

## THE *APHTHARSIA* IN THE PAULINE THOUGHT. A BIBLICAL ANTHROPOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

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**Abstract.** For biblical anthropology, the concept of *aphtharsia* (incorruptibility) plays an important role in the construction of a holistic vision about man, in accordance with the Hebrew tradition of the Old Testament. This vision is continued in the New Testament, especially in the Pauline texts. Entering the biblical literature of the New Testament by means of the sapiential books of the Old Testament, *aphtharsia* is a term used in the biblical text designating both God and man. This double stance of the term allows for the shaping of a biblical anthropological vision about man's eternal destiny expressed in the patristic theology by means of the concept of *theosis*. The analysis of the occurrences of *aphtharsia* in the Pauline texts represents an important aspect of the research with regard to the place and role of this concept in the biblical thought about man, as well as the manner enabling the development of new contributions to the biblical anthropology.

**Keywords:** incorruptibility, New Testament, biblical anthropology, Pauline thought

### 1. Introduction

In the biblical anthropology of the New Testament, especially in the Pauline thought, one should remark the presence of a term which rarely<sup>1</sup> appears in the whole Scripture, namely *aphtharsia*. Incorruptibility is a biblical term seldom explored in this specialty literature. The studies regarding this concept focus

<sup>1</sup> In the canonical texts of the Old Testament, the use of the term *incorruptibility*, used either as a noun (*ἀφθαρσία*) or an adjective (*ἀφθαρτος*) is not at all explicit, either in the Hebrew text, or in the Septuagint. The term takes both forms only in two of the deuterocanonical texts: Wisdom of Solomon (2,23; 6,19; 12,1; 18,4) and 4Maccabees (9,22; 17,12). In the New Testament, the term *incorruptibility* appears under both forms 14 times, of which 11 times in Apostle Paul (Rom 1,23; 2,7; 1Cor 9,25; 15,42; 15,50; 15,52; 15,53; 15,54; Eph 6,24; 1Tim 1,17; 2Tim 1,10) and 3 times in Apostle Peter (1Pet 1,4; 1,23; 3,4). If the extended versions of Mark 16,20 and that of Titus 2,7 are to be taken into account, then we record other two occurrences of the term in the New Testament. It should be mentioned that the extension to Mark (Μετὰ δὲ ταῦτα καὶ αὐτὸς ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἀπὸ ἀνατολῆς καὶ ἄχρι δύσεως ἐξαπέστειλεν δι' αὐτῶν τὸ ἱερὸν καὶ ἀφθαρτον κήρυγμα τῆς αἰωνίου σωτηρίας, ἀμήν) appears only in several manuscripts (see Westcott and Hort, United Bible Societies *Greek New Testament* 4 Variants), and in the modern English translations it is met, for example, in NAS, 1995. The completion from Titus 2,7 refers only to the term *aphtharsia*: *περὶ πάντα σεαυτὸν παρεχόμενος τύπον καλῶν ἔργων, ἐν τῇ διδασκαλίᾳ ἀδιαφορίαν, σεμνότητα, ἀφθαρσίαν*, cf. Robinson-Pierpont Majority Text, 1995.

mainly on the dogmatic aspects, analyzing mostly the occurrence of the term and its conceptualisation in the Church Fathers' works, as well as its role in the patristic dogmatic<sup>2</sup> construction. The studies from the perspective of biblical theology and anthropology which deal with incorruptibility are scarce<sup>3</sup>, and the biblical comments overlook this term fairly easily. The commentaries<sup>4</sup> to the texts from 1Cor. 15 represent the exception. Here the occurrence of the incorruptibility term has a greater frequency and calls for an anthropological and eschatological analysis.

The aim of this study is to conduct an analysis of the occurrences of the term *aphtharsia* in the Pauline texts in order to highlight the way in which the Apostle Paul uses this term for the development of a biblical conception about man. The underlining of anthropological meanings of incorruptibility in the Pauline texts is done under the hypothesis that the biblical new testamentary anthropology is built on as a unitary vision, continuing the holistic paradigm about man from the Old Testament.

In the Pauline texts, where *aphtharsia* appears explicitly, the idea of incorruptibility announces the influence of certain veterotestamentary sources that will be dealt with in the next chapter. The ontological and soteriological significances of the concept of incorruptibility developed in the Pauline texts in line with the veterotestamentary sources are fairly important for the biblical anthropology, creating thus a strong relationship between anthropology and Christology. According to the teaching of the New Testament, man is invited to share the divine life, in compliance with the destiny he has received at the beginning. Through the incarnation of God's Son, the process of man's transformation has begun in history, having at its horizon the resurrection. Christ's

<sup>2</sup> See: Y. de ANDIA, *Homo vivens: incorruptibilité et divinisation selon Irénée de Lyons*, Etudes Augustiniennes, Paris, 1986; M. AUBINEAU, *Incorruptibilité et divinisation selon S. Irénée*, in *RSR*, 44 (1956), 25-52; A. GRILLMEIER, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, vol. 2, Mowbray, London, 1995; N. RUSSELL, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2006; D.O. ENDSJO, *Greek Resurrection Beliefs and the Success of Christianity*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2009; M.D. NISPEL, "Christian Deification and the Early Testimonia", in *VC* 53 (1999), 289-304.

<sup>3</sup> R. Feldmeier is an example of author who studies the term incorruptibility, both with regard to its sources and occurrence in the biblical texts, cf. R. FELDMEIER, *The First Letter of Peter, A Commentary on the Greek Text*, Baylor University Press, Waco, 2008. See also, Neyrey, J.H., *Body Language in 1 Corinthians: The Use of Anthropological Models For Understanding Paul and His Opponents*, in *Semeia* 35 (1986), 129-170; E. PAGELS, *The Mystery of the Resurrection: A Gnostic Reading of 1 Corinthians 15*, in *JBL* 93 (1974), 276-288.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, G. FEE, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, W.B. Eerdmans. Grand Rapids, 1991; J.A. FITZMYER, *First Corinthians*, The Anchor Yale Bible 32, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2008.

economy has as outcome the fulfillment of human destiny, which involves the victory upon death, sin and corruption. These accomplishments are made actual in history for those who believe, and they take the form of a continuous process of transformation of man's fallen existence which aims at perfection. The transformation of what is corrupt and rotten into something incorruptible is part of the divine economy, while the end of this process is resurrection, as a recovery of man to his original condition, without the disease of sin and corruption.

## 2. *Aphtharsia* and the veterotestamentary sources

For the Old Testament, the history of the term *aphtharsia* is connected both to the Old Testament texts and the Hebrew tradition, as well as to the extra biblical literature, namely the ancient poetic, religious and philosophic Greek texts<sup>5</sup>. In the biblical tradition, *incorruptibility* appears only in the canonical texts of the New Testament. Even though in the Old Testament the term does not appear at all, the idea of incorruptibility is implicitly developed in the Psalms and in the Prophetic Books<sup>6</sup>. These texts describe the prophetic hope of redemption of the chosen people as well as their salvation from the power of sin and death by means of God's intervention in history and by the construction of an eschatological reality where corruption will not find its place anymore.

*Aphtharsia*, originating in the Greek philosophy as well as the intertestamentary Judaism<sup>7</sup>, reaches the biblical tradition in the direction of sapiential literature by means of two deuterocanonical texts of the Old Testament: The

<sup>5</sup> D. Endsjo believes that in the Greek religious thought and traditional culture, sufficient elements can be identified which may support the interest of the old Greeks in the man's body, in its immortality and resurrection (cf. ENDSJO, *Greek Resurrection*, 21-35). Also, D. Endsjo's study presents examples from Greek culture, such as the example of Homer's *Iliad* as well as from other poets that support the idea that in the ancient Greek world the incorruptibility theme is related to the body. Man can reach incorruptibility only by coming back from the dead, fact which is possible only after resurrection, after the body's exit from the grave (cf. ENDSJO, *Greek Resurrection*, 47-104). To this point, it is important to mention that the first Christian thinkers and apologetics took over these examples from the Hellenic culture in order to argue the resurrection theme in the Christian thought. See, for example, JUSTIN MARTYR, *The First Apology XXI*.

<sup>6</sup> This problem was already discussed in the paper *The biblical veterotestamentary foundations of the incorruptibility concept in St. Irenaeus of Lyon 's anthropology*, presented by the author of this paper within the Doctoral School of the "Babeş Bolyai" University of Cluj Napoca, under the coordination of Prof. Stelian Tofană.

<sup>7</sup> See J.J. SCOTT, "On the Value of Intertestamental Jewish Literature for New Testament Theology", in *JETS* 23/4 (1980), 315-323.

Wisdom of Solomon and 4Maccabees. These books<sup>8</sup> were written at the crossroads between Jewish thought and the Hellenic one, the biblical and the extra-biblical thought as well as an analysis of a range of conceptual evolutions of Jewish thought resulting from this dialogue. In these texts, the occurrences of the term incorruptibility are strongly connected with the often exploited themes of immortality and resurrection, as well as with important ideas of anthropological nature. The analysis of the transition of the term incorruptibility from the Greek world to the biblical tradition enables the highlight of Greek influences on the teachings which are present in the canonical biblical texts of the Old Testament regarding man.

In The Wisdom of Solomon and 4 Maccabees, incorruptibility is considered a feature of the divinity, indicating his transcendence and the specific difference between the divine nature and the world and man. The attribute of incorruptibility is also used for the human being, and its anthropological valences concern the human constitution and man's eternal destiny.

#### a. The Wisdom of Solomon

The book of Wisdom of Solomon is a very important source for biblical anthropology as well for New Testament theology and especially for Pauline thought. Biblical commentaries<sup>9</sup> on the Pauline letters prove these statements and show the example of continuity in the New Testament of the fruitful meeting between the Greek and Hebrew traditions. In this book, the Jewish tradition is represented by the personified Wisdom present during creation and now plays an important role in the world, while the Greek treasure brings into question the possibility of relating with the transcendent One. The three parts of the book

<sup>8</sup> The book *Wisdom of Solomon* is assigned by some authors to the King Solomon, as the title also suggests. It is so entitled in the earliest Manuscripts, such as the Sinaitic, Vatican and Alexandrin Codex. Following Jerome's thought, there are authors arguing that this book was written by Philo of Alexandria, but the specialty critics identified several names, including that of Solomon, but it must have been written late, during Caligula's reign (37-41 AD). See in this respect W.J. DEANE, *Sophia Salōmōn: The book of Wisdom: the Greek text, the Latin Vulgate, and the Authorised English version*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1881, 30-34. P. Hayman considers that the book was written in Greek, in Alexandria, late first century BC to early first century AD (cf. A.P. HAYMAN, "The wisdom of Solomon", in J.D.G. DUNN, J.W. ROGERSON (ed.), *Commentary on the Bible*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 2003, 763). The book *4 Maccabees* is addressed to the Jews who live in the middle of tensions generated by the assimilation attempts of Judaic communities living between the Romans and the Greeks. It was probably written after the year 63AD and it is attributed to Iosephus Flavius, cf. D.A. DESILVA, "4 Maccabees", in J.D. Dunn, J.W. Rogerson, ed. *Commentary on the Bible*, W.B. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 2003, 889.

<sup>9</sup> In the next chapter of this paper we shall present several examples connected mainly with the Epistle to the Romans.

correspond to thematic approaches from different perspectives, but the theme of wisdom pervades throughout the book. In the first part (1-5) there appears the theme of immortality (3,4-8; 4,1) and incorruptibility (2,23), as a destiny of man who committed justice. In the second part (6-9), man is asked to seek wisdom, which is life-giving and provides incorruptibility (6,18-19). Part three (10-19) is a retrospective of the history of Israel whose vocation is to spread God's incorruptible light among other nations (12,1; 18,4).

The first occurrence of *aphtharsia* in this book is in Wis 2,23: "For God created man to be immortal, and made him to be an image of his own eternity" (ὅτι ὁ θεὸς ἔκτισεν τὸν ἄνθρωπον ἐπ' ἀφθαρσίᾳ<sup>10</sup> καὶ εἰκόνα τῆς ἰδίας αἰδιότητος ἐποίησεν αὐτόν). This passage makes explicit reference to Gen 1,26-28 and points out the connection between man's destiny and his nature as a being, created in the image and likeness of God.

In Wis 2,23, incorruptibility is viewed as God's feature<sup>11</sup>, as opposed to the human being which is created and subject to degradation. But for man, the purpose is to receive life as a gift, which is eternal life, synonymous, according to the author, with incorruptibility. Human destiny is defined by the relationship between the nature of God and that of man. The human being was created in the image of God, which is a constitutive principle that allows for participation to the divine incorruptibility. This passage appears in a context in which the author gives an answer to the man deprived of wisdom who believes that death means the annihilation of both body and soul (cf. Wis 2,3). Under the pressure of the wicked, the righteous are left to express their faith in God, and the author links this belief to the hope of immortality (cf. Wis 3,1-9).

In patristic literature, Wis 2,23 is used to support the idea of man's eternal destiny in connection to his constitution. One example is Athanasius who interprets this passage from an anthropological perspective. Athanasius quotes this passage in his treatise *On the Incarnation of the Word* proving that the human destiny to live in incorruptibility can only be achieved by maintaining the communion with God.

<sup>10</sup> The English edition *King James version* translates ἀφθαρσία by immortality. The translation in Romanian of the Septuagint adopts the variant: "Dumnezeu l-a zidit pe om pentru nestricăciune (incoruptibilitate) și l-a făcut chip al propriei sale veșnicii", bringing into discussion the difference among manuscripts that use either ἰδιότητος, meaning "characteristic, feature", or αἰδιότητος, which is translated "eternities" (cf. *Septuagint*, translation S. Bădiliță, Polirom, Iași, 2007, 178). The French translation TOB prefers the first version: "Or Dieu a créé l'homme pour qu'il soit incorruptible et il l'a fait image de ce qu'il possède en propre".

<sup>11</sup> The idea of the incorruptibility of the divine being is not specific to the Old Testament, being rather common to the apocrypha and Gnostic texts written at the crossroads of the Greek and Jewish thought.

Being created, man cannot have incorruptibility in himself but can benefit from it through a permanent relationship with God, especially because of the Word dwelling within man<sup>12</sup>. Another example is Methodius who uses this passage as a proof for the resurrection of the body. As man is composed of body and soul<sup>13</sup>, and God created man to be incorruptible, “then the body does not perish<sup>14</sup>”.

The idea of an ontological distance between God and man, which is built by using the term incorruptibility, can be drawn from the following passage: τὸ γὰρ ἄφθαρτόν σου πνεῦμά ἐστιν ἐν πᾶσιν (Wis 12,1). This verse explains the phrase δέσποτα φιλόψυχε ("master lover of life") from Wis 11,26, a name that indicates God's economic feature of sparing all things and giving life to all. The contrast between God's incorruptibility and man's state of decay is indicated in the context of the Jewish theme of the divine right judgment of his people. The Spirit of God has the characteristic of incorruptibility, while the created world is dependent on life coming from the Creator, because it has in itself neither life, nor incorruptibility.

In relation to Gen 1,26-28 and 2,7, Wisdom refers to the dignity and destiny of man in the following passage: “She preserved the first formed father of the world, that was created alone, and brought him out of his fall. And gave him power to rule all things” (Wis 10,1-2). In this text, the man is named as πρωτόπλαστον (first formed), πατέρα κόσμου (father of the world) and the one who has the ἰσχὺν κρατῆσαι ἅπαντων (power to rule all things). Royal power and dignity of man spring from divine wisdom, which is given by the Spirit of God (cf. Wis 9,17). The link between this wisdom and incorruptibility<sup>15</sup> is expressed in several passages in the book and brings into question the human participation to the divine incorruptibility, as we show below.

<sup>12</sup> „But men, having rejected things eternal, and, by counsel of the devil, turned to the things of corruption, became the cause of their own corruption in death, being, as I said before, by nature corruptible, but destined, by the grace following from partaking of the Word, to have escaped their natural state, had they remained good. For because of the Word dwelling with them, even their natural corruption did not come near them, as Wisdom also says” (cf. ATHANASIUS, *On the Incarnation* 5.1-2).

<sup>13</sup> This distinction between body and soul belongs to the Greek thinking and appears very clearly in Wisdom due to the Hellenistic dichotomy's influence on the author. But, at the same time, the book preserves the Jewish holistic vision about man. An example is the use of the term ψυχη for the entire human being, as in Wis 3,1.

<sup>14</sup> METHIDIUS, *Discourse on the Resurrection* I.11.

<sup>15</sup> On the theme of wisdom and the relationship with incorruptibility see HAYMAN, *The wisdom of Solomon*, 768, and BONAVENTURE, *Commentary on the Book of Wisdom*, Franciscan Institute Publications, St. Bonaventure, 2006, 146.

According to the Wisdom, man is called to participate in incorruptibility through an effort implying the fulfillment of God's Law, as Wis 6,17-19 expresses: "For the very true beginning of her (wisdom) is the desire of discipline; and the care of discipline is love; And love is the keeping of her laws; and giving heed unto her laws is the assurance of incorruptibility; And incorruptibility maketh us near unto God<sup>16</sup>". The final conclusion in Wis 6,17-19 leads to a definition of incorruptibility: ἀφθαρσία δὲ ἐγγύς εἶναι ποιῆι θεοῦ - it is man's experience in an intimate relationship with God. According R. Cox, "this passage is important both because it fills out the picture of Sophia's primary anthropological task, but also because it adds to the dimension of human involvement<sup>17</sup>". For Cox, to be close to God also means to have a mystical relationship with him and think that this idea has Greek philosophical roots.

In the patristic literature this definition receives anthropological accents. Irenaeus quotes Wis 6,19 in book IV of the work *Adversus Haereses* in a context in which he discusses human destiny and his status as a created being. He defines human's destiny as participation to the uncreated glory, i.e. the incorruptibility, and stresses that this destiny can be achieved by remaining obedient to God. For Irenaeus, incorruptibility means this very obedience and dependence on God, while the permanence of incorruptibility is the uncreated glory, which is the glory of God<sup>18</sup>. In line with Irenaeus of Lyons, Athanasius quotes from Wis 6,18 to capture the nature of the mortal and corruptible human being<sup>19</sup>, because man is created from nothing and is imperfect in comparison to his creator. Despite being created

<sup>16</sup> Cf. *The Apocrypha: King James Version*, Bellingham WA, Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1995, Wis 6,17-19. This passage imitates a typical Greek argumentation, i.e. a structure which resembles a series of syllogisms where the conclusion of each becomes the premise for the other one (such as: a is b, b is c, c is d, and the final conclusion is that a is c), until it reaches the main conclusion intended by the author. Thus, the penultimate argument "near unto God" from this passage is repeated in relation to another one, "royal state", in v 20. Using this argumentation, the main purpose of the author is to prove that the desire of wisdom is the first step towards heavenly kingship, to incorruptibility.

<sup>17</sup> R. Cox, *By the Same Word, Creation and Salvation in Hellenistic Judaism and Early Christianity*, Walter de Gruyter, Berlin, 2007, 85.

<sup>18</sup> IRENAEUS, *AH IV.38.3*. In the final part of this section, Irenaeus says: "Or the Uncreated is perfect, that is, God. Now it was necessary that man should in the first instance be created; and having been created, should receive growth; and having received growth, should be strengthened; and having been strengthened, should abound; and having abounded, should recover [from the disease of sin]; and having recovered, should be glorified; and being glorified, should see his Lord. For God is He who is yet to be seen, and the beholding of God is productive of incorruptibility, but incorruptibility renders one nigh unto God".

<sup>19</sup> ATHANASIUS, *On the Incarnation*, 4.6.

in the image and likeness of God, he would remain incorrupt. Athanasius defines incorruptibility as life lived as God, as his model of existence. To support this definition, the author relates to Ps 81,6-7.

Incorruptibility means to be close to God. It is this experience that makes a man share in His royal dignity the eternal life (cf. Wis 6,20-21). The human vocation is to be the "master of the world", to achieve incorruptibility and live forever with God. But this implies obedience to God's commandments, keeping his wisdom. In a Jewish biblical vision, the law of God is considered eternal, and his light or his wisdom is incorruptible (cf. Wis 18,4). Thus, obedience to God's commandments gives light, i.e. eternal life. Wisdom can not be acquired by man through his powers, but is given by God to people who seek it (cf. Wis 8,21). The human vocation to have eternal life and to reach incorruptibility, as the fulfillment of his destiny, requires the biblical way of dependency on God with the clear conscience of the ontological difference between the created and the uncreated.

#### 4 Maccabees

The book 4 Maccabees has the same topic as 2 Maccabees, namely the story of Eleazar's heroic martyrdom and of the mother with her seven sons. In comparison with the previous book, in 4Macc the author presents some examples of the martyrs' endurance in order to prove the power of God, who is the source of the "true philosophy".

In the context of the presentation of the martyrdom of the seven brothers, the text of the book 4Macc uses the term incorruptibility twice. The author appeals to the idea of incorruptibility, associating it with the reward for effort to fight in order to keep faith. 4Macc 9,22 presents the suffering of the sixth son who was burned alive, and the author links and interprets the strength and resilience of this young man with the state of man's incorruptibility after the resurrection: ἀλλ' ὡσπερ ἐν πυρὶ μετασχηματιζόμενος εἰς ἀφθαρσίαν ὑπέμεινεν εὐγενῶς τὰς στρέβλας. It is hard to maintain that such a text as 4Macc 9,22 alludes to the ancient Stoic idea of the purifying fire<sup>20</sup>. We rather believe having in the text a reference to the state of man's incorruptibility after resurrection, when there will be no suffering and corruption. The eulogy of rationality of faith that accepts the suffering<sup>21</sup> and leads to overcoming various passions is not an apology of salvation from the flesh, as the ancient Greeks thought. We believe that the holistic Jewish vision of man can be

<sup>20</sup> See the note of this passage in the Romanian translation of the Septuagint (cf. *Septuaginta 3*, Polirom, Iasi, 2007, 665).

<sup>21</sup> In the specialty literature there are authors who see in the young man's defense the typical Greek philosophical idea that considers that physical coercion has no negative effect on the mind and the moral faculty of man (cf. DESILVA, *4 Maccabees*, 896).

felt in this text, although its author suffered a substantial Greek influence, in comparison with 2Macc.

In 4Macc, incorruptibility is the reward for suffering for God's Law and is defined in the text as endless life: "Truly the contest in which they were engaged was divine, for on that day virtue gave the awards and tested them for their endurance. The prize was incorruptibility in an endless life" (ἀφθαρσία ἐν ζωῇ πολυχρονίῳ, cf. 4Macc 17,11-12). The young brothers have given their bodies to suffering, so they are worthy of becoming partakers of the divine inheritance (θείας μερίδος, cf. 4Macc 18,3). The hope for incorruptibility does not imply only man's soul<sup>22</sup>. Even if 4Macc recovers less from the intensity of the belief in a body's resurrection from 2Macc, the idea of reward preserves the vision about incorruptibility within the parameters of biblical anthropology, aimed at the afterlife of the complete man, as he was created by God.

### 3. Incorruptibility in the Apostle Paul

The term incorruptibility appears in the Pauline texts under both of forms met in the deuterocanonical books: as a noun (ἀφθαρσία<sup>23</sup>) and as an adjective (ἄφθαρτος<sup>24</sup>). In these texts, *aphtharsia* is used both for God and man, with

<sup>22</sup> C.W. Emmet notices a connection between 4Maccabees and The Wisdom of Solomon as regards the Greek-type focus on the soul's immortality and the dwelling of the rights' souls with God as a reward for their faith and deeds (cf. C.W. EMMET, *The Fourth Book of Maccabees*, Macmillan, New York, 1918, xvi-xvii). This relationship is accentuated in the same line with the critics who support the complete Hellenization of the book 4Maccabees and the loss of its Judaic biblical valences. We believe that this conception is not entirely substantiated, even if we agree that the accent of the text changes in comparison with 2Maccabees. In support of this conclusion we emphasize the importance of the idea of punishment of the tyrant in the eternal fire, which appears several times in the text, in contrast to the reward for physical and spiritual suffering of the believers (cf. 4Macc 9,9; 10,11; 12,12). A possible influence of this idea can be quoted in the New Testament in Luke 16,19-31, in the parable of the poor Lazarus.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. W.E. VINE, *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, Thomas Nelson, Nashville, 1997, 235-236, ἀφθαρσία defines the state of be free of decay, dissolution or interruption, an existence without corruption. According to the same source, the term *aphtharsia* is used in the NT in relation to: (a) the resurrection of body, 1Cor 15,42.50.53.54; (b) a condition associated with glory and honor and life, including perhaps a moral significance, Rom 2,7; 2Tim 1,10; this is wrongly translated "immortality" in the AV; (c) the love to Christ, that which is sincere and undiminishing, Eph 6,24 (translated "uncorruptness").

<sup>24</sup> In the same dictionary mentioned in the previous footnote, the term is defined as "not liable to corruption or decay, incorruptible" and refers to the meanings used in the New Testament: is used of (a) God, Rom 1,23; 1Tim 1,17 (AV, "immortal"); (b) the raised dead, 1Cor 15,52; (c) rewards given to the saints hereafter, metaphorically described as a "crown," 1Cor 9,25; (d) the eternal inheritance of the saints, 1Pet 1,4; (e) the Word of God, as incorruptible" seed, 1Pet 1,23; (f) a

ontological and soteriological valences. The significances of the term in the Pauline texts will be assessed from an anthropological perspective, as proven by the exegesis of the passages where it appears.

The noun form ἀφθαρσία is derived from the negative particle α (not) and the verb φθείρω<sup>25</sup>. The term *aphtharsia* is translated as incorruptibility, as an antonym for corruption, destruction and degradation. This corruptive state of man appears in the New Testament in several instances with distinct meanings in the Pauline texts which refer to: man's body in 1Cor 3,17a ("If anyone destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him") and 2Cor 7,2 ("Open your hearts to us. We have wronged no one, we have corrupted no one, we have cheated no one"); behaviour, in 1Cor 15,33 ("Do not be deceived: Evil company corrupts good habits"); man's thoughts, in 2Cor 11,3 ("But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ"); man's fallen state and the passions, in Eph 4,22 ("that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man who grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts"). The state of incorruptibility is given several meanings, as we shall see from the eight texts where *aphtharsia* appears at the Apostle Paul in the noun form. The adjective form of the term incorruptibility appears at Apostle Paul in four passages, two of which mention God, the other two referring to the human being. As for the man, incorruptibility points to the eschatological dimension and brings into discussion both the reward and the transformation that resurrection brings. In this paper we shall analyze all eleven occurrences of *aphtharsia* in Paul's Epistles structuring them according to the biblical texts in four groups: Romans, Corinthians, Ephesians and the Pastoral Epistles.

### 3.1. Romans

In Paul's letter to the Christians in Rome the *aphtharsia* occurs two times, in Rom 1,23 and 2,7. In the structure of the epistle, after the introduction (1,1-17) two passages are present in the first part of the book (1,18-3,20) in which the major topic is the righteousness of God. The Apostle Paul introduces us in an analysis of man's sin and decline in relation to God's way of righteousness and underlines the idea of God's reward in accordance with man's faith and deeds.

meeq and quiet spirit, metaphorically spoken of as "incorruptible" apparel, 1Pet 3,4, cf. VINE, *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary*, 236.

<sup>25</sup> The term is translated *to destroy, corrupt, ruin, spoil* (cf. H.G. LIDDELL and R. SCOTT, *A Greek – English Lexicon*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1996, 1928).

**a. Rom 1,23**

The first passage where *aphtharsia* occurs in the Pauline texts is Rom 1,23 and concerns God's being: "and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man - and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things". The text makes reference to the event from Sinai (Exod 32), when the Jews worshipped the golden calf and left God. The author quotes here two other old testamentary sources: Ps 106,20: "They exchanged their glory for an image of a bull, which eats grass" (a reference to the worship of the golden calf); Jer 2,11: "Has a nation ever changed its gods? (Yet they are not gods at all.) But my people have exchanged their Glory for worthless idols!" By means of these biblical fragments, the Apostle Paul's aim is to draw attention to the fallen state of man and to the difference between the Creator and the created being. The term incorruptible is associated with God, the uncreated and eternal being, in contrast with the created being of humans, birds and animals, all in a state of corruption.

In this occurrence of *aphtharsia* in Paul we can identify a Greek influence<sup>26</sup> via Hellenistic Judaism for Pauline thought, which implies the use of the concept of incorruptibility from an ontological perspective. The Apostle Paul observes the man's lack of judgment, having lost the ability to see the fundamental distinction which can bring light and wisdom into human existence: it is the ontological difference between the created and the uncreated, between God's being and the world's being. In a biblical way, following the sapiential tradition, the Apostle Paul uses this distinction to analyze the idolatry and its effects. This contrast between the glory of God and man's glory, between incorruptibility and corruption, which is discussed in relation to idolatry, has its roots in the Book of Wisdom of Solomon 14,12-15: "For the devising of idols was the beginning of spiritual fornication and the invention of them the corruption of life. For neither were they from the beginning, neither shall they be for ever. For by the vain glory of men they entered into the world, and therefore shall they come shortly to an end".

<sup>26</sup> J.M. Reese considers that the Epicureans used the term *aphtharsia* in an original way to explain how gods are different from men: the first are not subject to decay and are incorruptible, while the latter are liable to corruption (cf. J.M. REESE, *Hellenistic Influences on the Book of Wisdom and its Consequences*, Pontificio Istituto Biblico, Rome, 1970, 65-68). See also the analysis of the *aphtharsia* in the Greek philosophy in FELDMEIERS, *The First Letter of Peter*, 73. The Greek influence can be noticed as well in the Philo's works, but in a platonic perspective. There exists a paper of Philo whose paternity has not yet been decided upon by the specialty critics. It is about the work *On the Incorruptibility of the World*, where the idea of world's incorruptibility is discussed as a doctrine that might have been set by the philosopher Diogenes and inspired by Plato's philosophy, according to which incorruptibility is a feature of the eternal, of everything which is unborn (cf. PHILO, *Aet. I.1-XVII.150*).

We agree with the sapiential influence presented here and consider that the ironic tone of the Apostle Paul in vv 22-23 concerns the false wisdom of the idolatrous human being. Man was created in the image of God (Gen 1,28), in glory and honor (Ps 8,5) with the aim to be incorruptible (Wis 2,23), to participate to the glory of God, but now he is in a state of corruption having lost the meaning of his destiny.

The passage from Rom 1,23 asks the question: in which respect is God incorruptible? Is it shown by v. 23 which refers to idolatry<sup>27</sup>? A possible answer to this question appears in the text through the idea of change or replacement of God's glory with that of the creature's image in the act of worship. In essence, idolatry means the man's worshipping of an image made after the glory of the created being, but this glory is temporary, liable to change and corruption. While the image tries to avoid the state of corruption, even the matter of which it is made, such as gold, is still subject to the same process of decay and may be destroyed, as it happened on Mount of Sinai, when Moses burnt the golden calf in the fire. By appealing to the concept of incorruptibility, the Apostle Paul does not support the Greek dualistic vision; in exchange, he shows the ridiculous situation of the man who replaces God by images of creatures. Man in himself is corrupt in comparison to God, the only one who is incorruptible, the more so as the images or faces built by him in the attempt to create a god.

At an anthropological level, this passage is important for the shaping of the biblical thought about man. The text does not look down on the quality of the human being, nor does it cast a negative light on it through the comparison to God. It only shows the ridiculousness of its claim to define through itself and to ignore its own created nature, dependent on its creator.

#### **b. Rom 2,7**

The second passage where the term ἀφθαρσία appears in the Apostle Paul is taken from Rom 2,7 and is used in relation with the idea of a divine reward, in

<sup>27</sup> Cf. D. De WELT, *Bible Study Textbook: Romans Realized*, College Press, Joplin, Missouri, 1989, 27. J. Dunn considers that Ap. Paul's analysis also sends to Gen 1-3, to the fall of man and his claim to be like God. Such a correlation with the fall could be supported by the context in which this passage appears, case in which Ap. Paul addresses to his non-Jewish contemporaries and to their claim of wise men, contrasting through foolishness, as it is the difference between corruptible and incorruptible (cf. DUNN, *Romans 1-8*, 62). Finally, K. Barth consolidates this idea according to which at the basis of idolatry stays the loss of judgment as regards the distinction between the Creator and the created being. God is incorruptible through his pre-existence and uniqueness, while the created being finds itself in a state of corruption and relativity, as a consequence of its own choice (cf. K. BARTH, *The Epistle to the Romans*, Sixth Edition, Oxford University Press, London, 1968, 49-50).

accordance with man's faith and deeds. For the believers who do good things, the reward is eternal life, incorruptibility: "eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality<sup>28</sup>".

In the above text, the Greek incorruptibility (ἀφθαρσία) is related to glory (δόξα) and honor (τιμή), two words which express in biblical language God's purpose for the man (Ps 8,5). *Aphtharsia* occurs here in a formulation alongside the two veterotestamentary terms in order to explain what eternal life means. The apostle's statement appears in the context of the discussion about judgment according to each person's deeds (Rom 2,5-6). The passage analyzed is a part of a chiasmic structure (vv 7-10) where two categories of people<sup>29</sup> are compared as well as the outcomes of their deeds. In v 10, the formula from v 7 is modified: on one hand, instead of incorruptibility the term εἰρήνη (peace) is used, while, on the other hand, glory, honor and peace do not seem to express the effort and searches of man anymore. They are rather presented as a reward for the one who seeks the good. In antithesis, for the one who does evil, who obeys the injustice, the reward is trouble and distress (θλίψις καὶ στενοχωρία, cf. Rom 2,9). For the Apostle Paul, in this passage incorruptibility has an eschatological significance and represents a feature<sup>30</sup> of the redeemed man's life. It is a reward for the effort made in the world and concerns eternal life<sup>31</sup> with God in his kingdom (v 10).

The analysis conducted by the Apostle Paul in chapter 2 regarding God's judgement echoes from the Book of Wisdom of Solomon, chapters 11, 12 and 15, where a similar<sup>32</sup> analysis about divine judgment and the justice of his redemption

<sup>28</sup> As in most of the modern translations, the English edition of *New King James Version* translates ἀφθαρσία by immortality. In our opinion, as this study will also highlight, in the Pauline texts, the two terms, immortality and incorruptibility do not overlap, even if sometimes they can be synonymous.

<sup>29</sup> N.T. Wright considers that the passage from Rom 2,7-10 does not represent a scale that measures the deeds or the reward for each human being; it utters the truth of universality and of the justice of the divine judgement. The Pauline scale only shows several of the implications of this truth, both for the believers and for those who choose the evil, but it stresses that for God there are no favourites, the judgement for the Jews and for the other peoples being the same (cf. N.T. WRIGHT, *The Letter to the Romans*, The New Interpreter's Bible 10, Abington Press, Nashville, 2002, 440).

<sup>30</sup> Chrysostom admits that incorruptibility is the specific feature of eternity, it is the qualitative leap that man does through the holy grace, because the glory and honor are pursued and experimented by man when still being in this world (cf. CHRYSOSTOM, *Homilies on Romans 5*).

<sup>31</sup> J.A. Fitzmyer believes that in the analyzed verse the three features: glory, honor and incorruptibility, represent three qualities of man's destiny, of the new life to which he is called (cf. J.A. FITZMYER, *Romans*, The Anchor Bible, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1993, 303).

<sup>32</sup> The commentaries to the book *Romans* suggest this influence from *The Wisdom of Solomon* on Apostle Paul. In this respect, see, for example: J.D.G. DUNN, *Romans 1-8*, Word Biblical

is undertaken. But here Paul's intention is to change the Jewish perspective of the judgement which makes a distinction between the Israelites and the Gentiles. If in Wis 2,23 *aphtharsia* applies to the eternal human destiny planned by God before man's fall, in this soteriological context, Paul's aim is to show how this very man, subject to decay, can still reach his destiny. Exploring the sapiential idea of divine justice, the Apostle Paul redefines it in a new testamentary perspective presenting God's will of salvation for ἐπὶ πᾶσαν ψυχὴν ἀνθρώπου (Rom 2,9).

An explanation of the formula καθ' ὑπομονὴν ἔργου ἀγαθοῦ from Rom 2,7 can be provided in line with sapiential literature, as it is developed in the Wisdom through the relation between wisdom and incorruptibility. In Wis 6,17-19, the obedience of the wisdom's commandments or God's commandments is the guarantee of incorruptibility. Incorruptibility is defined as a man's experience in an intimate relationship with God, while man's participation to incorruptibility means a life of obedience and total dependence on God.

In Rom 2,7, incorruptibility is presented by the Apostle Paul as a feature of eternal life or even the eternal life itself. Beside the soteriological accent of this passage, we can assume that for the Apostle Paul, the Hellenistic-Jewish influence from Wisdom also allows for certain anthropological meanings. Incorruptibility, as God's reward for a proper Christian life in the world (which is "the patient continuance in doing good") represents the end that God has in view when creating man (cf. Wis 2,23). The couple "glory" and "honor" describes this destiny in a Jewish manner: "and hast crowned him with glory and honor" (Ps 8,5). The anthropologic accent of Rom 2,7 is emphasized as well as in the patristic literature. For example, Origen quotes this passage to prove the existence of freedom of will<sup>33</sup>, and Irenaeus uses it to support the reality of man's freedom and his power of choice against<sup>34</sup> the Gnostics' deterministic idea that some people are by nature bad and others good. Finally, Chrysostom connects the term incorruptibility from this passage with the resurrection of the body: "See how he has opened the door to the resurrection of our body by speaking of incorruptibility.... For all of us will rise immortal but not all to glory. Some will rise to punishment and others to life"<sup>35</sup>.

Commentary 38A, Word Books Publisher, Dallas, electronic version, 1998, 82-86; F.F. BRUCE, *Romans. An Introductory Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries 6, Inter-Varsity Press, 2008, 83-84; FITZMYER, *Romans*, 298.

<sup>33</sup> ORIGEN, *De Principiis III.1.6*.

<sup>34</sup> IRENAEUS, *AH IV.37.1-2*.

<sup>35</sup> CHRYSOSTOM, *Homilies on Romans 5*.

### 3.2. 1Corinthians

In 1Corinthians, the term *aphtharsia* occurs six times, all of them in an eschatological context, related either to God's reward, in chapter 9 or to resurrection, in chapter 15. As in Romans, in 1Corinthians the Judeo-Hellenistic influence on Paul's eschatological thought is an important one, especially when he uses the term incorruptibility.

#### a. 1Cor 9,25

In 1Cor 9,25, the Apostle Paul uses the analogy between Christian life and an athletes' life in order to highlight the exigencies the believer assumes on his road as well as the outcomes of this process that take the form of a prize, of a crown denoting stability and incorruptibility: "And everyone who competes *for the prize* is temperate in all things. Now they *do it* to obtain a perishable crown but we *for an imperishable crown*".

The contrast between corruptible (φθαρτός) and incorruptible (ἄφθαρτος) appears several times and under several forms in the book 1Corinthians. In the passage under analysis, Apostle Paul uses the image of the athletic fights in order to contrast two types<sup>36</sup> of approach of Christian life and its outcomes: the optimistic perspective of those who thought they were perfect, spiritual and who neglected the quality of their Christian life; and the biblical perspective of the man engaged, who has standards and a clear goal as well as principles guiding his life in order to reach his objective.

In this passage, incorruptibility refers to the believers' reward for the effort done on the road to faith and discusses the nature of this reward as well as the man's eternal destiny. The metaphor of the sports games, highlights that each result, either of the athletes, or of the Christians, requires rigour<sup>37</sup>, work and high standards. Still, for Christians, the stake is eternity<sup>38</sup>, while the reward or crown received is incorruptible, being the eternal life itself.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. R.A. HORSLEY, *1Corinthians*, Abingdon New Testament Commentaries, Abingdon Press, Nashville, 1998, 133.

<sup>37</sup> The Greek term ἀγωνίζομαι (from which we have the word agony) suggests this dimension through the idea of involvement in a competition, in an argument or fight with the difficulties one has to cope with or even with oneself in order to attain the desired result.

<sup>38</sup> R.F. Collins believes that the antithesis corruptible – incorruptible aims to provide the Corinthians the eschatological perspective, the value of the prize won by the believers in Christ. The text also presents the Christian vision according to which all those who believe will win the prize, not only some of them, which represents the encouragement to take the competition more seriously (cf.

Irenaeus of Lyons quotes this passage from 1Cor 9,25 in an anthropological context in which he refutes the Gnostic idea of two categories of man by nature<sup>39</sup>: "material" and "spiritual". His answer is that man was created a rational being, endowed with the power of examining and judging the reality. Without freedom, he could not know what good he has to be grateful for is, or that the communion with God is precious. Rhetorically, Irenaeus asks his opponents: "For how can those who are ignorant of good enjoy it? Or what credit is it to those who have not aimed at it? And what crown is it for those who have not followed in pursuit of it, like those victorious in the contest?" For Irenaeus, incorruptibility is the result of a struggle, not only a gift from God. Thus, the moral choice proves the true identity of man and also explains his liberty by means of the responsibility of all choices in the world.

#### **b. 1Cor 15,42-49**

In 1Cor 15, the contrast between corruptible (φθαρτός) and incorruptible (ἀφθαρτος) is used by Apostle Paul in his argument of the resurrection from the dead. For the Greeks, the main argument against the resurrection is that the body is subject to decay and by its nature it is corruptible. The Pauline answer in this chapter uses Greek dichotomist language, both for the distinctive soul – body and corruption – incorruption.

The first occurrence of the term incorruptibility in 1Cor 15 is that from 15,42: "So also *is* the resurrection of the dead. *The body* is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption" (οὕτως καὶ ἡ ἀνάστασις τῶν νεκρῶν. σπείρεται ἐν φθορᾷ, ἐγείρεται ἐν ἀφθαρσίᾳ). This passage is a part of a bigger one (vv 42-44) which represents a conclusion to the seed's image from 1Cor 15,36-41. The metaphor is used by Apostle Paul to answer the question from v 35: "How are the dead raised up? And with what body do they come?" According to the seed's metaphor, the resurrection implies a process of transformation, a passage of the body from a certain state – that of corruption and degradation, to a new one – that of incorruptibility<sup>40</sup>. The state of the man's body living in history is characterized by three terms: φθορᾷ, ἀτιμία, and ἀσθενεία, a triade, detailing the process of man's

R.F. COLLINS, *First Corinthians*, Sacra Pagina Series 7, The Liturgical Press, Collegeville, 1999, 358-360).

<sup>39</sup> IRENAEUS, *AH IV*.37.6-7.

<sup>40</sup> The antithesis between corruption and incorruption is doubled in v 43 by that between disgrace and glory and highlights the contrast between the man's weakness in history and God's power that will cause the transformation of the man's body in the moment of resurrection (cf. C.S. KEENER, *1-2 Corinthians*, New Cambridge Bible Commentary, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2005, 131-132).

transformation. The sum of all these characteristics is the σῶμα ψυχικόν (1Cor 15,44) or the “natural” body. In opposition, the resurrection will produce a dramatic change of this body into a new one that will be characterized by ἀφθαρσία, δόξη and δυνάμει. For this new body, Paul has another name: σῶμα πνευματικόν<sup>41</sup>.

An important detail in the text is that the process of man’s change to resurrection does not happen by itself, but God is the one doing that, as much as he is the one giving body to each seed. The importance of this detail has both anthropological and soteriological implications and shows that the entire process of transformation of the man’s body is part of the divine economy where God’s power manifests itself. In the Pauline biblical vision, incorruptibility is a feature of the resurrected body that man receives from God, meaning he does not have it in himself. As stated in Rom 8,11, the resurrection of the body, subject to death, is related to Christ and to his resurrection as well as to the incorruptible Holy Spirit that man receives as a gift from Christ. In accordance with Rom 8,20-23 as well, resurrection means a change<sup>42</sup> and man’s redemption from his present state of corruption, from the bondage of this process of degradation. Irenaeus also uses Rom 8,9-11 to interpret 1Cor 15,42 and the threefold comparison between the actual and future state of the human body. St. Irenaeus clarifies this distinction through the idea of participation<sup>43</sup>. By "physical body" it is understood that the human body is involved in the life of the soul. When you lose this participation, the man dies, loosens, and the body returns to earth. Once a man is raised from the dead by the Holy Spirit, the body becomes “spiritual”, that is a body involved in the life of the Spirit<sup>44</sup>, which offers eternal life. With this interpretation Irenaeus

<sup>41</sup> It seems that the Corinthians use the distinctions that occur in 1Cor 14,42-44 to oppose two kinds of people, one inferior and the other one superior. See in this regard: FEE, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 785-786; HORSLEY, *1 Corinthians*. 210-211; KEENER, *1-2 Corinthians*, 131-132.

<sup>42</sup> S. Tofană considers that “the term *hope* used by the Apostle at the end of the verse 20 (ἐφ’ ἐλπίδι) seems to be the pivot on which Paul turns from the past to the future of creation. *Negatively*, creation will be liberated from its bondage to decay (21b) and *positively*, creation will be liberated into the glorious freedom of the children of God (21c), (cf. S. TOFANĂ, “The Relation between the Destiny of Humankind and that of Creation according to Romans 8:18-23”, in T. NICKLAS and K. ZAMFIR (ed.), *Theologies of Creation in early Judaism and ancient Christianity*, De Gruyter, Göttingen, 2010, 341).

<sup>43</sup> IRENAEUS, *AH V.7-9*.

<sup>44</sup> With R.F. Collins we encounter a vision similar to that of the bishop of Lyons in the contrast between the natural and the spiritual body. This is related to the difference between their sources of life: the first is the soul and the second is the Holy Spirit, cf. COLLINS, *First Corinthians*, 567. In the same line, A.C. Thiselton believes that the relationship "physical body - pneumatic body" should be understood through the Pauline grid "psychological man - pneumatic man"; the first

refutes the Gnostic belief in the immaterial body and the idea that the physical body is denied at resurrection.

By means of the incorruptibility concept, the Apostle Paul suggests a certain type of relationship between man and God, between history and eschaton. Incorruptibility is the outcome of the redeeming work of God from which man benefits in order to live forever. This does not point to a substance continuation or a unity in essence between God and man, as the Greeks thought. Irenaeus is a thinker who undertakes an essential work of delimitating Christian anthropology from the Greek one. If at the Gnostics, man's eternity was ensured by his consubstantiality with the spiritual nature of God's being, Irenaeus affirms the transcendence of the divine being, and that incorruptibility can be obtained only through participation<sup>45</sup>, while through a relationship with God. For the bishop of Lyons, the Holy Spirit is the guarantee (pledge) of incorruptibility given to man in Church and ensuring thus his relationship with eternity (cf. Rom 8,11; Eph 1,13-14).

The eschatological accent from 1Cor 15,42-44 is significant for biblical anthropology to designate a content specific to the concept of incorruptibility in the ancient context dominated by the Greek dualistic philosophy. Under biblical terms, there is no contradiction between man's present state and the eternity to which he is resurrected, because eternal life starts with a transformation of the present fallen state of man to an incorrupt one, specific to the afterlife.

The Christological dimension of incorruptibility is developed in the next section in vv 45-49. Analyzing this passage, G. Fee believes that the distinction between the first and second Adam is a typological one and discusses the distinction between the two bodies: the one from history ("psychical") and the one after the resurrection ("pneumatic"), which is the risen and glorified body of Jesus. At the same time, this distinction refers to the two ways of existence, of the fallen man and of the one restored in Christ. By resurrection, Christ has the incorruptible body and becomes the source of the new life for those who follow him<sup>46</sup>. On the other hand, for Irenaeus, the explanation that the first Adam was made a living soul and the second Adam a life giving spirit has firstly an anthropological meaning.

one lives in his own nature, and the second in the Spirit of God. The author prefers a non-substantialist interpretation of the biblical expression "spiritual body" and defines it as a way of being or a characteristic of the new life after resurrection, cf. THISELTON, *The First Epistle to Corinthians*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary, W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, 2000, 1275-1276.

<sup>45</sup> IRENAEUS, *AH V.8.1*.

<sup>46</sup> Fee also considers that the Apostle's intention is to send a message to the Corinthians that pneumatic life in its fullness is reached, as in the case of Christ, only after resurrection (cf. FEE, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 788-790).

Man could not be made perfect at first, but he was called to perfection and this goal was imprinted in his very nature as a being that grows and develops (cf. Gen 1,28). Human perfection can be attained only by the incarnation of the Son<sup>47</sup>. Therefore, the second Adam is the culmination of God's economy that fulfils the destiny of man. He is the "archetype" that comes to give perfection to the "type" (cf. Rom 5,14) that was created in his image.

### c. 1Cor 15,50-54

The second section in 1Cor 15 in which the term *aphtharsia* occurs is the one from vv 50-54, whose main theme is eschatological and is built in a Jewish apocalyptic manner. We intend to analyze Apostle Paul's thought about incorruptibility structuring the text in three sections.

### 1Cor 15,50

In the same context of the discussion about resurrection there is the passage from 1Cor 15,50 where we come across again the contrast between corruption – incorruption: "Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption". In this text<sup>48</sup>, incorruptibility is presented by means of the idea of heritage, having the same perspective of transformation<sup>49</sup> suffered by man at the resurrection.

<sup>47</sup> IRENAEUS, *AH 5.12.1-2*.

<sup>48</sup> This Pauline passage enjoys a rich interpretative history since the Ancient times, starting with the Gnostics and Irenaeus of Lyons's reply until the modern ages. The interpretations of this passage can be split into two categories: some authors sustain that here Ap. Paul presents the idea of a break according to which the man will receive at resurrection a spiritual body and not a physical one. This is the version supported by the Gnostics, cf. E. H. PAGELS, *The gnostic Paul: gnostic exegesis of the Pauline letters*, Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1975, 85-86; M.J. OLSON, *Irenaeus, the Valentinian Gnostics and the Kingdom of God (A.H. Book V): The Debate About 1 Corinthians 15.50*, New York, Mellen Biblical Press, 1992, 32-33. The second group of authors backs the idea that the Pauline passage makes reference to the process of qualitative transformation that the man's body undergoes in the moment of resurrection, that in the Kingdom of Heavens, the body in its present form won't be able to enter. This position is supported by Church Fathers such as St. Irenaeus and Tertullian. The former allocates an important part of the V<sup>th</sup> book of his work *Adversus Haereses* to fight against the Gnostic interpretation to 1Cor 15,50, (cf. IRENAEUS, *AH V.9-14*). The latter, in his work *De Carne Domini adversus quatuor haereses*, argues against Heretics that the Son had a real body, he lived and died as a man with this kind of body, without being an illusion and that the man will have a similar body at resurrection, (cf. TERTULLIAN, *De Carne Christi V*). In the same category there are the modern comments such as: FEE, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 797-799, and FITZMYER, *First Corinthians*, 602-603.

<sup>49</sup> G. Fee thinks that the text refers to the man's body, which in this state of his historic existence is composed of "flesh and blood", and that this body will not be the Kingdom of Heavens, but only

The idea of heritage (κληρονομία) that appears in the text is very important for the correct understanding of the Pauline message from this verse. The eternal heritage, God's Kingdom, is incorruptible. Man's participation to this reality imposes a change, a transformation in accordance with its characteristics. The formulation of "flesh and blood" used by the author in this passage is not ambiguous and does not promote a type of dualism<sup>50</sup>, but it is a typically Jewish biblical syntagma to designate the man, cf. Gal 1,16 ("to reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood"), Heb 2,14a ("Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same"). In history, the man ("the flesh and blood") is corrupt, liable to corruption, therefore not able to enter eternity in such a way. In order to inherit God's Kingdom, man has to undergo a process of transformation, meaning a passage from corruption to incorruptibility.

From an anthropological perspective, the Pauline emphasis in this passage is twofold. Firstly, incorruptibility is inherited; therefore it is not an inner feature of human nature, the idea also met in Rom 2,7. Irenaeus of Lyons amplifies the anthropological perspective by stressing out the fact that in the Pauline vision the idea of heritage means that the man ("the flesh and blood") is the one taken into heritage by God's Spirit in order to become part of eternity. Irenaeus considers that the negative formula renders the idea that only "the flesh and blood" will not inherit by itself the eternal life, since man is not limited to a definition comprised of the two constitutive elements<sup>51</sup>. Secondly, the negative formula in the text does

a transfigured body will be able to enter there. The author comments that in the specialty literature there is the distinction between the living man and the dead man in the interpretation of the passage from 1Cor 15,50. The living one cannot enter the Kingdom of Heavens as he is now, because he is liable to weakness and death. Fee also underlines that this passage mentions the eschatological dimension of the Kingdom of God, and not the present one (cf. FEE, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 798-799).

<sup>50</sup> Novatian considers: "This does not mean that the substance of our flesh was condemned. On the contrary, only the guilt of the flesh is censured, the guilt which was caused by humanity's deliberate and rash rebellion against the claims of divine law" (cf. NOVATIAN, *On the Trinity* 10).

<sup>51</sup> In this context of the analysis of the Pauline text from 1Cor 15,50, St. Irenaeus uses the pneumatological dimension of man's constitution. In his opinion and contrary to the Gnostic definition, the perfect man or the redeemed man has a constitution comprising: the body, the soul and the Spirit. The expression "flesh and blood" denotes man in his fallen state, who does not have God's Spirit therefore he cannot be saved, cannot reach the Kingdom of God (cf. IRENAEUS, *AH V.9.1*). As A. Rousseau mentions in the footnote 2 from page 73, St. Irenaeus' attention does not focus on a third constitutive element of the perfect man, as some modern authors interpret, that is on the body. According to A. Rousseau, the polemic with the Gnostics leads to affirm that for St. Irenaeus the perfect man does not mean only the union of the soul with the Holy Spirit, but also a union from which the body should not miss (cf. A. ROUSSEAU, "Notes Justificatives", in

not refer to the weakness of the present whole man to reach the kingdom of God but focuses on the transformation process of the man's fallen state, a transformation taking place at the Parousia and requiring the passage of the body from the state of corruption into an incorruptible one, according to the verses following the analyzed excerpt: 1Cor 15,51-52.

### **1Cor 15,51-52**

The next Pauline passage where the term *aphtharsia* (in the adjective form ἄφθαρτος) appears is the text from 1Cor 15,52: “in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed”.

This fragment opens the entire pleading of Apostle Paul about man's change at the Parousia from vv 50-58. The antithetic construction corruptible – incorruptible, occurring firstly in v 42, is resumed in v 50, and appears implicitly in this passage where Apostle Paul speaks about the man who has not yet been fully restored, including here both the dead and the living at the end of history.

The apocalyptic emphasis from this excerpt, as well as the difference between this life and the afterlife, represent a recurrent theme in Judaic apocalyptic literature. An example of the apocalyptic echoes in Pauline eschatology can be identified in the *Apocalypse of Baruch*<sup>52</sup>. In this book the contrast corruptible – incorruptible appears several times, especially in the speech of Baruch<sup>53</sup>. In his vision, the world is subjected to corruption and death and it will end, whereas the upcoming world is incorruptible and eternal. This new life will start with the resurrection of the dead and the victory over death: “For corruption shall take those that belong to it, and life those that belong to it. And the dust shall

IRÉNÉE de Lyons, *Contre les heresies, Livre V, Tome I, Sources Chretiennes, Les Editions du Cerf, Paris, 1969, 226*.

<sup>52</sup> R.F. Collins considers that Apostle Paul makes use of the apocalyptic style, specific to the Apocalypse of Baruch, 4Ezra and to the book 1Enoch, in order to present the incompatibility between the present state of man and that at the Parousia. This incompatibility is especially presented by means of the antithesis corruptible – incorruptible that occurs several times in 1Cor 15,50-58, cf. COLLINS, *First Corinthians, 575-577*.

<sup>53</sup> “Because whatever is now is nothing, But that which shall be is very great. For everything that is corruptible shall pass away, and everything that dies shall depart, and all the present time shall be forgotten... And the new world (comes) which does not turn to corruption those who depart to its blessedness, And has no mercy on those who depart to torment, And leads not to perdition those who live in it” (cf. Apoc Bar 44,8-12). “For that time is the consummation of that which is corruptible, And the beginning of that which is not corruptible” (cf. Apoc Bar 74,2).

be called, and there shall be said to it: *Give back that which is not thine, and raise up all that thou hast kept until its time*” (cf. Apoc Bar 42,7-8).

The Pauline text from 1Cor 15,52 presents the biblical vision about the quality of the resurrected man, whose body will be incorruptible<sup>54</sup>. This characteristic will belong both to those who have been resurrected and to those living in the moment of the Parousia, since the latter will gain incorruptibility without knowing death. Incorruptibility is the feature of the Kingdom of God, and its inauguration is described by the Apostle Paul in apocalyptic words, following the model of Jewish literature. One last event shall mark history and put an end to it: the transformation of the fallen and corrupt state of man into the incorruptibility condition for eternity.

### **1Cor 15,53-54**

The change brought about by the resurrection is suggested by the Apostle Paul by means of the image of clothing, as it is told in 1Cor 15,53-54, a passage where the term incorruptibility appears twice: “For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal *must* put on immortality. So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: *Death is swallowed up in victory*”.

The above-cited fragment restarts under an imperative from the theme of the transformation of man’s body at the resurrection in order to inherit the Kingdom of Heaven. Apostle Paul’s argument has two main dimensions: a veterotestamentary one of the resurrection of the body (cf. Dan 12,2), and a Greek one, of the distinction between body and soul. It should be noticed that the author’s emphasis falls on *this* body liable to corruption and death. The process of restoration starts from this body<sup>55</sup>. In accordance with the text in Is 25,8 (“He will swallow up death forever! The Sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove the disgrace of his people from all the earth. The Lord has spoken”), the accomplishment of God’s plan complies with the victory over death and involves this process of transformation of man’s body from the corruption state to incorruptibility and not his elimination. The end of the divine economy implies the

<sup>54</sup> A.C. Thiselton suggests that the term ἄφθαρτος should be understood through the semantics of the opposite term φθορά, proposing a dynamic perspective. Being incorruptible does not mean something static, but a dynamic state, something bearing fruit, the rich fruits of a life with God. Thus, the incorruptible body from resurrection is a body opposed to the corrupted one, it is a body providing the fruits of eternal life (cf. A.C. THISELTON, *The First Epistle to Corinthians*, 1296-1297).

<sup>55</sup> “While the identical body is raised up, it will be transformed by the putting on of incorruption, as iron exposed to fire is made incandescent. This occurs in a manner known only to the Lord who raises the dead” (cf. CYRIL OF JERUSALEM, *Catechetical Lectures* 8.18).

removal of death and corruption from creation. Even if for man, the horizon is eschatological, the victory over death and corruption is already undertaken by Christ and will be shared by the believers.

The antithesis corruption - incorruption<sup>56</sup> from the text above is doubled<sup>57</sup> by the relationship between the mortal-immortal in order to better clarify the process of man's transformation through his death and resurrection. The idea of unclenching and clothing suggests that the Pauline thought has in view the change of a state or a man's characteristic from now into another state in the moment of resurrection. This idea is supported by a similar passage from 2Cor 5,1-4, where it is explicitly presented that the man's body will undergo a change, similarly with the image of clothing<sup>58</sup>. Both in 1Cor 15,51-54 and in 2Cor 5,1-4, the Apostle's emphasis falls on what will happen at the Parousia: the man's change from the fallen state of corruption into incorruptibility corresponding to eternity. The apostle's hope is to be alive at the moment of the Parousia, so that the process of change will not imply death. The idea of putting a new tent on the old one suggests that the latter is not lost, but it is recuperated<sup>59</sup> in the process of transformation, the anthropological

<sup>56</sup> G. Fee considers that the passage from 1Cor 15,53 intends the transformation of all bodies, of the living and of the dead, in order to enter the Kingdom of Heavens. The author says that what was negatively told in 15,50 is positively restarted in 15,53. The contrast is created between man's body in history and Christ's resurrected body. The conclusion is that the bodies found in their present state, as well as those buried, cannot inherit the Kingdom of heavens, but they should be clothed, similarly to Christ's body, in incorruptibility and immortality (cf. FEE, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 799-803).

<sup>57</sup> J.A. Fitzmyer states that in the Pauline text we have two discontinuous elements between the present man and the eschatological one, while the pair incorruptible – immortal refers to the biblical vision of the Old Testament about resurrection and not to the Greek philosophic dualism (cf. FITZMYER, *First Corinthians*, 605-606).

<sup>58</sup> The theme of clothing is used by the Gnostics in a variant met in the *Gospel of Philip*, according to which the "naked" man is the one dressed in his physical body, as this type of man remains "undressed" of his spirit. The inverse process would happen at resurrection, through the abandonment of the physical body and the clothing of a spiritual one, cf. *The Gospel of Philip 23b*. In St. Paul's language, the Gnostic image is practically reversed and the stress is on the biblical vision about man's resurrection in a material body and not in a pneumatic one as the Gnostics proposed.

<sup>59</sup> R.P. Martin suggests that the Pauline text from 2Cor 5,1-4 would support the idea that the clothing metaphor points especially to the theme of death and of the intermediary state of man. After death, the man will remain "naked" or undressed, meaning without body, implying he is not complete and he needs to be dressed up. The clothing over the old tent of the new one refers to the transformation that the Parousia brings to those left alive at that moment (cf. R.P. MARTIN, *2Corinthians*, Word Biblical Commentary 40, Word Books Publisher, electronic ed., Dallas, 1986, 107).

emphasis being placed on the compound nature and on the unity of the human being.

We agree with Irenaeus' theological vision on the analyzed paragraph, that builds a Christological anthropology and considers that man's incorruptibility is a Christological accomplishment. The aim of the Son's incarnation is man's incorruptibility and the attainment of this goal involves an ontological exigency. If the Son of God had not become a human being, man could not have been united with God; he could not have received the adoptive filiation, the communion with God and incorruptibility. In a rhetorical manner, Irenaeus speaks to the Gnostics who do not believe in the Son's incarnation<sup>60</sup>: "But how could we be joined to incorruptibility and immortality, unless, first, incorruptibility and immortality had become that which we also are, so that the corruptible might be swallowed up by incorruptibility, and the mortal by immortality, that might receive the adoption of sons?". This Christological emphasis is present in the Pauline text in 1Cor 15,57, since the accomplishment of God's plan, the victory over death, is conducted in Christ.

### 3.3 Ephesians

In the passage from Eph 6,24, there is another occurrence of the term incorruptibility at Apostle Paul<sup>61</sup>, and the commentators were surprised to find this complex term in a benediction at the end of the epistle: "Grace *be* with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity (ή χάρις μετά πάντων τῶν ἀγαπώντων τὸν κύριον ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν ἐν ἀφθαρσίᾳ).

<sup>60</sup> IRÉNAEUS, *AH III.19.1*.

<sup>61</sup> On the authorship of the epistle to the Ephesians there are at least four positions: "those who accept Paul as the author, those who see Paul as responsible for an original script that has been augmented by an editor, those who reject Pauline authorship, and those who think that there is not enough evidence to decide" (cf. D.A. CARSON and D.J. MOO, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 2005, 486). This study assumes the first position.

In the modern translations<sup>62</sup>, this term is perceived in at least two different ways, being applied either to God, or to man. When referring to God, incorruptibility is associated with: his love manifesting in the relationship with the believers – an unaltered, stable and pure love; his economy, accompanying people in the world – the apostle’s benediction refers to God’s grace and incorruptibility with which the believers should be blessed. When applied to man, the incorruptibility is a state of the person loving God who manifests himself in this world – one of sincerity and purity.

An interpretation of this passage applied to the actual Christian experience is told by Jerome in his treatise *Against Jovinianus* in a context referring to chastity. The author thinks that the blessing which concludes the epistle to the Ephesians may be applied to the believers. The antithesis corruption – incorruption is understood by Jerome through the Pauline contrast flesh – Spirit (cf. Gal 5,16-17; 6,8). He stresses that incorruptibility is a feature of actual Christian life: “For the grace of God hath appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us, to the intent that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live purely and righteously and godly in this present world<sup>63</sup>”. In a similar way, Gregory of Nyssa interprets Eph 6,24 and identifies the term *aphtharsia* with virginity<sup>64</sup>, but in a spiritual sense. In Gregory’s treatise, incorruptibility is first applied to God in a Trinitarian construction: the Father is incorruptible, the Only-begotten God is incorruptible, and the Holy Spirit has an incorruptible purity<sup>65</sup>. By the incarnation of the incorruptible Son of God, the believers have the possibility of participating to his purity and so they become partakers of His glory.

<sup>62</sup> For instance, the translation KJV specifies the man’s attitude: “Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity”. The French translation BFC mentions the feature of love: “Que la grâce de Dieu soit avec tous ceux qui aiment notre Seigneur Jésus-Christ d’un amour inaltérable”. A.T. Lincoln highlights three possible approaches of the term incorruptibility in this fragment, analyzing the literature interpretations. The first approach associates incorruptibility with love and points to the quality of relations within the Christian community. The second position relates the term ἀφθαρσία to the syntagma “Our Lord Jesus Christ” and mentions that He is in incorruptibility. Finally, the author affirms a third position that associates incorruptibility with the term grace from the beginning of the verse and proposes the translation: *Grace be with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ, grace and immortality* (cf. A.T. LINCOLN, *Ephesians*, Word Biblical Commentary 42, Word Books Publisher, electronic ed., Dallas, 1990, 466).

<sup>63</sup> JEROME, *Against Jovinianus*, I.38.

<sup>64</sup> GREGORY OF NYSSA, *On Virginity*, 1.

<sup>65</sup> GREGORY OF NYSSA, *On Virginity*, 2.

If we accept that incorruptibility refers to the Christian's quality, to his attitude within Christian relationships<sup>66</sup>, the use of the term ἀφθαρσία shows a Pauline understanding according to which incorruptibility is not a feature exclusively reserved to the Eschaton, but it reaches a man's life in history, offering a way of life while reminding him of the resemblance with God. The use of the term proposed by A.T. Lincoln sustains the same idea of the presence of eternal life characteristics in history, in the Christian community where the living presence of God is manifested.

### 3.4. Pastoral Epistles

In the Pastoral Epistles<sup>67</sup>, the term *aphtharsia* appears two times: as a part of a doxology, in 1Tim 1,17, and in a soteriological context in 2Tim 1,10.

#### a. 1Tim 1,17

The first passage from 1Tim 1,17 is a liturgical text where God is praised for the grace and divine work in a man's life: "Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, to God who alone is wise, *be* honor and glory forever and ever. Amen." (Τῷ δὲ βασιλεῖ τῶν αἰώνων, ἀφθάρτῳ ἀοράτῳ μόνῳ θεῷ, τιμὴ καὶ δόξα εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων, ἀμήν)

Apostle Paul's doxology contains two affirmative and two negative expressions about the person of God. He is named King of the ages and the only God in order to emphasize monotheism. The negative formulas are unseen or invisible and incorruptible<sup>68</sup> (as in Rom 1, 23). For Gregory of Nyssa, "through these titles, he suggests conceptions which represent to us transcendent power<sup>69</sup>". The terms unseen and incorruptible are frequently used in ancient thought for

<sup>66</sup> F. Foulkes grasps a potential connection of the analyzed passage with that from 1Cor 13,8, in order to describe both God's love for men and the reality of Christian love in history (cf. F. FOULKES, *Ephesians*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries 10, Inter-Varsity Press, electronic ed., Downers Grove, 2008, 187).

<sup>67</sup> The specialty critics have brought numerous objections to the Pastoral Epistles, regarding the Pauline authorship and proposing other names, such as, for example, that of the apostle Luke (cf. P.M. ZEHR, *1 & 2 Timothy, Titus*, Believers Church Bible Commentary, Herald Press, Scottdale, 2010, 325-332). In this study, we adopt the Pauline authorship of the Pastoral Epistles.

<sup>68</sup> In this passage P.M. Zehr translates ἀφθαρτος by incorruptible and thinks that it is a characteristic of Christ contrasting with the nature of the created beings (cf. ZEHR, *1 & 2 Timothy, Titus*, 47).

<sup>69</sup> GREGORY OF NYSSA, *Against Eunomius*, 2.11.

divinity, but for Apostle Paul these features of the divine being are used as a token of the recognition of his redeeming work<sup>70</sup>.

The Pauline biblical vision anchors the incorruptible character of God in the redemption economy in Christ, as Zehr and de Welt suggest. Thus, the true, unseen and incorrupt God is the one who “came into the world to save sinners” (cf. 1Tim 1,15). In the context of that time, by means of the term king addressed to the Lord Jesus Christ, the text may suggest man’s royal dignity. The terms unseen and incorruptible represent the specific difference among the Saviour’s royalty, the one who is the true God, in contrast with any other human king, who does not have these divine features. Though, by incarnation, these features reach the human level and give man the possibility of communion with eternal life. At an anthropological level, the analyzed passage is important in its Christological dimension. Christ’s incorruptibility does not aim only at his holiness, but also his assumed humanity. Incarnation answers the ontological exigency requested by the concept of incorruptibility: man does not have incorruptibility in himself; he receives it through participation and communion with God.

#### **b. 2Tim 1,10**

The last Pauline text where the term incorruptibility appears in its substantive form is 2Tim 1,10: “but has now been revealed by the appearance of our Saviour Jesus Christ, *who* has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel”.

In most of the modern translations of this passage, for ἀφθαρσία the term immortality is used<sup>71</sup> or everlastingness. The translators’ option may have been suggested by the use of the antithesis death – life. Still it is to be remarked that at St. Paul, immortality and incorruptibility do not overlap. According to this text, incorruptibility is the outcome of the redeeming work of Jesus Christ who conquered death, while man is related to this reality through the Gospels. It should

<sup>70</sup> D. de Welt observes that “all the qualities of God here described should be associated with the thought of His providing salvation in Christ. Notice: He is King, therefore able to save. He is ruler over all men of all ages and hence can save all of them; He is not subject to corruption; He shares His nature with man and thus gives him an eternal salvation; He is invisible to mortal eye; He is of Spirit-quality thus superceding this temporal sphere” (cf. D. de WELT, *Paul’s Letters to Timothy and Titus*, College Press, Joplin, Missouri, 1961, 43).

<sup>71</sup> P.M. Zehr, who also translates by immortality, believes that vv 9-10 of this passage are parts of a chiasmic structure, the text under analysis being right in its center and pointing to the Gospel’s nature. The author correlates the term ἀφθαρσία with 1Tim 1,17 and thinks it is a characteristic of God. Through the Gospel, the man receives the liberation from the power of death and the eternal life of God, cf. ZEHR, 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus, 159-163.

be underlined once again that in the Pauline vision, the redeeming work of the Son of God has real implications in history. Life and incorruptibility are offered to man through the Gospel, making it possible to benefit from what the Saviour has done in the entire economy of the resurrection.

By the association of the two terms<sup>72</sup>, life and incorruptibility, the Apostle Paul intends to specify the quality of the life Christ brings to man. The idea of revelation of this incorruptible life admits anthropological valences in relation to v 9. God's plan for eternity is that man should obtain this life through Christ. The Son's incarnation represents the accomplishment of this plan, so that man already participates in eternal life, to incorruptibility through the Gospel.

#### 4. Conclusions

The biblical meaning of the term incorruptibility is twofold: it refers to God and to the human being. When applied to God, incorruptibility is a divine feature which, along with immortality, characterizes eternity and the lack of a necessity in God. Incorruptibility shows perfection and self-sufficiency in itself of the divine being who was revealed in the Scriptures. This does not mean an abstract quality of the divine transcendent essence, but the personal character of the biblical God deeply involved in the relationship with man and the world. Incorruptibility also defines God's entire economy, his actions and words, especially those uttered after the Son's incarnation.

At an anthropological level, the Pauline vision about incorruptibility is different from the Greek one, constructed from the Bible and centered on the event of the resurrection of God's Son. Dismissing the soteriologic reductionism regarding only the redemption of the soul, Apostle Paul redefines the concept of incorruptibility, applying it to the man within a holistic vision. The redemption and state of incorruptibility at resurrection focus the entire man. The Pauline response to the heretic challenges, such as the Gnostic one includes the data of the Christian revelation, and the dialogue with the Hellenism implies a reorganisation of the Greek philosophic material as well as a conceptual reshaping in line with the biblical anthropology. Incorruptibility is thus defined in a theological structure where Christological anthropology is developed, as well as soteriology, which is aimed at man's salvation in his wholeness.

When applied to man, *aphtharsia* appears in the Pauline texts with soteriological and ontological implications. Incorruptibility represents the feature of the restored man, of the whole man changed from the fallen one. This process happens at the resurrection and is related to Christ, the one who united in himself

<sup>72</sup> Cf. D. GUTHRIE, *Pastoral Epistles: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries 14, Inter-Varsity Press, electronic ed., Downers Grove, 2008, 147.

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the two natures: divine and human. *Aphtharsia* is an attribute of eternal life and the man is invited to participate to this life as a heritage from God. For Apostle Paul, incorruptibility is at the same time the result of a struggle and a gift of God's grace. The contrast corruption – incorruption becomes the equation of the fallen man as a result of his freedom, and the solution requires the process of salvation. The incarnation of the Son is the way God accomplishes both goals: to conquer death and “cloth” man in incorruptibility; to bring man closer to God, that is to give him the incorruptibility in stability, for eternity.

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