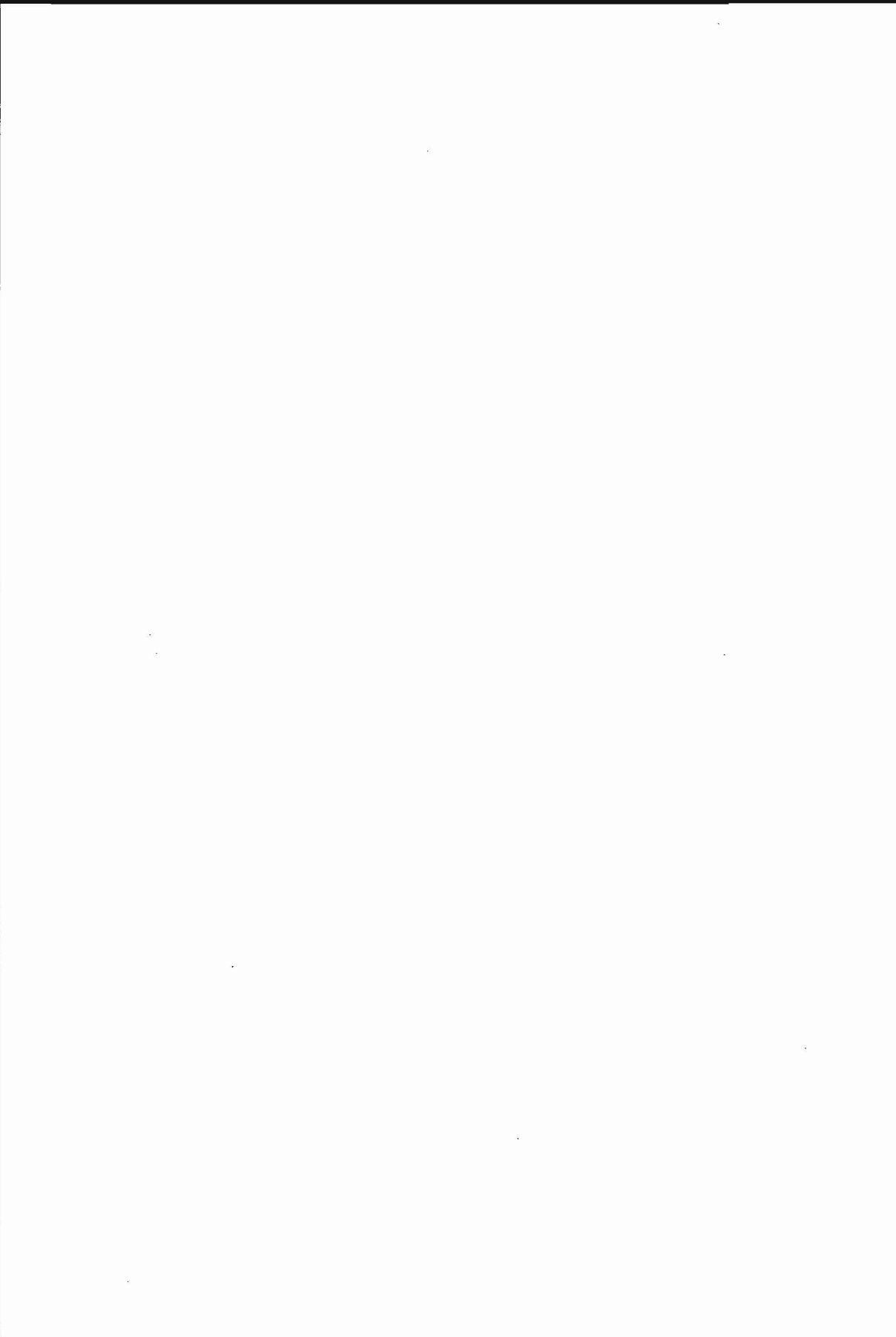


**PSYCHOANALYSIS AND  
ORTHODOX ANTHROPOLOGY**

BY  
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The many diverse cultural disadvantages currently in existence notwithstanding, I believe that our era enjoys a twofold privilege as compared with the centuries of the great apex of ecclesial theological discourse. I am referring specifically to the knowledge of nature that modern science (especially quantum mechanics) has afforded us with the language and method of modern scientific investigation, as well as to the horizons for studying the human subject that the science of psychology-psychoanalysis has opened.

I am of the opinion that the great Church Fathers and teachers of the Church did not ignore the scientific knowledge of their times; rather, they used it to shed light on the interpretation of the real and the existing that ecclesial experience proclaims. One is convinced of this simply by examining the Fathers' commentaries in *About the Hexameron*, or in the terminology and methodology the Fathers adapt from Aristotle's *On the Soul*: Church theology is a life-giving continuation of the event of the incarnation of the Word: it continuously assumes a particular historical flesh, animating that which has been assumed.

I will attempt to demonstrate briefly how this process of intellectual incorporation could be attempted today, based on the conclusions of psychoanalytic research into the primal composition of the human subject. What degree of mutual complementarity exists between the psychoanalytical view of human subject and the ecclesial interpretation of the human being as a person? I can offer only certain hints, but I think they are fertile for the purpose of further exploration. It is common knowledge that in modern science there are no definitive certainties. There can only be interpretive suggestions, subject to refu-

tation but accepted so long as other interpretations with a distinctively more complete interpretive range are not forthcoming.

I draw these observations from the French psychoanalytic research of the so-called school of Jacques Lacan, which emerges as the one most faithful to the so-called Freudian tradition. The texts that helped me are those of Lacan himself, as well as books by Françoise Dolto, Denis Vasse, Gérard Séverin and Daniel Lagache. I am not a specialist in the field of psychology-psychoanalysis, so any inaccuracies, misconceptions or errors must be attributed to my inadequacy and not to my sources.

How is the human subject viewed by modern psychology? First, as an existential reality distinct from the biological being, not unrelated and yet other – not identical to the biological individual. If we should attempt to point out the basic qualitative distinction between the subject and the biological self, we must employ the term «referentiality»: the possibility of existential reference. An infant comes into the world without speech, imagination or judgement. It is equipped only with the ability to refer. And what is referred to –the form of the reference– is a fundamental primal desire. The referentiality of desire –the desired referentiality– is the original definition of the existence of the subject. I desire, therefore I exist: «Desidero is the Freudian cogito. It is certainly there [in desire], that the essential aspect of the primary procedure of constructing the subject occurs».<sup>1</sup>

In the positivist language of psychoanalytic realism, the desire is difficult to define. It is the libido – the erotic desire for a relationship of fulfillment. What every human being seeks, from the moment of separation from the womb, is the immediacy and fullness of a relationship-coessentia. Not to be, at first, as a biological self and then to have relationships, but rather to draw existence from relationship – to exist as an event of relationship.

The libido as erotic desire for a fulfilling relationship is an exclusively human trait. It transcends, as given urge, the biological purpose of reproduction and constitutes, according to Lacan, «pure life instinct, in other words, immortal life, unlimited life, life requiring no instrument, a life that is simple and unending».<sup>2</sup>

The desire for life is the desire for a fulfilling relationship and the response to the desire is only the potential of a relationship. But in a vague hypotheti-

1. Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire, vol. II: Les quatre concepts fondamentaux de la psychanalyse*, texte établi par Jacques-Alain Miller (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1973), 141.

2. *Ibid.*, 180.

cal sense the desire for life is mediated first by the specific desire for food, which is a life-giving prerequisite to the infants' biological survival. An infant desires the life-giving relationship coessential with food, but not merely to satisfy the instinct of self-preservation. Thus a psychologically anorexic infant dies of its own accord, demonstrating that its «soul is» essential to existence much more than the regulating mechanism of its biological functions.<sup>3</sup>

The infants's life-giving desire for food encounters its first potential response at its mother's breast. Her breast signifies the potential of response to the life-giving desire; it is the first signifier, the founding event of the relationship that forms the subject. The appearance of the signifier is a prerequisite to the relationship, the required origin of the «birth» of the subject. The subject is born once the signifier appears in the field of the Other<sup>4</sup> – the potential of response to the desire emerges.

The event of relationship «begets» the subject, making precise the primordial referentiality of the manner of existence, a manner that is expressed in speech. «If the subject is defined by language and speech, this means that the subject, in initio, begins in the space of the Other, provided that the first signifier appears there».<sup>5</sup>

This is the most radical rejection of the perception of the subject as an ontic self but also of the perception of the subject as an individual intellect, as a unit with the capacity to reason (animal rationale). Before thought is the desire that constitutes the subject and establishes it as a logical existence. Whatever we name the subject, it is an erotic event and because it is an erotic event, it is also a logical existence. The erotic impetus is realized through speech, and this realization constitutes the subject.

The subject is born once the signifier appears in the space of the Other. The appearance of the signifier renders concrete the potential of response to the desire – it makes it «logos». But at the same time the «logical» nature of the signifier concretizes the desire as a logical request. What signifies the signifier is what it says at its surface. It is the potential for a fulfilling relationship, which is a fulfilled life. And the signified potential refers to the concrete subject – it is the logical response of the primordial desire of the subject, the mutual referentiality that constitutes the desire as «logos-logical request».

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3. Cornelius Castoriadis, *L' institution imaginaire de la société* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1975), 392.

4. Lacan, *Le Séminaire*, vol. II, 181.

5. *Ibid.*, 180.

It is the mutual referentiality that comprises the subject as an existential event of relationship, as logical existence as, an existence capable of incorporating the collective reason of human society.

The first signifier may be the mother's breast, because this life-giving relationship to which the primordial desire is directed is not abstract. Rather, it is a relationship of communion in the food – a real relationship on which life depends. Yet receiving food does not exhaust the desire; the desire does not aspire solely to biological survival but to a life without boundaries, an immortal life. «If receiving food is not associated with the experience of a presence which remains or vanishes without ceasing to be signified, if the Other of the desire is not mediated by the alternative presence and absence of the provider of food, the infant will never enter the world of humankind, the world of language and symbols».<sup>6</sup>

Thus, the central and decisive agent in the establishment and the constitution of the subject is not the first signifier but the last signified, toward which the primordial desire for a fulfilling relationship, forever unfulfilled, is directed. The signifier of the response to the desire always surfaces in the space of the Other, and this surfacing establishes the logical subject. However, the Other remains forever the transcendent objective of the fulfilling relationship, of immortal life. This is why Lacan –without metaphysical intentions and with only the realism of clinical experience– always writes of the transcendent Other with a capital «O». The subject is born in the space of the Other; there is no human subject except as a response to the desire for a fulfilling relationship with the transcendent Other that calls the subject into existence.

In the course of transient individual life, the Other is mediated through the mother's breast, through the presence, or absence of the mother, through food, through affection, through the language of communication, through intervention of the image of the father – intervention that «socializes» the life-giving relationship with the mother and constructs the awareness of the ego as an autonomous Third.

The Other is mediated, once maturity has been reached, by the body of the desired erotic coessentiality, by the surprise of the familiar otherness of offspring and descendants –a surprise that liberates bodily being from time– space individuality. The Other is also diversely mediated by the authority of law, the erotic beauty of nature, the unlimited dynamic of the signifiers of relationship.

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6. Denis Vasse, *Le Temps du désir* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1969), 23.

The subject is rendered an existential event owing to the life-giving desire for a fulfilling relationship with the transcendent Other. And the desire is sustained as an existential referent because the space of the Other is never defined in one given presence but is a space of presence-absence on the part of the multifaceted signified. Even the mediating signifiers refer only to the presence-absence of response to the life-giving desire: if the presence of the mother were permanent, continual and possessed by the infant (if the mother held the baby constantly in her arms, offering the breast), the infant would never be constituted as a logical subject. There would be no surfacing of the signifier of desire in the space of the mother, and therefore there would be no construction.

If the Other of the presupposed logical appeal for relationship, the Other of the desired telos of the relationship, were a given and definitively possessed Newtonian presence it would be impossible for the signifiers of the appeal and signifiers of the relationship to surface, there would be no human logical existence. If God were not a presence absence, there would be no logical human. The real distance between physics and metaphysics, the refusal of God to be subordinate to definitive certainties, is the existential presupposition of the logical subject.

Man enters the world as a bearer of desires, desire for eternal and fulfilling life. And for human desire, the fulfilling life is the fulfillment of the relationship, the erotic communion. For this reason the potential response to the desire –the signifiers of fulfillment of the desire– surface only in the space of the Other. The potentials are always transient and fragmented in comparison with the desired fulfilling relationship. They do not cease to be signified as potentials for relationship. The signifiers of the relationship are the primary elements of logos. The appearance of the signifiers begets the subject, constitutes it as a logical existence. The subject exists in the manner of logos, the manner of referentiality. The logical referentiality is articulated and built through linguistic syntax and symbolism.

The logical referentiality is one of desire, but the desire never exhausts itself with the signified of transient and fragmented signifiers. The concretization of desire into request does not exhaust the desired referentiality of the subject. There is always a remainder of desire, an undercurrent of the request for whichever relationship, once again as desire.

This remainder is designated by logic – in other words, the referentiality of desire: it is a substatum of desire that preserves the manner of logos, the manner or structure of speech. It is the unconscious. By «unconscious» we mean that which remains as desire (in the manner of the logos, the manner of speech)

when the referentiality of desire has been concretized into request through the signifier.<sup>7</sup>

The unconscious is constructed from the consequences of the signifiers, that is, from the consequences of the fact that the signifier expresses the desire that has been concretized as request, without exhausting the referentiality of the desire. Desire remains the universal substratum of all signified requests, a substratum that is itself referential (it refers to transcendent fulfillment, which is the aim of desire).

The major contribution of Lacan to psychoanalytic science is summarized in this aphorism: «The unconscious is structured as language».<sup>8</sup> This conclusion states first and foremost the referential character of the unconscious substratum of subjectivity. It states as much the referential manner in which the unconscious is constructed as it states its referential, which we might term the content (or remainder) of the unconscious. Thus, both the structure and that which is constructed are homologous to language: language is the sum total of signifiers and as the composition of the signifiers. Language is the manner of reference and relationship.

The unconscious is structured like language because it is a «remainder» or «substratum» of desire and desire is referred to only by the logos, the logical articulation, the structure of language. The unconscious is the unfathomed yet real distance between the forever deficient fulfillment of desire and the desired fulfillment of erotic coessentiality with the transcendent Other. The unconscious itself remains a desire articulated through logos, revealing the basic and primary logic of reference that makes the subject a subject.

The manner in which the unconscious surfaces (through the psychoanalytic method) expresses the referential nature of the subject's constitution at all levels. We assume some nucleus of subjectivity, even the unconscious which, however, is expressed and referred to only through the manner of logos.

The hypostatic «nucleus» of subjectivity cannot be classified through intellectual conception because it is simultaneously objectified and possessed by the subject, not identified with it. What, then, is the alternative to the intellectual conception when it comes to the self-determination of the subject? Lacan responds: «The being of the subject, that which is situated beneath the intellectual conception».

However, if the notion objectifies the being, leaving out «that which is sit-

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7: Lacan, *Le Séminaire*, vol. II, 141.

8. *Ibid.*, 23: «L' inconscient est structuré comme un langage».



uated beneath intellectual conception», the choice of being as self-definition of the nucleus of subjectivity is lost in the indefinability of the nonconception. «Whatever the choice is, the consequence is neither the one nor the other. We choose being, the subject disappears, eludes us, and falls back into nonconception. We choose the conception and the conception survives maimed by that part of nonconception which is, clearly, that which establishes the unconscious by virtue of the realization of the subject».<sup>9</sup>

Neither the conception nor the being. Is there a third choice regarding the self-definition of the subject? The Church answers: «My beginning and hypostasis has been your creative command». The nucleus, or the hypostasis of the subject, is the summons from non-being to being. And the hypostasis is personal, when God calls beings from the non-being, beings capable of logical relationship/communion with Him. God's will to commune His uncreated existence with personal creative existence is active will, it is a work and God's work is His word: «In the case of God, the work is logos».<sup>10</sup>

The human being is a personal existence because the creative summons of God presupposes the person as a hypostatic answer to this summons. In other words, as an existential potentiality for a relationship with God, as the freedom to affirm or to reject existential communion with Him. The summons «creates» a hypostatic that attributes real identity to the existential potentials of the consequences of the summons: it hypostasizes not only the creative but also the appealing dynamic of the summons, the potentiality of relationship.

God' summons presupposes the human answer not simply as an expression of will but as a way of being, as an existential event. Thus the referentiality, the manner of relationship, the manner of logos is not one of the «attributes» or «abilities» of the subject but the conditional potentiality of the establishment and construction of the subject.

Thus psychoanalytic terminology permits us to reiterate the ecclesiastical definition of human personhood: the human being is a personal existence because it is established, constructed and acts as an event of relationship. It is not simply placed, as every biological being is, into the web of interrelations and interlinking exchanges of energy that make up the biosphere. Rather, its very existence is a dynamic realization of relationships, the impetus of desire for a fulfilling existential relationship.

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9. Ibid., 191-192.

10. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Hexameron*. P.G 44, 73A.

The human person is born in the space of God. The impetus of desire for a fulfilling relationship with Him is His life-giving summons, which establishes and constructs the human person as an existential event of erotic reference. The relationship between human being and God is not an intellectual decision or a conscious ethical attempt. It is the event of the personal mode of existence, a mode of existence that encompasses both conscious and unconscious manifestations of His existence. For this reason, the Church rejects morality (which pertains only to conscious will) and insists on the *askesis* (which aspires to the total mode of existence, conscious and unconscious). It is not the logical and conscious will that informs the existential event of the relationship. It is the relationship that constructs the logos, not the logos the relationship. The mode of the relationship shapes the consciousness as much as the unconscious of the subject.

If the human person is the hypostatic response to the divine summons to relationship, if it owes its existential origin to the summoning energy of the Uncreated, then its personal character rests on the freedom to realize or to reject existence as a mutual relationship, as a loving communion of being. If the human person only comes into being thanks to the summoning energy of God, which is only loving, and if the existential answer to the summons is not affirmation but denial, then we can draw two conclusions: either that free denial of the created negates and nullifies the loving energy of the Uncreated, or that the loving, summoning energy of the Uncreated, which is timeless, renders the existential denial of the created timeless as well.

The second possibility refers to the absolute of love, which respects freedom, even if freedom hypostatizes the denial of loving reciprocity. Such a denial means a curtailment, a maiming, a diminishing of existential potentialities of desire, potentialities of being as a fulfilling, loving relationship. It does not derive from deficient «grace» (gift of the life-giving, summoning energy of God) but from the free denial of the recipient to hypostatize grace as an existential event of relationship. And then the disruption of desire into narcissistic egocentric objectives is only self punishment: the torture of an existence that actively denies itself without, however, being capable of nullifying its hypostatic composition.

Another crucial contribution of modern psychology-psychoanalysis to theological debate is that illuminates the self torture of narcissistic egocentrism with the realistic language of clinical experience regarding neurosis and psychosis.<sup>11</sup>

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11. Igor Caruso, *Psychoanalyse und Synthese der Existenz* (Vienna: Herder Verlag, 1952), is representative and especially important for the connection of the clinical experience with ecclesiastical anthropology.