


Article

André Scrima's Christology and Its Practical Implications

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Abstract: Father André Scrima is one of the most enigmatic figures of the Romanian Orthodox Church. Everything related to him passes as extraordinary. He was an exception among the Romanian intellectuals who suffered under communism. Beyond that, his journeys and spiritual experiences possess something indescribable, almost sacramental. His presence overwhelmed those who met him and his writings retained this trait. The present study focuses on Scrima's Christology, highlighting its uniqueness and its practical implications. Although Scrima does not dedicate a book to the subject, all of his writings refer to it. However, due to his distinctiveness, it is difficult to organize his Christology in a systematic way. The most lucrative approach is to group his texts along the hermeneutical moments that define his writing: images, stories and stances. In Scrima's logic, all *words/signs* are the very synthesis of a spiritual experience, all stories develop the theological synthesis of the signs, and the relation between the stories forms the tradition as a set of interrogations and communitarian commitments. If we evaluate Scrima's Christology in this manner, we do not come to a system, but to a succession of images. The core of these images remains the same, Jesus Christ, yet it is seen in nuances that unveil His beauty—Stranger, Gate, Logos, Name above all names—, in an unpredictable play of perspectives. It can be said that Scrima's approach resembles a kaleidoscope, which, by using mirrors and light, gives an insight to the unsuspected possibilities of all fixed forms.

Keywords: André Scrima; Christology; stranger; gate; spiritual experience; Orthodox Church



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1. Introduction

At the time when he returned to Romania, after a long absence, Father Scrima had gained the fame of a legend. Everything related to him was extraordinary. He was an exception among the Romanian intellectuals who suffered under communism. Moreover, his journeys and spiritual experiences are unspeakably unique and overwhelming. His life and writings have both retained this trait. His personal history was mysterious—Radu Bercea humorously notes that even in Scrima's "official record" there are four variants regarding the year of his birth (Bercea 2005, pp. 117–18). His ecclesiastical activity was exceptional—for this reason he triggered the interest of the Department of State Security (The "Securitate") and in November 1962 there was an attempt to kill Scrima (Morariu 2020). His monastic vocation (Giogas and Ladoucer 2007) was unique and his thought woke astonishment and consternation alike. In a nutshell, Father Scrima was and still remains enigmatic: a nomad¹ who refused to settle down in any geographical or cultural space.

Scrima's theology cannot be understood outside of his formative experience. He lived most of his life abroad Romania in a monastery from Lebanon (Sonea 2021, p. 36), but his education and his spiritual formation were related to the Romanian thinkers from Bucharest and to the Burning Bush group of the Antim Monastery (Vasileanu 2020). He studied philosophy at the University of Bucharest (1943–1948) where he became Anton Dumitriu's assistant professor for two years. In 1945, Dumitriu introduced Scrima to the Burning Bush group of the Antim Monastery and from that point on Scrima's life took a turn. At Antim, Scrima met Father John the Stranger (Ivan Kulâghin), who played an essential role in his thinking and formation, and became part of the monastic community. From 1949 until 1956 Scrima studied theology in Bucharest, while, from 1950, he became

a novice at Neamt Monastery. From 1953 he worked with Bartolomeu Anania at the Romanian Patriarchate Library and was highly appreciated by Patriarch Justinian Marin. On 28 November 1956, due to the intervention of Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, India's Vice-President, who met Scrima during a short visit in Romania, and with the help of Patriarch Justinian, he obtained a study visa for India. He went to India after spending a short period in Europe. During his stay in India he worked on a PhD thesis—*The Ultimate, its Methodology and Epistemological Connotation according to Advaita-Vedanta*—under the supervision of Professor T.R.V. Murti (Tofan 2021, p. 70). Unfortunately, he never completed his work and, from 1961 his theological and academic endeavours took a second turn. In 1961 he met Patriarch Athenagoras I of Constantinopol and he became the personal representative of the Ecumenical Patriarch at the Second Vatican Council (1963–1964). Afterwards, Scrima taught theology at the French University of Beirut (1968–1989) and lived in a closely located Lebanese monastery. It was not until 1991 that he returned to Romania, where he continued his activities “surrounded by a small group of friends and within an institute for advanced studies entitle *New Europe College*” (Sonea 2021, p. 36).

Scrima's writings preserve traces of his spiritual journey and they are difficult to define. First, because of the way in which most of his texts were composed. They were neither part of a larger project, nor were they elaborated in a systematic manner, as pieces of a broader theological vision. They are the result of meetings, requests or lectures or writings brought forth due to his communion with others and which were meant to serve others (Patapievici 2004). Secondly, and more importantly, Scrima's texts do not follow the usual academic patterns, although he was academically trained and worked for a long time in the university system. He operates with unconventional associations, with logical leaps and opens perspectives never developed to the backbone.

“Father Scrima's discourse seemed to have an *arborescent* associativity, an *unpredictable* logic, which did not allow itself to be controlled, a *discountenanced* erudition. He practiced a speed of thought which *short-circuits* ones understanding or, as Wittgenstein would have said, which gives one ‘mind cramps’. His advancements had a type of boundless slowness, in which *you felt lost*. His speech thrust readers into a partnership in which *they were made to forget its logical architecture*. He often manifested a sharpness of spirit which blocked one's mind in the impression that one came across a *sophism*. He opened up his readership to vigilance. Nonetheless, when his discourse came to a conclusion, he *left his readership on the way*—he never brought his readers to the end”. (Patapievici 2005, p. 25)

This makes close to impossible the attempt to resume his ideas. To conquer, at least in part, the depths of his words, a different method is required, i.e., one that fits his hermeneutics, his “unpredictable” style.

Given Scrima's uniqueness it is difficult to determine the theologians that played an essential role in his thinking. His discourse is closer to the Oriental manner of writing than to the Byzantine tradition to which he belongs. However, Scrima makes frequent references, without properly mentioning them, to well-known Fathers of the Church that founded the Byzantine tradition. On the other hand, in his pneumatology, which has an ecumenical openness, he resembles Yve's Congar ideas. In his theology of religions he shows a “tight connection with the three Abrahamic traditions” and was influenced by his Indian experience (Sonea 2021, p. 38). From Scrima's published personal notes and from his academic references, Sergei Bulgakov seems to have played the central role in his thinking. Yet, this assumption needs further consideration.

The present study aims to give a glimpse at Scrima's Christology by using his own method of thinking. Thus, before exploring two of his most important statements, Scrima's ‘working method’ is defined. While this approach helps in highlighting Scrima's unique theological style, it raises also limitations. On the one hand, his writings are the result of an ecclesial experience better defined by images than by a doctrinal system. That does not mean that he cannot be related to a doctrinal system—the traditional Orthodox

one, in this case—, but that his theology is more iconological than philosophical. There is always a risk of misinterpreting his symbolic language, a risk one has to take, if one desires to capture Scrima’s thought. On the other hand, an exhaustive presentation of his Christology is difficult to achieve since, to my knowledge, none of the scholars has even approached the subject. In the present context, I have tried to bring forward Scrima’s Christological leitmotifs by following his spiritual experience, his theological writings and their interpretation. In doing so I have used most of his writings: his courses on the liturgical experience (*Biserica liturgică*), his extensive commentary on John’s Gospel, his Bachelor thesis in Theology, his essays on hesychasm, his studies on ecumenism and his courses on spiritual experience. However, I have organised the material not by following Scrima’s developments of a certain topic—spiritual experience, to give an example—, but by analysing his usage of a particular Christological image. After reading his work, I have taken up two Christological images that appear most often in his writings and sought the theological relations Scrima develops by using these images. In order to verify my interpretation, I took into consideration the theologians, public intellectuals, art historians and others writers who have commented on Scrima’s work, even if their work does not focus on Christology. This methodological approach bares, I must admit, a risk, since the selection process has left aside many Christological images that would have deserved to have been taken into account, due also to the fact that this research field is related to my own ecclesial formation. That being said, the study opens a new perspective on Scrima’s work and raises questions that need further debate.

2. Preliminary Remarks

There is only one moment when Scrima reveals his ‘working method’. In the beginning of his interpretation of Father’s John the Stranger *Letter*, he describes his method in analogy with stellar spectroscopy (Scrima 2010, p. 28). This process, specific to astrophysics, unveils the proprieties of a distant object by analysing the light within it. For example, when the spectrum of a star is studied, its features, size and composition become known. The theological interpretation functions in the same manner, according to Scrima, with the difference that by studying the sacred words, one gains knowledge about God’s eternal life (Patapievici 2005, p. 30). Just as light inhabits the entire creation and gives an opportunity to identify distant bodies, the Logos inhabits the entire Tradition and gives, if one adjusts oneself, a path to the knowledge of true life. Ioan Alexandru Tofan observes that the methodology proposed by Scrima outlines three successive moments:

“When he talks about a miracle as well as when he develops a course on the experience of the desert in Judaism and Islam, his approach is twofold: phenomenological and semantic. A third, rather historical approach can be added to the above mentioned. It tackles the traditions, texts and gestures that articulate the object and give it a determined, recognizable form”. (Tofan 2019, p. 34)

Therefore, the phenomenon, the sign and the tradition that recalls them constitute Scrima’s hermeneutical pillars. In an alternative arrangement, more suitable for the present study, the following can be outlined: *the sign, the theme and the stance*.

The question that arises is: *How can these hermeneutical pillars express Scrima’s Christology and its practical implications?* Two preliminary observations must be made. The first refers to the Christological doctrine present in Scrima’s texts and the second relates to the form in which this doctrine is expressed.

In Scrima’s work there is no systematic presentation of Eastern Christology. There are neither writings devoted to the ecumenical or patristic testimonies about Jesus Christ, nor any thematic developments on one or another of the practical implications of this doctrine. The *Commentary on the Gospel according to John* (*Comentariul integral la Evanghelia după Ioan*) comes closest, in terms of content, to a classical handbook on Christology, as it offers an interpretation of John’s confession about Christ. The courses collected in *Spiritual Experience and its Language* (*Experiența spirituală și limbajele ei*) take in question Christ’s “radical” revelation, in the same way in which Scrima’s bachelor thesis, supervised by

Father Dumitru Staniloae, *Apophatic Anthropology (Antropologia apofatică)*, highlights the centrality of Chalcedon for the Eastern doctrines. Thus, without having any text dedicated to the subject, Christology comes up in all of Scrima's writings. The problem is that his Christological system remains a mosaic, almost impossible to retrieve.

The only possible solution one can think of is to regroup the pieces around three hermeneutical pillars, namely *signs*, *themes* and *stances*. Following Scrima's logic, all *signs* encompass a spiritual experience. Furthermore, all *themes* develop a theological discourse founded on one of the signs and all *stances* grow out of the relation between different themes and signs. While such an approach to Christology does not expose a theological system, it does present a succession of images. The focus of these *eikóna* remains Jesus Christ, but His *oikonomia* and Person are depicted in descriptions that catch the nuances of His beauty—'Stranger', 'Gate', 'Logos', 'Name above all names'—, in an unpredictable stream of connections. It can be said that Scrima's approach resembles the kaleidoscope, which with the help of mirrors and light, brings to front the unsuspected possibilities of any fixed form.

3. Christ, the Stranger

The first image which should be taken into account, because it portrays Scrima's own life, is that of the Stranger. Jesus Christ is the Stranger for He "does not settle in our current familiarity", in our sedentary condition and He "bears in Himself an ontological or, better said, meta-ontological, irreducible surplus" (Scrima 2010, pp. 36–37). Christ is the Sign of revelation, He is the One in whom the Father is seen, He is the icon of the unseen and transcendent God, close to man and, yet, a Stranger to the world. Christ's unique position can be perceived in His sacrifice and in His post-resurrection appearances. At Crucifixion, when the soldiers were casting lots for His robe, the pillage "confirms that we are witnessing a total alienation, its border" (Scrima 2008a, p. 369). Again, after Christ's Resurrection, when He displays an eschatological body, He becomes "the only visitor" in Jerusalem (Luke 24, 18).

Being an absolute Stranger, Christ cannot be alienated from His creation. His presence is intimately felt by all humans that are *on the way*. In *Spiritual Experience and its Language*, Scrima summarizes this image:

"The resurrected Christ, therefore present in the Holy Spirit, is no longer bound by a city. He is from now on a stranger on Earth, but not an alien of Earth. A settler longs to acquire stability on Earth, to grow roots. But he ignores the deepness, the vertical dimension of the Earth. Meanwhile, a nomad, a traveller, remains a stranger on Earth, unbound, confined by no earthly datum. Because he is a stranger everywhere, he is everywhere in a hospitably disposition, capable to receive, capable to meet.

And for an absolute stranger there are no strangers. Strangers exist for the man who has settled". (Scrima 2008b, pp. 170–71)

Therefore, Scrima argues that, when Saint Luke narrated the events which happened on the road to Emmaus, he shared the secret of his heart (Scrima 2008a, p. 271). He confesses how his existence was shaken by the unexpected presence of the 'forever' Stranger.

Beyond common associations with this image, Scrima opens up by using this *sign*, a *theme* to which he returns "almost obsessively": the theme of itinerancy (Bercea 2005, p. 112).

Firstly, human existence is defined in relation to this theme. To live means to experience a journey, to unfold the significance and orientation of a path (Scrima 2010, p. 35). Since life is God's gift, the 'right' journey implies an orientation towards God. In this context, "sedentariness" goes against God's gift and deters the sacramental sanctification of man. It fades man's natural powers and his destiny. Scrima uses Cain and Abel to express this anthropological dualism and puts efforts into proving that any form of sedentariness works against God. Abel, the nomad whose sacrifice was received by God, is killed by his brother, the sedentary, out of envy. "The direction Abel's smoke takes, the ascension to Heaven,

denotes in a very concrete symbolism, the *right intention . . .*" (Scrima 2008b, p. 183). This intention is not broken by Abel's death, but, contrary to Cain's demonic will, death fulfills and consumes Abel's intention. Through his death, Abel is ascended together with his sacrifice and reaches his initial goal, while his brother, Cain, remains a hostage of the fallen world in which he builds cities. Cain becomes self-referential; he falls into the last abyss of sin:² he sets the purpose of God's creation in himself. It must be said that this type of fixation can happen with a community as well as with a person. In the *Old Testament*, according to Scrima, David tried to quantify with a census a living community in order to lead Israel towards a historical project, secondary in terms of its vocation (Scrima 2010, p. 92). David, as Cain, fails in his attempt and is punished by God.

Secondly, itinerancy is defined in relation to God's *oikonomia*. Itinerancy is regarded not only as an ontological condition of the world, but also as a hypostatical face. Christ is the Path (*John* 14, 6), He sets the target, He points the direction, He offers "the richest and most precious gift, i.e., life, which gives value to the path and to veracity" (Scrima 2008a, p. 214). Christ is the Path for His Incarnation resumes creation and establishes a convergence point (Scrima 2008b, p. 303). From this point, world's history rearranges itself as a succession of signs, as God's work from Abraham to David, "from David, to the exile, to Babylon" and from exile to Christ (*Matthew* 1, 17). History becomes more than a succession of chronological events; it is a path built up by persons in whom God's grace is felt:

"The rhythm of holiness brings and discovers to the world God's intention for it. The saints embody in a real an actual way God's *oikonomia* profound plan, which they present and fulfil in the spatial and temporal datum, revealing in a succession the essential moments of our salvation process". (Scrima 2008a, p. 100; 2008b, p. 207)

In each Saint Christ's convergence is observable, for the Lord associates each of them with His life.

Thirdly, due to this unity between Christ and the Saints, itinerancy is the entire Tradition of the Church. Father Scrima finds his vision on St. John's narrative of the Crucifixion, who, unlike the Synoptics, describes Christ's death as an entrustment: Christ gives His Spirit. "In this entrusting of the Spirit, in this transmission", "John already sees the beginning of 'Jesus' Tradition'" (Scrima 2005b, p. 28; 2008a, p. 100). Not only is the Holy Spirit given to the Church and comes to dwell in the hearts of the Apostles, but He reveals the itinerant condition of man (Scrima 2008b, p. 82) and brings God in the eyesight of the world. In all biblical events in which the Holy Spirit makes His presence known a sense of mobility is implied. The Spirit sweeps (*Genesis* 1, 2), He comes down (*Judges* 15, 14), He comes into (*Ezekiel* 3, 24) and He flows; but creation itself is transformed in this movement: the waters give birth, the feeble are empowered, the invisible come to light and the infants speak as prophets. To say that Christian Tradition begins with the entrustment of the Holy Spirit means, therefore, to assert that Tradition continues only if the community meets, generation after generation, this divine mobility. Any immobility which is born out of fear to assume in a personal and ecclesial way the Tradition, goes against the very nature of the act on which Tradition is founded and against true doctrine (Scrima 2004, pp. 99–100):

"If God became man, the Christian can have only one purpose: to live in a total resemblance with God, beginning from this world. This life in God, for God is engrafted in living humans and is transmitted through them. This is the meaning of Tradition, *parádoxis* (according to the Greek term): what is given, what comes down, the transfusion of spiritual life. Tradition, thus understood, is pivotal, before being a fixed form or even frozen, hence expressing an axis that directs towards the essential. Between the first event and the Second Coming, it is hold forth not as a system of abstract knowledge, but as a pivot for rightly leading in life . . .". (Scrima 2003, p. 65)

The way in which Scrima approaches itinerancy brings forward a stance: solidarity. In the ecclesial communion, solidarity can be tracked historically, as it constitutes a genuine monastic genealogy: fathers have raised spiritual sons and sons have continued the work of their fathers. It is a spiritual way of facing history and reshaping it. On the other hand, in a broader context, solidarity takes a “metaphysical form”, difficult to pin in temporal terms.³ This metaphysical form can be described in a spatial manner, because solidarity directs not only to a temporal state, but to a place in which God will be recognised by all.

In the Church, solidarity takes the form of spiritual fatherhood. For the Eastern Church, a spiritual Father is not a ‘conscience director’ or a teacher who imposes his moral code in virtue of the distance he takes from his followers. Neither is his exceptional character the source of his greatness. He wins the hearts of his disciples precisely because he is ready to open his heart, to lay his life for others (*John* 10, 11). He opens himself in a kenotic way for those who are in need. He sacrifices himself in a manner which cannot be fully apprehended until the moment when, due to his physical absence, his disciples are obliged to *recover* his presence from his teaching. Thus, he does not leave a theological system, but a way of living and an ethical perspective:

“[...] a spiritual father who wants to initiate his disciple, his son, does not give a theory. He tries to sense an inner condition, a personal life to root them in God in such a way that the disciple will become beings capable to live from prayer”. (Scrima 2003, p. 95)

Spiritual fatherhood offers, then, a double solidarity: in destiny and in personal inner life. Because he gives his heart, the father ties his destiny with that of his disciples, he brings them to true life and empowers them with some of his own spiritual gifts. He embodies Tradition and proves, in the eyes of the world, that the Spirit has raised people which ascend to Christ (Scrima 2008a, p. 392) and to God. Moreover, a spiritual father bequeaths his inner life and an inner language capable of expressing God’s mystery:

“Joyless are the souls who have no mystery, who have no inner sharpness, in Isaiah’s words: ‘my mystery is with me ...’ It is not a rejection of communion, but the astonishment one lives in front of God’s mysterious realities. It concerns the indescribable communication between God and human beings, for which one has to be able to invent a language. Common language stifles mystery. Instead, the language of the *Sacred Scriptures*, for instance, unfolds more than one layer of meaning, it is essentially a symbolic, poetic language, which signifies more than it offers as information”. (Scrima 2003, p. 91)

At a different level, solidarity has a transcendental dimension, it keeps the world running. It is true that Incarnation is fundamentally different from other “models of revelation” (Scrima 2008b, p. 134), but it offers, at the same time, the basis for a cosmic and eschatological hospitality. Incarnation makes cosmic communion possible:

“Christ is the Logos, the spring of all meanings opened, seen and invisible. If He would not be the Logos, the word and ‘mind’ of the Incarnated God, we would not be interested in Him, He could not have kept us for a long time. Yet, he came not to bring in the world a sense of superiority (which would not have lasted for a long time), but to unveil us a centrality of all that is manifested and manifests: creation, salvation, returning-unity in the living God”. (Scrima 2004, p. 113)

Considered in this perspective, theology cannot generate either tolerance or indifferentism towards other traditions. Christians must live differences as a *sign* and *theme*, as strangers to the world and as nomads on the path (Boicu 2020).

4. Christ, the Gate

A second image which deserves to be mentioned is that of the Gate. Christ is not only a Stranger, He is the Gate of Heavens. Scrima draws on this image in his commentary on John’s Gospel and in his courses on spiritual experience. However, in *Spiritual Experience and its Language* this *sign* is prospected in depths. Scrima starts by affirming the role of any

gate, the “fundamental idea” which precedes the object. A door is a “category” constituted by ‘opened’ and ‘closed’, a place within two realms, an ‘in-between’. Human conscience itself functions as a door, as an opening and as a breach (Scrima 2008b, p. 30). Because there are different levels of reality—different kingdoms, in biblical terms—, there are three doors that Scrima focuses on: for Heavens, for Hell and for the heart. With this biblical perspective in the background, Scrima depicts Christ as the Gate of Heaven, bearing in mind two meanings.

First, He is the breach between worlds. In Scrima’s words:

“Christ is the gate in the sense that He is the place of crossing from one world to another, the place through which one enters from the earthly world into the Heavens, from the human level to a divine one. Before Christ, people wanted to enter Heaven, but they attempted to do this like thieves. Let us recall the Tower of Babel”. (Scrima 2008a, p. 55; 2008b, p. 122)

This is, Scrima argues, both a spatial and functional determination. The spatial determination is clear, but the functional one comes as a surprising turn in Scrima’s text. Christ is the opener of breaches, the One who gives knowledge. Scrima’s conception about Christ’s *function* as Gate comes close to Origen’s description of Christ’s role in Revelation. In his *Commentary on Ezekiel* (Origen 2010, pp. 166–67), Origen insists that the gate between the earthly world and Heavens can only be opened by Christ. He is the key to the gate and He alone has the knowledge of the whole creation:

“But there is only one gate and another that is closed, through which ‘no one passes.’ For there are certain things unknown to the whole creation and known only to the One. For whatever the Son knows [cf. Matt 11:27] he has not disclosed to this world. The creature does not take in what God takes in, and, to come to lesser things, the signs do not take in knowledge equally. There was more [knowledge] in Paul than in Timothy, since he was a ‘vessel of election’ [Acts 9:15]. And again Timothy, who was truly ‘a large vessel in the house’ [cf. 2 Tim 2:21], takes in what I cannot take in. And there is perhaps someone who takes in even less than I. There are some things that only Christ takes in and that is why ‘the second door of the temple of God is closed’ [Ezek. 44:2]” (Origen 2010, p. 168)

Scrima’s image takes the same turn: as Gate, Christ is the place and the Key of all Heavenly knowledge.

Secondly, this image—Christ as Gate—should be understood in a hypostatical manner. Christ is the only Person to which the Heavens open. There is a subtle transition from imagining Christ as place and key to describing Him as the foundation of the entire opening. He is not only the breach between worlds, He is also the Person on whom this opening can be sustained in history. Scrima uses the Synoptics to prove his point:

“The opening of the Heavens takes place at the prophetic birth of Jesus, and its semantic consistency resembles a code which we are to decipher, in the same manner we do with any message. The Heaven opens, and its opening is manifested by angelic beings, by the ‘indigenous people’ of the Heavens, the angels. Living naturally in that realm, they are the ‘autochthons’ of Heaven. And they address some receivers, some sensors of the message: the shepherds—pre-established beings, in a prophetic context [...]. ‘I have come to bear witness to the poor’, not to the rulers, not to the high priests, not to those who settled in the city, but to the poor. This is what Christ says. [...] In John’s Gospel, when Christ depicts Himself as the gate, he presents Himself, at the same time, as the good Sheppard. [...] This mystagogical script, present in Luke, does not appear in the beginning of his Gospel, but in a different place, complementary without being inconsistent with the moment of Birth. It is the moment when Christ, as adult, receives baptism and Heaven opens. [...] The last discontinuity between Heaven and earth is obsolete in this opening that leans over Christ”. (Scrima 2008b, pp. 55–56)

As previously seen, this *sign* builds up into a *theme*: the worship space. The place of worship is outlined in relation to its typologies from the *Old Testament* and in relation to the eschatological reality it symbolises. In Scrima's writings, this 'middle' land is constructed in contrasting terms: city and wilderness, consecrated altar and God chosen *locus*. While I will not insist in this study on the more 'material' aspect of this theme, it should be noted that Scrima sets Jerusalem at the heart of this presentation. Jerusalem is a breach, a city that crosses multiple levels of reality (Scrima 2004, pp. 29–73); it is the city of convergence (Scrima 2008a, pp. 36–37) where itinerancy continues in a sacramental way. This sacramental configuration of Jerusalem is essential for any worship space. In a lecture on the traditional narratives regarding the establishment of Putna monastery, Scrima highlights this idea and makes it clear why there is no conflict between the city, wilderness and itinerancy. None of the three can be properly considered in their spiritual function if one uses conventional measuring tools. The way to comprehend the spiritual fabric of space and movement is to measure space's quality, not its quantities (Scrima 2008b, pp. 339–45).

Worship space was often neglected in Eastern liturgical theology. Of course, there are many studies regarding ecclesial architecture or doctrinal significance of the building and its consecration for service. However, the broader issue of spatiality was rarely addressed. By contrast, in the Bible, liturgy is related to a specific understanding of spatiality: before happening in a place, the rules of service are revealed in a God chosen land. The people of Israel, to give one example, were taught to serve God in the wilderness, at the same time and in the same context in which they received the Law and were promised a land (Ratzinger 2014, pp. 26–27). The wilderness, not the holy tent, is the space in which Israel discovered how Yahweh wants to be served. Only in the wilderness is Moses given a clear picture of the right place for worship. It is worth noticing that even in Eastern allegorical interpretations of this moment—such as that of Saint Cyril, who understood the exodus from Egypt as an expression of escaping from sin (Sf. Chiril al Alexandriei 1991, pp. 47–59)—, the journey into the desert configures an inner space where the relations between God and man determine the empirical reality.

There is only one way along which the depths of this theological notion can be sensed: the Incarnation. Through His Incarnation, Christ gives space an epistemological and eternal value (Torrance 1997, pp. 2–4). Space is, due to Christ, more than an indispensable axis of cosmology; it is the interval (*diastema*) in which God the Father is known by man. That means that Christ's acts are essential for understanding the spiritual fabric of space. And this is exactly what Scrima does.

Scrima defines space in relation to the Cross. The Cross is the place *par excellence* where freedom is achieved and, precisely because of this, it is both a *locus* and a pole.

"In the beginning there was the Cross. Otherwise, in the vision of the Christians, the wilderness and the cross were in permanent communication. Is it not the wilderness associated with the original fall that, by removing man from the Tree of life, had hidden the Paradise and condemned human race to exile, far from God's face, eventually bringing it to this last form of alienation, namely to death? Through Christ's Cross, man's return to God is fulfilled: for the East the cross represents, first of all, the sign of resurrection, the renewal of all created life through the gift of uncreated Life". (Scrima 2003, p. 25; 2008a, p. 204)

In many texts, Scrima comes back to this idea. The Cross is the place towards which one moves when entering the church and it is the pole that opens the vertical ascension towards the Pantokrator (Scrima 2008a, p. 156). The event becomes a place, Christ's act becomes a pole that shapes the perception of space and which determines the structure of liturgy.

At a deeper level, Scrima relates worship space to Christology by affirming its 'tabernacle' quality. The church building resembles Christ's body. It holds that which cannot be retained: the divine. In Scrima's words:

"[...] the Byzantine church is, above all, a tabernacle of the Eucharist. Since the mystery of the Eucharist subsists in its sharing and in its incorporation in the

most inner part of the human being (body and soul), a byzantine church will be the place where the brethren's community is ceaseless formed and confirmed. This is the mystical body. That is why, the function of a byzantine church, even strictly architectonically speaking, is to signify the opening of a communication between time and eternity, between earth and Heaven, between seen and unseen". (Scrima 2008b, p. 263)

The Christological symbolism of a worship space is not the only one which Scrima highlights. When considering the mystical function of the building, Scrima refers to Incarnation and to Theotokos, as well. Anca Manolescu records Scrima's interpretations of the church *Kariye Djami* (Manolescu 2002, pp. 51–55). After considering the building and its theological architecture, Scrima underlines its historical 'model': the Theotokos. She is the *chôra tou achôrêtou*, the border between the seen and the unseen, the space that contains the One Who cannot be contained even by the highest heavens (2 *Chronicles* 6, 12). The Virgin Mary is the hypostatical tabernacle that, in a mystical way, any church reproduces.

The sign—Christ as Gate—opened a theme—worship space—, but it also brings to attention a stance: a Eucharist ethic. From an Eastern perspective, liturgy is the natural state of human beings. Liturgy is more than one of the segments of life. It is the inner reality of humanity. Adam's relations with the entire creation were, before sin, liturgical. Adam and Eve perceived the cosmos as a gift from God and used it in a Eucharist manner. Yannaras rightly argues that, God's blessing of all earthly goods, made even the most common acts—like eating—a moment of communion (Yannaras 2004, p. 88). The fall gave birth to a series of antagonisms, where God's gifts became places of confrontation and death. Adam is swallowed by the reality which was created to serve communion and the liturgical implication of all human actions is shadowed. For this reason, Scrima argues that Christ's body must be a "body that eats death". Christ did not abolish the body's temporal state, His body was in all terms that of a human, but He was, at the same time, full of the Holy Spirit:

"[...] his body died, but instead of being consumed by death, decomposed and turned back into the nutritive substance of the Universe, it eats death and swallows it through the incorruptible element [...]. This is the signification of the Resurrection: Eschaton entered history and opened up, suspended time. Because Jesus does not resurrect to go back to the life He had before, instead crossing over—not in immortality, but in trans- mortality an life". (Scrima 2010, p. 115)

Thus, Scrima's insistence on the liturgy as the Spirit's specific manner to manifest is, at the same time, an insistence on God's way of restabilising man to his natural state:

"The liturgical prayer, fulfilled as unceasing prayer constitutes the sign of eternity. It assumes time in its entirety, as a structure of being, and bears it into eschatology, achieving an inter-time, liveable between the Resurrection and the Second coming". (Scrima 2005b, p. 60)

This Eucharistic ethic raises a spiritual method for living in and contemplating the Spirit (Scrima 2005b, pp. 54–55).

5. Conclusions

Without being a complete survey of Scrima's Christology, the present study does give a sense of his method, doctrine and its practical implications. In the beginning of this study, I proposed an analogy between Scrima's approach to Christology and the kaleidoscope. Scrima's writings do not give a straightforward explanation of Christology, nonetheless they focus on a sequence of images. When you search light by looking through a kaleidoscope, you are bound to grasp the unpredictable possibilities of a fixed form. In the same manner, when you consider the Christological doctrine by using Scrima's methodology, you experience a theological journey that opens in an unpredictable way to an ethic. Scrima's 'sight glass' is built on the intuition that God's incomprehensible mystery reveals itself to the one who makes an effort to achieve "a glimpse of God's love":

“God’s truly incomprehensible mystery is Love. A created being can easily accept the concept of an all-knowing intellect, of an omnipresence etc. However, the idea (and reality) of God’s love for man, a type of personal, empirical (not abstract) love, in the name of which He gave His Son for us, remains an incomprehensible, unapproachable mystery. And, that is why, the one who is able to achieve a glimpse of God’s love has understood and knows more about Him (even if one is unwise from a human perspective) than the one who aims to gain an intellectual understanding of God”. (Scrima 2005a, p. 188)

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Notes

- ¹ Anca Vasiliu (2005, p. 13) affirms: “[...] what matters for André Scrima above all is to be on the way, never to stop, never to ‘solidify’ (as he liked to say and write), never to tie himself to places and possessions, and never to allow himself to be confiscated, to become the place or the object of a power—therefore, ownership and responsibility are equally rejected in the name of an inner freedom more precious than all of earth’s goods.”
- ² Father Scrima distinguishes three moments in man’s sin. The first moment is when man imagines that they can arrange the world according to their mind; the second is when man takes a stand against the supernatural order and the last moment is when they establish their purpose in themselves (Scrima 2005a, pp. 25–26).
- ³ Anca Manolescu (2005, pp. 50–51) considers that we should speak of *metaphysical hospitality* and not of *eschatological hospitality*. She argues that this highlights the value of different spiritual experiences while underlining divine unity. However, Scrima’s expression—*eschatological hospitality*—has an Christological significance and is closer to the Eastern overall teachings.

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