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The hypostatic union – the foundation of the theandry of the Church

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Abstract. God being love, He decided from ages the incarnation of Christ for the salvation of the whole mankind, which was subject to sin and death. In the Person of Christ, through the act of incarnation, performed at "the fulness of time" (Galatians IV,4), the divine and the human nature are harmoniously completed, the latter becoming entirely obedient to the Father. If Christ had not been incarnated and if He had not lifted our own nature towards complete obedience to the Father, humanity would have never been able to obtain divine forgiveness and would not have known how to exist in the love of the Holy Trinity.

Keywords. God, hypostatic union, Church, incarnation

I. Defining the theandric aspect as an extension of the hypostatic union fulfilled in Christ within the Church

Jesus Christ, the incarnated Son of God, is the essence of the *theandry* of the Church. This fact can only be made clear in the light of the relationship between the two natures assumed by the Saviour within the hypostatic union, as a continuity in the human realm of the relationship between the divine and human so perfectly fulfilled in Christ. Therefore, "from the intimate connection of the two natures in the person of Jesus Christ the theandry of the Church stems and grows, in the same way in which He is present and active in the person of the Incarnated Son, moulding the mysterious body of the Lord after the image of the divine nature, so that it may be said that not only the Church lives, but also Christ is the One who lives in her."¹ (Galatians 2, 20)

The personal relation between man and the trinitarian God is developed in the ecclesiastical framework through the work of the Holy Spirit. Through this work, each believer experiences the communion based on love and obedience to God, through a lively relationship and by any means not through a mediation over an impersonal principle or idea. Through this one can observe the greatness of the theandry of the Church.

God expresses Himself through the Church, hence the Church has in herself the defining element of Christ, and the members that compose the Church each have a special ability that differentiates them and makes them unique in the whole ensemble, an ensemble for which each

¹ Prof. Nicolae Chițescu, Biserica, trupul tainic al Domnului, in BOR, year LX, 1942, nr. 7 – 8, Bucharest, p.312.

member perseveres in manifesting his/her functionality with the scope of ensuring a correct functioning of the Church.

The Church, as the body of Christ, does not hold any of the real attributes of the Son of God incarnate, for in her we do not have an identity with the real body, but more a resemblance to it. Through this relationship of resemblance with the real body of Christ, the Church tends towards the absolute role model of perfection. The branches of this vine are in personal and direct connection with the other elements, and also with Christ through the intercession of the Church. Through the latter they become members of the body of Christ and their life is lived only in and only for Christ.

Although the Church is a theandric existence of two natures, of two wills inseparably united, namely the union between the creature and God obtained in the person of Christ, in the persons of the faithful, who represent the multiple hypostases of His nature, she reaches this perfection only virtually. However, the theandric nature of the Church facilitates the ascension towards perfection, hence reaching such a state depends heavily on a happy conjunction between the perseverance of the faithful in their work towards spiritual ascension and the help of God sent to them for this purpose. On the one hand, the Church receives from Christ divine life and all the holy gifts, and on the other, the Church, the „fulness of Christ”, „completes Him” and „perfects Him”, allowing him to continue His Redeemer role².

The incarnation of Christ accomplished at the fullness of time (Galatians IV, 4) unites, without intermingling, His uncreated and His created nature, allowing the latter to ascend to God through the grace of the Holy Spirit. The incarnation is the act where the Church begins and the Pentecost is where the Church is completed as a space of union between the Divine and the human, between the uncreated and the created, defining herself as a theandric place. “The essence of the Church is the divine life revealing itself in the lives of creatures; it is the deification of beings by the power of the Incarnation and the Pentecost”³. The deification of man cannot take place without the existence of the theandric aspect of the Church, because this act of God’s mercy is fulfilled only within the theandric act. Jesus Christ as the true God deifies the creature *de jure* when Incarnating; by the communion with His Holy Sacraments He deifies it *de facto*.⁴ Through the Sacraments, our own nature is united with the divine nature of the hypostasis of the Son, but in order for this union to be complete, human hypostases must become like the person of Christ, comprising of “two natures”, uniting in them the nature that is created with the fullness of grace, with the holiness that the Holy Spirit confers to each member of the body of Christ and, therefore, each believer is to live according to the teaching of Christ⁵.

The intimate connection between Christ and the faithful is fulfilled only when the Holy Spirit finds the believer's spirituality in accordance with the nature of the relationship that is to be accomplished. The first consequence of the theandry is the indissoluble connection between the faithful and Christ, therefore it is imperative that the believer perseveres in reaching a state in which the work of the Holy Spirit is able to bear fruit in him/her. In the Orthodox theology there is no principle by which man ascends through grace as a simple gift from God, He is acting on the man from without, but in order for the theandric act of man's union with Christ to take place, man's free will is absolutely necessary. This union can be achieved only in the Church as an active working environment of God's grace on the one hand and on the other, of

² Drd. Dorel Pogan, Aspectul teandric al Bisericii, in „Studii teologice”, 1972, nr. 9-10, p.686.

³ Sergiu Bulgakov, Ortodoxia, translated by Nicolae Grosu, Paideia, Sibiu, 1994, p. 8.

⁴ Prof Nicolae Chițescu, Despre îndumnezeirea credincioșilor. De ce nu primesc romano-catolici această învățătură, în BOR, year LVI, 1938, nr. 11 - 12, Bucharest, p. 851.

⁵ Vladimir Lossky, Teologia mistică a Bisericii de Răsărit, translated by Pr. Vasile Răducă, Bonifaceo, Bucharest, 1998 p.178.

man's free will manifested through deeds. "Only the visible Church cultivates the religious feeling, because its true and divine coming into being always presupposes a visible society and a visible settlement that is connected to it and that animates it. Only the visible Church is the treasurer and thorough teacher of the eternal words of faith and the clear source of the redemptive power of the cross."⁶ The theandric act of the union between man and God has two elements: one visible and one invisible, elements that must always be thought of as a whole, because the exclusion of one of them leads to an inability of defining the whole theandric organism.

The comparison between the Church and Christ unveils the fact that the former represents the existence of two natures - the divine and the human - two wills and two distinct works which are inextricably linked, hence the result that the Church is in fact a Christological structure. It is precisely this structure that determines the fact that the permanent action of the Holy Spirit takes place in the Church, an action which is based on the theandric relationship with Christ. The person of the Holy Spirit, sharing the same essence (*homoousion*) as Christ, is the One who makes Him known, the One through whom the Son of God manifests His work in the world by using the Church as His body. Through the presence of the Spirit in the Church, the faithful receives full access to Christ, for the Holy Spirit is the One who establishes this connection. The consequences of this connection with Jesus Christ are profound for the believer; because in him/her the impact is not in terms of a simple influence, such as that of a moral causality (advice, commandment), but a radical transformation takes place by positioning the faithful towards a spiritual and ascending direction, as a fruit bore by the sanctification process of that which is natural through that which is transcending⁷. This is the transformation that the Holy Apostle Paul speaks of when he states that the body "is the temple of the Holy Spirit." Through this transformation of the bodies of the faithful, the Church becomes a community of people united with the Son through the Spirit.

The Spirit is the One who, in the material framework of the Church, communicates the uncreated divine grace. By receiving this grace that works on man not from the outside - as some claim - but ontologically, that is from within, man receives the necessary powers, which together with personal effort, give the man the ability to participate in the theandric connection with Christ in the Church.

We are summoned to build, in the theandry of the Church, our own person in the grace of the Holy Spirit and this is all the more possible as we are building on an already established foundation, on an unshakable stone which is Christ, the One who contains our own nature in His divine person⁸. It should be noted that through the theandry of the Church man does not become united with Christ in His essence and not even with the Church in her capacity as the body of the Lord, for the theandry does not in itself bring about the fusion of persons. They, the persons, exist in diversity. Even the Church herself, even if she is called the body of Christ, is not Christ except in her Eucharistic aspect. All of whom are within the sanctifying framework of the Church are truly in the Eucharistic Christ.

The Eucharistic Christ is our life. Through the Church, the life of Christ becomes our own life, hence we are buried with Him in His death (Romans VI, 4) and are raised with Him

⁶ Hristu Andrușos, *Simbolica*, translated by † Iustin Moiseșcu, Centrul Mitropolitan al Olteniei, Craiova, 1955, p. 66.

⁷ Pr. Prof. D. Stăniloae, *Transparența Bisericii în viața sacramentală*, in „Ortodoxia”, XXII (1970), nr. 4, p. 516.

⁸ Vladimir Lossky, *Teologia mistică a Bisericii de Răsărit*, translated by Pr. Vasile Răducă, Bonifaceo, București, 1998 p. 180.

(Ephesians II, 6), and if we persevere with Him, we shall reign with Him (Romans V, 17). This means that Christ, in His body and in His members, lives His heavenly life⁹.

The world is led through time towards the Kingdom of God through the Holy Spirit that proceeds from the Father and whom Christ sends into the world (Ephesians IV, 11-16). This process of leading men towards the Kingdom of God is accomplished through the work of the Holy Spirit and through the man as the living members of the body. Through Him, the Church becomes a transparency of the Son of God: “Christ being imprinted in us and transparent in us is shown in our feelings, in our thoughts, in our deeds, in a renewed ethic, which indicates the strengthened spirit, through our restored nature. The transparency of Christ, of humanity restored and deified in Him through the Church, and the transparency of the Church for Christ, are shown in a life lived by the example of Christ, given the fact that Christ, with His shape of exemplary humanity, is imprinted in her”¹⁰.

The theandry of the Church is characterized by the work of the Holy Spirit who, as a Person of the Holy Trinity, creates a relationship of reciprocity between God and man, facilitating man's call to salvation through the kenotic act of Christ's Incarnation. Having this opportunity, man, through personal effort, can gain access to the Father through the Son.

“God is love” said Father Stăniloae, and through the theandry of the Church, man is called to take part in the love of the Holy Trinity, but this participation can only be achieved within the Church of Christ where united believers, being in full communion and love, can experience the living of the One Being Trinity. In other words, the theandry suppresses personal individualism by transforming it into love for one another and for all. This love does not have its origin in something human, but only in the Holy Trinity whose love is not limited only to the divine Persons, but also flows into the Church through the Holy Sacraments. Through this love man gives up individualism and begins to know God. “He who loves God in his heart is known to Him. For in so far as one receives in his feelings and soul the love from God, in the same measure one reaches the love of God”¹¹.

II. The foundation of the Church through the Holy Spirit and her necessity for man

Through the sacrifice on the Holy Cross, the incarnate Son of God founds the Church in a virtual manner while the real and complete form of the Church becomes real and accomplished when the Holy Spirit descends on the Holy Apostles at the Pentecost. Thus, comes into being the public body of the Church in which the faithful, united with one another and with Christ, aspire to the Kingdom of God.

The effects of the objective salvation achieved through the sacrifice on the cross, through the death and the glorious resurrection of Christ, extend through the works of the Spirit within the Church towards all its members so that the latter, through their personal contribution of deeds, may bear fruit on the road to salvation. The work of salvation does not belong only to the Son, for He is always working with the Father and the Spirit. The relationship between the Spirit and the Son in the history of salvation is on the one hand clearly highlighted by the act of incarnation - for the Son is born of the Spirit and the Virgin Mary - and on the other, the relationship between the two Persons of the Holy Trinity becomes evident in the baptism, sacrifice and glorious resurrection (Romans V, 17, 20, 21; VI, 23). The beginning of the Church

⁹ Nicolae Cabasila, *Despre viața în Hristos*, translated by Pr. Prof. T. Bodogae, Deisis, Sibiu, 1946, p.110.

¹⁰ Pr. Prof. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Transparența Bisericii în viața sacramentală*, in „Ortodoxia”, XXII (1970), nr. 4, p.508.

¹¹ Diadochos of Photiki, *Cuvânt ascetic*, in „Filocalia”, vol. I, translation by Pr. Prof. Dumitru Stăniloae, Sibiu, 1947, p. 339.

is based on the descent of the Spirit over the apostles, as well as the baptism of the first catechumens which took place through the grace of the Holy Spirit (Acts II).

Our humanity, being objectively and fully uplifted in Christ, is developed through the Holy Spirit in all the human hypostases that make up the Church, as her living and active limbs. Beginning with the act of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit descends upon each hypostasis, aiding the latter in making subjective the objective salvation accomplished by Christ. Therefore, “The Holy Spirit has a special role in founding and sustaining the Church, as a unity in communion, as a unity in diversity. It represents the living relationship between the Father and the Son *par excellence* and, as such, also establishes the relationship between the members of the Church and between them and the Father. For in Him is fully expressed not only the difference between persons in God, but also the unity between them; In Him appears the Trinity completed as St. Gregory of Nazianzus says. He is the keystone linking different people. The Holy Spirit represents the living force of unity between the faithful, and between them and the Holy Trinity. By resting forever in the incarnate Son, He also rests in the personal humanity of Christ and afterwards in the humanity of all those who are united with Christ by faith. But through this rest in Christ, He not only unites the faithful with Christ and the faithful one with another, but also with the Father so that, together with Christ, they can belong to the Father. Hence the Holy Spirit does not proceed from the Son, neither Him nor the Son can become their own believers separated from one another. The Spirit is a principle of connection between the faithful and God, not one of separation. That is why the Church cannot be conceived outside the Trinity, as an exclusive Church of Christ, or an exclusive Church of the Holy Spirit. Moreover, no Church can be conceived where the Son and the Holy Spirit would work simultaneously, but separately, in the sense that the Son would represent one nature of the Trinity and would accomplish the unity of human nature, while the Holy Spirit would represent the personal diversity of the Trinity and would accomplish the diversity of human beings in the Church. This would fundamentally reduce the personal reality of the Trinity to a single person (that of the Holy Spirit) and the communion of the faithful as persons, to an exclusive communion with the Holy Spirit”¹².

The action of descent of the Spirit into the Church over every person at their Baptism actualizes today the relationship between the divine and the human created by Christ through His acts of redemption. In the Church founded at the Pentecost, the Holy Spirit is the Comforter promised by Christ, who was to be sent after the Ascension, He is the Giver of life, He is the One who completes the salvation plan of the Trinity which is One. The descent of the Holy Spirit ensures the passage of the acts of the Son of God incarnate to men with the purpose of saving humanity, by the descent of the Spirit first over the Apostles and then over all those who have been baptized in the name of the Holy Trinity. With the baptism of the first people, the Church is founded as a reality of communion between divine and human, as a reality of the theandric community. The Holy Spirit poured out by His grace at the Pentecost on all those baptized in the name of the Trinity, subjectivizes the consequences of objective salvation accomplished through the sacrifice of Christ.

The descent of the Spirit at the Pentecost is the last element of the work of salvation and is announced by Christ the Saviour to His disciples when He says to them, “It is expedient for you that I go away; For if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you” (John XVI, 7); thus the Ascension of the Saviour into heaven becomes “the lever of our salvation, of our personal salvation” because He appears alongside us “in the presence of God for us” (Hebrews IX, 24). At Pentecost, God the Father, following the

¹² Pr. Prof. Dr. D. Stăniloae, Sfântul Duh și sobornicitatea Bisericii, in „Ortodoxia”, XIX, nr. 1(1967), p. 45-46.

redemptive activity of the Son, sends the Holy Spirit in the form of tongues of fire over people whom He thus makes sons of Him, of Christ, by the grace of the Holy Spirit.¹³

Alongside the Spirit, that came in the world over the apostles, came also the grace of God and also the divine gifts by which the disciples received new attributes. Referring to this, Saint John Chrysostom says that the Holy Apostles: “were all filled with grace, they did not just simply take the grace of the Spirit, but they were filled by it”¹⁴ becoming, through the divine power and the gifts of God, the worthy workers of the vine of Christ.

Sending the Spirit in the world does not, by any means, signify a new era "of the Holy Spirit" in which Christ is replaced, but on the contrary, “Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, *that* shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come. He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew *it* unto you. All things that the Father hath are mine: therefore said I, that he shall take of mine, and shall shew *it* unto you.” (John XVI, 13-15). The Gift of the Holy Spirit present in the Church offers the presence of Christ in all of the people who, through baptism, believe in Him and become the sons of God not through their nature, but through grace, sons of God and the brothers of Christ after his human form. Saint Cyril of Alexandria says, “by adhering to Him, we were sealed towards resemblance with Him through the Spirit and we were lifted towards the dignity that is beyond our nature, therefore we will not be fully Sons of God like Him, but we will be resembling to Him through the imitation of grace.”¹⁵ In the plan of salvation, the plan of the Spirit is the same as that of the Son, for the Son saves humanity through the Holy Spirit. All the plans of salvation are accomplished in the Church and start from the Father and are accomplished by the Son in the Holy Spirit. “One, if he has a mind, cannot think any word without Spirit. Therefore, the Word of God, which came from God, contains the Holy Spirit hence they both appeared from the Father ... and that Spirit of the Supreme Word is like the unspoken love of the One Who Gives Birth to the One that is born ... This is what the Son has from the Father, resting in Him through the unity of nature, as the Spirit of Truth, of Wisdom and of the Word”¹⁶.

The work of Christ is alive in the Church by the grace of the Holy Spirit, who helps man rise from death to Life Itself, from corruptible to utterly incorruptible in the love of God. “For Christ is in you through the Spirit, turning to uncorrupted what is corrupt by nature and moving from the need to die towards what is not like this”¹⁷. The extension of the body of Christ after the glorious resurrection, for all who believe in Him, is the work of the Spirit in the Church, beginning with the Holy Apostles, on the day of Pentecost: “[At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you.](#)” (John XIV, 20). Therefore, the founding of the Church at Pentecost means the full union of Christ, through the Holy Spirit, with those who believe in Him. “The Spirit introduces the power of Christ into the members of the theandric establishment of the Christic body, the Church, to transform them, renew them, save them and deify them. By the coming of the Holy Spirit into the world, at Pentecost, created nature is introduced into a new relationship with God and acquires a new condition of existence.

¹³ Paul Evdokimov, *Rugul Aprins*, Mitropolia Banatului, Timișoara, 1994, p. 102.

¹⁴ St. John Chrysostom, *Omilia a IV-a la Fapte*, in *Traduceri patristice*, vol.3, translations and comments by Pr. Dorin Octavian Picioruș and Dr. Gianina Maria-Cristina Picioruș, Teologia pentru azi, Bucharest, 2011, p. 147.

¹⁵ St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Comentariu la Evanghelia Sfântului Ioan*, translation by Pr. D. Stăniloae, in „*Părinți și Scriitori Bisericești*”, I.B.M., Bucharest, 2000, p. 107.

¹⁶ St. Gregory of Palamas, *Capete teologice*, cap. 36, translation, introduction and notes by Pr. Prof. Dr. D. Stăniloae, in „*Filocalia*”, vol. VII, edit. I.B.M.B.O.R., Bucharest, 1977, p. 445.

¹⁷ St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Comentariu la Evanghelia Sfântului Ioan*, IX., apud. PHD thesis Marin I. Bugiulescu, *Biserica, comunitate și instituție teandrică*, Constanța, 2009, p.89.

Surrounded by the newly divine - human reality of the Church, nature and grace come so close that they come to form a single unity”¹⁸.

The grace of the Holy Spirit shared with the faithful in the Church through the Holy Sacraments is the sanctifying work that Christ accomplishes through the Spirit for the faithful who take part in them. In other words, this is the source, the power that deifies people through grace, making them worthy of the Kingdom of God (Colossians I, 18-19; Ephesians I, 22-23; II, 14-19; John XVII, 17).

The Church, as a reality of the union between the divine and the human, is founded when the incarnation of the Son of God took place, while the connection of the human nature with the persons of the Holy Trinity is the work of the Holy Spirit. The solemn communion between the living members of the Church brought about by the descent of the Spirit is made after the model of the trinitarian communion. “The Holy Spirit descends upon each Apostle and over all of them together to highlight the model of Trinitarian communion, which holds together the diversity of people with the unity of nature, in the light of an ontology of love”¹⁹.

The humanity took upon Himself by Christ in the hypostatic union, fully exalted by the voluntary sacrifice brought to the Father and through the glorious resurrection, represents the foundation through which all human beings objectively receive the capacity to rise to the state of deification by grace, and the Holy Spirit is the One in the Church who, through uncreated divine grace, makes real the state of salvation accomplished by the Son in every man who desires to approach God. This work of the Spirit in the Church makes Christ present in every member of her, in an ontological way, within man: “Pentecost restores in the world the internalized presence of Christ and reveals Him now, not before, but within His disciples.”²⁰ The communion of the faithful with Christ is fulfilled through the Spirit through the Holy Sacraments of the Church. Since Pentecost, the Church has been the mysterious foundation of the world, the heart of the universe, the centre where the destinies of the world are decided²¹.

III. Conclusions

By breaking the primordial commandment, man, the crown of creation, willingly submitted himself to sin and implicitly to bodily and spiritual death. So that he may not remain in death, out of love, "in the fullness of time" (Galatians IV,4), the Son of God becomes our brother according to the humanity He takes upon Himself in His Person, in order to raise our nature to the state of communion with God. Through the sacrifice, the death and the resurrection of the Son of God, we also rose through the human nature assumed by Him, obtaining the forgiveness of the Father. Therefore, from now on, every person can benefit from the fruits of objective salvation, through personal effort and grace, while making them subjective within the Church through the Holy Sacraments. With the act of the ascension of the Son of God begins the work of the Holy Spirit through which all mankind truly approaches Christ, tasting the body and blood of the Eucharist in the visible Church, thus gaining life in Christ and experiencing in this material world the joy of living in the love of the Holy Trinity.

¹⁸ Pr. Ilie Moldovan, *Natura și harul în gândirea teologică a Sfântului Vasile cel Mare*, in „Ortodoxia”. XXXI, Nr. 1, (1979), p. 87.

¹⁹ Pr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru Popescu, *Iisus Hristos Pantocrator*, E.I.B.M.B.O.R., Bucharest, 2005, p. 240.

²⁰ Paul Evdokimov, *L'Esprit Saint dans la Tradition Orthodoxe*, Paris, Les Edition du Cherf, 1969, p. 90.

²¹ Vladimir Lossky, *Teologia Mistică a Bisericii de Răsărit*, Anastasia, Bucharest 1993, p. 138.

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