

Voluntary Death in view of the Eastern Orthodox Christian and Jain Tradition

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During Alexander's campaign to the East, the Greeks met with the "gymnosophists" (*γυμνοσοφισταί*), as they called them. Namely, the "naked sages"; ascetics who followed a special way of living in accordance with the tenets of their religious tradition. One of them, Kálanos (Κάλανος) or Kalanós (Καλανός) –probably a name derived from "kallāṇa", an Indian word for greeting–, followed Alexander on his return to Babylon. However, exhausted by a disease and old age, he decided to end his life by self-immolation. The incident took place at Susa, in the year 323 BC, although Alexander had tried to dissuade him from this course of action. Then, according to the historical references of the time, when the incident took place some of the Greek spectators considered him mad, others as someone that was in vain in seeking glory for his ability to withstand pain and some others admired Kálanos's determination to ascend on the pyre and the stillness of his body throughout the ceremony till it turned to ashes¹.

It is difficult to define if Kálanos or Kalanós as a "gymnosophist" was a Hindu, a Jain, or a Buddhist. The fact that Kálanos chose self-immolation

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1. Δ. Κ. Βελισσαρόπουλος, *Ἑλληνες καὶ Ἰνδοί – Ἡ συνάντηση δύο κόσμων*, τ. 1ος, ἐκδ. Βιβλιοπωλεῖο τῆς Ἑστίας, Ἀθήνα 1990, pp. 159-165, 182-185, 196. G. T. Halkias, "The Self Immolation of Kalanos and other Luminous Encounters Among Greeks and Indian Buddhists in the Hellenistic World", *Journal of the Oxford Centre for Buddhist Studies*, Vol. 8, May 2015, pp. 163-186, 175.

to end his life instead of gradual starvation (a choice appertained to Jain tradition) reinforces the hypothesis that he was probably a Buddhist. That hypothesis is based on reliable scriptural data and solid arguments exposed by Prof. Georgios T. Halkias in one of his articles².

However, Kálanos's act and determination brings to mind that man is a totally free being. In contrast to the irrational animals which are subjugated to their needs and instincts, humans are capable of controlling both. Having free will and moral consciousness they are able to overcome every physical need and act as sovereign persons. Moreover, human beings can determine their lives freely and turn them to an end willingly. As a result, some people, from the ancient times till the present day, decide to end their lives, either by love to God or to fellow-beings, or for a noble ideal, while in some cases due to a failure or despair.

Jainism and Eastern Orthodox Christianity as block realities and religious entities

Coming back to the historical reference, it should be mentioned that by the end of the Hellenistic period and the rise of the Roman Empire, the majority of Greeks converted gradually to a new religion, namely Christianity³. The encounter of this new religion with Greek language and thought shaped a form of Christianity which can be found in the doctrines of the Eastern Orthodox Church⁴, as well as its cultural expression which

2. G. T. Halkias, "The Self-immolation of Kalanos and other Luminous Encounters Among Greeks and Indian Buddhists in the Hellenistic World", *Journal of the Oxford Center for Buddhist Studies*, 8 (2015), pp. 163-186.

3. After the lapse of a long time, nearly 2,000 years, present-day Greeks met contemporary Jain scholars and believers in an International Conference and Exhibition on Jain History, Art & Culture, held at the Museum of Asian Art, Corfu on 17-18 November 2018. Scholars from Greece, India and Pakistan participated in that Conference. See <https://elinepa.org/el/jain-symposium>, retrieved May 31st 2021.

4. For standard introductory works concerning the Orthodox Church see Bishop Kallistos (Timothy) Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, Penguin Books, New York 1993. St. S. Harakas, *The Orthodox Church: 455 Questions and Answers*, Light & Life Publishing Company, Minneapolis 1987. See also by the same author, "Christianity: Christianity in Eastern

took place in the geographical area of the eastern part of the Roman Empire, Romania (Ρωμανία), or Byzantine Empire, as it is more known. The formation of creed didn't take place at once, since it was amenable constantly to the need of clarifications and the correct interpretation of the Holy Bible due to various heretical views. By the time, the Orthodox Christianity expanded beyond the boundaries of the Eastern Roman Empire embracing other nations and countries.

Nowadays, the Eastern Orthodox Church is the second-largest Christian church, after the Roman Catholic Church, with over 220 million baptized members⁵. The word *orthodox* ("right believing") has traditionally been used in the Greek-speaking Christian world to designate communities or individuals who preserved the true faith (as defined by the seven Ecumenical Councils), as opposed to those who were declared heretical. The official designation of the church in Eastern Orthodox liturgical or canonical texts is "the Orthodox Catholic Church". Because of the historical links of Eastern Orthodoxy to the Eastern Roman Empire and Constantinople, however, in English usage it is referred to as the "Greek Orthodox" Church. But this term is sometimes misleading, especially when applied to Russian or Slavic churches and to the Orthodox communities in Western Europe and America.

It should also be mentioned that apart from the Roman Catholic Church and the various Protestant churches and denominations, the Eastern Orthodox Church constitutes a separate tradition from the so-called Oriental Orthodox Communion as well. Nowadays, that Communion includes the Armenian Apostolic Church, the Ethiopian Tewahedo Orthodox Church, the Eritrean Tewahedo Orthodox Church, the Coptic Orthodox Church of Alexandria, the Syriac Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and All

Europe", in Lindsay Jones (ed. in chief), *Encyclopedia of Religion*, vol. 3, Thomson Gale, Farmington Hills, 2nd ed. 2005, pp. 1680-1687 and "Greek Orthodox Church" in 6th volume of *Encyclopedia of Religion*, pp. 3656-3659. J. Meyendorff, *The Orthodox Church: Its Path and Its Role in the World Today*, St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, Crestwood NY (1962), revised 4th ed. 1996. Th. E. Fitzgerald, *The Orthodox Church*, Preager Publishers, Westport 1998. J. A. McGuckin, *The Orthodox Church*, John Wiley and Sons Ltd., Chichester 2010 and *The Eastern Orthodox Church: A New History*, Yale University Press, 2020.

5. Joanne O'Brien and M. Palmer, *The Atlas of Religion*, Earthscan, London 2007, p. 22; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eastern_Orthodoxy_by_country, retrieved August 14th 2021.

the East, and the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church of India, which are designated as “anti-Chalcedonian” or “non-Chalcedonian” due to the fact that they do not accept the Definition of the Council of Chalcedon (451) regarding the divine and human natures of Jesus.

The Eastern Orthodox Church operates as a communion of regional churches, which are either autocephalous (“self-headed”), or lower-ranking “autonomous” (the Greek term for “self-governing”) each governed by its bishops in local Synods. These include the fourteen autocephalous churches: that means the four senior Patriarchates (the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, the Patriarchate of Alexandria and All Africa, the Patriarchate of Antioch and All the East [with headquarters in Damascus, Syria] and the Patriarchate of Jerusalem), the five junior Patriarchates (the Patriarchate of Russia, the Patriarchate of Serbia, the Patriarchate of Romania, the Patriarchate of Bulgaria, and the Patriarchate of Georgia), the Autocephalous Archbishoprics of Greece, Cyprus, Poland, Albania, Czech and Slovakia, and Ukraine.

The vicissitudes of history have greatly modified the internal structure of the Eastern Orthodox Church, but even today the bulk of its members live in the same geographic areas. More specifically, the majority of the Eastern Orthodox Christians live mainly in South East and Eastern Europe, Georgia and some communities in Caucasus region and Siberia reaching the remote regions of East Russia. There are also smaller communities in Africa, the Eastern Mediterranean, and in the Middle East, where they are decreasing due to forced migration because of increased religious persecution in recent years. There are also many in other parts of the world (U.S.A., for example⁶) formed through diaspora⁷, conversions, and missionary activity.

The Eastern Orthodox Church has no central doctrinal or governmental authority analogous to the bishop of Rome or the Roman Catholic Pope, but the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople is recognized by all as *primus inter pares* (“first among equals”, “πρῶτος μεταξύ ἴσων”) of the

6. Catherine L. Albanese, “Christianity: Christianity in North America”, Lindsay Jones (ed. in chief), *Encyclopedia of Religion*, vol. 3, Thomson Gale, Farmington Hills, 2nd ed. 2005, pp. 1708-1717, 1713.

7. St. S. Harakas, “Greek Orthodox Church”, in Lindsay Jones (ed. in chief), *Encyclopedia of Religion*, vol. 6, Thomson Gale, Farmington Hills, 2nd ed. 2005, pp. 3657-3659.

bishops. As one of the oldest surviving religious institutions in the world, the Eastern Orthodox Church has played a prominent role in the history and culture of Eastern and Southeastern Orthodox Europe, the Caucasus and the Near East. Eastern Orthodox theology is based on Holy Tradition which incorporates the Holy Scriptures, the dogmatic Decrees of the Seven Ecumenical Councils, and the teaching of the Church Fathers. The Eastern Orthodox Church teaches that it is the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church established by Jesus Christ in his Great Commission and that its bishops are the successors of Christ's apostles. It maintains that it practices the original Christian faith, as passed down by Holy Tradition.

It recognizes seven major sacraments, of which the Eucharist is the principal one, celebrated liturgically in synaxis. The Church teaches that through consecration invoked by a priest, the sacrificial bread and wine become the body and the blood of Christ. The Virgin Mary is venerated in Eastern Orthodox Church as the God-bearer, honored in devotions.

In the Eastern Orthodox Church apart from the clergy and the laity, there is a well-established and long-living ascetic and monastic tradition starting in the middle of the 3rd century. Generally, for all of them (that means the clergy, the laity and the ascetics [monks and nuns]), repentance, acts motivated by love towards other human beings (almsgiving, for example), repeated participation to the sacraments of Confession and the Holy Eucharist play the main role leading to Salvation. This attitude towards life is based on the words of Jesus Christ himself *"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it, You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets"*⁸.

On the other hand, Jainism, traditionally known as Jain Dharma, is an ancient Indian religion, which does not recognize the authority of the basic Hindu scriptures, that is the Vedas⁹. It traces its spiritual ideas and

8. *Mat. 22, 37-40: «ἀγαπήσεις Κύριον τὸν Θεόν σου ἐν ὅλῃ τῇ διανοίᾳ σου. αὕτη ἐστὶ πρώτη καὶ μεγάλη ἐντολή. δευτέρα δὲ ὁμοία αὐτῇ· ἀγαπήσεις τὸν πλησίον σου ὡς σεαυτόν. ἐν ταύταις ταῖς δυσὶν ἐντολαῖς ὅλος ὁ νόμος καὶ οἱ προφῆται».*

9. On Jainism valuable introductory works recommended: P. Balcerowicz, *Essays in Jaina Philosophy and Religion*, Motilal Banarsidas, Delhi 2003. P. Dundas, *The Jains*, Routledge, London and New York (1992), 2002. By the same author, "Jainism", in Lindsay Jones (ed.

history through a succession of twenty-four leaders or tīrthaṅkaras (lit. “ford-makers”), with the first in current time cycle being Rishabhanatha (R̥ṣabhanātha), whom the tradition holds to have lived millions of years ago, the twenty-third tīrthaṅkara, Pārśvanātha, whom historians date to 9th century BC, and the 24th tīrthaṅkara, Mahāvīra around 600 BC Jainism is considered to be an eternal dharma (anadi-anat) with the tīrthaṅkaras guiding every cosmic period.

The main religious premises of the Jain dharma are ahimsā (non-violence), anekāntavāda (many-sidedness), aparigraha (non-attachment) and asceticism (abstinence from sensual pleasures). Devout Jains take five main vows: ahimsā (non-violence), satya (truthfulness), asteya (not stealing), brahmacharya (sexual continence) and aparigraha (non-possessiveness). These principles have affected Jain culture in many ways, such as leading to a predominantly vegetarian lifestyle.

Jainism is one of the world’s oldest continuously-practiced religions, and has two major ancient sub-traditions, Digambaras and Śvetāmbaras, with different views on ascetic practices, gender, and which texts can be considered canonical; both have mendicants supported by laypersons (śrāvakas and śrāvikas). The religion has approximately five to six million followers, mostly in India¹⁰. Outside India, some of the largest communities are in Canada, Europe, and the United States. Jain Dharma is growing in Japan, where more than 5,000 ethnic Japanese families have converted to Jainism in the 2010-2020 decade¹¹.

in chief), *Encyclopedia of Religion*, vol. 7, 2nd ed., Thomson Gale, Farmington Hills 2005, pp. 4764-4772. H. von Glasenapp, *Jainism-An Indian Religion of Salvation [Der Jainismus: Eine Indische Erlösungsreligion, 1925]*, transl. Shr. B. Shrotri, Motilal Banarsidass, New Delhi 1999. Padmanabh S. Jaini, *The Jaina Path of Purification*, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi 1998. J. D. Long, *Jainism: An Introduction*, I. B. Tauris, London & New York (2009) 2013. W. Schubring, *The Religion of the Jainas*, transl. by Amulyachandra Sen and T. C. Burke, Sanskrit College, Calcutta 1966, repr. 1982. Kristi L. Wiley, *The A to Z of Jainism*, The A to Z Guide Series, No. 38, The Scarecrow Press, INC, Plymouth 2009. Άπ. Μιχαηλίδης, «Τζαϊνισμός», *Θρησκευτολογικὸ Λεξικόν*, ἔκδ. Ἑλληνικὰ Γράμματα, Ἀθήνα 2000, pp. 529-532.

10. Joanne O’Brien and M. Palmer, *The Atlas of Religion, op.cit.*, p. 26; https://worldatlas.com/articles/countries_with_the_largest_jain_populations.htm, retrieved August 14th 2021; https://icetonline.com/articles/countries_with_the_largest_jain_populations, retrieved August 14th 2021.

11. K. C. Archana, “Jainism Gains Traction In Japan, Thousands Travel To India To

What's the meaning and treatment of voluntary death in Eastern Orthodox Tradition?

Coming back to the main subject of the present article, that is the treatment of voluntary death, we could say that for Christianity proportional to the formation of dogma was its view concerning the handling of human life.

For the Eastern Orthodox Church both human life and the existence of the universe is a gift from God. The source of life is God himself¹², as Creator and Preserver of the whole world. Especially for mankind He is not only considered as its Creator but as its Father as well¹³. Consequently, every human being despite of race, sex, age, nation, and religious denomination is His child.

Given that, man has no right to end life¹⁴. So, in Greece, for example, “God gives life and God takes it”, it’s a common saying among members of the Orthodox Church. However, taking into account that many times in its history the humankind has turned to violence we must distinguish: natural death which is caused either by old age or disease; unexpected death caused either by accident or sudden lesion; violent death caused on culpability of someone else (meaning death by assassination, war, or by execution). Apart of these kinds of death, there is voluntary death which also varies¹⁵.

Transition From Zen to Jain”, Feb 23, 2020, <https://indiatimes.com/treading/human-interest/Jainism-gains-traction-in-japan-thousands-travel-to-india-to-traction-from-zen-to-jain-506991.html>, retrieved May 25th 2021.

12. 2 Mac. 14, 46.

13. Si. 23, 1. 4.

14. Rom. 14, 7-8: «οὐδείς γὰρ ἑαυτῷ ζῆ καὶ οὐδείς ἑαυτῷ ἀποθνήσκει· ἐάν τε γὰρ ζῶμεν, τῷ Κυρίῳ ζῶμεν ἐάν τε ἀποθνήσκωμεν, τῷ Κυρίῳ ἀποθνήσκομεν. ἐάν τε οὖν ζῶμεν ἐάν τε ἀποθνήσκωμεν, τοῦ Κυρίου ἐσμέν» (“Non of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself. If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord’s”). Cf. 1 Cor. 3, 16-17: «Οὐκ οἴδατε ὅτι ναὸς Θεοῦ ἐστε καὶ τὸ Πνεῦμα τοῦ Θεοῦ οἰκεῖ ἐν ὑμῖν; εἴ τις τὸν ναὸν τοῦ Θεοῦ φθειρεῖ, φθειρεῖ τοῦτον ὁ Θεός· ὁ γὰρ ναὸς τοῦ Θεοῦ ἅγιός ἐστιν, οἷτινές ἐστε ὑμεῖς» (“Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you? If any one destroys God’s temple, God will destroy him. For God’s temple is holy, and that temple you are”).

15. Μ. Π. Μπέγζος & Ἀ. Ν. Παπαθανασίου, *Θέματα Χριστιανικῆς Ἠθικῆς*, ΙΓΥΕ «Διόφαντος», Ἀθήνα 2016, pp. 114-118, 125-129.

Nowadays, the Eastern Orthodox Church classifies voluntary death into three kinds. That is self-sacrifice, suicide, and euthanasia.

Self-sacrifice is treated as the voluntary offering of life either for noble goals and ideals, or as a saving intervention by the motive of love in order to release someone else from a risky situation¹⁶. The motives of self-sacrifice are held as unselfish and the act in question is held either by love to the fellow being or to prevent an affront to human freedom and dignity. It has been applied in numerous occasions by members of the Orthodox Church in its long-time history, at the example of Christ, who offered his life for the redemption of humanity. Very long is the list of members of the Church who suffered martyrdom during the period of persecutions by the Roman state till our present times, whenever it was demanded to renounce their belief to Christ. They are named and honored as martyrs¹⁷.

The second kind of voluntary death is suicide¹⁸. The Orthodox Church condemns this choice as self-destruction, denial of God and his Providence and lack of Christian hope¹⁹. Suicide denies the gift of life; it separates man from God, and eliminates the possibility of repentance. In order to guide its members to the right way and protect every man of weak character from such a desperate step the Church takes strong measures: it forbids the chanting of funeral service and the presence of any priest at the burial of a suicide victim, unless a medical certificate testifies that the perpetrator was suffering from a mental illness²⁰. Especially in

16. *Ibid.* p. 127.

17. Especially in Greece, those who suffered a martyrdom at the period of Ottoman rule are honored as “neo-martyrs” (“neomártyres”, “νεομάρτυρες”); namely the period that begins from the fall of Constantinoupolis (the present-day Istanbul) in 1453 till the establishment of the independent Greek State in 1830.

18. Μ. Π. Μπέγζος, *Ψυχολογώντας την θρησκεία*, έκδ. Γρηγόρη, Αθήνα 2011, pp. 89-95; Γ. Ίω. Μαντζαρίδης, *Χριστιανική Ήθική*, τ. II, έκδ. Π. Πουρναρά, Θεσσαλονίκη 2004, pp. 629-630.

19. Cf. *Mat.* 10, 22: «ὁ δὲ ὑπομείνας εἰς τέλος οὗτος σωθήσεται», (“But he who endures to the end will be saved”).

20. Cf. the 14th Canonical Question and Answer of Timotheos (Timothy) I, the Destitute, Patriarch of Alexandria (381-385), approved by the 2nd Canon of 6th Ecumenical Synod (680/681), see Π. Ίω. Ἀκανθόπουλος, *Κώδικας Ἱερῶν Κανόνων καὶ Ἐκκλησιαστικῶν Νόμων*, έκδ. Ἀδελφῶν Κυριακίδη, Θεσσαλονίκη ²1995, pp. 604-605 and Α. Σ. Ἀλιβιζᾶτος, *Οἱ Ἱεροὶ Κανόνες*, έκδ. Ἀποστολική Διακονία, Αθήνα ³1997, pp. 541-542: «Ἐρώτησις:

our days, the Church, taking into consideration the variety of causes that may guide a person to such an action, responds pastorally by offering a funeral service and burial to suicide victim whose capacities for judgment and action were found to be significantly diminished²¹. In addition, it takes into consideration the burden carried by the living, the family and friends of the deceased, and the support and love they themselves urgently need.

The third kind of voluntary death is *euthanasia* (εὐθανασία); the “good death” or “easy death”, as it is translated from Greek. It may sound strange that Church not only accepts an “easy death” but also wishes for it. During the Divine Liturgy the following verse is chanted: “[Let’s have] a Christian ending to our life, painless, without shame, peaceful [...]”²². Besides that, the Church honors a painful death, not only when it happens for the confession of faith to Christ, but whenever man suffers diseases or painful circumstances with patience and hope to God. Consequently, the “good” or “bad” death is not defined by the easiness or the difficulty it comes through, but by the internal condition of man through which he or she faces it. A “bad death” for the Church

Ἐάν τις μὴ ἔχων ἑαυτὸν χειρίσῃται, ἢ κρημνίσῃ ἑαυτὸν, εἰ γίνεται προσφορὰ ὑπὲρ αὐτοῦ, ἢ οὐ; Ἀπόκρισις: Ὑπὲρ αὐτοῦ διακρίναι ὀφείλει ὁ κληρικός, εἰ τὸ ἀληθὲς ἐκφραγῆς ὢν πεποίθηκε τοῦτο. Πολλάκις γὰρ οἱ διαφέροντες τῷ πεπονθότι, θέλοντες ἐπιτυχεῖν τῆς προσφορᾶς, καὶ τῆς ὑπὲρ αὐτοῦ εὐχῆς, καταψεύδονται, καὶ λέγουσιν, ὅτι οὐκ εἶχεν ἑαυτὸν. Ἐνίοτε δὲ ἀπὸ ἐπηρείας ἀνθρώπων, ἢ ἄλλως πως ἀπὸ ὀλιγωρίας πεποίθηκε τοῦτο, καὶ οὐ χρὴ προσφορὰν ἐπάνω αὐτοῦ γενέσθαι αὐτοφονευτῆς γὰρ ἑαυτοῦ ἐστὶ. Δεῖ οὖν πάντως τὸν κληρικὸν μετ’ ἀκριβείας ἐρευνῆσαι, ἵνα μὴ ὑπὸ κρῖμα πέσῃ». Translated into English by me as follows: “Question: If someone, who does not have his reason, commits suicide or falls on a cliff, is it performed a Liturgy for him or not? Answer: The cleric should discern about him if he committed it because he was really out of his mind. Because, on several occasions, the relatives of the killed, wanting to secure a Liturgy and a prayer for him, lie that he did not have his senses. In some cases he committed it due to the fact he was influenced by some people or in other cases out of negligence and therefore should not be performed a Liturgy for him, because he is a murderer of himself. For that reason, the cleric must examine carefully, so as not to sin”.

21. For example, see the Encyclical of the Permanent Holy Synod of the Church of Greece concerning the suicides’ funeral, issued on the 12th of March 2001) (Διαρκῆς Ἱερὰ Σύνοδος τῆς Ἐκκλησίας τῆς Ἑλλάδος, Ἐγκύκλιος περὶ κηδεύσεως τῶν αὐτοχειρῶν, ἐκδοθεῖσα τῇ 12ῃ Μαρτίου 2001).

22. «Χριστιανὰ τὰ τέλη τῆς ζωῆς ἡμῶν, ἀνώδυνα, ἀνεπαίσχυντα καὶ εἰρηνικά...», according to Saint John Chrysostom’s Divine Liturgy.

is not a painful one, but a death in sin. So, from a Christian point of view euthanasia is unacceptable²³, for the following reasons: Firstly, as an intentional intervention for the deliverance of man from incurable disease or from unbearable physical or mental pain, and secondly, as an intentional termination of supportive technical devices for the continuation of life. The first kind of euthanasia, which is known as active euthanasia, is a form of suicide when it comes about with the patient's consent or a murder when it happens without it. The latter kind of euthanasia, which is described as passive euthanasia, could not differ from the former²⁴.

The jiva and ajiva relationship in Jain tradition as a preliminary remark for a voluntary death understanding

As regarding Jain tradition and the treatment of voluntary death, there is a standard attitude through the ages. That is the concept of *sallekhanā*, a kind of voluntary death; a concept which is very familiar to its present-day members. Nonetheless, whenever it happened to be mentioned to a Westerner, a slight reaction of surprise is detected. A surprise which is probably a result not only of ignorance of Jain tradition but also due to the different cultural and religious environment in which he or she lives. Yet, granted that human mind does not differ from place to place and virtually is one and unified, an exposition in brief of Jain world-view would be adequate and necessary for a better understanding.

23. See Ἱερά Σύνοδος τῆς Ἐκκλησίας τῆς Ἑλλάδος-Ἐπιτροπή Βιοηθικῆς, *Ἐπίσημα Κείμενα Βιοηθικῆς*, p. 43: «Ἡ Ἐκκλησία μας [...] κάθε θάνατο πού ἀποτελεῖ ἀποτέλεσμα ἀνθρώπινων ἐπιλογῶν –ὅσο “καλός” κι ἂν ὀνομάζεται– τόν ἀπορρίπτει ὡς “ὑβρὸν” κατὰ τοῦ Θεοῦ. Κάθε δὲ ἰατρικὴ πράξη πού συνειδητὰ ἐπιπεύδει τὴ στιγμὴ τοῦ θανάτου τὴν καταδικάζει ὡς ἀντιδεοντολογικὴ καὶ προσβλητικὴ τοῦ ἰατρικοῦ λειτουργήματος». Translated into English by me as follows: The Holy Synod of the Church of Greece-Bioethics Committee, *Official Documents on Bioethics*, p. 43: “Our Church [...] rejects, as an ‘insult’ against God, any kind of death that is a result of human choice -no matter how ‘good’ it is called. It also condemns any medical act that consciously hastens the moment of death as unethical and offensive to the medical function.”.

24. Γ. Μαντζαρίδης, *op.cit.*, p. 654.

The Jain Dharma does not support the existence of a creator God²⁵. According to it, the universe, the whole world, is eternal and self-existent, liable to periodical recycling. The cosmic reality consists of two ontological categories: animate and inanimate entities. Every animate being consists of soul (jīva) and material substance (ajīva). The souls or jīvas are innumerable, eternal, conscious, distinct and independent entities that motivate the activity of animate beings. In the case of the latter the correlation of jīva with material substance prevents the realization of jīva's true nature which by itself is characterized by unobstructed perception, pure intelligence, and bliss. The correlation between jīva and ajīva is without beginning and eternal, but not incapable of modifications. It is maintained due to the activity of karma.²⁶ The latter is thought as a subtle form of matter which is attached to jīva veiling its inherent qualities, but incapable to transform them. The veiling of jīva's qualities causes its successive embodiment in various living beings. As a result, the ascetic endeavour in Jainism aims at liberation which is perceived as a release from the bonds of karma and rebirth and the consequent entrance of jīva to siddha-loka, the uppermost reaches of the universe. Then jīva, by regaining its real nature, abides on its innate perfection, bliss, and perfect knowledge (kevala-jñāna). However, the release of jīva from karma-storing may demand many repeated rebirths and ascetic endeavours. So that an elder ascetic or a layman, following Mahāvīra's²⁷ example, may choose to end his/her life at will by abstaining gradually from food and liquids.

At this point, it should be mentioned that Jain tradition distinguishes, as Christian tradition has already done, the afore-mentioned three kinds of voluntary death. Nevertheless, a proportional kind to sallekhanā does

25. Άπ. Μιχαηλίδης, «Τζαϊνισμός», *op.cit.*, p. 531; Emma Salter, «Τζαϊνισμός», στό: Christopher Partridge (έπιμ. έκδ.), *Οί Θρησκείες του Κόσμου, μετάφρ. Β. Άδραχτάς, έκδ. Ούρανός, Άθήνα 2006*, p. 175.

26. Concerning the Jain concept of karma and rebirth, see P. Jaini, "Karma and the Problem of Rebirth in Jainism", in Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, *Karma and Rebirth in Classical Indian Traditions*, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi 1983, pp. 217-238. Also, Nathmal Tatia, *Studies in Jaina Philosophy*, pp. 220-260, especially pp. 232-260.

27. Άπ. Μιχαηλίδης, «Μαχαβίρα», *Θρησκευολογικό Λεξικό, έκδ. Έλληνικά Γράμματα, Άθήνα 2000*, p. 368.

not exist in Eastern Orthodox Christian tradition except in the case of a monk and saint, “the great senior” Varsanoufios (5th-6th cen. A.D.). As Prof. Panagiotis Christou wrote in one of his articles, after the death of abbot Seridis and well on in years “*he was completely isolated, neither reconciled to the new abbot any more, nor he was replying to questions and he was not consuming food anymore. As a consequence, he died after a short time*”²⁸.

What is *sallekhanā*?

Yet, for reasons of mutual comparison and understanding between both religious traditions on the issue in question, a brief exposition of what is *sallekhanā* and what are its prerequisites, are demanded.

Sallekhanā (in Sanskrit: *sallikhita*) means to properly “thin out”, “scour out” or “slender” the passions and the body through gradually abstaining from food and liquids. It is also known as *samlehna*, *santhara*, *samadhi-marana* or *sanyasana-marana*. It is viewed in Jain tradition as a supplementary vow to the ethical code of conduct described as “facing death voluntarily through fasting”. In addition, it is another means of destroying rebirth-influencing karma by withdrawing all physical and mental activities. According to Jain texts, *sallekhanā* leads to *ahimsā* (non-violence or non-injury), as a person observing it subjugates the passions, which are the root cause of *himsā* (injury or violence).

Sallekhanā is divided into two components: Firstly, *kashaya sallekhanā* (that means weakening of passions) or *abhayantra* (internal) and secondly *kaya sallekhanā* (slenderising the body) or *bahya* (external).

Sallekhanā could be applied by both men and women, laymen and ascetics. It is always undertaken after public declaration, and never assisted by any chemicals or tools. It is supplementary to the list of vows

28. Translated from Greek by me. Π. Χρήστου, «Βαρσανούφιος», *Θρησκευτική και Ήθική Εγκυκλοπαιδεία*, τ. 3ος, Ἀθήναι 1963, column 653, cited also by Ἡλ. Βουλγαράκης, *Αὐτοκτονία καὶ ἐκκλησιαστικὴ ταφή*, Ἄρμος, Ἀθήνα 1992, p. 42: «[...] ἀπεμονώθη τελείως, δὲν ἐδέχετο δὲ πλέον οὔτε τὸν νέον ἡγούμενον, δὲν ἀπὸ πάντα βεβαίως εἰς ἐρωτήσεις καὶ δὲν ἐλάμβανε τροφήν. Ὡς εἰκός, ἀπέθανε μετ’ ὀλίγον χρόνον».

prescribed to the followers of Jain Dharma. Firstly, there are five great vows: that is ahimsā (non-violence, that means not to hurt any living being by actions or thoughts), satya (truthfulness), asteya (not to take anything if not given), brahmacharya (chastity or celibacy in action, words and thoughts) and aparigraha (non-possession or detachment from material property). A further seven supplementary vows are also prescribed, which include three guṇavratas (merit vows) and four śikṣāvratas (disciplinary vows). The three guṇavratas are: digvrata (restriction on movement with regard to directions, or limiting one's area of activity), bhogopabhogaparimana (limiting use of consumable and non-consumable things), and anarthadandaviramana (abstain from purposeless sins or refraining from harmful occupations and activities). The śikṣāvratas include: samayika (vow to meditate and concentrate periodically), desavrata (limiting movement to certain places for a fixed period of time), prosadhopavāsa (fasting at regular intervals), and atithi-samvibhag (offering food to the ascetic and people in need). Although sallekhanā is treated as a supplementary to these twelve vows, some Jain teachers such as Kundakunda, Devasena, Padmanandin, and Vasunandin have included it under Śikṣāvratas.

As for the prerequisites of proceeding to sallekhanā, the Tattvartha Sūtra states: "A householder willingly or voluntarily adopts sallekhanā when death is near"²⁹ and according to Ratnakaranda Śrāvākācāra, sallekhanā can be observed only "on arrival of unavoidable calamity, distress, senescence and disease"³⁰.

With the words of Justice T. K. Tukol: "[...] *the person adopting the vow must have subjugated all his passions and given up all attachments and possessions. [...] He should put an end to all family or friendly ties by disclosing his intentions and by asking their forgiveness with an open mind. He has also to discuss all his acts of commission and omission with his Guru. He should forgive everybody and must have developed full faith in religion and acquired clear knowledge of its principles*"³¹.

29. T. K. Tukol, *Sallekhanā is Not Suicide*, L. D. Institute of Indology, Ahmedabad 1976, p. 10.

30. C. R. Jain, pp. 58-64.

31. T. K. Tukol, *Sallekhanā is Not Suicide*, *op.cit.*, p. 88.

The duration of practicing *sallekhanā* could be up to twelve years or more. The procedure of it, expounded in the sixth part of Ratnakaranda Śrāvakācāra (127-128), is as follows: “*Giving up solid food by degrees, one should take to milk and whey, then giving them up, to hot or spiced water. [Subsequently] giving up hot water also, and observing fasting with full determination, he should give up his body, trying in every possible way to keep in mind the pañca-namaskāra mantra*”.

During this procedure he or she should avoid five transgressions, which are: 1) wishing death to come a little later, 2) wishing for an early death, 3) entertaining fear as to how he would bear the pangs of death, 4) remembering friends and relatives at the moment of death, 5) wishing for a certain reward as a result of this vow³².

In conclusion, we could say that *sallekhanā* is a very special vow. The principle behind this vow is that a person when giving up his body, with complete peace of mind, calmness, and patience, without any fear at all, not only prevents the influx of the new karmas but also purges the old ones which are attached to the soul.

Considering that *sallekhanā* is not a practice by means of chemicals or tools, without use of external violence, it is not treated as a suicide by Jain tradition.

Conclusions

After exposing both the Eastern Orthodox Christian and Jain world-views, I would mention that a great difference lies between them concerning the creation and preservation of the world. A source of life that is a creator God appertains to Eastern Orthodox Christianity but not in Jainism. Due to this difference there could not be an essential comparison on the issue of voluntary death. For that reason, the only convenient field for both is that of a mutual understanding and tolerance.

In this way, towards the issue of *sallekhanā*, an Orthodox Christian respecting the freedom of his/her fellow-persons who belong to a different religious tradition, and taking into account its basic principles

32. Ratnakaranda Śrāvakācāra 122-129.

and its established procedure, he/she could not regard the application of this vow with a strain of condemnation nor to consider it as something extraordinary. Just as Jesus respected free will, without imposing the meaning of his Gospel³³, an Orthodox Christian could not but react to that –though *sallekhanā* is not in harmony with his/her own concept of life– with deference, displaying a spirit of understanding.

ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

Ὁ ἐκούσιος θάνατος
ἐξ ἐπόψεως τῆς Ἀνατολικῆς Ὁρθοδόξου Χριστιανικῆς
καὶ Τζαϊνικῆς Παραδόσεως

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Οἱ ἀρχαῖοι Ἕλληνες, κατὰ τὴ διάρκεια τῆς ἐκστρατείας τοῦ Μεγάλου Ἀλεξάνδρου πρὸς τὴν Ἰνδικὴ ὑπόγειο, ἦλθαν ἀντιμέτωποι μὲ τὸν διὰ πυρᾶς ἐκούσιο θάνατο τοῦ Κάλανου ἢ Καλανοῦ, ἐνὸς Ἰνδοῦ ἀσκητοῦ, καταβεβλημένου ἀπὸ τὴν ἀσθένεια καὶ τὰ γηρατεία. Τότε, κάποιοι ἐξ αὐτῶν θαύμασαν τὴν ἀμετάκλητη ἀπόφασί του, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὴν ἐνέργειά του νὰ ἀνέλθει στὴν πυρὰ καὶ νὰ παραμείνει ἀκίνητος μέχρι τὴν ὀλοκληρωτικὴ ἀποτέφρωσή του. Ἐπρόκειτο γιὰ ἓνα γεγονός, ποὺ προφανῶς ἀποτελεῖ ἀπόρροια μιᾶς ἐκ τῶν Ἰνδικῶν θεωρήσεων τῆς ζωῆς.

Ἀπὸ τὸν 1ο αἰῶνα ἄρχισε νὰ ἐξαπλώνεται στὸν εὐρωπαϊκὸ χῶρο ὁ Χριστιανισμὸς ὡς ἡ νέα θρησκεία ποὺ ἔδινε τὶς δικές της ἀπαντήσεις στὰ ὑπαρξιακὰ ἐρωτήματα ποὺ ἀπασχολοῦσαν τοὺς ζωντανοὺς φορεῖς τοῦ τότε παραπαίοντος ἀρχαίου κόσμου. Μὲ τὸ πέρασμα τοῦ χρόνου ὁ Χριστιανισμὸς, καὶ εἰδικώτερα ἡ Ἀνατολικὴ Ὁρθόδοξη Ἐκκλησία,

33. Mark 8, 34: «ὅστις θέλει ὀπίσω μου ἀκολουθεῖν, ἀπαρνησάσθω ἑαυτὸν καὶ ἀράτω τὸν σταυρὸν αὐτοῦ, καὶ ἀκολουθεῖτω μοι» (“If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me”).

διαμόρφωσε τις δικές του απόψεις περί έκουσίου θανάτου, είτε πρόκειται για αὐτοχειρία, είτε για αὐτοθυσία, είτε τέλος για εὐθανασία.

Ὁ Τζαϊνισμὸς εἶναι ἕνα ἀπὸ τὰ ἀρχαιότερα καὶ κύρια θρησκευόμενα τῆς Ἰνδίας. Λόγω ὅμως τοῦ ἀναλογικῶς μικροῦ ἀριθμοῦ τῶν πιστῶν του καὶ τοῦ χαμηλοῦ ποσοστοῦ διάδοσής του, εἶναι ἐλάχιστα γνωστὸς στὸν Δυτικὸ κόσμο. Πολὺ δὲ περισσότερο, παραμένει σχεδὸν ἄγνωστη ἢ φιλοσοφικὴ καὶ ἀσκητικὴ παράμετρος τοῦ «σαλέκανα» ἢ «σαμάντι μάρανα», ἥτοι τῆς ἐπιλογῆς τοῦ έκουσίου θανάτου διὰ τῆς σταδιακῆς ἀσιτίας ὡς τελικοῦ σταδίου ἀσκήσεως κατὰ τὸν ἠθικὸ κώδικα τῆς τζαϊνικῆς παραδόσεως. Τί ἀκριβῶς ὅμως εἶναι τὸ «σαλέκανα» καὶ πῶς θὰ μπορούσε νὰ ἐκτιμηθεῖ ἐπὶ τοῦ παρόντος ὑπὸ τὸ πρῖσμα τῆς ὀρθοδόξου χριστιανικῆς θεωρήσεως;

Σκοπὸς τοῦ παρόντος ἄρθρου εἶναι νὰ παρουσιασθοῦν ἐν συντομίᾳ οἱ περὶ έκουσίου θανάτου ἀπόψεις τῆς Ἀνατολικῆς Ὀρθοδόξου Χριστιανικῆς Παραδόσεως καὶ αὐτὲς τῆς Τζαϊνικῆς, ἀναζητώντας καὶ ὑποδεικνύοντας ἕνα πεδίο κατανόησεως μεταξὺ τῶν δύο.

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