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**THE CONCEPT OF ANGST AND ITS
ANTHROPOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS IN
EXISTENTIALIST PHILOSOPHY AND 20TH
CENTURY DOGMATICS
(SUMMARY)**

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Motivation and Selection of the Topic

In the ascetic-spiritual framework of Eastern theology, fear is a seldom-addressed subject. It is rarely mentioned among the writings of the Holy Fathers on the seven-eight thoughts of the evil, with few exceptions such as St. John of Damascus and St. Maximus the Confessor. Fear is not typically classified as one of the passions—pathologies and ailments of the soul in the person. This limited treatment of fear remains the case even today in Orthodox theology, where fear is not commonly listed among the illnesses of the soul. There are, however, two remarkable figures who have laid a preliminary foundation for more in-depth studies on this topic: Father Dumitru Stăniloae and Jean-Claude Larchet. Other approaches within the Eastern tradition briefly reference fear without further examining issues like anxiety, angst, phobia, dread, horror, and panic—varied forms and intensities of the same psychological and spiritual capacity.

The reason for choosing this topic, at the suggestion of my advisor, is the lack of thorough theological research on the pathological forms of fear, as well as the lack of integration of extensive psychological research that could aid in formulating a specialized perspective on the patristic understanding of the pathology of fear. Such an undertaking would be beneficial, as it would facilitate a productive dialogue between psychology and theology and contribute to sacramental and spiritual therapeutics.

According to a study by the Department of Psychology and Psychiatry at the University of Göttingen¹, approximately one-third of the population experiences some form of anxiety during their lifetime. The *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-5) of the American Psychiatric Association (APA) allocates 46 pages to diagnosing anxiety disorders and an additional 30 pages to obsessive-compulsive disorders, which are often associated with anxiety disorders and other types of mental disorders. Beyond these pages dedicated solely to simple and combined forms of anxiety, anxiety appears frequently as either a cause or an effect in numerous diagnoses.

¹ Marc-Antonie CROCQ, „A history of anxiety: from Hippocrates to DSM”, in *Dialogues Clin Neurosci*. 2015 Sep., 17(3): p. 327–330.

The inner disposition of people during the COVID-19 pandemic² was deeply marked by heightened, chronic, and burdensome feelings of fear affecting daily life³. Amidst this generalized fear, existential themes resurfaced in the public sphere⁴: freedom, defining a purpose in life, choice, angst, death, etc.—themes that dominated the first half of the previous century, a period marked by the two world wars. Given the ongoing Russo-Ukrainian war (2022-present) near the European Union's eastern borders, concerns about the meaning of existence and the anxiety of confronting the potential loss of life and material security remain relevant topics.

I also selected a psychoanalytic perspective from the foundational psychological schools, as fear for one's own life presents the risk of a rational disconnect, allowing emotional responses to overtake the control of the will. This elusive, uncontrollable, and wholly unexpected danger compels individuals to confront anxiety in the face of death, a lack of inner strength, and the absence of external support⁵. Anxiety-induced weakening of one's psychological resilience depletes internal mental energy, triggering either a fight-or-flight response—a courageous rise to confront or a cowardly retreat. In the latter case, empirical case studies demonstrate that people often revert to a selfish, survivalist instinct—a "survival at any cost"⁶ mentality. In this regard, psychoanalytic analysis, particularly Freudian and Adlerian psychology, clarifies the inner mechanisms that people resort to when fear takes hold in the human heart.

These statistics and clinical analyses from a purely psychological perspective highlight the urgent need for a deeper exploration of the patristic theology of fear and the development of bridges between theological insights into fear and the pathology of anxiety. Such collaboration must respect the clear boundaries of each field: psychology (*psyche*) is analyzed through the lens of humanistic psychology from a positivist perspective, while the theological understanding of the human *nous* (intellect) holds paramount importance. Orthodox therapeutic practice must

² Faxiang LUO (coord.), „Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis of Fear of COVID-19” in *Front. Psychol.*, vol. 12, 2021, p. 1-11.

³ Gaëtan MERTENS (coord.), „Fear of the coronavirus (COVID-19): predictors in an online study conducted in March 2020”, in *Journal of Anxiety Disorders*, nr. 74, 2020, p.1-7.

⁴ Mattia VACCHIANO (coord.), „The COVID-19 pandemic as an existential threat: Evidence on young people's psychological vulnerability using a Multifaceted Threat Scale” in *PLoS One*, 18(10), 2023, p. 1-12.

⁵ Marianne Lauzinger-BOHLEBER, Herbert BLASS, „Editorial introduction: Psychoanalytical perspectives on the COVID-19 pandemic”, in *International Journal of Applied Psychoanalytic Studies*, 18(2), 2021, p. 115.

⁶ A. VANCAPPEL (coord.), „Psychological consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic: a qualitative study”, in *Encephale*, May 2022, p. 5.

incorporate clinical and medical language effectively, while psychology needs theological grounding to place the patient within a holistic therapeutic framework.

Originality and limits

This paper, far from being an exhaustive approach to all major psychological schools on the topics of anxiety and anguish or all forms of fear, is focused on juxtaposing and integrating the Eastern theological perspective with existentialism and psychoanalysis. Existentialism, more than just a philosophical movement, emerges from the direct experience of suffering and the quest for meaning, especially where socially prescribed meanings fall short of addressing the intensity of inner life. Concurrently with existentialism's development, there was a decline in the biological-positivist current (late 19th century), leading to the emergence of psychoanalysis, with its notable merit of attributing importance to the inner psychic activities as reflections and indicators of the human self's depths.

While a holistic approach—a creative encounter between the patristic theology of fear and major psychological schools—would be ideal, this work narrows its scope to the beginnings of psychological research. Psychoanalysis, as the foundational science of psychology, along with its intersections with existentialism, serve as our starting points, with plans, God willing, to extend this research in the future to also engage patristic theology with insights from behaviorist, cognitive, cognitive-behavioral, and Gestalt psychology. Temporally, this study focuses on the period between 1850 and 1950, encompassing the philosophers and psychologists of that era. Patristic theology, being timeless and unaffected by paradigm shifts, remains consistent in essence, though it may adopt different forms. The theological works consulted also primarily belong to the 20th century.

A strength of this paper lies in offering new interpretations for longstanding concerns; the theme of anguish and anxiety recurs cyclically throughout history. The fresh perspective provided here involves synthesizing patristic writings with insights from 20th-century Orthodox theologians to deliver an updated response to the growing sense of fear stemming from the harsh external realities of the pandemic and nearby war. Another notable contribution is our exploration of the Adamic nature of "double-fear": a fear mingled with audacity as a result of the interrupted dialogue between Adam and God in Eden, and fear as an innocent instinct granted through the "garments of skin" by which God permitted the biologically deterministic survival mode of fallen human nature.

Furthermore, the chapter on the healing of fear through Christ's Agony in Gethsemane addresses a rarely explored and insufficiently examined theme. This study advances this fundamental theological research, representing the healing of Adam's fear-rebellion duality—and thereby, of every person—as well as the fear as a survival instinct implanted by the Lord in postlapsarian human nature. Since, in psychoanalysis and individual psychology, the root of fear is the fear of death, and in existentialism, the reality of death or nothingness, this work emphasizes the life-giving death of Jesus Christ as the foundation for experiencing life within the confines of temporality. Another strong point of this work is the exploration of how the theological perception of the Agony in Gethsemane varies significantly across the three major Christian confessions, which in turn leads to distinct views on the therapeutic approach to fear.

Methodology of Research

Given the interdisciplinary nature of the topic, I have employed a comparative method for presenting and analyzing anguish within the existentialist movement, as developed by thinkers such as Søren Kierkegaard, Martin Heidegger, and Jean-Paul Sartre. This comparative approach has been applied both intra-disciplinarily, within the philosophical and psychological frameworks of existentialism, and inter-disciplinarily, in comparing these philosophical perspectives with Eastern Christian theology and practice.

Similarly, the same comparative structure has been applied to the study of anxiety within the psychoanalytic school and its prominent figures—Sigmund Freud, Alfred Adler, and Melanie Klein—considering both intra-disciplinary analysis within psychoanalysis and inter-disciplinary engagement with patristic spirituality, particularly in the context of the pathology of fear. In addition to the comparative method, I have also utilized an analysis from the standpoint of Orthodox theology, focusing on anthropological foundations and cosmological implications within the thoughts of the aforementioned thinkers. This has allowed for the construction of bridges between these domains of knowledge, highlighting the similarities and differences between them, and emphasizing the potential for cooperation towards the common goal: the healing of man and living life in its fullness.

Furthermore, I have employed intra-disciplinary analysis within Orthodox theology, comparing and examining the fundamental differences between major Christian confessions and their implicit consequences concerning the theme of this work. The historical method used in the final chapter

traces a guiding line from the 4th to the 19th centuries, which highlights the emergence of theological concepts that laid the foundation for the rise of nihilism and later existentialism in the Western intellectual tradition. The hermeneutical analysis of existentialism through the lens of Eastern apophatic theology facilitates a conceptual rapprochement between this philosophical current and the teachings of Patristic Fathers such as Gregory of Nyssa and Maximus the Confessor. Ultimately, the work aims to provide a theological response to the inner struggles of humanity, along with a guiding framework for addressing the soul's suffering.

Current State of Research

In the dual approach of psychology and Orthodox theology on the subject of fear, there are not many published works⁷. Each ethnic space faithful to Eastern theology has one or two works that touch on the topic, but none exhaustively address the pathologies of fear; instead, they highlight essential aspects. One of the first authors is Jean-Claude Larchet, in *The Therapeutics of Spiritual Diseases* (1997)⁸, where he provides an insightful analysis of the passion of fear. Fear (*phobos*) and related states, such as dread, terror, panic, anxiety, anguish, despair, are discussed within this context.

Fear is explained as stemming from a loss or impending suffering tied to the mental concept or emotional content that we will be alienated from something we desire or are attached to. Fear can be both a virtue and an inner illness; as a virtue, it serves as a force that keeps the person connected to their being, preventing the loss of both body and soul. Fear of losing life or the idea of non-existence is a natural tendency of humans, as cited by St. Maximus the Confessor. Fear of God is also considered virtuous. As a passion, however, fear arises from original sin. It is a repulsion from what might take away or destroy existence, with which one is pathologically attached. Larchet points out that the fear of God and pathological fear stem from the same source, but they are directed differently—one expels the other. Pathological fear enters the soul when it is empty of good fruit. It signifies a sick relationship with God, as He is forgotten as the principle and center of life and existence. Fear reflects a lack of trust in spiritual reality. Imagination plays a pivotal

⁷ To check our study Pr. Ioan-Simion HODEAN, „Patologiile fricii în preocupările teologiei românești”, in *Studia Doctoralia*, Editura Universității Aurel Vlaicu, nr. 1/2019, issn: 2537-3668, pp. 119-133.

⁸ Jean-Claude Larchet, *Terapeutică bolilor spirituale*, translated by Marinela Bojin, Sophia, București, 2001

role in fear, as the individual perceives reality differently, attributing non-existent dangers, making perceived risks seem infinitely larger and unbearable. Particularly, anxiety and restlessness (due to the lack of objective reasoning) are the most paralyzing forms of fear. Fear is closely related to other passions, such as pride, laziness, or sin in general, which generate anxious states. One particular form Larchet mentions is pusillanimity (the fear of failure, fear of not succeeding⁹), which closely resembles timidity. It is an unnatural, pathological attitude of the soul. Its presence signifies a lack of faith, with the absence of courage due to exaggerated imagination. Citing John of Sinai, Larchet describes pusillanimity as a force that blocks the dynamism of the person, inhibiting or paralyzing the activity of the soul's faculties.

Another significant work in the pathology of fear translated into Romanian is written by Moise Aghioritul, *The Sorrow of Anxiety and the Joy of Hope* (2005)¹⁰. His merit lies in the clinical description of anxiety manifestations with the precision of a psychologist. The causes of anxiety he notes include an attachment to worldly goods (such as materialism, addiction, gluttony, greed, and other forms of worldly attachment), as passions nurture and feed anxiety. Manifestations of anxiety include sadness, fear, fragmentation, gloominess, nervousness, anger, fatigue, apathy, melancholy, guilt, remorse, suspicion, memory disturbances, insomnia, anorexia, psychomotor agitation, abulia, indecision, and excessive sensitivity. The consequences of anxiety are paralyzing on a psychological, spiritual, and existential level: refusal to engage in confession, constant feeling of weakness, refusal of physical and intellectual activity, excessive dependence on others, disrupted interpersonal relationships, shifting personal responsibility to others, etc.

Fr. Dumitru Stăniloae, in *Orthodox Spirituality: Ascetics and Mysticism* (1981)¹¹, presents two innovative themes in the research on the pathologies of fear: anxiety and fear in relation to existentialist philosophy, and the clearer relationship between fear and the fear of God. In the relationship between fear and the fear of God, he notes that the latter arises from faith, not the reverse. Fear of something in creation is a fear of something specific (an object or a potential loss), or of losing opportunities for pleasure, which forces one to live by oneself, without the support of

⁹ Termenul ολιγοψυχία, δειλία a fost tradus diferit în limba română; astfel, Părintele Fecioru l-a tradus prin „neliniște”, Părintele Stăniloae prin „frica lașă” sau „lipsa de bărbăție”, Prof. David Popescu prin „lașitate”; traducătorul volumului amintit l-a tradus prin „pusilanimitate”, care înseamnă micime de suflet și toate cele de mai sus. cf. nota traducătorului Bojin Marinela, în volumul J.-C. LARCHET, *Terapeutica bolilor spirituale*, p. 192.

¹⁰ MOISE AGHIORITUL, *Tristețea anxietății și bucuria nădejzii*, traducere Siluana Petre Sophia, București, 2005.

¹¹ Pr. Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *Ascetica și mistica Bisericii Ortodoxe*, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 2002.

the world. This fear stems from anxiety (*Angst*), which seeks points of support in the face of existential emptiness. Without the divine reference points, fear serves to protect one from losing pleasure. From a spiritual-patristic perspective, Stăniloae identifies a threefold anthropological foundation of fear in Adam: 1) Human earthly life is inevitably accompanied by fear; through it, man avoids identification with the fallen world; 2) The fear that should keep man from the world and bind him to God, the source of authentic existence, has been perverted; 3) This fear, in its fallen form, has turned into a fear of being disconnected from the world, from the existence within the gray horizon of the fallen world. Fear remains an essentially Adamic factor, with no specific place in the Edenic man, and in the Christic man it is absorbed into love (1 John 4:18). Fear also denotes the human responsibility for perfection, as it prevents one from sinking into the flatness of horizontal existence. However, Stăniloae also addresses fear within the context of detachment, when the self is separated from the fallen form of the world. The world poses a danger in this phase because, in its fallen state, it exerts a strong, almost irresistible attraction back into its limited meanings¹². Once this stage is passed, the world will reveal its inherent beauty and purpose, which will ease its acceptance and the perfection of its transformation into the new heaven and the new earth¹³.

In summary, the research landscape concerning the pathology of fear from both psychological and theological perspectives is still in its early stages in the Romanian context. The works of Jean-Claude Larchet, Moise Aghioritul, and Dumitru Stăniloae, though insightful, have not provided exhaustive treatments of the subject, and there remains much work to be done in bridging the gap between Orthodox theology and psychological theories of fear.

The perspective of the Association of Christian Orthodox Psychologists and Psychotherapists of Romania is summarized in their document *The Principles of the Orthodox Psychotherapy Concept*

¹² Înțelesurile originale fiind ascunse prin căderea lui Adam sub stratul înțelesului consumist.

¹³ Pr. Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, Volumul 1, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1997, p. 249. Merită amintit textul părintelui Stăniloae privind veșnicia, identitatea strânsă om-creație și datoria omului de a o spiritualiza și subiectiviza: „Va fi Judecata (de Apoi) întregă , în măsura în care a contribuit la această transfigurare a lumii. Și fiecare va fi judecat după măsura în care a contribuit la această transfigurare, care constă în a face transparente structurile iubirii și frumuseții spirituale divine în relațiile interumane în cadrul cosmic. Aceste frumuseți descoperite în acest sens de oameni și de popoare în lume se vor eterniza desăvârșite în viața viitoare: picturile Voronețului, domurile Occidentului, simfoniile lui Beethoven, relațiile de profund omenie și dreptate înfăptuite între oameni, ca expresii ale spiritualității divino-umane, care au luat chip în istorie.” Pr. Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *Teologie Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, vol. 3, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1997, p. 246.

(2016)¹⁴. It is a representative association in the interdisciplinary field of Romanian theology and psychology. Here are a few key points:

- Anxiety – as fear without an object, while fear has a precise cause. There is a non-pathological component of fear in various situations (imminent danger, accident, someone else’s aggression, etc.).
- In the Edenic man, there was no pathological fear: “God has not given us the spirit of fear” (2 Tim. 1:7). Pathological fear originated from the fall of the first humans (Gen. 3:9-10).
- In the Holy Scriptures, the cause of fear is a lack or absence of faith (Matt. 8:26, Ps. 13:1-5), lack of love (1 John 4:18), as well as a pathological fear with a demonic origin (Ps. 26:1, Ps. 55:11, Prov. 3:25).

The Orthodox Psychologists Society of St. Petersburg published *The Struggle with Passions: Ascetic and Psychological Methods* (2013)¹⁵, where in the chapter dedicated to the passion of sadness, it addresses states of anxiety. It begins by differentiating between the state of anxiety, restlessness, and distrust in the future, and anxiety as a personality trait, manifested through frequent and intense emotional experiences of fear without cause. Anxiety is described as the fear of fear, an unnamed and endless restlessness; emotionally, it is experienced as a syndrome composed of feelings such as tension, worry, restlessness, helplessness, nervousness, fear, shame, oppression, uncertainty, uselessness, lack of defense, and insecurity. A novel aspect is the association of the state of anxiety with the passion of sadness. As a physiological manifestation, it leads to an increased heart rate, accelerated circulation, raised blood pressure, and heightened excitability of the nervous system—similar to the words of St. Gregory the Theologian, who said that sadness is the decay of the heart and disturbance. As a constant personality trait, it is characterized by a tendency towards frequent and intense experiences of restlessness, an over-responsible attitude towards one's duties, and the success of one's activities becoming a means of frequent self-affirmation, forming a hyper-valuable idea. Through an increased level of demands, the personality strives to compensate for a low self-esteem. The anxious personality perceives the world as a threat to its own existence, with a fundamental distrust in the world. On the spiritual level, anxiety is accompanied by a sense of guilt, sinfulness, self-flagellation, depression, and despair. Existential anxiety, or metaphysical guilt, is related to the fall of the first parents. It emerged from alienation from God and the alienation of the human self. Anxiety, or the worries of many, is founded in distrust of God's care. Among the volumes mentioned here, the psychological methods of correcting the anxious state are a novel aspect. Physiological means of regulating the

¹⁴ *Principiile conceptului de psihoterapie ortodoxă*, Christiana, București, 2016.

¹⁵ *Lupta cu patimile. Metode ascetice și psihologice*, traducere Adrian Tănăsescu-Vlas, Sophia, București, 2015.

anxious state include medication (sedative preparations), physical exercise (tonifying, calming), and breathing exercises. A detailed presentation of these does not fall within the external scope of this study. Emotional-volitional regulation of the anxiety state includes increasing mental resilience (self-correction: orientation towards an optimal emotional state, pleasant memories, control of expression) and external correction (mental training, repetition). The level of values and meanings in regulating anxiety and sadness lies in the worldview. The phenomenon of decentering is essential, shifting the focus from the process of forecasting to the process of activity. Spiritually, the struggle consists of an unseen war, in the stages of temptation, accompaniment, agreement, and enslavement. Several works at the intersection of psychology and Orthodox theology have appeared in the Russian space, written by Christian-oriented psychologists such as Dmitri Semenik: *How to Overcome Fear* (2016), and Dmitri Avdeev, *Mental Disorders and the Pathology of the Spirit*¹⁶, offering immediate solutions for anxious states and related conditions.

From the sphere of Catholic theology, Hans Urs von Balthasar's *The Christian and Fear* (1951)¹⁷ philosophically and theologically analyzes the work of Søren Kierkegaard, particularly his *Concept of Anxiety*, considering it the first systematic work on anxiety and dread. Building on it but not remaining within the existentialist category (Kierkegaard synthesizes that fear remains specific to the finite spirit, filled with dread in the face of its own infinity), Balthasar leads it towards a paradox of the finite spirit, whose acts of knowledge and freedom linked to reality are open towards the infinite. Balthasar does not follow exactly the line of the evangelist John: "perfect love casts out fear" (1 John 4:18), but rather sees the process of sanctification as deepening fear, moving from the fear of the wicked to Christian fear, which he calls the "fear of the Cross"¹⁸. The concept of the fear of the Cross remains somewhat unclear in explaining this form of fear, which is opposed to dread and anxiety; the foundation of the fear of the Cross is nothing other than God's love, which takes upon itself all this world of fear so that, suffering, it overcomes it—a love which is in every way opposed to the experience of the sinner's fear. He emphasizes the potential of Christianity to save humanity from the fear of sin through the opening to salvation, replacing the fear of sin with the fear of the Cross. However, God does not grant any believer participation in the fear of the Cross of His Son unless He has first granted them the full power of the Christian

¹⁶ Dmitri AVDEEV, *Tulburările psihice și patologia duhului*, traducere Denis Chiriac, Doxologia, Iași, 2019.

¹⁷ Hans Urs von BALTHASAR, *Creștinul și frica*, traducere Hans Klein, Galaxia Gutenberg, Târgu-Lăpuș, 2016.

¹⁸ H. U. von BALTHASAR, *Creștinul și frica*, p. 68.

mission and the joy, light, faith, love, and hope it carries, and thus has already removed the fear of sin. This status of the fear of the Cross is ambiguous, as it follows the stages of purification and illumination. Paradoxical and ambiguous terms that wander outside the Johannine call. If the Christian enters the path of salvation, they simultaneously depart from the first and approach the saving fear, with the area of the lack of fear between the two¹⁹. Yves Tourenne, in the introduction to Balthasar's book, notes that Christian fear is defined by both a negative and a positive thesis. The Christian cannot and must not know fear because Christ, through His Passion and death, assumed it and overcame it; but the Christian receives from Christ a participation in His redeeming fear. Although Balthasar distances himself from two false attitudes (the sick fear and the theology of a serene, smiling detachment from the present), Yves Tourenne mentions that, although radically different from contemporary fear, it will not depart from it like the Pharisees. Balthasar radically distinguishes between sick, psychological (existentialist) fear focused on itself, and the fear that results from accepting in the Holy Spirit the redeeming fear of Jesus. He also distinguishes between the fear of the disciple and the fear of the Lord: redemption is not shared, for no one is on the same level as the Only Son, and the baptized person who partakes in the redeeming fear remains a human and a sinner. Thus, Balthasar accepts the Protestant insistence on the absolute uniqueness of the redemptive act and the concept of *sola gratia*²⁰. He writes:

Christians, even if they are saved, faithful, loving, and hopeful – are they not still sinners?... How is it that they fall back into great guilt, and then sin even more horrifically... In the face of these shameful compromises, this lukewarm state of theirs, will they not be easily overwhelmed by a new fear, which only Christians can understand, the fear of an impossible "both-and," and thus "neither-nor"? And isn't this, in fact, the specific Christian fear²¹?

Research at the intersection of theology and psychology regarding fear, anxiety, dread, despair, phobias, etc., although mentioning a few titles or perspectives from psychology, does not manage to create a comprehensive analysis of fear as it is studied in the major schools of psychology. The current level of research on the issue of fear is quite limited, often overshadowed by other psycho-spiritual pathologies, such as depression.

The Structure and Content of the Work

The work is structured into four main chapters, the first two presenting the perspectives of existentialist and psychoanalytic authors on the anthropological foundations, as well as a synthesis

¹⁹ H. U. von BALTHASAR, *Creștinul și frica*, p. 73.

²⁰ H. U. von BALTHASAR, *Creștinul și frica*, p. 18.

²¹ H. U. von BALTHASAR, *Creștinul și frica*, p. 68-69.

of the significance of anxiety. The third chapter will summarize the Orthodox Christian perspective on the aforementioned themes. The final chapter, a dialogue chapter, will bring together the perspectives to provide a cohesive Orthodox Christian vision, capable of interdisciplinary dialogue on the complexity of fear.

Chapter 1: Angst – Existential Void: An Existential Perspective on Fear: This chapter explains the roots and foundations of existentialism, guiding lines of thought, etc. It then moves on to discuss anxiety (as a fundamental form of fear) through the perspectives of three major representative authors: Søren Kierkegaard, Martin Heidegger, and Jean-Paul Sartre. Each philosopher presented here is seen as evolving from the thoughts of the previous one. Thus, Heidegger is considered a secularization of Kierkegaard's ideas, and Sartre as a further secularization of Heidegger. A clear distinction is made between anxiety and fear; fear being the fear of a specific object, while anxiety is a state of fear without a precise cause. Kierkegaard understood anxiety as a general fear and anxiety in human life. Through the anxiety embedded in human nature, God calls us to live a spiritual life despite the abyss of meaninglessness we feel through it. Anxiety represents the finite spirit in its fear before its own infinite. Heidegger uses the term anxiety as a point of reference for the impossibility of finding meaning in a world that has no meaning in itself. Anxiety shows the human being what it is: a being-toward-death. Sartre links anxiety closely to freedom and nothingness. It is the burden of responsibility for one's actions and choices, which cannot be transferred to anyone else. Nothingness (the lack of existence of anything other than the empirical) makes possible the self-definition of the person. In all three perspectives, anxiety is a fundamental human dimension with a beneficial purpose: self-awareness and the possibility of building oneself.

Chapter 2: The Depths of Man and Anxiety: A Psychoanalytic Approach: This chapter presents psychoanalytic perspectives on anxiety from organic, social, and other standpoints. Although both Alfred Adler and Melanie Klein distanced themselves from the thinking of their mentor, it is noted that they preserved certain fundamental concepts upon which they built their systems of thought and interpretation of the inner human world. The first author, Sigmund Freud, has the merit of opening an entirely unknown world in European humanist culture, the world of the unconscious. Although Freud's theory underwent numerous modifications over about 40 years of psychoanalytic work, this is not a cause for scandal, as his work was pioneering. Alfred Adler, the educator, focused on a social theory of anxiety, seeing it as an intelligent function through

which people conceal their deficiencies and inferiority to benefit from help and intervention from others. Dr. Melanie Klein extended her research to infancy, focusing on how children correlate with object-persons, and these positions correspond to fundamental life attitudes. Unlike the others, she links anxiety to the fear of death. The remedies for anxiety, concluding the chapter, primarily consist of dialogue about the sources of conflict, the internal psychological journey to the conflict's source, whose emotional tension has been repressed, and the interpretation (with the help of the therapist) of the traumatic emotional content (which causes fear and horror in the patient, forcing the implementation of certain defense mechanisms). Over the course of several therapy sessions, this emotional inflammation is brought to a more normal state.

Chapter 3: The Passion of Fear in Patristic Thought and Orthodox Theology of the 20th Century:

This chapter is of particular importance in the spirit of the work. The Orthodox theological perspective on fear and its passions calls upon both protology and eschatology, the beginning and the eternal destiny of man, within two types: Adam and Christ, the God-Man, the New Adam. The three existential stages of human life are essential to understanding the anthropology of fear. These three stages, Edenic, Adamic, and Christic, bring with them different ontological traits. Thus, the Edenic stage represents the original man, entirely good, with the possibility of immortality. The Adamic stage brings distortion and death into all dimensions of the human person, and through the skins of animals, God delays human death as a pedagogical exile in suffering and death. The Christic stage is the slaying of death by God incarnate Himself, and the sharing of His victory with all who wish it through the sacramental-spiritual path. In Eden, sinful fear did not exist. At most, we can find traces of a good tendency through which man was wholly connected to God as the source of existence (the good fear). Only through dialogue with the demon did Adam partake of the satanic inner state: prioritizing a divine attribute instead of the Person who defines Himself as infinite love (God is powerful, and in His omnipotence, He can crush my existence); losing the real sense of reality, entering a phantasmagorical existence where the illusory becomes the law. Moreover, through the skins of animals, God introduces the affect of the fear of death so that Adam may guard his existence (holistically) until a new divine intervention (the Incarnation). The suffering of the world, from the apostasy in Paradise to the present day (in the extra-ecclesial space), is one that is tributary to sin. Death, suffering, ignorance, and uncertainty about eternal spiritual realities through epistemology—all keep the Adamic humanity captive in the first death (the organic-ontological separation from God through sin) and the second death (the

unnatural separation of the soul from the body). Pathologies related to anxiety dominate the spectrum of psychological suffering, all stemming from the fear of death; both inner death, loss of identity, loss of those things the Adamic person clings to in order to give an illusory self, as well as physical death—the abrupt end of an existence that feels its infinite destiny confronted with the objectivity of death. The deterministic canopy of the Adamic ecosystem suffers a rupture through the Incarnation of the Lord, who, in His Body, heals the original wound of death (and, implicitly, of fear). Through His preaching and miracles, He reassures people of the merciful Providence of the Father, and by assuming agony (through prayer) in Gethsemane and the Crucifixion, He chooses to submit to the Father, even in the taboo topic of humanity: death (violent, unjust even). By conquering fear in His Body, the Lord offers Himself as Bath, Myrrh, and Food for the renewal of all who believe in Him, recovering the Edenic stage, the liberation from determinism, healing those called by the name of Christ (Christians) from death. Sacramental incorporation into the Body of the Lord generates the possibility of spiritual, theandric life, through which the baptismal gifts are activated, working the virtues. The Spirit of strength, courage, and bravery will fortify the choice of the reborn person through baptism not to irrationally fear the Lord, as Adam did in Eden, and the fear of the Lord will become an instinct—vigilance, which will reject all the devil's thoughts of blasphemy and fear (as well as all other thoughts of wickedness). The work of the fear of the Lord will gradually and consistently give birth to divine love, to the point where fear is healed through love (1 John 4:18).

Chapter 4: An Orthodox Analysis of the Existential and Psychoanalytic Foundations: Angst and Anxiety: In the final chapter, the author first explains how the ecclesial (dogmatic) crisis will have repercussions on identity crises, chronologically highlighting how the Augustinian specificity will crystallize into rationalism and deism, provoking the existentialist reaction. As a counterbalance, the analysis of existentialism in the Orthodox ethnic space will present a radically different situation, foreign to the anticlericalism of Western Europe. The chapter continues with a comparative analysis of the theology of the death of God (and later kenotic theologies)—a reaction to Nietzschean nihilism—and the theology of the Agony in Gethsemane, as well as the Death and Resurrection of the Lord, with an interconfessional analysis of this latter, emphasizing the consequences of each confession in addressing and treating fear. The work highlights, positively, the differences with Lutheranism (and implicitly Augustinianism) in the native thought of Kierkegaard and the connections with the theology of the first centuries, through the person of

Saint Irenaeus of Lyon and his optimistic anthropology. Heidegger's Being-toward-death will be highly appreciated by Father Stăniloae and Christos Yannaras as a precursor to the fear of God; the anxiety before death being a divine feature in fallen man, a failsafe (preventive mechanism) to avoid stagnation in the grayness of positivist existence. The most radical existentialist, Jean-Paul Sartre, who places anxiety in the realm of freedom, will be the one who reconnects Western thought to ancient Greek philosophical sources, creating a bridge to Nicaean theology concerning being, freedom, and responsibility for one's own existence.

Difficulties Encountered

The main difficulty encountered was that caused by the domestic isolation during the COVID-19 pandemic, which limited – for a significant period – access to digital resources from online databases of national and international philosophical, psychological, and theological journals. A secondary difficulty stemmed from limited knowledge of widely spoken international languages, which led to the use of English translations or, less frequently, French translations of works from the Slavic or Hellenistic spaces.

Purpose of the Thesis

The objective of this research is the acute lack of a comprehensive work on the theology of fear in the Romanian theological book market, as well as internationally. To ensure growing relevance, the chosen interdisciplinary approach allows for greater transparency toward the extra-theological realm, with the potential to serve as a bridge for dialogue toward the common goal, which is the human being and their happiness. Although one might argue that existentialism has been replaced by consumerism and psychoanalysis by the cognitive-behavioral branch, the last few years marked by the pandemic and war have shaken human consciousness, awakening it to a more acute sense of responsibility for the struggles of existence within deterministic, finite (biological) frameworks; or, on the opposite side, plunging it into an instinctual state characterized by the search for pleasure at any cost, the avoidance of pain, and the quest for power, even at the expense of the suffering of others – a place where psychoanalysis and Alfredian individual psychology shine in analyzing the pathological roots of vital energy. The response of Orthodox theology, however, remains always the same: Jesus Christ, the God-Man, offers the possibility of a full and real union with Him, receiving as a gift His victory over fear in the Garden of Gethsemane, to live in the horizon of divine love, regardless of the social context.

Conclusions

This work aimed to analyze existential anguish and its related themes, such as freedom, death, nothingness, as well as the experience of anxiety from the psychoanalytic perspective and individual psychology, contrasting them with the thinking and life experience of the Holy Fathers of Orthodox Christianity. A deeper study of patristic texts allowed for a systematic approach to the pathology of fear, emphasizing that it is not a natural Edenic trait, but rather that fear is the absence of love – Adam fears God because he no longer lives in His love; moreover, since fear is introduced into the human mind from the outside, through the temptation of the serpent, it reveals the unnatural character of this fear, which is also tainted by the rebellion and insolence of the evil one against God. Before the fall, the only possible form of fear would have been the fear of losing the Beloved (noting that this is a positive trait). The temporary doubling of human nature, through the "tunics of skin" (Genesis 3:21), introduced survival instinctive fear into human existence, to protect Adam from the harshness of the cosmos and the wildness of creation that he brought upon all existence through sin. The fear of losing the beloved becomes rebellious fear against the One whose love is no longer felt, and the survival fear (in the temporal framework, where death will liberate nature from the tunics of skin) will be perverted into a betrayal of spiritual identity and origin, in exchange for preserving pleasure and power in the service of self-love and sinful self-love. Both forms of fear are healed through the work of the Incarnate Lord, who awakens in man the deep roots of trust in God's loving care, through His miracles, teachings, and infinite love constantly manifested, especially through His Incarnation. The rebellious fear against God, which casts the human self into a phantasmagorical world – under the dominion of the imagination – where God might crush him, being Almighty, and that he must defend himself from this possibility, living separated from Him, is healed by the Lord precisely by accepting the sensitive point of this phantasm: to accept this suffering upon Himself, not interrupting communion with the Father during His suffering, allowing Himself to be crushed for our sins (Isaiah 53:10), though He is innocent, healing in Himself His own humanity, and, afterward, healing all those who wish to partake of Him. The second form of fear, survival fear, passes through two stages: the first, the protection of existence at all costs, including through betrayals of conscience, is healed by the Lord also through the act of Crucifixion, dying for those He loved (John 13:1), calling us to do the same, through His love, for His love (Matthew 10:32), trampling upon the fear – the safeguarding of one's own life at the price of betrayal, the consequence of which is eternal separation from Him

(Matthew 10:28). The second part of survival fear is represented by His Resurrection, when His risen Body is no longer subject to the biological determinisms of the tunics of skin, and Adamic fear is no longer a constitutive part of His human nature but has been swallowed up by the love of the Father.

A chronological analysis of Western theology (from the 8th century to the present) highlighted paradigm shifts in anthropology, theognosis, and soteriology of the undivided Church, which crystallized to the point where they could no longer offer undistorted theology of Revelation and the uncreated light of Christ. As noted in the abundant remarks on the insufficiency of humanist Christianity, human existence remains estranged (even in its good state) from God. The thesis of this work posits that Catholic and Protestant traditions provoke the emergence of nihilism and, later, existentialism – as a natural, Orthodox reaction to European deism, which mourns, consciously or unconsciously, the absence of the living, personal God. When theology is no longer a witness to Revelation, it drastically limits the therapeutic power of humanity’s true wound (sin-death-hell). As presented in Chapter III, fear is not a simple emotion to be moderated by courage, but it is part of the very essence of the fall, the rupture of man from God, and also of the work of the Economy; given this fact, an interpretation that is not in conformity with the Tradition of the undivided Church results in a paradigm shift in understanding the root of fear (perceived, succinctly, as the fear of death and the fear of losing worldly goods). The historical context after the 1789 Enlightenment Revolution allowed the identity hiatus to be vocalized. A turning point is Nietzsche’s famous cry about the death of God, and the response of Western theology, although varied, was unable to offer a satisfactory answer. Furthermore, the relationship between Western theology regarding the death of God and the ever-living testimony of the Church concerning the death of Christ and the gifts poured out over humanity through it was presented; theological differences provoke amputations in the potency of human nature, and the appropriation of the Agony in Gethsemane being different in the fundamental Christian traditions can offer (or not) an answer to anguish only insofar as it understands, confesses, and lives according to the Economy. The direct proportionality between the theology of the Agony and the healing of anguish, existential absurdity, emptiness, and spiritual death will be one of the pillars of our research. A review of the existentialist impact in countries with Orthodox traditions (influenced by Western theology to varying degrees) provided an overview of the providential role of existentialism as an external challenge to return to Tradition. The fruits of the creative meeting between Eastern

theologians and the existentialist world offered a new terminological framework for an Orthodox answer dressed in a modern cloak, capable of transmitting the eternal Truth in the conceptual conditions of the 20th century. The fear of God, in particular, became an ideological weapon in the Muscovite space, and the scholastic form of Orthodox theology of the 19th and early 20th century allowed fear not to be treated in all its complexity, as a barometer of estrangement from God. Reading existentialist literature in the key of Dionysian apophaticism provides a comprehensive understanding of the pathology of fear. Thus, anguish, a fundamental dimension of existence, was analyzed in relation to the self, death, and freedom, and the space of Christian theology highlighted the dual root of fear: rebellious fear against God, as the fear of being crushed by Him (present in Lucifer and voluntarily transposed in Adam), and fear – the survival instinct sown by God in Adamic man. In this sense, Kierkegaardian anguish before the self had as its theological counterpart the fact that God, who is more intimate to the human self than the self itself, when man anguishes before himself, he is, in fact, anguishing before God, whom he no longer recognizes in the breath of life; the moment when man awakens to reality, perceiving the Lord in a natural way, anguish is recognized as sin – a dividing element and wall, to be overcome through the mystery of faith. The study of Heideggerian anguish of death has as its Christian corollary the fear of being swallowed up by the positivism of matter, in the grayness of existence, of losing one's ipseity by being assimilated into some creation-based dimension. Since authentic living is given by the awareness and living according to being-toward-death, the bridge to patristic theology is made by accepting the fact of mortality, but especially through the virtue of fearing the Lord's Judgment after death, which gives an open horizon beyond death. Sartrean freedom, the fact of knowing that you are solely responsible for the course of becoming your own self, which is maintained in creative tension by anguish, meets divine Providence, which – through right knowledge and living of God – rests those "weary and heavy-laden" (Matthew 11:28), assuring them that in God's active care, He knows all the smallest details of life (Matthew 10:30), caring far more than a parent strives to provide the best for his child (Matthew 7:9-10), offering even to take care of our own life (Matthew 6:33) and of tomorrow's day (Matthew 6:34), with us only needing to care in the present time to live in God's love, fulfilling His commandments, which are the source of Life (John 14:15), and serving others in love, leaving to the Lord the care of arranging all things necessary for our becoming, material, physical, psychological, emotional, and spiritual.

The root of human suffering, felt through anguish, manifests itself in anxiety. Though anxiety takes many varied and numerous forms, it arises from the ignorance of God – not so much theoretical ignorance, but communal ignorance. The common root of fears is the fear of death, which allows for a dual nuance: the fear of death, in the sense of losing life and the things of this world – which represents, for the person estranged from God, the only horizon – and also the fear of inner death: the thirst for the Absolute, for meaning, for fulfillment in love that satisfies and quenches the human spirit (epectatic). Pleasure and power (will), two fundamental dimensions of the inner human being, when absolutized and freed from the control of reason and spirit, tyrannize human nature through the fear of losing the thing/status with which one identifies. Death, in this way, represents the final insurmountable barrier to preserving the pastiched happiness – but a creation-bound landmark placed by God intentionally, to convince us of the transience of sensual pleasure outside communion with God, a trait given to awaken us from the dizziness of unlawful pleasure and guide us toward the joy of experiencing divine love²².

²² *Slujba învierii*, p. 58.

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