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John McGuckin's Contribution to the Development of Modern Biblical Theology and Anthropology: The Context of Postsecular Discourse

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ABSTRACT

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Modern biblical theology and anthropology are in a phase of formation. At this stage, it is important to overcome secularizing monism and relativism, and therefore to integrate biblical and patristic teachings about man into biological and psychological science, not to mention the humanities. Scientific and theological cultivation of an authentic understanding of man as the image of God in the conditions of postsecularization also requires a thorough rethinking of traditional religious doctrines about sin, salvation and human nature, the ability to moral and spiritual improvement and deification. Many modern European theologians have made a huge contribution to the implementation of these ontologically important tasks, but their concepts have still not found proper articulation in Ukrainian philosophical and theological thought. The article presents a comprehensive analysis of the philosophical and theological expression of the anthropological contours of biblical and patristic theology of John Anthony McGuckin, which contributes to the deep integration of the intellectual and spiritual achievements of European theologians of the 20th century into Ukrainian national religious and theological thought, science, and the educational process in particular. A comprehensive analysis of the philosophical and theological expression of the anthropological contours of the biblical and patristic theology of John Anthony McGuckin has been carried out, which contributes to the deep integration of the intellectual and spiritual achievements of European theologians of the 20th century into Ukrainian national religious and theological thought, science, and the educational process in particular. The critical synthesis of Platonic metaphysics, in particular the concepts of *eide* and *Nous*, which acquired forms, established ideological and semantic parameters, and value criteria in theological thought of the 20th century, is expressed and explicated through the work of the Orthodox theologian and practicing priest Father Anthony McGuckin. The hierarchical structure of human consciousness, scientifically objectively substantiated by the thinker, in which *nous* appears not only as the highest inner intellect, but primarily as the only locus capable of *theoria* – contemplation and true knowledge of Divine transcendence. On this basis, a delimitation of the dialectical relationship between Platonic philosophy and Christian anthropology is carried out to determine the dynamics of ascetic practice in the context of cleansing the soul from passions in the context of McGuckin's anthropological concept. Research attention is also focused on interpreting the religious and theological content of the concept of deification as the highest ontological and eschatological achievement of human existence in the light of Gaki's interpretation of the internal potential of the essence of *phronema* as a corporate, liturgical and doxological mentality, as the main feature of the integrity and immutability of the Eastern Byzantine ascetic tradition.



KEYWORDS

axiology, asceticism, anthropology, biblical theology, God, theology, deification, patristic tradition, psychology, postsecular discourse, religious-theological thought.



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Внесок Джона Макґакіна в розвиток сучасного біблійного богослов'я та антропології: контекст постсекулярного дискурсу

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СТАТТЯ	АНОТАЦІЯ
Дослідницька DOI: 10.70651/3041-248X/2026.4.02 Отримана: 19.02.2026 р. Прийнята: 24.03.2026 р. Опублікована: 06.04.2026 р. Авторське право © 2026 автора  Цей твір ліцензовано на умовах Ліцензії Creative Commons «Із Зазначенням Авторства – Некомерційна 4.0 Міжнародна» (CC BY-NC 4.0).	Сучасне біблійне богослов'я та антропологія перебувають у фазі становлення. На цьому етапі важливе подолання секуляризаційного монізму та релятивізму, а відтак інтеграції біблійного та патристичного вчення про людину в біологічну та психологічну науку, не кажучи вже про гуманітаристику. Науково-богословська культивування автентичного розуміння людини як Божого образу в умовах постсекуляризації, вимагає також ґрунтового переосмислення традиційних релігійних доктрин про гріх, спасіння та людську природу, здатність до морально-духовного вдосконалення й обоження. Багато сучасних європейських теологів зробили величезний внесок у реалізацію цих онтологічно вагомих завдань, проте їхні концепції ще й досі не знайшли належної артикуляції в українській філософсько-богословській думці. Здійснено комплексний аналіз філософсько-теологічного увиразнення антропологічних контурів біблійного та патристичного богослов'я Джона Ентоні Макґакіна, що сприяє глибокій інтеграції інтелектуально-духовних досягнень європейських богословів ХХ ст. в українську національну релігійно-богословську думку, науку та освітній процес зокрема. Увиразнено й експліковано критичний синтез платонічної метафізики, зокрема концепцій <i>eide</i> та <i>Nous</i>, що набули форм, усталених ідейно-сміслових параметрів і ціннісних критеріїв у богословській думці ХХ ст. завдяки творчості православного теолога і практикуючого священника отця Ентоні Макґакіна. Науково об'єктивовано обґрунтовану мислителем ієрархічну структуру людської свідомості, у якій <i>nous</i> постає не лише вищим внутрішнім інтелектом, а передусім як єдиний <i>locus</i>, здатний до <i>theoria</i> – споглядання та правдивого пізнання Божественної трансцендентності. На цьому ґрунті проведено делімітацію діалектичного співвідношення між платонічною філософією і християнською антропологією для визначення динаміки аскетичної практики в контексті очищення душі від пристрастей в контексті антропологічної концепції Макґакіна. Дослідницьку увагу зацентровано також на витлумаченні релігійно-богословський зміст поняття обоження як найвищого онтологічного й есхатологічного досягнення людського буття у світлі ґакінового трактування внутрішнього потенціалу сутності <i>phronema</i> як корпоративної, літургійної та доксологічної ментальності, як головної риси цілісності та незмінності східноівантійської аскетичної традиції.



КЛЮЧОВІ СЛОВА

аксіологія, аскеза, антропологія, біблійне богослов'я, Бог, богопізнання, обоження, патристична традиція, психологія, постсекулярний дискурс, релігійно-богословська думка.

1. Introduction

Religious and theological thought of our time, in particular patrology, is characterized by increased attention to the integrative analysis of the Eastern Christian tradition, which requires a clear expression of its ideological, value, moral and theological foundations. Especially when it comes to those semantic constructs that were formed in dialectical interaction with Hellenistic thought, primarily with Platonism, but in theological anthropology occupied almost a dogmatic status.

Therefore, in the structure of modern theological and philosophical-religious discourses, not only the leading ideas and value-semantic constants of patristic anthropology acquire a new sound, but also their further reception and influence on modern anthropological constructs, which are formulated by philosophers and theologians as theorists of the post-secular paradigm of thinking. In view of this, the need for a comprehensive analysis of the scientific heritage of those anthropologists who managed not only to synthesize Christian anthropology of the patristic period, but also to clearly determine the natural, deep and continuous connection of doctrinal postulates with the mystical and ascetic practice of the Eastern Christian tradition is actualized.

One of the most famous among a small galaxy of extraordinary religious thinkers of the twentieth century. John Anthony McGuckin (born 1952), British theologian, church historian, Orthodox parish priest (rector of the parish in Lytham St. Anne's, which belongs to the jurisdiction of the Romanian Orthodox Church), is legitimately considered. He combines pastoral activity with teaching at the University of Oxford. The priest and teacher are full members of the Royal Historical Society of Great Britain and work as international consultants to the Council of Europe. In particular, he helped Ukrainian experts with the development of research tools called "Prison through the eyes of a prisoner" [3, p. 2].

But this is not the only reason to turn to the intellectual activity of John Anthony McGuckin. His works, along with the rich work of other theologians of the late twentieth and early twentieth centuries, played an important role in the process of theoretical substantiation of the idea of deification "as one of the central concepts of patristic discourse" [13, p. 177] with its passionate relevance throughout the centuries and primarily today. However, despite the wide recognition of the thinker's contribution to the historiography of Byzantine spirituality and Christological disputes, the complex generalization and rethinking of the theoretical foundations and praxeological potential of patristic anthropology, his reconstructive theological methodology of the synthesis of Eastern Byzantine patristic thought, carried out based on Christian anthropocentrism, remains poorly developed, in particular, in Ukraine, where the majority of believers profess the tradition of Eastern Christianity.

The anthropological model that McGuckin explicates, based on Origen's methodology, on which the Cappadocians, especially Evagrius of Pontus (345–399) [12, pp. 201–202] and Maximus the Confessor (580–662) [1, pp. 324–326], are, in fact, the key to understanding the Byzantine mentality and the teleological goal of Christian existence, i.e., deification.

2. Literature Review

Inspired by Platonism, the theologian defines the key task of modern religious and theological thought – detachment from sensory perception to "see" and cognize the Divine realities. The study of the philosophical and anthropological contours of McGuckin's theological thought refers us to the works of Origen (c. 185–254), who also followed the path of combining the Christian-apologetic paradigm with Platonism [2, p. 629]. In this regard, McGuckin insists that the anthropological model laid down by these thinkers is not only hierarchical but also dynamic. Therefore, a person must be perceived on at least two levels: mental and noetic.

Important for the integrity of McGuckin's philosophical anthropology are the works of Maximus the Confessor (c. 580–662), as well as Simeon the New Theologian (949–1022). They are prominent representatives of the patristic anthropological tradition, emphasizing the ability to "see" invisible things and signs [4, p. 223]. Moreover, as modern Catholic theologians rightly note, they are natural and quite significant representatives of the patristic tradition. Here is what T. Timo writes about St. Simeon: "He continues the same intuitions, the same themes, practices and even to a large extent the same literary genres that were practiced by the monastic patristic authors before him. At the same time, we must pay tribute to Simeon's uniqueness, because the tone of his writing is extremely charismatic, personal, zealous and passionate" [25].

The sources of McGuckin's anthropology also include the work of Gregory Palamas (1296–1359), the most progressive theorist of the hesychast school of mysticism, who was opposed by the most powerful representative of philosophical rationalism of that time, Barlaam of Kalambria. St. Gregory placed Eastern Byzantine mysticism and the experience of contemplation of the "Uncreated Light" emanating from God Himself and His saints within the Church [8, pp. 118–119]. His teachings were established in the eastern territories of the Roman Empire, first under the imperial policy of Andronikos II Palaiologos (1282–1328), and later under John Cantacuzene (1347–1354). On the other hand, in the Western Church, Palamism remained strictly taboo for a long time [26, p. 145]. His return and legitimization are associated not only with the work of McGuckin but also with many Ukrainian philosophers and theologians.

Of course, McGuckin's works formed the basis for substantiating the anthropological contours of biblical theology and anthropology, among which the most relevant and popular are "Standing in the Holy Fire of God: The Byzantine Tradition" [14], "The Orthodox Church: An Introduction to Its History, Doctrine and Spiritual Culture" [16], "The Way of Christianity: The First Thousand Years" [17], as well as a fairly wide palette of sermons, interviews, articles, reports, etc. The totality of the theologian's works is not only systematized, but also a quite clearly outlined trajectory of the emanation of theological thought, in particular, one of its basic components – Christian biblical anthropology.

It should be noted that among Ukrainian scholars, in particular religious scholars, philosophers and theologians, the main attention to McGuckin's anthropological constructs in her scientific research was paid to Daryna Morozova, who comprehensively and thoroughly analyzed the anthropology of the Antiochian School in its influences on the formation of the spiritual and intellectual heritage of the Kyiv tradition [19].

Calling the Antiochian intellectuals "the first patrologists", the researcher comes to the conclusion that the Antiochian School was not limited to the episcopate, but was a dense and well-consolidated community of believers, which provided it with the status of a living socio-cultural and spiritual network [19, pp. 95–96]. We emphasize this because McGuckin, in his anthropological reflections, stands in the same position.

Quite close to Gakin's inferences and connotations can be found in Bohdan Zavidniak. The religious philosopher uses not only a similar methodology, but also the very method of mystical-experiential theodicy, which underlies McGuckin's anthropological thought, arguing about the decisive influence of the patristic tradition on the formation of biblical theology, anthropology, and orthodox Christianity in general.

In this context, it is also necessary to mention Gennadiy Khrystokin [11 pp. 59–70] and Yuriy Chornomorets [6; 7, pp. 74–88; 5], who have several publications on the specifics of the development of theological thought in the second half of the twentieth – early twenty-first centuries. The value of their scientific works lies in the fact that researchers convincingly substantiate the importance of a new trajectory for the development of theological science, in particular Ukrainian, which would ensure its coherence and wide integration into the European spiritual-intellectual (religious-theological) space and cultural and civilizational process.

Thus, Mag-Gakin's works and their reflection should and do serve to form a single integral great thing, in which the element of his creative theological genius and living religious experience reigns, but also an obvious desire to transform them into a living, spiritually energized, dynamic, pulsating and life-giving source of spiritual and moral perfection, true knowledge and veneration of God.

A thorough study of the work of the leading theologians of the twentieth century, among whom the main place belongs to Dmytro Staniloe [23, pp. 1–7], J. S. Staniloe. Mag-Gakin et al. contribute to the radical turn of "neopatristic theology" to the "radical orthodoxy of the Eastern Church" with its advantages and controversies, which was reflected in the works of Roman Soloviy [24, p. 222–223].

Meanwhile, they are both inclined to believe that the transition to radical orthodoxy (in both Protestant and Catholic discourses) is accompanied by heated discussions between theorists of liberal theology and representatives of fundamentalist theology. It is noteworthy that Orthodox theologians perceive the ideas and values of radical orthodoxy as a completely natural phenomenon of modern religious and theological thought. With this in mind, the main author's statements that we substantiate in the exploration largely follow in the wake of the connotations of these two philosophers.

But despite the obvious scientific interest in neopatristic theology and radical orthodoxy, there are still several issues that require attention and religious and philosophical objectification. For example, how to maintain a balance between the patristic tradition and unorthodoxy and radical

orthodoxy, or how to implement the achievements and values of the theological heritage of representatives of the synthesis of patristic thought, in particular neo-palasticism and modern philosophical and anthropological challenges, etc. This, on the one hand, and on the other hand, post-secular society tends to indocrinate, which can lead to intellectual conflict, because in theology of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, the concepts of theosis (deification) become dominant, which, according to McGuckin's anthropological system, means the transformation of believers by grace to such an extent that they are filled with light and likened to the divine presence.

3. Problem Statement

Thus, a very obvious problem arises – the philosophical-religious objectification of McGuckin's anthropological system as a new theological-anthropological paradigm, the starting point of which is the assimilation of the experience of salvation and knowledge of Divine transcendence on the basis and in line with the Eastern Byzantine patristic tradition. This is important in view of the fact that without a holistic reception and reconstruction of the system of complex interaction between mind, soul and body, without a clear definition and conceptualization of the soteriological potential of the practice of contemplation as a noetic form of cognition, the essence of Eastern Christian spirituality risks being reduced not only to simplified, but also to philosophical categories that do not correspond to the inner essence. At present, it is the religious-theological anthropological paradigm substantiated by McGuckin that does not allow this to happen.

That is why the problems of John McGuckin's scientific study of anthropology in the structure of modern theological and philosophical-religious discourses are urgent, and its development is of theoretical and practical importance for modern religious, philosophical and theological thought.

The main goal of the study is a comprehensive analysis of the anthropology of John Anthony McGuckin to thoroughly systematize and determine those main contours of the theological and anthropological system of the thinker, which give grounds to develop the concept of his anthropological thought as a new paradigm of subjectivation of the mind, soul and body of the noetic form of cognition, which determines the essence of Eastern Christian spirituality and theology, the formation of which ideologically and chronologically covers the period from Origen to the late Byzantine mystics, several whom are completed by Gregory Palamas (1296–1359) – a theorist and practitioner of hesychasm [22, pp. 444–447], whose ideas were established from above (under the pressure of the imperial authorities) and in the crucible of complex and contradictory political transformations of the Byzantine era [10, pp. 70–80].

4. Methods and Materials

Since the study is aimed at analyzing complex issues covering more than a thousand years of Christian history, we decided to apply an integrative methodological basis based on historical-patrology, comparative and phenomenological-hermeneutic approaches. The historical and patrological method, which is actively used by scientists, in particular J. McGuckin, made it possible to trace the genesis of several key anthropological concepts, among which the leading place is occupied by the mind, psyche and deification in their primary and ideological-semantic connotations, starting with the intellectual activity of representatives of the Alexandrian school (Origen, Clement, etc.) and ending with the systematization by Evagrius of Pontus, Maximus the Confessor, and others. This made it possible to identify theological approaches aimed at critically synthesizing Platonic intuitions with the revelation of the Holy Scriptures, forming a truly Christian anthropology. A comparative approach is necessary for the dialectical delimitation of Christian concepts from their Hellenistic counterparts, in particular, for a clear distinction between deification and pre-Christian apotheosis. The use of the potential of systematization and generalization methods helped to identify and thoroughly express the contradictions of Palamism in relation to academic philosophical and theological discourse, at the center of which is hesychasm. Thanks to the method of generalization, it was possible to carry out a comparative generalization of Plato's thea makaria with the Christian theōria. The hermeneutical-phenomenological approach is applied to interpret the experiential categories of phronēma and theōria, which McGuckin describes not so much as intellectual constructions but as a way of being and a normative mentality that grows out of the liturgical and ascetic life of Christ's Church. Because phronēma remains a concept that is not easy to define unambiguously, because it concerns not only

mental guidelines, but also the entire way of life, its religious interpretation requires a keen hermeneutic sensitivity to the integrity of the Eastern Orthodox spiritual tradition.

The application of a set of methods and principles of the theoretical and methodological tools chosen by us made it possible to interpret the spiritual practice of hesychasm not only as a spiritual and cultural phenomenon but also as the core of the Eastern European religious tradition. This also contributed to the identification of the contradictions of Palamism to the academic philosophical and theological discourse and made it possible to conclude that its controversies were largely influenced by the dominance of the classical Western European religious-philosophical paradigm, with its extrapolation to the Eastern patristic heritage. As a result, it is proven that the methodology of the non-classical religious-philosophical paradigm can become a heuristic basis for the theoretical understanding of the hesychast tradition.

The corpus of primary sources that serve as a historical, ideological-theological basis for a comprehensive study of John McGuckin's contribution to the formation and development of biblical theology in general and Christian anthropology in particular, is the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, as well as documents that express the oral and written patristic tradition in its extrapolation to modern religious, philosophical and theological anthropological thought.

In addition to biblical texts and the works of the Church Fathers, philosophical maxims of ancient thinkers are widely used, to which McGuckin himself often appeals. First of all, we are talking about the published treatises of Plato (427–347/348 BC) and Plotinus (205–270 BC), who considered the synergy of the theory of *eide* (forms) and *nous* (reason) to be primary realities, which in turn form the basis of the anthropology of the thinker.

5. Results and Discussion

And the fact that this divine presence in the world, which is all in evil (1 John 5:19), is manifest, is evidenced by the sacrifices that Ukraine is making today on the Altar of Freedom and Independence, defending God's Truth and Justice at the cost of life. In our opinion, the death of each Fulfiller of the Commandment of God about love to the end (Jn 15:13) is the fruit of faith in the Resurrection, the result of transfiguration and deification, which are taught by the Church Fathers and those who study their heritage. Only with such an inner spiritual state can one follow Christ all the way to Golgotha.

In the context of these statements, all of McGuckin's theological works are extremely valuable. Using a diachronic approach, it focuses on the key structural ideas and "obsessions" of Christians that can shed new light on the history of mankind, specific peoples and nations in the context of interpreting the Bible as a sacred history of salvation, which requires the active application of the principles of consonance and value potential. Important components of his reflections and substantiation of the philosophical and theological contours of the anthropological system are the human dimensionality of the concept of the "Apostleship of the Sword" (the use of force, influence, etc.), the attitude of the Church to war, the study of various liturgical practices, in particular healing and exorcism, methods of prayer, etc.

McGuckin focuses on the role and place of women in ancient Christianity and modern church and religious life, on philanthropic activities, the formation of early Christian art and its modern evolutionary forms and styles. The general ideological and value approach of the theologian aims to emphasize the deep-rootedness of the Christian movement in the eschatological philosophical paradigm and to prove the importance of the steadfastness of the foundation laid in the era of unity of the Church of Christ with its Western and Eastern liturgical practices.

John Anthony McGuckin's anthropology is based on a deep and comprehensive reception of the Eastern Christian tradition. But because it must take into account one of the most important methodological approaches of anthropological thought of the twentieth century – the transition from purely metaphysical reflections to a multidisciplinary theological-existential analysis with its clear focus on the value of the human person in the conditions of post-secularity – appears as a complex system in which philosophical borrowings (mostly of Platonic and Neoplatonic origin) are subordinated to Christological and soteriological imperatives. This gives grounds to talk about the dynamism and openness of McGuckin's anthropology and theology in general, which treat man not as a complete and perfect being, but as an open and ready for growth essence that realizes its potential for perfection through the restoration of connection with God.

At the same time, his anthropological concepts have a pronounced eschatological orientation. The theologian builds anthropological reflections in close connection with eschatology, which makes it possible to comprehensively comprehend modernist trends and the meaning of human existence from the perspective of eternity. Summing up the conclusions about theosis, which is unthinkable outside of a one-of-a-kind true Christian mentality, where the individual takes precedence over general structures, and the human being is defined as the highest value due to his unique connection with God. Because of this, McGuckin constantly emphasizes the dialectical interaction between Christian anthropology and classical Greek philosophy, in which Plato is a critically accepted but fundamental source [4, p. 227]. A key element of this synergy is the concept of *eide* (forms) and the concept of *nous* (intelligence), which ancient thinkers interpreted as primary realities, *archai* of the universe [4, p. 11 and 67].

Critics agree that McGuckin, referring to a wide range of scholars of Platonism, sought to prove that the main task of philosophers is primarily to detach themselves from sensory perception to better “see” and know the Divine [4, p. 11]. They argue that for McGuckin, this “visual” aspect of cognition (*thea*) had a non-metaphorical significance in Platonism [4, p. 68 and 72-73]. Another thing is that the Christian tradition, especially in the Origen school, entered into a critical dialogue with him and synthesized Platonic intuitions with revelation. The Origen tradition, having become the cornerstone of Byzantine thought, accepted the idea of the “descent of human consciousness” to Divine transcendence as the quintessential duty of the philosopher, constituting a specific *proprium* of human awareness [4, p. 223]. On the whole, this is true, for Origen, whom McGuckin calls the “master of the third century”, was the first to articulate this theological idiom, insisting that the life of the mind is a practical expression of asceticism and *metanoia* [17, p. 387].

It is noteworthy that McGuckin considers his own intellectual potential and academic efforts to be the main fruits, and at the same time, the impulse of asceticism, which, according to his own convictions, led to spiritual and moral purification and enlightenment of the mind. From here, he formulates the statement that the soul seeks mystical union with God. Therefore, the theologian put the principle of patristic *hesychia* as the basis of his own anthropological system. In addition, the thinker considers it key in the experience of the knowledge of God and theology [17, pp. 386–387].

However, it seems to us that McGuckin is not original here. After all, this generalization is consonant, in particular, with the statements of the Protestant preacher and ideologist of the Pentecostal “awakening” Dwight Moody (1837–1899), who taught that a Christian, standing on his knees, sees more than philosophers on tiptoe [9], as well as with the teaching of Pope Benedict (2005–2013) on the birth of true theology not in offices, but in prayers and reflections on the knees, for which Pope Francis (2013–2025) called him an outstanding example of a teacher of “theology on the knees” [20].

Instead, his original conceptualization of biblical theology and, above all, the anthropological model substantiated by him, at the center of which is Greek-Eastern spirituality. It is hierarchical and dynamic, and its axiological potential is in life-giving. Therefore, McGuckin argued that in the proposed paradigm, a person should be perceived at least on two levels: psychic (related to *psychē*) and noetic (with *nous*) [4, pp. 227–228]. Noetic perception, or *nous*, is an internal, higher intelligence, that is, the core of consciousness that has a unique ability to know God [8, pp. 76–77].

Referring to Syrian patristic sources, which greatly influenced the formation and synthesis of the Eastern (Greek) spiritual tradition, he proved that the organ of “vision” (*theoria*) is transferred from the eyes and mind to the heart, which should be interpreted as the core of the highest psychic acuity of human beings. It is *nous* that he endowed with the ability to know and cultivate the knowledge of God, to have living communion and unity with Him, which is an integral component of human nature, because God created man solely for this purpose [8, pp. 73–74].

The function of *nous* is closely related to the ascetic practice systematized by Evagrius of Pontus, which McGuckin not only borrows but also concretizes, actualizing its axiological and soteriological potential. To do this, he had to divide the path of asceticism into two multi-encompassing stages. First, the *rraktikos*, or “ascetic practitioner”, must acquire practical knowledge about oneself, learn one’s own spiritual shortcomings and faults and, conversely, virtues and virtues, as well as the action of evil forces, and only after that can one embark on the path to achieving the state of *apatheia* (dispassion).

Note that, according to McGuckin, *apatheia* includes not only external self-control, but also inner peace, which protects against passionate thoughts in the process of contemplation and reflection [21, p. 494]. Therefore, without attaining *apatheia*, there is no hope for the birth of sacrificial love (*agápē*). Having cultivated *agapic* love, a person becomes a *gnostikos* (*gnōstikós*), that is, one who not only knows, but also understands. Therefore, one can acquire true knowledge about existing things.

Ascetic exercises, including fasting and solitude, are aimed at purifying the nous and being illuminated by divine light and energies. Therefore, the struggle against pathē (passions) is rooted in the flesh, and the purpose of asceticism is to stress the body for the sake of purifying the soul and strengthening the nous [21, pp. 130–131]. All this means that asceticism is an obligatory and irreplaceable path to noetic vision.

McGuckin seeks to prove that the ultimate goal (telos) of the anthropological process is theōsis – deification [14, p. 198]. However, deification depends not only on the aspirations and efforts of the person himself, but also on the grace of God. Therefore, the theologian introduces the concept of “deification by grace”, which, in fact, corresponds to the Eastern Christian doctrine of perfection [14, p. 156]. But this is not an echo of the ancient concept of apotheosis characteristic of the pre-Christian anthropological ideas of the ancient Romans, but a transformation possible only by the grace of God [16, p. 198]. It is the divine presence that radically changes the nature of man. This metamorphosis is described by the theologian as a transfiguration by grace [16, p. 198].

And finally, theōsis is ontological perfection. This component of religious experience is inextricably linked with the contemplation of the Uncreated Light, especially in the tradition of hesychasm. The leading concept by which McGuckin substantiates the prospects and importance of integrating anthropology into ecclesiology is the concept of phronēma (“mentality”, “thought”, “guide” or “approach”) [8, p. 118–119]. Researchers argue that for McGuckin, the main characteristic of phronēma is a conciliar, i.e., collective or corporate understanding of the nature of perfection and salvation [8, p. 224–225]. However, a superficial perception of this statement can lead to the idea that it is clearly dissonant with the common statement: save yourself and thousands around you will be saved.

The theologian himself emphasizes that true theology cannot be based on individual reason or individual speculation, since true theology is liturgical, doxological, and deeply mystical. He emphasizes the importance of corporate phronēma, so he emphasizes its axiological potential. First of all, it is about the ability to ensure the unity of faith and its preservation unchanged from generation to generation, the nurturing of the linguistic tradition, the spiritual culture of believers, etc., which is especially characteristic of church structures with imperialist ambitions and, in particular, the Russian Orthodox Church with its heresy of the “Russian world”.

6. Conclusions

Summing up the coverage of John McGuckin’s intellectual heritage, several generalizing conclusions can be drawn.

J. McGuckin belongs to the cohort of famous theologians of the twentieth century, who made a significant contribution to the development of theology in the era of postecocularism. His special merit is in the formation of new approaches to determining the role, place and tasks of biblical theology and anthropology in the context of modern scientific discourse.

A thorough analysis of the scientific work of the Orthodox theologian testifies to a rather systematic explication of the holistic and deeply rooted in the Eastern Christian tradition anthropological paradigm with its mental, philosophical, soteriological and existential dimensions. The approach proposed by McGuckin, characterized by historical and theological accuracy and logical consistency, convincingly demonstrates the peculiarities of the formation and development of the theological thought of the Eastern Church, in particular, through the legacy of the Alexandrian School (Clement and Origen) and its systematizers (the Cappadocian Fathers and Evagrius), expressing at the same time the experience of subordinating the critical synthesis of Platonic metaphysics to the main postulates of the doctrinal doctrine of Christianity.

The key anthropological contours outlined by McGuckin include the hierarchical structure of the human being, in which the nous (higher, inner intelligence) appears as the locus of true consciousness, the only one capable of theōria (contemplation) and cognition of the Divine transcendence. The path to restoring this noetic function is through askēsis, which is not only an ethical guideline but also an ontological effort aimed at purifying the pathē and achieving apatheia, as systematized by Evagrius.

The teleological-axiological goal of human life, theōsis (deification by grace), is an eschatological metamorphosis that is the personification of the highest correspondence to Christ, which is radically different from the pagan apotheosis because it is based on grace rather than human merit. This concept is closely related to the vision of the Uncreated Light, which, in the tradition of hesychasm (Simeon the New Theologian, Gregory Palamas), testifies to the reality of the Divine energy in the world.

Finally, McGuckin defines *phronēma* as a corporate mentality and way of life that results from the illumination of the nous and ensures the immutability and integrity of the Orthodox Tradition. This idiom encompasses all spheres of being, affirming theology as a “liturgical, doxological, and mystical” effort that cannot be separated from the spiritual life of the believer.

Thus, McGuckin’s anthropology is not an ordinary catalog of ideas, but a dynamic scheme that integrates patristic history, mystical practice, and theological doctrine into a single soteriological narrative in which man, as the image of God, realizes his potential for eternal glory. His works, a significant contribution to religious and theological thought, including Christian anthropology, demonstrate that theological disputes that determined the specifics of adoption, ideological, theological and dogmatic content, are inseparable from a deeply developed model of human consciousness and its ability to know God.

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