

**Interpretation and understanding, major premises  
incontemporary spiritual edification  
(research report)**

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*Hermeneutic Landmarks of Spiritual Edification in the Modern European World,*

**Rev. Prof. Gheorghe Popa, PhD**

*The Concept of Edification in Orthodox moral theology,*

**Prof. Ion Dafinoiu, PhD**

*Therapeutic Metaphor and Spiritual Edification,*

**Prof. NicuGavriliuță, PhD**

*Binaro-Fractallic Interpretation and Tolerance – Premises of Spiritual Edification,*

**Assoc. Prof. Dan Chițoiu, PhD**

*Between Paideia and Kenosis: Constitution and Re-Significations of the Idea of Edification between the Greek Philosophy and Eastern Christianity,*

**Assist. Lect. SmarandaBuju, PhD**

*Understanding the Process of Edification from a Psychological and Psychotherapeutic Perspective,*

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*Theoria: a Mystagogic Hermeneutics in Saint Maxim The Confessor.*

**Abstract**

Each study conducted in the framework of this grant uses distinct meanings of edification and spiritual life. Edification is thus debated either in the terms of Christian Theology (as the soul's preparation with a view to her communion with God, human soul's salvation and redemption), or in terms of Morality (cultivation of moral consciousness and of elevated ethical attitudes in relations with our fellows), or in other, more narrow terms (such as those of pedagogy and psychotherapy, or those of hermeneutics, anthropology and sociology). The latter are more specialized and most often they are concerned with only some premises of spiritual edification, ways to prepare it and achieve good interpersonal communication with a view to accomplishing this old

desideratum. What is more, the phrase “spiritual life” has natural differences in meaning from one study to another, depending on each researcher’s preoccupations and the scientific or cultural tradition that is mostly resorted to through references, concepts, representations, authority names etc.

**Keywords:** interpretation, understanding, spiritual edification, Christian Theology, psychotherapy, hermeneutics, interpersonal communication

### **I. Brief Outline of Completed Research**

The distinct research topics that have been tackled by the members of the research team reveal that they have shared a common concern: the possibility for spiritual edification in the contemporary world. Such a general topic has made at least two demands on each researcher: 1) to distinguish premises or necessary conditions in the effort towards spiritual edification in today’s world; 2) to delimit concrete and visible ways by which the possibility of edification gradually becomes a real fact.

As far as the former issue is concerned, we gave special consideration to a few premises that were recognized as relevant, throughout the unfolding of this research project: 1) the need for adequate interpretation of cultural and historical data (texts, symbolic facts, human conduct and behavior, ways of talking etc.); 2) the attainment of a high level of understanding of our own condition and of life in community; 3) the cultivation of an active moral consciousness, of Christian inspiration and in agreement with the new historical coordinates in which people live nowadays; 4) the importance of personal communication, especially of educational communication and of communication of therapeutic purposes (such as narrative communication, in which therapeutic metaphors have a decisive role); 5) the idea of tolerance and good cohabitation in a cosmopolitan world, that cultivates cultural, linguistic, religious and hermeneutic diversity; 6) the resort to the exemplary character of those traditions that today can inspire new forms of knowledge, understanding and edification; 7) the actual exploration of human mentality, of

human inner life, so as to distinguish between what is called psychic life, psychological life and spiritual life as such; 8) the cultivation of natural and simple dialogue between various human experiences (or, as Hans-Georg Gadamer calls them, experiences of truth): scientific, religious, aesthetic, philosophical and technical; 9) steering pedagogical effort from the community's technical problems towards practical problems of communication and cohabitation, in parallel with the design of adequate forms of education etc.

With respect to the concrete ways in which the possibility of edification becomes a real fact, they have been foreseen and described by mainly considering certain distinct everyday and cultural situations that contemporary man experiences. We could notice, with almost each individual study, that usual discussions are general, as if an impersonal instance were talking to the homogeneous and neutral human collectivity, and most often it passes unheard and unnoticed. A counter example, in this context, is the discourse of Christian scholars from the patristic age: theirs was a natural discourse, in the open and comprehensible language at the time, equally accessible to foreigners or the non-initiated, with a certain address that was easy to delimit in the practical order.

At the same time, the ways to translate into practice certain possible forms of edification must ensure and recognize, in relation to each individual separately, a full and sensitive freedom, an ample space for option and decision, the feeling of one's own dignity, the awareness of one's own concrete and autonomous person.

Each participant to this grant sought to set his or her own preoccupations in relation with the project of a possible spiritual edification and thus deepen the idea of edification from a certain perspective. Above all, we considered the clarification of certain preliminary concepts, such as "interpretation", "understanding" or "comprehension", "edification" and "spiritual edification", "everyday conduct", "community life" etc. Certain distinct variants of spiritual edification have been explored from a semantic and pragmatic point of view: moral education, cultivation of the mind and of the senses, cultural training, moral training, psychic and moral

therapy, personal growth and maturation etc. At the same time, we brought into discussion various types of experience of an edifying intention: social, moral, aesthetic, historical, hermeneutic, scientific, and religious. Such distinctions and concepts can be considered prerequisites for the entire research project. Their clarification was performed, in general, from a triple perspective, that was: 1) scientific (especially through research in sociology, psychology and psychotherapy), 2) philosophical (most often with reference to modern philosophy, current hermeneutics and history of Eastern spirituality) and 3) religious (moral Orthodox theology and patristic thought are most often invoked here).

Each author had an obvious wish to conduct interdisciplinary research, either by the consistent opening up of the concepts used towards other related fields, or by deepening common, so-called frontier topics. Thus, there emerged numerous conceptual analogies and extensions, eloquent references to connected fields of research and to a series of distinct perspectives, observations concerning the fundamental closeness between distinct ways of approaching one and the same phenomenon.

At the same time, we realized that such research must also have an important pragmatic opening, which is permanently imposed by the very idea of edification (as edification in general and especially as spiritual edification). For this purpose, we made frequent references to men's social life context and their everyday action in the community. Thus, numerous moral, psycho-social and pedagogical, historical, cultural and anthropological issues emerged in our discussion.

## **II. Assumed ideas and perspectives, and research outcomes**

In what follows, we shall mention a few of the ideas and perspectives assumed by the members of the research team, as well as some research outcomes. We shall do this by considering, first, each topic individually, and the steps that each researcher understood to clarify in the study that he or she completed.

1) **Prof. Ștefan Afloreaei, PhD**, whose main academic interests are modern, contemporary philosophy and hermeneutics, completed a study entitled *Hermeneutic Aspects of Spiritual Edification in the Modern European World*. He first developed the idea that a distinct understanding of interpretation is that of an actual testing out of certain concepts, when what is at stake is precisely their sensitive effect in our life and in the life of the others. The ensuing result is that interpretation is not to be perceived as a goal in itself, nor as a gratuitous game of the mind, but as having its meaning precisely in the understanding of human facts or situations. Actually, an important direction in current hermeneutics aims to steer it towards the essential phenomenon of understanding. In this case, it will not be defined as a theory of interpretation, as it most frequently happened in the 17th-19th centuries, but as research on meaningful understanding and communication. Hans-Georg Gadamer, Michel Foucault, Paul Ricoeur, Umberto Eco, Richard Rorty, Wayne Booth (especially in *Critical Understanding*) offer numerous arguments to support this idea.

This latter hermeneutic perspective is especially important because it sets in unmediated relationship man's way of thinking and interpreting with what he does in the practical order of life. Thus, one can say that, ultimately, it is only he who is able to really accomplish something that can prove to understand a thing, for instance the good (Gadamer). In fact, our understanding does not exclusively concern utterances, written passages or knowledge, but equally the relation with the self and with the other, a visible relation in the world we inhabit.

The terms invoked in this sense, almost irrespective of the language of origin, are quite eloquent. For instance, the German verb *verstehen* means both to understand someone's utterances and to understand one's self (*sichverstehen*), to be good at something practical (*verstehen von...*), to get along with someone, possibly to make it up with someone after a long quarrel. Gadamer had enough reasons to invoke the older *subtilitas applicandi*, on the one hand, and to discuss the question of interpretation as one of practical philosophy, on

the other hand. The possibility to reduplicate in existence that which we think or say (if I were to approximate here Søren Kierkegaard's words) heralds the next step, which is much more important in the human order of life. In this latter case, we shall say that someone really understands an idea or a belief that he considers right only if he observes it throughout what he actually does.

We bring into focus the anagogic side of our interpretation and understanding, which is somehow more difficult, for it tells, among other things, to what extent the meaning that we accept as right is faithfully observed in what we ourselves do. In other words, it uncovers the extent to which we ourselves accept practically that which we strongly state one way or another. Otherwise, what will be at stake is only the will for interpretation and imposition of a self-image. This will, in the case of an official or institutional interpretation, pertains to one form or another of the will to power, which in this case has become plain ideology. Or, this should be acknowledged as such in the case of those interpretations that end up being indifferent to dialogue and arguments.

It also makes us careful to our relation with the other, which, when it is missing, frustrates any attempt to talk about self-edification. As we well know, a certain meaning can emerge only dialogically. In other words, meaning is constituted in the communication with the self and with the other. Umberto Eco speaks about an essential triangle for the constitution of any meaning in the act of interpretation. This triangle is given by those intentions that are conjugated in the practice of interpretations: *intentionis operis*, *intentionis auctoris* and *intentionis lectoris*. This should be considered especially when interpreting texts or facts that belong to foreign cultural traditions. We can thus realize if the other is granted the significance that his presence really requires in the act of interpretation.

This issue was already broadly thematized in early modernity. Blaise Pascal, careful to a new form of egolatry of the European man, sought to see how self-understanding and self-edification are carried out. He noticed that most times we only pretend to understand a certain thing. For instance, we pretend easily to understand the evil that our wish for glory

brings about – and we then voice our contempt for this wish. Yet, secretly, at the same time, we wish precisely that which we say must be despised. “Those who write against it want to have the glory of having written well; and those who read it desire the glory of having read it. I who write this have perhaps this desire, and perhaps those who will read it...” (Pensees, II. 150). Our vanity keeps us, unawares, in this deep duplicity. It goes as far as to throw real precipices between what we think and what we say, or between what we say and what we do. “Few men speak humbly of humility, chastely of chastity, few doubtingly of skepticism. We are only falsehood, duplicity, contradiction; we both conceal and disguise ourselves from ourselves” (VI. 377).

Subsequently, Kierkegaard draws our attention again to this strange way of living that we have. For rarely do we live according to those categories that we express or suggest to the others as doctrine. We do not translate into our existence that which we pretend to really think. Here lies the most difficult test of any way of thinking. When a stated truth is set against the meaning of human facts or conducts, one can see if its presence becomes real or not. Or, it becomes real only if man makes room for it during the span of his life as such. It is the same when the truth of an interpretation is set against the good; it will be proved as such only if it can be actually followed.

In certain milieus of thought there was a special interest for our topic of investigation. We refer, first of all, to patristic literature and its view on anagogic interpretation, which is probably the most significant out of the well-known doctrine of quadruple meaning. Of high relevance in this discussion is the so-called care for the self or preoccupation for the self. Michel Foucault, in the lectures called *Hermeneutics of the Subject* (1981-1982), analyzes precisely this intentionality of philosophical thought, both during the old Greek age and during the patristic age. Other authors too tackled this idea, such as Jan Patočka, who argued that “life in truth and liberty” is not possible without the care for one’s own consciousness (“care for the soul”, to quote the old Greeks). The ethos that they seek is connected precisely to this desire or rather

responsibility (cf. Platon et l'Europe, Verdier, Paris, 1983, p. 65).

The historical world, especially the one opened by the Greek spirituality after Socrates, is seen as having its meaning in "free life as such". Yet such a meaning already supposed the awareness of truth or of freedom. We know that the relation between truth and liberty in human life is already stated in the Scriptures, as we can see, for instance, in John 8, 31-32 ("If ye continue in My word, then are ye my disciples indeed; / and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free"). Jan Patočka does not ignore this source of the ideal that he writes about. However, he pays more attention to the Greek, Platonic source, which brings to the fore "man's concern for the soul".

In essence, it is all a matter of how consciousness itself opens itself to the world; in this opening, one meaning or another becomes possible. This means that the "care for the soul" bears huge importance. Such care is manifest under various ways: care for this man – so that things seem right to him; care for the life of the community – so that it grounds itself, progressively, on truth and justice; care for the inner life, where what belongs to death and what is immortal is decided upon. This is what the Platonic tradition expresses in its own language: man is not a neutral consciousness, but one oriented towards the ideal forms of the extant forms. It is not this world as such which bears a meaning, but precisely the opening of consciousness to the world. Man's consciousness is oriented towards those landmarks it considers durable, such as truth, beauty, justice and the good. The latter can ultimately be seen as ideal, i.e. as having a value in themselves. They are perceived as limits that offer and attract, offer inexhaustibly and attract freely.

The ancient Greeks thus foresaw the problematic character of human existence, the fact that man lives a real tension. Through his way of being, he is situated between that which is sensitive and that which is genuinely ideal. In other words, man is bound to live "in interval". On the one hand, consciousness perceives this world and sees itself tied to the access to what reveals to it here. On the other hand, it is attracted by something "in itself", that is inexhaustible and indeterminate. This is how its landmarks emerge – when they

do – landmarks of limit, truth, the good and justice. And it is only thus that they can become sources of values and criteria that are ultimately assumed in a concrete manner. Man's gaze is oriented towards them, which means that they – in the very gaze oriented towards them – can offer a meaning to our historical world.

Europe could not be reconstructed now according to another social ideal than that in which the truth will make us free. Europe was born, argues Patočka, from the "care for the soul", from this fear of what the soul itself can discover and defend. After all, it emerged out of man's fear of losing his soul. And, as it has happened on a few occasions, Europe enters in decline precisely when it abandons this "care for the soul", whenever such a thing happens. If we were to believe Jan Patočka, we could say that man's care for the soul, for what we call spiritual life, matters unexpectedly much. It matters much more than we would be inclined to believe during an age like ours. It matters not just as utopia or useful fiction, but in the most sensitive and real way possible. This fact can be perceived by anyone in this common and uncertain history that we live.

All this ultimately concerns the relation between self-understanding and self-edification. For understanding tends towards a genuinely elevated point when what we sincerely and justly think can become work, a real act. In other words, this happens when the meaning in our mind is more than logical clarification in words, but skill to do something, knowledge to do something, similarly to how a painter truly understands the language of painting when it has been proven that he can paint. Of course, he could explain to the others why certain colors and not others are used, but he is truly convincing when he himself knows how to use them.

Then, probably, there occurs what Pascal wished so much for man, namely to talk justly about justice, humbly about humility and beautifully about beauty. In other words, only the one who can perform the thing that he supports and that he agrees with can truly understand. The good is truly understood only by the one who can, one way or another, accomplish it. It is only the one who makes room for truth as

such in his mind and in his life, who can understand it. But all these matters, and their consequences in the order of man's spiritual edification, must be resumed, not necessarily under a historical aspect, but also with permanent reference to the situation of man in this space that we inhabit today. This is the highest stake of our research, to see how man's edification is possible, both socially and especially spiritually, in the world we inhabit.

2) **Rev. Prof. Gheorghe Popa, PhD**, a specialist in moral, biblical and patristic theology, and hermeneutics, framed his research under the heading *The Concept of Edification in Orthodox moral theology*. He argues that edification - man's moral and spiritual edification, can only be accomplished in the Christian space that we inhabit through community. There is an ontological and theological dimension of edification. It starts with the sacraments, which make possible the restoration of the human being ("clothing with Christ", as the chief corner stone that ensures the true process of edification). The difficulties for this process must be known very well, and many of them are related to family, education, community, external influences etc. When they are big, these difficulties can block the natural process of edification. There are, as we know, distinct stages of edification through Grace (practice, theory and theology, in their patristic understanding), whose core is the mystic union in Christ - of one's own person with other persons - and with Christ. Ultimately, this long-tested truth must be restored, that the person is edified within the community, and the community is edified through personal effort, in the light of Grace.

Rev. Prof. Gheorghe Popa insists on a few new paradigms of spiritual communion and renewal, and considers that in fact, the idea of edification must always be related to that of man's communion with God. The entire patristic theology, faithful to the Revelation, announces the beginning of the restoration of the entire creation - and, equally, the end of human exile - with the embodiment of the Logos. The embodiment of God's Word and subsequently, His death on the cross and His resurrection restored in humanity its original vocation, the vocation towards communion. The theological

deepening of these three events in the history of our salvation is necessary in any discussion on man's spiritual edification. Through the act of embodiment, Christ remakes human nature ontologically, by restoring in it the "greatness of the divine image, that persuades the soul to transform itself through the free decision of his will, so as to become in the likelihood of God" (Saint Maxim the Confessor). Since God's image concerns man's entire being, ontological remaking and renewal concern both the soul and the body. The latter becomes God's transparent temple and the environment where the Holy Spirit's love and transfiguring power can become manifest. Consequently, through the embodiment of the Logos, the contempt for the body, that was specific to ancient mentality, can no longer be justified theologically. Due to the ontological relation that exists between the human body and the rest of sensitive creation, the valorization of the body through the act of the embodiment of God's Word also represents a valorization of matter. The ontological remaking and renewal of the entire human nature has an obvious effect on the entire creation.

Yet the divine event of the Word's taking of flesh represents only the beginning of this remake and renewal of the world. For the effective restoration of His creation, Christ had to accept, willingly, death on the cross, so as to thus restore the communion of love between man and God. The three paradigmatic events, embodiment, death and resurrection, are not just historical events, but also sacraments of the Person of Christ (Dumitru Stăniloae). These very sacraments set light from the insight on both the general meaning of history and man's actual existence in the midst of creation, as existence in and for communion. Or, the embodiment of this meaning supposes man's radical, ontological and moral conversion. In its turn, this conversion is not the work of man as a historical being, but the Christ's co-working, through the Holy Spirit, with man as liturgical and ecclesial person. The conversion that occurred on Pentecost day expresses this idea quite clearly. After all, radical, completed edification, means conversion, i.e. man's return to his original condition, to his communion with God. In the same

line of thought, conversion means crucifixion, death and resurrection in the consciousness and life of those who are prepared to accomplish them.

Thus, in the theology of the Holy Fathers, the Pentecost represents the ultimate moment in the economy of salvation, as well as the beginning of every human person's conversion, renewal and divinization that, through the Holy Spirit, becomes a mystic member of Christ's mystic body. In other words, he becomes a member of Christ's Church (PavelEvdokimov, in *Presence of the Holy Spirit in Orthodox Tradition*, 1995, p. 109, insists on the same idea). By entering the Church, through the Holy Sacraments, man's being itself becomes a church. This means that man acquires spiritual edification in the Christian meaning of the term only in his relation with the Church. Not only man, but the entire cosmos can renew and transfigure itself only in his relationship with the Church - the liturgical center of the entire creation (DumitruStăniloae).

**3) Prof. Ion Dafinoiu, PhD**, a specialist in psychology and psychotherapy, defined his research topic as *Therapeutic Metaphor and Spiritual Edification*. He starts from the idea that metaphor has deep roots in man's spirit. It is the product of the primary stages of knowledge and inter-human communication. This is why this means of transfer (meta-pherein - to carry across) of significations is practically present in most theoretical systems and techniques of psychotherapeutic intervention. In his attempt to describe personality complex, as well as the techniques to influence it therapeutically, Freud made frequent use of metaphors. In fact, most concepts used by Freud are the condensed expression of metaphors: Oedipus' complex, the castration complex etc. "Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis" abounds in metaphors referring to the unconscious, resistance, interpretation. Clinical manifestations, patients' symptoms, are nothing but metaphoric expressions of repressed psychological contents; they are "a new, artificial and ephemeral substitute of the repressed element and they resemble it all the less its deformation, under the influence of resistance, is bigger" (Freud, 1980, p. 389-390). In agreement with these ideas

promoted by psychoanalysis, most psychotherapeutic systems and methods (Ericksonian therapy, systemic couple and family therapies, neurolinguistic programming etc) consider metaphor a privileged instrument of therapeutic intervention and spiritual edification. Our study is a useful guide for the use of metaphor as a means for psychological intervention, all the more that it ends with the presentation of some clinical cases.

From the perspective of psychotherapy, we mention a few functions of metaphors: 1) Approached in relation to symbolic imagination (Jung, Ricoeur, Durand), metaphor is said to allow significations that have become occult, that are inaccessible to rationality and explanation, to become apparent. For instance, certain forbidden or intangible objects or realities are designated, metaphorically, through figurative names (“The Cruel Serpent”); 2) Metaphors allow the verbalization of the psychological, strictly individual reality, of the sensations and experiences of our inner universe, for which common words are inadequate, because they have a categorical logic content. We do not have words for each sensation; suffice to recall that, although we perceive more than tens of shades of red, we use a single word for each of them - “red”. For the sake of better communication, we use metaphors: “crimson red”, “red like fire”, “bright red” etc. This is why metaphors such as “dull pain”, “crushing pain”, “excruciating pain” etc. increase the communicative effect of the message sent by the patient to his therapist. 3) Metaphor is equally indispensable when conceiving certain abstract realities that are hard to represent. We can quote, for the sake of illustration, the metaphoric expression of the “passage of time” in terms of space: time, as a moving object, moves in comparison with us, who remain still; this is why “time comes, time passes...”; 4) By performing a transfer of meaning from the secondary subject to the main subject (the two terms of comparison), the metaphor becomes a logical instrument that restructures how we think and interpret the world. The patient’s attitudes and expectations will give our words the weight that, otherwise, they do not have in themselves, and that will prompt him to seek a deeper signification.

Like Freud, an equally masterful user of metaphor is M. Erickson. His way of listening to and observing a subject, and the way the latter responds, are for him means to process metaphoric messages that people communicate to each other. His therapeutic approaches abound in metaphors: some are based on his own experience, others are inspired from his patients' experience.

Erickson's innovative use of metaphors in psychotherapy was not initially appreciated as such. Erickson himself did not theorize the aspects referring to the use of therapeutic metaphors, when, how and why they influence therapeutic change. His subsequent collaboration with E. Rossi led to new theories in this field, which capitalized on their experience in the field of metaphors and indirect suggestions, as well as psycho-physiological research on the functions of the two hemispheres of the brain. The initiators of neurolinguistic programming (N.L.P.) could not bypass the issue of metaphors. Without giving a lengthy account of the fundamentals of N.L.P., - we shall just mention that Bandler and Grinder's outlook on metaphor comprises many of the ideas on communication promoted by Erickson and the Palo Alto School.

By combining personal observation with the observation of Erickson's activity in his clinic, they suggest a mechanism that could explain how metaphors work. It supposes successive passages (alterations) of the metaphoric message through three various stages: 1) The level of external significations - the metaphor presents an external (surface) structure of the meaning in the words of the story; 2) This activates a deeper associated structure of meanings, which is indirectly relevant to the listener; 3) In its turn, this structure activates a deep regenerated structure of meanings which is directly relevant to the listener.

A particular way of using metaphors consists in resorting to a metaphoric object. The latter adds a special therapeutic virtue to the ones already pointed out so far: its material presence during the session. "The metaphoric object - argues C. Angelo (1987, p.107) - is a means of communication that conveys numerous messages connected to its structural characteristic features and, to a larger extent, connected to significations that are attributed to it by family and the

therapist". Often the metaphoric object is the material concretization of a verbal metaphor. The metaphoric object equally belongs to the regular universe of the family and to the new reality created by the therapeutic relation between family and therapist. It gives a visible and concrete expression to the relations, rules, behaviors of the family or of one of its members. In order to be efficient, the object must be placed in a certain moment of therapy, depending on the latter's objectives; if not, the end result can be not only the failure of the method but also of the whole therapy. Just like the therapeutic story, the metaphoric object allows the therapist to avoid his absorption in a difficult and confusing situation and to remain outside a process that involves the metaphoric object and the family. The therapist's de-centering – facilitated by the metaphoric object - has mechanisms that are similar to hypnotic induction: "Just like the hypnotizer uses an object to provoke a state of trance, the therapist uses the metaphoric object to provoke an increasing state of curiosity and tension inside the system. Attention is focused on the metaphoric object, thus allowing the therapist to de-center" (C. Angelo, 1987, p.115).

Metaphor proposes a new reading of reality by pointing out other reference frames. It acts as a map that the therapist superposes on reality, the patient's territory. It is thus an illustration of Korzybski's famous dictum- "the map is not the territory". It "dissociates" the patient from his generally difficult and invalidating reality, in order to place him at a level where possible alternatives are shaped (Malarewicz, 1992). The patient can learn, for instance, that sadness and fear – that he wishes to escape - also have positive aspects, and their expression can sometimes be useful.

The outline of the problematics of metaphor has already highlighted a series of functions of metaphor: a) it propels trans-derivational search (each individual has a certain representation of the situation in which he is; the messages that we can integrate in this representation have meaning, the others, do not; the information transmitted by the metaphor are isomorphic with that contained by the patient's representation, or model); b) the function of mediator (the

therapeutic story creates a psychological reality that is interposed between the patient and the therapist, thus avoiding their direct confrontation; this reality belongs to both; it belongs to the therapist who tells the story, as well as to the patient who gives it a certain meaning, and preserves the complete freedom of his thoughts); c) the regressive function (the story mobilizes the subjects' imaginative capacities and has a strong regressive dimension); d) the function of "mirror" (the metaphoric story facilitates the patient's distancing from his own conflict, its externalization; in the story, argues Bettelheim, the intra-psychic process generated by the problematic situation, is externalized and it thus becomes more accessible to a rational exam when it is represented by the story's characters and events); e) the function of model (stories provide test-situations, in which the patient can try out unusual solutions and answers, by comparison with his thoughts and feelings up to that point, and then he can apply them to his own conflicts, in an experimental manner); f) the function of re-signification (any story changes the perspective and the reference frames, uncovering new significations, and offering a more complete imagine on our problems).

4) **Prof. NicuGavriluță, PhD**, a specialist in anthropology and sociology, delimits his research to the topic Binaro-Fractal Interpretation and Tolerance – Premises of Spiritual Edification. A first premise of spiritual edification that he analyzes in this text is binaro-fractal interpretation. Specialized hermeneutic literature contains several interpretative types: structuralist, psychological, sociologic, based on invariants etc. To all these typologies, we suggest the model of binaro-fractal interpretation of spiritual, social and political phenomena, inspired from the last writings of the Romanian hermeneutic philosopher IoanPetruCulianu.

Taken over from mathematics and physics, binaro-fractal interpretation relies enormously on the existence of a set of rules and a generation mechanism. The set of rules is the equivalent of the system of sexagesimal, decimal, or binary numeration from the mathematic theory of numbers. In the field of spirituality, the set of rules is comprised of self-

contained sentences of the ontological assertion type. Another main component of the binaro-fractal interpretation model is the generating principle. It replaces the explanatory principle of classical hermeneutics and understanding through invariants. By combining the set of rules, the generating principle enables the virtual and real existence of several systemic versions of interpretation. Some of them remain virtual for ever, others, on the contrary, become real. They are identical from a genetic and functional point of view, but they are capitalized on differently. The ultimate versions of the game of interpretations compose a certain space of tolerance. Within its limits, the object of interpretations is ideal. Thus, culture and history are understood as the result of “morpho-dynamic integration of ideal objects” (Ioan Petru Culianu).

The second premise of spiritual edification present in this text refers to assuming tolerance in its strong formula, that of accepting otherness. Understanding the strong, hard meaning of otherness supposes the prior unmasking of weak meanings. The latter focus on knowledge without accepting, bearing or standing otherness, as well as tacitly ignoring the other as “passive tolerance”.

The analysis of weak forms of tolerance continues in this text with indulgence, complicity and resignation (Andrei Pleșu). To the limit, they lead to what we call intolerable by excellence. The paradox and vicious circle of tolerance reveals, ultimately, the limits of tolerance and its possible transformation in the acceptance of otherness. To conclude, interpretation in the binaro-fractal version, together with the acceptance of otherness, become genuine premises of spiritual edification in the contemporary world.

5) **Prof. Dan Chițoiu, PhD**, specialist in Greek philosophy, Byzantine and patristic culture, entitled his study in its final version *Between Paideia and Kenosis: Constitution and Re-Significations of the Idea of Edification between Greek philosophy and Eastern Christianity*. He starts with a few conceptual clarifications. He argues that the term edification, with reference to human experience, proves to be relatively recent. It is a product of Western philosophical meditation,

originating in the change of perspective brought about by Enlightenment and Romanticism. The German term, *Bildung*, stimulated significant meditations on human experience, both with respect to its nature and especially to what has to do with the real or potential purposes of the human way of constituting experience.

Current concerns with the connection between interpretation and understanding, as a path towards self-edification, have triggered a few dilemmas that cut through the various perspectives. Thus, the subject is claimed by hermeneutics, with a phenomenological opening and emphasis, as well as by the analysis originating in the horizon of analytical thought, as well as from pragmatism. At the same time, a topic that has now been open to discussion is connected to the dilemma between externalism and self-knowledge in edification.

This is a recent expression of an older dilemma comprised in the hermeneutic circle: edification is connected to self-knowledge, which, in its turn, depends on the experience of the world, on the experience of otherness. The experience of otherness is not possible without the prior constitution of the self through inner knowledge. Understanding permanently moves from the whole to the part and back to the whole. Its task is to expand the unity of the understood meaning in concentric circles. The harmonization of particular features in the whole is always the appropriate criterion for correct understanding.

Language philosophy has also been involved, with an insistence on the influence that the process of understanding and interpretation of external reference has on language categories. Under the circumstances, to determine referentiality implies the issue of the truth of the sentence. The concept of faith is implied in the same register, when it is connected to the act of understanding. Understanding depends on the act of faith, but the term of faith is understood as largely subjective, without implying the explicitly religious dimension. The truth conditions of a sentence are investigated, as a prior act to the decision on the truth value of understanding.

Two directions emerged in philosophy after Heidegger, to solve difficulties connected to the need for self-edification.

Mostly due to the need for objectivity, “technical” aspects of edification were formulated in analytical and pragmatic terms. Yet this direction cannot account for the ultimate goals of training, that cannot be expressed within the limits of positive discourse. This is why not only hermeneutics, but especially phenomenology and existentialism join forces to restore an understanding of what is aimed for in self-edification, an understanding that modernity ignored. In this respect, recent French phenomenology, which majestically restores statements from the Gospels, is the most significant example.

There is a special aspect that is worth mentioning with reference to the Romanian spiritual space, and in general, to the cultural model of Byzantine Eastern Europe. The concept of edification is rather foreign to the mentalities cultivated by the spiritual openings of Eastern-European traditions. More precisely, we refer to the significations that this concept had acquired in the context of Enlightenment, at the dawn of modernity. Beginning with the 18th century, especially, the fault-line between the two European cultural expressions had become extremely visible: the West was fully confident in the possibilities of the positive description of man, and the increasingly efficient manipulation of the human aspects and qualities both at individual and community level, while the East seemed anachronic and immobile through its anchorage in Tradition; it was characterized by its appeal to historicity, and it could not receive any positive appreciation whatsoever from the West.

Up to mid-20th century, the East had remained mostly not understood, if not looked upon with total superiority. Of course, this happened because of the ideals of Enlightenment and rationalism, which saw the logical-rational cultivation of the mind as the fulfillment of man’s most authentic destiny. This paradigm had lost the meanings and purposes of the symbolic expression of reality and especially of man’s own way of existing. This is why the acceptations that the idea de edification had received could not resonate with what the East understood by the purpose of human existence. It was only after Heidegger overturned the formulation of the purposes of interpretation and of the nature of understanding that things

began to change. What is more, the hermeneutic and phenomenological discourse produced after this turn offered Eastern authors the opportunity to achieve terminological clarification of their own cultural data in a more authentic way.

If we were to question today the idea of self-edification, it is clear that we cannot but start from how understanding is produced, as its fundamental premise. The trajectory between interpretation and understanding represents a compulsory aspect of research after Heidegger and Gadamer. Yet we must clarify the relevance of this trajectory from the perspective of Eastern-Christian spirituality, a spirituality that resorts to other symbolic codes and is anchored in a perspective dominated by what has been called the apophatism of the person. This is not an easy task, as one must by all means avoid the confusion caused by terms that seem to be synonymous in a modern language, but which are symbolically loaded and grounded in various traditions.

There are numerous traps that modern cultural mentalities set to the fine and accurate understanding of the specific features of descriptive formulas for the formative ideals that various European cultural traditions, and not only them, have designed in connection with man's essence and destiny. Another type of syncretism of values and traditions, an unjustified superposition of spiritual values and interpretative perspectives, is the least productive and closest-at-hand solution for an interpreter who stands (unawares or not) under the influence of rationalist-Enlightened ideals.

In the Eastern perspective, self-edification is not consumed within the data and the confines of subjectivity: what is sought for is the understanding of man as a mediator. As Maxim the Confessor stated, this description of the role of man in the world and beyond it supposes his own understanding as a micro-cosmos and thus his symmetry with the Cosmos. As Maxim presents it, mediation is accomplished across several levels, beginning with the mediation between man and woman and up to the mediation between heavens and earth, between the intelligible plane and the meta-sensorial plane.

This mediation that man has a calling for is possible because the entire creation stands under the same Logos, and

shares a common rationality. Therefore, self-edification cannot have an end-goal that concerns the self exclusively, or subjectivity, but plays a fundamental role in the evolution and way of being not only of the intelligible world, but of the entire Creation. Self-edification equates an objective modification in reality with conferring it an added value that pertains to its deepest rationality.

When one questions the need for self-edification today, we must consider these founding aspects of the horizon of possibility in the cultural model of contemporary Europe and of the Western world in general. The fact that we raise the issue of edification starting from a self, but we are equally aware of the implication of a dimension that transcends the limits of the individual, is in itself a proof of our anchorage in these landmarks. Of course, the actual experience of trying to achieve in ourselves something that pertains to edification is different, but similar to an expedition that needs a map to find its way; spiritual experience needs firm landmarks in order to be aware of where it is heading and especially if there is a meaning in what is going on. Anyway, it is wrong to consider these landmarks as pertaining to history, as something that once mattered but which now is no longer valid. The inner constitution of our intimate landmarks is a cultural given outside which we cannot behave in a meaningful way.

Therefore, in this project, the fundamental intention is to clarify how a cultural horizon marks the possibility of self-edification. More precisely, it aims to retrace how a cultural inheritance, a spiritual horizon, marks its access to the self and to the world. We specifically refer to the Eastern Christian spiritual tradition, uniquely originating from the Byzantine culture. The difference between how inner and community life unfolds in Western Europe, and what counts as an inner act or as relation with the other in Eastern European, is obvious. This is not a matter of industrial rhythms of various civilizations. A deeper level is implied here, that decides how one understands to seek oneself, or place oneself in relation to the other.

There are moments, or periods, in a cultural history when nuances are established, that guarantee the identity of that

model; they are often refined articulations, without an easily grasped visibility. In order to answer the question about the identity of the Eastern European man, one can invoke many factors, among which some are historical, politic or social, yet such approaches are not sufficient. Another source of this way of being must definitely be understood and investigated, which, ultimately, can be termed cultural and spiritual, eventually.

We should strive to better understand the meaning of Tradition in Christian Orthodoxy, beyond the appeal to Tradition invoked by theological literature even when, with modernity, man no longer perceives himself as a religious being. Tradition also means attitudes or gestures that are less brought to awareness, attitudes towards the self and the world taken rather as natural. However, these states and attitudes that mark us from the beginning and arguably even before birth entail a challenge: to assume or not to assume that which we receive.

Each generation carries with it its answers and nuances in a diachrony of the spirit of a Tradition. In addition, the more we face life's challenges, each of us is compelled to have an attitude towards our customs, that have been handed out to us by our parents, grandparents and close friends. It becomes clear that a Tradition cannot survive by itself, through the collective unconscious, but it needs to be somehow assumed. Each generation has its own spokespersons, who best express the answer of that generation in terms of assuming customs or resisting them. For us, it is important to retrace the testimonials of various generations from a cultural and spiritual space, in order to understand the living essence of an inheritance.

On these grounds, we pointed out how the functioning of terms, or words, that established the landmarks of a spiritual model. In our case, we refer to the first centuries of the Byzantine Empire, that left its imprint on Eastern Europe. More precisely, we are concerned with retracing how authors such as Basil the Great, Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory of Nazianz, Dionysius the Areopagite, Maxim the Confessor, used the terms of Greek philosophy to express another spiritual reality and another understanding of man. These are certainly key-

aspects that must be present in the successful investigation of the meaning of the idea of edification in Eastern Europe, and especially in Romania. Surely, we can find here another meaning and purpose of understanding and interpretation, as premises of self edification.

Second, on this ground, we must establish the anthropologic model that has dominated this spiritual space for over two millennia. This research is important because studies on anthropology in the Eastern Christian space are extremely few, and this is due to the specific features of this vision about man, which lays an emphasis not on descriptions, on framing human nature, but on the ineffable categories of the human, that is called upon to overcome the human condition, even though many times the turn it takes is different. Anyhow, man in Eastern vision is not a static, fixed reality, but one in a state of becoming, not psychologically or socially, but at an ontic level. In the third stage, after the clarifications that we could gain after the Eastern-Christian anthropological investigation, we can interpret the signs of the current man in order to establish what interpretation and understanding mean now, how much and how they can be talked about. Obviously, the contemporary man finds himself in front of changes of civilization that affect him to his finest inner articulations. This is an opportunity to better observe how and if individuals who live in various cultural contexts react differently, how and if they find separate solutions and answers to these challenges.

6) **Assist. lect. SmarandaBuju, PhD**, psychologist and psycho-pedagogue, deals with a distinct set of research topics, under the title *Understanding the Process of Edification from a Psychological and Psychotherapeutic Perspective*. The first part of her research refers to a few conceptual delimitations of the three key-terms of the topic: interpretation, understanding and edification in psychology in general and in some psychotherapies; it refers to understanding and interpretation's importance and relevance for therapeutic edification, as psychotherapeutic techniques and attitudes exemplified especially by Freudian psycho-analysis, by Rogers'

client-centered therapy and by cognitive behavioral therapy. The second part traces the signification of the three terms in moral psychology and experiential therapies, and then it develops the topic of spiritual edification in Orthodox psychotherapy (also called the science of the Holy Fathers, by Hierotheos Vlachos) vis a vis the lay psychotherapies previously presented. The third part analyses a model of psycho-spiritual edification that is defining for Eastern Orthodox spirituality, namely hesychasm, and how the modern man can relate to such a model.

The attempt to select or slice off from human reality that which is likely to be scientifically investigated can entitle us to argue that general and experimental psychology does not aim for an edifying understanding of the human person. This does not mean that some of its results, corroborated with others, cannot represent significant steps in this direction, that various fields try to decipher. When applied to the human person, psychological understanding will consider the inner, psychological grounds underlying all dimensions of personality (character, temperament, skills, affection, will, intelligence), among which there are significant ties. Any interpretation of a behavior in psychology will be done by using a theoretical model, whose potential to explain the human person will be assessed according to certain criteria. The data offered by psychology or psychologists will be capitalized on by various psychotherapies whose explicit goal is the therapeutic edification of the human person in various hypostases of dis-adjustment, alienation or psychopathology (as performed through psychoanalysis, Rogerian therapy, cognitive and behavioral psycho-therapy), and of the normal human person in need of personal development and spiritual fulfillment (person-centered therapy, existential and experiential therapies).

The study's conclusions seek to correlate the stages of completed research and basic working concepts. We thus learn that man's natural aspiration towards growth and personal evolution, towards emotional, moral or spiritual maturity, has implied an authentic engagement that has produced, (possibly as a side effect), from various perspectives (psychological,

philosophical, social and religious), methods, practices and techniques that could lead to their accomplishment.

For instance, from the first perspective, certain psychotherapies propose interpretation and understanding as techniques or only as therapeutic attitudes through which it is hoped to attain the purposes mentioned above, with questionable effects on the therapy's efficiency on the client. For psychoanalytic orientation, the therapist becomes the expert interpreter of the history of his patient; he deciphers the "deep" meaning of the individual's feelings, acts, thoughts, starting with and stopping at his past. Psychoanalytic interpretation as evaluation, diagnosis and psychological treatment are thus taken over passively by the patient, more or less understood and less doubted by virtue of the psychoanalyst's authority as an expert. The consequences of such a technique can become contrary to the above-mentioned aspirations, and in most cases they lead to a temporary solution of the other's problem, to affective dependence and even depersonalization.

There is, however, another type of therapy, such as Roger's, also known as non-directive and later centered on the person. In this case, interpretation and understanding have a totally different status, for instance as emphatic comprehension. This attitude is manifest in the therapist, whose intention is to empathically understand the subjects' inner frame of reference, i.e. in its terms and significations, here and now, without adding his perceptions or theories as a practitioner (the latter are external elements in the patient's subjective universe). Then, interpretation as evaluation, self-evaluation, reflection on one's own feelings and clarification are assumed by the other, who must practice self-acceptance by achieving the congruence between lived experiences and perception of the self, between the real self and the ideal self, between what is thought, what is felt and what is communicated.

**7. Rev. Dragoş Bahrim, PhD candidate**, specializing in Biblical hermeneutics and patristic culture, called his study: "Theoria", Hermeneutic Mystagogics in the Works of Saint

Maxim the Confessor. His research aims to highlight the hermeneutic function that the concept of *theoria* has, in the writings of one of the most important authors in the Patristic age, Saint Maxim the Confessor (580-662). The research starts from highlighting the ontological contents of the sacred text in general, which St Maxim the Confessor connects with his conception on the Logos. For him, Scripture is just another way of presenting the Logos in the world, another type of body of Its. Consequently, the language used to describe this fact, is incarnational. The written law is one of the steps in the gradual presentation of divine Logos in the world, preceded by natural law and continued by the law of grace. The concept of *theoria* has an interesting history in Greek philosophy, whose echoes reverberate up to our age (M. Heidegger). Maxim understands theory as contemplation. It is done by the mind ( $\nu\omicron\theta\eta\varsigma$ ), man's essentially contemplative power. What it "sees" – in a basically hermeneutic act – are the textual reasons or  $\lambda\omicron\gamma\omicron\iota$ . This interpretative-contemplative approach by Maxim must be set within the more general human effort towards spiritual edification. *Theoria* or contemplation is just one of the stages of spiritual life. It will be followed by *theologia*, that will culminate in *theosis*.

### **III. Final Remarks**

As a general observation, we can mention that the studies conducted were consistent, broad in their scope and rigorous. Above all, one has to appreciate the professionalism with which all issues under investigation were tackled, especially because they are concerned with a complicated and difficult process in the practical order of life, namely spiritual edification. Each author's documentation ran smoothly, and it can be seen in the effort to rightly define the terms and issues raised by this topic.

The topic is neither simple nor comfortable nowadays, especially because meanwhile the term "edification" has undergone serious semantic erosion. The idea of edification, restored especially as guidance in life or in this historical world, has had a strange evolution over the past two centuries. The ideologies of "radical change", in their secular meaning, spawned in Europe, especially after 1789. Some of them, such

as those in post WWII Eastern Europe, proved truly awful from a practical, social and moral point of view. They made a primitive or brutal use of the idea of “right and necessary guidance”. They turned it into a simple instrument of control and total domination. The idea as such, reduced at a given moment to that of forced dirigisme, was overstated to saturation and disgust. Consequently, such a phrase (and related others, like “radical change” and “guidance”) has already been severely eroded semantically.

This compels one to use it more carefully, as much as possible, only in simple historical reference or descriptive passages. One feels forced to keep his distance from a possibly dangerous synonymy between the generic meaning of edification and what, in our recent history, meant the forced and total command of one’s life. It does not suffice to talk about guidance in life or, more emphatically even, about historical guidance in general. What matters, essentially, is what really happens in people’s actual life from time to time. Or, the gap between what is possible in their daily life and what actually happens can be utterly huge. Therefore, one must first assess what type of guidance is free, natural and simple in people’s life. Or, if we were to take a further step, one should assess what is truly possible in this perspective, when and how it can be accomplished etc. Only then could we see if a certain guidance is desirable, if we can consider it able to open a broader space of freedom.

In fact, each study ends with a few conclusions, some on the research completed by each participant, individually, and others on the grant’s generic topic, namely that the interpretation and understanding efforts represent genuine and major grounds for contemporary spiritual edification. This is something very important: each study is concerned with the possibility of man’s moral, social, cultural, hermeneutic, or ultimately spiritual edification in the contemporary world.

Of course, each study conducted in the framework of this grant uses distinct meanings of edification and spiritual life. Edification is thus debated either in the terms of Christian Theology (as the soul’s preparation with a view to her

communion with God, human soul's salvation and redemption), or in terms of Morality (cultivation of moral consciousness and of elevated ethical attitudes in relations with our fellows), or in other, more narrow terms (such as those of pedagogy and psychotherapy, or those of hermeneutics, anthropology and sociology). The latter are more specialized and most often they are concerned with only some premises of spiritual edification, ways to prepare it and achieve good interpersonal communication with a view to accomplishing this old desideratum. What is more, the phrase "spiritual life" has natural differences in meaning from one study to another, depending on each researcher's preoccupations and the scientific or cultural tradition that is mostly resorted to through references, concepts, representations, authority names etc.

We should also mention that each study has an extended and updated bibliography, that is useful for the reader and anyone interested in spiritual edification in today's world.