

THE UNION OF MAN AND CREATION WITH GOD, REFLECTED IN THE "MEDITATIONS" OF SAINT MAXIM THE CONFESSOR

PhD. Student Cosmin Iulian CÎRSTEA,

Faculty of Orthodox Theology "Justinian the Patriarch", University of Bucharest,
ROMANIA

Email: cosminiulian93@yahoo.com,

ABSTRACT

The union of man and creation with God, reflected in the "meditations" of St Maximus Confessor. God created all that exists out of love, wishing to share His eternally good existence with all creation. But the world cannot enter into a personal relationship with God, not being a person. That is why the Creator has placed in its midst man, who is the rational and personal representative of creation. He has been endowed with the vocation of uniting all that exists within himself and drawing the whole world into the most intimate communion with God. St Maximus Confessor describes this vocation of man through a series of five mediations that Adam had to carry out: mediation between man and woman, paradise and the inhabited world, heaven and earth, the intelligible and the sensible, the created and the uncreated.

Keywords: *deification; priesthood; mediations, man; creation;*

INTRODUCTION

God created everything out of love, wanting to share His eternally good existence with all creation. But the world cannot enter into a personal relationship with God, as it is not a person. That is why the Creator placed man in the midst of it, who is the rational and personal representative of creation. He has been endowed with the vocation of uniting in himself all that exists, and of drawing the whole world into the most intimate communion with God. St. Maximus Confessor describes this vocation of man through a series of five mediations that Adam had to carry out: mediation between man and woman, paradise and the inhabited world, heaven and earth, the intelligible and the sensible, the created and the uncreated.

1. MEDIATIONS OF SAINT MAXIM THE CONFESSOR

In man, there is a potential unity of all creatures, a unity which he is called upon to actualize. This potential unity exists between man's body and the material world, between his body and his soul, and between his soul, the spiritual world and God.¹ Specifically, Adam had the mission of being the priest of all creation, which he was to move like a train, together with himself, and bring into union with the Creator. St Maximus Confessor describes this mission through the five mediations.² He says that existence is divided into created and uncreated, intelligible and sensible, heavenly and earthly, paradise and the rest of the created

¹ PANAYOTIS NELLAS, *Omul, animal îndumnezeit*, trad. DIAC. IOAN I. ICĂ JR, Ed. Deisis, Sibiu, 2009, p. 85.

² SFÂNTUL MAXIM MĂRTURISITORUL, *Ambigua*, Io., 41, PG 91,1305B-1308C [trad. rom. SFÂNTUL MAXIM MĂRTURISITORUL, *Ambigua*, Io. 41, PSB 80, trad. PR. PROF. DR. DUMITRU STĂNILOAE, E.I.B.M.B.O.R., București, 1983, pp. 260-262].

world, male and female. Adam was called to overcome these divisions by a conscious work that would bring all creation together in him.³

First of all, the separation of man and woman was to be overcome by a chaste union, more complete than the bodily one typical of human nature after the fall into sin. Secondly, paradise was to be united with the rest of the earthly world; in this sense, man was to embrace nature, as if through love of God, uniting it with the paradise he carried within himself. By relating rightly to the surrounding nature, without dwelling on it as an end in itself which brings pleasure through consumption, man would have discovered the reasons put by God into the world and would have led it to the form desired by the Creator, bringing it to the likeness of paradise. In the third stage, through the spirit inserted in his body, he would overcome space, unifying the sensible world, the earth and the whole universe. In the next stage, Adam would have entered the heavenly world, living the life of the angels, and assimilating their intelligence; thus he would have united in himself the sensible world and the intelligible world.⁴

Finally, cosmic man, by giving himself fully to God, could give back to Him his entire creation, receiving from Him, in reciprocity of love, i.e. in grace, all that is God by nature. In this way, in overcoming the primordial separations between created and uncreated, the deification of man and, through man, of the whole universe would have been achieved.⁵

The latter mediation, between the created and the uncreated, might, at first glance, seem unattainable. How can the finite share the infinite and how can the created aspire to union with the uncreated?! This would have been impossible if God's plan had not yet included a stage of creation. The genesis of the world does not end with the seventh day, but creation continues after that, for Christ says: "My Father is working until now, and I am working." (John 5:17). Everything continues towards an eighth day, a day of creation perfected through the Incarnate Logos. He is the bridge between the created and the uncreated, and in union with Him alone, all can rest perfected. It was therefore necessary for the Logos to become man, in order for man's mission to be accomplished, and for the mediation between the created and the uncreated to take place.⁶ His resurrection is not determined by the accident of sin, sin only added to the mission of the Logos and redemption. Therefore, for the ultimate mediation to take place, the resurrection of the Son of God was necessary because He is the foundation and meaning of all that exists.⁷

Returning to the mediations of Saint Maxim the Confessor, they were not performed by Adam, because he committed the primordial sin by which the movement of his natural powers towards the purpose for which God had created him was interrupted.⁸ Man has missed his ontological vocation, ceasing to see in creation the reasons put into it by the

³ LARS THUNBERG, *Microcosm and Mediator. The Theological Anthropology of Maximus the Confessor*, Open Court Publishing Company, Illinois, 1995, pp. 51–60.

⁴ JEAN-CLAUDE LARCHET, *Îndumnezeirea omului la Sfântul Maxim Mărturisitorul*, trad. MARINELA BOJIN, Basilica, București, 2019, pp. 105–109.

⁵ PR. PROF. DR. DUMITRU STĂNILOAE, notă explicativă, în SFÂNTUL MAXIM MĂRTURISITORUL, *Ambigua*, Io. 41, pp. 263–264.

⁶ J.-C. LARCHET, *Îndumnezeirea omului...*, pp. 110–111.

⁷ PR. PROF. DR. DUMITRU STĂNILOAE, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, vol. I, Ed. IBM BOR, București, 2010, p. 337.

⁸ SFÂNTUL MAXIM MĂRTURISITORUL, *Quaestiones ad Thalassium*, prol., PG 90, 253C [trad. rom. SFÂNTUL MAXIM MĂRTURISITORUL, *Răspunsuri către Talasie*, coll. *Filocalia* 3, trad. PR. PROF. DR. DUMITRU STĂNILOAE, Ed. Apologeticum, București, 2005, p. 29].

Creator and has repositioned himself, stopping at its sensitive aspects⁹ and attaching to it through pleasure: "(...) by violating the divine commandment, which forbade him to contemplate creatures before he was established in godliness and unchangeableness, man allowed himself to be tempted by the image of what he saw and attracted by the promised pleasure of bodily delight in them; in this way he no longer regarded God as above them and, a fortiori, no longer saw His presence in them according to their reasons (logoi), which he was not sufficiently prepared to recognize. Thus man, without waiting until he was mature enough to devote himself to a spiritual contemplation of creatures, which would relate them to God, immediately gave himself over to an exclusively sensory knowledge of them - which therefore implies a lack of knowledge of God - accompanied by a bodily enjoyment, which takes the place of the spiritual enjoyment, giving rise, as was to be expected, to the passions."¹⁰

Thus, man has failed in his mission as "priest of creation", not understanding that this mission with which he has been endowed by creation cannot be fulfilled independently of God. In this way, Adam altered, along with his human nature, all that was ontologically linked to it, i.e. the whole of creation. Alone he could not now restore the world, so the incarnation of the Son of God was saving for him and creation.

Christ becomes man and assumes, in addition to the mediation between the created and the uncreated, the other four mediations and the redemption of man. By becoming man, Christ becomes the link between the created and the uncreated, and by his whole activity he brings to fulfilment the plan from which Adam had departed. In this way, he gives the possibility of man's deification and, through man, the whole world united with him.¹¹ The meaning God has planted in all that exists can now be actualized through the priest of creation, man. The latter can transfigure the whole cosmos by working with the God-man and can actualize its powers.¹²

2. THE INCARNATION OF THE WORD, THE FUNDAMENTAL ACT OF THE UNION OF MAN AND CREATION WITH GOD

God's eternal plan therefore included the incarnation of the Word, because only in this way could man, and through him all creation, overcome in grace the separation between the created and the uncreated¹³ and could unite with God¹⁴: "*The great counsel of God and the Father is the silent and unknown mystery of iconomy, which the only-begotten Son, having fulfilled in the incarnation, revealed by becoming an angel of the great and eternal counsel of God and the Father.*"¹⁵ Saint Maxim also says that for human nature, the Logos "*fulfilled the whole counsel of God and the Father, ennobling it by the power of His*

⁹ SFÂNTUL MAXIM MĂRTURISITORUL, *Epistolae*, 16, coll. PG 91, 580A [trad. rom. SFÂNTUL MAXIM MĂRTURISITORUL, *Scrieri și epistole hrisologice și duhovnicești*, Epistola 16, coll. PSB 81, E.I.B.M.B.O.R., Bucuresti, 1990, p. 146].

¹⁰ JEAN-CLAUDE LARCHET, *Îndumnezeirea omului...*, pp. 203–204.

¹¹ M. TH DISDIER, „Les fondements dogmatiques de la spiritualité de saint Maxime le Confesseur”, *Revue des études byzantines* 29, 159 (1930), Persée-Portail des revues scientifiques en SHS, p. 312.

¹² Pr.Prof.Dr.D. STĂNILOAE, *Teologia Dogmatică...*, vol. I, p. 393.

¹³ PANAYOTIS NELLAS, *Omul, animal îndumnezeit*, pp. 72–73.

¹⁴ NORMAN RUSSELL, *The doctrine of deification in the Greek patristic tradition* (The Oxford early Christian studies), Oxford University Press, Oxford; New York, 2004, p. 262.

¹⁵ Sfântul Maxim Mărturisitorul, *Capita theologiae et aconomiae*, II, 23, PG 90, 1134A [trad. rom. Sfântul Maxim Mărturisitorul, *Capete teologice sau gnostice, Filocalia 2*, Ed. Apologeticum, Bucuresti, 2005, p. 221].

incarnation."¹⁶ Taking this reasoning further, if the ultimate goal of creation is deification, and the incarnation is the fundamental act by which this goal can be achieved, we can safely say that the incarnation is the goal for which everything was brought into existence.¹⁷

In this key we can also better understand the beginning of the Gospel of John: *"In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. It was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him; and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not contain it."* (John. 1, 1-5)

"The concept of word or logos has possessed throughout history various semantic valences. In Heraclitus' conception, for example, logos defined 'the underlying principle of the organisation of the universe,'¹⁸ that gives harmony to the opposing elements that sustain and compose the dynamics of cosmic becoming. Looking to Plato, we see that the term is the epistemological essence of a thing, brought to light by the deepest knowledge of it.¹⁹ Therefore, logos is the true meaning of being-ousia. For Aristotle, the meaning of the term is that of rationality, the reasoning of things. As far as Stoic philosophy is concerned, logos is material in nature and is identical with nature, representing the active force in the universe; it is the basis of "cosmic sympathy and natural law, and the ethical imperative of life in conformity with nature".²⁰

The encounter of Judeo-Christian and Hellenistic thought brought a much clearer perspective to the term. The Logos is the essence of the above verses and represents the divine Reason of the world, which is seen in all of God's creation. Moreover, it is the fulfilment of the plan of the deification of all that exists. The Logos is no longer just an abstract principle, but the very Second Person of the Holy Trinity, the Word of God, which comprises the divine paradigms that will be actualized in time and space as God's creation.²¹

Returning to the incarnation of the Logos as God's plan from eternity, a few more issues need to be clarified. First, by linking the incarnation to the deification of man, it may be objected that we make it a necessary act, which would be contrary to God's absolute freedom. It could be objected that we are thus introducing a necessity into God, who is compelled to the act of incarnation in order to fulfil his original plan. It could also be argued that this conditioning of the incarnation on the incarnation would instrumentalize the latter. In the first case, we can answer very simply that it cannot be a compulsion. God decides from eternity to create man and to offer him the possibility of deification through the incarnation of the Logos. Incarnation is therefore an absolutely voluntary act of God.²² In the second case, the incarnation becomes not only an instrument, but the act of supreme love. God empties Himself of glory in order to give man through grace all that He is after being.²³

¹⁶ SFÂNTUL MAXIM MĂRTURISITORUL, *Quaestiones ad Thalassium*, 54, PG 90, 520D [trad. rom. SFÂNTUL MAXIM MĂRTURISITORUL, *Răspunsuri către Talasie*, 54, coll. *Filocalia 3*, trad. Pr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru Stăniloae, Apologeticum, p. 274].

¹⁷ Vladimir LOSSKY, *Teologia Mistică a Bisericii de Răsărit*, trad. Pr. Prof. Vasile Răducă, Ed. Bonifaceo, București, 1998, p. 166.

¹⁸ Francis E. PETERS, *Termenii filosofiei grecești*, trad. Drăgan Stoianovici, Humanitas, București, 1993, p. 161.

¹⁹ PLATON, *Republica*, vol. I, *Opere complete*, Ed. Humanitas, București, 2001, p. 297.

²⁰ F.E. PETERS, *Termenii filosofiei grecești*, p. 163.

²¹ PR. PROF. DR. ION BRIA, *Dicționar de Teologie Ortodoxă*, E.I.B.M.B.O.R., București, 1994, p. 242.

²² SFÂNTUL MAXIM MĂRTURISITORUL, *Epistolae*, 13, PG 91, 516D-517C [trad. rom. SFÂNTUL MAXIM MĂRTURISITORUL, *Scrieri și epistole hrisologice și duhovnicești*, Epistola 13, pp. 103–104].

²³ PANAYOTIS NELLAS, *Omul, animal îndumnezeit*, pp. 72–73.

The direct linking of incarnation to deification can also produce another confusion. We can consider that incarnation is inseparably linked to salvation and therefore to the fall into sin. Sin thus becomes a necessary instrument for the fulfilment of the plan of human deity. This cannot be accepted precisely for the reason explained earlier: the incarnation is not linked to the fall. The Son of God would have become man even if Adam had not fallen, precisely in order to fulfil the first mediation, that between created and uncreated. Sin only reconfigures this path and adds another aspect to the incarnation, salvation. Thus, in addition to the hypostatic union, the Saviour performs a series of redemptive acts, culminating in the crucifixion and resurrection.²⁴

As we have said before, the incarnation of the Word has been part of God's eternal plan for the deification of human beings.²⁵ This means that the Word's coming into being was the purpose for which the human nature was created, and the human nature was created with the purpose and capacity to receive the Son of God as hypostasis.²⁶ Man therefore has the ontological vocation to serve the union of the created and the uncreated: "(...) *the fact that God fashioned man 'in His own image' means in the last analysis that He created him so that he would tend by his very nature, by the very fact that he is human, towards that which is His Godly Image. It means that He has given him gifts, and has given them to him in a real way, so that these gifts constitute for man the very possibility and purpose of actively serving the incarnation of the Logos who is the perfect and unique Image or Icon of the Father. And so man, enipostatized in the Logos, may also be raised to the image, may also show himself to be the icon or image of God*".²⁷

Thus, man finds his ontological foundation in the Archetype. The Old Adam was created in the image of the New Adam, Christ, even though the latter did not exist as a man historically. Christ is in the timeless reality of God, and historical existence or non-existence is no impediment to the Creator.²⁸

In connection with the Logos' incarnation regardless of the appearance of sin in history, one more point needs to be clarified. This does not mean that it should have occurred under exactly the same conditions as it did after the fall. God could have found another way of uniting the divine and human natures, thus sharing the grace of deification with the creature.²⁹ If Adam had not fallen, he would have climbed step by step towards God, performing the mediations of which Saint Maximus speaks.³⁰ Reaching the last step, the Word would have enipostatized the human nature, overcoming the difference between created and uncreated. There would have been no need for all the saving activity or even the sacrifice on the cross and resurrection. The sharing in God's grace of man and of all creation would have been realized at that moment. But because Adam had fallen into sin and was thus diverted from his purpose, it was necessary for Christ to accomplish all five mediations in his place.

²⁴ JEAN-CLAUDE LARCHET, *Îndumnezeirea omului...*, p. 83.

²⁵ NORMAN RUSSELL, *The doctrine of deification...*, pp. 264–265.

²⁶ PR. PROF. DR. DUMITRU STĂNILOAE, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, vol. II, E.I.B.M., București, 2010, p. 38.

²⁷ PANAYOTIS NELLAS, *Omul, animal îndumnezeit*, p. 72.

²⁸ PANAYOTIS NELLAS, *Omul, animal îndumnezeit*, p. 71.

²⁹ J.-C. LARCHET, *Îndumnezeirea omului la Sfântul Maxim Mărturisitorul*, pp. 86–87.

³⁰ SFÂNTUL MAXIM MĂRTURISITORUL, *Quaestiones ad Thalassium*, 22, PG 90, 320A [trad. rom. SFÂNTUL MAXIM MĂRTURISITORUL, *Răspunsuri către Talasie*, 22, *Filocalia* 3, trad. Pr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Apologeticum*, p. 95].

3. THE FULFILMENT IN CHRIST OF THE FIVE "MEDIATIONS" DESCRIBED BY SAINT MAXIM THE CONFESSOR

In becoming man, the Son of God Himself accomplished all five mediations: Christ overcame the difference between man and woman by breaking the law of birth through sin.³¹ His conception which did not involve sexual pleasure, the preservation of the mother's virginity and the birth without the specific affections are acts through which the mediation between the sexes was accomplished. Therefore, in Christ "There is no longer Jew or Greek; there is neither slave nor free; there is no longer male and female" but we are all one. (Gal. 3:28). Expressing this mediation more abstractly, we can say that Christ overcame the separation between man and woman by freeing their common nature from the characteristics arising from the passions. He subsumed the characteristics of both sexes into their common reason (logos) by removing what was perverted by sin. Thus the specifics of each sex are not eliminated, but subdued by their common nature.³²

As for the mediation between heaven and the inhabited earth, Christ sanctified the world by His sinless life, thus introducing into its existence a reality specific to heaven. Moreover, after His death, He not only descended into hell, freeing the bound, but also entered heaven, returning to earth and showing that for the transfigured man there are no barriers between these realities³³: "In the grave with the body, in hell with the Soul, as one God, in heaven with the thief, and on the throne you were, O Christ, with the Father and the Spirit, filling them all, you who are uncorrupted."³⁴

The mediation between heaven and earth was accomplished by the Saviour ascending to heaven with His human body, co-substantial with ours. In this way, he eliminated the separating particularities and demonstrated the unity of the sensible nature.³⁵ Moreover, through virtuous living, Christ "overcame the fatness of the body"³⁶ ascending human nature into the "heaven of the perfection of angels".³⁷

As for the mediation between the intelligible and the sensible, it must be said that it has in common with the mediation between heaven and earth the act of the Saviour's ascension to heaven. This ascent of the human being through the various categories of created beings corresponds to a natural tendency of creation towards unity in the Logos. Both angels and men and all creation have their reasoning in the supreme Reason, Christ. The latter has raised up the knowing faculty of the human being through the categories of knowledge of the nine angelic groups, and thus man, who includes in himself the sentient nature, has the capacity to contemplate God together with the angels, beings par excellence intelligible.³⁸

The last mediation the man had to perform was different from all the others. It belongs to the last stage of spiritual evolution, involving mystical union. It is achieved when

³¹ SFÂNTUL MAXIM MĂRTURISITORUL, *Ambigua*, Io., 41, PG 91, 1309A [trad. rom. SFÂNTUL MAXIM MĂRTURISITORUL, *Ambigua*, Io.,41, p. 264.

³² LARS THUNBERG, *Microcosm and Mediator...*, pp. 379–380.

³³ LARS THUNBERG, *Microcosm and Mediator...*, pp. 381–382.

³⁴ *Liturghierul Pastoral*, Editura Mitropoliei Moldovei și Bucovinei, Iași, 2004, p. 137.

³⁵ SFÂNTUL MAXIM MĂRTURISITORUL, *Ambigua*, Io., 41, PG 91, 1309BC [trad. rom. SFÂNTUL MAXIM MĂRTURISITORUL, *Ambigua*, Io.,41, p. 265–266].

³⁶ SFÂNTUL MAXIM MĂRTURISITORUL, *Ambigua*, Io., 41, PG 91, 1305D [trad. rom. SFÂNTUL MAXIM MĂRTURISITORUL, *Ambigua*, Io.,41, p. 262].

³⁷ SFÂNTUL MAXIM MĂRTURISITORUL, *Ambigua*, Io., 41, PG 91, 1305D [trad. rom. SFÂNTUL MAXIM MĂRTURISITORUL, *Ambigua*, Io.,41, p. 263]L. THUMBERG, *Microcosm and Mediator...*, p. 391.

³⁸ LARS THUNBERG, *Microcosm and Mediator...*, pp. 398–399.

man overcomes the sphere of creation and the last type of separation that exists between man, nature and the Creator and unites in grace with God. It is an absolutely paradoxical mediation, since there is no unity of substance and no common logos between creation and Creator.³⁹ The only bridge between the created and the uncreated is the divine Logos who embodies human nature. Thus, the incarnation is the beginning of this mediation, and its completion is found in the placing of Christ with all human nature at the right hand of the Father, within the Holy Trinity.⁴⁰ From there, the Son of God made man can impart his divinizing grace to every human person, to the extent that he opens himself to this sharing.

As a conclusion to what has been said so far about the performance in Christ of the mediations to which Adam was called, we can say that the Son of God, by becoming man and performing the saving and deifying acts, virtually achieved the union of man with God. But this is not enough for the perfection of each individual human person. It would be a violation of man's freedom if both salvation and perfection in union with God were received by man without any action expressing his consent, or rather his adherence to the gift of Christ. The mediation between the created and the uncreated accomplished in and by Christ also implies a personal realization of the consequences of the enipostatization of the human being. In what follows, therefore, we will speak of the role of each human person in the act of full union with God.

4. THE ACTUALIZATION ON A PERSONAL LEVEL OF THE DEIFICATION OF THE HUMAN BEING ASSUMED BY THE SON OF GOD

The deification of man was part of God's plan even before he came into existence, or in other words, man was created to be deified⁴¹: *"For to this end he has also made us, 'that we might be made partakers of the divine nature' (II Pet. 1:4) and of his eternity, and that we might be made like him through the deification according to grace, for which is the whole existence and duration of those who are and the bringing into being and birth of those who are not."*⁴²

The fact that man is ontologically called to deification also implies his capacity to receive and cooperate with deifying grace. In this sense, man's logos comprises, as we have already shown, the impetus towards fulfilment in union with God. Thus, in order to be ennobled, the human person must put himself in accord with the logos of his nature⁴³ through everything he does: *"Every one of the creatures endowed with mind and reason, angels and men, is and is called part of God by the very reason (logos) after which he was created, which is in God and for God, which preexists in God as it was said. And if it moves according to it, it will certainly be in God, in whom the reason (logos) of its existence preexists, as its origin and cause. And if he does not wish to grasp with desire anything but his own origin, he does not fall away from God, but becomes, stretching himself more and more after him, a god, and is called a part of God, in that he partakes of God according to*

³⁹ Sfântul Maxim Mărturisitorul, *Ambigua*, Io., 41, coll. PG 91,1305A [trad. rom. Sfântul Maxim Mărturisitorul, *Ambigua*, Io. 41, p. 259]

⁴⁰ LARS THUNBERG, *Microcosm and Mediator...*, pp. 404–405.

⁴¹ NORMAN RUSSELL, *The doctrine of deification...*, p. 266.

⁴² SFÂNTUL MAXIM MĂRTURISITORUL, *Epistolae*, coll. PG 91, 609C [trad. rom. SFÂNTUL MAXIM MĂRTURISITORUL, *Scrieri și epistole hrisologice și duhovnicești*, 24, coll. PSB 81, E.I.B.M.B.O.R., Bucuresti, 1990, p. 163]

⁴³ JEAN-CLAUDE LARCHET, *Îndumnezeirea omului...*, p. 85.

his own will, as one who embraces according to nature, wisely and rationally, by a movement with a good face, his own origin and cause (...)"⁴⁴

Man must therefore live and act according to the reason by which he was created, guarding against anything that would divert him from his purpose.⁴⁵ Only in this way did the saints "learn to let themselves be led without deviation, according to the right reason (logos) of nature, towards its Cause."⁴⁶ In this way, every human being is called to move by free choice from mere existence to good existence, which eventually is perfected in eternally good existence, which is deification. More precisely, by putting freedom into action, starting from the virtues imprinted in the image of God in man, man must cooperate with the grace given by God and become more and more like the Creator.⁴⁷

This conjoining is done in the most proper way through virtues, which are nothing more than the attunement of man's actions with the logos according to which he was created.⁴⁸ They are steps towards a conformity of life with God's eternally good existence, which is reached when man's will is no longer split by the choice between good and evil, but is steadfast in choosing the good.⁴⁹

If the incarnation of the Son of God virtually offers man deity, the practice of the virtues gives man the opportunity to actualize it. By doing good, an incarnation of the Word takes place in each person, since man acquires reflections of the divine attributes. The divine gifts to which human nature has access through incarnation become operative in the virtuous man.⁵⁰

However, virtues alone are not enough for the deification of the human person, but an effective sharing of the grace that Christ brought into human nature from the Virgin Mary is also necessary. This is done through the Mysteries of the Church.⁵¹ Saint Dionysius Pseudo-Areopagite lays strong emphasis on the fact that deification is accomplished only if, in addition to the virtues, man also partakes of the grace offered through the Holy Mysteries.⁵² For example, through Baptism, man is incorporated into Christ and thus receives the deifying grace that the Savior's humanity received through hypostatic union.⁵³ Through the sacrament of the Chrism, man partakes of the gifts of the Holy Spirit which enable him to put into action the powers offered by union with Christ through Baptism.⁵⁴ But the fullest manifestation of the deifying character of the sacraments is seen in the Holy Eucharist. Here man receives Christ Himself within himself, in whom "dwells bodily all the

⁴⁴ SFÂNTUL MAXIM MĂRTURISITORUL, *Ambigua*, Io., 7, coll. PG 91,1080BC [trad. rom. SFÂNTUL MAXIM MĂRTURISITORUL, *Ambigua*, Io. 7d, p. 81]

⁴⁵ JEAN-CLAUDE LARCHET, *Îndumnezeirea omului...*, p. 186.

⁴⁶ SFÂNTUL MAXIM MĂRTURISITORUL, *Ambigua*, Io., 10, coll. PG 91,1116C [trad. rom. SFÂNTUL MAXIM MĂRTURISITORUL, *Ambigua*, Io. 10, p. 115]

⁴⁷ PANAYOTIS NELLAS, *Omul, animal îndumnezeit*, p. 73.

⁴⁸ POLYCARP SHERWOOD, *St. Maximus the confessor: The ascetic life. The four centuries on charity*, Longmans, Green and Co, Londra, 1955, p. 71.

⁴⁹ JEAN-CLAUDE LARCHET, *Îndumnezeirea omului...*, p. 188.

⁵⁰ LARS THUNBERG, *Microcosm and Mediator...*, pp. 430–431.

⁵¹ POLYCARP SHERWOOD, *The Earlier Ambigua of Saint Maximus the Confessor and his Refutation of Origenism*, Orbis Catholicus, Roma, 1955, pp. 72–81.

⁵² SFÂNTUL DIONISIE AREOPAGITUL, *De Ecclesiastica Hierarchia*, 1, 5, PG 3, 376BC [trad. rom. SFÂNTUL DIONISIE AREOPAGITUL, *Despre Ierarhia Bisericească*, 1, 5, *Opere complete*, trad. Pr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru Stăniloae, Ed. Paideia, București, 1996, p. 73.].

⁵³ JEAN-CLAUDE LARCHET, *Viața sacramentală*, trad. MARINELA BOJIN, Ed. Basilica, București, 2015, p. 29.

⁵⁴ SFÂNTUL ATANASIE CEL MARE, *Epistolae ad Serapionem*, I, 20, coll. PG 26, 580A [trad. rom. SFÂNTUL ATANASIE CEL MARE, „Epistole către Serapion”, I, 20, în: *Scrieri. Partea a II-a*, coll. PSB 16, E.I.B.M.B.O.R., București, 1988, pp. 47–48].

fullness of the Godhead" (Col. 2:9). Thus union with Christ is achieved, which radiates from within the interior the grace of deity.⁵⁵

So we see that man can be ennobled by the work of virtue, but only by sharing in the mysteries of the Church, which is the social extension of the body of Christ. It is the "power of the new mystery"⁵⁶, i.e. as the incarnation, which extends the effects of the hypostatic union and of the whole saving and deifying work to each individual human person. *"The Church is the synthesis of the three laws — the natural, the written and the laws of grace — which are the different ways of life of those who walk in the way of the Lord. It represents above all the third, which includes and perfects the first two, and which is founded on the mystery of the incarnation, which is the law of the Spirit, and correlatively related to the law of deification."*⁵⁷

Another aspect that we should address regarding the deification of man is its beginning and completion. We need to see when it begins, whether it is a steady state or an advance, and whether it can be fully realized here on earth.

St. Maxim speaks on several occasions about the fact that deification can be achieved even in this life and gives the example of the apostles Peter, James and John, who at the Transfiguration of Christ saw the uncreated light while still in the flesh.⁵⁸ Moreover, Christ Himself, being also true Man, was able to transfigure in part His human body and let divine light shine from it. We can therefore conclude that deification is not only the final step of our existence beyond physical death, nor is it only the last step of perfection, because it begins here on earth and is to a greater or lesser extent present from the lowest steps of spiritual evolution.⁵⁹

Thus we understand how the saints have had certain gifts since this life. They could overcome certain natural laws and physiological processes, showing a partial transfiguration of the body, they could perform miracles, resembling Christ, and they could contemplate uncreated light. Of course, all of this reached perfection after the separation of the soul from the body. It should be noted that this separation is only partial, the soul retaining a certain connection with the body, and the body showing evidence of the impregnation in it of the grace of deification. This is why saints leave holy relics which are the most visible proof of the sharing of the body with grace.⁶⁰

Thus, deification begins in earthly life, but is completed after death: *"(...)distinguishing past ages from future ones, he distinguished by these words in a mysterious and wise way the reason of activity from that of suffering. Thus the ages of life in the flesh, in which we now live (for Scripture also knows temporal ages, according to the word: And hath endured for ever and ever, and shall live to the end", are the ages of the active state, and the future ages, which follow after those here, are the ages of the spirit, of the prefiguration into the state of the suffering. Here, therefore, finding ourselves in the state of activity, we shall at once come to the end of the ages, our power and work by which we*

⁵⁵ SFÂNTUL NICOLAE CABASILĂ, *Despre Viața în Hristos*, IV, 1-6, E.I.B.M.B.O.R., București, 1997, pp. 106–108.

⁵⁶ SFÂNTUL MAXIM MĂRTURISITORUL, *Quaestiones ad Thalassium*, 63, PG 90, 665B [trad. rom. SFÂNTUL MAXIM MĂRTURISITORUL, *Răspunsuri către Talasie*, 63, p. 396].

⁵⁷ JEAN-CLAUDE LARCHET, *Îndumnezeirea omului...*, pp. 440–441.

⁵⁸ SFÂNTUL MAXIM MĂRTURISITORUL, *Ambigua*, Io., 7, coll. PG 91,1076CD [trad. rom. SFÂNTUL MAXIM MĂRTURISITORUL, *Ambigua*, Io. 7, p. 75-77]

⁵⁹ JEAN-CLAUDE LARCHET, *Îndumnezeirea omului...*, p. 723.

⁶⁰ PR. PROF. DR. DUMITRU STĂNILĂ, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, vol. III, E.I.B.M.O., București, 2010, pp. 366–367.

are active coming to an end, and in the ages to come, undergoing the preformation of deification by grace, we shall not be in activity, but in passivity, and therefore we shall never come to the end of our deification. For the "suffering" of that time will be beyond nature, and there will be no reason which will determine the endless deification of those who suffer it. So we work as long as we have in activity the working power of the virtues, which is rational by nature, and the thinking power, capable, without restraint, of all knowledge, being able to traverse the whole universe of what is and is known and to make retroactively its own all the ages that have been. And we shall perish after we have passed altogether beyond the reasoning of those created out of nothing, and have come in an unmeasured way to the Cause of things. Then we shall also let our powers rest, at once with what is bounded by nature, acquiring that which can by no means acquire the power after nature, because nature has no power to comprehend that which is beyond nature."⁶¹

We note that neither beyond death nor even at the end of the ages is deification static, but is a continuous evolution; here we are actively perfected through the work of the virtues and the reception of God's grace.⁶², and on the other side we receive from God the grace of deity that makes us continually grow in union with Him.⁶³

Likewise, the deification of men is not done equally for all, but each one as much as he is able to receive and as much as he cooperates with divine grace. There is therefore a hierarchy of deification according to each person's worthiness.⁶⁴ The human person advances in union with God according to the willingness of the will to work virtue and receive divine grace.⁶⁵

CONCLUSION

It must also be said that the deification of the human person is of particular importance for the rest of creation. By uniting himself in grace with God, man also brings into this union the world to which he is ontologically bound by his body. The world is thus deified through man, and the state he achieves is also reflected in it.

We can therefore conclude that God's plan from eternity includes the dehumanization of man and through him of all creation. In this sense, man has been endowed by God with the capacity and vocation to be a priest of creation. In this way he rises to the most intimate communion with God, and in this way he also brings the world into the closest proximity with the Creator, in accordance with his capacity to receive divine grace.

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⁶² POLYCARP SHERWOOD, *St. Maximus the confessor: The ascetic life...*, pp. 81-82.

⁶³ PR. PROF. DR. DUMITRU STĂNILOAE, *Teologia Dogmatică...*, vol. III, pp. 324-325.

⁶⁴ JEAN-CLAUDE LARCHET, *Îndumnezeirea omului...*, p. 730.

⁶⁵ SFÂNTUL DIONISIE AREOPAGITUL, *De Caelesti Hierarchia*, III, 2, PG 3 [trad. rom. SFÂNTUL DIONISIE AREOPAGITUL, *Despre Ierarhia Cerească*, III, 2, coll. *Opere complete*, trad. Pr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru Stăniloae, Paideia, București, 1996, p. 90]

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