

In the search for symbolic meaning of the Genesis “fruit”

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Abstract: The desire to determine what the Genesis “fruit” was comes from both its mystery and the fact that it became the source of the fall – as a result of being picked and consumed by a human. Generally speaking, all the known proposals of the interpretation of “the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil” can be divided into a literal interpretation, which refers to a particular natural fruit, and symbolic interpretations, in which the “fruit” is a symbol. The strictly theological proposal of understanding the “fruit” is maintained in the mainstream of moral theology, because it directs the symbolism of the “fruit” to the moral dimension of human behavior and leads to a situation of non-compliance of the prohibition, and so breaking the right given to man by God. This article is an attempt to interpret the early chapters of the *Book of Genesis* which in hermeneutic and biblical philosophy seek deep and universal meanings of the Genesis “fruit” symbol.

Keywords: Genesis “fruit”, axiology, agathic perspective, biblical philosophy.

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Resumo: A questão que subjaz à expressão “fruto proibido” provavelmente atravessou os leitores do livro dos Génesis desde o seu início. O facto de se ter tomado a causa da queda original – por ter sido apanhado e consumido – marcou a interpretação do texto. As propostas de interpretação do “fruto da árvore proibida” podem ser divididas em interpretações literais e simbólicas. A leitura teológica contemporânea prefere as segundas no contexto da história bíblica da queda da humanidade, sendo o fruto identificado com o pecado original. Há que notar que esta leitura tem a marca do contexto teológico de toda a revelação cristã e da respetiva tradição. Por isso, pode ser aceite por parte daqueles que compartilham esta visão teológica das origens, da natureza humana e do destino da humanidade.

A estrita proposta teológica de entender este “fruto” é mantida no horizonte principal da teologia moral, pois direciona o fruto para a dimensão moral do comportamento humano, conduzindo a uma situação de não compromisso com a proibição e, desse modo, abandonando o direito concedido por Deus à humanidade.

Estes aspetos não permitem captar o nível da interpretação do “fruto”, que se refere à sua essência antropológica e axiológica (e não apenas teológica). Este artigo tenta, assim, interpretar o fruto dos primeiros capítulos dos Génesis no horizonte da filosofia cristã e da filosofia bíblica, tentando aprofundar o significado universal do símbolo genesisíaco do “fruto”.

Palavras-chave: Génesis, fruto, axiologia, perspectiva agática, filosofia bíblica.

1. Introduction

The concrete question hiding under the term the “forbidden fruit” has probably pervaded readers of the biblical *Book of Genesis* since its inception, and perhaps the audience of the history of the origin of the world and man during its orally formation.¹ The desire to determine what this “fruit” was comes from both its mystery and the fact that it became the source of the fall – as a result of being picked and consumed by a human – the consequences of which, according to the biblical picture, humanity bears to this day.

Generally speaking, all the known proposals of the interpretation of “the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil” can be divided into a literal interpretation, which refers to a particular natural fruit, and symbolic interpretations, in which the “fruit” is a symbol, and thus a semantic stylistic means with one literal meaning and a different number of hidden meanings.²

¹ LEMCHE, Niels Peter – *The Old Testament Between Theology and History: A Critical Survey*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008, p. 44-69.

² The symbol can be described as a type of work of art created by the harmonious combination: effort of intellect and imagination of what is visible with the invisible, what is expressible of the inexpressible.

Among the literal interpretations, the most common is the claim that the Genesis fruit was an apple. This belief is reflected in European art of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, where the tree growing in Paradise was an apple tree and its fruits "heavenly apples" which Adam and Eve reached their hands for.³ "The forbidden fruit" was perhaps also associated with an apple because the Latin word *malum*⁴ meaning "apple" and "evil" sounded the same. *Genesis* does not specify what type of fruit "the tree of knowledge of good and evil" bore, and Hebrew tradition sees the fruit of the vine on it, because – as the Talmud proclaims – there is nothing more imposing man in intoxication than wine.⁵ According to another interpretation of the Talmud and Midrash, the tree was either a fig, a pomegranate or lemon tree, and even a stem of wheat.⁶ In turn, the contemporary Terence McKenna suggested a different, peculiar understanding of the fruit of Paradise as a psychoactive mushroom, because, in his opinion, this kind of mushroom played a key role in the evolution of the human brain.⁷ Earlier, a similar interpretation was suggested by John M. Allegro.⁸ It is interesting that in the light of some of the so-called private revelations (e.g. the German mystic Anne Catherine Emmerich) that "the tree of the knowledge of good and evil" is presented very realistically: a tree trunk was covered with scales like a palm tree with large leaves, widely springing from the trunk; among them fruit was hanging in fives in the shape of a circle, one in the middle, and four round stalks; the fruit was the color of "brown sugar" on red flesh and was more like a pear or figs than apples.⁹

In turn, the symbolic interpretations should include the views of Philo of Alexandria, who believed that "the tree of the knowledge of good and evil" and its fruits are a symbol of wisdom, prudence, giving the ability to discern the soul. Picking the fruit of the tree meant a violation of the wisdom and prudence

³ For example: Titian, *Adam and Eve* (Museo Nacional del Prado).

⁴ HANGEN, Eva – *Symbols: Our Universal Language*. Wichita: McCormick-Armstrong Co., 1962, p. 36. *Malum* was borrowed from Greek – μήλον, means: „apple“. Latin *malum* means also each big fruit.

⁵ BAR YOHAI, Shimon; BERG, Michael, ed. – *The Zohar: The First Ever Unabridged English Translation, with Commentary*. Kabbalah Publishing, 2003: vol. 2, p. 388-390.

⁶ BLACKMAN, Philip, ed. – *Mishnayoth Zeraim*. New York: The Judaica Press, 2000, 40a.

⁷ MCKENNA, Terrence – *Food of the Gods: The Search for the Original Tree of Knowledge – A Radical History of Plants, Drugs, and Human Evolution*. New York: Bantam, 1992.

⁸ ALLEGRO, John. M. – *The Sacred Mushroom and The Cross: A study of the nature and origins of Christianity within the fertility cults of the ancient Near East*. New York: Garden City – Doubleday, 1970.

⁹ EMMERICH, Anne Catherine – *The Life of Jesus Christ and Biblical Revelations*. TAN Books, 1986, vol. 2, p. 37-45.

in the human soul.¹⁰ Sometimes the fruit of “the tree of knowledge of good and evil” discerned the symbolism of human sexuality, within which it was to accomplish the fall. It is about the reference to the nakedness of the first people and their “shame” as expressed in the making of a loin cloth after eating the fruit.¹¹ Augustine of Hippo believed in the spirit of symbolic realism – that on the one hand it cannot be doubted that “the tree of the knowledge of good and evil” was actually a tree, but on the other hand it is necessary to read its symbolic meaning. He emphasized that the tree had no harmful fruit, because God, who made everything very good, would not establish something bad in Paradise; while eating the “fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil” was a violation of the natural order, hierarchy of values, turning away from the Creator and turning toward creation.¹²

Generally speaking, there is a double meaning of “fruit” in the Bible. This is a type of crop plant, which may be edible for humans. In addition, the fruit is both the result of earthly toil of man and a visible sign of blessing from God. That is why the Israelites offered the sacrifice of “the first fruits of the earth” to God (Deuteronomy 26:2.10). The fruit also has a metaphorical meaning as a result: the consequences of human behavior (e.g. Jeremiah 17:10).¹³

In contemporary theological interpretation (Catholic) the fruit of “the tree of knowledge of good and evil” is understood symbolically in the context of the biblical story of the fall of man. Therefore, the “fruit” (and its consumption) is identified with the original sin. It is believed that the original sin lies in the fact that man closes in on himself instead of opening himself to the actions of God. In other words, it is the sin of pride. The hagiographer put this truth in the form of pictorial description and therefore we cannot determine in detail the nature of sin. In an attempt to clarify the nature of the fall, the authors, with their biblical comments and theological studies, interpret it as an attempt by man to obtain the power possessed only by God. Taking into account the rich symbolism contained in the analyzed sentence, it can be concluded that the prohibition of “eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil” means having the power to decide, namely judging on what is correct and what is not.

¹⁰ PHILO – *Allegorical Interpretation of Genesis II, III. (Legum Allegoria)*. In *Philo in Ten Volumes (And Two Supplementary Volumes)*. Cambridge M.A., London: Harvard University Press – William Heinemann, 1981, p. 211-219.

¹¹ See as an example: WRIGHT, David. P. – Sex and Death in the Garden of Eden. *Sunstone*. (June 1988) 33-39.

¹² ST. AUGUSTINE – *De Genesi ad litteram libri duodecim*. In *St. Augustine Literal Meaning of Genesis. Volume II, Books 7-12*. New York: The Newman Press, 1982, p. 32-69.

¹³ RYKEN, Leland; WILHOIT, James. C.; LONGMAN III, Tremper, ed. – *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*. Downers Grove: Inter Varsity Press, 1998, p. 665-666.

Such power would include all the planes of existence, but mostly it is the possibility of establishing order in the existing world. And this belongs to God alone, because He is the sole Creator of the world and of man¹⁴.

Without denying the above interpretation of the fall of man and the understanding of the symbolism of the Genesis "fruit", it should be noted that they are heavily involved in the theological context of the whole biblical revelation and theological tradition of the Catholic Church. Therefore, they can be accepted especially by those who identify themselves with that theological vision of human origin, human nature and human destiny. In addition, the strictly theological proposal of understanding the "fruit" is maintained in the mainstream of moral theology, because it directs the symbolism of the "fruit" to the moral dimension of human behavior and leads to a situation of non-compliance of the prohibition, and so breaking the right given to man by God. It seems that both these aspects constitute a restriction of depth and complexity to simplify the symbolism of the "fruit" and thus does not allow one to capture this level of interpretation of the "fruit", which refers to its anthropological and axiological (and not only theological) essence. Fortunately there have been recent attempts to interpret Bible history (including those contained in the early chapters of the *Book of Genesis*) which in hermeneutic and biblical philosophy seek deep and universal meanings of symbols present in the Bible, including the Genesis "fruit".¹⁵

The author of one of these new attempts at interpretation, summarizing their findings on the "fruit" of the "tree of knowledge of good and evil", states that:

«[...] the matter of *the first* fall remains and must remain forever imperceptible, having to dissolve into the symbol of the "fruit" (...) The "elucidated" fruit would be an instance of the trap. The concreteness of that act would be immediately marked as an additional adverse quality by us. It would arise in

¹⁴ See more: BUCKLEY, James J. Frederick; BAUERSCHMIDT, Christian – *Catholic Theology: An Introduction*. Malden – Oxford, John Wiley & Sons, 2016, p. 96-106; SUCHOCKI, Marjorie Hewitt – *The Fall to Violence: Original Sin in Relational Theology*. New York: Continuum, 1994; REEVES, Michael; MADUEME, Hans, ed. – *Adam, the Fall, and Original Sin: Theological, Biblical, and Scientific Perspectives*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014; VAN DOODEWAARD, William – *The Quest for the Historical Adam. Genesis, Hermeneutics, and Human Origins*. Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2015.

¹⁵ See as example: SCHWEID, Eliezer – *The Philosophy of the Bible*. Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2009; HAZONY, Yoram – *The Philosophy of Hebrew Scripture*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012; JOHNSON, Dru – *Biblical Knowing. A Scriptural Epistemology of Error*. Eugene: Cascade Books, 2013; SEKINE, Seizo – *Philosophical Interpretations of the Old Testament*. Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2015.

the human world anywhere in its factuality, and then it would always become a great sin, because it ushers in a procession of apostate acts of man. In fact, the Etiological narrative of the fall, denounced the one particular matter of sin in a completely unintentional way, fatally focusing attention. It would interfere with the possibility of understanding the common root of the multitude of human derogations from God, falsifying the image focusing not on the entry into an absolute relationship with that which is not God, but on the subject of the specific act. Behind the story of the fall is the discretion of the pedagogy, which leads thought sufficiently to give a grasp to the mechanism of the apostasy of God and what is crucial, but the concrete act itself wisely covers the symbol of the "fruit".»¹⁶

It is necessary to agree with the cited author that the individual matter of the particular historical act, which is also a matter of the first fall of man, is impossible to expose and any attempt to prejudge it is condemned to failure or, at most, will end on an arbitrary adduction on this or any other concreteness. It is also true that this insurmountable concealment of the said act allows for avoiding the narrowing of the essence of man's fall, presented in the *Book of Genesis*, to "the behold" clearly defined acknowledged human decisions and the resulting acts. Thanks to this, the biblical image of the fall of man retains value in its versatility for men of all times and of all places. It can also be newly filled in with content for personal confrontation of its universal significance of individual human existential experience. It should however be considered whether between the universality of the "fruit" and its literal, historical instantiation there is no place for an intermediate element, which however would not clearly indicate the matter of the act associated with the fall of the first man, but at the same time more closer "content" (not just "form") of the human withdrawal from God. It was therefore about the interpretation capturing and unveiling the essence of the first and at the same time each fall of man, but to a much deeper and more specific extent than just at the level of statements that the fall involves making certain good or bad the definitive "for-me" (i.e. the absolute response relative to him). It is just the response to the question of what is the basis for the definitive and absolute assuming the position of a man to a certain value, this seems to be crucial in an attempt to capture what is on the one hand the common denominator of every human fall (the universal aspect), and on the other hand a practical form in a huge diversity of all human decisions and deeds (individual aspect).

¹⁶ GRABOWSKI, Marian – *Historia upadku. Ku antropologii adekwatnej*. Kraków: WAM, 2006, p. 262.

The interpretational treatment referred to can be likened to trying to determine the Aristotelian prime matter, which together with the substantial form creates the concrete being (his substance). It is known that in terms of Aristotle, the prime matter is the potential factor in making the substantial existence. The prime matter remains uncertain, itself undefined and possible to detect only through the rational. It is also not entitled to independent existence, although it is the "act of lust" in itself that somehow requires an update thanks to the combination of substantial form. Its fuller understanding is conditioned by the analysis of substantial form and consequently the structure of being¹⁷.

The analogy applied demonstrates the need and also the direction of the interpretive unveiling of the elusive, in itself the matter of the first fall in close communication with the proposal in which the fall of man (the first and each one) can be discerned absolutizing the value. The value mentioned (any value) represents the intention of creation of God's "window" of access unto Him, but focusing the attention of the human body can lead to believing it to be definitively good or bad for a person. Then the Genesis fall occurs.

I am convinced that the above indicated proposal represented in the aforementioned analogy, the equivalent of the "substantial form" component of the substance ('being'), is the fall of man. Therefore the substance, in accordance with the recognition of Aristotle, does not exist unless it is a combination of the prime matter and substantial form. Therefore, according to our analogy, the fall also does not exist without the connection of what constitutes the equivalent of the two components of the Aristotelian structure of being. This is exactly the missing interpretive piece in the form of the equivalent prime matter that I would like to demonstrate, in the belief that it will bring significant and fruitful apposition to the analysis of the biblical fall, in particular, it will bring the nature of the Genesis "forbidden fruit".

The successful unveiling of the "veil of secrecy" of the said "prime matter" will not mean a clear indication on the prime matter, the historical human fall. This mystery will remain concealed, and moreover its search seems to be so insignificant that, even in the case of crowning it with success, nothing can be beyond the determination of the historical unconsolidated fact. Whereas it does seem possible to such a concretion of what constitutes the essence of the Genesis "fruit" of the "tree of the knowledge of good and evil", through which it can be called the "prime matter" of every human act that constitutes the biblically understood fall, namely a universal matrix for specific historical deeds of individual people. Along with the "substantial form" (the claim that

¹⁷ See more: LOUX, Michael. J. – *Primary Ousia: An Essay on Aristotle's Metaphysics Z and H*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008, p. 64-70.

the fall of man means the absolute of some value), the aforementioned "prime matter" will create a specific 'substance' of the fall, that "the beheld" act, for which reality requires more "affliction" or circumstances of place, time and interoperable factors of personal and non-personal information, etc. In this way, the unveiled "fruit" does not focus attention on the matter of a single act and does not lose the overall merit of the symbolic versatility and universality and at the same time gain a certain degree of concretization, which will better perceive and understand the essence of every fall, which is shared by "the beholder" man.

Moreover, in the rest of the analysis I will try to demonstrate that the following proposal of interpretation is in conformity with the intention of the author/s (editor/s) of this passage in the *Book of Genesis*, and by taking into account the historical context of its emergence it gains further credibility and internal cohesion.

2. "The fruit" in the Genesis "garden" (Gen. 2:4-15)

Aiming to propose the interpretations of the Genesis "fruit" of the "tree of the knowledge of good and evil", it is necessary to start from the identification of the "key of interpretation", which will be a tool enabling the creation of a coherent image of the entire portion of the biblical history of the fall of man. As every natural fruit appears as a product of a specific plant (tree), it seems necessary to interpret the symbol of "trees", which are essential elements of the Genesis "garden" – the place of the appearance and residence of God and man. In the Edenic "trees" I see a symbol of access of man to the values and image of the axiological structure of reality, in which a man resides and where he meets with God, thus I read the symbol of Edenic "fruit" as the world of values (the trees are the way and the means of access to them). Values-"fruits" represent the basic food, material and spiritual nature of humans. Every one of the "fruits" contained on individual trees of the garden of Eden is the specific value that distinguishes itself from the rest of the value of both its unique character (the fruit of a particular tree is the fruit of a different kind of "species" – Gen. 1:11-12), and "axiological quality", i.e. the degree of perfection and availability (after all, the fruit on a tree may be higher or lower, may be more mature or less mature, larger or smaller, etc.)

The "fruit" is understood as any type of values focusing the attention of a man, a resident of the garden, attracting him and satisfying his natural needs. Man moves among them constantly, associating with them, and makes choices of these or other values, thereby forming a specific and, to a certain extent,

unique configuration of values precious for a particular human individual. This configuration is characterized by a particular man in axiological terms and gradually gives his axiological shape, which is the result of creative cooperation of man with God's act of creation (creation of the garden and placing man in it). The world of "fruit" values is the space in which human life is created through axiological choices in the spiritual dimension due to human activity. Therefore, it can be described as a living environment of the human spirit and also the "garden in the garden", i.e. the human world typically immersed in the world of beings called into existence by God.

The axiological dimension of reality, and the possibility (or even necessity) of entering into it by man, is something distinctive and most appropriate for man – otherwise man is not really able to live. Through the world of values (i.e. the Edenic "fruit") and our functioning in it, we discover its own specificity involving the functioning of the various dimensions of axiological references. Therefore man stands against the Edenic "trees" and "fruit" as an "axiological animal", sensing and living the values (and not only and not primarily rationality): "feeding" the values like feeding on the fruits of various biological trees. In addition, the values enable man versed in the world (in the "garden") through various contact with them and represents a kind of landmark for the human spirit. The way of being of man in the "garden", designated by their presence and the possibility of contact with them, provides the basis for human development and improvement and self-knowledge and knowledge of God. Indeed, the Creator's intentions of values through its natural transparency are to pose the way of access of man to God and to redirect His human attention. The contact with God takes place through contact with human values and this is its deepest meaning.

Things can still be stated about the value of the "fruits", interpreting further the statements of the biblical author that they affect the sphere of sensual man in the first place as aesthetic, hedonistic and utilitarian values (the trees being "nice in appearance") and are first discovered through a simple experience like pleasant–unpleasant, beneficial–unbeneficial, etc. However, there are also the values that affect man in a different way, i.e. they move him, providing experiences such as a sense of beauty, delight, selflessness, grace, love etc. (the tree "of good nascent fruit"). Generally, one can speak of the "fruits": impersonal values (biological, vital) and personal (related to the dimension of the human spirit).

"Tendering the garden" or caring about the values by making choices between them indicates also the possession of knowledge by man to prioritize more than one of the values (before) others. Thus, the values involve and evoke an emotional stir, triggering certain reactions from man and finally giving him

life, because at any time and at any level they provide man with that which allows him to function in the world.

It should be noted that of all the trees of the Edenic garden, the biblical author singled out two of them, giving them distinctive names. While all the trees in the garden are simply "trees", the "tree of life" and "the tree of the knowledge of good and evil" were given their own names and were thus distinguished. It can therefore be assumed that their "fruits" are not the same "fruits"-values like the fruits of the "normal" trees, although they remain in close association with them.

From the point of view of the designated theme of this interpretation it is most important to interpret the fruit of "the tree of knowledge of good and evil", around which the drama of man's fall unfolds. It is known, of course, that there is no tree of the knowledge of good and evil, which clearly indicates its symbolic importance in the biblical story. In the content of the biblical text, it is known that the said tree is located in the heart of the garden. This "centrality" can be understood as meaning that the tree is both the center of the biblical narrative in itself and as the center and sense of events described in it and beyond real significance of events. Moreover, its central location means that all the other trees with their fruits are located around it. Therefore, the values the world represented by the "tree" and "fruit" has its central point, which occurs through contact with the individual "trees" and the "fruit" on them. In other words, it can be said that all the "fruits" (the values with which man comes in contact), ultimately refer it to this central location (the "tree" and "the fruit").

Individual "trees" in the garden encountered by man choosing and eating "fruit" are accompanied by the so-called consciousness of agates, or man's response to good or evil "for-itself". Man chooses a specific "fruit" of value and "consumes" it, because he recognizes that it is good for him, and renounces contact with her; he considers that it is not advisable for him. In the perspective view of God all the values are good ("And God saw that it was good"), but for certain people in the garden the selection of all the values is neither necessary nor possible. Therefore, individuals make reconnaissance of specific values and make decisions by accepting or rejecting them. Thus, the prospect of human communion with the values is an agathic prospect, in which someone recognizes something as "good-for-itself". Of course, this means that the values are different for various people considered good and desirable. In this way, the personal configuration of values will create a set of characteristics of man (which does not eliminate the possibility of similarities, and sometimes is almost identical between these configurations).¹⁸

¹⁸ Cf. Thinking in Values. The Tischner Institute Journal of Philosophy: Agathology. 2(2008).

"Eating fruit from any tree in the garden" means the possibility of human contact with all values. However, alongside the fact of accessing the values, it is necessary to distinguish a certain way of accessing them. The biblical author highlighting "the tree of knowledge of good and evil," seems to focus not so much on the diversity and uniqueness of the values of the "fruit" that are on it (after all, each "tree" of the garden is different, and therefore the "fruit" for each tree is unique, although the biblical author has not named them directly) but rather on a distinctive way to access the value. This is not about accessing some special values (unique and proprietary), but a distinguished way to access all the values, which may relate to any of them, regardless of the "tree" on which the value of the "fruit" increases. The aforementioned particular way of access, symbolized by the "tree of knowledge of good and evil", is accessible for man, but also dangerous for him. The search of further interpretative unveiling of the Genesis "fruit" should be interpreted as God's prohibition.

3. The "fruit" in the order of God (Gen. 2:16)

God's prohibition concerning the consumption of "fruit" of the "tree of knowledge of good and evil" is, just as the fruit itself, also a symbol. The subject is not a casuistically specified thing or act restricted by God, but each vitally important axiological decision opening the agathic prospect, which is final and absolutely heeded in relation to any good or bad "for-me".

What enables man to maintain this prohibition is to equip him by God in the act of the creation in the initial trust (great-trust), which, however, is present in embryonic form requiring development and refinement¹⁹. Thus the prohibition, by formulating it in the words "Do not" commences the curiosity of man (the same curiosity is not bad and is not "the first step to hell", as used to be commonly believed); therefore, as a prohibition in the non-religious nature, it draws and initiates human rationality in the relationship between God and man, because the absoluteness of the prohibition is dumbfounding, a sign of that which is absolute. The search for the meaning of the prohibition is safe for man for as long as it takes place in the framework of trust in relation to the forbider.

¹⁹ Great-trust as a natural accessory of man is the basis for the prohibition of God, because God is thus right to count on the trust of man, which is supported by the consciousness of the goodness of the forbider (previously in relation to the prohibition). Great-trust means a positive attitude to reality in practice ("I know that people drift cars, but I go across the street") arising from the conviction of the primary, fundamental goodness of reality. Therefore great trust is also the primary means of human openness to God by recognizing the metaphysical good of the created world.

In addition, in order to be meaningful, the prohibition has to protect against real danger and, very importantly, the prohibition reminds man of his liberty because it compels to define itself in relation to him (making a choice between "preserve" and "break").

The significance and need for the existence of the prohibition arises from the fact that man cannot grasp the definitive value of what is good or bad for him in terms of the ultimate. The human agathic sense is simply too limited and therefore there is a risk that we cannot in true capture (to know) in the concrete ultimate axiological "good-for-us," but we can try to do so. And it was just before man was doomed to failure in trying to protect the prohibition. For man this could thus establish the agathic sense of his experiences and settle permanently in a misplaced way (because the relevance of the judgment in this area is not possible, and concerns the most important thing – the ultimate) of absolute good and evil in concrete situations.

Thus the Genesis "fruit", as seen from the perspective of God's prohibition, revealing its additional feature, which is the ability to treat it as a man giving an opportunity for the absolute of a specified value considered to be good or bad "for-itself" and giving it sense as containing the full meaning. At the same time, such attitude toward any value, that is breaking the prohibition, means questioning the abutment by man of the relationship between man and God on the basis of great-trust of man toward God, arising from the conviction of all of God's goodness. The "fruit" is therefore something that has a close relationship with the other "fruits" and a "common denominator" for all the "fruits" of the garden. It is somehow present every time a man reaches any value, and with awareness of the prohibition he realizes that the present value is the "second base", which may or may not have to guide him to God. It is impossible to benefit from the value, not to respond to the Genesis "fruit". That is what a man by association with the value will open, depends on how he will treat God's prohibition: as a loving protection granted to him graciously for the Creator or as incomprehensible and unacceptable embarrassment by a jealous God King.

4. The "Fruit" in conversation of the "woman" with the "Serpent" (Gen. 3:1-6)

When analyzing the conversation of the "Woman" with the "Serpent" from the perspective of responses to the question, 'what is the "fruit" of the "tree of knowledge of good and evil"', it should first be noted that it is a conversation symbol that takes place at the level of the human spirit (people after all do not

talk to serpents, and also the presence of "the Serpent" is not a surprise for the "Woman", as if it were something natural in the world). "The Serpent" directing the attention of the "Woman" to the "fruit of knowledge" and encouraging her that by eating it she will poses the ability of another mode of existence than actually takes place («like God, knowing good and evil»), indicates the irrationality of proposals that the "Woman" does not notice. In the course of continuation of the dialog the absurdity of proposal becoming less absurd and more coveted (tempting) in the mind of the "woman", even though in practice it means that the existence of man in the "garden" is incompatible with the nature of man. The serpent therefore suggests changing the way of being, i.e. questioning the truth of his own existence and disagreement of who and what you are, and consequently a denial of what is factual and real. The essence of the dangers associated with the consumption of "fruit" depend on this as well as a violation of the prohibition of God, false manner of being, inconsistent with individual human destiny and descending into progressive self-destruction because of the lack of acceptance of his own nature.

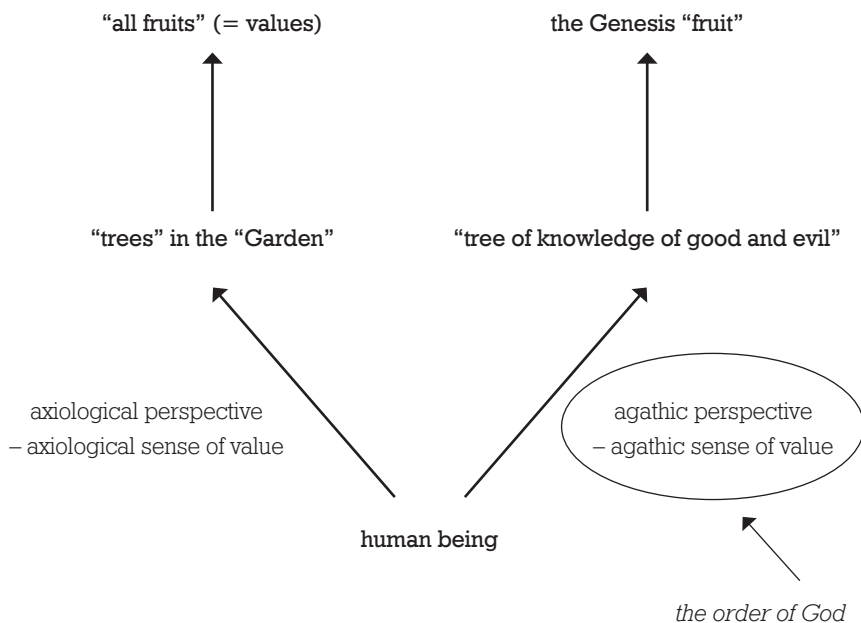
"The serpent", with his suggestive statements, introduces disorder in the central attitude of human life and, consequently, leads man to open the agathic prospect (absolute "good-for-me") in definitive response in terms of value. However, the findings made by man regarding the value is false, because man, as mentioned, is imperfect in terms of recognizing the value and can easily be regarded as definitive, what it is only transient and inconclusive.

As a result, the conversation of "the Woman" with "the Serpent" leads to the "break and tastes the fruit" of the "tree of knowledge of good and evil", and consequently to the fall of man. Man, after "tasting the fruit", gains some kind of likeness to God, that is it ultimately defines good and evil "for-itself", thus resisting against the values in an absolute way (as does God himself). Man, however, does it differently to God planned, taking "shortcuts" of roads that, contrary to appearances, do not lead to the intended purpose, as the human agathic sense should have ripened (honed) by trust to be able to finally refer to the ultimate goal – God – by means of successive, partial choices. However, man established the aforementioned relationship somewhat prematurely and inappropriately, the result of which he began to create absolute (fullness, perfection) in what it is not, and no longer recognizes him through what is good, though not absolutely. Consequently, the entry into a definitive relationship with anything beyond God isolated man from the real God and changed his image in human consciousness.

The result of the conversation of the "Woman" with "the Serpent" is ubiquitous and an overwhelming desire of the Genesis "fruit" in human consciousness. Indeed, man had demanded this coveted fruit since the beginning (according

to the plan of God, who wanted to design man to his proper perfection), but now saw him in a new perspective, and he could not give up the idea of God's prohibition of the supported element of trust and divine goodness with such fruit. So one can say that the "fruit" as a matter of human volition has become a complex construct of what is factual and what is imagined (created by the "the Serpent"). The object created in this way turned out to be untrue, but still very appealing to human mentality and axiologicality. The exorbitant, although false promise of perfection, concentrated the attention of man to the extent that it was made absolute as the definitive "good-for-me".

Axiological and agathic perspectives in the "Garden"



5. Toward to the substance of the fall

Recapturing the existing arrangements concerning the interpretation of the Genesis "fruit", it is clear that one can speak of a natural desire appearing in man, which is located near the "tree of the knowledge of good and evil". It is related to the axiological human nature coming particularly strongly to the fore in situations where certain "important-for-me" values arouse and intensify the specific type of desires: the desire of the absolute and definite, "like God...". However, the reduction of divine principle to the effectiveness, empowerment (omnipotence) that is creativity, which is the "Serpent's" promise to achieve superhuman perfection, meaning directing man to something truly "for-him", does not exist. It is this desire to profile the shape of the spirit of the fallen man, who was deceived by the promise of preying on the imperfections of his agathic sense. It is important to remember that the desire for fullness (perfection, absolute, etc.) does not necessarily have to be the desire of the true God, but only His specific, human, fragmentary image.

In an attempt to reveal the meaning of the symbol of the Genesis "fruit", it is even necessary to take into account the aforementioned historical circumstances of occurrence (editorial) in the introduction, the first chapters of *Genesis*. It is now known that the opening chapters of the Bible, the *Book of Genesis*, arose early in the period of the Babylonian exile (VI century BC).²⁰ The oral traditions preserved in them, transmitted in the form of stories and genealogies, belong to various streams existing in the tradition of ancient Israel, as can be seen, among others, in their peculiar arrangement of the whole. The framing of these stories was subordinated to the dramatic circumstances in which the Israelites were deported by Nebuchadnezzar. In Babylon they met descendants of their compatriots kidnapped more than 100 years earlier from the Kingdom of Israel, and undertook common reflection on the causes of the disaster. They asked questions that arose from their existential position and references to God and a thorough examination of conscience, including the available collective memory of the past. Apart from the specific issue of the effect of other cultures, traditions and myths on the creation of the *Book of Genesis* and the reconstruction of the sources of the text of *Genesis*, it is worth understanding the position of Israel which, as a result of the invasion, conquest, murder and abduction of a large part of the population, lost their family ties, social structures and religions. In particular, they lost their center of devotion, which

²⁰ See more: MILLARD, Alan R.; HOFFMEIER, James K.; BAKER, David W., ed. – *Faith, Tradition, and History: Old Testament Historiography in Its Near Eastern Context*. Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1994, p. 79-148.

was the temple of Jerusalem, and were confronted with the threat of losing their own national and religious identity. All these catastrophic and dramatic circumstances were a powerful shock to the religious consciousness of the survivors of Israel, who had to deal with the fundamental question of the presence and action (or rather, absence of action) of God toward a national catastrophe. The key thing was to understand why God, who has repeatedly declared his care for the survivors of the chosen people from slavery in Egypt and the recipient of earth, now became indifferent and did not take care to rescue them. Moreover, he allowed for the destroyed holy place dedicated from His will to adore Him and that the Israelites lost their land received from Him as the Promised Land. It can therefore be said that what the followers of Yahweh had to confront being displaced to Babylon was a dramatic search for meaning – the deep meaning of the tragic and painful experiences that became their contribution.²¹

It is worth noting that the question of the meaning of life experiences is a universal question, inflicted by people of all times. This happens because none of the people were completely spared of the confrontation (though to varying degrees) with the crises of life, and the natural human desire is to obtain and preserve the “sense of purpose” that is a consistent and adequate explanation which would allow to understand both the sequence of cause and effect responsible for the course of events, as well as finally reconciling with them, recognizing their benevolent logic.²² The more difficult existentially is the more complex, entangled and shattering the previously held confidence of the state of man, the stronger and more poignant is the need to capture even a particle sense of what is being experienced. And if you fail in any way to capture it by using some external tool or overriding factor (e.g. the prophecy given by God, the private revelation, unambiguous right to allow the association of causes and effects), a man is ready to move frequently for treatment aimed at artificially and temporarily creating that sense of purpose, even at the cost of getting entangled in another absurdity and fresh senselessness. This illustrates how great the power of the human desire is to have a sense of purpose of lived-out events and experiences, and how important the value is that triggers that desire in him. It is an echo of God equipping human nature in the act of creation in the desire of the absolute, fullness and perfection. You can compare it to the instinct of

²¹ Cf. LEVIN, Christoph – Introduction. In BEN ZVI, Ehud; LEVIN, Christoph, ed. – *The Concept of Exile in Ancient Israel and Its Historical Contexts*. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010, p. 6-10.

²² The meaning of life has a kind of inner experience. It is the result of intellectual exploration, emotional experience, moral choices, profound and sublime references, sometimes suffering difficult times of trials and experiences, and always existential decision. A component of culture, social life, living environment, experiences and sensations is contained in them. They allow for crystallization and acceptance of the values that are becoming “the scaffolding life” of man.

self-preservation, which saves man from destruction in a crisis situation, somehow forcing him to take up the fight for survival "at all costs".

It is necessary to suspect that in the case of the Israelites, who were in Babylonian captivity, the said desire to recover the sense of life and history, also (and maybe primarily) on the religious level, i.e. in relation to the person of God, was huge and at that moment focused all their consciousness. The Book of Genesis, and in particular its initial three chapters, represents the essence and the symbolically presented result of the struggle of that meaning in a situation of national crisis and personal tragedies of those people. From this point of view we can treat them as a response to questions raised by the Israelites (the nationality to which the editors of *Genesis* 1-3 belonged). We notice, however, that the answer that the biblical author gives is not a simple explanation of the meaning of historical events by applying to them a certain logic and order. The biblical author does not refer directly to a specific existential experience, but in a universal and timeless way envisions the beginning of the world and man, which are essentially a re-focus of the human perspective on the person and act of God. It could even be said that what is proposed is not a typical explanation of what happened to the Israelites and to himself. This is precisely what the originality and universal, timeless and paradigmatic power of the answer is to the very question of imposing the meaning of them, and every story depends on. This is the "answer-not-answer", the basis for which there is a desire to extend the cognitive perspective and conscious idea of interpretation in which the center creates the conviction of an incorrectly formulated question about the meaning. The point is that the author of the biblical *Genesis* 1-3, seems to refuse to grant that answer, and encourages others to also refrain from seeking it. He recognizes it as impossible for a man to find it above all, because it is not within his grasp. In the view of the author, the biblical meaning is not something that could be grasped in all its fullness in a given historical moment. It does not have a comprehensive and unequivocal meaning as long as the story continues and until subsequent events occur, and the person makes further decisions.²³ Therefore, fruitful exploration and attempting to fix the meaning is impossible and even harmful, because it becomes a human temptation and inevitably pushes it, immediately establishing it "on one's own", with limited knowledge about the world, in the perspective of only a partial understanding of the multiple and complex causal relationships and toward the impenetrability of the human mentality of God's plans and his own nature. Therefore, precisely this stubbornness, not counting on human limitations and developing the history of the world and of man, with the openness

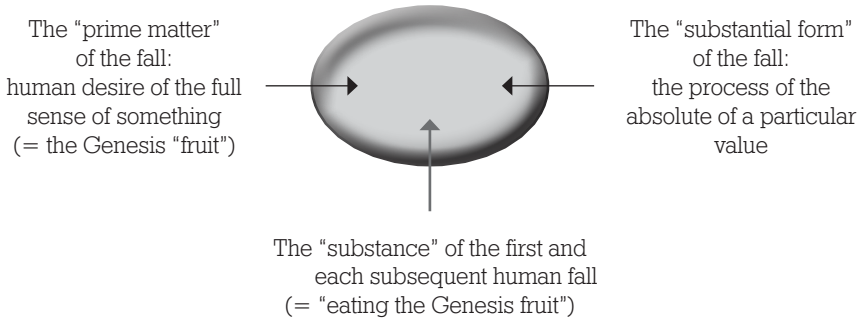
²³ In this way one can interpret the seventh day of creation, when God "rested", i.e. he launched the course of history as well as natural and human activity.

of history and impenetrable thoughts of God's search for meaning in the context of human logic, is the author of the biblical "original sin", the collapse of the first and each subsequent person who makes an effort in this direction.

In order to illustrate and present symbolically that object of desire of people and the associated negative consequences, the biblical author uses the symbol "the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil". Thus, the Genesis "fruit", this "prime matter", the fall and God's apostasy, is the desire of the full meaning of universal values that are most appealing to human consciousness, focusing all human forces and capabilities as well as awakening the desire to complete and finally binding with it. In combination with the "substantial form" of the fall, which is the process of the absolute of a particular value, treating it as an aim in itself and bonding with it the definitive conscious act of one's own free will of the "prime matter", that is, the desire for feeling the full meaning of "something" creates "substance" of what constitutes first and each subsequent fall of man. All the additional elements, i.e. time, place, circumstances, non-human factors etc., particularize that "being" as its afflictions, important for a given event and its participants but secondary from the standpoint of someone who wants to guess the inner nature "of picking and the consumption of fruit".

An overwhelming desire to find a full meaning is revealed by way of human contact with all other values, starting with those from the lowest level up to the "high end" values. This is because each value is a value precisely because to some extent it gives meaning to human existence. So one can ask: if it is at all possible to prevent the meaning of desire to such an extent that it represents its absolute? As it is inextricably linked to all the values that "are nourished" and which "feed" the man who is in the "garden", then how can one not get entangled in the pursuit of experiencing it and feeling all its fullness? This is the place where the help comes from deep insight of the biblical author. For observing from seeking the full meaning of the lived reality filled with values and reincarnating the absolute, instead proposes a return to "the beginning", that is the image of God, who alone has full insight into the reality of the world, man, and history, and as the Creator permeates as well as clearly seeing the mysterious and inconceivable meaningfulness for man. Therefore, this is not the same meaningfulness that is enticing from a human point of view, which for various reasons is limited to the possibility of accepting God's perspective overview of reality. The only full meaning accessible to man remains God himself, who can be treated as the inexhaustible source and the ultimate basis of universal meaningfulness. Therefore the de-absolute of human desire of full meaning depends on the re-absolute of the people of God and desires focused on Him. In this way it becomes possible to avoid the "tasting of the fruit," which man is not able to "swallow and "digest" without dire consequences for himself.

The "substance" of the human fall according to proposed interpretation of Gen. 1-3



However, another perspective is open in which human reference to God, in the form of continuously deepened and perfected trust in situations involving the temptation to grasp the meaning of life experiences, protects man from self-destructive entanglement in the creation of the subsequent and apparent, false nature of things and human-like meanings insufficient to man himself.

The perspective shown in *Genesis* 1-3 is also the prospect before and after the fall.²⁴ Therefore, it should be remembered that, in accordance with the message of the biblical author, man is this, who by the first fall embroiled in the improper contact with the "fruit" and the entanglement continues. Therefore, he desires a sense of full meaning of passion and the state that currently clarifies his human nature, in every situation, as being focused on the meaningfulness of all that is his participation. However, according to the entire biblical message, initiated in *Genesis*, this is not the final destination and specification of human nature, and in any case not in the mind of God. Hence the possibility of a different direction of man by the grace understood in theological meaning. The revelation contained in the person, teaching and activity of Jesus Christ, preserved in the books of the Bible called the New Testament, shows the possibility of a new, further redefinition of human nature after the fall, and another game of complex charades of human existence than by the absolute of universal values of having full meaning.

²⁴ It is worth noting the contrasts, through which the biblical author tries to depict the state of human difference before and after the fall. For example, the issue of human nakedness and shame as a symbol of man's relation to his own (and other people) and the limitations of inherent weakness (cf. Gen. 2:25 and Gen. 3:7).

6. Conclusion

In summing up the above interpretive attempt of unveiling the Genesis "fruit", I allowed myself to formulate the assumption given in the early chapters of *Genesis* of the human desire and the search for full "knowledge of good and evil" that is the present desire for knowledge of the meaning. The biblical author concealed a story here about his own sense of temptation of full meaning, which personally experienced the "tree of knowledge of good and evil". His "tree of knowledge" was a historical experience of national and personal disaster in terms of loss of statehood, homeland, loved ones and, most importantly, the previously possessed image of God. Struggling with these experiences (and seeing a similar struggle in others), he attempted to read them in the religious key. This resulted in the biblical story of the fall, which was preceded by the biblical story of the creation of the world and man by God. Thanks to this, the image of God the Creator was recovered, together with all the consequences of this image, as well as the deepening self-understanding suffered by man. The central symbol of that story of the Genesis "fruit" was a symbol of a complex structure in which one can find both its "matter" and "form". The entity ("substance") with its combination was formed, a unique axiological and theological communication about God, man and the world in their mutual composite references.

In view of the contemporary intensifying social and cultural trend, some of which guide the man toward extremely rational (in the sense of empirical rationalism) conception of reality, while others offer him various forms of irrationality²⁵, the proposal contained in the *Book of Genesis* seems to be the true way – "a happy medium". It is indeed situated in the area of the broad field of human rationality, in which the possible turns out to welcome and accept not only the accuracy of rights and creating the structure of reality, but also the existence of a "backlash" for the action of cases and "vacancies" on the operation of free will and sometimes irrational decisions. All of these can be considered as incorporated in the structure of the whole that not only does not destroy the rationality (meaningfulness), but perhaps are indeed its condition. If we agree on such a concept, this human drama and the existence of evil ceases to be an argument in favor of nonsense, but becomes what can be described as a sense of mystery, the existence of which can and is worth believing. We believe, after all, not because of having conclusive evidence, but because we see the value of such an attitude. The symbolism of the Genesis "fruit" is hidden, so specific knowledge is understood as achieving a complete and definitive insight

²⁵ See more: SUTHERLAND, Stuart – *Irrationality: The Enemy Within*. London: Pinter and Martin, 2007.

into the meaning (sense of) all that we and other people encounter in life, but this knowledge is lacking trust in the existence of something more than itself, knowledge closed for further development of events, not ready to entrust ourselves to Him, who can demonstrate the absurdity of its salvation.

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