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The Unspoken and The Forbidden in André Scrima's Thought as a Way to Encounter the Other

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Abstract: André Scrima's interest in Christian–Muslim dialogue goes beyond a historical or comparative approach. In this sense, knowledge from within the two monotheisms is achieved through an apophatic theology. Through it, the spiritual and mystical language that is characteristic of any authentic religious experience offers the possibility of a renewed approach to the differences between Islam and Christianity, and at the same time, clears a path for a truly authentic encounter. Fresh insight into the faith of the other does not put into parentheses the specific identity of the two monotheisms, but deepens it from the perspective of its apophatic content, where the possibility of experiencing the transcendent in a much deeper way is rooted, not by making new affirmations, but by adopting an attitude of stillness and silence.

Keywords: apophatism; God's name; Christian–Muslim dialogue; interiority; monachism; Lebanon

"For as I went through the city and looked carefully at the objects of your worship, I found among them an altar with the inscription: Ἀγνώστῳ θεῷ" (Acts 17:23)¹



Citation: Danca, Mihai-Iulian. 2022. *The Unspoken and The Forbidden in André Scrima's Thought as a Way to Encounter the Other*. *Religions* 13: 117. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13020117>

Academic Editors: Stefan Tobler and Annemarie C. Mayer

Received: 26 November 2021

Accepted: 23 January 2022

Published: 25 January 2022

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1. Introduction

The question "what is it to be a Christian or Muslim?" can be answered in two complementary ways. To be either is to adhere to given religious doctrines, to participate in particular rites, to follow a moral code, to attend special places of worship, to be guided by a religious hierarchy, to respect Holy Books, and so on. This "definition", which concerns the visible aspects of religion, needs to be complemented by another which comes from within, that is, from the place where the believer searches for a more profound and authentic sense of God who, as St. Augustine famously put it, is "*interior intimo meo et superior summo meo*", "deeper within me than my innermost depths and higher than my highest parts" (Augustine of Hippo 1841, col. 688; 1966, p. 60). This complementary "definition" goes beyond simple adherence to external practice.

If we choose this last definition, then it is possible to see that it raises a new type of question in the field of interreligious dialogue. Should it still be seen as a confrontation between irreconcilable doctrines, or as a quiet recognition that all doctrines belong to the same mystery? Should it still dream of a general consensus, or should it settle for a "different" one, which, as the word indicates, must "differ" (Breton 1994)?² For the Romanian Orthodox theologian and monk André Scrima (1925–2000), although religions are irreducible to each other, they are no less "relative" to the mystery that transcends them. This mystery he calls *the unspoken*, a term which, as its name indicates, no longer allows us to say of a religion that it is this or that, but that it is neither this nor that. In other words, it is a term that pushes us to go beyond the visible structures of a religion to reach its most interior dimension, where, to quote Augustine again, "*habitat veritas*", the "Truth dwells" (Augustine of Hippo 1865, col. 154; 2005, p. 78).

This awareness that every believer belongs to the same mystery is linked to one of the most decisive experiences in the life of André Scrima, which was his encounter with Islam in Lebanon. He arrived in Lebanon in 1959, after a brief period of two years in India, and

remained there “permanently” (Clément 2003, p. 244)³ for more than three decades, until his return to Romania in the 1990s. This long period was divided between the spiritual guidance of a very small community of monks at the monastery of St. George in Deir el-Harf, and the rich academic activity at the Maronite Holy Spirit University of Kaslik, and the Jesuit University of St. Joseph in Beirut, where he was one of the co-founders of the Institute of Islamic-Christian Studies.

André Scrima’s theological thought is centred on the meditation of this *unspoken* theme, which runs through most of his lectures at the Institute of Islamic-Christian Studies, as well as some of his most important articles, such as “Le Nom-Lieu de Dieu” (Scrima 1969), “L’apophase et ses connotations selon la tradition spirituelle de l’Orient chrétien” (Scrima 1981), or the great article commissioned by Claude Geffré, “Jérusalem: réflexions sur une cité ‘unique et universelle’ pour les religions monothéistes” (Scrima 1980).

In this study, we shall see how a concept like the *unspoken* and its corollary, *the forbidden*,⁴ can lead us to look at Islam and Christianity from a completely different perspective; no longer from their visible, clear and familiar face, but from Father Scrima’s own experience; that is to say, a disconcerting encounter with the face of the other and its ineffable mystery.

2. What Is *The Unspoken*?

Let us say this first: the origin of a word is silence. All words carry within a silent dimension, which constitutes part of their mystery. This *silence* is not a flaw in the word, but rather its bubbling up: *bullitio et fervens*, as Meister Eckart would say (Lossky 1960, p. 69). In a homily in 1973, Father Scrima also said that every word is like lightning, which “before becoming lightning, must remain for a long time in the darkness, in the dark clouds of the storm” (Scrima 2003b, p. 294). Consequently, *the unspoken* is not an absence of the word, but its most original dimension; the *lethé* in which a possible saying finds its origin, and what a philosopher like Heidegger calls “the Saying” (*die Sage*) (Heidegger 1971a, p. 135; 2007, p. 91). *The unspoken* is always in relation to a word to come; in other words, a word/discourse in waiting. For this reason, the word from its origin bears the mark of *the interdiction*: it says nothing (the word says nothing yet), and at the same time, it is found in all possible expression, as *inter-diction*; that is to say, “between” the words themselves, as an inner dimension that brings them to the fullness of meaning. *The inter-diction* is thus itself the sign of an ambiguity of the word which, at the same time, reveals and conceals. Likewise, *the unspoken* is kept in abeyance in the very saying itself as a possibility of taking on an original and authentic saying, which is none other than *the inter-dicted*. *The unspoken* and *the forbidden* are not, therefore, two different things that we cannot explain, but what establishes the spoken word as authentic and true. To explain this, Father Scrima uses a geometrical image, that of the circle and the point: “The centre is the place of origin, the point on which the compass rests to draw the circle. Now, the point is dimensionless, it is a non-place. It is, as the origin of the circle, the place on which the circumference depends” (Scrima 2008, p. 29). The possibility of any discourse is thus rooted in an original *unspoken* that becomes the expression of a fundamental question: how does faith discern and educate itself in the horizon of the *unspoken* that never ceases to assail a faith that is too quick to assure itself of its own object of faith? Anca Manolescu, in the introduction to one of André Scrima’s collections of texts entitled *Teme ecumenice*, states that: “In every religion, ‘saying’ God means opening up language, as a religious experience, to his unspoken and infinite mystery” (Manolescu 2004, p. 17).

However, just as it allows for saying, *the unsaid* challenges all saying, including dogmatic saying (to be understood here as definitive saying, as saying that exhausts the object in its capacity to make itself heard). In this case, *the unspoken* manifests itself as a refusal to say; in other words, it no longer says anything (as a consequence of being locked into a definitive saying). Consequently, a saying that explains, rationally and objectively, is not the same thing as a saying that makes one hear, where, once again, the important thing is not the formal content of a certain listening, but the predisposition by nature to listen:

“to listen is to open oneself to the word, to make a path for it, one could even say a dwelling place for it in me” (Scrima 2003b, p. 294).⁵ Here, we are faced with what negative theology defines as an *apophatic difference*, which, for André Scrima, corresponds to the irreducible distance between the essential content of dogma and its formal expression. In this sense, the unpronounceable name of YHWH has more to do with an unspeakable *unspoken word* than with any abstract conceptualization, as has been attempted by translating his mysterious name into a substantive name (including the *Ego sum qui sum*). In reality, every concept must submit itself to this first manifestation of God, which is first of all mystery and “Name-Place” (favouring here, according to Father Scrima’s indication, his other meaning of “Non-Place”) (Scrima 1969, p. 213).⁶

To “say” God, on the basis of his belonging to the *unsaid*, actually makes us question basically, the legitimacy of any saying that concerns him. Thus, we are in a position to ask ourselves what in what is said cannot, precisely, be said? Or, how can what is said, though saying, say nothing? These questions, which are a bit daunting, are far from being trivial. They all point to the need to adopt another kind of language, one that is more capable of submitting to listening to what happens, certainly not in a total absence of words, but rather, beyond the words themselves. This is the perspective adopted, among others, by apophatic language. It is not difficult, therefore, to see to what extent the notions of *the unspoken* and *the forbidden* are part of the great tradition of Eastern contemplation, which had a profound influence on all his thinking. We can cite here, by way of example, the influence of such authors as Gregory of Nyssa, John Cassian, Evagrius of Pontus, John Climacus, Dionysius the Areopagite, Simeon the New Theologian, Maximus the Confessor, and Gregory Palamas. In particular, the influence of Dionysius the Areopagite and Gregory Palamas is noticeable in Father Scrima’s early writings, especially in his licentiate work, completed under the supervision of Dumitru Stăniloae, and entitled *Apophatic Anthropology*. It is on the privative propositions (*alpha-privative*) (Dionysii Areopagite 1857, col. 588B) and the terms of pre-eminence (*hyper*) (ibid., col. 981A) of Dionysius the Areopagite that André Scrima relies in order to first reject, through the two notions of *the unspoken* and *the forbidden*, the automatic connection between the positivity of theological affirmations and the content of the mystery in itself, and then to defend the specific status of apophatic knowledge, which is never a simple corrective of affirmative theology. Nevertheless, as he himself recognises, Dionysius’ thought is merely a synthesis of a whole thread of reflection that goes back to the thought of the Desert Fathers, the Cappadocian Fathers, Evagrius of Pontus and Macarius of Egypt (Scrima 1981, p. 164). Later, Gregory Palamas, when he was obliged to defend the realism of the doctrine of deification through the distinction between the essence of God and his uncreated energies, would draw on the spirituality of the Desert Fathers and the Fathers of the Church who preceded him.

Having said this, does not this apophaticism, which we have just mentioned, run the risk of missing the encounter with the Word itself by its rejection of all words? What meaning can be given, in this case, to an event such as the Incarnation of the Word, where God names himself in his Son as a visible presence close to humankind? How can we translate this surprising closeness other than through a language that risks, at any moment, diminishing its infinite mystery? If the name revealed by God at the heart of the Burning Bush is not an identity in itself⁷ but the adventure of man with God, or, as a theologian like Bernard Dupuy puts it, the “risk” (Dupuy 1980, p. 105) of God exposing himself through his *namings*, then does the Incarnation not come under this same fragility that is involved in every wager of man’s relationship with God? To allow oneself to be named (as the God of Jesus Christ) in a way that is so direct, intimate, and close to *humankind* is also to accept the risk of exposing oneself in the most vulnerable way possible to man’s control (something that history, alas, will never cease to bear out). The Incarnation does not speak of God’s omnipotence but of his extreme weakness. In other words, in any encounter where a certain history between God and man is decided, God also takes the risk that his unveiling exposes him to the incomprehension of creatures. His naming is possible only at this price: “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” (Matt 16:13). In apophatic language, the identity

of God in Jesus Christ translates, in truth, a form of annihilation. The Son bears “a simple name” (Scrima 1981, p. 169) (a sign of his self-emptying) behind which is hidden the true face of God, a face that is revealed only in the names of the “*little ones*”; it is precisely they, those who “do not exist”, who bear the new name (ibid.) on “a white stone, and on the white stone is written a new name that no one knows except the one who receives it (Rev 2:17)”.

3. *The Unspoken as Apophatic Language*

In an article entitled “Religions de salut et salut en Jésus-Christ”, André Scrima states that “all language is an option of being” (Scrima 2004, p. 92). For this reason, it simply states, in many ways, the One, the One whom the sages of the Kabbalah said hides “in the depths of his Nothingness” (Villela-Petit 1980, p. 92).⁸ When Father Scrima rejects the specific procedures of cataphatic discourse (the use of concepts, synthesis and discursiveness), the aim is not, of course, to negate these methods, but rather to *seek* an original way of saying, in which the possibility of another way is decided (Scrima 2012, p. 29). We can thus see that what is at stake is not the fate of a certain syntax, but the fate of being.

Such statements may give the impression that apophatic discourse is very close to the inclusivist perspective that characterises much of pluralistic theology. John Hick, for example, recognises that this shift would require a ‘Copernican revolution’ in theology because:

“the Copernican revolution in astronomy consisted in a transformation in the way in which men understood the universe and their own location within it. It involved a shift from the dogma that the earth is the centre of the revolving universe to the realisation that it is the sun that is at the centre, with all the planets, including our own earth, moving around it. And the needed Copernican revolution in theology involves an equally radical transformation in our conception of the universe of faiths and the place of our own religion within it. It involves a shift from the dogma that Christianity is at the centre to the realisation that it is God who is at the centre, and that all the religions of mankind, including our own, serve and revolve around him”. (Hick 1993, pp. 130–31)

John Hick, like J.A.T. Robinson and a whole line of Protestant theologians of the second half of the twentieth century, develop the idea that Christianity, when considered from an inclusivist perspective, must not only have an open dialogue with other religions, but must indeed find its fulfilment, as truth, in its encounter with them (Fitzgerald and Machado 2002, p. 282). In relation to these aspects, André Scrima’s position is to be found in what he calls, in the same article, the “apophatic foundation” (Scrima 2004, p. 93). This notion involves the recognition of at least three requirements:

- the apophatic fundament works as a “principle and a critical operator of any affirmation about God” (ibid.);
- it is “the *sine qua non* condition of a theological itinerary threatened by ideological closure” (ibid.);
- it is “the only possible way to communicate with other spiritual or *religious* doctrines focused on seeking and receiving God” (ibid.).

It is therefore on the basis of these three aspects that André Scrima will make *the unspoken* the starting point for another theological *episteme*. It implies, indeed, a diverse methodology that moves from what each religion “tells us” in its external structure to an *unspoken* where the uniqueness and truth of each religion can be claimed in a non-exclusive way. It is therefore important to note that, by virtue of this *unspoken*, which remains as such, André Scrima’s apophaticism cannot quite correspond to the perspectives of a pluralist theology, because this *unspoken* refuses any theological explanation as such. Rather than an attempt to explain it, *the unspoken* is a reality to be recognised and welcomed. Consequently, there is no “ultimate Reality” in André Scrima’s work, as in John Hick’s, and no “anonymous Christians” as in Karl Rahner’s. “The truth of the other, he said, remains incomprehensible” (Scrima 2005d, p. 299).

The unspoken thus refers to the negativity of all discourse. The latter is “nothingness, emptiness, darkness, non-being, *Ungrund*...” (Scrima 1981, p. 157). It is an “ungrateful” (ibid., p. 167) discourse, insofar as, in its antinomic form, “the apophasis establishes a non-commutative structure with ‘eminent’ formulations or internegative statements (*naiti...*, *naiti...*; *οὐχ...*, *οὐχ...*); between its two extremes will always spring an irreducible ‘sur-plus’ of meaning” (ibid.). Could we not then locate this irreducibility of the Names under which God manifests Himself (in Christianity but also elsewhere) from the single antinomic tension that sustains them? The different names must and can differ without the need to bring them to a dialectical resolution. Here, moreover, applies one of the richest distinctions of Eastern apophaticism relating to the “incommunicable and imparticipable essence of God” (ibid.) and of his “uncreated energies”. For André Scrima, “words find their meaning only after they have first agreed to lose it” (ibid., p. 157). However, this loss is the pledge of a more original rediscovery of meaning. Apophatic discourse thus responds, in André Scrima’s perspective, to the reigning confusion between what he distinguishes, on the one hand, as “ontological content”, and on the other, as “formal articulation of discourse” (Scrima 1966, p. 83). Not speaking, not saying, is not due to any formal impossibility of saying, but to the presence of a completely different language (apophatic), which is the language of the *unspoken*. *The unspoken* indicates above all an ontological difference, not a linguistic one (this is not a debate for philologists!). Scrima says very clearly about the oracle in Delphi:

“The language of the one ‘who founds’, ‘who holds everything’, is no-one’s discourse. It is he, on the other hand, who makes possible the discourse of man, where it comes to be inscribed not by homologation to linguistic values (which corresponds to a second and subaltern ‘meaning’), but by conferring signifying support both to what is not said (*οὐτε λέγει*), and to what does not conceal (*οὐτε χροῦται*)”. (ibid., 99. 84–85)

Consequently, *the unspoken* is not so much a “hiding” as a “signifying” of a very different nature. This is the reason why *the unspoken* of God signals a closeness and familiarity that is much more original than a certain naming, because what is most familiar to us can also be the most banal, and, as Heidegger would say, “inconspicuousness” (*Unauffälligkeit*) (Heidegger 1962, p. 297; 1967, p. 253). Now, God is the One who never ceases to surprise us.

4. God, Mystery of an *Unspoken* That Reveals Itself

For André Scrima, the “foundational reference” (Scrima 1969, p. 213) of all theological discourse is found in God. He is the guarantee of its mystery, according to this other statement: “theological ‘speech’ must always take place in the name of God, not in order to perpetuate an inherited system of thought, but to signify the origin and the enigma which make it speak” (ibid.). Thus, “theological speaking” is never, strictly speaking, a discourse *on* God but a discourse *in* God. What thus remains a “founding reference” in both Christianity and Islam is kept in the background of its definitive expressions, while melting into them. For this reason, *the unspoken* nature of God remains, for the most part, mysterious, for speaking *about* God offers no guarantee of the truth of his mystery. In this sense, the legitimacy and validity of any theological discourse depend on its ability to make the mystery heard. Does it speak of God or simply of the expectations we project onto Him?

Now, at Pentecost, the one who speaks is no longer man but the Spirit (in the sense that any authenticity of the discourse on God can no longer depend solely on the courage or psychic dispositions of the Apostles, but on the strength of the Spirit). From where does the Spirit speak, if not from that protected place which is the mystery of the Father and which no other language can exhaust? For Father Scrima, “God cannot be the object of any human language; man cannot ‘say’ God” (Scrima 2008, p. 89). Consequently, any statement that is to be pronounced “in the name of God”, in order to be authentic and true, must be an affirmation expressed “in the name of the Holy Spirit”, for the Spirit is, according to

André Scrima's commentary on the letter of his teacher, Father John the Stranger, the name of the most enigmatic presence of God, God beyond all names,⁹ the impersonal God. To say that God "is beyond all qualification" (Scrima 2012, p. 90) is to acknowledge that he is always greater, "or as the Muslims say: *Allah akbar*" (ibid., p. 110). The real "locus" (Scrima 1969, p. 213)¹⁰ from which God speaks is, in reality, the place in which the discourse on his mystery is rooted, God being then the original "significance" which signifies all discourse elaborated later. However, the fact that the latter can, in a way, condition the significance of the site of his mystery is precisely what apophatic language rejects.

For André Scrima, the conflict between the discourse *on* God and the discourse *in* God is the real struggle between the "logocity" (ibid., p. 214)¹¹ of the Logos (the discourse) and the "Unspeakable" in the direction of which it should make a sign. Now, the Logos of God is the bearer of precisely this double contradiction, being a Logos who, on the one hand, shows himself (the Incarnation), and on the other, hides himself in his own monstration (making us close to Him through the Incarnation, it is no less true that between God and us, there remains an abyss, a surplus of being that nothing will be able to fill).¹² When Christ replies to Philip: "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9), this "seeing" is not a simple representation, as one would stare at a person from head to toe, but a seeing *towards* the Father which goes beyond what we are capable of *seeing*. Now, "to go towards", that is to say, to look in the direction of, is the very movement of faith which lives from this incessant orientation towards the Father, in the Son. Consequently, what the Incarnation shows us is this: the Son inaugurates among humankind the fatherly face of God, he "paternalizes" the God of Mount Sinai, in which is inscribed a new beginning of God who has become, in his Son, our Father. That a fearsome God can, through his Son, show the loving face of a Father, is what remains a real mystery for faith.

Can we, then, reconcile what has just been said with the "strictly untranslatable" (Scrima 1969, p. 214) of God who refuses to be confused with any definitive naming? For this, we need to know what, through this prohibition, is really being called into question. For the Name of God is not untranslatable because of some hidden knowledge, but because of the danger that accompanies any proper and definitive saying; namely, the reduction of the Name to a "receptacle of power" (ibid., p. 213). Now, in this regard, and as has already been said, the Incarnation is not about the power, but the weakness of God, who in this way, risks entering into a more personal relationship with humankind. That this relationship may, in turn, run the risk of being recovered by man in a project of power is precisely what the Incarnation assumes, which is never about taking on the Name of God, but his unwavering service up to the sacrifice of the Cross.¹³ Consequently, we must admit that, if we speak in these terms, then yes, there was an attempt to take over control precisely where, according to Father Scrima, the first translation from τὸ ὄν (neutral) to ὁ ὢν (I am—personalized—who I am) (Scrima 1969, p. 214; 2012, p. 186) and, in Latin, the translation of the unpronounceable name by *Ego sum qui sum* (a translation which becomes a substantivisation, and therefore fixes on the Name) (Scrima 1969, p. 216)¹⁴ is accomplished.

Nevertheless, if this *Ego sum qui sum* should assume, in the history of faith, a new significance which responds to the "inaugural bursting forth of the biblical Name" (ibid., p. 215)¹⁵ (a bursting forth in which the passage from Hebrew to Greek is also agglutinated), it should not, for all that, be forgotten that this Name of God rightly belongs to the order of an inaugural, and not an exclusivist naming. As Father Scrima says: "'What he is' does not answer the question 'what is he?'" (ibid.); He is neither "this" nor "that", nor the "same" (ibid.), except in a secondary and derivative way, by virtue of the plurality that his Name *bears*. Thus, for Muslims, he is the personal pronoun of the most impersonal name of Allah: "'Oh!, Him!' (*Huwa*)" (Scrima 2008, p. 64).¹⁶ This exclamation expresses the absolute transcendence of the Name of God and the surpassing of all knowledge. God is always a beyond, an endless *oportet transire*. Any substantivisation of the Name slips into a form of sedentarism, which is nothing other than the very cessation of its movement of expropriation, for God "cannot be contained within the limits and the language of the

tribe" (Scrima 2004, p. 42). The inaugural character of the Name makes it a Name that is "asemic" as it is "polysemic" (Scrima 1969, p. 215), thus confirming the assonance that Scrima indulges in when he speaks of the *Name-place of God* as a *non-place*, and of the latter as the *unspoken*,¹⁷ where the inaugural destiny of the Name is decided, in its original meaning. If it is true, then, that every revelation of the Name inaugurates a "place" where God allows himself to be spoken, for André Scrima, this remains only "(one) place" (ibid.) among many others, thus leaving the door open to a plurality of manifestations: "This Logos speaks in all the lands and languages of the world" (Scrima 2008, p. 91).

The unpronounceable Name of God does not want to be fixed on any identity in itself, but on *what* the Name is meant for; namely, the salvation of man. It is in this sense that it "initiates not so much a new path, but the possibility of opening up unexplored paths for the cardinal interrogations of the spirit" (Scrima 2012, pp. 185–86). God is neither subject nor predicate, but *a coming* (from the depths of the Burning Bush), a revelation beyond what we can know and judge from the surrounding reality. In the expropriation of the Name, there is thus an "absolutely unthinkable dispossession of this very 'there is'" (Scrima 1969, p. 217). This is the reason why the mystery of the Incarnation is to be situated in the line of this history which is deepened in a unique way in the event of Jesus Christ. From this point of view, the historical figure of mediation becomes significant only by the finality of the act of mediation in which Christ receives, as Son of God, his unique status.

As long as it remains *unspoken*, the Name of God also remains *forbidden*, a word that Father Scrima defines as "inter-diction that is irreducible to the order of the letter or to that of philosophical conceptuality" (ibid., p. 215). From this point of view, this *forbidden/inter-diction* can be understood in a double sense: in the first sense, it manifests divine transcendence as irreducible to what is; in the second sense, it is that "between" what is said or written, as when we say, for example, that in order to know the true meaning of a text, we must know how to read between the lines. In this case, God is spoken "askew", obliquely from what is shown, by hiding. To see "between" is then to see beyond appearances, beyond what is visible and clear. In the *inter-diction*, "the letter becomes transparent, trans-apparent" (Scrima 2008, p. 234). This is the old rule of hermeneutics mentioned by the Apostle Paul: "the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life" (2Cor 3:6), and Father Scrima will make it his own on several occasions (Scrima 2008).¹⁸

Let us try to understand here the real reason that justifies this *inter-diction* as a *forbidden*. It is not its primary meaning of an object set aside, reserved, or unattainable. Rather, *the forbidden* is the trace of a completely different reality, of a "saturated phenomenon" (see: Marion 2005),¹⁹ that is to say, a reality in which God transcends any concept that tries to name him, whether in a breathtaking way, or by exceeding him on all sides (like the torrent that sweeps away everything in its path), which is the reason why God presents himself as *the inter-diction* par excellence: he is never that concept which tries to name him. There is, as André Scrima affirms, an "absolute impossibility of naming" (Scrima 1969, p. 215) linked to the fullness of his mystery which overflows all possible naming. Thus, we can say that names are always relative to the reality they claim, without the latter being absorbed by them. This also explains André Scrima's conclusion on the subject of the *inter-diction* as *forbidden*: "The forbidden takes on, from then on, an unheard-of meaning, that of the coming of the Name" (ibid.). Because he remains forbidden, that is to say, withdrawn into his mystery, God can, from then on, manifest himself as a free initiative of his manifestation: "God takes his place in the saying only on condition that he undoes it, that he forbids it" (Kerényi 1969, p. 19). The coming of the Name is possible only at this price, by remaining forbidden to human attempts to recover it: "You shall not make for yourself an idol" (Ex 20:4). It is forbidden to call God by any other name than the One revealed by Himself; that is, the unpronounceable YHWH: "man receives, beyond the distance of proximity, the revelation of a Name without any other semantic identity than that of his (self-) naming in the revealed act" (Scrima 1969, p. 215). *The unspoken* of God thus challenges all the idols that monopolize his presence.

What then is the truth of this *unspoken* that critiques all discourse? Could it be a more original experience of the divine that no discourse can capture? Such a question should, in any case, make us aware of the provisional character of statements, given the presence of this *unsaid* that every statement conceals. For, before pointing to man's impossibility of knowing the mystery, *the unspoken* part points above all to his capacity to accept a call that calls out to him: "Now the Lord said to Abram, 'Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you'" (Gen 12:1). What is decided then is no longer a problem of God's absence or silence (as a possible consequence of his *not saying anything*), but a problem of man's closure or openness towards him. This was also Heidegger's great question: "the decision as to whether being will once more be capable of a god"? (*ob das Sein noch einmal eines Gottes fähig wird*) (Heidegger 2002, p. 85; 1977, p. 112). Is it not from this that we should question the silence of God? For God is silent when man becomes closed. In the Bible, we speak of the "closed heavens".

5. The Foundation of an Institute of Islamic-Christian Studies

What we have said so far about *the unspoken* will be concretized in one of the most original and novel projects that could be known in the world of theological studies after the Second Vatican Council, and in the wake of the declaration *Nostra aetate*. The fact that such a project was able to come into being precisely in Lebanon, a land of encounter between Islam and Christianity, is not the result of mere chance.

Among the reasons for this project was the local political context. This is why in 1975, when the civil war broke out in Lebanon, four academics, two Christians (Father Augustin Dupré La Tour, SJ, and Father André Scrima) and two Muslims (Professor Hisam Nashabe and Professor Yussuf Ibish) decided to found together an Institute of Islamic-Christian Studies, in order to offer a peaceful and enlightened response to the intolerance and murderous violence that put the two communities in opposition. In response to this war, they wanted to reflect on the meaning of Lebanon's religious diversity, which was none other than the environmental, concrete and multiple reality of the Lebanese people.

Second, a much more urgent reason was to offer a comparative study of religions and of Islam in particular. It is true, as Father Scrima acknowledges, that studies on Islamology did exist at the University of Saint Joseph in Beirut, but their strictly historical and descriptive perspective made them insufficient for the perspective of "overcoming" that the founders of the Institute of Islamic-Christian Studies had in mind. However, for such a perspective to be achieved, it is necessary to start from the common cultural and social context of the two monotheistic religions, and not from an academic perspective which is outside the reality under study. As Alexandru Tofan states, Father Scrima's thinking is centred on the study of "concrete history" (Tofan 2021, p. 121).

It was in this sense that in 1974 the Faculty of Catholic Theology, the oldest faculty of the University of St. Joseph in Beirut, put an end to its activities "in the hope", Father Scrima tells us, "of seeing the unity of the theological teaching of the local Churches, more faithful to the reality of the situation, finally achieved" (Scrima 2005b, p. 29). The first step was the creation of a Faculty of Religious Studies in which Latin-rite Christians, Maronites, Greek Catholics and Armenian Catholics, according to Father Scrima, could study theology together.²⁰ Then, in 1977, the Department of Islamic-Christian Studies was opened, which became an Institute in its own right in 1980. For Father Scrima, the aim was "to pool the essential data of the two religions" (*ibid.*, p. 30) and to share them "with a greater respect for the truth proper to each" (*ibid.*). What we must remember above all about this initiative, because it is in this that the pioneering work of the Institute consists, is the completely new perspective from which Islam is approached. From an exclusivist confessional theology in which Islam was approached "as an 'object' inevitably 'dominated'" (Nashabe and Dupré La Tour 2005, p. 35) by a superior Christianity, we are now moving to an inclusive plural theology, in which the multiple identities of the Lebanese people will be reflected. It is from this perspective that Christian studies of Islam will also be renewed. Islam is no longer studied in an apologetic and inferior manner, but from its Abrahamic roots; in other

words, from a perspective that starts from the centre (the very heart of a religion, which is none other than the part of its *unspoken* nature within it), and not from the periphery (the historical and contingent aspects).

Of course, to place Islam in the same Jewish and Christian heritage does not mean that we adore the same God (because, if so, for Christians, this God could only be the God of Jesus Christ, or else we would be speaking of an abstract God), but as religions that unfold from the same *unspoken* fact that allows the essential encounter of man with God to come about. Father Scrima has an expression for this: “The universal and the immediate are thus brought together in a burning question and a liberating search” (Scrima 2005b, p. 31).

In all the courses of the Institute, there is a will to go towards this *unspoken* present in these experiences born of the encounter between the universal and the immediate, as we can see from the titles of the courses themselves (which are, moreover, about so many concerns): “Spiritual experience and its language: Christian tradition and Islamic tradition”; “Community of believers and contemporary renewal: description and analysis of contemporary cultural and religious currents in Islam and Christianity”; “Scripture and forms. Research on the foundations and meaning of spiritual language through Christian and Islamic art”; “Does the consciousness of faith have a critical function on the world order?”. These courses also include themes linked to the current political issues of the three monotheistic religions: “Zionism: a religious movement or a political phenomenon?”; “Islam and the ‘World Order’”; “A Church for our time”.

The aim of the course was therefore to study Islam and Christianity from the point of view of a set of common experiences, those which unfold on the horizon of the same *unspoken* that points to them. For André Scrima, however, this perspective aims at much more than a form of passive tolerance, inviting Christians and Muslims to a real communion, despite their differences.²¹ This living together is, without a doubt, one of the most audacious attempts that these courses dreamt of implementing (a daily living together being always more difficult than a theological dialogue between enlightened minds).

Another aspect of originality concerns *the method* of these courses: they are given in two voices, by two teachers: one Christian, the other Muslim.

“In concrete terms, two professors, one Christian, the other Muslim, both university professors, agree to compose their course according to a similar structure. And, in front of the same students, they follow each other, one listening to the other’s lecture and intervening when necessary. In this way, research is carried out in common and is enriched by the reciprocal contribution of each religious tradition”. (Nashabe and Dupré La Tour 2005, p. 37)

The theme is therefore common, but the approach is complementary. The aim is that each person should express himself, according to one of Father Scrima’s expressions, “*from within*” (Scrima 1977b); that is to say, from his own norms and values, which do not necessarily have to be the norms and values of the other. There is, in this respect, a notable difference between a “safe” language and a language “*from within*”. The former is historical and comparative, while the latter goes to the very heart of religion. On the side of the listeners, the aim is to make them experience “a necessary change of scenery which will then help them to penetrate the religious universe presented to them from within” (Nashabe and Dupré La Tour 2005, p. 36). In this sense, we can recall the emblematic title of a draft course that Father Scrima entitled: “The religious experience of the desert in Judaism and Islam of the origins”. What he could have dealt with here would undoubtedly have been the meeting of Islam and Judaism from the same spiritual reality (and therefore, “*from within*”), which is, in the present case, the very place of an *unspoken* experience materialized by the spiritual experience of the desert (one should not seek here, of course, any geographical connotation, the desert being that dimension which says something about the life of the spirit and the spiritual adventure of man).²² For this reason, it is quite possible to agree on a common belonging of believers by virtue of the appropriation of these universal experiences, which are, however, only expressed in the singular mediation of their religions.

Father Scrima's experience in Lebanon has sometimes been referred to as the period of maturity of the spirit of Antim; that is to say, of that monastery in Bucharest which in the 1940s was the cradle of the spiritual and cultural renewal of Romanian Orthodoxy through the Burning Bush movement.²³ At Antim, the man who was then only a young philosophy student in search of something, tasted the unconditional openness towards the religious otherness of the other from the same pole of transcendence. The Burning Bush was thus the place of one of Father Scrima's most fundamental experiences linked to the notion of *equi-distance*; that is to say, of that capacity to recognize that we are all "at the same distance from the living Infinite" (Scrima 2012, p. 148).²⁴ It is for this reason that it is possible to say that the experience of Antim is the same one that will come back to Lebanon as an unconditional opening towards the religion of the other, centred on the search for the same Absolute.

6. Co-Presence of Christians and Muslims in the Same Mystery

The notion of co-presence of Christians and Muslims has, as its starting point, the concrete situation of Lebanon, which is that of a multicultural and multi-faith society. It is this reality that constitutes the true content of reality, and not the one fabricated by slogans and clichés (of which the civil war will be one of its ultimate exacerbations). The true reality, for André Scrima, is the co-presence of Islam and Christianity in the same region. It is this co-presence, while respecting their own identities, that really manifests the same mystery, and the same *unspoken truth* that surpasses them (it is, moreover, in arguments of this kind that the genesis of the Institute of Islamic-Christian Studies is to be found). The rest, after all, is just an ideological discourse (all the more so when it provokes wars). The accusations against Father Scrima of being pro-Arab and anti-Zionist (or even anti-American) are, from this point of view, symptomatic of a discourse incapable of going beyond a narrow and politicised vision. Thus, in a 1971 book, André Chouraqui wrongly attributed to Father Scrima statements that were obviously false, and undoubtedly misunderstood. When he writes that "the presence of the Jews in the Holy Land, for Monsignor André Scrima, is the very symbol of the triumph of the forces of evil which threaten man in our time" (Chouraqui 1971, p. 135), one wonders what kind of evidence he is relying on to support such statements. Or how, according to Chouraqui, Father Scrima's participation in a conference in Dijon dedicated to Palestine would automatically make him a bearer of "the good word of anti-Zionism" (ibid., p. 140)? For Father Scrima, it has always been clear that Israel's "return" cannot be achieved if it refuses "to integrate effectively into the world in which it lives, to become a part of the Middle East as a whole" (Scrima 2005c, p. 93); in other words, to consider its "native land" as inalienable, not only for Jews, but also for Palestinians. Consequently, whether we like it or not, the presence of two peoples or two religions on the same land brings us face to face with what André Scrima considers to be "the most difficult clause in human dialogue: the desire to get as far as possible to the 'bottom of things' when we are clearly in the presence of the most contrasting positions" (ibid., p. 96). However, from this point of view, according to Father Scrima, we do not remember to what extent the first contacts between Christians and Muslims, "far from being hostile, curiously bore the promise of an unprecedented dialogue" (Scrima 2005b, p. 22). The most emblematic example is that which he believes to be found in Gregory Palamas concerning his presupposed "conviction as to the profound convergences of the two beliefs" (ibid.).²⁵ It goes without saying that, beyond the historical veracity of such an affirmation, we are far from having exhausted the full significance of such an affirmation, which goes beyond the simple objective recognition of religions in general. At what level of depth does this convergence take place? Where and in what does it really converge? Is it the beautiful intuition of Hölderlin in *Patmos*: "And dear friends live near/Growing weak on the separate mountains"? (Hölderlin 2004, p. 39).

In any case, in a letter sent to his monks for the beginning of Lent in 1960, Father Scrima wrote, on the subject of this belonging, that "we do not have to worry about knowing 'where' we are. We are in him" (Father Elijah of Deir-el-Harf 2003, p. 248). "Where" we are,

that is to say, in what kind of exteriority, in what religion, in what confessional affiliation, in what tradition, nation or tribe (and how can we fail to recognize here the divisions of all kinds that afflict Lebanon?). For Father Scrima, our true identity is found in God, and in the mystery of what he does *not say*. It is in the reality of this mystery that people draw the strength to rise above contingencies, to overcome identity barriers and artificial separations of all kinds.

The unspoken, insofar as it helps believers to rise above contingencies (beginning with that of their religion), transposes them into the most authentic of believing conditions, which is that of the journeying of their faith journeying of believers (and which Christians will necessarily recognise as an active disposition of the Spirit of Christ). It is this experience that two of the founders of the Institute of Islamic-Christian Studies, Hisham Nashabe and Augustin Dupré La Tour, will also retain after a year of courses given at the Institute:

“Believers of both religions (Muslims and Christians), we found ourselves not as ‘sedentary’, satisfied with what we have, but as belonging to the race of ‘nomads’, living in a ‘tent’, itinerants guided by the Spirit of God. We recognized ourselves, quite spontaneously, not as possessing the divine Truth, but as possessed by that Truth which guides, leads and liberates, each in his own line, more attached to his own faith”. (Nashabe and Dupré La Tour 2005, p. 44)

In the same Lenten text sent to the monks of Deir al-Harf, Father Scrima exhorts them to have a faith that is “luminous and pure of all prejudice and superstition” (Father Elijah of Deir-el-Harf 2003, p. 249). This is what “maturity of faith” (ibid.) is all about. But what kind of prejudice is he referring to? What does it mean to have a “luminous and pure faith”? For André Scrima, this faith is only born of the authentic encounter of the monk with his God, in such a way that it is illuminated and enlightened in the monk’s own openness to God, an openness that would not be possible if the monk (but also the believer in general) continued to adhere to prejudices and superstitions of all kinds. Can we go further and ask, with Father Scrima, what is the danger of drifting away from any expression of faith that is developed, if need be, in the absence of the other, and without taking account of his presence? From what basis would such an expression of faith derive this privilege? Consequently, should Father Scrima’s statement about “pure and luminous faith” not be understood precisely from the point of view of the *unspoken* nature of Christianity and Islam, in which the faith of the two monotheisms is authentically based, an *unspoken* nature which situates them and calls on them to go constantly beyond their contingencies? For Father Scrima, there is a word of God that “whispers in the depths of every being” (Scrima 1975). This word “opens me from within, so that I am always ready to see God even where I do not expect Him, where I do not know how He will come, where He is completely different from my tradition” (Scrima 2003a, p. 304).

“Maturity of faith” thus goes hand in hand with “maturity of charity”: “know how to love the other precisely because he is other” (Father Elijah of Deir-el-Harf 2003, p. 249). Loving the other is called showing hospitality (because the other is not welcomed intellectually but existentially). The other is the stranger, that is to say, the person whose essential features are a fundamental *unspoken* and *unknown* which we cannot reject (out of prejudice, superstition or mistrust), but rather welcome. What calls for hospitality is the surplus of being that comes precisely from what is not yet given, from a word waiting to be spoken. Hospitality then becomes the testimony of a completely different reality that is attested in this way (in hospitality) and that, in this respect, in the words of Anca Vasiliu, “frees language from the necessity of logical proof and discursive passage through demonstration” (Vasiliu 2019, p. 70).

Now, how could *the unspoken* arise if not through this disposition which is called hospitality?²⁶ Overcoming prejudice through the practice of hospitality is the way for faith to become “bright and pure”. For Christians, hospitality is another name for the Spirit of God who wants to reach the ends of our being (Scrima 2004, p. 56). This is the reason why hospitality remains the theological place par excellence of the universal presence of God among people: “To recognize that we are now all equi-distant from God, that the *being of*

others represents the inalienable place where God himself can appear" (Scrima 1980, p. 124) (to think theologically about this theme is, without question, one of the most urgent tasks of contemporary theology).

The inseparability between faith and hospitality is also underlined by a Catholic hermit, Sister Noëlle Devilliers, a member of the community of the Beatitudes and the spiritual daughter of Father Scrima during his twelve years in Lebanon. In a posthumous testimony, she said: "loving union with the Lord, the inescapable test of which is love of the brothers" (Devilliers 2003, p. 266). Faith in itself, without the love of the brother, is incapable of becoming a luminous faith if it lacks this love. Faith can never be discussed in the absence of the other or in opposition to the strangeness shown by his presence. This is because *the other is the unspoken in waiting*, a possibility whose realization depends only on the encounter with him.

It is in this sense that the appearance of Islam must be situated in the horizon of universal history; not chronologically, but prophetically. In other words, Islam emerges from the horizon of *the unspoken*, of which it is one of the historical realities that shape man's existence.

In Lebanon, this recognition should, in principle, have led to the existence of a harmonious "synthesis" between Christians and Muslims. However, what Scrima observes is exactly the opposite: in contrast to this "synthesis", there is always "the gap" or the shaping of a "sectorial society [...] where the definition of each is done by the exclusion of the other" (Scrima 2005a, p. 61). The worst expression of inauthenticity is, basically, this definition by opposition, where one only affirms oneself by symbolic elimination of the other. This is a violent affirmation of oneself. If one of the examples Father Scrima thinks of is the fate of the Palestinian people and of Palestine, it is also because it allows him to say that through it is "Lebanon itself [that] becomes 'aware of its state of non-state'" (ibid., p. 64). This awareness only confirms the extent to which the acceptance of the other, and of *the unspoken*, is the missing component of the plural and multicultural identity of the Lebanese people. For, as Levinas said, the face of the other is never "a figure offered to serene participation" (Levinas 1980, p. 242). On the contrary, it is a face that challenges me and asks to be seen. "Then the king will say to those at his right hand, [...] I was a stranger and you welcomed me" (Matt 25:34–35).

7. Conclusions

In this article, we have discovered that *the unspoken* and *the forbidden* do not represent a flaw of the word, but its most original dimension. They define the language of apophatic theology, in which what is not said is much richer in promise than what is definitively affirmed. Passing through philosophy, it has been shown that the possible is not some virtuality, but the enigmatic fullness of a "reality" that is happening. In this way, does not what is neither decided, nor finished, nor realized nor accomplished, carry in itself the promise of a new reality? This promise, which we have tried to outline in these few lines, is that of the encounter between Islam and Christianity from the same horizon of transcendence.

However, when we speak of *the same*, we are not speaking of the identical. The same mystery can only be considered in the dimension of its journeying, which is nothing other than *this possible* happening. The itinerant approach of faith (should we recall that "Islam began as a stranger, it will return as a stranger as it began"?)²⁷ does not merely seek to have such a *stabilitas*, but it aims above all at an existential way of situating ourselves in the faith that requires constant "new departures". Is such a perspective realistic enough? Does it not risk losing touch with the contingent reality of faith?

On the other hand, do we take enough time to notice the consequences of a faith filled with certainty? How is it that we don't even see how problematic the problem of one-sided truth is? To so many questions, the answers seem impossible. Yet, we say that the first one who ventured out of these impasses was God himself in the person of his Son. We have stressed that the Incarnation is never a new proof of truth on the part of God to men, but a

weakness assumed to the point of incomprehension: “Never has anyone spoken like this!” (John 7:46). The one who dared to speak to us of *the other face* of God was Christ. It is this other face which reappears unceasingly in the Gospels to the point of scandalizing scribes, Pharisees, and even apostles: “Does this offend you? Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before?” (John 6:61–62). Thus, any language that speaks of God is never simply a language *about* God, but a language *in* God, and consequently a language in which the destiny of the being is decided. Is it not from this side that we should look when we speak of the truth of Christianity and Islam? Is it not rather in the journeying that they inaugurate than in the jealous exclusivity of their own truths? Such questions, formulated in this way, clearly show the impasses in which we find ourselves. To quote Kierkegaard, whom Father Scrima used on several occasions, “objectively there is no truth, but the appropriation is the truth” (Kierkegaard 1992, p. 77). Faced with the two paths represented by Islam and Christianity, it is not a matter of choosing between one or the other, or even measuring them, but of walking, like Abraham: “By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to set out [. . .]; and he set out, not knowing where he was going” (Heb 11:8). It is wrong to believe that, under the pretext of disregarding the destination, one would disregard the way itself, because the truth of the latter is not in its end but in its beginning; that is to say, the walking (for an image one could just as well say that the truth of a dancer is not in the dancer himself but in his dance. The truth of who he is only happens in the movement of his two feet).²⁸

The unspoken and *the forbidden* are not an obstacle to divine knowledge, but its unceasing passage towards more knowledge and more truth. It is from here that a new possible path for the encounter between Christians and Muslims must be born, which will perhaps allow the realization of part of the “dream” of one of the Turkish interlocutors of Gregory Palamas: “the time will come when we will be in agreement with each other” (Balivet 2011, p. 44).

Funding: This research was funded by a Hasso Plattner Excellence Research, grant number LBUS-HPI-ERG-2020-XX, financed by the Knowledge Transfer Center of the Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes

¹ But, this unknown God, “is the measure of man’s habitation” (Blanchet 2016, p. 87).

² “The different must differ” (Breton 1994, p. 12).

³ Olivier Clément uses this adverb in a brief biographical note in the issue of *Contacts* dedicated to Father Scrima, which, in view of the life of the perpetual nomad that André Scrima was, can only be described as “inappropriate”.

⁴ In French, the language in which André Scrima expresses himself, there is a pun between *unspoken* (“le non-dit”) and *forbidden* (“l’inter-dit”) that cannot be understood in English. Thus, what is *unspoken* is at the same time *forbidden* in the double sense of the latter word: what is effectively *prohibited* (in French: “interdit”) but also what is *inter-dicted* (in French: “inter-dit”) i.e., what can be read between two lines, between two paragraphs of a text, etc., and which is not visible on first reading.

⁵ Heidegger too, about the poet’s work (*Dichten*) will say that this one is rather a “saying again” (“Wieder-spruch”) (Heidegger 2015, p. 13; 1998, p. 13) in the sense that, “For the longest time-before it comes to be said, that is, spoken-the poet’s work is only a listening” (Heidegger 1971b, p. 188; 1985, pp. 66–67).

⁶ As for the word “interdit” (*forbidden* and *inter-diction*), “le Nom-Lieu de Dieu” (*the Name-Place of God*) has, in French, the same phonetism as “le Non-Lieu de Dieu” (*the Non-Place of God*), which allows us to say that the name of God is as much an affirmation as a negation.

⁷ Doesn’t the Burning Bush show us that “the letter, the image, the symbol, inflamed by meaning, are not consumed by interpretation, that its foundation and its vector of meaning are not reduced to ashes by hermeneutic knowledge?” (Scrima 2012, pp. 188–89).

⁸ This theme, which is one of the high points of negative theology and mystical spirituality, is also very present in the theology of Father Scrima. Nevertheless, we must not misunderstand the true meaning of this “nothingness”, which is not to be confused with nihilism. God “is nothing compared to what is” (Scrima 2005d, p. 62), not because of the limits of human knowledge, but

because of its otherness that disposes us, unceasingly, to a purer search. It is in this sense that “God must hide himself and withdraw, so that we can seek him. In this way, nothingness becomes the supreme attestation of being” (Scrima 2012, p. 53). In Christian theology, the symbol par excellence of this annihilation is the death of Christ on the Cross: “On the Cross we are in the presence of this ‘annihilation’ of God delivered up to death in the person of Jesus Christ” (ibid., p. 89). Commenting on the meaning of John the Baptist’s index finger in the direction of Christ dead on the Cross in the Issenheim tryptic, Stanislas Breton will say that: “The so-called negative theology is only the impotent index finger of an essential that is always to come” (Breton 1994, p. 643).

⁹ This sometimes implies “leaving God for God” (Scrima 1972), a spiral movement where one meets Him in greater authenticity. Scrima also interprets Jesus’ criticism of the Pharisees in this way: “It is probably the trial of appearances themselves, at the moment when they are brutally confronted with the reality of God. In other words, God is confronted here with God, the true God is violently confronted with the appearance of God” (Scrima 1974b).

¹⁰ For André Scrima, this “locus” is the “very heart of the divine ‘saying’ of everyone” (Scrima 2004, p. 98). The “locus” of the “divine saying” is thus the source of all possible theological discourse on God. It is similar to the sound from a bell tower that fills the whole valley: “one single sound continually filled young hearts, dreams, prayers, and games” (Heidegger 1997, p. 109). Apophaticism imposes a necessary distance between “saying” and “speaking” precisely to protect the original clarity of the “locus”.

¹¹ This “logocity”, which always runs the danger, according to Father Scrima, of becoming a “logodicy”, only seeks to justify God “within language or by means of it”, which does not respond to any kind of necessity, since, according to Scrima, a philosopher such as Wittgenstein could very well “imagine a religion in which words have no importance” (Kerény 1969, pp. 33–34).

¹² This proximity of the Logos, which in no way cancels the abyss that separates us from God, must not be thought of in terms of a distant and inaccessible presence of God. On this superficial reading, we must try to understand that the proximity of God in Jesus Christ is a proximity of the abyss to us. In the Son, we are “on the edge”, “on the cliff”, that is to say on the point of taking the leap into the great abyss which is none other than the mystery of God. But for this to happen, the “entrance” into the abyss had to come close to us.

¹³ The Cross is an event in two senses: first, in the familiar sense of the death of Christ. But for André Scrima, the Cross is also equivalent to the coming of our God, in the sense specified in one of his homilies: “It is also the Cross that has engendered God. Our God comes to us through the Cross and not in any other way” (Scrima 2003c, p. 75). In other words, the Cross becomes the mediator of the God of Christians as the burning bush once was for the God of Israel.

¹⁴ “it is as a result of a shift in language that the Greek semantic support of this expropriated foundation (ὑποστάσις) becomes substantivized until it becomes, in the personalized mode of the ‘Thou’, the frozen connotation of an ontotheological and anthropological present” (Scrima 1969, p. 216).

¹⁵ This bursting (plural) so similar to the “sparks of the rocks that leap when the hammer strikes” (Dancă 2021, p. 7) of which the prophet Jeremiah speaks to us: “Is not my word like fire—the Lord’s oracle—like a hammer that smashes the rock?” (Jer 23:29).

¹⁶ This exclamation conveys an experience, not any identity.

¹⁷ “The place of God inevitably appears there as an ‘unsaid’. I mean that he stands there by opening up language, by suspending it if not breaking it, and with it the very enclosure of being (I refer without hesitation to Heidegger) that language limits. In this context, ‘God is not just a word’, but it is the impossible word that names him” (Kerény 1969, p. 19).

¹⁸ “You have to force the letter so that it gives its spirit, you have to kill it so that it exhales its spirit” (Scrima 2008, p. 175); or, making his own (ibid., p. 115) this quote from Paul Verlaine: “Take eloquence and wring its neck!” (this is a line from the poem *Art poétique*, see: Verlaine 2016, p. 16).

¹⁹ For the explanations concerning the notion of “saturated phenomenon” see: (Marion 2005, pp. 325–61). In another work by the same author, *De surcroît. Études sur les phénomènes saturés*, the phenomenon is defined as that “overflow, which no concept, no meaning, no intention can foresee, organize or contain” (Marion 2001, p. 197).

²⁰ In the “André Scrima” Archives, kept at the New Europe College in Bucharest, there are a number of drawings, plans or drafts of projects concerning the genesis of the Faculty of Religious Sciences and the Institute of Islamic-Christian Studies (Preamble and Statutes of the Centre for Theological Studies and Research [CERT]; The CERT: General Overview, 1974–1975; The University of Saint Joseph School of Religion Sciences. Department of Islamo-Christian Studies; Project of an Islamo-Christian Institute.) There is also an important correspondence between Father Scrima and Father Augustin Dupré La Tour, the Dean of the Faculty of Theology, from which it is quite clear that Father Scrima played a leading role in the creation of these two institutions. Let us mention, for example, this letter (Scrima 1974a) of 17 November 1974, from Augustin Dupré la Tour to André Scrima, in which the latter writes that the idea of creating a “Center” dedicated to theological studies and research is due in large part to Father Scrima. It was also Father Scrima who, in a letter to Augustin Dupré La Tour dated 1 January 1977 (Scrima 1977a), informed him of his telephone conversations with Prof. Yussuf Ibish of the American University of Beirut, in order to test the ground and evaluate the chances of implementing the project of a Centre for Islamic-Christian Studies. Scrima’s financial involvement in these projects was also important, as he obtained funds from Madame Dominique de Menil, who was known at the time for her patronage projects and with whom Father Scrima formed a lasting friendship (he later became her scientific advisor for the Rothko Chapel Foundation).

- ²¹ This can also be seen in two surahs of the Quran, III, 64: “Oh People of the Book! come to common terms as between us and you that we worship none but God, that we associate no partners with Him, that we erect not, from among ourselves, Lord and patrons other than God” ([The Holy Quran 1937](#), p. 139) and V, 85: “And nearest among them in love to the Believers wilt thou find those who say, ‘We are Christians’ because amongst these are Men devoted to learning and men who have renounced the world, and they are not arrogant” (*ibid.*, p. 268).
- ²² Father Scrima’s hermeneutical genius is shown once again in this surprising analysis of the etymology of the word *dabar* (word with *mitbar* (desert): “In Hebrew, the root of the word (*dabar*) is *dab*, which means to browse, hence the word *dabor*, which means to walk. If we add an *m*, we get *midbar*, which means desert. The desert is the place par excellence where one has no choice but to walk, a place that tolerates only roaming. It rejects and excludes the sedentary man who, established here, would either be in danger of death or would go mad” ([Scrima 2008](#), p. 182).
- ²³ The Burning Bush movement was a group of Orthodox intellectuals, monks and lay people, focused on the dialogue between faith and culture as well as on the rediscovery of Eastern spirituality, especially through the practice of the prayer of the heart (*hesychasm*). Born around the Antim monastery in Bucharest, the main activity of this group took place between 1943 and 1948, when it was dissolved by the new communist government. In 1958, all the members, except Father Scrima who managed to leave the country in 1956, were arrested and imprisoned following a mock trial which accused them of plotting against the social order and of subversive activity against the working class and the revolutionary movement.
- ²⁴ A sign of the extraordinary openness that prevailed in Antim in those years is also the “anecdote” that Father Scrima told in an interview about the reaction of a monk who, at the end of a lecture in which Djālal-od-Din Rumi and Ramakrishna were spoken about, stood up and asked: “Forgive me. You quote a Muslim, someone else quotes a Hindu. But what does all this mean?” Then Father Benedict Ghiuș answered him very simply: “If God said that in the end times he will take all the sheep upon himself, who am I to exclude them? How can I reject someone who speaks of Him in this way? How can I not listen to him?” ([Sorescu 2012](#)).
- ²⁵ Even if it is not too clear on which sources Father Scrima relies to make such assertions (more likely it is a personal interpretation of Gregory Palamas’ period of captivity in 1354–1355 among the Turks), it is nevertheless interesting to decipher these “deep convergences” from their eschatological perspective. It is, in any case, in this sense that we can accept the meaning of the answer Gregory Palamas gave to his Turkish interlocutor when the latter declared: “the time will come when we will be in agreement among ourselves”, and Gregory Palamas replied: “And I agree and wish that this time would come” ([Balivet 2011](#), p. 144).
- ²⁶ For André Scrima, hospitality is “a unanimous tradition” and “a sacred reality of the human universe” (Scrima, *Hospitalité et monachisme oriental*, undated and unpublished archive text, p. 1). The addressee is the foreigner, as the bearer of “a message that one must know how to decipher, even if it is only a simple message of humanity” (*ibid.*).
- ²⁷ *Hadith* attributed to Imam Ja’far (see: [Scrima 2004](#), p. 62).
- ²⁸ This example is not taken entirely by chance, for Father Scrima wrote a little text entitled “Et si au commencement était la danse?” in which he asserts that “each step of the dance is literally a step on the way to higher knowledge, to more freedom, to more love” ([Scrima 2004](#), pp. 203–4). Even more extraordinary, this text is a reflection on the dance of the dervishes.

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