the text from I Cor 15:27 where Paul the Apostle, quoting from Psalms 8:6, says: “For he «has put everything under his feet»”. It is clear that in this text the Apostle refers to God.³¹

²⁶ Ibidem.

²⁷ Cf. G.W.H. Lampe, *The New Testament Doctrine of Ktisis*, in SJT 17, 1964, 458.

²⁸ Chrysostom, *Homilies*, 597.

²⁹ See Iosif Olariu, *Epistolele Sf. Ap.Pavel...*, 123; Douglas J. Moo, *op. cit.*, 515;

³⁰ Ibidem, 516. See also John R. W. Stott, *Epistola lui Pavel către Romani*, Ed. Logos, Cluj-Napoca, 2000, 265-266.

³¹ The difficulty of the interpretation of the expression ϕ111 | di | tōn øpotfxata resides in a problem of grammar. The Apostle never uses the preposition d^a with an Accusative, which would presuppose that the person to which it refers is not the author of the action of “putting” – such as God is – but he reason for this action. However, this might be case in which the preposition d^a with an Accusative means the same thing as if it were used with a Genitive (Cf. Joh 6:57). It is probable that the Apostle wanted to underline God’s decree as a cause for “obedience”. In any case, the grammatical matter cannot be superposed with the strength

According to Nichita Stethatos' point of view, by creating the man in the likeness of the King of all times, God made man "king of the creation" and "made him have within himself the reasons for and the knowledge of all there is."³²

Prior to the fall, the universe was united in a relationship with the human being; nature following its course through the motion of matter towards the purpose for which it had been created. It was also spiritual through man. But, Adam's trespass of the commandment made the motion of the matter go out of track and become less attracted to the spirit. Hence, in the fall of man there is also a fall of the nature.³³ The original sin created a breach in the harmony of the universe, not only changing the place of all things that were "set within Him", but also deforming the normal relationships in which they had found themselves until then. The disobedience of man led to the disobedience of all those which were under his control. There was something very close to a mutiny at the genetic level of the created being. Nature refuses to subject itself to the man in whom it does not see anymore or it does not perceive anymore the one who was supposed to bring it to an existence marked by a permanent perfection. Thus, the hope of the Prophet Isaiah in the instauration of a messianic era in which "the wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together; and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze; their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play over the hole of the cobra, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den. They shall not hurt or destroy in my entire holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea!" (11: 6-9) is based upon a profound tragedy of the creature with deep biblical implications. It is the mysterious sigh of the being that yearns after its original state.

Still, the submission was done "with (in) hope" - *in* TMf' TMlp...di -³⁴, that is, with the anticipation of a future day when "the frustration" will be removed (Rom 8:24-25). Referring to the Apostle's phrase - *in* TMf' TMlp...di -, St. John Chrysostom said: "And now say in what hope? What have you to say? He means. It was evil entreated for thy

of the logical and theological arguments. (See Douglas J. Moo, *op. cit.*, 516).

³² See Panayotis Nellas, *Omul, animal indumnezeit*, Ed. Deisis, Sibiu 2000, 117.

³³ Ibidem, 117-118

³⁴ The translation of the preposition *in* TMf' with « in » is justified because it denotes "the condition" in which God's action took place.

sake, and became corruptible; yet it has had no wrong done it. For incorruptible will it for thy sake again. This then is the meaning of «in hope». But when he says, it was «not willingly» that it was made subject, it is not to show that it is possessed of judgment that he says so, but that you may learn that the whole is brought about by Christ's care, and this is no achievement of its own".³⁵ It is probable that the Apostle had in mind, when he spoke about *hope*, the primary Gospel/ Protevangelion or the first good news that was brought to our forefathers when they were promised a Savior who will redeem them from their sin and from its consequences (Gen 3:15). Thus, even if the creation had been subjected to decay through the original sin, there has not been a single moment in its history when it did not have the hope of redemption and this due to the fact that its sentencing was done, still, within the boundaries of hope.³⁶ Viewed from this perspective, the 20th verse: "For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope" becomes the "pivot" of the Apostle's arguments in the entire passage (8: 19-23), because he goes now from the "explanation" of the reason for which the creation must not be seen as lacking hope to the nature of this hope and to its relationship to "the revelation of the children of God" (8 :19). When God's plan to redeem the world will be completed and the children of God will be given the possibility to experiment together with the glorious freedom in front of the sin, and the liberation from Satan and from physical decay, then the creation will be redeemed from the bondage of decay: "that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God" (8:21). Referring to what must be understood through the content of the "decayness" to which the creation had been subjected, Origen asked himself: „What is this futility to which the creation is said to be subject? It seems to me that this is said about the material and corruptible substance of the body".³⁷

With respect to this aspect, St. John Chrysostom said: „Now what is this creation? Not thyself alone, but that also which is thy inferior, and partakes not of reason or sense, this too shall be a sharer in thy blessings. For «it shall be freed» he says, «from the bondage of corruption» that is, it shall no longer be corruptible, but shall go along with

³⁵ Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistle to the Romans*, 598.

³⁶ Cf. Douglas Moo, op. cit., 516.

³⁷ Cf. *Romans*, in „Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture", 224.

the beauty given to thy body; just as when this became corruptible, that became corruptible also; so now it is made incorruptible, that also shall follow it too.³⁸ In his attempt to argue this idea, Chrysostom affirms: “For as a nurse who is bringing up a king’s child, when he has come to his father’s power, does she enjoy the good things along with him, thus also is the creation, he means”. Continuing the same idea he states: “Thus men (father n.n.) also when a son is to appear at his coming to a dignity, clothe even the servants with a brighter garment, to the glory of the son; so will God also clothe the creature with incorruption for the glorious liberty of the children”.³⁹ Thus, the content of the hope about which the Apostle speaks is the liberation of the being from the bondage of decay so that it might also rejoice in the freedom of the glory of the children of God. Heinrich Schlier correctly understands this redemption of the being from the bondage to decay as signifying „die Freiheit der eschatologischen δόξα sein, die absolute dessen, der in der Macht und dem Glanz der Gegenwart Gottes und des erhöhten Kyrios sein Leben empfängt. Es wird die Freiheit des Lebens sein, das im Anblick und durch den Anblick der Erscheinung Gottes im Angesicht Christi lebt”⁴⁰.

Having its original point in that biblical „*beginning*”, the world traverses through the human being the path of initiation in history, guided by the target in which it finds its great transfiguration.

God’s curse of the physical creation in the moment of the fall of man into sin must be understood as an anticipatory part of the Judgment and of man’s punishment for his transgression and, that is, due to his position and authority over the creation, meaning that he is its master, dignity which he had acquired from God (Gen.1:26-30; 2:8.15).

In a similar manner, considering the fact that God’s plan of redemption for the human being has as ultimate purpose the creation of a new being (II Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15), the physical world will be recreated (Rev 21:5). This will happen in two stages:

1. the restoration of the universe in connection to the second coming of the Lord and the establishment of the messianic kingdom on earth (Isa 11:5-9; 35:1-2.5-7; 65:20.25; Amos 9:13).

³⁸ Chrysostom, *Homilies*, 598.

³⁹ *Ibidem*

⁴⁰ *Der Römer*, 262.

2. the creation of a “*new heaven and a new earth*” (Rev 21:1; II Pe 3:7-13).⁴¹

However, the idea of the interdependence between the destiny of man and that of the physical creation is underlined more strikingly by the Apostle in the 22nd and 23rd verses, where it is said: “For we know (οἰδμεν ὅτι) that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies”.

The Greek expression οἰδμεν indicates a state of *uninterrupted knowledge based on an act of faith* in which we perceive the pulse of the creation and we relate to it (cf. Rom 2:2; 3:19; 7:14; 8:29): to this day the entire creation sighs and endures a labor, namely the one of the world’s rebirth, of the constant ascent towards complete spiritualization through *epectasis*. In the Jewish apocalyptic literature, the sufferings that afflicted Israel were frequently named “*Messiah’s lamentations*” or “*the birth pains of Messiah’s time*”. That is to say, they were seen as the painful overture of Messiah’s victorious arrival⁴². Jesus Himself used the same expression in His apocalyptic discourse when He spoke of the false teachers, wars, famine and earthquakes as “*the beginning of birth’s sufferance*” (NIV) or “*birth pains of the new era*”, meaning the preceding signs of His Advent (Mt.24:8; Mc.13:8; Joh.16:20 ff.). In fact, verse 22 joins together past, present and future, as it does not say that the present creation groans only now, but that it does so “until now”, meaning continuously from the past to this instant. And because its groans are those of labor, they are the expectation of the arrival of a new spiritual order⁴³.

However, the presence of the preposition *σύν* – together, in the syntagm “*the whole creation groans in pain together*” is not to be understood as referring to Christians, who are specifically mentioned in verse 23, but to different parts of nature which are solidary with one another as well as with the human, in fall no less than in rising⁴⁴. The entire creation pertains to an immense symphony because every reality shares with all the others a common destiny and because of its Creator’s oneness. At the same time, verse 22 introduces this new paragraph which displays the hope of a future deliverance from

⁴¹ See *Comentariu al Noului Testament*, 464.

⁴² Cf. John R. W. Stott, op. cit. 268.

⁴³ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*, 465.

the sufferings that have sprung from the curse of the sin. Actually, this section referring to “*the sufferings of this present time*” is opened by the Apostle with verse 18: “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us”.

As to the Christians, Paul the Apostle says that they also groan inwardly, awaiting the adoption even though they have “the firstfruits of the Spirit”. This expression is a genitive used as an apposition and it means that the first fruits of the process of adoption, namely of renewal, are bore by the work of the Spirit⁴⁵. The firstfruits of the Spirit are the gift received by the Christian in the sacrament of baptism, signifying by anticipation the state of final perfection in Christ⁴⁶. If the Apostle says that we too sigh within ourselves even if we have the firstfruits of the Spirit, awaiting the divine adoption, this means that from baptism onwards, the Christian is on the way to reaching his state of child of God. It follows that the way to accomplishing the Christian’s relationship with God – son-Father – is a constant ascent, which is called *epectasis* in Eastern theology. The Apostle Paul’s vision of the divine adoption as a deliverance from sufferings, meaning the redemption of the body, is interesting: “And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption (ϝύπολυτρωσις) of our bodies” (8:23)⁴⁷.

Referring to the Christian’s inner groan, St. Cyril of Alexandria wrote: “The corruptible body weighs down the soul, and the earthly body pulls down a mind full of cares. For as soon as the Spirit comes to dwell in us and turns us to the study of virtue, the love of the flesh jumps up to combat it, and the law in our members, which is prone

⁴⁵ In the Pauline theology, the Person and the actions of the Holy Spirit, have a special place. The Christians had received the Spirit (Rom.8:15; I Cor.2:12; II Cor.11:4) from God (Rom 5:5; II Cor. 1:22; 5:5; Gal 3:5); through the Spirit the Christians are being sealed (in the Baptism – Eph 1:13; 4:30) and after that, the Spirit lives in their hearts (Rom 8:9.11; I Cor 3:16); the Christian’s life is guided by the Holy Spirit and to Him Who became the ultimate target (Gal 5:16; Rom 8:4.5); helped by the Spirit, the Christians can destroy the body’s evils actions (Rom 8:13); from the Spirit the Christian will be able to gain its eternal life (Gal 6:8); the Holy Spirit is the access way to the Father (Eph 2:18); the Spirit is the agent of our adoption (Rom 8:15; Gal 4:5); the Spirit is the source of the inner power to defeat all human weaknesses (Eph 3:16; 4:23; II Cor 3:17); the Spirit realizes our unity in Christ’s Body, meaning in the Church (I Cor 12:13; II Cor 13:3; Eph 2:22; 4,3; Phil 1:27; 2:1); the Spirit is the source of all special gifts (II Cor 4:13; Gal 5:22; Rom 5:5; Col 1:8; I Cor 2:10; 2:14; 14: 1ff); the Spirit is the one who offers us love, peace and joy (Rom 8:6.11; 14:17; II Cor 3:17; 3:6; Gal 5:22 I Thes 1:6); the Spirit maintains the flame of hope (Rom 15:16; Gal 5:5). See more details in this respect, H. Schlier, *op. cit.*, 265.

⁴⁶ See Peter Stuhlmacher, *Der Brief an die Römer*, NTD, Band VI, Göttingen und Zurich 1998, 123.

⁴⁷ See more details, Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 464-465.

to silly lusts, begins a bitter struggle. That is why we groan waiting for the liberation of our bodies as a result of the adoption”⁴⁸. Thus, in St. Paul’s theology, the “redemption” together with the “adoption” and other several terms express that certain tension between “already” and “not yet” characteristic to his eschatology, firstly because the redemption can be conceived both as a past soteriological act (Eph.1:7; Col.1:14; Rom. 3: 24; I Cor. 1: 30) and a future one (Eph. 1:14; 4:30).

Etymologically, the term *ϕύπολύτρωσις* relates to the action of freeing someone, of releasing from slavery by the means of compensatory payment⁴⁹. When St. Paul uses this term in order to define the redeeming of humankind he understands Jesus’ death as being the ransom He paid the Father in our place, for our release from the bondage the first sin of disobedience had thrown us into, that of our forefather Adam.

Hence the creation must be endlessly molded by man and completely transferred in the contents of the loving human conscience, so that from here the next step may be made, namely the one of the spiritual metamorphosis of the matter through the force of the creative spirit present in his incorporeal side. Resettling the creation in its natural borders is a duty concerning the human being deriving from their destinies interdependence. He who is aware of these things is automatically responsible not only of his own eschatological destiny, but also of the one belonging to the surrounding nature. However, this responsibility of the Christian to the entire creation is not to be comprehended as a mere effort to adjust to (within) the environment, but in the sense that the nature he inhabits should be found in the eschatological freedom of his own personal glory⁵⁰.

Yet, after the fall the man in his turn needed to be restored to his natural scope, an action corresponding to a second creation. This act of “re-creation” of the man and implicitly of the nature could not have been carried out by him alone because of the sin and the consequences it had had upon the whole of the creation. Christ stepped in at this point: when he who had been called to be master and emperor has become a slave. It is

⁴⁸ Cf. *Explanation of the Letter to the Romans*, Migne PG 74, col. 824.

⁴⁹ Cf. Otto Procksch, Friedrich Büchsel, art. *λύω, λυτρόω, λύτρωσις, φύπολύτρωσις*, in *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*, Band IV, 329 urm.

⁵⁰ Heinrich Schlier states correct when he affirms that „der Reflex dieses Zusammenhanges ist jenes geheime Harren uns Seufzen der Kreatur, von dem der Apostel spricht“ (*Der Römer*, 262).

essential that nature be restored because salvation is gained in a cosmic context and not in isolation⁵¹.

Therefore, the sanctification and the renewal of the world and of the man brought by Christ through His embodiment and the redemptory act of His death and Resurrection, is more than an ontological reunification of everything and everyone in Him. It is a super-creation⁵² (II Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15) and an eternalization. Christ is and becomes through Incarnation, sacrifice and Resurrection the ultimate sense and the essential driving force of the progressive and irreversible spiritual evolution of the Cosmos and of the man.

3. Conclusions

- According to the Pauline conception outlined in Romans 8:18-23 man's destiny determines the destiny of the universe, as he is an immense **hope** and **risk** for the universe and for the entire creation, that may have undefined salutary or catastrophic consequences.

- The man and the nature are in their present state helping each other, guiding each other towards a return to the origins. In his freedom the man is called to transform with his own powers and in the embodied Christ, namely His Body, the Church, the entire cosmos firstly by a continuous effort to consecrate and spiritualize himself, through a christogenetic and christophoric transfiguration of his spiritual being. For Christ's ruling over the entire creation employs the entire spiritual becoming of the man and of the cosmos - the anthropogenesis and the cosmogenesis becoming theophores.⁵³

- As a consequence, the Christian idea of man and cosmos is in its essence, in the light of the event called Christ, dynamic and optimistic conceiving the two in a continuous evolution, interdependent, in a perpetual gradual movement from sensitive to extra-sensorial, from the immanent material life to the transcendence of the spiritual.

⁵¹ Cf. Dumitru Staniloae, *Teologia vietii spirituale*, Casa Cartii de Stiinta, 1993, 187.

⁵² Cf. P. Teilhard de Chardin, *Le milieu divin. Essai de vie intérieure*, Ed. Du Seuil, Paris 1957, 201.

⁵³ More details see, P. Teilhard de Chardin, op. cit., 147-158.

Because “in its true essence, nature has divine roots” being summoned to become in its whole the temple of God⁵⁴, everything converging in the incarnated Christ.

- The situation of the cosmos, it being free in God or enslaved by corruption and annihilation relies entirely on the fundamental attitude of the rational being, the man, towards the world and its Creator.

⁵⁴ A developing of this idea, see, O. Clement, *Le Christ terre des vivants*, Coll. Spiritualité Orientale, Ed. Abbaye de Bellefontaine, Maine et Loire, 1976, 87, 91-95.