

# Religious Morphology, Hermeneutics and Initiation in Andrei Scrima's *Il padre spirituale* (*The Spiritual Father*)

MARCO TOTI

This article deals mainly with some themes drawn from the Italian version of Andrei Scrima's *Țîmpul Rugului Aprins. Maestrul spiritual în tradiția răsăriteană* (*The Time of the Burning Bush. The Spiritual Master in Eastern Tradition*), published in Bucharest in 1996 and partially translated into Italian in 2000. Scrima (1925–2000), a Romanian monk, was one of the most gifted Orthodox theologians of the 20th century. The subject here considered are, on the one hand, the development by Scrima himself of a 'religious morphology' founded on a profound intellectual and spiritual hermeneutics, using the historico-religious comparison especially between Christianity, *Islâm* and Hinduism (and giving rise to the attempt to renew Christian theological language); on the other hand, the discussion on the value of a particular rite to which the Romanian theologian explicitly refers as 'blessing of grace', an 'initiation' transmitted in the *Rugul Aprins* – a hesychastic circle of monks and laymen, in which the young Scrima took part, active from 1944 until 1958, notably in the *Antim* monastery in Bucharest under the direction of the writer Sandu Tudor, later Fr Agathon (1899–1960?) – by Father John the Stranger (Ioan Kulygin). This latter topic is strictly connected with the intellectual relations Scrima had with the most significant spokesmen of the 'traditional orientation' (R. Guénon, F. Schuon), also as far as the question of the perennialist 'universalism' is concerned; on that, as is often the case with him, Scrima's position is very nuanced. It should be clear that, given the complexity and the subtlety of the matters dealt with here, this work constitutes only an initial sample of a wider treatment (on which we are currently working).

**Keywords:** A. Scrima; *Rugul Aprins* (Burning Bush); Father John the Stranger (Ioan Kulygin); R. Guénon; F. Schuon; hermeneutics; religious morphology; 'blessing of grace'; *Logos*.

Born in 1925 in Gheorgheni, A. Scrima graduated with the renowned theologian D. Stăniloae and was the assistant of A. Dumitriu, professor of logics and metaphysics in Bucharest (through which he was introduced to *Antim*). Scrima became a monk in July 1956; between the beginning of 1957 and the spring of 1959 he managed to escape the Communist persecution thanks to a scholarship in India, which allows him to study Sanskrit and Hinduism. The anonymous article (published in two parts in the Dominican review *Istina*) 'L'avènement philocalique dans l'orthodoxie roumaine' dates back to that time. Back from India, he was ordained an orthodox priest and later appointed observer for the patriarch Athenagoras at the sessions of 1964 and 1965 of the Second Vatican Council; during that period, he wrote *Duhul Sfânt și unitatea Bisericii. Jurnal de conciliu* (*The Holy Spirit and the Unity of the Church. A Journal of the Council*, published in 2004 by the Romanian publishing house Anastasia), which constitutes a significant document with regard to the 'intra-Christian ecumenicism'. Between 1968 and

1989 he taught in the University ‘Saint Joseph’ in Beirut. After the fall of the Communist regime, in 1992 Archimandrite Scrima went back in Romania; in the 90’s – during the half of which he published *Țîmpul Rugului Aprins. Maestrul spiritual în tradiția răsăriteană* (*The Time of the Burning Bush. The Spiritual Master in Eastern Tradition*) and the introduction to the Romanian edition of F. Schuon’s *De l’unité transcendante des religions* – he made his interest in the ‘traditional orientation’ more explicit; moreover, he was one of the ‘inspirers’ of the establishment in Bucharest of the ‘New Europe College’, an institute for advanced studies in humanities founded in 1994 by Andrei Pleșu, former Foreign Minister and Minister of Culture of the Republic of Romania. The Romanian hieromonk died in 2000 in Bucharest for cardiac complications.

Scrima left a *corpus* of writings which, though not vast in size, was of particular density and undoubtedly central to the field of contemporary religious and Christian studies. We shall be dealing here with only a few of the themes of *Il padre spirituale*, Scrima’s only substantial work translated into Italian,<sup>1</sup> but especially significant in that it is the mature synopsis of his writings. The identification of the main themes underlying his work will be used as a means of analysing Scrima’s own perspective, directed towards suggesting a *morphological* affinity between the traditional forms of various religions,<sup>2</sup> an affinity which grows ever clearer the deeper the symbolic hermeneutics becomes and which occurs in monasticism – or, more accurately, ‘asceticism’.<sup>3</sup>

One of the immediately apparent characteristics, on even a superficial glance through *Il padre spirituale* in both its Romanian and Italian versions, is the subtlety of the language used and the starting points which, from the standpoint of ‘linguistic comparison’, tend to dwell on language itself as a means by which to bring out the depth and breadth of the Christian *kerygma*. Indeed, in reading *Țîmpul Rugului Aprins*, the formal and semantic refinement of the terminology used immediately springs to the eye – highlighting the delicacy of the subject dealt with. Scrima’s language is allusive and at times deliberately ‘obscure’,<sup>4</sup> clearly at one with the profundity and restraint of the symbolism which it continually brings to mind. After having related the letter-testament (of which the text in question is substantially a comment with various *excursus*) with which

<sup>1</sup> See, for original work, Scrima, *Țîmpul Rugului Aprins. Maestrul spiritual în tradiția răsăriteană*, and, for partial translation from Romanian into Italian, Mainardi (monk of the Bose Community), *Il padre spirituale*. In this brief article the focus will be on the first two, of a total of three chapters of the Italian translation of the work: ‘Un pellegrino forestiero’ (‘A Foreign Pilgrim’), 9-15 (in the original version ‘Scrisoarea Părintelui Ioan cel Străin’, 21-24), and ‘Il ministero del padre spirituale’ (‘The Ministry of the Spiritual Father’), 17-102 (‘Lectura hermeneutică a scrisori’, 25-108). If no other information is reported in the footnotes below, translations of the passages taken from Scrima’s and Montanari’s works (originally not in English) are ours.

<sup>2</sup> Dumbravă called this perspective ‘isomorphism’ (see her ‘Storia delle religioni ed ecumenismo’).

<sup>3</sup> See below.

<sup>4</sup> Montanari, *La fatica del cuore*, 119 n. 150. On the subject a significant international Conference took place about a year ago in Rome: *Andrei Scrima e il linguaggio teologico contemporaneo*, 10/29-30/2008, Romanian Academy and Pontifical Oriental Institute.

Father Ioan<sup>5</sup> bid farewell to his spiritual sons before his Siberian exile<sup>6</sup> – bearing witness to a ‘spiritual inheritance’<sup>7</sup> – the work begins with the chapter *Il ministero del padre spirituale*, the first paragraph of which is meaningfully entitled *L’apertura della parola* (*The Opening of the Word*). This name alludes to the ‘word which opens’ the Divine Word, giving rise to an encounter and evoking a descent (which calls to mind the Koran and its Sura *Fâtiḥah*, the ‘Opening’, to which Scrima meaningfully refers), and the ‘word which has opened’ to reveal a path.<sup>8</sup> In Christianity, the opening of the injury to the side of the crucified *Logos* (John 19.33-4) enables access to knowledge which ‘transcends from within’ the dogmatic sphere by those willing to receive it.<sup>9</sup> This possibility is based on a *re-velation*<sup>10</sup> which, while revealing the substance of a redeeming spiritual horizon, also etymologically implies a ‘double concealment’.

As to the *incipit* of the letter by Father Ioan, Scrima says that

every sacred text has its opening word, so that from that moment on a place, a topology is offered: within the latter, what is to be said afterwards can then *take place*, in the double sense of receiving a suitable place and that of being made able to occur there. *Father Ioan therefore conforms, in an instinctive manner I would say, to a universal protocol.*<sup>11</sup>

In relation to the ‘emptying’ (in Greek *kénosis*) of the Word, Scrima says that ‘the essential source of this “disappearance of the countenance” is once again the crucifixion of the *Logos* on – and only on – the cross. This is the birthplace of the *christic* (not *Christian, historical*) tradition’.<sup>12</sup> It is here that Scrima implicitly takes up once again the widely-debated issue of the excessiveness of ‘cosmic Christ’-*Logos* compared to the historical Jesus. According to a theological

<sup>5</sup> Born in 1885, he was the confessor of the metropolitan of Rostov, then the spiritual father of the *Rugul Aprins*. This Russian monk from Optina Pustyn’ managed to escape from the former USSR and took refuge in the monastery of Cernica, close to Bucharest, in 1943. He was interned in a Siberian Gulag at the beginning of 1947, and died in an unprecised date. On Fr Ioann’s letter see Dragan, ‘Une figure du Christianisme oriental’.

<sup>6</sup> Fr Ioan spent almost three years (from 1943 until January 1947) in Romania.

<sup>7</sup> On that see below. In another version mention is made of ‘the “charismatic tradition of the spiritual inheritance”’ (cited by Vâlsan in Montanari, *La fatica del cuore*, 120). We agree with Montanari in believing that the first version (with the definite article) ‘refers to the spiritual lineage of Optina, and that therefore it indicates an act of humility more than an awareness – much less probable – of the multiplicity and equivalence of “initiatic ways”’ (*ibid.*, 121).

<sup>8</sup> *Il padre spirituale*, 19.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> On the *mundus imaginalis*, a symbolic dimension which connects – by distinguishing them – the world created to the ‘forms of creation’, see Florensky’s magisterial analysis in *Le porte regali*, 19 *et seq.* (with specific reference to Eastern Christian iconography). See also below, n. 59.

<sup>11</sup> Scrima, *Il padre spirituale*, 19 (the second set of italics is ours: pay close attention to what we can call Fr Ioan’s ‘unconscious agreement’, although with some ‘significant nuances’ (*ibidem*), to ‘a universal protocol’ [cf. above, n. 7]). If and how much Scrima consciously ‘superimposes’ a ‘Guénonian’ interpretation onto Fr Ioan’s letter is entirely a different issue which cannot be tackled here.

<sup>12</sup> Scrima, *Il padre spirituale*, 38 (on *kénosis* cf. also below). On the meaning of the ‘disfigurement’ of God and of the *starets* see Scrima, *Il padre spirituale*, 39.

line which leads, in the Catholic sphere, to the so-called ‘theology of pluralism’, the *Logos*, pre-existing to every ‘manifested’ form (including, as *one of the possibilities*, that of Jesus as a man) since eternally generated by the Father, is not limited *sic et simpliciter* to the ‘individual’ figure of Jesus.<sup>13</sup>

In any case, the symbolism of the cross, with which the ‘annihilation of God’ is connected, did not by simple chance develop more in the Islamic sphere than in the Christian one;<sup>14</sup> moreover, the ‘annihilation of God’ constitutes the sign *par excellence* of ‘apophatism’, as negation of human ‘limits’.<sup>15</sup> An apophatism which – almost as a sort of ‘lowest’ (or ‘highest’!) common denominator, closely linked, in its Eastern Christian formulation, to the *antinomic* orientation of theology<sup>16</sup> – seems to be assumed as a sort of *medium* leading to a ‘zenithal’ *unity* not only of Catholicism and Orthodoxy, but also – at least tendentially – of other traditional ‘religions’.<sup>17</sup> As concerns the disfigurement of Christ on the cross there is clearly, correlatively, ‘the seed of a paradox, with man becoming richer the more he empties himself [...] *something of a universal nature* and, above all, extremely specific for an *existential apophatism* which [...] is part of the orthodox tradition’.<sup>18</sup> In this sense, ‘it is necessary that God hide, that he efface himself, so that we seek him. In this way *nothingness becomes the supreme affirmation of being*’:<sup>19</sup> something which bears similarities with the *Abgrund* (German: ‘depth,

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. J. Dupuis, *The Cosmic Christ in the Early Fathers*, 53–83. Take, for example, some theologically fundamental implications: while it is true that Justin, Irenaeus, and Clement say that the manifestation of God in the *Logos* culminates in becoming man in the form of Jesus Christ, it is also true that ‘the *Logos*-theology of Justin, Irenaeus, and Clement is not lacking in similarity from one author to another. *All three make reference to a manifestation of God in the Logos before the Incarnation of the Word*, indeed throughout human history and from creation itself’ (*ibid.*, 70; our italics). The distinction between the generation of the *Logos* by the Father and the Incarnation of the *Logos* in Jesus would therefore allow for a ‘universalist’ (‘inclusive’) opening up of Christianity to other religions. This thesis has also been used, on the basis of reasons which many times are reductionist in a social sense, by the ‘liberation theology’. The distinction between ‘christic’ and ‘Christian’ (see above), which implies an ‘asymmetry’ between Jesus and *Logos*, does not necessarily have a heterodox nature: we could say that Jesus Christ ‘is’ the *Logos*, but that the *Logos* is not *only* – it being not possible to be so – Jesus. On this subject, see Scrima’s judgement on the Schuonian thesis of the impossibility that the *Logos* be entirely contained in a single form (see below). However, we must take into account that Scrima, although a sympathizer of the ‘traditional orientation’ with Schuonian ‘nuances’ (see below, nn. 25 and 26) and to some extent not far from some Catholic ‘pluralistic’ themes, is still an Orthodox archimandrite holding high-level positions in ecclesiastical spheres.

<sup>14</sup> See Montanari, *La fatica del cuore*, 94.

<sup>15</sup> Scrima, *Il padre spirituale*, 37 et seq.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>17</sup> See below. Traditional ‘religions’, in Guénonian terms, generally include monotheistic ones and those of the Oriental tradition (*in primis* Hinduism, Buddhism and Taoism).

<sup>18</sup> Scrima, *Il padre spirituale*, 41-2 (first set of italics mine).

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 39. The idea finds confirmation *ibid.*, 72-3: ‘through it [the cross] nothingness becomes a way to attest to being. The cross constitutes the “level zero” of God’s presence: “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?”. It is the Father’s abandonment of his Son, it is his expiring: “and He gave up the spirit”. But this final act is the “fulfilment”, of that leading to perfection of everything by which the Spirit is given, is communicated to others. And it implies the descent to the lowest regions of being’.

bottom, precipice’) of Eckhartian metaphysics, the Buddhist *shunya* (Sanskrit: ‘emptiness’) and the Hindu *Brahman nirguna* (Sanskrit: ‘non-qualified’).<sup>20</sup>

As concerns the theme of a ‘religious morphology’ delineated on the basis of a ‘wide-ranging’ comparison, in part by way of profound ‘spiritual hermeneutics’ (which clearly does not let itself be dragged into facile forms of occultism, nor so very fashionable heterodox references, much preferring suggestions and data outside of Christianity but tendentially compatible with it), Scrima explicitly speaks of a ‘Christian gnosis’, the mystery of which prevents its profanation, and bases it on Romans 10.2,<sup>21</sup> with reference to 1 Corinthians 2.14–3.1 (in which Saint Paul distinguishes between spiritual, psychic and hylic, without separating them in the Gnostic manner).<sup>22</sup> This gnosis is based on the transmission of an authentic and objectively active spiritual influence. In Christianity, transmission (Greek: *parádosis*) of such an influence dates back to – and has its foundation in – the outpouring of the Spirit (Greek *parédoken* in John 19.30: ‘gave up’, ‘passed on’ the Spirit) by Christ at the moment of his death.<sup>23</sup> The theme of transmission raises the issue – in addition to that of the affirmation of the initiatory nature of hesychasm (in the case in point of the forms of transmission of the hesychastic method of prayer as part of the *Antim* Romanian confraternity)<sup>24</sup> – of ‘inheritance’, meaning the authentic succession of *startsy* (plural of Russian: *starets*, ‘spiritual father’): a theme which Scrima links to the ‘resumption of the attention (and not mere curiosity) and relative debate over the initiatory nature of the spiritual life’, a debate in which R. Guénon was, according to the Romanian father, one of the forerunners.<sup>25</sup> In addition to that, and with clear reference to ‘the

<sup>20</sup> And yet, Scrima affirms – explicitly *contra* Schuon – that it is precisely the *kénosis* of the Christ on the cross which does not allow to ‘cataphatically reconcile’ the different ‘traditional forms’ (see below, n. 25).

<sup>21</sup> Scrima rightly quotes the ‘important *hapax*’ in Romans 10.2, *epígnosis* (*Il padre spirituale*, 46).

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 38–9.

<sup>24</sup> Dragan, ‘Une figure du Christianisme oriental’, 11. That the ‘blessing of grace’ is a ‘virtual initiation’ is explicitly attested by Scrima since 1958, the publication year of his ‘L’avènement philocalique dans l’orthodoxie roumaine’ (see Montanari, *La fatica del cuore*, 124 and Scrima, *Il padre spirituale*, 57).

<sup>25</sup> On the relations between Scrima and the ‘traditional orientation’ see Montanari, ‘Meta fisica e asceti: le tracce di A. Scrima nel mondo moderno’ and Toti, ‘A. Scrima e l’orientamento tradizionale’ (International Conference ‘Andrei Scrima e il linguaggio teologico contemporaneo’, Pontifical Oriental Institute, 10/30/2008), and Montanari, ‘Prospettiva di una *élite* intellettuale: A. Scrima e l’Occidente’, paper given at the Dragan Foundation in Rome, 04/02/2009. Of a ‘contiguity’ on the part of Scrima with ‘traditionalism’ there are also, obviously in addition to his writings, various clues and evidence, including the preface to the Romanian edition of *De l’unité transcendante des religions* by F. Schuon (Bucharest 1994) and the statements by A. Manolescu, who, close to the ‘traditional orientation’, knew and was an assiduous visitor of the Romanian monk (Dragan himself confirmed the thesis). On this subject, attention should be given to this passage, which comments on paragraph 3 of the letter-testament by Father Ioan (quoted in Scrima, *Il padre spirituale*, 14): ‘herein the text implies [...] that there is a topology of concealment. There are places, centres in which tradition has its well-springs, with custodians, sentinel guards, men invested with a special responsibility: places jealously “guarded” [...] *The consciousness [...] and the evidence of such a region integrates orthodoxy (in an external sense) with what I would call oriental tradition, which extends to the edges – once again in an external sense – of Asia. These are spe-*

problem of the initiatic transmission' posed by Guénon himself, Scrima also said that 'it seems very significant that these issues were formulated publicly at the very time when Father Ioan joined us'.<sup>26</sup>

On the matter of the 'blessing of grace' as *word and act* – therefore *ritual* consisting in an invocation and a placing of hands<sup>27</sup> – reproducible on the 'cosmic' level, Scrima, after having defined the spiritual father as 'transmitter' of a spiritual influence by way of the blessing<sup>28</sup> (on the subject drawing examples from both the Semitic and Sanskrit traditions), states that creation is necessarily followed by blessing as qualification of the fulfilment of the work. In this sense, the blessing is 'the first article of a grammar of consent to manifestation'. It 'has

*cific assonances that originate from their common direction, within a consciousness of the centre which appears, mutatis mutandis, in other traditions within the Orient'* (*ibid.*, 92; our italics); all that clearly calls to mind, for example, Guénon's *Le roi du monde*. In addition, on the 'consonances' between Scrima and Guénon, see also the rigorous survey in Montanari, *La fatica del cuore*, 133-44, especially 138-9 (it would seem that herein we are approaching – though within a context of a 'symbolic hermeneutics', and not an explicitly 'operative' one – some Schuonian 'supra-formal syntheses' [the expression is reported *ibid.*, 164 n. 344, and can be applied, for example, to the 'Marian' character conferred by Schuon to the *tarîqah* he directed]); see also below, n. 36, 42, 43 and 46. It seems worthy of note to us that Scrima took part in the important week-long series of talks at the Rothko Chapel in Houston on *Traditional Modes of Contemplation and Action*, the proceedings of which were published in part as well as in a definitive edition (Ibish and Lamborn Wilson, *Traditional Modes of Action and Contemplation. A Colloquium Held at Rothko Chapel*). The introduction to the complete edition was written by M. Pallis [*ibid.*, 1-11] and in the same edition there was also a message by F. Schuon: *ibid.*, 13-19). In this symposium, participants included such eminent 'traditionalists' as H. Smith, S. H. Nasr (one of the organizers of the event), J. E. Brown, L. Schaya, V. Danner (all followers of Schuon), with in attendance Mr and Mrs Chittick, scholars 'close' to 'traditionalism' such as E. Zolla and T. Izutsu, and others which showed an interest in this orientation (R. Panikkar and J. Needleman), as well as various authoritative religious figures. On this occasion Scrima gave a paper entitled 'The Hesychastic Tradition: an Orthodox-Christian Way of Contemplation' (published in Ibish and Marculescu, *Contemplation and Action in World Religions. Selected Papers from the Rothko Colloquium 'Traditional Modes of Contemplation and Action'*, 157-68, and followed by discussion whose summary is found *ibid.*, 169-76. Scrima also wrote an introduction for the abridged edition: *ibid.*, 11-15). The event also included other lectures (among the others Scrima's 'Iconography and Architecture of the Eastern Church') and documentaries by Smith on Sufism and Tibetan Buddhism. On the intellectual relations between Scrima and Schuon see the discussion below.

<sup>26</sup> Scrima, *Il padre spirituale*, 47. The theme is once again engaged, with reference to the chronological 'coincidence' between the publication of *De l'unité transcendante des religions* by Schuon (sign of a serious recognition of the sense and destination of the hesychastic tradition from a western stance and a work 'scrutinized as suitable' in Romania already at the time of its release) and the activities of the *Rugul Aprins* in Bucharest, in Scrima, *Teme ecumenice*, 157. The Romanian father agrees with Guénon's conception of initiation, basing the view on the fact that 'such distinctions [between initiation and exoteric rites] are also found in other Church Fathers; Basil the Great also spoke of a secret knowledge, of a 'discipline of the arcane' (*Il padre spirituale*, 56). On the consonances between Scrima and Guénon as concerns the notion of 'tradition' see Dragan, *Une figure du Christianisme oriental*, 14 and n. 49 (even if we nurture doubts over the thesis of the 'Gnostic' character of the Burning Bush, and even of its being a forerunner of 'new religious movements' [*ibid.*, 11 *et seq.* and 20]). However, accepting – from this point of view – Schuon's thesis (*Il padre spirituale*, 57), Scrima states that '[however] reductive in Guénon is the thesis that in Christianity there was an initiatic tradition which in any case has been lost: in this way, everything would now accordingly be esoteric (doctrine, rite, initiation)' (*ibid.*, 56; see Dragan, *Une figure du Christianisme oriental*, 14 and, on the definition of initiation according to Scrima, *Il padre spirituale*, 57). In reality, Guénon simply said that this initiatory tradition, following the providential descent of Christianity in the esoteric domain, completed more or less about the

the role of a seal. What is blessed is in this way set up within the fullness opened up by the act of becoming [...] in Maximus the Confessor, the “essence” is the *well-being* (*eu-eînai*), not only *being* (*eînai*). The blessing constitutes an act of consent, and therefore of qualification, which goes beyond the level of *phýsis*, of the natural being. By way of blessing, one can establish communication between the spirit and the *phýsis*. *Ens et bonum convertuntur* was the assumption of mediaeval scholars, who still placed themselves in the transparency of this meaning of the blessing’.<sup>29</sup> The ‘God saw that it was good’ (Hebrew: *wa-yare’ Elohim ki tov*) of Genesis refers both to the last *word* of Christ on the cross (Greek: *tetélestai*, ‘has been fulfilled’, ‘is perfect’), meaning ‘the blessing of a creation [...] *reoriented*’, and also to ‘the other end of the *arché* revealed by tradition and the holy text, and therefore in the Sanskrit sphere’, to the Sanskrit *su asti* (which precisely means “[it] is good”) from which we have ‘swastika’, a form of a rotating cross and therefore, as rotation, *act*.<sup>30</sup> The terminological and semantic parallel is accompanied also by a significant correspondence in terms of ‘sacred chronology’ with ‘the commentaries of Brahmin saying that, at every rotation of the swastika, at the end of every cosmic rotation, *su asti* is said. This corresponds perfectly to the rhythm of the days in Genesis’.<sup>31</sup> Therefore, here Scrima highlights a remarkable ‘morphological’ parallelism between the ‘*act*’ of creation and the *words* of blessing in the Old Testament, in the New Testament (cross as *axis* of the world<sup>32</sup>/last words of Christ on the cross) and in some commentaries of Hindu sacred texts (rotation of the swastika/*su asti*); moreover, it is interesting to notice that the ‘blessing of grace’ as authentic ‘initiation’ reproduces all that, in its join-

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time of the Council of Nicea, was knowingly relegated to circles being almost entirely inaccessible (for example, the *Fraternité du Paraclet* and the *Estoile internelle*, on the subject of which see Salzani and Zoccatelli, *Hermétisme et emblématique du Christ dans la vie et dans l’œuvre de Louis Charbonneau-Lassay* [1871–1946], with special reference to 61–114, and Zoccatelli, *Le lièvre qui rumine, autour de René Guénon, Louis Charbonneau-Lassay et la Fraternité du Paraclet*) or ‘to branches of Christianity different from the Latin Church’ (Guénon, *Considerazioni sull’esoterismo cristiano*, 32 n. 4; cf. also, on the modes and causes of this ‘adaptation’ [not ‘loss’!], *ibid.*, 20–22: ‘[...] to say that [the sacraments] have “lost” this [initiatory] character leads to a certain inappropriateness of language, as if this had been something purely accidental. We, on the other hand, believe that it was an adaptation which, despite the unfortunate consequences that it necessarily had in certain senses, was entirely justified and made necessary by the circumstances in terms of time and place’ (*ibid.*, 20–21). The search for an initiatic chain on Mt Athos by V. Lovinescu in 1935 should be seen within this context (on that see Mutti, *Eliade, Vâlsan, Geticus e gli altri. La fortuna di Guénon tra i romeni*, 59–60, and Dragan, *Une figure du Christianisme oriental*, 14–15). Of special interest, on the other hand, is Scrima’s affirmation that ‘also within the context of the Guénonian vision [...] Christ’s resurrection, *éschaton* fulfilled, is situated *outside* or *beyond* tradition: it is an *extra-* or *meta-*traditional datum. It goes without saying that the first expected to understand this are Christians [...]’ (*Il padre spirituale*, 57 n. 28).

<sup>27</sup> As attested by Sœur Devillers, *Ce que fut dans ma vie la rencontre du père André Scrima*, 264–5.

<sup>28</sup> Scrima, *Il padre spirituale*, 50.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 52–3. Cf. below, n. 32.

<sup>30</sup> Scrima, *Il padre spirituale*, 52–4.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 53. Cf., on the ‘ascendancy’ of this passage, Montanari’s observations above, n. 25.

<sup>32</sup> Scrima, *Il padre spirituale*, 54 n. 25.

ing act and words. In addition, at the fall – ‘necessarily’ induced by creation,<sup>33</sup> creation in turn ‘confirmed’ by way of the blessing of God – by symmetric correspondence, the revelation of the divine function of *omnitenens* (Greek: *pantocrator*, Arabic: *Dhabet al-Kull*) ‘occurs’.<sup>34</sup>

Also significant – on the same subject – is the reception of the Hindu doctrine of the four ages: ‘our human history can be considered an unceasing succession of cycles which prepared for the end’.<sup>35</sup> Scrima implicitly attributes to *kâli-yuga*<sup>36</sup> (Sanskrit: ‘age of the goddess *Kâli*’, goddess of destruction and, by no coincidence, ‘female hypostasis of time [*kâla*]’),<sup>37</sup> in which humanity is considered to be currently, the ‘*crystallization* of time’<sup>38</sup> of which Father Ioan had spoken and which Russian Communism had eminently caused – quantifying humanity and thereby ‘reifying’ it, like David who dared to take a census of the populace<sup>39</sup> – by way of ‘the opposite face of exuberance, of momentum: parades, meetings, competitions [...]’, which acted as a counterpart to ‘*the impossibility of still being pilgrims*, whereas all Russians had traditionally been pilgrims until just before World War I broke out’.<sup>40</sup> And movement, ‘attraction towards a centre’, was also attested in sacred Hindu chronology, for example in the *Aitarêya Brahmana*, which, according to what Scrima reports, says: ‘*Kritia* [*yuga*] [“golden age”]: travels and crosses (space)’.<sup>41</sup> The same geometric symbolism of the circle and the

<sup>33</sup> The creation is depicted in this sense as a primordial, cosmogonic sacrifice of the divinity, through which the One ‘becomes manifest’ in many. This is reproduced by ritual sacrifice, which is made of the two phases of ‘disintegration’ and ‘reintegration’ (the latter consisting in the bringing into being of the *coincidentia oppositorum*; on this subject see, with special reference to the Vedic sacrifice, Coomaraswamy, *Selected papers. II. Metaphysics*, 199). According to what is said of Scrima by Father Élie of Deir-el-Harf, ‘le fondement de la réalité est le sacrifice. “Si le grain ne meurt...”’ (quoted in ‘Témoignage’, 251). In addition, incarnation constitutes, beyond a ‘supreme’ divine sacrifice, the ‘course’ and peak of a constant, ongoing creation.

<sup>34</sup> Scrima, *Il padre spirituale*, 54-5.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>36</sup> Scrima explicitly supported (at least from the beginning of the 1970s) the idea that we are at the end of a cycle, with one of the ‘signs of the times’ being the general reduction of Christianity to a *cultural and institutional fact* historically understood: ‘Christianity, *in this approaching end of our historical cycle*, is first of all a fact of culture, of institutional structure and of temporal presence’ (discussion after Scrima’s speech at the Houston conference: Ibish and Marculescu, *Contemplation and Action in World Religions. Selected Papers from the Rothko Colloquium ‘Traditional Modes of Contemplation and Action’*, 169; our italics). Furthermore, the publication of *The Way of a Pilgrim* ‘was a sign that *the end was approaching*. The time was about to be fulfilled. *The cycle was about to end*, it was about to be completed and the contemplative had once again to become a foreigner and a pilgrim’ [*ibid.*, 170; our italics; cf. below, n. 41]). It is well-known that the exposition of the Hindu doctrine of the *manvantara* (‘period of a *Manu*’, of which the *kâli-yuga* is the last of its four ‘ages’, and the most ‘degenerated’ of all) is one of Guénon’s *topoi* (see for example his *Formes traditionnelles et cycles cosmiques*; cf. also below, p.).

<sup>37</sup> *Il padre spirituale*, 95.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 74 (our italics).

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.* (cf. *ibid.*, n. 4), and, in another context, Guénon, *L’écorce et le noyau*, 31 n. 2: ‘the terms *shariah* and *tarîqah* both contain the idea of “to set out”, and therefore the idea of movement’, which confirms the concept of constant tension towards a constitutionally unreachable centre in



square refers to the being/becoming dichotomy, the two figures – the impossibility of the coincidence of which expresses an aporia of a symbolic nature<sup>42</sup> – recalling, as symbols of the ‘dynamism of the cosmic form’ and ‘stability’, firm support of the ground’,<sup>43</sup> the *peregrinatio in stabilitate* as an essential distinguishing feature of the life of a monk, of the Christian and therefore of man. Becoming is in this sense a form of being, which in turn is the meaning (cf. Latin *sensus*: destination and significance) and the fulfilment of the former.<sup>44</sup> Moreover, one may easily spot a clear connection between what we just reported and the transition, which came into being with the advent of Christianity, of the ‘circular book’ – recalling the cyclical nature of time and the possibility inherent in the book to roll up/unroll – to the ‘rectangular’ one, that expressed the passage to the ‘symbolic closing of the text in Revelation 6.14’.<sup>45</sup> In the final analysis, what emerges here is a hermeneutics which seems to be compatible with Guénon’s ‘thought’: the *kâli-yuga* is significantly characterized by the acceleration of time – tending to its final ‘crystallization’ (to be understood as an ‘alchemical precipitation’ into the solidified space), on the base of which time will be turned into space – and, precisely, by the solidification of space: that’s why the end of times is the end of *time* and the end of *a world*.<sup>46</sup>

The theme of the Word – in connection with the *Logos* and the Scriptures (and the cosmos) – is widely dealt with in the paragraphs ‘Il libro circolare’<sup>47</sup> (‘The Circular Book’) and ‘L’orizzonte dell’in-scrizione’<sup>48</sup> (‘The Horizon of the In-scription’). In the former, the author highlights the synchronic and diachronic nature of the Scriptures since it is the ‘organic outline of [...] *grámmata*’,<sup>49</sup> a succession of words and sounds, and therefore sheds light on the terminological

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its ‘essence’ (consider the Christian notions of *epéktasis* [see Deseille, *Épectase*, 785-8) and *théosis*. In particular, the latter turns out to be a sort of ‘down payment’ [Greek *arrhabón*], an anticipation of a blessedness which is fully achievable only in the life to come: Montanari, *La fatica del cuore*, 58-59 [especially n. 212] and 173). On *epéktasis* as a paradoxical ‘undefined fulfillment’ cf. also Scrima, *Il padre spirituale*, 102: one should perhaps realize that the ‘end’ (i.e., Truth, or Life) is precisely the Way (cf. Chinese *Tao*; on spiritual itinerance as a constitutive character of the pilgrim – other than one of the most significant *filles rouges* of Scrima’s book – whose ‘impossibility’ is a sign of the current ‘solidified’ time, see above and n. 36). On the subject cf. also Scrima, *Il padre spirituale*, 74 *et seq.* We could also say, in passing, that modern travels are the ‘exteriorization’ and (etymologically) the ‘profanation’ of the contemplative aptitude typical of the traditional world, and best expressed by prayer and liturgy.

<sup>42</sup> Scrima, *Il padre spirituale*, 83 n. 36 (cf. Guénon, *Il regno della quantità e i segni dei tempi*, 140).

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 82 n. 36 (cf. Guénon, *Il regno della quantità e i segni dei tempi*, 135-40: ‘Dalla sfera al cubo’ [‘From the Sphere to the Cube’]).

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Scrima’s words in *Il padre spirituale*, 65: ‘Existence is nothing but a mobile image of stability’ (cf. also Plato’s *Timaeus*, 37d: ‘Time is a mobile image [*eikôn*] of eternity’).

<sup>45</sup> Scrima, *Il padre spirituale*, 82-3.

<sup>46</sup> On that see Guénon, *Il regno della quantità e i segni dei tempi*, 113-8 (‘Solidificazione del mondo’ [‘Solidification of the World’]), 155-9 (‘Il tempo mutato in spazio’ [‘Time changed into Space’]), and 267-70 (‘La fine di un mondo’ [‘The End of a World’]).

<sup>47</sup> Scrima, *Il padre spirituale*, 75-85.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 85-6.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

connection between the semantic areas of writing and weaving (cf. Sanskrit *sûtra*, which designates both thread and sacred writing; in Latin *textus* and *textura*; in Arabic *surat*, which means ‘threads of wool’ and ‘chapters’ of the Koran; in Greek *strophé* and *strophein*, which ‘indicate the back and forth movement of the shuttle with the spool transversally to the warp’).<sup>50</sup> Above all, it seems very significant that

in all the great traditions, the holy text – as well as the text itself – evoke weaving [...] *Weft and warp weave together the apparent sense, the visible one, and the hidden but fundamental one of the text.* However, in the act of weaving the last act is that of cutting the thread so that the finished fabric is freed from the square of the tool, the frame that has created the form. When the carpet is finished, the link with the loom is removed and the fabric appears as a living, autonomous being, endowed with its own being.<sup>51</sup>

Scrima also stresses the theme of the rolled book, which can be rolled (hiding its meaning) or unrolled (revealing it), and sets this alongside *Revelation*, where it is repeatedly said that the sky is furled as a coil.<sup>52</sup> The *Logos* can therefore have as ‘container’ (whether personal or not, and which is not the ‘whole’ of the ‘content’ or, better, of the *Logos* himself) either the book (in *Islâm*) or the flesh of the Man-God (in Christianity). As a consequence, in the latter case personal character will heighten the importance of freedom,<sup>53</sup> without by this causing an essential divarication between ‘liberated’ and ‘free’ man. The truth will be revealed<sup>54</sup> entirely in ‘history’ at the time of *parousía* (a view entirely accepted even in *Islâm*). According to Scrima, one of the more significant representations of the ‘apocalyptic’ sky, the *Universal Judgement* in the Chora monastery in Constantinople, is but ‘the iconographic transcription of a verse of Revelation: “the sky withdrew as a volume that rolls itself up, and all the mountains and islands were moved from their place” (Revelation, 6.14)’, in the Greek text: *Kaì ho ouranòs apecorìsthe* (‘retracted’) *hos biblíon helissómenon* (‘like a closed book’, ‘rolled-up’).<sup>55</sup> At the ‘unrolling’ of the manifestation, induced by the ‘overabundance of love’ of God, the annihilation and death on the cross, the crossing of all the

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<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.* (my italics). Here it is clear that the carpet is the human being and the loom God, in his role as *Logos* creator.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 86. Cf. also, against all ‘miraculous’ drifting of the Christian faith, *ibid.*, 101.

<sup>54</sup> On the significance of the notion of ‘re-velation’ see above.

<sup>55</sup> Scrima, *Il padre spirituale*, 77-8. In addition to the book and the sky, also human beings can ‘roll up’ and ‘unroll’. ‘Given the structure of our physical condition, to be stable we must be in movement: “Those who stay in one place must be careful not to fall”. Stability here means an internal realization, not only within the personal self, but also of the spiritual being: it is, at one and the same time, a *rolling up* and an *unrolling*’ (*ibid.*, 76; immediately afterwards Scrima underscores the ‘unexpected analogy [...] with the way of using books in antiquity’). On the related theme of *pergrinatio in stabilitate* see above.

states of being *ad inferos* (moments that recall the ‘Lesser Mysteries’) and Jesus’ Resurrection-rise to heaven (recalling the Greater Mysteries) ‘follow’.<sup>56</sup>

Creation will moreover be ‘followed’, in line with the necessary symmetry, by the retraction of the creation in the ‘non-manifested’ (one can think of the apocatastasis as a ‘return to the Beginning’ and the ‘end of a world’, which in turn is the anticipation of a ‘new creation’). The ‘microcosmic’ re-rolling of the Book clearly corresponds, on the macrocosmic plane, to the refurling of the sky, since

the book sealed in Revelation 5.1 offers one of the celestial models of traditional writing, and this model results in a clear circularity. It is a book which one can roll and unroll, in its form and functionality, with cosmic circularity. Rolling up and unrolling, the book directs the vectorial becoming of the times, the cycles, God’s order and economy which runs through history, wrapping and unwrapping the stages of its revelation until its final fulfilment.<sup>57</sup>

Therefore, *the Koran summarizes the cosmos, of which it is a ‘synthesis’ and a ‘model’*:

There is thus a sort of relation, innateness, in this vision, between the Book, the object which acts as a medium for the Scriptures (which by no coincidence is called the Bible), and the totality, which is the medium for its manifestation, rightly called cosmos. The one and the other are bearers of signs, and both can be grasped, as here suggested, from one end to the other of their offering themselves up as a form.<sup>58</sup>

It is not by chance that there are at least strong affinities between the Book and Jesus Christ as full ‘bearers’ (‘repositories’) of the *Logos*. At first, Scrima says that just in passing, almost allusively:

In Byzantine liturgy and iconography, this hypostasis of the text-roll persists: for instance, the term *kontákion* – which designates a particular liturgical chant – comes from the act of rolling and unrolling a cylinder.<sup>59</sup>

After a while, in a very subtle passage of the paragraph *The Horizon of the In-scription*, the Romanian monk confirms these *analogies* and makes them explicit:

*The real Book is analogous to the uncreated Sophia* – the function of which is ‘situated’ by the Orthodox thought – [...] In the ‘religions of the book’ [...] the *Book* offers the sense of eternity transmitted, that marks ‘every man coming into the world’, as it is said in the prologue of the Gospel of John. Whoever comes into the world is written in a book and his life ‘has written

<sup>56</sup> On this subject, specifically as concerns Eastern Christian iconography, see the superb discussion in Lindsay Opie, *Il significato iniziatico delle icone pasquali*, 164–76 and id., *I sensi esoterici delle icone pasquali*, 373–94.

<sup>57</sup> Scrima, *Il padre spirituale*, 81.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 78–80.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

itself'. And yet, it is a writing that may be rolled and unrolled, in a dynamics of fulfillment of being.<sup>60</sup>

### Some Conclusions and Perspectives

The summary analysis attempted above is obviously susceptible to further, more circumstantial studies.<sup>61</sup> Nevertheless, some central elements have emerged.

In addition to the issue of the linguistic reformulation of the Christian truth – a reformulation that, as already alluded to, did not give rise in Scrima's case to heterodox satisfaction – there seems to be a pressing need to delineate a religious morphology common to some of the major spiritual traditions. This need to discover a hidden 'meaning' is typically modern and Western, since, incidentally, it is clearly not linked to an apologia of the classic soteriological mould, but appears closely moved by an 'anthropological' tension (as well as that, obviously, of a spiritual kind) to understand the other, and *through the other*, ourselves and what of ourselves has been 'occulted' (sometimes even by 'tradition'!). It is significant that this type of operation was carried out without any theological yielding, firmly within the Eastern Christian tradition. Modern instruments of such an intellectual *and* spiritual elaboration are hermeneutics and morphological comparisons. The former also takes on the form of 'intelligence of the Scriptures and *therefore* of the world', and has a clear connection with the works of Scrima's fellow countryman M. Eliade – which were not accidentally linked to a 'religious morphology', too – and the Frenchman H. Corbin (it is well-known that, for instance, the first spoke expressly of 'creative hermeneutics').<sup>62</sup> Moreover, Scrima's attempt to construct a 'compared morphology' of religions based on a profound intellectual and (*in primis*) spiritual hermeneutics could be contextualized within that 'moving of constellations' of which he himself wrote<sup>63</sup> (having lived it personally: since the first half of the sixties, 'publicly' also) and that probably refers also to the 'new policy' of relations between Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy and then, by extension, to the central theme of the 'encounter of religions': two real cultural and spiritual turning points in the framework of postmodernity. All this induced the Romanian archimandrite to elaborate a hermeneutics which is discreet, allusive and consciously ambiguous – we would say almost 'suspended', at times –, as well as programmatically evasive with regard to the theme of the 'absolute equivalence'

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 86. Cf. above, n. 55.

<sup>61</sup> We especially intend to consider the original (and full) version of Scrima's *Tîmpul Rugului Aprins* in a forthcoming study.

<sup>62</sup> Eliade, *La nostalgie des origines*, Paris 1971, 131 *et seq.* (quoted by Montanari, *La fatica del cuore*, 119). For a study on the application of 'creative imagination' in the 'mystical' (su fi) sphere, see the cardinal work by H. Corbin, *L'imagination créatrice dans le soufisme d'Ibn 'Arabî*, Paris 1958. On 'esotericism' as 'hermeneutical perspective' see Borella, *Esoterismo guénoniano e mistero cristiano*, 53-74; on the profound connections between *mundus imaginalis*, hermeneutics and spiritual practice see Toti, 'Figure del *mundus imaginalis*: ascési, iconografia, sogno, morte. Tra ermeneutica storico-religiosa e prassi spirituale' (forthcoming).

<sup>63</sup> *Il padre spirituale*, 47.

of the different religious traditions: a hermeneutics oriented towards the affirmation of their ‘apophatic unity’, and therefore not fully coinciding with what we could define as a ‘cataphatic unity’ of religions.<sup>64</sup> On this point his introduction to the Romanian edition of Schuon’s *De l’unité transcendante des religions* is certainly very significant, for it constitutes a clear (and relatively late, thus tendentially ‘definitive’) document of the thought of the Romanian monk with regard to one of the central theses of the ‘traditional orientation’ (explicitly expressed by Schuon, but of course fundamentally accepted by Guénon, too). As a matter of fact, Scrima writes, with reference to that: ‘Schuon underlines the ‘particular’ aspect of the form manifested by the incarnated Logos: “If Christ had been able to be the only manifestation of the Logos, supposing that such a uniqueness of manifestation is possible, his birth should have to have for effect the instant transformation of the entire universe in ash”. *This is a claim which is too much ‘reasonable’ not to be somewhere mistaken.* We are convinced that the great Christian thinkers of the first centuries were conscious of this argument of Platonic taste, always consonant with the too natural needs of the immanent cogency. It’s only that – and this is one of the components of what one defines the “folly of the cross” – the Logos incarnated in Christ chose, rather than the destruction of the world, “to destroy” himself to death – even the “death by the cross” (cf. Philippians 2.5-8)’.<sup>65</sup> In addition, Scrima uses these ‘ambivalent’ terms to discuss Schuon’s central thesis, explicitly formulated in the title of the work by the Swiss author: ‘Our author has had the luck, or maybe the intuition, of a happy expression: “the transcendent unity of religions”... His semantic invention, his great victory, lies in its “banality”. It focuses the perception and the understanding on the truth of a cliché: the transcendent as an unmistakable referent of the unity, which is realized or in convergence, of a religious fact. Therefore, talking about a “transcendent unity” of religions means, in the end, to suggest a tautology that tries to let the meaning of the religious category pass from the exterior and the contingent to the essential and at the top. Saying that way, we may keep asking

<sup>64</sup> This seems also to be the current position of another renowned theologian, J. Borella (see especially his ‘The Problematic of the Unity of Religions. Afterword to B. Bérard, *Introduction à une métaphysique des mystères chrétiens*’, 157-82).

<sup>65</sup> ‘Cuvînt înaintea (la traducerea volumului lui F. Schuon, *Despre unitatea transcendentă a religiilor*)’, 156 (our italics). See also, for a critique of Schuon on that point, Borella, ‘The Problematic of the Unity of Religions. Afterword to B. Bérard, *Introduction à une métaphysique des mystères chrétiens*’, 172-9, in particular 176. On this subject cf., with reference to the *hulûl* (‘specification of place’, ‘localization’ of the divinity in a form contained within a space whose erroneous attestation is thought to have been induced, according to the Islamic point of view, by the Christian notion of the Incarnation), Montanari, *La fatica del cuore*, 175. On the question, from his point of view, there is the clarification by Â. K. Coomaraswamy: ‘Le Christ en tant que tel, étant une Personne, n’est pas le but final, mais plutôt la Voie elle-même. Le Christ est l’Axe de l’Univers, Agni “en forme de colonne [*skambhah* = *σκαμνός*] dans le nid de la vie immédiate, debout sur Son sol à la croisée des chemins” (*pathâm visarge*, RV X, 5, 6), le Soleil (*savitâ satyadharmendrah*) vers qui convergent tous les chemins (*samare pathînam*, VS XII, 66), et, de plus, la Porte du Monde, la voie pour entrer dans le temps et la voie pour retourner dans l’éternité. “Je suis la porte, par Moi, si un homme entre, il sera sauvé, et il entrera et sortira et trouvera à paître [...] Je suis la Voie, la Vérité et la Vie: personne ne va au Père si ce n’est par Moi” (Jean 10, 9 et 14, 6)’ (*La signification de la mort. ‘Meurs avant que tu ne meures’*. *Études de psychologie traditionnelle*, 138).

ourselves if this “cliché” (*and we all know, at least from Léon Bloy on, which terrible truths a cliché can hide*) has a sure referent in the concrete realities of the concept of unity. *Yes and no*.<sup>66</sup>

In the late work by Scrima which has been mainly considered here, *Il padre spirituale*, we managed to find, among other things, some ‘borrowings’ of evident Guénonian origin. With special regard to the definition of ‘initiation’, Scrima completely and explicitly agrees with Guénon;<sup>67</sup> it is also very interesting to note that at the same time the Romanian monk, in his discussion, confirms, *through a first hand experience*, Guénon’s theses on the existence (and on the sporadic and very reserved ‘survival’, at present times) of a specific, extrasacramental rite of initiation in Christianity,<sup>68</sup> and the more nuanced views of Schuon about the ‘initiatic value’ of the sacraments themselves.<sup>69</sup> Nevertheless, these evident influences do not necessarily coincide with the image of a fully ‘perennialist’ Scrima. In our opinion, Scrima recovers, develops, deepens and recontextualizes some typical ‘traditionalist’ themes – softening, for example, the ‘mathematical’ orientation given by Guénon to them, and placing in his treatment poetic and philosophical motives which are completely irrelevant to the French metaphysician. By the way, the issue of the ‘initiatory’ value of the ‘blessing of grace’ seems particularly urgent, linked as it is with the controversy of the possible ‘esoteric’ nature of Hesychasm.<sup>70</sup> It should be also kept in mind that Scrima later passed on the ‘blessing of grace’ to some western Christians:<sup>71</sup> a fact that makes the theme of an Hesychasm ‘in’ the West or ‘of’ the West very significant (also from an ecumenical perspective with regard to the relationships between Catholic and Orthodox monasticism).

However, it seems that, from Scrima’s exegetical standpoint, Christianity, without denying it (how could it?), ‘assumes’ and ‘reverses’, for example, the Old Testament perspective of God as ‘majestic judge’. In the New Testament, where the stress is placed on the merciful character of the divinity, God is, in addition to a man, an infant (*in-fans*, or ‘non-speaking’, confirming his *kénosis* at the other end of his ‘descent’ – incarnation and death) who therefore reveals himself as a ‘discrete’ presence.<sup>72</sup> Extending this type of relation to the major religious traditions, they (being clearly irreconcilable at the ‘dogmatic’ level) could be said to develop and deepen their various meanings and languages in accordance with their perspective, and therefore functionally from their ‘point of view’, taking up or excluding, rendering values, facts and symbolic contributions ‘relative’ or ‘absolute’ to the extent that they are compatible with those of its own general ‘system’. Whether all this leads or not to the thesis of an ‘essential equivalence’ of

<sup>66</sup> ‘Cuvînt înainte (la traducerea volumului lui F. Schuon, *Despre unitatea transcendentă a religiilor*)’, 147-8 (our italics).

<sup>67</sup> Scrima, *Il padre spirituale*, 56-7 (see also above, n. 26).

<sup>68</sup> For references see *ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> See his ‘Les Mystères christiques’, 191-203.

<sup>70</sup> On the point see the sharable conclusions in Montanari, *La fatica del cuore*, 177.

<sup>71</sup> Sœur Devillers, ‘Ce que fut dans ma vie la rencontre du père André Scrima’, 263-72.

<sup>72</sup> See what is quoted of Scrima by Père Élie of Deir-el-Harf in ‘Témoignage’, 258.

traditional religions – and not simply to the classic confirmation of the justification-interpretation of other spiritualities as ‘seeds of the Word’ – Scrima does not expressly say, perhaps because it is not his main purpose. A metaphor taken from astronomy might appropriately conclude this treatment. Scrima’s spiritual ‘system of reference’ is Christianity, his ‘sun’ Jesus Christ, the *Logos* made flesh. However, the Romanian theologian seems to suggest – and not even in too disguised a manner – that the unequivocal fact that in our solar system we all draw life from the same and only sun does not rule out the existence and, above all the effectiveness, of *other* suns in *other* solar systems, which, ultimately, are analogous to<sup>73</sup> (or, perhaps, the “same” as?) ours.

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### Notes on contributor

Marco Toti was born in Rome in 1976. He got his PhD in the History of Religions (University of Messina) with a thesis devoted to a historical and typological comparison between Athonite Hesychasm and Sufism, and to the analysis of the theme of *mundus imaginis* in Eastern Christianity and *Islâm* (Ibn ‘Arabî) and of recent debates on the supposed ‘initiatic’ nature of Hesychasm. His publications include *Aspetti storico-religiosi del metodo di orazione esicasta* (2006), and a wide range of articles and papers on comparative mysticism and on forms of postmodern religiosity. Of these, the most significant and recent are: ‘The Inner Dimension of the Pilgrimage to Mount Athos’, in R. Gothóni-G. Speake (eds.), *The Monastic Magnet. Roads to and from Mount Athos* (2008); ‘The Hesychastic Method of Prayer: Its Anthropological and Symbolic Significance’, *IJSCC* 8, no. 1 (2008); ‘L’ermeneutica quale veicolo di un “ecumenismo profondo” tra metodologia storico-religiosa e prassi spirituale’, *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* (forthcoming); ‘Figure del *mundus imaginis*: asceti, iconografia, sogno, morte. Tra ermeneutica storico-religiosa e prassi spirituale’, *Perennia Verba* (forthcoming). Among other things, he is currently working on the English translation of his PhD dissertation and on the Italian translation of K. Ware’s *How Are We Saved? The Understanding of Salvation in the Orthodox Tradition* (1996). He has been Fulbright Visiting Researcher in the University of California, Berkeley, and in the University of South Carolina (June-December 2008).

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<sup>73</sup> Cf. Borella, ‘The Problematic of the Unity of Religions. Afterword to B. Bérard, *Introduction à une métaphysique des mystères chrétiens*’, 173: ‘[...] the unity of religions is an analogical unity, the first analogy of which is the religion of Christ’.

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