



## ***The Complementarity of Spiritual Values according to the Chalcedonian Dogma\****

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**Abstract:** *Starting from the dogmatic formulation of the Synod of Chalcedon, and correlating references to the Holy Fathers (John of Damascus, Maximus the Confessor, Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory of Nazianzus, Gregory Palamas, Leontius of Byzantium, Irenaeus of Lyon, Theodor of Studion, Athanasius of Alexandria, Cyril of Alexandria, Leo the Great, Cabasilas) with modern theology (Stăniloae, Lossky, Barth, Schmemmann, Brunner, H. U. von Balthasar, O. Clément, Nissiotis), this paper highlights the essential complementarity of the Chalcedonian dogma. It analyses the implications of the complementarity of the two natures – divine and human – inconspicuously joined within the unique Hypostasis of the Son of God incarnated. It discusses the relevance of the Chalcedonian definition of man as a “bipolar” person, realised in the communion of the divine with the human (on the verticality and the horizontality of existence), both for theology, and as a basis for ecumenical dialogue. The divine kenosis grounds the bipolarity of the human as a theandric*

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vocation: we are created in the “image of the Image”, in order to achieve the likeness unto Him. Hence the specificity of Orthodox anthropology – which is not merely that of man, but of the Man-God, of God’s humanity.

*The overall tenet of the paper is particularly relevant for inter-confessional dialogue. The ultimate foundation of ecumenicity is the Christological interpretation in the spirit of unity of the One, undivided Church, on the basis of the Ecumenical Synods’ and Patristic heritage. The concise formula of the Christological dogma: „While remaining what He was, He made Himself that which He was not” also concentrates the mystery of human and ecclesial unity. Divine love (agape) has a unique virtue: you can remain what you are as a being, in the plenitude of truth, while, at the same time, you can become that which you are not, by kenosis, by sacrifice. You can share the condition of the other, undertake that which is authentic in the other, just as Christ undertook humanity suffering for us and together with us. You can serve, you can come closer to all, without sacrificing the truth, but opening yourself to the others by the truth, in genuine love, progressing towards unity. These are the foundations in which Orthodoxy grounds its ecumenicity: fidelity to the integral truth, and service to the others in truth and love.*

**Key words:** transfiguration, Head-Hypostasis, Source-Hypostasis, fruitful virginity.

The subject of this dialogue has been a felicitous choice: it highlights the unbroken fecundity of the dogmatic elaboration of the Fourth Ecumenical Council. That Synod, from the period of the ecumenicity of the Church, is a monument of the Holy Tradition; even to this day it provides a basis for ecumenical dialogue. All the more so, as it opens up for us a divine, luminous horizon in theology, Christology and anthropology, in the mystery of the Church, and of the Creation itself.

It does so, in fact, no less than the preceding Ecumenical Councils, whereby the Revelation became embodied in history through relentless tension and harsh asceticism of the spirit. The First Synod of Nicaea (325) elaborated the doctrine of *homooúsios*, the consubstantiality of the Son with the Father, and at the same time,

established our general, human consubstantiality through the Son of God made Man. The Second Synod (Constantinople, 381) brought equal worship to the Holy Spirit as to the Father and the Son, revealing in all its plenitude the icon of the Holy Trinity, as the archetype of the One Church, in the plurality and diversity of the Persons. The Third Synod (Ephesus 431) moved more visibly toward anthropology, or rather – more profoundly said – toward theanthropology, and the Mother of God, the human chosen vessel, is recognised as the *Theotokos*, “Birth-Giver of God”.

Consecutive to the previous elaborations, the Synod of Chalcedon was confronted precisely with the need to shed more light on this “core of mystery” of the union between the divine and the human, and, of course, with the implications of the complementarity arising from it – which shall also be the topic of our paper.

But firstly, let us recall the dogmatic text of Chalcedon. Having repeated the creed of Nicaea and Constantinople in a *prooemion*, and referred to the tensions between the Nestorians and the Monophysites, the Synod gave the following definition:

We, then, following the holy Fathers, all with one consent, teach people to confess one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, the same perfect in Godhead and also perfect in manhood; truly God and truly man, of a reasonable [rational] soul and body; consubstantial [co-essential] with the Father according to the Godhead, and consubstantial with us according to the Manhood; in all things like unto us, except for sin; begotten before all ages of the Father according to the Godhead, and in these latter days, for us and for our salvation, born of the Virgin Mary, the Birth-Giver of God, according to the Manhood; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, only begotten, to be acknowledged in two natures, inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably; the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the union, but rather the property of each nature being preserved, and concurring in one Person and one Hypostasis, not parted or divided into two persons, but one and the same Son, and only begotten God the Word, our Lord Jesus Christ; as the prophets from the beginning [have declared] concerning Him, and the



Lord Jesus Christ Himself has taught us, and the Creed of the holy Fathers has handed down to us.<sup>1</sup>

The dogmatic definition of Chalcedon affirms, above all, a supreme value, that of God's love for man, since, according to the divine revelation: "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). And we, all those present here, unanimously confess that God's boundless love is the foundation and the reason of the Creation, and of His redeeming Incarnation. As Saint Maximus the Confessor (†680) said: "Out of His boundless love for man He has made Himself that which He is by nature, the beloved One."<sup>2</sup> Or, as the Orthodox Church worships in her cult: "Thou Being God, hast created Thyself for Thy creation."<sup>3</sup> This is the unspoken *kenosis* of the Son of God, of love descending from the love of the Trinity; which reveals the life-image of the Trinity. The love which "hath broken down the middle wall of partition", of opacity, and "made both one" (Eph. 2:14). A love which reveals its glory by "depriving itself of all glory". As Saint Gregory Palamas profoundly observes: "Being nature above all natures, God needn't ascend any further, to greater height, to greater glory. He heightens Himself from the lowly ones... He rises by descending and humbling Himself in His creatures. The glory of the Most High is the descent to the humble ones."<sup>4</sup> The interpretation of Karl Barth is in the same biblical and patristic spirit: "Thus, the abasement of God is the elevation of man. God's abasement is His supreme glory, for it is this very degradation that confirms and demonstrates His divine nature. And the elevation of man, as a work performed by the

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Eduard Schwartz, *Concilium Universale Chalcedonense, Vol. II, 1.2.*, Walter de Gruyter, Berolini et Lipsiae, 1936, pp. 126, 130; see also Dumitru Stăniloae, *Definiția dogmatică de la Calcedon* (The Dogmatic Definition of Chalcedon), in "Ortodoxia", Review of the Romanian Patriarchate, No. 2-3/ 1951, pp. 410-411.

<sup>2</sup> *Ambiguorum liber*, P.G. 91, col. 1048 C.

<sup>3</sup> The Second Prayer of the Holy Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick.

<sup>4</sup> From *Cuvânt la Nașterea lui Hristos* (*Sermon on the Nativity of the Lord*), quoted in St Nikodemos the Hagiorite, *Paza celor cinci simțuri* (The Guarding of the Five Senses), chapter 11, Neamț Monastery Publishing House, 1826, p. 381, note 256.

divine grace, is precisely the highlighting of His true humanity.”<sup>5</sup>

But God’s love thereby also affirms the value of man. The fact that God makes man His second nature grants man a unique value; qualifies him as “*homo capax divini*”. God turns man into His complement. In Christ, the true God is hypostatically united to the true man: the sinless man. Therefore, the man in Christ is, to us, the authentic man, “fully humanised and fully deified... Connected to Him, one can become both humanised and deified”<sup>6</sup> and we can fulfil the vocation of our condition.

He took our nature “except for sin”, the *Definition* specifies. “Because sin doesn’t even belong to nature” – as St. Maximus observed<sup>7</sup>. Hence, even in sin, “when the Gentiles, who have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, they are a law unto themselves, even though they have not the law. They show the work of the law written in their hearts” (Rom 2:14-15).

Therefore, the evil cannot “destroy”, and does not pertain to, the being of reality. The divine within us is deeper than sin. “Man is at once spirit and flesh, a spirit grounded in the grace” – says Saint Gregory the Theologian<sup>8</sup>. He is a spirit ontologically rooted in the grace, in the “divine breath of life” (Gen 2:7), indestructible. And, as St. Paul says again: “...the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable” (Rom 11:29).

At the origin of the evil lies an alienated mode of the creature in its autonomous liberty, in the person’s free choice (γνώμη). This is “a deviation from their purpose of the operation of the powers implanted in nature” (Saint Maximus the Confessor), which may corrupt, weaken, obscure nature, render it opaque through egocentricity; thus, nature loses its authentic

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<sup>5</sup> Karl Barth, *Die Kirchliche Dogmatik*, vol. IV, 1, p. 139, *apud* Dumitru Stăniloae, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă* (Orthodox Dogmatic Theology), vol. II, Publishing House of the Biblical and Missionary Institute of the Romanian Orthodox Church, București, 1978, note 75.

<sup>6</sup> D. Stăniloae, *Teologia dogmatică...*, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

<sup>7</sup> *Ambiguorum liber*, *ibidem*.

<sup>8</sup> *Oratio* 38, 11, P.G. 36, col. 324 A.



transparency to God, to one's fellow-men, to the luminous meanings of existence; yet, God's image in man is never completely destroyed. This is proven by the fact that even those possessed by the devil could be healed. Fundamentally, there remains in us, and is renewed through baptism, "the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, [even the ornament] the jewel of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in God's sight of great price" (Peter 1:3-4); this deep place of graceful link, this junction or "contact point" (*Anknüpfungspunkt*) as Emil Brunner<sup>9</sup> called it, remains indestructible; there remains man, as a "responsible subject" before God and his neighbours.

But, if sin entered nature through the conscious, personal will, in the unique event of the incarnation of the Son of God, in Christ, the Person is God the Word; the Subject is divine, He is the Absolute, wherein the fall, the sin, is no longer possible. And it is precisely the person, the hypostasis, that – in our view – was the inspired revelation and elaboration of the Chalcedonian dogma: the person, the subject who communicates the life, the love and the message of God to us, to His creatures. In this sense, a brief recollection of the theological context of the age appears to be necessary.

As it is known, ancient thought had particularly reflected on nature, understanding by nature, by "*ousia*", everything which has the quality of being, of existing. By *hypostasis* – a less elaborated concept – they understood the specific being, i.e. the individual, identical to his own nature, and manifesting it concretely, for instance: Peter, John, Paul, etc.<sup>10</sup> However, here was the dilemma. How to explain, according to this view, that one

<sup>9</sup> Emil Brunner, *Natur und Gnade. Zum Gespräch mit Karl Barth* (Nature and Grace. A Conversation with Karl Barth), J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), Tübingen, 1935.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Aristotle, *Metaphysics* (Romanian edition, transl. Șt. Bezdechi, introduction and notes D. Bădărău, Ed. Academiei, București, 1965); N. Chițescu, *Formula o singură fire intrupată a Logosului lui Dumnezeu* (The Formula: Only One Incarnated Nature of the Logos of God), in "Ortodoxia", Review of the Romanian Patriarchate, XVII (1965), No. 3, pp. 295-307; Jean Tixeront, *L'histoire des dogmes dans l'Antiquité chrétienne, Vol. 3: La fin de l'âge patristique (430-800)*, preface Mgr. Pierre Batiffol, Librairie Lecoffre J. Gabalda, Paris, 1928.

and the same person could assume two, radically different, natures? The Nestorians, who started from “nature”, could only conceive a duality of persons. In Christ: two natures – two persons. Their union was merely a moral one. – The Eutychians, who focussed primarily on the “person”, could only think according to a monophysite pattern: one single person of God the Word – one single nature. The human was absorbed into the divine: radical monoenergism. – Then, according to the two attitudes, the conclusion was: either the separation of natures, or their melting together in the divine Being, which signified a deification by being.

The Chalcedonian definition, however, which was the fruit of inspiration and ascetic struggle, further deepened by Leontius of Byzantium, Saint Maximus the Confessor, the Sixth Ecumenical Synod, Saint John of Damascus, the Patriarch Photius, etc., highlighted the reality and the value of the person – which is “irreducible to nature” (V. Lossky). The person – a fundamental spiritual value in its uniqueness, and itself a source of values. Let us specify, in our context, some of its characteristic features:

- The person is identical to nature, and yet distinct from it;
- The person subsists in its own nature, as its subject and mode of subsistence, but at the same time assuming, enhypostasing another nature as well. As the dogmatic definition says: “in two natures”, but each one keeping within its own rationality.
- And, consequently, the person is a principle of communication between natures.

It follows, as Leontius of Byzantium will explain, that: “one of the natures deified [the other], being the divine nature, and the other was deified, being capable of deification. One was elevated, the other was not. One gave its own, the other received the natural gifts. The personal unity brings no harm whatsoever to the distinction of natures”<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> Leontius of Byzantium, *Adversus Nestorianos, Liber VI*, P.G. 86, col. 1748.



The natures remain, each within its own reason. Yet, the divine condescendence opens up, through the Incarnation, the way for human transcendence. And that is done by means of the person, of the hypostasis. Of the divine Hypostasis, obviously. But the divine Hypostasis – and this is the essential complementarity or implication of the Chalcedonian dogma – also institutes the human hypostasis in this, let us call it, “bipolar” condition of existence, meaning that, if Christ is one Hypostasis in two natures (divine and human), then humans, in Christ, are also called to be created “hypostases”, but to join in themselves, in the likeness of God, two fundamental worlds and realities: that of the grace, and that of nature; that of the divine energies, and that of the free human nature; thus, they are called to an infinite progress in the “deification by grace”.

This definition of the human as person – and, according to Chalcedon, as a “bipolar” person, therefore accomplishing oneself in the communion of the human with the divine, along both the verticality and the horizontality of existence – we consider to be exceptionally important to theology, to human thought in general, and also to our present dialogue. For that reason, a deeper understanding is necessary.

And, fundamentally, this definition is to be found in the witness born by the Lord Himself, of which we are pointing to the most direct one, that passage in the Gospel of John, where our Saviour quotes and confirms before the Jews the statement in the Psalms: “I have said: Ye are gods” (Ps 81:6). And He adds: “If he called them gods, unto whom the word of God came, and the scripture cannot be broken, Say ye of him, whom the Father hath sanctified, and sent into the world: Thou blasphemest, because I said: I am the Son of God?” (John 10:34-36).

Here, the Lord reveals Himself in His divine-humanity, but also grounds us in our theandric bipolarity, in the accomplishment of the “likeness”. Our ascent is now born, hypostatically, of His descent, from His kenosis. – And it must be said that the Gospel of John, even in its Prologue, announces this vocation and condition of ours: “as many as received Him, to them gave He



power to become the sons of God, [even] to them that believe on His name” (1:12). As He says further: “which were born of God” (1:13), “from above”, “born of water and the Spirit” (3:5).

Thus, our Christian model and way of life is theandric, in the image of the Image. “Our Orthodox anthropology is not merely that of man, but that of God’s humanity” (Nikos Nissiotis).

The Holy Spirit, by whom the Son became embodied from the Virgin, also edifies our hypostasis in the image of the Son. The Spirit, as a Person, edifies in us the person as spirit, as a responsible subject, making us hypostases – dialogue-partners and life-partners of Christ. And, as the Romanian Orthodox theologian, Fr. Prof. Dumitru Stăniloae, observes: “The Holy Spirit does not affirm Himself in man through the category of **You**, like Christ, but of **Me**, in order to emphasize the human person, the self, the **me** – but a Christ-loving **me**.”<sup>12</sup>

The Holy Spirit creates anew our innermost self, and we discover therein our own identity in Christ. Therefore, “the Spirit itself intercedes for us with groanings which cannot be uttered” (Rom 8:26). In us, the Spirit is our “life, will, light, mind, treasure of knowledge and glory”, as the Church worships in her cult. In the Holy Spirit we proclaim: “Jesus is the Lord” (1 Cor. 12:3). In the Spirit we exclaim: “Abba! Father!” (Rom. 8:15), for Him to reveal the theandric image of the God-Man in us, too. The Spirit makes the Christian a “*théophilos*”, a “*théologos*” who should give a free, living, personal answer to God’s love.

And of course, consecutively to this fundamental reality of the hypostasis, the Church, as a theandric body, is also revealed to us under this aspect: as being a communion of hypostases, of persons, to whom Christ is the Head-Hypostasis, the Source-Hypostasis. That is, in fact, her very distinction, her identity as the body of Christ. The Saint Apostle Peter speaks of the Christians as “living stones”, to be built as a “spiritual house” (1 Peter 2:5). In the same sense, St. Cyril of Alexandria says that

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<sup>12</sup> D. Stăniloae, *Teologia Dogmatică...*, *op. cit.*, p. 309.



“Christ edifies the Church of intelligible stones.”<sup>13</sup> The Church, in her being, in her depth, is this great mystery of the “personal communion..., of the person’s growth, in relation to the life of others, and, ultimately, from the life of Christ’s Person, filled with the divine infinity.”<sup>14</sup>

Considered in this spirit, in the Church every human hypostasis manifests itself by coming out of its individualism, by never-ending openness, self-surpassing, and growth. And this takes place in both directions: towards God and towards man, both in the vertical and the horizontal sense of existence, in conjunction, in the image of the two arms of the cross which unite heaven and earth and embrace the world. This self-surpassing, in the spirit of Chalcedon, means to overcome nature itself, to jump beyond “immanence”. This is a real overcoming, originating in the very “creation in the image” and in the commandment to “subject the earth”, and which represents the most significant fact of our vocation.

To outgrow ourselves is the essence of our spiritual progress in knowledge and love, through Christ, in the Holy Spirit. For, as St. Diadochos of Photiki says: “He who loves God with the feeling of his heart... shall never cease longing to be in the light of knowledge... And, while dwelling in his own body, he travels, due to love, outside of it, moving incessantly with all his soul toward God.”<sup>15</sup> This self-outgrowing, as St. Gregory the Theologian says, calls me “to become god to the same extent that Christ made Himself man.”<sup>16</sup> Which leads, according to St. Ap. Peter, to making us, through grace, “be partakers of the divine

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<sup>13</sup> *Glaphyra*, P.G. 68, col. 325 A.

<sup>14</sup> D. Stăniloae, *op. cit.*, p. 366.

<sup>15</sup> *The Philocalia*, vol. I, Romanian ed., transl. and notes D. Stăniloae, Sibiu, 1947, p. 339.

<sup>16</sup> *Oratio XXIX (Teologica III)*, P.G. 36, col. 100 A. Or, according to that patristic adage: „God made Himself Man so as to make man a god” (St. Irenaeus, P.G. 7, col. 1120; St. Athanasius of Alexandria, P.G. 25, col. 192 B; St. Gregory of Nazianzus, P.G. 37, col. 465; St. Gregory of Nyssa, P.G. 45, col. 65 D). That patristic vision is very well outlined by Dan Ilie Ciobotea in *Reflexion et vie chrétienne aujourd'hui, Essais sur le rapport entre la Théologie et la Spiritualité*, Thèse de doctorat de 3-e cycle présentée à la Faculté de Théologie Protestante, Strasbourg, June 1979.

nature” (2 Peter 1:4), yet without confusion or blending of natures thereby, without human nature transgressing its own “definition”, its own reason of being. For it is the human hypostasis or subject who travels beyond its own nature, in its continuous striving to acquire, as St. Ap. Paul teaches us, “the mind of Christ” (1 Cor. 2:16), the brilliance of His presence within us, in the “*logos*” and the “*agape*”. In our Orthodoxy, this brilliance means both sanctity and *theosis* at the same time. Moses and Elijah on Mount Tabor, like the three Apostles (Peter, Jacob, John), were also partakers of the same brilliance of Christ in the Holy Spirit.

And of course, implicitly, the presence of Christ, “the Lover of mankind”, within us, also signifies our triumph over egocentricity and our opening on the horizontality of existence to the communion with the other human hypostases, with our fellow human beings. This communion, in its plenitude, signifies a “mutual interiority” or presence, in the very image of the Most Holy Trinity. It is to this communion that our Saviour calls us, when He announces to the Apostles the descent of the Holy Spirit, saying: on “that day ye shall know that I am in My Father, and ye in Me, and I in you” (John 14:20). And St. Paul also addressed the faithful in Corinth: “O [ye] Corinthians, our mouth is open unto you, our heart is enlarged. Ye are not straitened in us” (2 Cor. 6:11-12). And thus, the heart which has been opened by the grace, the Christian person, is called upon to bear within itself, through active love and knowledge, ever more comprehensively, one’s neighbour, the fellow human beings, the family of one’s own nation and Church, the larger family of the Church of Christ, of the Christian faith, and every man “who comes into this world”.

And this vocation of perfecting ourselves in communion, in both senses, whose foundation was laid by Christ through His Cross and Resurrection, is to be fulfilled by each one of us beginning here, in this world, on this Earth. Similarly to the glory seen on Mount Tabor, which was anticipating the Resurrection, we should experience the work of salvation, make the experience of love, the experience of “faith which worketh by love” (Gal



5:6), starting here, on earth. This is the handsel and hope of the “Kingdom”. The parable of the unmerciful rich man and the beggar Lazarus (Luke 16) shows that “the beyond” is to be prepared here and now, through living and active love (charity), through communion, through real service for others. Service in the Spirit of Christ, not just delivered in view of payment, but finding joy in the Spirit of Truth and the conscience of responsibility; understanding, with Saint Mark the Ascetic, that “any superabundance of virtue that we may add today is but the proof of past negligence, not the right to any reward.”<sup>17</sup> The reward being precisely our own progress in love, in this vision of our personal communion and growth from one another’s lives, and, fundamentally, of our growth from the infinite Person of Christ in the Holy Spirit, which establishes us ever more profoundly in the mystery of the Church, makes our life more directly and immediately responsible, and dynamically engages us on the way to unity.

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The Chalcedonian formula also stresses that “God the Word, begotten before all ages of the Father according to the Godhead, and in these latter days ... born of the Virgin Mary, the Birth-Giver of God, according to the Manhood.” Thus, the subject who, on behalf of all human nature, answers to the divine love and kenosis, is the Holy Virgin Mary. A human being, a woman, responds to God. The woman, who by her very vocation represents the receptivity and flourishing of the creation, expresses the very state of the creature before its Creator.

But the fact that the woman was called upon to answer to the unique event of the Incarnation, in the name of all humanity, reveals to us that God, while maintaining the condition of human nature of being born from a woman, shows at the same time that the human exists in plenitude in the feminine nature, since she gave a body to the Godhead from her own body, God being

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<sup>17</sup> *The Philocalia*, vol. I, p. 253.

incarnated from her.

Certainly, this woman is a chosen vessel, is the Holy Virgin Mary. But the birth from a Virgin – and God could only be born from a virgin, nature in its entire purity – casts a particular light on a distinctive Christian calling. It shows us that Christianity doesn't simply pay homage to virginity as such, but to virginity which gives birth, bears fruit. Christianity gives higher veneration (*hyperdouleia*) to the Virgin-Mother, the Virgin who embodied the Son of God. – “Rejoice, oh, Bride, forever Virgin!” – chants the Church. Thus, virginity is not an ideal in itself, but as a perfect instrument and availability, a pure offer under the action of grace, in the service of God and the service of higher values: good, truth, beauty, and the unity of life. Any sacrifice is justified only if it bears fruit. A virginity, or an askesis, turned into an object of self-adoration, into a kind of sacralised egocentrism, reveals a tragic state, deprived of grace, and eventually – according to the Scripture – ends up in “folly”. The five virgins who have no oil, with their extinguished lamps, deprived of the grace of light and love, are not accepted by God to the wedding of the Bridegroom. They are left outside, in their solipsism. The gate of grace, the door to an authentic hypostatic realization, stays closed to them.

Touching upon another aspect, the Incarnation of the Son of God from the Virgin Mary reveals to us the Mother of God as an “altar” – in the words of St. Andrew of Crete –, as a “temple”, a “sanctified Church and talking Heaven”, and our Saviour as our Great Arch-Hierarch. Here, Orthodoxy sees the revelation of the two fundamental forms of service in the Church, and of the unity thereof:

Firstly, that of Jesus Christ as Arch-Priest and, implicitly, that of his successors: Apostles, bishops, priests – co-workers with Him in this calling to sacramental priesthood. And secondly, that of the Most Pure Virgin as a Mother, temple and altar of Christ the Archpriest, and implicitly, of the feminine nature in



this sacred mission of a “giver and protector of life” (Prof. N. Chițescu<sup>18</sup>), of sacrificial love and service to the Church, which has raised so many women to sainthood.

These two kinds of service must remain – by hereto also applying the Chalcedonian formula – “*inconfused* and *unchangeable*”, but also “*inseparable*”, without any risk of ontological confusion, of any confusion between these two vocations pertaining to the being itself.

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However, through the incarnation, it is not only the human nature that is sanctified in Christ, but also the entire creation – this “Garden of Eden”, which was entrusted to Adam “to dress it and to keep it” (Genesis 2:15); where man was placed as Archpriest, prophet and emperor, called upon to be the Creator’s collaborator to its sanctification and perfection.

More profoundly, the God-Man, by assuming in Himself all humanity, and implicitly all creation, is – in the inspired words of M.J. Scheeben – its “great sacrament”: He is the “fundamental Sacrament” of the Church and of the world. He, the Logos, “through Whom all were made”, is the “personal bosom of all the reasons of this world”, and He can pronounce over the bread and the wine: “This is My body... this is My blood”, in order to make us all, through His blood, His relatives, as well as one another’s relatives; to communicate and sanctify us further, after His Ascension, from His pneumatized body. He does that now, by means of the Holy Sacraments. “That which was visible in our Redeemer has now passed into the Sacraments” – says a father of the Church<sup>19</sup>.

And, the spirit of Chalcedon inspires to us an even deeper

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<sup>18</sup> N. Chițescu, *În legătură cu preoția femeii* (On the Priesthood of Women), in “Ortodoxia”, XXXI (1979), No. 2, p. 353.

<sup>19</sup> Leo I, *Sermo 74, II*, in *Sermones et epistolae*, P.L. 54, col. 398; regarding the sanctification of the world, see D. Stăniloae, *The World as Gift and Sacrament*, in “Sobornost”, No. 9, London, 1969; Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World. Sacraments and Orthodoxy*, St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, New York, 1973.

understanding of the Sacraments. As the Lord, through the Holy Spirit, makes a body unto Himself from the body of the Virgin, and fills it with His godly presence, “in Him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily” (Col. 2:9), and in the Sacraments of the Church, from bread and wine, elements taken from the body of this world, He makes, through the Holy Spirit, His sacramental body. Nicolas Cabasilas calls the Sacraments: “the home and gate of Heaven”, through which enters the “Sun of Righteousness”, radiating light into the Church and the “house” of humanity.

If sanctity is God’s presence in man, the Sacraments are also the “place” of the presence of divine energies, of sanctity. The Logos is their supreme reason, and thus they become a place of His presence in the Spirit, a place of God’s Kingdom. A place for having Supper with Christ, of His consecrated gifts. A place for meeting Him, since – it must be observed – our sacramental life is a hypostatic relationship, not an impersonal one.

This personal meeting, in Christian Orthodoxy, also takes place by means of the icon. Since God the Word “became embodied”, since He undertook a human body and face – as there is no body without a face – the icon is, to us, a spiritual depiction, evocation, opening and communication with Christ and with the heavenly Church. The icon is “a plasticized expression of the knowledge that we have about its real Prototype.” We commune with the body of Christ in the Eucharist, we listen to His word in the Holy Gospel, but we also rise to the contemplation of His face by means of the icon, which is – to quote Olivier Clément – “an epiphanic veil... an appeal<sup>20</sup>.”

Obviously, between the icon and its Prototype there is an ontological distinction. During the Iconoclastic dispute, Saint Theodor of Studion showed both the difference and the link, the likeness, between the icon and the Prototype. As the icon represents not the being, but the hypostasis. Therefore, it is the Hypostasis of the Word made flesh, and not His nature (His

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<sup>20</sup> Olivier Clément, *Le Visage intérieur*, Stok / Monde ouvert, Paris, 1979, p. 30.



Being), that is represented in the icon of Christ<sup>21</sup>.

I was already anticipating that the entire creation, having its reason to be in the Logos, is at the same time an offering, a sacrifice. “What shall we bring forth to Thee, oh Christ?” – the faithful are chanting, hailing the Nativity of the Lord; “For Thou hast shown Thyself on Earth as a Man. Each and every one of the creatures Thou hast made brings Thee proof of their gratitude: the angels – their hymns; heavens – the Star; the Magi – their gifts; the shepherds – their adoration; the Earth – the cave; the desert – the manger; and we – the Virgin Mother” (*Vespers, 4<sup>th</sup> Stychera, December 25<sup>th</sup>*).

Thus, everything is meant to become a sacrament, a “spiritual body”, since everything “is sanctified by the word of God and by prayer” (1 Tim. 4:5). In other words, everything is sanctified through God-the-Word, and through the Spirit Who “groaneth” together with all creation that “travaileth in pain”, waiting for “the manifestation of the sons of God”, of those who have received “the first-fruits of the Spirit” (Rom 8:19-23). Everything is called to become Eucharist, *i.e.* to be consecrated through our spirit illuminated by grace; transformed, through a kind of “*metavoli*”, into ever new values, and then shared with everyone, like from a single chalice.

That, however, does not signify a “sacralisation” (or deification) of the world, but a consecration thereof; not a pantheistic fusion or confusion, but a charismatic transparency and transfiguration. Just like in the Incarnation, the creature is not merged, mingled or confounded with the divine, in monophysite fashion, and never loses its own identity, but neither does it close in on itself, yet, it keeps opening itself up to the plenitude, being transmuted, and rising “from glory to ever greater glory.”

Therefore, we should not forget that our vocation in the world is a sanctifying, creative and serving one – with a recently used term: a liturgical one. The parable of the talents (Mat 25) reveals this vocation to us. God expects a creative answer from

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<sup>21</sup> Saint Theodor of Studion, *Antirrheticus III*, in *Antirrhetici*, P.G. 99, col. 405 A.



us. The relationship between God and man is not that of Creator–spectator (audience), but that of Creator–disciple (or apprentice). The divine Hypostasis is in dialogue with the hypostasis made “in His image”. And the fact that the Master in the parable was happy to see that he who had received five talents had gained no less than five more, and he who had received two also brought another two – therefore, the same as he had been given – shows us that God sets us up as His partners in Creation: “It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord” (Mat 10:25). Offering the world to us as a gift from Him, He receives it back as an offering from man, asking us to enhance the values of the Creation, to give the Creator a personal, original answer, and to serve man, and our nation, our country, each according to the gift received from God.

But our answer, at the same time, also involves a responsibility towards the Creation. From the body of the Virgin, as from the bread and wine, therefore from this world, Christ makes a divine body and Eucharist for all. This shows us that, fundamentally, the world, the Creation, are not meant for destruction, for degradation, profanation, or depletion, but for transfiguration through the endless power of the same Spirit of Christ, as in the Divine Liturgy. We are called upon to transcend the world through God, but not for denying or despising it, yet for elevating it through the lights of grace, for putting a theandric seal on it. Saint Gregory of Nyssa says “the Creator gave us the gift of love as an expression of our human face.”<sup>22</sup> That means love is our authentic expression and background. The love which communicates light, which generates a sacred communion. The love which reveals the man in Christ radiating on the Creation the gifts of the Spirit: “of wisdom and understanding, of counsel and might, knowledge and fear of the Lord” (Isaiah 11:2-3). – And bringing the fruit of “love, joy, peace, longsuffering and endurance, goodness, gentleness, kindness, meekness, benefaction, temperance, purity...” (Gal 5: 22-23), transfiguring

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<sup>22</sup> Saint Gregory of Nyssa, *De Opificio Hominis*, 5, P.G. 44, col. 137 D.



himself and transfiguring the world.

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In this paper, I have referred to this set of values – a reverberation of Chalcedon – “stones” for the building of the Church. But now, we believe we should also ask ourselves what was the message of this Ecumenical Synod concerning unity, this fundamental value for which our Lord Jesus Christ prayed on the eve of His sacrifice: “Father, I pray that all be one”; a unity in the faith and hope of which we are also gathered here.

In this sense, reflecting on the respective historical moment, we recall so many confronting tensions, alternatives, shades of thought, until our Fathers eventually reached this wonderful unity in confessing the orthodox faith.

And, meditating even more profoundly, this is also whence we derive /draw the power to surmount any obstacle; for was in not the Son of God who showed us that He himself defeated infinite obstacles and covered infinite distances in order to be united to us for all eternity? Nicholas Cabasilas observed that, to this purpose, the Lord crossed a triple barrier: that of nature, of sin, and of death; of nature by His Incarnation; of sin by His Crucifixion; and the last wall of all, that of death, by His Resurrection”<sup>23</sup>.

And this is also where we discover the road to unity: with God and among ourselves.

The Mystery of Christ, His descending to us, His kenosis and His union with us, reveals that – as His Beatitude the Patriarch Justin said – “the walls separating Churches and peoples do not reach up to Heaven. They exist belong to our ephemeral world; therefore, they will fall”<sup>24</sup>. The beginning was made by Christ, “our peace” (Eph. 2:14). The Chalcedonian dogmatic definition, representing a Christological synthesis, or “*summa*”,

<sup>23</sup> N. Cabasilas, *Viața în Hristos* (The Life in Christ), Romanian transl. T. Bodogae, Sibiu, 1946, p. 73; see also V. Lossky, *Essai sur la théologie mystique de l'Église d'Orient*, Aubier, Paris, 1944, p. 132.

<sup>24</sup> From the Discourse held on his election as Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church, in *The Romanian Orthodox Church* review, No. 7–8, 1977, p. 600.

was inspired by the Spirit of Christ. And on this point we agree with His Excellence Tibor Bartha, that the ultimate foundation of ecumenicity is the Christological interpretation in the spirit of the unity of the Church. The foundation of this unity is Christ the Servant”<sup>25</sup>. And, prior to all other values, it is unity – a source of them all – that He came to serve in the first place.

But how could we represent this unity more poignantly, in its essence?

On the Birth of the Lord, on Christmas Eve, in the First *Stychera* of the Feast (during *Vespers*), Orthodox Christians chant this hymn to Christ: “The unchangeable image of the Father, the imprint of His eternity, assumes the shape of a slave, without undergoing a change: for He remained what He was, being the true God; and yet He undertook that which He was not, making Himself a man, out of love for man...” Or, in another, more concise, theological version: “While remaining that which He was, He made Himself that which He was not.”<sup>26</sup>

We consider that this consecrated formula concentrates in itself the entire Christological dogma and the mystery of our unity. Divine love, the “agape”-love, is vested with this unique virtue: you remain what you are by your essence, in the truth-plenitude, and at the same time, you can become that which you are not, through kenosis, through sacrifice. You can share the Condition of the other. You can assume that which is authentic in the other, as Christ assumed humanity, “not knowing sin but making Himself sin for us” (2 Cor 5:21), i.e. suffering for and together with us. You can serve, you can approach all, without sacrificing the truth, but rather opening yourself to the others in truth, in love, and progressing toward unity.

These are the two foundations on which Christian Orthodoxy is establishing its ecumenism: faithfulness to the

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<sup>25</sup> Cf. Mezey Gy. Lorand, *Tradiție și contemporaneitate în dialogul ortodoxo-reformat, Debrecen, 1972* (Tradition and Contemporaneity in the Orthodox-Reformed Dialogue), Seminary paper for PhD, Theological Institute of Bucuresti, 1978 (typed manuscript).

<sup>26</sup> Text inspired from St Gregory the Theologian, *Oratio XXIX (Teologica III)*, P.G. 36, col. 100 A. See also Theophilus of Bulgaria, quoted in V. Lossky, *op. cit.*, p. 134.



integral truth, and service to the others in truth and love.

The Chalcedonian fathers worked, inspired by the Spirit of Christ, and attained the unity of faith.

Let us follow them!

*(Revised English translation, abstract and references by Andrei Dîrlău)*

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