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## THE ECLESIOLOGICAL AND SACRAMENTAL DIMENSION OF SPIRITUAL EXELLENCY

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### *Abstract*

The Church is a sure reality through which mankind can rise from the burden of sin. The Church expresses through the Holy Spirit all those who have been redeemed and harmonized in the love of Christ. That is why the Church contains millions and millions of hypostases, just as the Hypostasis of the Son of God comprised in Him, without absorbing it, the whole human nature assumed by Him as a connection to all mankind. In this sense, perfection is accomplished in Christ as a sacramental church, because He encompasses all in Himself as a center of straight lines that start from Him. The indispensable participation in the life of the Church, through a life after Christ, according to the attributes of the Church, highlights in us the grace of adoption, given to us through the Holy Baptism in the Holy Spirit in a life after the will of Christ. In the Church, we clothe the new man who renews himself in knowledge in the image of Him who made him (Colossians 3: 9-10).

**Keywords:** The church; perfection; Christianity; saving;

### 1. INTRODUCTION

True moral perfection of man is accomplished only through Jesus Christ, the Son of God Incarnate. In their desire to achieve perfection all the way to the likeness of God, humans are modeled on the Savior, for He is "the way, the truth and the life" (John 14: 6) through which the Father can be reached. Exellency is continuous progress, it is constant growing, it is unceasing ascension on the golden staircase that leads to the light palace of happy life, illuminated by truth, holiness, joyless joy.

Perfection is never over, it does not have a climax, from which it will not continue.

Perfection is flight from the top to the top, namely from a high peak, to a higher peak, the peaks becoming higher and higher "that fade in the sky's blue, through which it will continue to climb"(Ioan G. Coman 1995, 217). To this perfection, the Savior calls us when he says, "Be ye, but ye are perfect, as your perfect Heavenly Father is" (Matthew 5:48).



## **2. THE UNION WITH CHRIST BY PARTICIPATION IN THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH**

God's perfect knowledge is conditioned in the case of the created natures by His Incarnation, this being the perfect expression of God's manifestation in the way that He Himself becomes visible, but "not as He is, but as He who sees Him is capable, through a proportional division of the vision with the poverty of those who see" (Vladimir Lossky, 1995, 79).

An unseen and unknown God in His being is made known and revealed by coming out of His own self, descending to the created beings. It is His descent from Heavens as a work of His will through which the Word, as the unseen face of God, is seen by angels and men. The kenosis is the outpouring of God from His being through His works or energies. God's contemplation thus has a sacramental aspect, and the Church becomes the space of holiness where union with God is accomplished by the Holy Mysteries.

God has allowed salvation to be available only through His Son. Only those who believe and work in Jesus, who receive Him as Lord and Savior, and continue in a vital and intimate relationship with Him, will receive the benefits of His death on the cross. Salvation hangs on the status of being in Christ. Being in Christ means being in the Church. To be outside of Christ means to have sunk into the world's sin without hope or safety. Thus, salvation depends on remaining in the relationship with Jesus Christ, being faithful to His Word and the work of the Holy Spirit in us (E. H. Schillebeeck 1966,123). Christians, through the church, are sons of God (I John 5:13).

Christ saves people as it expands in them through the Holy Spirit, because it incorporates them into Himself and gradually assimilates them with His resurrected humanity. The Church is this extension of Christ by the Holy Spirit into humans, this laboratory in which the assimilation of humans with the risen Christ is gradually realized. Each of us receives salvation through the grace and divine gift of the Spirit, but it can come to the perfect measure of virtue through faith, love and the struggle of his free will, as he or she can inherit eternal life through the grace but also through justice (D. Belu, 1956, 552).

## **3. THE CHURCH AND THE WORK OF CHRIST IN PEOPLE THROUGH THE HOLY MYSTERIES**

Salvation can only be achieved in the Church; it is the field of action of the energy of grace, that springs from Christ, that is, of the Holy Spirit, who dwells fully in the humanity of the risen Christ, and from it, it is also communicated to us. Believers make up the mystical Body of the Lord, that is, the Church. The notion of Mystical Body expresses a more intimate and mystical part of the church, while the notion of seen Church as an exteriorized one, embodied in three exponents: the place, the institution, and the hierarchy.

Through the Church, the kingdom of God is expressed in the world, which has united the whole world from the Pentecost when the first Christian community was formed until the end of the world when we will have a new heaven and a new earth. The word "Mystical Body of Christ" always calls into mind the mystery of the frightening divine economy of the Incarnation, whose extension is "His Body" (N. Chițescu, 1942, 298).

It thus bounds itself to infinity, not only as a perceived earthly organization, as a present intersection of the two eternities: the past and the future, but also as an extension of the endless past to the eternal God, when it will be in a state of paradigm, and of the future that will not end, beyond the visible edges of this ephemeral world.

The Church, the mysterious body extended to humanity is the sure reality through which mankind can rise from the burden of sin. In the Body of Christ, the whole of the redeemed humanity is expressed in the Body of Christ, harmonized in the love of Christ, comprising millions and millions of hypostases, each complementing the building of the body to the praise and magnificence of the Creator. So, the notion of a mystical body has a sense of supernatural, wonderful. Seeking to deepen it further, we find that it also has that "mystical" and that of "hidden, secret", it has Christ the image of the unseen God revealed in the sacred holiness.

In the Church, each believer is part of the Church, and each receives the grace of the Holy Spirit through the Holy Mysteries, and through their communion acquires salvation. From that "he who believes and will be baptized will be saved ... (Mark XVI, 16); grace is transmitted in the communion of believers, sharing with the Spirit of Christ, uniting with Christ not only as human, but also as God, and through Him and the Father. As a consequence of the presence and work of the Spirit, there is the impetus towards the brotherhood with all humans, "for the Holy Spirit is the divine energy that tends to bring forth the adoption of all, in relation to the Father, and thereby the universal brotherhood. The believer, who feels the Son of the heavenly Father, sees all humans as such, even if they do not have this understanding, so he or she sees them all as his or her brothers and sisters. The Spirit, filling it with the enthusiasm of the paternal fellowship with the Father, fills him or her implicitly with the brotherhood's impulse for all humans. The Spirit, through the very fact that it is the Spirit of the Son, is the spirit of a son, wants to fill all with this spirit, towards unity, it being the spirit of communion.

The sharing of Holy Spirit is only through the Mysteries of the Church. That is why life in the Church manifests itself as an endless communion with the Spirit of Christ, with the spiritual powers that our flesh carries in the person of the Savior. We receive these new powers from Christ, through the work of the Holy Spirit, in the Holy Mysteries. By fulfilling the commandments of Christ, these spiritual powers bear us through the same labors and states through which Christ Himself endured in His life.

To be able to bear the image of the heavenly One, *σώμα πνευματικόν*, to reach "the state of the perfect man" (Ephesians 4:14), the human must unite with Christ. This union with Christ is accomplished first through the Sacrament of Holy Baptism and continues throughout his life through the other Holy Mysteries. The Savior sees the Sacrament of the Baptism as indispensable for the attainment of perfection: "If someone is not born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God (John 3, 5) and" He who believes and will be baptized, will save himself; and he that believeth not shall condemn himself" (Mark 16, 16).

So the mystical experience in Orthodox theology is permeated by the liturgical life. Only through the Holy Mysteries man enters into intimate communion with God. The importance of the Holy Spirit's grace for spiritual life is capital, without him the knowledge of God would not be possible. God becomes known to the human through faith, because of the uncreated energies by which God is made known to the human.

#### **4. THE DESTINATION, UNIQUE AND SACRAMENTAL MISTIC TRUTH**

The moral perfection of believers, as we have seen, becomes the only condition of the mystical experience, because those who have reached moral perfection have come to the full mystical knowledge of the truths of faith and to the full gracious union with Christ. The objective-mystical union with Christ, which is accomplished and perfected in the Church through the Holy Mysteries, must and can be externalized in the life of every Christian. Every Christian feels this union due to the presence of divine grace in him, and giving himself or herself intimately to God, he or she succeeds in perfecting this union.

Metropolitan Nicolae Mladin says that the mystical human is the Christian "for whom the objective-mystical union with Christ becomes conscious, is updated, becomes a fact of spiritual experience" (Nicolae Mladin, 2012, 257). Thus, the mystic is the human who has reached spiritual maturity, through a continuous and steady ascetic-mystical process, is the spiritual human, the spiritualized human. It is true that the mystical experience is a divine gift, realized in grace through the free and conscious participation of the human will and reason, but the closeness of the soul to God cannot be accomplished without the involvement of reason. The mystical experience is rational, and the one who wants to unite with the Supreme Reason will have to purify and restore his faculties first, including reason.

The existence of the world is seen as exerting also, besides other joints, all the powers of the soul in the ascension towards God. If God wanted to make Himself known at once, the world of things would be deprived of one of its meanings. The existence of the world itself as a way to God is proof that the supreme knowledge of God is not an irrational act, but an over-rational act, that is, it is not accomplished by premature renunciation of reason, by a direct leap out of reason, but by exceeding reason, a level that

does not disintegrate it, but involves it, after the activation and use of all its resources, after the fullest exercise of its powers (Dumitru Stăniloae, 2002, 230-231).

The mystical experience, understood as a life in connection with God, the life that has God in itself, has the ultimate goal of deification and union of the human with God. "Mystic," says Koepgen, "always has one goal: the deification and union of the human with God, without the confusion with Him. In Christianity, everything is necessarily oriented towards future perfection. Christian mysticism is not based on a predisposition of the humans that manages to confound themselves with the deity in a pantheistic experience of union with it, but it is the actualization of the incarnation of God in the believer" (Koepgen George, 1939).

In the vision of St. Maximus, mysticism is not unreasonable, but it implies reason in the process of "assimilating man in Christ", it is not an unreal product of the phantasmagoric side of the human, it is connected to the very human being, to its person, it being accessible to all who follow Christ. Through this position Saint Maxim the Confessor "has succeeded in uniting philosophy with mystical theology, the beginning of creation with its end," the straight line ", but not in an abstract and speculative way, but only in the Person of the Son as the creating and redeeming Logos, by virtue of the universal and harmonious rational order of all creation that has its center of gravity in Himself" ( Dumitru Popescu, 2005, 434).

In this respect Ioannis Zizioulas says: "It is perhaps for the first time in the history of philosophy as a whole when such a thing could have been expressed, because there is no other case, as far as I know, in which philosophical language has succeeded in uniting the beginning and the end of the being without closing in in a vicious circle. What Saint Maxim has accomplished is nothing but the miracle of making the circle compatible with the straight line.

The manner in which he succeeded, namely the happy relationship between ontology and love, and the development of an ontology of love in the notion of "ecstasis", can have tremendous value both in theology and contemporary philosophy" (Ioannis Zizioulas, 1996, 68).

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

Perfection, as the supreme mission of the human, involves an ecclesiological and sacramental work made gradually by the progressive breaking from the material to receive the spiritual, in which the limits and boundaries of human nature are established in the divine intimacy, having God as boundary, whose brightness is reflected in the beings who approach Him, like the mirror that approaches the light of the sun, but in order for the light to shine, the mirror of our soul must be pure and without sin.

The greatest good given to the human, is the soul that cannot be defined by a material representation, but by report and analogy to its Creator, he must wisely select the negative influences from the body to appear pure, full of glory, and light before God. The whole world, through the human "is an iconic world", being potentially portrayed in the divine paradigm. Through the human, the world and creation presents itself as a liturgy and cosmic service, which makes the heavenly world serve and sing with the earthly one, all being a "play" of love, communion, and perfection, from which the mesmerizing smell grows and blossoms, which sanctifies and fully realizes the image of the human, making it like God's through the consumption of the Holy Eucharist, as the eternal praise of God the Creator.

In other words, man was created as priest of the cosmos. He brings the entire created world as sacrificial offering to the praise of God, calling His love over the world through this eternal cosmic liturgy. The human subject is called to a conscious spiritual-material life in communion with God. He is called to sanctify all creation through asceticism and spiritual life, lifting it gradually through its endless wealth, to the fullness of a transfigured nature.

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