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**ΜΕΣΟΤΗΣ – ΜΕΓΑΛΟΨΥΧΙΑ – ΤΑΠΕΙΝΩΣΙΣ.
THE ETHICAL IDEALS OF ANCIENT GREEK
PHILOSOPHY AND THE VIRTUE OF HUMILITY
ACCORDING TO THE GREEK FATHERS
OF THE CHURCH IN THE FOURTH CENTURY**

Christian aretology of the patristic era is an excellent example of a productive convergence of the message of the Gospel and the philosophical thought of ancient Greece. The one virtue particularly underscored in the moral teaching of the fourth century Church Fathers was humility, called by John Chrysostom (c. 350-407) the “mother of virtues” (μήτηρ ἀρετῶν)¹, defined in his homilies as: depriving oneself of a high self-esteem, attributing to God of all of the good man is capable to do, and assuming the last place as Jesus Christ did². In spite of emphasizing its distinctly Christian character, the early Christian writers attempted – in accordance with the principle of missionary accommodation – to search for its prototypes in pre-Christian ethics. This, however, occurred a difficult task because the ancient Greeks were unfamiliar with the virtue of humility in its posterior meaning, although they conversed a lot about the extremely harmful vice of pride. There existed, however, in the antique ethics the notions or at least terms, that could be used by Christians in their explanation of the virtue of humility. Nearly a half a century ago some scholars have already paid attention to this phenomenon, for example Stefan Rehrl (1912-1997) – in his monograph *Das Problem der Demut in der profan-griechischen Literatur*³

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¹ Cf. Joannes Chrysostomus, *In Acta Apostolorum hom.* 30, 3, PG 60, 225: “Οὐδὲν ταπεινοφροσύνης ἴσον· αὐτὴ μήτηρ καὶ ρίζα καὶ τροφὸς καὶ ὑπόθεσις καὶ σύνδεσμος τῶν ἀγαθῶν”; idem, *In Matthaem hom.* 47, 3, PG 58, 485; M. Szram, *Pokora – “matka cnót” (μήτηρ ἀρετῶν) w ujęciu Bazylego Wielkiego i Jana Chryzostoma*, RT 51 (2004) z. 4, 43-64.

² Cf. Joannes Chrysostomus, *De paenitentia hom.* 2, 4, PG 49, 290: “ταπεινοφροσύνη γὰρ τοῦτό ἐστιν ὅταν τις μέγας ὦν ἑαυτὸν ταπεινοῦ”; idem, *De incomprehensibili Dei natura (Contra Anomaeos hom.)* 5, 497-499, ed. A.M. Malingrey, SCH 28bis, Paris 1970, 312; idem, *In epistolam I ad Corinthios argumentum et hom.* 12, 1, PG 61, 97; idem, *In Acta Apostolorum hom.* 30, 3, PG 60, 225; idem, *De Christi precibus (Contra Anomaeos hom.)* 10, 472-474, ed. A.-M. Malingrey, SCH 396, Paris 1994, 274; idem, *Ecloga 7. De humilitate animi*, PG 63, 618.

³ Münster 1961.

and René Antonin Gauthier (1913-1999) – the author of *Magnanimité. L'idéal de la grandeur dans la philosophie païenne et dans la théologie chrétienne*⁴, then the late professor of our university – moral theologian Stanisław Witek (1924-1987) in his articles⁵, and recently: Stephen Pardue⁶, Antonio Cioffi⁷ and Stanley Harakas⁸ in their articles concerning the ethical teaching and the concept of humility in the works of Gregory of Nazianzus (c. 329-390), Gregory of Nyssa (335/340-394) and John Chrysostom. The ancient ethical concepts have been alluded to in some of the doctrines of humility: at first by Clement of Alexandria (c. 150-c. 215)⁹ and Origen (c. 185 - c. 254)¹⁰ in the third century, and then in the fourth century by Cappadocian Fathers¹¹, and John Chrysostom¹². In

⁴ Paris 1951.

⁵ Cf. S. Witek, *Koncepcje pokory w patrystyce Wschodu*, AnCra 2 (1970) 257-278; idem, *Interpretacja pokory w patrystyce zachodniej*, RTK 17 (1970) z. 3, 5-24.

⁶ Cf. S. Pardue, *On Faithfully Knowing an Infinite God: Humility as an Intellectual Virtue in Gregory of Nyssa's "Contra Eunomium" II*, "International Journal of Systematic Theology" 13 (2011) 62-76.

⁷ Cf. A. Cioffi, *Giovanni Crisostomo e il "vero" filosofo*, w: *Giovanni Crisostomo: Oriente e Occidente tra IV e V secolo. XXXIII Incontro di Studiosi dell'Antichità Cristiana* (Augustinianum 6-8 maggio 2004), SEA 93, Roma 2005, 513-520.

⁸ Cf. S.S. Harakas, *Ethical Teaching in Saint Gregory the Theologian's Writings*, GOTR 39 (1994) z. 1-2, 141-150.

⁹ Cf. Clemens Alexandrinus, *Paedagogus* II 3, 37-38, ed. C. Mondésert – H.I. Marrou, Sch 108, Paris 1991, 80-82; idem, *Stromata* II 22, 132-133, ed. C. Mondésert – P.Th. Camelot, Sch 38, Paris 1954, 134; L. Rizzerio, *L'éthique de Clément et les philosophes grecques*, StPatr 41 (2006) 237-238; Witek, *Koncepcje pokory*, p. 260; E. Osek, "Poznaj samego siebie" w interpretacji Bazylego Wielkiego, VoxP 28 (2008) t. 52/2, 769-770.

¹⁰ Cf. Origenes, *In Lucam hom.* 8, 4-5, ed. H. Crouzel – F. Fournier – P. Perichon, Sch 87, Paris 1962, 168-170; idem, *Contra Celsum* VI 15, ed. M. Borret, Sch 147, Paris 1969, 214-218; idem, *In Ezechielem hom.* 9, 2, ed. M. Borret, Sch 352, Paris 1989, 302-304; W. Völker, *Das Vollkommenheitsideal des Origenes*, Tübingen 1931, 222; P. Nemeshegyi, *La morale d'Origène*, RAM 37 (1961) 415; P. Adnès, *Humilité*, DSp VII 1154; R.A. Gauthier, *Magnanimité. L'idéal de la grandeur dans la philosophie païenne et dans la théologie chrétienne*, Bibliothèque Thomiste 28, Paris 1951, 422; Witek, *Koncepcje pokory*, p. 260.

¹¹ Cf. Basilii Caesariensis, *De humilitate hom.* 1, PG 31, 525B; ibidem 4, PG 31, 533B; idem, *Asceticon magnum sive Quaestiones (Regulae brevius tractatae)* 198, PG 31, 1213B; Gregorius Nazianzenus, *Orationes* 12, 5, ed. M.A. Calvet-Sebasti, Sch 405, Paris 1995, 356-358; ibidem 19, 9, PG 35, 1053A-B; ibidem 32, 19, ed. P. Gallay – C. Moreschini, Sch 318, Paris 1985, 125-126; idem, *Carmina moralia* I, II, 34, 86, PG 37, 951A; Gregorius Nyssenus, *De virginitate* VII 1, 23-26, ed. M. Aubineau, Sch 119, Paris 1966, 352; idem, *In Canticum canticorum* 9, ed. H. Langerbeck, GNO 6, Leiden 1960, 284; idem, *Orationes de beatitudinibus* 1, ed. J.F. Callahan, GNO 7/2, Leiden 1992, 88; T. Špidlik, *La sophiologie de S. Basile*, Roma 1961, 73; Osek, "Poznaj samego siebie", p. 780-781; D.G. Tsamis, *The Teaching of Gregory Nazianzen on Moderation (mesotes)*, "Kleronomia" 1 (1969) 275-284; D.T. Runia, *Festugière revisited: Aristotle in the Greek Patres*, VigCh 43 (1990) 1-34; D. Zagórski, Αἱ σωτηρίας ὁδοί. *Model doskonałości chrześcijańskiego w świetle ekshortacji pastoralnych Grzegorza z Nazjanzu*, Toruń 2007, 97; G. Gould, *Basil of Caesarea and Gregory of Nyssa on the Beatitudes*, StPatr 22 (1989) 15.

¹² Cf. Joannes Chrysostomus, *De incomprehensibili Dei natura (Contra Anomaeos hom.)* 5,

my article I will address two ethical ideals opposed to the vice of pride by the ancient Greeks, which are reflected in the teachings concerned with humility of the Greek Fathers of the Church in the fourth century, that have been processed by them creatively: the principle of moderation (μεσότης) and the attitude of the just pride (μεγαλοψυχία). As a final point I will take into consideration the Platonic understanding of the term ταπεινώσις, which later on in Christianity begun to denote alongside with the term ταπεινοφροσύνη the virtue of humility.

1. The principle of “moderation” (μεσότης) and Christian humility.

One of the particular heralds of the virtue of humility in the ethics of ancient Greece was the principle of moderation or golden mean rule or right measure (μετριότης, μεσότης). The main theorist of this principle was Aristotle (384-322 BC), who discussed it in a systematic manner in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. In his opinion, every virtue (ἀρετή) occupies the central position (μέσον) between two extremes: excess (ὑπερβολή) and insufficiency (ἔλλειψις)¹³. Aristotle recognized disobedience to this principle as the characteristic feature of the youth that sin by extravagance and excessive haste, because they do everything “above measure” (ἄγαν) and finally fall into an attitude of pride (ὑβρις)¹⁴.

The first who tried to connect the Christian virtue of humility with the Greek term μεσότης were the Alexandrian writers at the beginning of the third century: Clement and Origen. The latter stated in his *Homilies on Luke* that humility (ταπεινώσις), on which God looks upon, is called by philosophers μετριότης¹⁵. The same way of thinking may be found in the works of Cappadocian Fathers of the fourth century. Gregory of Nazianzus portrayed the virtue of humility in accordance to the spirit of golden mean rule and characterised it with features of the moderate attitude in life, both in the spiritual sphere, as well as in the external one, related to the way of clothing and asceticism in diet¹⁶. In Gregory’s Nazianzen opinion, a particular sort of a humble

497-499, SCh 28^{bis}, 312; idem, *De paenitentia hom.* 2, 4, PG 49, 290; idem, *De Christi precibus (Contra Anomaeos hom.)* 10, 449-450, SCh 396, 274; idem, *In epistulam ad Philippenses argumentum et hom.* 7, 5, PG 62, 235; idem, *In epistulam ad Romanos hom.* 20, 3, PG 60, 599; idem, *Ecloga 7. De humilitate animi*, PG 63, 618; idem, *In Matthaem hom.* 65, 5, PG 58, 623-624; E. Nowak, *Le chrétien devant la souffrance. Étude sur la pensée de Jean Chrysostome*, Théologie historique 19, Paris 1972, 183; J.-P. Cattenoz, *Le Baptême mystère nuptial. Théologie de saint Jean Chrysostome*, Venasque 1993, 152; T. Mada, *Spécifique de la morale chrétienne d’après saint Jean Chrysostome*, “Revista teologica” 15/2 (2005) 159-189; P. Szczur, *Ideal doskonałości chrześcijańskiej według Jana Chryzostoma*, SSan 17 (2010) nr 1-2, 197-221.

¹³ Cf. Aristoteles, *Ethica nicomachea* II 6, 1107a – 1108b, ed. F. Susemihl – O. Apelt, Bibliotheca Scriptorum Graecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana, Lipsiae 1912, 35-39.

¹⁴ Cf. Aristoteles, *Rhetorica* II 12, 1389b, ed. M. Dufour, t. 2, Paris 1938, 92.

¹⁵ Cf. Origenes, *In Lucam hom.* 8, 4-5, SCh 87, 168-170.

¹⁶ Cf. Gregorius Nazianzenus, *Orationes* 12, 5, SCh 405, 356-358.

temperance should be maintained during the conversation about God (μετρίως περὶ Θεοῦ φηέγγεται), especially during the practice of theology without undue curiosity, leading to excessive penetration into the nature of God, devoid of respect of His mystery¹⁷. Otherwise, one shall fall prey to pride leading to Trinitarian heresies, which left their strong mark on the fourth century. What is more, Gregory of Nyssa praising the humility of his sister Macrina the Younger (324/330-374) used the term μετριοπάθεια – “moderation in feelings”¹⁸, which is a combination of two ancient ideals: Aristotelian μεσότης and Stoic ἀπάθεια.

John Chrysostom has also associated the teaching of St. Paul with the principle of moderation¹⁹ and defined humility as being moderate in words and actions (καὶ λόγῳ καὶ ἔργῳ μετριάζων) and not making more of oneself than one should²⁰. One may observe the similar way of thinking among the ascetical works of the Greek monk Nil of Ancyra (died in 430), who defined the Christian virtue of humility as a reasonable moderation (μετριοφροσύνη), characterizing the attitude of the Christian philosopher²¹.

Despite of the occurrence of some cases of humility understood as a reasonable moderation in John Chrysostom's homilies, a different attitude was still closer to the Antioch preacher's mentality, namely the radicalism of the Gospel, so a specific lack of moderation, promoted especially by the monastic movement. In Chrysostom's opinion true humbleness is taking the lowest-ranked seat, even if one achieved a magnificent perfection in the virtues²². However one does not find a contradiction in terms between so conceived radicalism and the philosophical golden mean principle at John Chrysostom's thought. The Antioch preacher while referring to the views of Clement of Alexandria²³, who combined the teaching of the Gospel with the idealism of Plato (428/427-348/347 BC)²⁴, recognizing that God determines all right measure, emphasized that the measure for a Christian to judge by, stands not a limited in capacity man, but God Himself – the highest reason, the ultimate

¹⁷ Cf. *ibidem* 32, 19, SCh 318, 125-126.

¹⁸ Cf. Gregorius Nyssenus, *Vita sanctae Macrinae* 11, ed. P. Maraval, SCh 178, Paris 1971, 174-180; S. Strękowski, *Makryna Młodsza – mistrzyni życia duchowego według św. Grzegorza z Nysy*, in: *Kobieta w starożytności chrześcijańskiej. Materiały z sympozjum patrystycznego 22.10.1998 ATK*, SCh 14, Warszawa 1999, 43-52; J. Dybała, *Ideal kobiety w pismach kapadockich Ojców Kościoła i Jana Chryzostoma*, *Byzantina Lodziensia* XIV, Łódź 2012, 302-303.

¹⁹ Cf. Joannes Chrysostomus, *In epistulam ad Romanos hom.* 20, 3, PG 60, 599.

²⁰ Cf. *idem*, *De consubstantiali (Contra Anomaeos hom.)* 7, 275-285, SCh 396, 134-136.

²¹ Cf. Nilus Ancyranus, *Epistula* I 326, PG 79, 200D; L. Nieścior, *Asceza chrześcijańska i filozofia w pismach Nila z Ancyry*, Poznań 2001, 116-117.

²² Cf. Joannes Chrysostomus, *De incomprehensibili Dei natura (Contra Anomaeos hom.)* 5, 497-499, SCh 28^{bis}, 312; *idem*, *De paenitentia hom.* 2, 4, PG 49, 290.

²³ Cf. Rizzerio, *L'éthique de Clément et les philosophes grecques*, p. 237-238.

²⁴ Cf. Plato, *Leges* IV 716c-d, ed. R.G. Bury, Loeb Classical Library 1, London – Cambridge Mass. 1961, 296, tłum. M. Maykowska: *Platon, Prawa*, Warszawa 1997, 148.

and transcendent norm, a kind of “measure without measure”. Thus, the moral requirements for the believers have no boundary. According to John Chrysostom to maintain a measure is to stand before God in light of all one’s weakness and sinfulness, with the greatest possible humiliation, as the Son of God demonstrated in His terrestrial life²⁵. In this way two attitudes of the patristic era, which seemed irreconcilable, were indeed conciliated: the classical attitude of moderation (μετριάζειν) and deep humility without measure, characteristic to the Christian understanding of the virtue of humility (ταπεινοφροσύνη)²⁶.

2. The ideal of “just pride” (μεγαλοψυχία) and Christian humility. Another ideal cherished by the ancient morality was μεγαλοψυχία – literally a “greatness of soul”. It meant a justified pride and was contrasted with a conceited pride. This ideal, known to us mainly from the Aristotle’s detailed description in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, signified perceiving oneself as capable of great things, because one really can, that is having the proper view of oneself and a sense of high self-esteem²⁷. It should primarily be a characteristic feature of philosophers and manifest through different attitudes. Among them, the immediate to Christianity was the peaceful acceptance both praises and failures, whereas the most contrary to the spirit of the new religion was the belief in self-sufficiency and aversion to asking anyone for help in need.

In Aristotle’s terms, the ideal of right pride meant the application of the distinctively understood principle of moderation to the relationship of man with the world around him. The description of this attitude reminds a later model of stoic sage who retains developed over the years peaceful indifference (ἀπάθεια) to all the stimuli coming from the outside. In the Stoic ethics μεγαλοψυχία meant a contempt for the unimportant external affairs, which is in the same time an affirmation of human greatness²⁸. Revealing any weakness, be it manifested in the request for help, would be inconsistent with such an attitude.

As it has been mentioned above, the depicted by the author of *Nicomachean Ethics* ideal of μεγαλοψυχία, to which referred later the Stoicism, adjoined the attitudes which from the point of view of the posterior Christian concept of humility seemed to be somewhat contradictory. On one side, Aristotle called for restraint against any exaggerated opinions coming from the outside, and for recognition of the truth about oneself – with which Christianity could come to terms, and which was a humble man’s characteristic feature. On the other side, Aristotle relegated the rightly proud man within the group of the better, stronger people, who were content that due to the strength of their own will they achieved the stance of ethical courage. Such an attitude must have been

²⁵ Cf. Joannes Chrysostomus, *Ecloga 7. De humilitate animi*, PG 63, 618; idem, *De paenitentia hom.* 2, 5, PG 49, 290-292; idem, *In Matthaeum hom.* 3, 5, PG 57, 36-40.

²⁶ Cf. idem, *Quod frequenter conveniendum sit* 5, PG 63, 467B; idem, *De statutis* 1, 6, PG 49, 24B.

²⁷ Cf. Aristoteles, *Ethica nicomachea* IV 7, 1124a – 8, 1125a, ed. Susemihl – Apelt, s. 80-84.

²⁸ Cf. R. Kozera, *Idealy ojców pustyni. Pathos i apatheia*, Lublin 2000, 201-261.

considered in Christian terms as a sign of pride and arrogance against God the Creator and Giver of any moral perfection. No wonder that the fourth century Fathers of the Church while referring in their aretology to the ancient attitude of the right pride or self-esteem, bound it tightly with humility and gave it a clear religious character: a man should know his dignity, but also remember that he owes it to God.

A case in point, Basil the Great (329-379) in his homily about humility emphasized, accordingly to the spirit of St. Paul, that a man should find his glory only in God, and not to seek his own vain-glory²⁹. In turn, Gregory of Nyssa found the attitude of remaining humble with a simultaneous awareness of being great in his own actions as the greatest accomplishment of Christian way of life³⁰. John Chrysostom in his panegyrics in honour of St. Paul, in reference to the person of the Apostle of the nations, collated together two seemingly unrelated to each other concepts: the Biblical ταπεινοφροσύνη and the classical μεγαλοψυχία. He noted that Paul spoke with humility, yet simultaneously with power, being aware of the significance of the God-given message³¹. In homilies to the Gospel of John Chrysostom describes humility directly with the term μεγαλοψυχία, explained however that this virtue is characteristic for a man who acknowledges his condition of being created, despises himself in the face of God, and recognizes solely as the great the divine reality³². The term μεγαλοψυχία had in this particular occurrence little in common with the original Aristotelian sense of the conviction about human self-sufficiency, dignity and greatness. Rather, it directed to man's greatness, which was a result of his humble submission to God. In the homilies to the Acts of the Apostles John Chrysostom seems to criticize openly the Aristotelian doctrine of legitimate pride. He says, that people who consider themselves to be great among great, do not have everything to do with the virtue of humility³³.

Paradoxically, through this statement, Gregory of Nyssa and John Chrysostom altered in a way the meaning of ancient term μεγαλοψυχία. Attitude, described by his denotation of the term, is purely Christian and consistent with the spirit of the Gospel yet unknown to antiquity. In John Chrysostom's opinion man becomes great not only because of his indifference to the problems of everyday life and because of the contempt of the external world, but mainly because of his humility (ὁ ταπεινός [...] ὁ ὑπελὸς καὶ μεγαλόφρων), resulting from the awareness that he is only a creature. The greater he is in his acts,

²⁹ Cf. Basilius Magnus, *De humilitate hom.* 1, PG 31, 525B.

³⁰ Cf. Gregorius Nyssenus, *De instituto Christiano*, ed. W. Jaeger, GNO 8/1. *Opera ascetica*, Leiden 1963, 66.

³¹ Cf. Joannes Chrysostomus, *De laudibus sancti Pauli apostoli hom.* 5, 8, ed. A. Piédagnel, SCh 300, Paris 1982, 246.

³² Cf. idem, *In Joannem hom.* 71, 2, PG 59, 386: "οὐδὲ ταπεινοφροσύνη γένοιτ' ἂν, εἰ μὴ μετὰ μεγαλοψυχίας".

³³ Cf. idem, *In Acta Apostolorum hom.* 44, 1, PG 60, 308: "Εἰσὶ τινες οἱ πρὸς μὲν τοὺς ταπεινοὺς ταπεινοὶ τυγχάνοντες ὡσι, πρὸς δὲ τοὺς ὑψηλοὺς ὑψηλοί· τοῦτο δὲ οὐ ταπεινοφροσύνης".

the more should be humble in his thinking³⁴. However, it should be mentioned on the margin that the term μεγαλοψυχία appears in Chrysostom's homilies many times more in a different meaning, a one that was widespread later on in the Christian culture, yet also has been known to Aristotle, namely that of the kindness, generosity, openness of heart³⁵.

3. The foreshadowing of virtue of humility (ταπεινώσις) in the writings of Plato. In the ancient Greek thought, beside the term ταπεινοφροσύνη, appears the term ταπεινώσις – “lowliness”, used also in the Bible and then in the Greek patristic literature as the term referring to the virtue of humility³⁶. Among the ancient Greeks this term, however, had rather pejorative sense and meant smallness, weakness, misery³⁷. The Greek philosophers identified it even with low self-esteem and contrasted it with the right pride (μεγαλοψυχία), typical for the sage. In Plutarch's (c. 45 - c. 125) *Moralia* one may find a negative reference to the term ταπεινοφροσύνη used for a man terrified of the difficult circumstances of life and lacking courage³⁸.

However, in Plato's *Laws* one can find a text, quoted later by the authors of the patristic era, in which the word ταπεινός takes up a positive meaning. It denotes the attitude of moderation, which is opposed to the pride and brings man closer to God:

“[God] is always accompanied by Justice [...]. The one who desires a happy life, keeps her and follows her footsteps, humble and modest (ταπεινός και κεκοσμημένος). One who has a healthy sense of moderation (μετριότης) is acceptable to God. However, one who [...] inflates with pride (ὑβρις) [...] is rejected by God and left for himself”³⁹.

In the beliefs of the early Christian writers, starting from Clement of Alexandria⁴⁰ and Origen⁴¹, this formulation was seen as a grain of God's truth, contained within the philosophy of the Gentiles. The Alexandrian authors went even further on in their apologetic fervour, arguing that the Greeks took over the teaching of humility from the Jews, according to the promoted among the

³⁴ Cf. idem, *In I epistulam ad Corinthios hom.* 1 2, PG 61, 15.

³⁵ Cf. idem, *In epistulam ad Romanos hom.* 21, 2, PG 60, 603-604; idem, *In Acta Apostolorum hom.* 48, 3, PG 60, 336; C. Straw, *Chrysostom's martyrs: zealous athletes and the dangers of sloth*, in: *Giovanni Crisostomo: Oriente e occidente*, p. 537 and 544.

³⁶ Cf. R. Popowski, *Wielki słownik grecko-polski Nowego Testamentu*, Warszawa 1995, 594; Lampe 1375.

³⁷ Cf. Abramowiczówna IV 279.

³⁸ Cf. Plutarchus Chaeronensis, *De tranquillitate animi* 17, ed. G.N. Bernardakis, in: Plutarchus Cheronensis, *Moralia*, Bibliotheca Scriptorum Graecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana 3, Lipsiae 1891, 235-236.

³⁹ Plato, *Leges* IV 715e-716b, ed. Bury, t. 1, s. 294-296.

⁴⁰ Cf. Clemens Alexandrinus, *Stromata* II 22, 132-133, Sch 38, 134.

⁴¹ Cf. Origenes, *Contra Celsum* VI 15, Sch 147, 214-218.

Christian Greek authors of II and III century – although not having support in the historical data – theory of theft of all real wisdom from Moses' Torah. In the fourth century Greek Fathers have not directly comment this text of the Rights of Plato. However, a certain continuation of the way of thinking of Clement and Origen one can find in the John Chrysostom's homilies to the Acts of the Apostles. Despite his critical attitude to the Greek philosophers, Chrysostom says that Socrates (470/469-399 BC) must have known the virtue of humility, but has not practiced it⁴².

The patristic authors' opinion about the ancient philosophers' knowledge of the virtue of humility in the meaning similar to the biblical one seems to be just as abusive as the second-century pagan polemicist Celsus' (2nd century) claim that the Christians stole the idea of humility from Plato yet misunderstanding it⁴³. In fact, it was in the early Christian literature, especially coming from the monastic circles, where the terms of *ταπεινωσις* and *ταπεινοφροσύνη* meant not only the maintaining of human moderation to the Creator, as wished Plato in the quoted above fragment of *Laws*, but also commenced to denote a conscious and radical humbleness before God as the Bestower of all goods and to the persons not only equal, but even lesser than oneself. The Greek Fathers of the Church of the fourth century were aware of this, noting that the unprecedented and the most perfect model of humility was the incarnate Son of God, who – as John Chrysostom said – has built a new religion on this virtue⁴⁴. The Christian humility according to Cappadocian Fathers and John Chrysostom is a relationship with a loving Father – the Creator and Saviour, to whom one owes everything: creation, deliverance from sins, redemption and sanctification, diverse from how it has been presented in Greek antiquity – for example in tragedy – as a report to the omnipotent divine fate that causes anxiety⁴⁵.

The mentioned in this paper ethical ideals of the ancient Greeks contained the elements both close to the Christian concept of humility, as well as those that significantly diverse from it. Exaggerated pride was regarded in ancient Greece as a major vice, yet its opposition was not humility, considered as a sign of shyness or weakness, fear or cowardice, but the based on the principle of moderation attitude of right, justified pride, resulting from man's belief in his own capabilities.

⁴² Cf. Joannes Chrysostomus, *In Acta Apostolorum hom.* 36, 2, PG 60, 260-261.

⁴³ Cf. Origenes, *Contra Celsum* VI 15, Sch 147, 214-216.

⁴⁴ Cf. Joannes Chrysostomus, *De mutatione nominum* 4, 6, PG 51, 154; idem, *In Joannem hom.* 33, 3, PG 59, 192.

⁴⁵ Cf. A.J. Festugière, *L'idéal religieux des Grecs et l'Évangile*, Paris 1932, 23-25; W. Lengauer, *Religijność starożytnych Greków*, Warszawa 1994, 44-77 and 112-180.

The fourth century Christian writers, following the footsteps of Clement of Alexandria and Origen, took over the concepts developed by the ancient thinkers, though, attributing to them a slightly different meaning and putting them in a new religious context, although sometimes suggested that the ancient thinkers reasoned in a manner similar to the Christian one. The principle of moderation (μεσότης) was combined by John Chrysostom with evangelical radicalism and with the conviction that the measure of all things is God, who transcends human measure. He showed it in His Son's extreme kenosis. The ideal of just pride (μεγαλοψυχία) was presented by the Cappadocian Fathers and Chrysostom in the context of a reference to God the Creator and Saviour, who – as stated Basil the Great – is the only reason of man's glory. It deprives man of possibilities to compare with the other people and to show himself as superior to them. The attitude of deep humility – ταπείνωσις, more often termed ταπεινοφροσύνη (which became a technical term to describe the virtue of humility), received in the Patristic era a clearly positive evaluation and became a basis for both the acquisition of the other virtues, as well as an keystone enabling protection against squandering the virtues already gained. It was particularly emphasized by John Chrysostom in his teaching, but also by the authors from the monastic circles, as Evagrius Ponticus (345-399), and in later centuries by Dorotheus of Gaza (c. 505 - c. 565) and John Climacus (VII c.)⁴⁶.

The fact that the fourth century Greek theologians made use of the ethical ideals, deriving from the ancient philosophy and not fully consistent with Christianity, demonstrates the victory of the second century apologists and the begun by them approach to these elements of Greek παιδεία, in which resided the seeds of rational truth (λόγοι σπερματικοί), forming a kind of preparation for the reception of the Gospel. However, the Church Fathers' desire to emphasize at all costs this *praeparatio evangelica* might have sometimes caused the exaggerated interpretations of ancient Greek thought as analogous with Christian ethics and assigning to the ancient philosophy a knowledge of the realities they could perceive and define only through Christian worldview.

ΜΕΣΟΤΗΣ – ΜΕΓΑΛΟΨΥΧΙΑ – ΤΑΠΕΙΝΩΣΙΣ.

IDEAŁY ETYCZNE STAROŻYTNEJ FILOZOFII GRECKIEJ A CNOTA POKORY W ROZUMIENIU GRECKICH OJCÓW KOŚCIOŁA IV WIEKU

(Streszczenie)

Omówione w artykule ideały etyczne starożytnych Greków zawierały zarówno elementy zbliżone do chrześcijańskiej koncepcji pokory, jak i takie, które istotnie od niej się różnią. W antycznej Grecji uważano wprawdzie pychę za główną

⁴⁶ Cf. Evagrius Ponticus, *Practicus* 6, ed. A. Guillaumont – C. Guillaumont, SCh 171, Paris 1971, 506-508; Dorotheus Gazaenus, *Doctrinae diversae* 14, 151, ed. L. Regnault – J. de Préville, SCh 92, Paris 1963, 424-426; Joannes Climacus, *Scala Paradisi*, gradus 25, 36-37, PG 88, 997A.

wadę, lecz przeciwstawiano jej nie uniżoną pokorę, uznawaną za przejaw nieśmiałości, słabości, lęku lub tchórzostwa, ale opartą na zasadzie umiaru postawę słusznej, uzasadnionej dumy, wynikającej z poczucia własnych możliwości.

Autorzy wczesnochrześcijańscy IV w., idąc śladem Klemensa Aleksandryjskiego i Orygenesesa, przejęli pojęcia wypracowane przez myślicieli antycznych, nadali im jednak nieco inne znaczenie i osadzili je w nowym religijnym kontekście, chociaż niekiedy sugerowali, że antyczni myśliciele rozumowali w sposób zbliżony do chrześcijan. Zasadę umiaru (μεσότης) połączył Jan Chryzostom z ewangelicznym radykalizmem, uznając za miarę wszystkiego Boga, który przekracza ludzką miarę, co ukazał w skrajnej kenozie swojego Syna. Ideał słusznej dumy (μεγαλοψυχία) był przedstawiany przez Ojców Kapadockich i Chryzostoma w kontekście odniesienia do Boga Stwórcy i Zbawcy, który – jak mówił Bazyli – jest jedynym powodem chlubienia się człowiekiem, co odbiera mu możliwość porównywania się i wywyższania ponad innych ludzi. Postawie pokornego uniżenia (ταπεινωσις), określanej częściej słowem ταπεινοφοσύνη, który stał się terminem technicznym na określenie cnoty pokory, autorzy epoki patrystycznej nadali jednoznacznie pozytywną ocenę, widząc w niej zarówno podstawę zdobywania innych cnót, jak i fundament zabezpieczający przed utratą cnót już zdobytych, na co szczególnie zwrócił uwagę w swoim nauczaniu Grzegorz z Nyssy, Jan Chryzostom, ale także pisarze z kręgów monastycznych, jak Ewagriusz z Pontu, a w późniejszych stuleciach Doroteusz z Gazy (VI w.) czy Jan Klimak (VII wiek).

Wykorzystanie przez teologów greckich IV w. nie w pełni zbieżnych z chrześcijaństwem ideałów etycznych zaczerpniętych z antycznej filozofii świadczy o zwycięstwie zapoczątkowanego przez większość apologetów II w. otwartego podejścia do tych elementów greckiej *paidei*, w których tkwiły nasiona rozumnej prawdy (λόγοι σπερματικοί), stanowiące swoiste przygotowanie do przyjęcia Ewangelii. Chęć Ojców Kościoła do podkreślania za wszelką cenę owej *praeparatio evangelica* mogła jednak niekiedy sprawiać, że dostrzegali oni w myśli antycznej zbyt wiele analogii z etyką chrześcijańską, przypisując filozofom starożytnym znajomość tego, co mogli dostrzec i zdefiniować dopiero oni sami jako chrześcijanie.

Key words: ethics of ancient Greece, virtue of humility, Cappadotian Fathers, John Chrysostom, theology of IVth century.

Słowa kluczowe: etyka starożytnej Grecji, cnota pokory, Ojcowie Kapadoccy, Jan Chryzostom, teologia IV w.