

# Philosophical Reflections on the Existence and Presence of God Today

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**Abstract:** In the Judeo-Christian-Islamic tradition, God is regarded as the creator, ruler, and redeemer of the world and of humanity. Almighty God suffers when His people suffer and ensures that those who worship Him and obey His commandments have their desires fulfilled. This representation of God, which comes to us from the depths of Judaism, was called into question in the most dramatic way by the Jewish Holocaust. The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob,—whom the Jews had worshiped since their exodus from Mesopotamia and their settlement in the land of Canaan, and who so often helped the Jews—appeared to stand aside during one of the most cruel moments in their history and in that of the civilized world: the time when they were being "industrially" exterminated. The study will review the concept of God's existence through the lens of various philosophical thoughts and monotheistic religions—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—culminating in developments in thinking about God in modern culture.

**Keywords:** Philosophical Conceptions, God, Existence, Presence, Arguments

## 1. Introduction

Hans Jonas took up the question of God's presence from the point where those at Auschwitz, pushed from behind into the gas chambers, had left off, waiting in vain for God's help. In *Der Gottesbegriff nach Auschwitz. Eine jüdische Stimme* (1984), he asks: "What kind of God could have allowed what happened to happen?" the philosopher inquires. His answer was that the question of God's presence as the "master of history" must be taken up again. "After Auschwitz we can argue with greater determination than ever before that an all-powerful Deity would be either non-atotenevolent or (in the sector of the world in which we can conceive of it) totally incomprehensible. If God is to be in some sense and to some degree intelligible (and we must stay on the right side of this point), then His benevolent being must be put in accord with the existence of evil, which is possible only if God is not omnipotent. Only then can we maintain that He is intelligible and good, if we admit that there is nevertheless evil in the world. Since we have in any case found the notion of omnipotence itself doubtful, it is precisely this attribute which must yield" (Jonas, 1987, pp. 39-40). This means nothing other than to explain that during the Auschwitz years, "God was silent," rectifying the attribute of omnipotence that the biblical representation attributed to Him. "But God was silent. And here I say: God did not intervene not because He did not want to, but because He could not" (Jonas, 1987, p. 41).

## 2. Representations of God in various philosophical thoughts

Hans Jonas advocated a revision of the representation of God systematized by Moses Maimonides (Rotaru, 2005a, pp. 285-287) and transmitted to our age, a representation taken up in the hymns of the divine service, according to which God is the master of His creation,

rewards good, punishes evil and sent the Messiah to save us. "It is to be admitted," says Hans Jonas, "that something in the world is not in God's power." But the tradition of Judaism cannot be reconciled with any theology of two divinities, nor with Plato's ontology of matter and force. The solution to the problem lies in another branch of the Jewish tradition, which does not operate so monolithically with the idea of the "sovereignty of God": it is the idea of *Zimzum* in Luria's Kabbalah, which signifies a contraction, a restriction, a self-limitation of God. "The restraint is total, as the whole, the infinite – by virtue of its power – has exteriorized itself in the finite, and has thereby charged the finite with enormous responsibility" (Jonas, 1987, p. 46). "We have entered," Hans Jonas concludes, "the age in which God has restricted himself in such a way that we can be his, and in which, at the same time, it falls to man, burdened with super-responsibility, not only to receive something from God, but above all to give something from himself to God". This reflection by Hans Jonas signals the opening of a problem—of the greatest scope and with the most far-reaching cultural impact—starting with one of the most disturbing tragedies in history: how do we represent God? What is God to us, the after-born? What can we expect from God and what do we have to do? We will sketch an answer by reconstructing the representation of God in the *Bible*, observing the transition from the biblical God to the philosophical God, and searching for an appropriate representation today.

### 3. Aspects of the Concept of God in Monotheistic Religions

The monotheistic religions—Judaism, Christianity, Islam—all claim to be the God of Abraham and His descendants: Isaac and Jacob in the case of Judaism and Christianity, Ismail in the case of Islam. But how is God represented in the Abrahamic tradition? The answer is to be found in the first two books of the *Pentateuch*.

*Creation* begins with God as the creator of the world: "In the beginning God made the heaven and the earth" (*Genesis* 1:1). God "said" and thus were created, one by one, light, heaven, earth, man and all that there is. But God not only created man in His own image, but He also "blessed" him; God, therefore, saw to it that man and all that there is were in their natural place under His care. God took special care of human beings and, with Adam and Eve, gave them what they needed, so that they would lack nothing and suffer nothing, but required them to observe certain rules (Rotaru, 2005b, pp. 187-191). When the first people could not resist the temptation of the serpent and ate of the forbidden fruit, God took them out of paradise and sent them to make a living in the harsh conditions of the world. With this consignment of humans to the terrain of earthly history, God has not, however, withdrawn from human life. Eve thanks God for giving her children. God becomes angry with Cain when learns that he has killed his brother Abel and punishes him. Sins attract God's wrath and punishment. At a certain point, seeing how much humans have spoiled the earth, God regrets creating them. God brought the flood, saving only the righteous man Noah and his family. Noah brings offerings pleasing to God, who values them and proposes not to interfere in the natural succession of the seasons and parts of the day. God makes a covenant with Noah and his family, and blesses them: "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and possess it. [...] He who sheds the blood of man, by man shall His blood be shed, for God made man in the image of God" (*Genesis* 9:1-6).

With Abraham, God would make another covenant. "Get you out of your country, and from your kindred, and from your father's house, and come into the land which I will show you; and I will make of you a great nation; and I will bless you, and I will make your name great, and you shall be a fountain of blessing. And I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse those who curse you, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in you" (*Genesis* 12:1-3). Those who do evil to Abraham (like Pharaoh, who bound himself to Sarah), God punishes, but Abraham, the faithful, honest and sacrificer, God rewards by giving him children and the desired.

God renews this covenant with Isaac: "You shall not go down into Egypt, but dwell in the land which I will tell you, and make your dwelling in this land, and I will be with you and bless you; for I will give all these lands to you and to your descendants, and I will fulfill my oath by which I swore to Abraham your father. And I will make your descendants as many as the stars of heaven, and I will give all these lands to your descendants; and among your descendants all the peoples of the earth shall be blessed, because Abraham your father obeyed my word, and kept my commandments, my statutes, my judgments, my ordinances, and my laws (*Genesis* 26:2-5). God then renews the covenant with Jacob son of Isaac. "Do not be afraid! I am Yahweh, the God of Abraham your father, and the God of Isaac. The land on which you sleep, I will give to you and to your descendants. Your descendants shall be as the dust of the earth; you shall spread you out westward and eastward, northward and southward, and all the nations of the earth shall bless you and your descendants" (*Genesis* 28:13-15). God accompanies Israel and the "sons of Israel" in the circumstances of their lives and guides them, gives them commandments and helps them to overcome hardships.

When the 'children of Israel', in Egyptian bondage, are severely beaten by Pharaoh, God—we learn from the Book of Exodus—appears to Moses and shows him how to free His people. And Moses does just that, leading the people across the Red Sea to Sinai. On the mountain of that name, God makes a new covenant, this time with Moses and, through him, with the "sons of Israel": "You have seen with your own eyes what I did to the Egyptians, how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself. Now if you will obey My voice and keep My covenant, you will be My chosen people out of all the nations, for all the earth is mine; you will be My royal priesthood and My holy nation. [...] These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel" (*Exodus* 19:4-6). Then God reveals the commandments to Moses and gives him the *Law* (Rotaru, 2015, pp. 318-322).

According to Matthew's Gospel, the angel tells the betrothed Mary, even before she and Joseph had been together, that she is with child by the Holy Spirit and that she will give birth to Jesus, the savior of her people. Jesus begins His preaching in Galilee, pointing out that "man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (*Mathew* 4:4). In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus takes upon Himself to 'fulfill' the Law revealed to Moses and to reveal the new covenant with God. Later, in the discussion with the Sadducees, Jesus said, "You go astray, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are married, but are angels of God in heaven. As for the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what God has said to you: I am the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob. He is not the God of the dead, but of the living" (*Mathew* 22: 29-32). The Pharisees asked Jesus at this point what the commandment of commandments in the Law is that He defends and promotes. Jesus' answer was: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And the second is like it, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself. Upon these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets" (*Mathew* 22: 37-39).

For anyone who glances, however briefly, at the history of the culture built on the Judeo-Christian tradition, one unquestionable fact is obvious from the outset: in Europe, the Synagogue, on the one hand, and the Church, on the other, have together taken on the representation of the Almighty God, creator, director and savior of the world, who reveals himself and intervenes in the events of the world, at any time, through those who are in this world. It is from this representation that European culture has developed, and whoever wishes to reconstruct European cultural history has to go back to the experience which has most directly, most widely and most systematically taken up the Judaeo-Christian representation of God, which is the experience of the Church (Rotaru, 2023, pp. 62-79). It is in relation to this experience that religious, theological and, through their far-reaching effects, cultural initiatives have diversified in the truest sense of the word.

#### 4. Developments in thinking about God in modern culture

Neuenschwander (1977) had the idea of reconstructing the evolution of God in modern culture in reaction to the Church's reference experience and as an effort to ensure the agreement of biblical representation with the autonomy of thought that had already been assumed at the genesis of the modern world. In a thorough analysis, *Gott im neuzeitlichen Denken*, the Swiss theologian and philosopher has illustrated this evolution and drawn attention to certain realities which, chronologically speaking, lie behind us, but which should not be ignored, at least for the simple reason that this evolution is part of the intellectual edifice in which we find ourselves today, as the after-born.

**4.1. The first observation is that the debate about God "has decisively marked the destiny of the West"** (Neuenschwander, 1977, p. 13). In this debate, the positions have ranged from the mysticism of unbounded devotion, actualized moment by moment, to rebellion against God. In all likelihood, the culture in which we find ourselves in Europe was born and will continue to be a culture marked in its depth by people's relationship to God.

**4.2. The second observation is that, in relation to the God revealed and cultivated with the authority of the Church, the modern conscience has promoted the "principle of autonomy":** in the modern world, "autonomous reason questions the legitimacy of revelation, to which it does not want to surrender blindly" (Neuenschwander, 1977, p. 14). This "reason," to which people entrust themselves, basically means nothing other than that "only free, interior adherence to a truth opens a valid access to faith." It has remained a stepping-stone behind which European culture has been unable to fall durably. Augustine's principle that belief in the Gospels depended solely on the authority of the Church no longer holds. Religious faith and the authority of institutions began to stand on their own resources.

**4.3. The third observation is that 'reason' in Europe gradually took on the role of the intellect, of moral consciousness, of inner feeling, but, what is really decisive, 'reason' sought God and emphasized the Christian tradition.** Hegel has the overwhelming merit of having observed that "reason" cannot separate itself, whatever its impulses, from the Christian tradition, and of having looked at universal history by capitalizing on this tradition. "With this it was recognized that reason itself was inserted in a tradition. Its autonomy could not reside in complete independence. Reason was unable to evade the challenge of tradition. Precisely in this confrontation lies the fruitfulness of the debate, which brought with it not only a deepening of the project of reason, but also a critical elucidation of the traditional statements about God" (Neuenschwander, 1977, pp.14-15).

**4.4. The fourth observation is that in European modernity, on the support of "reason", God was sought in nature: Cusanus, Bruno, Böhme, Spinoza, and Schelling represent this search.** On the same basis, God was then sought in the sphere of the organization of the world itself, i.e. through a rigorously logical approach to the world: Descartes, Pascal, Bayle, Leibniz represent this second search, which the sceptics Hume and Voltaire put an end to, while Kant rescued it in the realm of "practical reason", before Hegel synthesized "reason" and "Christian tradition." Later on, God was also sought on the basis of "reason", starting from inner feeling: Pascal, Rousseau, Schleiermacher and Kierkegaard are representative of this search. But beyond these searches for God—in nature, in the rational organization of the world, in interiority—it can be said: 'The competence of autonomous reason to question uncritical authority has rightly shaken the naïve immediacy of faith in revelation - but the incompetence of empty reason to ground knowledge of God in the place of tradition, and to promote it comprehensively and profoundly, has not made anyone

entirely happy. Honesty in the discussion of God is indeed real progress. It has meant not only the undermining of illusions, but also, what is essential, the dismantling of absolute fanaticisms, with their instruments of power" (Neuenschwander, 1977, p.16).

#### **4.5. *The fifth observation is that "the way of the spirit, the seeker of God, through the modern age is long and winding***

Many failed hopes have been left behind, some wrong paths have been trodden, but along with them—even the wrong paths—have been gathered lessons [*Einsichten*] that cannot be lost. From the unproblematic self-consciousness of reason to unconditional skepticism or radical atheism, almost all possibilities have been traversed. In the end, reason has become more modest. It exposes itself to the seriousness of the unanswerable question about God, but it no longer shrinks from the conviction that it can comprehensively determine him in a system" (Neuenschwander, 1977, p. 17). Whatever the "ways" of the search for God in modern culture, right or wrong, and beyond these "ways," God has continued to be present in representations of human history within the hope of the coming "kingdom of God". The theme had long had a substantial, imposing history behind it. In the *Old Testament*, as early as the *Psalms*, Yahweh is depicted on a throne from which He rules over His people, and the prophet Isaiah has the same vision. According to the *Gospel of Mark*, Jesus announces the approach of the "kingdom of God", and in the *Gospel of Matthew* the "kingdom of heaven" is imminent. As many biblical scholars have observed, Jesus has given a specific "dynamic" to an ancient Jewish representation of the "kingdom of God" (Neunner, 1998, pp. 44-45). His Gospel programmatically entered the terrain of the restructuring of history. The realization of the "kingdom of God" is the central message of Jesus' Gospel.

This message has been, in Euro-American history, one of the most important forces transforming human society. History has been freed from linear interpretations and has been conceived in terms of a sense of the unfolding of events. This meaning has itself been interpreted differently, the means of promoting it have remained controversial, as have the evaluations of historical moments. But history was definitely associated with a meaningful development, and the perception of meaning motivated the actions of many people. Hope in the coming "kingdom of God" did not generate passivity, but, on the contrary, confidence and initiative. "The 'kingdom of God' was perceived, in the culture to which we belong, as a spur to initiative and action, as opposed to the quietist expectation.

### **5. Representations of God throughout history**

With the theme of the "kingdom of God", God has been linked in representations to the meaning of history. Today, in the development of this theme, even when God's transcendence is emphasized, "he is recognized as having a place in human history" (Waldenfels, 1998, p. 228). With this, God is represented in relation to time - to the past, but above all to the present and the future, thus to the actual experience of human life. Through prayer, more and more people call God into their lives and live with hope for a better future. The future is perceived by the person who calls God into his life not as something linear, a mere succession of what already is, but as something coming, as advent. Christian theology has made explicit this conversion of simple succession into advent and has linked the human future to the representation of God. "Suffice it to say, since it has become clear, that the human Ego does not present—neither individually nor collectively, not even in its ever-shifting limitation—the keyword of the times" (Waldenfels, 1998, p. 228). It is not only the "God of Abraham, of Isaac, of Jacob", with the message of the coming of the "kingdom of God", but also the "God of the philosophers" who is today being brought onto the historical stage. From Platonic resources (Rotaru, 2007, pp.139-158), enhanced by a long evolution in modern philosophy, from Cusanus, Descartes and Pascal to

Leibniz, Schelling, Hegel and Kierkegaard, the philosophical representation of God has gained profile and has always accompanied, concurred or interfered with, the biblical representation.

The God of the philosophers was demarcated from the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob by Pascal. On the famous evening of November 23, 1654—as it is written in his *Memorial*—Pascal turned from the God of the philosophers to the biblical God of Jesus Christ, full of the joy and tears of the joy of rediscovery. He describes as "fire" the experience of awakening and finding the true God. According to the indications in the *Pensées*, this is the God who is felt and, more than felt, experienced with all his being by man, unlike the God of the philosophers, whose existence is proved by "natural inferences". "The God of the philosophers," it has been well said, "is God in so far as his existence and his qualities must be proved by natural inferences. Such an intention proceeds from the conviction that, apart from the theology of revelation, that is, that theology which seeks to penetrate by the way of thought the word revealed by God in the Holy Scriptures, there is another theology. This other theology is called - in contrast to the *theology of revelation* or *revealed theology* - *natural theology* or *theologia naturalis*. Natural theology, such is the lapidary determination of its concept, is a science about God insofar as God can be recognized without faith. To recognize God without faith is to arrive at a knowledge of the existence and essence of God by the mere use of the powers of human reason, by natural light—*lumen naturale*—such as to face the skeptical assertions of the atheist, and this in contrast to the attitude acquired by faith alone in the revealed word of God" (Cramer, 1999, p. 15). Natural theology seeks to formulate rational proofs of God's existence and depends on finding them.

The search for rational proofs of God's existence has not always been an endeavor inspired only by philosophy as a discipline and the needs of philosophers to complete their systems. Already in the Epistle to the Romans, the Apostle Paul launched such a quest in Christianity itself, when he said that "since the creation of the world, His invisible things - that is, His eternal power and deity - have been seen by reason of the creation of the beasts" (Romans 1:20). But the search for rational proof of God's existence was kept within the representation of God based on biblical revelation and came as a confirmation of it. That which prevailed with the Apostle Paul—the God revealed and expressed in the Bible—subordinated his representation of God resulting from natural inferences from the observation of "creatures." Later on, however, a tension arose between the God of natural theology and the God of revealed theology, in essence, between natural reason and faith. The great epochs in the development of Christianity in recent times are demarcated by the way in which they have resolved issues that strained the relationship between reason and faith. Tertullian strengthened revealed theology over natural theology under the formula *credo quia absurdum*. Thomas Aquinas claimed the argumentative attestation of the existence of divinity, but admitted that what is obtained by the inferences of reason is not faith, but the preparation of faith — *non articuli fidei, sed preambula ad articulos*. His motto, unlike his famous predecessor, was *intelligo ut credam*: what I know is in order to believe. The God of the philosophers is the preparation for the revealed God. Anselm of Canterbury had overturned this motto, promoting the formula *credo ut intelligam*—I believe in order that I may understand.

Descartes relaunched the search for arguments for the existence of God and emphasized the famous ontological argument. Pascal accepted that the theology based on the inferences of reason and hence the God of the philosophers retained its legitimacy, but at the same time, he realized that the revealed God had to be chosen first. His profound observation was that the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is not the God attested by the inferences of the philosophers. The God of the philosophers satisfies man's need for knowledge, but it does not satisfy what the biblical God satisfies: a deeper, lived,

fundamental relationship of man with the world and with God, a relationship which cannot be reduced to knowledge. Kant, with his *Critique of Pure Reason*, criticized "the theological arguments for the existence of God"—ontological, cosmological and teleological—showing that they basically make an illegitimate derivation from concept to reality. Natural theology was thus dealt a heavy blow. The First Vatican Council in 1870 was to take up the Apostle Paul's formula and relaunch the search for rational proof of the existence of God by the natural light of reason. Nietzsche was impressed by attempts to explain the very belief in God positively, "scientifically", with psychological or sociological approaches, and was quick to launch, in *The Joyful Science*, the formula: "God is dead, we are the ones who killed him". Heidegger, in *Being and Time* (1927), linked the death of God and the end of metaphysics and proceeded to "destroy metaphysics" from the point of view of the temporality of human beinghood.

Has the God of the philosophers ceased to exist after Nietzsche proclaimed his demise? In the immediate posterity of the proponent of the "re-evaluation of all values", philosophy has undergone changes at an increasing pace. What Nietzsche foresaw, namely a decline of belief in God in Europe, was confirmed in philosophy in one respect: philosophers of positivist inspiration proliferated, in whose view questions about the existence of God appear meaningless, since the answers are not confirmed by perceptible experience. Rudolf Carnap, in *Überwindung der Metaphysik durch logische Analyse der Sprache* (1931), formulated most clearly the idea of the meaninglessness of the most far-reaching problems, including the question of the existence of God. Husserl, on the other hand, with his influential transcendental phenomenology, left the question of God's existence out of consideration, being focused on the transcendental performance of the subject. He was interested in *egology* rather than theology. Heidegger made overcoming "ontotheology" his philosophical program.

The existence of God has still preoccupied some philosophers (Jaspers, Marcel, for example), but it no longer holds a central position in philosophical systematizations and has no far-reaching consequences. Relatively recently, Alvin Plantinga has also taken up, in *God and Other Minds. A Study of the Rational Justification of Belief in God* (1967), the effort to formulate rational proofs of God's existence by exploiting the analogy between belief in the existence of other minds and belief in the existence of God and arguing that one cannot accept one belief without accepting, by force of inference, the second (Plantinga, 1990). His example is among the very few of its kind. But true for recent decades is the assessment that, "in so far as the problem of God still plays a role, it is no longer, as in older metaphysics, at the center of philosophical thought, but is, even if not a marginal one, just one problem among others. Even where it is considered possible to adduce evidence for the existence of God, this no longer has consequences for the theory of knowledge and ethics. Often the interest is in problems of proof rather than in what is proved. The character of contemporary philosophy would not change, therefore, if it did not discuss the idea of God at all" (Röd, pp.42-43).

The reduction of the weight of reflections on God in philosophy and the removal of the question of God's existence from the center of philosophical systems have found strong support in the characteristics of today's scientific research. As much as the scientific researcher understands the research enterprise of science as an autonomous one, in the sense that scientific research would be free of prior assumptions and presuppositions, he leaves aside issues that go beyond the questions of science, including the question of the existence of God. Even people dominated by the autonomist self-consciousness of science cannot come to perceive the actual weight and importance of the question of the existence of God. The people of factual science, taken as an end in itself, have become mired in relativism. The people of the scientific faith of science, in its autonomy devoid of assumptions and presuppositions, are unable to take on the comprehensive questions required by the

meaningful experience of life. We have reconstructed philosophical positivism from the point of view of the conceptual recovery of the meaning of the scientific approach to reality, according to Professor Andrei Marga (Marga, 1984).

Rejected from the territory of experience recognized by the experimental sciences, the human experiences of situations and especially the experiences of the need for certainty in relation to the whole of existence and the need to rise above the too fluctuating and confusing world of empirically given events have always led to the invocation of God and religions. Lucinda Vardey had the salutary idea of bringing together in a voluminous anthology, *God in All Worlds. An Anthology of Contemporary Spiritual Writing* (1995), texts from a vast expanse of culture (literature, philosophy, religion, ethics) to prove and illustrate a simple thesis: "organized religions offer not only a sense of community bound together by common faith, the collective study of Scripture, the performance of ritual and the use of disciplines and practices, commandments and sacraments, but also ways of caring for our souls" (Vardey, 1995, p. XV).

The author wants to outline, through extensive documentation, and the invocation of various life experiences, from different religions and different eras, of the most qualified opinions (Einstein, Krishnamurti, Jung, Maritain, Maritain, Schweitzer, de Chardin, Herschel, Herschel, Küng, Tillich, Buber, Capra, Borges, Whyte, Dalai Lama and many others), the notion of "spiritual truth". It is the truth that claims "a deep engagement with the divine in ourselves and others and can lead to transcendent states of consciousness, uniting mind, heart and soul" (Vardey, 1995, p. XVI). Such "spiritual truth", however, has nothing to do with psychoses or occult spheres. Based on the anthology of representative texts in Lucinda Vardey's book, God is presented as a human quest, as a revealed presence and a reality attested by the great tradition of revealed religion, as the protector of the world and of man in the unceasing struggle against evil of every kind, as a reality of the highest order to which many people are fully devoted, as the absolute judge and guarantor of eternal life. "God is our partner in our most intimate solicitations" (Viktor E. Frankl); God is in the "integrating principles" and in the "principle of harmony" with which we operate (Abraham H. Marlow); God is "the God of man, who provokes the decision for belief or unbelief" (Hans Küng); "God is something that cannot be spoken about, that cannot be described, that cannot be put into words, because it must always remain unknown" (Krishnamurti); "We do not create God, we choose him" (Jung); "God is something we cannot fathom", "the manifestation of the deepest reason and the most radiant beauty" (Einstein). These are some of the representations of God that are in considerable circulation today, stemming above all from the interweaving of the philosophical God with the biblical God and, above all, from the human need for certainty in relation to the whole of existence and in the face of an often harsh and disappointing world.

Especially after 1989, leading American intellectuals, sociologists, philosophers and theologians (Robert Bellah, Michael Sandell, Cornel West, John Cobb, David Tracy), have drawn attention to the need to develop American intellectual reflection towards public life, towards dismantling the barriers that still separate it from the general public, towards reviving the spiritual life and clarifying the role of religion in America now and always. An important step forward in this direction was taken not long ago by Victor Anderson, with his volume *Pragmatic Theology. Negotiating the Intersections of an American Philosophy of Religion and Public Theology* (1998). Here he seeks to determine, from within philosophical pragmatism, "the transcendence that is faithful to the preferences [...] for the American pragmatic tradition of philosophical, religious, and moral inquiry." The well-informed author sets an ambitious goal: "to interpret theologically the principles of finitude and transcendence within American philosophy of religion, which I call 'pragmatic theology.' My secondary aim is to keep open the conversation between contemporary

American philosophy and academic theology about the goods and ends that both discourses are prepared to determine for the moral fulfillment of public life" (Anderson, 1998, pp. 2-3).

The great accomplishment of this research is to take up the long-recognized, but seldom carefully addressed, problem of the connection between the "philosophy of public life" and theology. The argument that Victor Anderson draws, especially from the experience of the famous "Chicago school", is that "in pragmatic theology, the validity of theological claims about human life and its meaning depends on empirical and therefore socio-historical inquiry into the depths of the human need for religious life" (Anderson, 1998, pp.61). The externalization that allows empirical examination of religious life is the normative goods that religious life generates. In this way, public life becomes the ground on which theologies are tested. "The adequacy of a public theology is tested in its theological articulation of the public meaning of religious life within a democratic form of life. It is the public character of an inquiry (whether philosophical or theological) that justifies its relevance to public life" (Anderson, 1998, pp. 132).

The theologies and their guiding concepts are seen as cultural products, in terms of their consequences for public life under conditions of democracy understood as a form of life. God is represented in this vision starting from "the unity of being and value, which is framed by finitude (the recognition of limits to human actions, whether in thought or in performance) and transcendence (the recognition that human beings, as they live in the natural world, realize transformative moments of fulfillment). The principle of transcendence sees the goal of human fulfillment as the reflective integration of people's disparate experiences and outcomes in terms of cognitive, moral, social equilibrium and utopian expectations. Such integration is possible insofar as the self and community transcend isolated self-interests and seek fulfillment in relation to larger wholes that encompass the self together with the selves of others, and the community with other communities. The union of the self with others is religiously given and theologically interpreted in the idea of God" (Anderson, 1998, pp.106).

People turn to God today out of individual needs to find a basis and social needs to find a unifying principle. Cultural consciousness, and to a large extent even religious consciousness (Rotaru, 2016, pp. 30-37), is today reflexive (Istodor, 2020, p. 48). Simple faith is always prolonged by the search for evidence of the existence and manifestation of God in human life. An effort to rationalize faith in God itself has already been made over many centuries, and today we feel its effects. On the other hand, as today's consequences of fundamentalism and its history already show, a faith unaccompanied by rational elaboration and support easily degenerates into fanaticism. For all these reasons, Hans Küng, in *Existiert Gott?* was right to emphasize that "theology must not bypass the requirements of the Bewahrheitung [*Bewahrheitung*] of faith in God. Not a blind faith, but a responsible faith: man must not be forced spiritually, but must be convinced with grounds, so that he makes a decision of faith in response; not a faith empty of reality, but a faith in relation to reality: man must not believe simply, without verification. His statements must be in contact with reality, they must be true and confirmed within the horizon of experience of man and of today's society, and they must thus be covered by the concrete experience of reality" (Küng, 1978, p. 582).

How can the existence of God be proved today? Wolfgang Stegmüller devoted a large part of his imposing synthesis *Hauptströmmungen der Gegenwart philosophie* (1989) to the examination of the current state of the arguments for the existence of God. He observed that in logical positivism, represented in a manner that has become classicized by Rudolf Carnap, propositions that do not obey the "verifiability principle" (according to which the meaning of a statement consists in the method of its verification) are considered meaningless and therefore not amenable to rational discussion. Now, already in philosophy after logical positivism, it was clear that the "principle of verifiability" leads to the ruin of

the factual sciences (e.g. history) and of disciplines which forecast the future. J.L. Mackie, in *The Miracle of Theism. Arguments for and against the Existence of God* (1982), renounced the "verifiability principle" as a criterion of meaning and proposed to analyze, without hard prior assumptions, the theistic arguments for the existence of God. Wolfgang Stegmüller takes up Mackie's analysis and subjects it to a scrutiny that remains worthy of attention in view of his particularly sound logical-epistemological training. The results of his reflections, which are also Mackie's, can be summarized as follows:

- a) Mackie ultimately retains five arguments for the existence of God: accounts of miracles; the interpretation of religious experience as a direct contact with something supernatural; inductive variants of the cosmological argument; inductive variants of the theological argument; the belief in the existence of objective norms, whose existence he claims to explain further;
- b) the first two theistic arguments and the last one have too little force compared to the arguments of "naturalism", which rely on the force of "natural explanation";
- c) what remains from these theistic arguments, however, are two aspects that "naturalism" does not take up: the fact that there is a world and the fact that certain causal regularities have validity in this world;
- (d) in the theistic explanation, however, the "improbability" of God's having had recourse, when He created the world, to exactly the causal regularities that we have in experience and the "improbability" of the creation of the world remain unanswered;
- e) the fact that many people do not connect moral actions, religious faith and church organizations proves the absence of the dependence of morality on the philosophy of religion;
- f) the arguments for the existence of God that the following centuries have handed down to us turn out to need to be examined with the tools of logic and epistemology today, but new arguments are possible today;
- g) they might not be able to come from the tradition that modified (like Spinoza) the biblical representation of God in the direction of philosophical representation, but from the theodicy of the neotheistic religions (Stegmüller, 1989, pp. 342-518).

In *Existiert Gott?* Hans Küng considered the possibility that the arguments for the existence of God handed down by tradition no longer have the consensus-building argumentative force of the past. It could be, he accepts, that the arguments sketched out by Plato and Aristotle - then taken up in Christianity (Vasile, 2014, pp.837-842) by Augustine, systematized by Thomas Aquinas, revived in the formulation of Anselm of Canterbury and reworked by Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, Wolf, replaced by Kant with a moral "postulate", speculatively reinterpreted by Fichte and Hegel and more recently taken up by neo-scholasticism - no longer convince enough. The argument of the supreme Good, in which all good things participate (Plato), the argument of the first mover and the argument of the supreme end (Aristotle), the argument of the supreme creator (Augustine), the ontological argument (Anselm), the cosmological, theological, ontological, moral arguments (Thomas, Descartes, Leibniz, Wolf), the moral "postulate" (Kant) remain worthy of interest, but now have a reduced evidential efficacy. Hans Küng and H. Ogiermann, in *Sein zu Gott. Die Philosophische Gottesfrage* (1974), that these arguments move even the believer little today. Natural theology thus seems to be at an impasse.

But it can be seen, Hans Küng argues, that the arguments of natural theology are dependent on assumptions that are now more prominent. It is now clear that it is not possible to deal with the problems of "life forms" in the same way as with technical or scientific problems. The existence of God is not adequately approached by assimilating it to other existences (physical or mathematical objects). It is questionable, on the other hand, following Kant, whether human reason has an open field of application without any limit. Therefore, the effectiveness of traditional arguments does not condition the existence of

God. Hans Küng modifies the strategy of the argument for the existence of God, taking as the ground for the emergence of arguments "the existence considered existentially of man".

## 6. Hans Küng and the new strategy for perceiving transcendental things

The new strategy, proposed by Hans Küng in *Existiert Gott?* can be summarized in a few theses: (a) there is no "self-evident infrastructure" of reason on which faith can be founded; (b) the reality of God is not given directly in the world, and a direct experience (like Malebranche's direct intuition) of God is not possible; (c) without recourse to empirical (*= a priori*) experience, only from the concept of God (as a necessary and absorbed essence) is its necessary existence not deducible; d) it must be realized when and how the leap from what is given in experience to the transcendent is legitimate; e) "belief in God cannot be proved by neglecting the existential component of a man, in such a way that it is dispensed from belief, instead of being required to belief. A purely rational demonstration of the existence of God, which would aspire to convince in general, as hitherto experiences show, does not exist" (Küng, 1978, p. 587). Hans Küng is clearly seeking a new way - between the "dialectical theology" of Karl Barth, posing the question of a "faith in God that is not only maintained but also lived", and the "natural theology of the First Vatican Council" - thematizing a "faith in God that must be proved".

Hans Küng finds this path by retracing the route of Kant's *Critique of Practical Reason* and assuming the "whole man" in his existential existence, uncracked and unsimplified by reductionist strategies. The new path rests on the premise that ethical questions remain decisive for human life, and that ethics involves the question of finding meaning, the scale of values, guiding images and their foundation in/on/in religion. In Werner Heisenberg's formulation, "where no guiding image shows the way, the meaning of our action and our suffering disappears along with the scale of values, and only negation and despair can stand at the end. Religion is thus the basis of ethics, and ethics is the presupposition of life" (Küng, 1978, p. 608). "He who says yes to the existence of God knows why he can trust reality." This conclusion, resulting from the most wide-ranging research on the existence of God undertaken for centuries - we have in mind the research due to Hans Küng - concludes the debate on the existence of God that took place in the wake of the First Vatican Council and then the emergence of Karl Barth's dialectical theology. It also ends a period of "silence" on the existence of God, resulting from the characteristics of the scientific mentality regarding science and from the rather egological or analytic orientations of philosophy. It opens the period of reflections inevitably linked to the problems faced by people in the era of globalization (Rotaru, 2014, pp. 532-541; Petcu, 2023, pp. 90-100).

To highlight the importance of including the debate over the existence of God in the existential human condition, a few landmarks suffice. In *Identität und Differenz* (1957), Heidegger observed that "God entered philosophy through the Concilians" and that when immanentist approaches had to abandon the God of the philosophers, they felt closer to the "divine God". Referring to the situation of his time, the philosopher wrote: "whoever has experienced theology, both that of the Christian faith and that of philosophy from its origins, prefers today, in the realm of thought, to remain silent about God" (Heidegger, 1957, p. 51). Heidegger, in his turn, thus signaled a "silence" of theology. His philosophical rival, Theodor W. Adorno, considered theology to be over. He wrote in *Negative Dialektik*, "No words with a high tone coming from above, not even theological ones, have legitimacy without change after Auschwitz" (Adorno, 1966, p. 358). For two of the most sensitive spirits of their time, theology found itself in a new situation: for one, the existence of God had been silenced, for the other, the question of evil in its most brutal forms was raised in relation to God.

Hans Küng clearly crosses the threshold into a new epoch, the epoch in which we find ourselves, reaffirming the existence of God and giving it a new argument by exploring man's existential existence. The author of the monumental *Existiert Gott?* breaks the silence that Heidegger accused him of and makes the change that Adorno had in mind. He could not, at the time, disagree with the formula "nur ein Gott kann uns retten" (Heidegger, 1976), which Heidegger made public in 1976, and he admitted, with Adorno, that theology itself has to face the answers to the questions arising from the premeditated extermination of mankind. However, the precise question posed by Hans Jonas in *Der Gottesbegriff nach Auschwitz* returns: "What kind of God could have let what happened happen?" Those who are familiar with the Bible will remember the resolution in the *Book of Job* (Anania, 1996), starting from Job's experience. After a life blessed by God with land, herds, flocks, houses, family, the honor of those around him, Job, a faithful and unfailing believer in God and His commandments, finds himself overwhelmed by misfortune: he loses his wealth, part of his family dies in an accident, a severe, relentless illness overwhelms him. Although his wife urges him to denounce God, Job refuses. His friends come to see him and seek to convince him that somewhere he has sinned, so that misfortune befalls the sinner and blessings fall to the righteous. Job is still struggling to assert his innocence and suffers because he cannot explain why God should bring misfortune upon an innocent man. Job's troubles are brought to an end by God Himself, who shows him his mighty deeds, beginning with the Creation, all proof of God's almighty power, and gives him back all that he has lost—his wealth, his family, his health—in reward for his steadfast faith in God. To Job God no longer revealed that the misfortunes that befall him were due to God's permission to Satan to test Job (Rotaru, 2017, pp. 23-30) to see if his faith was self-serving or not. It was not God who was at the origin of Job's misfortunes, but his withdrawal and the opening of the way for Satan's schemes.

Hans Jonas believes that the tragedy of Auschwitz leaves room for the assumption that God did not intervene "not because he did not want to, but because he could not." The tradition inaugurated by Isaac Luria in the 16th century with the idea of God's voluntary "self-limitation," or "contraction," has thus been taken up again. Hans Küng himself takes up the question posed by Hans Jonas in *Der Gottesbegriff nach Auschwitz*, but assumes different points of departure from the philosopher. In *Das Judentum*, he starts from the renowned systematist of Judaism, Louis Jacobs, with *A Jewish Theology* (1963), and from the great American theologian Joseph D. Soloveitschik with *Halachic Man* (1983), to reject the thesis of a "finite God" as incompatible with the biblical representation of God as creator, director and redeemer of the world. From Christianity Hans Küng takes his point of departure in Cusanus' famous *De docta ignorantia* (1440), which defended the idea that "in God there is nothing but limitlessness."

Hans Küng argues that "The unlimited God cannot limit Himself in things. Why not? Because God is something else altogether: pure endless spirit, which nothing limits. And because things, people, the world do not exist alongside or under God, but from the beginning in God, the unlimited." "God did not retreat to the 'Making' but rather unfolded Himself" (Küng, 2001, p. 719). This representation of God as "unlimited in the limited", "absolute in the relative," as Hans Küng points out, is not pantheism, but "pantheism," which means: 'God acts not on the history of the world, but in the history of the world, in and with people and things' (Küng, 2001, p. 719). The author of the wide-ranging analysis in *The Religious Situation of the Times* has reacted to various attempts to reduce the attributes of the biblical God—limitlessness, goodness, omnipotence, presence—and has argued from various angles that "a God whose omnipotence has been taken away ceases to be God, and the representation that God, instead of being good and just, would be cruel and arbitrary, is from the outset untenable/unacceptable" (Küng, 2001, p.727).

## 7. Conclusions

What happened at Auschwitz and every other tragedy of humanity has no simple theodicy explanation. Nor does the great Bible-based tradition have a ready answer to the question posed by Hans Jonas. There is, however, a way out of the seemingly hopeless situation we are in when the all-powerful, just, loving God is confronted with the evil, suffering and tragedies of the world. Küng finds it in an interview given by Elie Wiesel (1989) to a German daily newspaper: "There can be no theology after Auschwitz and no theology about Auschwitz. For we are lost, whatever we do; whatever we say is inadequate. What happened can never be understood with God; nor can it be understood without God. Theology? Logos about God? Who am I to explain God? Some people try. I think they fail. And yet... It is their right to try. After Auschwitz everything is a trial (Küng, 2001, p. 728).

Küng believes that the right remains to a theological test made, as Elie Wiesel himself puts it, to "speak not about God, but to God". "It is my intuition formed over decades," he confesses, "to which I have so far not found a convincing alternative: suffering, immense, innocent, meaningless suffering—individual as well as collective—does not allow itself to be understood theoretically, but only determined practically. For Christians and Jews, there is only a practical answer to the problem of theodicy" (Küng, 2001, pp. 728-729). This answer is in fact an alternative, "the path of an unshakeable trust in God, not irrational but profoundly rational, in spite of everything: faith in a God who remains the Light, in spite of the abyssal darkness. Because Auschwitz exists, says the godless one, the idea of God is unbearable to me. And he who believes in God, be he Jew or Christian, can allow himself to reply: it is only because there is God that the thought of Auschwitz is bearable to me!" (Küng, 2001, p.732).

It is interesting to reflect on Hans Küng's argument that "the unlimited God cannot be limited in things. Why not? Because God is completely different: pure infinite spirit, which nothing limits. And because things, people, and the world do not exist alongside or beneath God, but from the beginning in God, the unlimited." "...God did not withdraw into 'Creation', but rather unfolded Himself." (Küng, 2001, p. 719). This representation of God as "unlimited in the limited," "absolute in the relative"—Hans Küng points out—is not pantheism, but "pantheism"—which means: "God acts not on world history, but in world history, in and with people and things" (Küng, 2001, p. 719). The author of the extensive analysis in *The Religious Situation of the Time* reacted to various attempts to reduce the attributes of the biblical God—unlimitedness, goodness, omnipotence, presence—and argued from various points of view that "a God who has been robbed of His omnipotence ceases to be God, and the representation that God, instead of being good and just, is cruel and arbitrary, is from the outset untenable/unacceptable" (Küng, 2001, p. 727).

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