

## **Place of sorrow in Christian spirituality. Witnesses of the great monastic writers from Evagrius to John Climacus**

### **Summary**

This present study provides a brief analysis of the texts of the great monastic writers (Evagrius Ponticus, John Cassian, Gregory the Great and John Climacus) about the role, which sorrow plays in Christian spirituality. These writers – following St. Paul (2 Cor, 7, 10) – distinguish negative sorrow, “sorrow of the world” (λύπη κοσμική) and positive sorrow, „sorrow according to God” (λύπη κατὰ Θεόν).

Evagrius was the first monastic writer who classified sorrow as one of the main evil thoughts. It is mainly caused by unsatisfied desires and lusts, anger, inflicted harms or lost goods. Sorrow results in a lot of harmful effects: confusion of mind, difficulties in prayer, sloth, dryness of feelings, anger, irritability and – in the worst case – suicide. Desperation about one’s salvation due to committed sins is particularly harmful. In that case man does not experience true repentance, cuts himself off from returning to God, and often commits even greater sins.

Sorrow in positive sense expresses itself first of all in contrition for committed sins. Some writers include here also longing for God, spiritual perfection and life eternal; fear of punishment; or finally compassion for our neighbours. The so called „gift of tears” is strictly linked with the inner contrition, which makes prayer especially effective, brings purification from sins and defects, and may be an antidote for bad thoughts and hardening of heart. Paradoxically, John Climacus emphasizes that religious repentance includes joy. This monk of Sinai coins even a new technical term: χαρμολύπη (joyful sorrow). The monastic writers stress that tears cannot be sufficient in themselves. There is also a danger that motivation of tears will be vainglory, or tears will carry pride. Then they will lose their value.