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## The Moral and Spiritual Value of the Old Testament in Postmodernism

### Abstract

Postmodernism is a natural consequence of the human society's evolution which tries to detach itself from the religious patterns of Antiquity and the Middle Ages. Change imposes, however, the identification of other lines as fundamentals, causing a dangerous spiritual reevaluation, with significant risks of eliminating the fundamental values of a life which has been given to us as a gift.

### Keywords

Creator, creation, postmodernism, life, consciousness, spirituality



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## **1 Introduction**

Today's modern society that we're so familiar is based on Christian principles of life which shaped it and led it, to make in full use, man and social life. And these moral principles were born in the treasure of revelation, which means in the Saint Script's books.

If the New Testament is Christian doctrine which has based The Church and it intermediates the spiritual transformation toward completion of the human person, for being like the model-our Saviour, our Lord Jesus Christ, the books of Old Testament also keep a special spiritual value.

They offer to the people knowledge concerning God and His creation, sin's origins and the need of virtue from the people, the existence of moral laws formulated by God and His support in the human effort of knowledge and accomplishment of direction of life.

All these aspects are crucial for two reasons: they provide the basis of introductory lessons that will be uncovered and explained by the activity of Jesus Christ. Some of the lessons learned (with a theological or a moral character), are valid no matter of their specific context in the course of time.

Far from being able to list all these typical notes for the Old Testament revelation, we can, however, underline the following topics:

## **2 The life on earth, in all of its forms didn't occur by accident, but by the divine will and action**

The entire existence begins in God, the first and supreme cause of creation. The Bible report about creation (from the book Genesis) and all the didactic-poetical books of the Old Testament confess essential aspects concerning the origin of life and the man on the Earth.

Biblical perspective confesses that life is the gift of God shared to His creation. The Act of Creation from nothing is the bringing of the human being, from non-existent to the existence.

There are also details of principle revealed to the people, in this divine action. God's commandment from day three, that Earth greenery from itself: "*grass and herb yielding seed after his kind, tree yielding fruit, whose seed was in itself, after his kind*" (Genesis 1, 12), has become a law firmly and entrusted by God to raw power<sup>1</sup>, that means "*it has become a law of nature and it remained a law of earth, giving for the future the power to give birth*"<sup>2</sup>.

Animals of the waters and the birds flying from the 5th day (Genesis 1, 20-23), are "*creatures that have life*" (Genesis 1, 20), because their main feature is the existence, the life and its perpetuating, through the will of God.

The Order received has involved water and then earth, in supporting the Creation act, on the sixth day (Genesis 1, 24-25) however is God which, by His great power, brings to life all the beast. "*And because the Creator of all is Life itself, He also made the waters, theirs living creatures and the flying in the air being. And He commands to the Earth to get out from the different types of animals and relatives of wild beast and there have been as soon as all according to command, above and beyond the mind*"<sup>3</sup>.

They have not taken out of them something that already exists in dormant. "*The word of God creates all those are doing. To grow earth! And not something that had been put into it before, but to*

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<sup>1</sup> N. I. Nicolaescu, "*The social mission of the Church into the World of Saint Scriptures*", Rev. Ortodoxia, Nr.1/1951, p. 46.

<sup>2</sup> Sf. Vasile cel Mare, "*Homilies on the Hexaemeron*", Ed. Sofia, București, 2004, p. 101.

<sup>3</sup> Sf. Chiril al Alexandriei, *Glafire from the books of Moses*, PSB 39, Ed. IBMBOR, București, 1992, p. 10.

*acquire what he hasn't, which means the power to work, the power given by God through command*"<sup>4</sup>.

The man is made by God on the sixth day of Creation, in His likeness (Genesis 5, 1) and he received the opportunity to reach the resemblance to Him, which become and remain a real challenge for human being. *"The Saints Parents say that we have His face, fully and it may not perish, but the likeness was given us at the beginning, only as a potential; human being must to work to achieve its perfection"*<sup>5</sup>, (Genesis 1, 26-27). Therefore, human life *"has the same beginning as the soul"*<sup>6</sup>.

Old Testament books are dependent on this concept of human being Creation, underlining the same divine paternity on herbals, animals and human being (Exodus, 20, 11; 31, 17; I Paralip. 16, 26; II Paralip. 2, 12). The priest Ezdra confessed, in V sec. B.C.: *"Only You are the Lord, only You have made the heaven, the heaven's heaven and its whole army, the earth and everything on it, the sea and everything inside; You create everything and to You submit the heaven's army"* (Nehemiah, 9, 6).

The preacher Isaiah told his contemporary: *"That's how speaks our all-powerful Lord who creates the heaven, who strengths the earth with everything on it, who give life to His people and spirit to those which walk on its extent"* (Isaiah, 42, 5). The preacher Jeremiah confessed: *" (...) He made the earth by his power, He established the world by His wisdom, and stretched out the heavens by His discretion. When He utters his voice, there is a multitude of waters in the heavens, and He causes the vapors to ascend from the ends of the earth; He makes lightnings with rain, and brings forth the wind out of His treasures. How ignorant the man is, in all his*

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<sup>4</sup> Sf. Vasile cel Mare, op. cit., Omilia 8, 1, p. 176.

<sup>5</sup> Ieromonah Serafim Rose, "Genesis. *The Creation of World and the Man of the beginnings*", Ed. Sofia, București, 2006, p. 98.

<sup>6</sup> Mitr. Nicolae Corneanu, "Patristics Miscellanies", Ed. Amarcord, Timișoara 2001, p. 203.

*cognition*”, (Jeremiah 10, 12-14). The confession of God Himself, through Jeremiah’s voice, shows Creation, as the source of every creature on the earth: “*Then was the word of God, to Jeremiah and he said: Look! I am the Lord of all the bodies! Is it really something impossible to Me?*”, (Jeremiah 32, 26-27).

### **3 God hasn’t drawn back from its creation, as a result of the emergence of sin**

Abusing by their freedom, Adam and Eve have eaten from the tree of right and wrong knowledge. In this way the vision of life was dramatically changed, because the possibility to understand and to feel their corruption on doing the evil, which they didn’t know until then. That is the beginning of doing wrong, and the descendants of those first people pursued always to chose between good and evil, depending on their reference to God and their faith in Him.

The books of Old Testament talk about the permanent presence of God within His Creation debased through the initial sin. Even if due to the sin committed by humans, God refuses more and more to talk to them, however His “*eyes*” concern toward those who committing the good, listen to their prayers, assess their humility. And He punishes those who do evil, taking away from them not only life, but also their descending (Genesis 7, 21-23; 19, 25; Ps. 33, 9-15), because there is a natural moral law in their conscience and later, through Moses, a written law. However, people chose rather evil, instead the good. Because of this, God often turns His eyes to not see any more their sins, and their malice.

Moses Law has sent to Jews and to the entire humanity, the theory of moral responsibility which belongs to humans: “*Look, today I put in front of you life and death, good and evil, commanding to love your Lord, to follow His way, to fulfil His commands, His decisions, His law, for living and procreating and your Lord bless*

*you, on the earth that you own*" (Deut. 30, 15-16). Therefore God's attention is continuously focused on humans: "*Look, Lord's eyes toward those who are afraid of Him, toward those who hope in His mercy. For saving their souls from death and feed them in famine*" (Ps. 32, 19). On the other hand, the life of the wicked will never be equally protected (Ps. 54, 23).

There is a concrete consequence of the common origin of humanity, namely human equality based on their life's value equality. God never distinguishes between His children and He doesn't belong just to the Jewish people. He is in charge of all the people whose creator is, especially of those who fulfil His will.

Saving life of ninivitins, as a result of their penance, thanks to prophet Jonah's preach represents the convincing example (Jonah 3, 5-10). Prophet Isaiah underlined that man enjoys his life because of God's mercy, because health and curing of diseases depend on the human relationship with the divinity. Human sins are hastening his death, are making him descend in the dead people home, in the devouring deep down, where nobody can praise God, hoping in a change of his soul condition. Only during this life can be established a beneficial relationship with Him, because only here people may express their voice and their feelings, to bring Him praise and to raise their children with faith in God (Isaiah 38, 16-19). He created the earth and He gave life and spirit to those who live here (Isaiah 42, 5).

When a disease overpowers a man, he is already at "*the gates of dead people home*". He is going to leave the land of "*the living people*", the yarn of his life is cut, as well as a weaver break a wire from his work. But the tenacious pray, full of penance may determine God to add some years, to his life. When the king Ezekiel was illness, he mentioned to God in his prayer that he behaved like a faithful man, and he has his heart clean of any injustice, because he committed only "*what is good*" before God eyes (Isaiah 38, 3). That is precisely why God healed him, and gave him fifteen years in addition to his life (Isaiah 38, 1-14).

The preacher Daniel underlined that the life of human is in God's hands, that means his life and his way on the earth (Daniel 5, 23), and prophet Amos advised: "*Choose good, not evil, to be alive, and so God our Saviour will be with you as you say. Detest the evil and love the good and decide the right judgment at the gates, maybe God will be merciful with the remaining ones*" (Amos, 5, 14-15). Spiritual life will increase if the man will call God's name (Ps. 142, 11), because He is the Creator of the body and the soul (Ps. 65, 8) and He is also the saviour of human's soul from "*the hell's hands*" (Ps. 48,16).

#### **4 The revelation is always an act initiated and supported by God for knowledge, as a factor of progress first of all as regards spiritual life, but also concerning material needs, for a better life**

Through the sin of disobedience of Adam and Eve, man lost the possibility of the communion and natural connection with God, which depends now on his soul's availability in restoring the relation with Heavenly Father, but also on His attitude. God doesn't reveal to each man (as He does with Adam and Eve), He restrained His direct relation to those who was suited for such discover (Enoh, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Joshua, Navi and His preachers).

Humanity had to be brought back to the lost paradisiacal condition, but this aim is supposed to be revealed to humans through appropriate representatives, the supernatural revelation becoming therefore, the main way of discovery and knowledge between man and God. Heavenly Father has not abandoned His creation; He planned its restoration to return to paradisiacal condition. The communication between the parts continued permanently and God reveal Himself when He found it necessary, people seeking Him through cultic acts based on sincere and powerful feelings (Genesis 4, 26; 8, 20).

Noah is the first beneficiary of some extensive revelation, for saving human nation from the flood, Abraham re-knots again the list of direct calls between God and man. And Moses opens the list of the Old Testament's preachers who tell to the people, with their hearts full of gratitude and warmth: "That's how our Lord speaks!" (Exodus 5, 1; Jud. 6, 8; Kings 7, 5; etc.).

God initiated the revelation offered to the people, an action which takes into consideration the circumstances and especially the spiritual capacity of the addressees, for a correct comprehension of His teaches. For Ezekiel is obviously that God refuses to communicate His will (even through His preachers), in front of some people who don't deserve the divine attention, due to a guilty practice of idolatry and a sort of alienation's development (Ezekiel 14, 1-8). They don't realize their estate of sin, which actually close God's communication to them, and persevering just in answers searching, so they seek witches and false priests for revelations which feed their vanity and their earthly plans.

When is necessary, God inspires His chosen, in order to deal with concrete situations, like the implementation of strategies of war which brings the victory or the chosen of some decisions with a lot of implications. Raising arms as spiritual support for the fighting effort (Exodus 17, 11-16), the brass snake construction (Numbers 21, 8-9), the way of structure the camp of war or the army (Jud.7, 4-6), war strategy, the way of divide the conquered territory (Numbers 33, 54), always represent the concrete expression of divine presence and intervention in the life of those who know Him and who wish to remain His obedient sons.

## **5 God sanctions those who resort to idolatry or polytheism, confounding ruefully the Creation with the Creator**

The first people knew God directly and they could not doubt His existence. Their descendants, through God's refusal to communi-



cate more with people due to their sins, they forgot the basic notions regarding the Creator and have resorted to imaginations. God has revealed himself only to those whom he has chosen to fulfil an important role in human history, to discover more and more from people that has protected, to become an example of religiosity, and in the same time, a missionary among other Nations for spreading monotheism. At that level of revelation, the divinity means a single Being and one Person alike. The focus is on monotheistic touch of religion and less on the theological explaining of what is God, Who maintains secrets to another stage of revelation soon to come. He is inaccessible to humans because He is Holy. Yet, the Jews do not have the permission to utter His name, because in their Semite apprehension, the name means the person itself, which would be an impiety in relation to reporting to Him (Lev. 24, 6). Although they knew the name according to the revelation on Sinai (Yahweh-Exodus 3, 5-6) the Jews would prefer to call Him - Adonai (the Lord) or Elohim, even when reading the sacred texts in the synagogue.<sup>7</sup>

The main battle that the Jews will have to fight with the surrounding Nations will be in the spiritual way, namely, the assertion of true monotheism against idolatrous and polytheistic wandering. The Jews will not always be able to retain their faith revealed, despite evidence of divine intervention and support in their favour. Keeping a high conceptual level regarding divinity is affiliated to a specific religious education and continuity in the life of the individual. The attraction towards the concrete religious forms, as the idolatry representations accompanied by a provocative, sometimes sensual cult, or respondent for the immediate material goals, have lodged a real attraction for the usual Jew.

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<sup>7</sup> Athanase Negoită, *"The History of Religion of the Old Testament"*, Ed. Sofia, București, 2006, pp. 67-68.

God strongly manifested against these human decay through the voice of His prophets (Exodus 20, 1-6), denouncing the lack of realism of the gods that run so close, but, especially, accusing their preference for the meanness and Sin, compared with His true reward. The gods of the people are egotistical and the belief in them is wandering: "*gods of silver, gold, brass, iron, wood and stone gods that do not see, nor hear, nor do know nothing*" (Daniel 5, 23; Jeremiah 10, 1-15). For this sin, God punished them repeatedly according to the warnings made (Exodus 20, 5; Deut. 29, 9-18; Joshua 24, 14).

## **6 God takes care of the whole human race and all creation**

The level of spirituality achieved by a certain man drew upon the supernatural revelation, communication, but its spread to a wider circle of people was done only as part of a divine plan, which was preparing the steps for true knowledge in respect to Divinity (Genesis 12, 3; 18, 18; 28; 14). Supernatural revelation was supposed to come from Noah to Abraham and then, through the Jewish people, to all peoples (I Paralip, 16, 24-36). This knowledge should be clear, convincing and full preventing arbitrary human intervention, with philosophical speculation, or re-considering the cult laws already established, as an expression of the religious practice of the link between the human and the divine.

Through the choice of God, the Jewish people had this responsibility, to bear through the history the light of knowledge of the true God (Gen. 12, 3; 18; 18; 28, 14): "*I, the Lord, have called You into My righteousness and I have taken Your hand and I have protected You and I have given You as the covenant of My people, to illuminate the Nations; to open the eyes of those blind, to whip out the enslaved and to bring out the depths of the prison to those who are living in total dark. I am the Lord, and this is My name. I will*

*not give to anyone My glory and My veneration of any graven images. The old prophecies were fulfilled and others, newer we preach; before they are born, I am letting you know them* (Isaiah 42, 6-9).

Israel's choice does not exclude the fatherhood of Yahweh and the other people. The Prophet Isaiah can thus proclaim his plenipotentiary character of Yahweh despite its ignorance by the peoples of the Earth: "*Oh, Sovereign Lord, the God of Israel, You who sit on the Cherubim, but you, alone, are God of all the kingdoms of the Earth. Thou hast made heaven and Earth*" (Isaiah 37, 16). If God manifests with toughness against those who don't know Him, or threaten His covenant people, He does it because they are fallen and, sometimes, even because of the wild religiousness of those. Their polytheistic wandering alienated them so far from God, so that they no longer have the original human value. That is why God supports the struggles of Jews in the conquest of the country and commanded the destruction of those who lost without sparing sometimes the women, the elderly people or the children, if there is a danger of contamination with religious practices of their fallen moral. "*Joshua enters the country with an army from God and from the heads of Israel; he attacked them all, crushed them, won and as a reward of victory, acquired the kingdoms to those whom he defeated*"<sup>8</sup>. "*Moreover, the wars fought by the Israeli have almost always had a religious character*"<sup>9</sup>.

God may seem biased in this case, that was absolutely destroying some and others, but the divine actions in support of Jewish and the commandments have always pursued the fulfilment of the divine promises made to virtuous people (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob), whose progeny was worth the divine reward because

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<sup>8</sup> Origen, *Omilia la cartea Iosua*, PSB 6, Ed. IBMBOR, București, 1981, XII, 2, p. 261.

<sup>9</sup> Ioan Sorin Usca, "*The Old Testament in the Holy Fathers. Joshua*", Ed. Christiana, București, 2004, p. 66.

they have inherited the virtue and may become in their turn moralistic examples for people of other Nations. For God did not matter the number of people involved in wars, but the moral quality that makes the difference between them as souls before God. Origen noticed this divine logic in supporting Jews<sup>10</sup>.

And, in order to prove that before Him the presence of the spiritual condition is straying people, Yahweh punishes in equal measure both the aliens and the sons of His people. An impressive number of young people are killed at the entrance into Canaan because of their falling into idolatry (Numbers 25, 1-9) and any Jewish who broke the commandment of God will be killed in this stage (Joshua 7, 1-26). *“Thus, the Sin must be deracinated along with all those arising from it”*.<sup>11</sup> Killing the sinner means the abolishing the Sin. Because *“justice is immortal, and injustice brings death. But the unbelievers are attracting their death with their hands and with their voice, are looking at it as a friend, are keen on it and have connected with it and truly worthy are to be hers”* (The Wisdom of Solomon, 1, 15-16).

The fact that every man counts before God is observed from the simple fact that, despite the idolatry wandering, Yahweh did not destroy these peoples throughout history, which do not admit Him. Moreover, he gives a clear example with regard to the reception of repentance from other Nations, compared to Jews in the Ninetieths' repentance (Jonah 3, 4-10). Any foreigner who wants to join his Law is received and integrated as a true native (Exodus 12, 48). The legacy of the divine goods is promised to all who respects his commandments. Moreover, foreigners participating in the fulfilment of the divine plans with regard to Jews,

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<sup>10</sup> *“Let us remember, if Joshua defeated the King of Jericho, the king of Ai, the king of Lebna , the king of Lachish and the king of Hebron, he made it for all those cities, living in a law of sin , under unworthy kings, now should live under God's law”*. Origen, *op. cit.*, XIII, 1, p. 265.

<sup>11</sup> Ioan Sorin Usca, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

because often by Philistines, Moabites, Amalekites, Ammonites, Syrians, Assyrians, Babylonians, Egyptians or the quarrel of Yahweh is materialized for the purpose of awakening them from sin. Nebuchadnezzar is called the servant of Yahweh, meaning obeying His commandment (Jeremiah 25, 9; II Paralip. 36, 5), and the King Cyrus of the Persians is considered the master of many Nations through the will of Heavenly God, the One who commanded to rebuild the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem (II Paralip. 36, 22-23).

## **7 Human Life acquires value only in so far as committing the moral good**

The prophets of the Old Testament have contributed decisively to shaping a fair image of human life as a gift, to be godly harnessed through a life lived in virtue. God is not separate from the world; He is a good Father who interacts to his children depending on their behaviour.<sup>12</sup>

But the call from God toward communion with Him has remained the same, even though, to redress the position of man, corrections were needed, more or less extended (flood, mixing languages, scattering, exile, slavery). The scattering of people on Earth has gone from a blessing (by multiplication and dominion, Genesis 1, 28; 9, 1), to a sign of punishing the sin of pride, of subversive thought, of unconstructive unity of rallying the forces of evil (Genesis 11: 7). The scattering of those who could think as one in order to build the Tower of Babel has become a punishment, because they were not based on actual aspects of religious and spiritual value. From then until now, the trends of separation have become a feature of humanity and an impediment in har-

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<sup>12</sup> Teodor M. Burcuş, *"Social Aspects in the Preaching of the Prophets of the Old Testament"*, S.T. nr. 9-10/1966, p. 575.

nessing the collective human potential. Their death mean nothing as neither their lives, in terms of spiritual, did not mean something.

Thus Yahweh is presented as a loving parent towards her children, even if some of them do not even admit it in the position of Master of the Heavens and the Earth. He has patience with everyone because he knows the prospect of bringing them to a moral law being able to offer them the meaning of existence, to remain in his love. Death itself speaks for itself about the limits of a human. And death becomes an instrument of His pedagogy. For those who do not understand His expectations, the death becomes finality of life and Sin, and for those who understand Him, they live a life full of spiritual sense pending divine justice when the Lord will accomplish the resurrection of the dead (Ezekiel 37, 10; II Maccabees 7, 9, 14; Sirach, 48, 5).

It is God who punishes through sickness and death those who sin, defeats the Heads and destroys the judges of the Earth (Isaiah 40, 23, Daniel 2, 21), but he brings those who repent themselves – healing (Ps. 102, 4) and gives life to live before him (Hosea 6: 1-2). *“Here’s that all souls are mine; how is my father’s soul, and the son’s soul: the soul that will go wrong will die. If anyone is right and does judgment and justice ... if anyone regards My commandments and My laws thou shalt keep them faithfully, he is right and undeniably living will be, said the Lord God”* (Ezekiel, 18, 4-5, 9).

Bodily life, similar to the spiritual one, can enliven if God agrees to approaching people, discovering them (Ps. 84, 6). He that he wants his soul’s salvation and observe life through the prism of the divine laws, will always praise God and will receive as a reward more than long days on this earth. His soul will remain alive because the judgment of God will not judge him but on the contrary, he will be rewarded (Ps. 118, 24-25, 174-175). The fear of God becomes a source of life (Proverbs 14, 27), because they are aware of the need for the fulfilment of the divine commandments. Their compliance attracts God’s protection and blessing

in this world, but also the continuity of the spiritual existence in a good condition in life after death.

Thus, the bodily life depends on the spiritual life and the future spiritual life depends on the bodily and spiritual lives here on earth (Ps 79, 19). God's mercy bestowed upon the people culminates in His salvation that He has given them (Ps. 118, 40-41).

The ones living this life as a personal good have taken their share of thanking here on Earth, enjoying the wealth offered by God directly, or inherited from their parents. But in death, they do not take anything from the earthly glory, nor will ever see the light of God (Ps. 48, 17-20). The one who loves life and wants to have good days must not say sly words and not do bad things. To do well and to pursue peace, knowing that God sees everything and he rewards those who understand the value of life.

In relation to these socio-religious principles of the Old Testament we can observe easily the contemporary slipping of the human life to other "*values*", which attract the postmodern human soul. The religious moral principle has become more difficult with time, due to human frailties that make the man attracted by both the permanent component of the world (neo-idolatry, materialism, atheism), and the thirst for unconscious novelty, on the line of a reprehensible superficiality of life, appreciating form at the expense of meaning depth. From Adam and Eve man is tempted to taste the fullness of life and curiosity, the negative example being copied and inappropriate much easier than the positive one. The result found in the evolution of the various ancient or modern societies was invariably the same: "*aging*" the positive moral ideas as time passes, developing new attachments in relation to something else, apparently useful, but not available according to the human existential meaning. There is also another idolatry which impede God in various forms, because it involves subjecting the human in front of some truly "gods": money (Matthew 6, 24), supremacy (Col. 3, 5; Ephesians 5, 5), pleasure,

envy and hatred (Rom. 6, 9; Tit 3, 3), in a word: the sin in all its forms.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Xavier LEON-DUFOUR, *“The Vocabulary of Biblical Theology”*, Ed. Arhiepiscopiei Romano-Catolice de București, 2001, p. 260.