

The sublime of water as messenger of the sacred

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Water represents one of the foundations of terrestrial biological life, circumscribed to known conditions. In a plurimilennar duration, it has constituted one of the main themes of reflection, admiration and fascination and one of the major sources of inspiration for human creations from all categories of knowledge. That is not really surprising, because water is not only an essential compound in the complex biological processes of the human being and the entire biosphere, but also has many practical uses and applications developed during this time interval, issues including the position of the first order where it stands its tremendous value in the religious field, defining human existence *ab origin*. All this would certainly be enough to argue or justify *the decision to opt for the theme announced* by the title, but the mobile, the agent that triggered the selection of this option was another.

About three years ago, a distinguished lady professor of biology at the “Liviu Rebreanu” National College in Bistrita, a prestigious institution where I also had the honor to study, invited me to collaborate in a large project, of transdisciplinary order – in which there were involved both teachers and students – with the thematic of “Water”. Of course, in those moments when I accepted the challenge with great joy and work disposition, I didn’t think at all of what was to come. Also, in that period I had not the amount of information needed to lay the foundations of the present paper, but I happily argue that the reflections placed on paper within that project are, to some extent, **the starting point, the origin of the present thesis**.

Sure, enrollment in the doctoral studies signified the opening of new perspectives on the topic addressed by the paper and the incipient horizon in the initial stage of the project has been substantially extended, considering the generous richness and variety of the thematic chosen for study. In this sense, we decline any claim of full coverage of all courses or potential directions to address the subject, any chapters or subdivisions of this work being susceptible to be subject to further improvement or optimization (or to an association of unexplored sub-themes), especially since researches in the field are in a perpetual editorial impetus.

Regarding the **title** of our paper, of course, it is the result of a bibliographic consultation and of certain appropriate reflections on which we will not insist. Only tangentially, not detailed, I express my desire to analyze it, to explicit it a little. If the moment when we stop on the term “messenger” (or on its usual synonyms – delegate, emissary), usually, a living being arises in the mind, a person with a mandate, sent on a mission circumscribed by some clear objectives, by another senior person (much) higher in statute, the condition of the delegate being one of ambassador, of a representative who imposes by his dignity and his attributes, on both a professionally, but also a human and moral-spiritual level, things are not at all outdone when implementing this concept on a “substance”, “element” or “compound”. And if this “delegate” is brought into existence and adorned with some extraordinary virtues and abilities by the Supreme Being, the Emperor of the cosmos, the purpose of “delegation” being also of a sublime splendor and grandeur worthy of Him (the more so as the “sublime” is defined as a superlative of perfection, finally associated to God), we are firmly convinced that the title isn’t exaggerated, but correctly expressed and fully justified.

The structure of the paper has been simplified through the contribution of the annual research reports, which held a decisive role in shaping the final plan of the work. Thus, we settled for these three reports to be only extended, through additions and clarifications that targeted an action of definitivation, to the three superior units, the three major parts of the work. Basically, the structure is characterized by a quasi-perfect (somewhat unwillingly implemented, not established *a priori*) symmetry, so each unit contains two chapters, organized themselves into three or four subchapters, dealing with sub-themes of major interest for the enounced theme.

Each of the three fundamental units of the research presents some topical issues, real challenges of interest not only on theoretical level, but also on applicative level, the first of them focusing on the proper elements of the History of Religions (Water as an instrument of sanctifying the whole creation), the second part proposing an insight into the optics of researchers in natural sciences (Water and the miracle of life), and the final part considering an emphasis on the necessity and the implementation of the Orthodox spiritual ecology (also known as eco-theology) in solving the serious contemporary crisis (Water in contemporary conceptions).

In the religious expression, water has an essential role, but double (dual, ambivalent), on the one hand symbolizing life, prosperity, peace, reinvigoration, purity and purification, the power which supports the efforts and achievements of man, eternity, and on the other hand,

also the destructive force of nature, always mysterious, never fully controllable, but under the control of the Divine, used so only as a pedagogical instrument. Broadly, in the human religious views, water is an essential element of healing, purification and sanctification, an agent of the divine presence and work in human life.

So, given this precisely wide semantic-functional variety, part I proposes a comparative analysis, through the spiritual, of this extraordinary inorganic (yet “alive”) structure: *water*. In a first stage, in the first chapter, we study the involvement of water in creating, as well as in sustaining life, both on cosmic and terrestrial plan, as well as on human (microcosmic) plan, having regard to water anthropogonies and the importance of water to human early communities. Then, in the second chapter, we approach the human religious expression about *aqua*, applied in practice. Here, we deal with the theme of our analysis in terms of sacredness of the aquatic space (in the section covering the sub-theme of water as a sacral area and its symbolism), so that, finally, in two subchapters, to properly insist on religious human acts that required and, in many religious beliefs, still claim the highly significant assistance of water to sanctify the created work.

Water and life represent a real miracle of the cosmic existence. Therefore, those persons who really acknowledge the value of water are fully right to sustain that it constitutes the expression of the joy of existence. The relationship between the two “constants” of creation remains one of mutual interdependence, noting that water would not have the same splendor if it were not an essential element of life. If for the *homo religiosus*, since the dawn of his life on Earth, water constitutes a source of mystery and fascination, and, ultimately, even adoration, we can say that, more and more, this type of reporting to the fluid of life can almost be identified or met at the man of science, pointing out, in this sense, a new current of perceiving the existential reality: *meta-realism*.

Therefore, the second part of the paper focuses on the topic of study in a comparative approach, presenting it in the scientific vision, but it brings into question also the details, the completions imposed by the theological angle. This second part is structured as well into two sections. The first chapter insists on the relation of water with life, first in terms of cosmology, and then addresses, in detail, the role of the aquatic element in sustaining the vital reality for beings of both vegetable and animal kingdoms, as well as for the complex human body. The second chapter considers an exploration in an area less understood and known so far, that of the fluid of life in its intimacy, in its inner mystery reflected outward. Here, we pursue both its internal structure and the consequences deriving from it, its paradoxical

characters, and, finally, the truly wonderful, amazing, properties of the substance we call *water*, which, in light of all this, we can almost consider holding the attribute of being “alive”.

Finally, the present civilization value is not uniquely indicated by the high degree of comfort, extraordinary achievements in the scientific and technical plan, with applications so needed in terms of optimizing the existential conditions, but, in equal measure, by human reporting to other created entities, by the self-sufficient, utilitarian and consumerist perception proven by him by the way he treats them, in other formulation – through his own conception of his dignity of *master* of nature and its practical implementation. The final part of the paper proposes an insight into this extremely sensitive and urgent issue, to which modern man is becoming more indebted to meditate and to focus his entire attention, in order that in a sustained effort and interpersonal unanimous collaboration to confer the water universe due consideration, of element created by God owning a sublime condition.

Therefore, the final part addresses the topic of our study in terms of modern and contemporary postmodern human perception and religiosity in a double, complementary, optics, of course. The first section – the initial chapter focuses on presenting the current situation of reserves, consumption and acute need of water for contemporary human society and for (the very) near future, analyzing also the special condition of many global regions facing multiple problems inflicted on the one hand by an intensive shortage, while on the other hand by an accentuated abundance of the vital fluid, condition transposed in a real and constant *conflict with or for the water* so precious to life.

The second section – the final chapter of this paper proposes the actual and detailed examination of the outlined theme from the theological point of view, exploring the current human vision on water and interconnected structures (water bodies and resources), namely the human dignity of aquatic *archon*, the biblical investment in this stature and the orthodox interpretation of the attribute, as well as its secular perception, the consequences of the current acceptance of the biblical concept “man – master of waters”, so the abuses provoked to the aquatic universe and the religious implications of these constraints, and finally it exposes also the various theological solutions proposed in order to solve the crisis, highlighting, thus, that only a sacramental, Eucharistic vision of water, conception engraved in the treasury of the Orthodox cultic expression, holds real ability to fully prove the human imperial-priestly dignity, in eschatological perspective.

The current state of research. In the last decades, the theme of *Water* as a subject of research in comparative studies was approached only from certain angles, emphasizing certain

aspects or facets of the issues addressed in our work. Of course it's extremely difficult to determine to what extent the topic is treated worldwide, being much easier to achieve such a desiderate regarding local works, in the Romanian space. Before exploring properly the Bibliography we've utilized, it is necessary to mention that one of the factors that contributed to the difficulty of putting together the thesis is even its trans-disciplinary character, hence in some regards the prudence assumed in selecting a particular sector of the bibliographical apparatus. Also, we will classify or group the material used depending on the disciplinary affiliation and its distribution in the paper, but also on the degree of usefulness, if we are permitted this formulation, for the chosen theme of research.

We will begin with the works from the local plan. First, I think we ought to mention the great work of our specialist professor Mircea Eliade, although we hold the fruit of his labor in our maternal speech through translations, however, he remains Romanian. Among his works in the field, the most useful were *History of Religious Ideas*, volume I (Scientific Publishing, 1991), for mentioning some water ablutions, then *The Sacred and the Profane* (Humanitas, 1992), where the author addresses the aquatic sacredness and some elements of water symbolistics and especially *History of Religions Treaty* (Humanitas, 2005), in which he offers some explicitations of the symbolism of water and of the vivifying, regenerative and curative attributes of water, as well as some edifications referring to certain representative aquatic cosmogonies and anthropogonies.

The coordinator of our work, Fr. Prof. Ph.D. Ioan Emil Jurcan, addressed numerous issues, as a multitude of aquatic Cosmogogenesis and philosophical conceptions on the origin of terrestrial life mediated by the presence of water, some anthropogonies and philosophical ideas which indicate the involvement of water, and a wide variety of water rites in the two specialized volumes, *Old religious world. Ancient messages about the lost revelation* (Reîntregirea Publishing House, 2003) and *Contemporary religious world. Evolution and problematization* (Reîntregirea Publishing House, 2004), from the article *From the worshiped world to the satanised world – An ecology through history of religions and its actual anxieties* – (International Symposium, Reîntregirea, 2007), I oriented for a comparative presentation of cosmologies from different beliefs, and, from his doctoral thesis, *The Holy Spirit and the contemporary challenges of the world* (Reîntregirea, 1999), I retained various theological proposals for solving the environmental crisis. Besides, in the problem of environmental crisis, Fr. Prof. Ph.D. Nicolae Achimescu also expressed his points of view in his work

Religion, modernity and postmodernity (Trinitas, 2013), mentioning also some contemporary opinions of several Western theologians from Latin America.

For a major part of ancient philosophers conceptions relating to Cosmogogenesis elements and the origin of terrestrial life, including the human one, I have consulted the synthetic, but very well structured work of Univ. Lect. Vasile Pop, *The history of philosophy – in concise exposure* – (University of Oradea Publishing House, 2009). A paper of amplitude where we found valuable data on the symbolism of higher and terrestrial aquatic units, as well as water relationship with various aspects of interest (numerology, chromatics, mythical names), but also with some rites of initiation, purification or fertilization from different regions, and also autochthonous, is that of Prof. Ph.D. Ivan Evseev, *Encyclopedia of religious symbols and cultural archetypes* (Învierea Publishing, 2007). A work of synthesis, very useful in the sense of presenting the symbolism of water and water rites, in the register of the Old and New Testaments, and in the expression of the actual Christian cult (with eloquent details), belongs to Fr. Mihail Rusu: *Water and its liturgical symbolism* (“Lucian Blaga” University Publishing, 2005).

Commander Marian Mo neagu, in *The Cult of waters at Romanians* (Publishing of the Company of Maritime Ports Administration [MPA], 2004) performs a double analysis, both in universal perspective, as well as in Romanian one, of the aquatic symbolistics, Cosmogogenesis and some anthropogenesis, of the water cult and rites from different areas and historical eras. Univ. Lect. tefan Borbely, in *General Mythology* (Limes, 2004), presents a more complex analysis, in a comparative system, of the main cosmological myths (and some aquatic anthropogonies), as well as initiation rituals and sacrifices (among which the water ones). In discovering the multitude of rituals that require the presence of water, as well as mythology texts of this profile, of a major utility, a particular support has conferred us the work of the erudite specialist Victor Kernbach, through two representative writings: *Dictionary of general mythology* (Scientific Publ., 1989) and *Essential myths. Anthology of mythological texts, with a general introduction to mythology, criticism and historical notes* (Encyclopedic Universe, 1996).

For Christian specifications relating to the Sacraments of initiation involving water as a basic element integrated into their structure, we used acknowledged works, of reference: Bartolomeu Anania, Archbishop of Cluj, *The opened book of the Kingdom. A liturgical accompaniment for priests and laymen* (EIBMBOR, 2007), for Eucharist, respectively Ene Brani te, *Special Liturgics for theology faculties* (World of Faith, 2005) and *Explanation of*

the Divine Liturgy after Saint Nicholas Cabasilas (EIBMO, 2011), for Baptism and Eucharist. A pertinent, comparative analysis of pagan sacrifices in water (“ice mummies”) gave us the work of Deac. Prof. Cornel Drago , *Beyond death. Holy relics, mummies, cursed bodies* (Egumeni a Publishing, 2009), and for Christian martyrdom in water we used a remarkable speech of Archiman. Sofian Boghiu, from *Bouquet of speeches. Sermons and meditations* (EIBMBOR, 2006) and the work that approaches the saints from Christian antiquity with Dacian-Roman specific of prof. of theology Mircea P curariu, *Dacian-Roman and Romanian Saints* (Trinitas, 1994).

Extremely useful in the perspective of presenting the scientific theories on the origin of life through the decisive contribution of water was the work of Prof. Marian Ni , *Biology seen through the eyes of faith in God* (Metropolitan of Oltenia Publishing, 2004), author who impresses also through involvement in environmental issues of currency and by proposing indications even of eco-theological nature in his book *Ecology seen through the eyes of faith in God* (Metropolitan of Oltenia Publishing, 2005). Also in the sphere of life origination and water intake in the process, but particularly in the context of trans-disciplinary debates, we mention Prof. eng. Gheorghe Sandu (now Hierom. Grigorie) with two extremely interesting works in this regard: *Evolution to the Creator* (Metropolitan of Oltenia Publishing, 2003) and *Science and faith together on the path of Truth* (Metropolitan of Oltenia Publishing, 2007). In the same spectrum of biblical cosmology and its interpretation issues, but also as regards the Eucharistic mode of perceiving creation, very useful for our topic is the work of Lect. Ph.D. Adrian Lemeni, *Eschatological sense of creation* (ASAB, 2007). Also, for edification into the specified problematic, the study of Fr. Prof. Ph.D. Nicu Dumitru cu, *Creation of heaven and earth, between theology and science* (Constan a Symposium, Vasiliana Publishing, 2005) is also of interest.

In the problem of aquatic dominion by man we retained some references of Fr. Lect. Ph.D. Vasile Borca, from his work *Man – crowning of the work of creation. The nature and his destiny in the light of biblical revelation of the Old Testament* (North University Publishing, 2007). Regarding the theological approach of water pollution, extremely interesting and useful was the explicitation of the meanings of suffering experienced by the whole creation, exposed in the article of Fr. Prof. Ph.D. Stelian Tofan , *The Sigh of creation and the glory of the children of God, after Rom. 8, 19-23* (International Symposium, Reîntregirea, 2007). Also concerning the human responsibility in this crisis generated by him, the study of Metropolitan Nicolae Corneanu, *Theology and Ecology* (“Quo vadis?”),

Metropolitan of Banat Publishing, 1990) is also of topical, and as proposals in order to solve the current crisis in the Orthodox perspective, for assuming a liturgical, Eucharistic way of life and perception, we used two remarkable studies presented at the same international Symposium held in Alba Iulia: Fr. Prof. Ilie Moldovan, *Spiritual dimension of formative spiritual ecology. Rediscovering the Romanian ethical paradise "Carpathian Church on the water"* and Fr. Prof. Ph.D. Vasile Stanciu, *Theology and Ecology in the Ritual and Hymnography of Great Holy Water – References of hymnographical exegesis* – (Reîntregirea, 2007).

In foreign literature, among specialized works analyzing aquatic symbolism (detailing each category perceived as sacred space), as well as water initiation rituals, we mention in particular Jean Chevalier, Alain Gheerbrant, *Dictionary of symbols. Myths, dreams, habits, gestures, forms, shapes, colors, numbers*, vol. 1-3 (Artemis Publishing, 1993), then Lindsay Jones (Editor in Chief), *Encyclopedia of Religion*, vol. 2 (Thomson Gale, 2005). Among the books which present aquatic cosmogenesis, mythological textual versions and clarifications of the concept of the aquatic sacredness applied to certain areas, of reference are: *The path of unknown Dao* (Herald, 2005), which insists on supremacy of water nobility in cosmos, Robert Cohen, *Egypt of Pharaohs* (Book's Friends Publishing, 1996), Jean Delumeau, *Religions of the world* (Humanitas, 1996), *Mythologies of the Ancient World*, edited and with an introduction by Samuel Noah Kramer (Anchor Books, Doubleday & Company, 1961). For a detailed, complex, comparative analysis of water sacredness from the perspective of sacred texts, rites of purification and water specific holidays in Judaism, Christianity (Catholic faith) and Islam, we consulted Mrs. Professor Patricia Hidiroglou work, *Divine water and its symbolistics* (Encyclopedic Universe Publishing, 1997).

A complex insight in philosophical concepts of ancient prestigious thinkers referring to the origination and the sustaining of life through water mediation is conducted by a joint team of Greek and Serbian authors, Efstratios Th. Theodossiu, Milan S. Dimitrijevic, Vassilios N. Manimanis, Theophanes Grammenos, in the study *Hydor from Ancient Greek to Modern Astrophysics Cosmogonies* ("Transdisciplinarity in Science and Religion", Curtea Veche, 2007). An article of related content that systematically analyzes the symbolistics of river water, is signed by a French author: Aimé Patri, *Note sur la Symbolique héraclitiéenne du feu et de l'eau* ("Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale", Nr. 2- 3 / 1953, Presses Universitaires de France).

Among the works of major interest to address terrestrial Cosmogogenesis and origination of life through the determinant involvement of the aquatic fluid are worth noted: Jean Guitton, Grichka Bogdanov, Igor Bogdanov, *Dieu et la science – vers le métaréalisme* – (Bernard Grasset, 1991) / *God and the science* (Harisma, 1992), Henry M. Morrys, Gary E. Parker, *What is Creation Science?* (Anastasia, 2000), Christopher C. Knight, *The God of Nature: Incarnation and Contemporary Science* (Curtea Veche, 2009), Hieromonk Seraphim Rose, *Writings* (Sophia, 2009).

A scientific profile paper, imposing by its particular argumentative force, belonging to Raymond Furon, *The problem of water: a world study* (Scientific Publishing, 1967), aims to present those aspects regarding the inexhaustible capacity of water, as biotic element, to perpetually support terrestrial existences, both in terms of the vitality of plant and animal organisms, as well as of the human being, in organic perspective. Also in this category, but in a much more complex vision that penetrates the mystery of life from inside living organisms and the compound which mediates their biological condition by its multiple abilities and unique functions, water, registers the paper of Biochemical speciality redacted by some renowned authors: David L. Nelson, Michael M. Cox, *Lehninger Principles of Biochemistry* (W. H. Freeman and Company, 2004). Another type of research, that provides a cognitive incursion into the world of molecular universe, but in a nuanced sense, as to reveal even other amazing faculties of water, by means of its crystals, is concretized in the work of the Nippon dr. Masaru Emoto, of which we consulted two books: *The Miracle of water* (Divine Truth, 2007) and *The secret life of water* (Divine Truth, 2007).

Of the papers that address multiple aspects of the topic approached in our thesis, including the importance of water to forming and the development of incipient human communities, the current crisis of water due to overstressing its reserves, to inequity of water resources distribution, the unequal variety of geoclimateric conditions and excessive water pollution, the following titles are of reference: Édouard Bonnefous, *Man or nature?* (Political Publishing House, 1976), Yves Lacoste, *The Water: The fight for life* (Rao, 2003), Glenn Murphy, *Water: what can you do?* (Rao, 2008), Al Gore, *Une vérité qui dérange* (Éditions de La Martinière, 2007), Michel Maxime Egger, *La terre comme soi-même: repères pour une écospiritualité* (Éditions Labor et Fides, 2012).

Exactly thanks to its qualities water was associated by the Hebrews with the divine Law (*Torah*), and in Christianity it's semantic assimilated to the divine grace bestowed through the

Holy Sacraments and to the innovative teachings transmitted along with the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Plenarily, Christianity sheds light that “the sanctity is transmitted”, water being a “vehicle” of its transmission. By its sanctifying dimension, it possesses a unique gift – the ability to restore the Edenic harmony in creation, through mediation and human collaboration, image and glory of his Creator. Water is by nature and its dignity, the emblem of the eternal that transcends material reality, but assuming and transfiguring it.

Homo scientificus supports the biblical thesis of the original perfection of creation, and therefore of the primary water, and that character could not be better shown than by its involvement in the origination and development or spread of terrestrial life. This process we consider we cannot conceive it could have fulfilled otherwise than so, by its mediation, this because water was invested by God with this kind of “prerogatives”. Life has a magnificent status, not only because it is an essential complex reality in the universe, but because, even more, it’s the final conclusion of created nature, and water is defined as the source that supports it, its perpetual flux.

Therein lies the greatness of water, in the fact that it is a cornerstone of existence and, thus, a priceless thesaurus. As a fundamental piece of the whole creation, water constitutes the fluid that determines the biogeochemical circuit of all elements and adorns the seen and unseen dimension of the living world. Consequently, the data presented in this paper argues that water can be crowned as a true wonder of creation, imposing by its expressions – its unique structure, properties, abilities and functions – thanks to which even the most reluctant scientists can perceive it as a *sublime divine messenger*.

In such circumstances, it becomes more clear humanity’s mission to ensure that the reserves of freshwater, scarce and vulnerable as they are, will not run out as soon as statistics indicate, which warn of this possible scenario (the diminution of of their capacity) within a few decades. Surely mankind has as a backup plan those massive amounts of fresh water placed under the oceanic level, on which we can rely, but these will also follow the same route, in case of the same attitude adopted by humans. Moreover it is necessary to stop water pollution, which reduces more and more its self-purifying capacity (up to 100%), affects its natural qualities and destroys all its resources, so precious even for humans, to which are also added the devastating consequences on man himself.

Only by assuming his natural nobility, man will reactnowledge and plenarily appreciate the splendor of aquatic worlds and beings dependent of the wonderful fluid of life, which adorns the entire terrestrial kingdom over which he was invested as king. In these conditions,

surely he will not feel anymore the need to over-exploit the aquatic environment for its resources, nor will he neglect and defile it by the relentless ways of pollution, but he will even begin to explore those alternative natural resources, constantly renewable and non-vulnerable, that he will prefer in exchange for the destruction caused to the aquatic planetary shell and the biosphere in general, even at the cost of considerably reducing his huge profits, to the detriment of which he will choose the celestial treasures.

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