

Christian Orthodox Ethics and Current Biotechnological Challenges (research report)

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Abstract

Each study conducted in the framework of this grant uses distinct meanings of edification and spiritual life. Edification is thus debated either in the terms of Christian Theology (as the soul's preparation with a view to her communion with God, human soul's salvation and redemption), or in terms of Morality (cultivation of moral consciousness and of elevated ethical attitudes in relations with our fellows), or in other, more narrow terms (such as those of pedagogy and psychotherapy, or those of hermeneutics, anthropology and sociology). The latter are more specialized and most often they are concerned with only some premises of spiritual edification, ways to prepare it and achieve good interpersonal communication with a view to accomplishing this old desideratum. What is more, the phrase "spiritual life" has natural differences in meaning from one study to another, depending on each researcher's preoccupations and the scientific or cultural tradition that is mostly resorted to

through references, concepts, representations, authority names etc.

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I. Christian Orthodox Ethics: An Overview

Within the framework of this research, Christian Orthodox Ethics refers to the Ethics of Orthodoxy or, in other words, of the Orthodox Churches that constitute a family of national, autonomous and autocephalous Churches. However, we shall not emphasize the ethical confessional aspects but we shall attempt to highlight the essential coordinates of Orthodox ecclesial ethics, as we can find them in the patristic Tradition of the undivided Church.

In patristic Tradition, the notion of Orthodox or Orthodoxy was used so as to distinguish the whole (Catholic) truth of Christian faith and life from the fragmenting and separating attitudes of heresies. In other words, Orthodoxy, in the first Christian millennium, expressed an attitude of Christian persons and communities towards the Truth. The latter would not identify with its theoretical formulation and its acceptance via rational argumentation and intellectual erudition, but would be related to the entire (catholic) experience of life assumed in Christ and His Church.

In time, this participatory and not possessive attitude towards the Truth, manifested during the Ecumenical synods, mirrored in the works of the Holy Fathers and grounded on the theandric and synergic principle of life in Christ through the grace of the Holy Spirit, gave birth to a certain way of thinking, of being and or working in this world. In other words, it gave birth to an ecclesial orthodox ethics that contemporary Orthodoxy proposes to its believers.

Therefore, in order to become familiar with Orthodox Ethics we must resort to its sources and especially, to the theological reflection of the Holy Fathers. The patristic sensibility of Orthodoxy is justified by that the Holy Fathers, as servants of Christ, always cultivated communion with God, holiness of life and brotherly love for all people.

Following Christ's example and bearing the Holy Spirit, the Holy Fathers manifested their ethical and spiritual authority not as a dominating power over humanity, but as a work of service that liberates from selfishness and egocentrism, from isolation, oppression and marginalization. Consequently, they worked for the salvation of all peoples and of all men with the deep conviction that the Church, in its capacity as God's people, the Body of Christ and Temple of the Holy Spirit is the "pillar and ground of the Truth" (I Timothy 3, 15). Due to this fact, the theological reflection of the Holy Fathers has remained, to this day, normative for the ecclesial ethics of Orthodoxy.

II. Some significant coordinates of orthodox ethics

II.1. Theological coordinates

a) Holy Trinity

For the Church Fathers, the source of ethical life and, in general, of the entire life of the Church, is the Holy Trinity. In the Hellenic mentality which was, essentially, a-personal, the teachings on Holy Trinity were a "logical" absurdity. This is why a "logical" formula had to be found in order to please the requirements of philosophical thought. By means of a creative inspiration, this formula was found by the Holy Fathers through the relation that they established between the concept of hypostasis (υποστασις) and that of person (προσωπον).

By identifying the person with the hypostasis of being and by transforming it into a theological category, the Holy Fathers managed to overcome both the absolute monotheism of Hebrew mentality and the ontological monism of Greek mentality. In all patristic works, one can clearly see that when the Holy Fathers would speak of God as a Person, at the same time they would refer to the unity of being and the personal alterity of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. "Je n'ai pas commencé de penser à l'Unité que la Trinité me baigne dans sa splendeur. Je n'ai pas commencé de penser à la trinité, que l'Unité me ressaisit. Lorsque'un des Trois se présente à moi, je pense que c'est le tout, tant mon œil est rempli, tant le surplus m'échappe; car dans mon esprit trop borné pour

comprendre un seul, il ne reste plus de place à donner au surplus. Lorsque j'unis les Trois dans une même pensée, je vois un seul flambeau, sans pouvoir diviser ou analyser la lumière unifiée" (Vladimir Lossky 1944: 45).

The natural tendency of human logic to subordinate everything to a single principle - a tendency that is also present in the epistemology and ontology of ancient philosophy - was overcome - as one can understand from this text, by a meta-logical thinking imposed by the inner "logic" of faith, grounded on the Revelation of Trinity. Due to this fact, the Holy Trinity represents the source and ground of Christian ethics. The mystery and ineffable value of the human person in communion with other persons are articulated in the mystery of Trinitarian communion.

b) The World - creation of the Holy Trinity

In agreement with the entire patristic theology, Orthodoxy states that God the Father creates the world through the Son in the Holy Spirit (Father Galeriu 1991: 52). The world or the "cosmos" does not have its ontological principle in itself, but in God. The world is not as old as eternity, co-eternal with God, but it was created out of nothing (*ex nihilo*) as a manifestation of the freedom and creative love of God-Trinity. This is why, deep in its "being," the world has a trinitarian, therefore communitarian structure. The Church Fathers argue that the world was created to be a "sacrament" of the communion between the divine Persons and the human persons, as well as among all human persons. To transpose in conceptual language the above-mentioned theological statement, the Holy Fathers used two concepts, present in the Gospel after John and in the epistles of Saint Apostle Paul, namely *λογος* and *πνευμα* (Word and Spirit).

The Word and the Spirit, argues Saint Irenaeus, are "the hands" of God the Father, through which the world was brought from non-being into being. In other words, the world has a "logical", rational structure; it has a message for man and a divine vocation.

Saint Dionysius the Areopagite captured this vocation of the entire creation in such words:

"Towards God all turn and all wish for Him. Those who have a mind (νοῦς) and reason (λογος) look for Him through knowledge; sensitive beings through sensitivity; and those deprived of sensitivity through the natural movement of the life instinct and those without life and which only have being, through their ability to participate to being (...) the light gathers in one place and attracts to it all those that "see" (know), those that move, those that are lit and warmed and those that live only through its rays. They all wish it, either to "see" (know) and move, or to receive light and heat, or to continue living through light" (Dionysius Pseudo-Areopagite, transl. 1936: 30).

We can notice in this text that Saint Dionysius the Areopagite considers creation as a Church, and the movement of creation towards God as "cosmic liturgy", that the whole creation participates to.

c) Theological and ecclesial vocation of Creation

Therefore, according to Saint Dionysius the Areopagite, creation has a theological and ecclesial vocation, but he did not give an exhaustive account of how this vocation is accomplished. Saint Maxim the Confessor, whom very many theologians considered the true father of orthodox theology, took over the theological reflection of Saint Dionysius and furthered it. He showed that the theological and ecclesial vocation of creation is truly and fully fulfilled in Christ.

For Saint Maxim, Christ, the embodied Logos, represents the center and the meaning of the entire creation, their final goal for which it was brought from non-being into being. "C'est le grand mystère caché, la fin bienheureuse, le but pour lequel tout fut créé. C'est le regard fixé sur ce but que Dieu a appelé les choses à l'existence. C'est la limite à laquelle tendent la Providence et les choses qui sont sous sa garde, et où les creatures accomplissent leur retour en Dieu. (...) Car c'est pour le Christ, pour son mystère, que tous les âges existent et tout ce qu'ils contiennent. Dans ce Christ ils ont reçu leur principe et leur fin" (Saint Maxim the Confessor, transl. 1948: 327).

This text reveals that Saint Maxim corrected the intellectualist outlook on creation, present in Origen's work, through a Christocentric vision, based on the economy of the embodiment of the Logos. This correction of Origen's doctrine

was possible because Saint Maxim the Confessor did not build his theological reflection on the intelligible/sensitive duality, present in Platonism and taken over by Christian theology, but on the Biblical distinction between the created and the non-created.

God-Trinity is non-created and eternal; creation, on the other hand, emerged in time, and it has the vocation to participate in the eternal communion of the Holy Trinity. According to Saint Maxim, this vocation had to be accomplished through Man, who was the last to appear in creation, as its accomplishment and the conscious hypostasis that is free and responsible for creation before God-the Trinity.

II.2. Anthropological Coordinates

a) Man: icon of God on earth

The idea of "icon" (εἰκὼν) of God constitutes the nucleus of anthropology of the Old Testament. The Book of Genesis, however, does not clearly specify what God's characteristic feature as an icon - which belongs to man only - consists of. It only makes clear that man was created differently from the rest of creation, through God's special intervention: by taking dust from the ground with His hands (the Logos and the Spirit), he "fashioned" man in His "image", and breathed the breath of life into him (Gen. 2, 7).

If we were to make a general analysis of how other Holy Fathers interpreted the notion of "icon" or "image" of God, we would discover very diverse connotations that complete each other without exhausting the mystery of the human person. Some Holy Fathers saw the reflection of God's image in man in his royal dignity, i.e. in his capacity to be "master" of the sensitive creation and of his body; others considered that the mind (νοῦς) or reason (λογος) reflect God's image, while others assimilated it to all three faculties of the soul: reason, will and feeling, or with man's proper freedom (αυτεξουσια), by virtue of which he is the master of his acts.

In a correct interpretation of Paul's anthropology, some Holy Fathers, such as Saint Irenaeus of Lyon, Saint Gregory of Nyssa, and Saint Gregory Palamas highlighted that not only the soul but the human body as well partakes of the quality of "image" of God. "The name of man, writes Saint Gregory Palamas, is

not given to the soul or body separately, but to both together, for it was together that they were created in God's image" (VI. Lossky 1944: 145).

This is why, Orthodoxy upholds the ontological unity of the entire humanity, but this unity does not exclude plurality of persons, just like plurality of persons must not separate its ontological unity. The unity of distinct persons is fully expressed when unity does not become loneliness, nor uniformity and when distinctions do not become separations or obstacles to unity.

b) Man's ethical, poetic and sacerdotal vocation

Apart from the ontological unity of the entire humanity, the first chapter in Genesis also highlights the ontological unity between man and creation. This unity was also emphasized in ancient philosophy, which saw man as a "micro-cosmos", a "small-world" that resumes in itself the "macro-cosmos," the big world. As a parenthetical remark, we should mention that it was the stoic philosophy that laid particular emphasis on man's centrality in cosmos because it is the latter's synthesis and because through man, cosmos acquires a "logical", rational meaning.

The Holy Fathers took over the idea of "micro-cosmos" but they also highlighted, at the same time, that it is not this quality that sets man at the "center" of creation, but his quality of being God's "image". This specific feature determines another relation between man and cosmos. He is no longer just a "pinnacle" of creation, but also its priest and poet, whose mission is to uplift the entire sensitive creation to a total union with God-Trinity, as total as it can be.

The text of the Holy Scripture highlights the fact that man, in order to fulfill his ethical vocation, had to go through an exercise of his personal freedom. This exercise had to unfold within the horizon of grace, of the communion with God and the entire creation.

According to Saint Maxim the Confessor, Grace and liberty are "the two wings of man" (Paul Evdokimov 1965: 102) through which he can fulfill his vocation. Grace, however, is never substituted to freedom, because deep in itself, grace is

the environment in which God's calling and man's answer secretly meet. This is why, in the exercise of Adamic freedom, the Holy Fathers distinguish two main stages: freedom to choose, which is proper to the person as hypostasis of nature, and freedom in Truth, which is born from the journey already made, by choosing to do good, so as to be in the likelihood of God. The symbolic language of Genesis highlights the fact that the freedom to choose, that the Blessed Augustine calls "libertas minor" (Constantin Paul 1937: 58), is part of man's condition and is very important because through it man can defend himself from constraint and can assert his personal identity.

In Genesis, this possibility to choose is expressed in a concrete-intuitive language through the tree of knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 2, 9). The Holy Fathers gave different interpretations to this tree set in the center of Paradise. The interpretation given by Saint Maxim the Confessor seems interesting for our topic: he considers that the tree of knowledge of good and evil represents the sensitive world in which we live. When it is assumed in the Spirit of God, it leads us to the knowledge of good; when it is assumed only from a biological or psychological perspective, it leads us to pseudo-knowledge, in which the good mixes with the evil.

Saint Maxim uses this symbolic interpretation to highlight the fact that man has the possibility to choose between two existential paths: communion with God, which means life, and separation from God, which means death. This is why the Biblical terms of "good" and "evil" are not just moral, juridical or social categories, but also ontological and existential categories.

The tree of knowledge of good and evil is set in the center of Paradise, i.e. in the center of human existence. The purpose of the good is eternal life, life in communion with God, while evil, according to Saint Maxim the Confessor, has no ontological status in existence. Yet, due to the failure of the freedom of choice, it can be instituted as a tragic reality in human life, taking it to separation and death.

Since evil has no ontological status conferred by God, the commandment not to eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil does not refer to the act of knowledge per se, but to

the desire to know and become God, but without God's grace. It is not the knowledge of good that is a sin, but the knowledge of good mixed with evil, the product of man's egocentric orientation.

c) The failure of the ethical vocation and the perversion of the entire creation

Through the temptation of luciferic knowledge, man instituted himself as center of all things, as center of the knowledge of good and evil, and thus his ethical consciousness became perverted, "Evil was set next to good and Adam's heart became a "laboratory" of justice and injustice" (Constantin Paul 1937: 16). The first consequence of this spiritual orientation is the birth of a sensation of inner emptiness and of a feeling of shame, in man's ethical consciousness.

The shame and fear that accompany the feeling of "emptiness" express a state of perversion of interpersonal relations. God who is looking for man "in the cool of the day" (Gen. 3, 8), is no longer recognized this time as the One Who loves man, but as the One Who "punishes". He is no longer felt as man's intimate "friend", but as "an other", the stranger who, through his presence, threatens man's individual autonomy. This is why Adam hides and this "hiding" expresses the fact that, in the state of sin, the feeling of his ethical responsibility was also perverted. He "hides" and, when he is discovered, he justifies himself by accusing God and his fellows: "The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat" (Gen. 3, 12).

So, the failure of man's ethical vocation first leads to a spiritual crisis (a perverted representation and relation with God) and a moral crisis (perversion of freedom and responsibility). These two forms of crisis are followed by a social crisis (the conflict between Cain and Abel).

Indeed, in the state of sin, freedom no longer means offering one's self, but selfish and possessive self-assertion. Expelled from Paradise, says Genesis, man (i?) no longer recognizes and no longer calls his woman *isha*, but Eve, i.e. the mother of the living (Gen.3, 30). Sin, which "objectified" bodies (and saw that they were naked), turned the two personal

alterities into two biological hypostases, two individual beings, who assert themselves through an instinct of possession: "and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee" (Gen. 3, 16).

The same instinct of possession will then be manifested in the relation between man and creation, leading to a serious "ecological crisis". Creation is no longer transparency, and the means of communion between God and man because man exiled God from creation, thus opening the path for perversion of the entire creation. Man feels that he is lonely and isolated in the middle of a hostile creation: "cursed is the ground for thy sake (...), thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee" (Gen. 3, 17-18). In other words, the earth shall turn into a space that separates and imprisons, and that God no longer bears in His glory. This is why it becomes a tomb for man: "til thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return" (Gen. 3, 19).

Man enters, thus, in a process of decomposition, because the seed of separation and not that of communion has taken root at the core of his being; man dies because he has become a being that is isolated in cosmos, fighting for survival; man dies because he has ignored God's justice and love as the "justice of creation." Consequently, punishment does not come from God as a juridical act through which He asks for satisfaction, but from the "justice of creation". This can be clearly seen in God's dialogue with Cain, after he killed his brother: "the voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground. And now art thou cursed from the earth, which hath opened her mouth to receive thy brother's blood from thy hand; when thou tillest the ground, it shall not henceforth yield unto thee her strength; a fugitive and a vagabond shalt thou be in the earth" (Gen. 4, 10-12).

So sin perverts the "justice of creation" because man no longer respects its order and beauty but aims to satisfy his own pleasures, which, ultimately, lead him to pain and death. Through death man reaches again the "pits" of creation whence he was called to life: his body becomes water, air, ground and light. Through death man reaches the limits of cosmos, "the light of the first day" and this is why death will become the "antidote" of death, the space of renewal and

restoration of the entire creation when Christ - the New Adam - will assume, through embodiment, the condition of man.

II.3. Christological, pneumatic and ecclesial coordinates

a) Embodiment of the Logos and restoration of man's ethical vocation

The Holy Fathers state that the restoration of man's ethical vocation within the horizon of communion with God and in God with the entire Creation started with the Embodiment of the Logos or of the Word of God.

Embodiment, however, does not represent anything but the beginning of this remaking and renewal of the world. In order to actually restore His creation, Christ had to willingly accept death on the cross, so as to restore the communion of love between man and God, between God and the entire creation.

Christ's death also means renunciation to any form of selfishness, as type of sin, and total surrender to God. But Christ accepted death not for Himself but for us, which is what Saint Maxim the Confessor, Saint Athanasius the Great and other Holy Fathers laid special emphasis on.

Because Christ's death means total offering of God the Father, Christ can no longer be kept subjected by death, because the antidote of death is love and everything that is implied in a sacrifice of supreme love is taken away from death and preserved for eternal life. This is why, Christ's death virtually comprises His resurrection.

As an expression of supreme love for God, Christ's death also represents a limit experience through which one passes to another way of living. And since Christ is not a simple human individual but the embodied Son of God, with His death there is a whole world that dies, the world that sprang from Adam's rib, as well as the world prepared by God for Adam and which was perverted through sin. The old world, the world of exile, of separation and death dies, is dissolved like an "insignificant drop in the abyss of the love" of Christ (Father Galeriu 1991: 52).

Due to this love, Christ's death represents, in fact, the death of death and the beginning of another eternal life. Thus, death becomes Easter, passage towards Resurrection and, through this, humanity and the entire creation are reset in their original rhythm and oriented toward their initial vocation.

b) Descent of the Holy Spirit and the edification of a new ethical consciousness

Seen in this perspective, the resurrection of Christ itself is not a "final" act for humanity, but only the beginning of its glorification. From Pentecost on, the grace of the Holy Spirit will irradiate out of the resurrected and ascended body of Christ over all people and the entire cosmos. Pentecost represents the ultimate moment in the economy of salvation, as well as the beginning of the edification of a new ethical consciousness for every human person since the Holy Spirit is the One Who, after Pentecost, communicates Christ's divine and human life to the entire humanity, from all times and all places. This is why, it is only in the Holy Spirit that we can recognize Christ's presence as Logos of life in the Church and in the world. The Holy Spirit is the One Who gathers in Christ-the Logos the life of the fragmented world so as to introduce it to the life and love communion of the Holy Trinity. The Holy Spirit is the One Who constitutes the Church as Body of Christ. In the Holy Spirit the world and the entire creation is called to become Church, i.e. place of the presence and love of the Most Holy Trinity (Paul Evdokimov 1995: 109).

By entering the Church, through the Holy Sacraments, man's being becomes Church itself. The Holy Fathers insisted especially on the fact that man can only become Church, his being can only be spiritually converted and renewed in relation with the Church (Dumitru Stăniloae 1982: 341). Yet it is not only man, but the entire cosmos that can renew and transfigure itself only in relation with the Church, the liturgical and sacramental center of the entire creation (Dumitru Stăniloae 1986: 27).

c) The church - "laboratory" of a new ethical consciousness

As Christ's mystical body, the Church is the place where people find again and live the communion with God-the Father through the sacrifice of His Son and through the grace of the Holy Spirit. This is why Origen stated that the Church is full of the Holy Trinity, while Saint Maxim the Confessor called the Church God's icon. This is why, the purpose of the life of Church and of Christian ethics is to deepen increasingly more the communion with the Holy Trinity and to make this communion shine in the entire world.

In His Church, Christ Himself is present in all those who live their life in communion as self-offering. He is present in the poor in the Spirit, in the charitable, in the meek, in those who convert from sins, from their lack of love. Christ is present in the peace-makers and in those who have a pure heart. All of them, depending on how much they love, are in communion with Him and make transparent His work and presence as Logos of life in the life of the world and of the entire humanity.

III. Christian Orthodox Ethics and current biotechnological challenges

III.1. Value of human life from the perspective of Orthodox ethics

When we talk about the value and meaning of human life from the perspective of Christian orthodox ethics, we can only start from the revealed text of the Holy Scriptures.

If we approach this text with the awareness that it represents the sensitive expression of the dialogue between God and man, a dialogue initiated by God Himself through His Word, then life in general, and human life in particular, are created realities, i.e. realities whose source and grounding is not in themselves but in God. God creates the world out of love and He gives it life, i.e. he gives it the power to become response-love to His love. The free, conscious and responsible hypostasis of this response-love is man. This is why in the Holy Scripture, man appears as the "pinnacle" of sensitive creation, connected to it through his biological life and, at the same time, as a being who is responsible for creation. This responsibility was conferred to him through God's special work: "Let us make

man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion (...) upon the earth" (Gen. 1, 26).

The verb to create (*bara*), in the first chapter of the Holy Scripture, is used in three distinct moments of creation, that express three essential moments of the creating act and three ontic levels, we could argue, that are manifest in creation: creation of the energy-matter system, creation of life, and creation of man. This aspect is also highlighted by the fact that on the fourth day, when the two light-givers emerge to light the world, the verb "to create" (*bara*) is no longer used. Instead, another verb (*asah*) is used, that is translated into English by "to do", "to order", "to organize something that already exists", and not by "to create out of nothing". This means that the sun, the moon and the other celestial bodies are not sources of energy in themselves but they are a concentration of the energy from the first day of creation. This is also confirmed by research findings in quantum physics, which considers that the original grounding of our life is energy, i.e. the light. Of course, from a Biblical perspective, this original ground cannot be explained only on the basis of an immanent determinism and of a blind, purposeless evolution, because the light or, more precisely, the energy-matter system is grounded in the non-created energy (grace, in theological terms) and God's creating will. This conclusion was reached by a great astronomer from the last century, Sir James Jeans, in his book entitled *The Secret Universe*, in which he wrote: "The finite character of time and space constrains us to represent creation as an act of thought (...). Modern science obliges us to acknowledge the Maker as working "outside" time and space, which are a part of His creation" (*Nouveau dictionnaires biblique* 1992: 208). Of course, from a theological perspective, this "outside" must not be understood in a deist, objectifying meaning, but with the meaning that God the Creator is absolutely transcendental and He does not observe the laws of time and space. However, through His non-created energies, He is also immanent, i.e. the non-created energies penetrate the spatially and temporarily limited creation and thus support its existence.

In order to provide sound Biblical argument to support this idea, I shall dwell again on a significant expression from the Holy Scriptures. I refer here to the phrase that the Genesis

starts with, namely: "In the beginning". The synonyms of this phrase in Hebrew, Greek and Latin are: bereshit, en arche and in principio. In Romanian, this expression has also been translated by: în început, dintru început, întru început. The phrase întru început seems closer to the truth as it helps us have a correct intuition of the origin of life and of the ground and purpose of the entire creation.

In Romanian, the preposition "întru" means both "în" and "towards". It thus indicates some "rest" which is also "unrest", a "state" which is, at the same time, a "movement" as well (Constantin Noica 1987: 27).

By translating the first verse of the Holy Scripture by "întru început", our thoughts are oriented towards the idea of "horizon" or "field" within which the world is created and life emerges. In this perspective, the beginning appears as a "horizon", as an ontological field, or a maternal "bosom" - a receptacle for life.

The phrase "întru început" is also present in the opening of the Gospel according to Saint John, which states: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1, 1). The prologue to this Gospel is closely related to Genesis and it suggests that the entire creation originates "inside" God. From a Christian perspective, this "inside" of God is not an abstract reality, an "emptiness" that must be "filled" through the act of creation, but an "ethos of communion" or a "structure of the supreme love" between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. This is why the entire creation is a work of the Most Holy Trinity. God the Father creates everything through the Son in the Holy Spirit. This theological statement is reflected throughout the Prologue to the Gospel according to Saint John: "All things were made by Him" (i.e. by the Son, Who is God the Word); and without Him was not any thing made that was made. In Him was Life (i.e. the Holy Spirit); and the Life was the light of men" (John 1, 3-4).

These statements of Saint Apostle John suggest that the life of creation in general, and human life in particular, is "inside", or we could say in God's "heart" and it is "oriented" towards Him. The One Who sets the entire creation in motion, towards its goal, is the Holy Spirit, Who, as we know from

Genesis, "moved upon" the original "waters" of creation in order to give them life. Saint Dionysius the Areopagite writes about this movement of creation towards its goal, which is achieved by the Holy Spirit through the Son towards God the Father in his work "On Divine Names": "To God - writes he, all turn and it is God that all desire. Those who have mind and reason look for Him through knowledge; sensitive beings through sensitiveness; those without sensitiveness through the natural movement of the life instinct and those without life and who only have being, through their ability to participate to being (...) The light gathers together and attracts towards it all that see, that move, that are lit and warmed up and that live only through its rays. All desire it, either so as to see and move, to receive light and warmth, or to continue the offering through light" (Dionysius Pseudo-Areopagite 1936: 35).

If we were to interpret this text from the perspective of current research, we could argue that he writes about a light of double signification: sensible light, which constitutes the ground of the physical order of world, and spiritual light, light as information, the light of the grace of the Holy Spirit, offered to man at the moment of his creation, when God "breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul" (Gen. 2, 7). This expression "breathed into his nostrils" shows that in the middle of God's creation, man represents a vis-à-vis, a "face to face", i.e. a person in communion with God and with other persons. To be in communion with God and his fellows is, therefore, man's natural state and through it, he discovers the values and meaning of his life.

III.2. Biotechnologies and their challenges to human life

It is obvious that Christian Ethics, that values that it proposes and the specific anthropology on which it is grounded are currently faced with unprecedented challenges. These challenges are caused especially by the unlimited possibilities offered by the development and continuous improvement of technologies and biotechnologies to manipulate life in general, and human life in particular.

Nowadays, when we talk about technologies and biotechnologies, specialists in the field think mainly of the new information and communication technologies and the

revolution that they cause in all areas of human life, including ethical life.

Although they have been entrusted to specialists working in laboratories, biotechnologies concern us all because we all belong to the world patrimony of humanity. The decisions that are made in laboratories affect us more or less; consequently, we must each have a point of view. If in a democratic society legislation must express the will of the majority, it will not be written out unless the majority expresses its point of view clearly. Obviously, the minority must have a point of view as well, yet, in the game of democratic decisions, the majority is the one that sets the laws and sometimes curbs the development of the new technologies and biotechnologies that could harm human dignity. This is why, they must also be approached from an ethical perspective. This "must" does not presuppose, of course, the censorship of research but the humanization of technique lest it should become a danger for humanity.

Current biotechnologies can intervene in the genetic patrimony of any living being, man included. This possibility breeds immense hope: the eradication of certain ailments, the correction of genetic anomalies, the feeding of the entire planet etc.

Where do we stand, as Christians, in the face of these challenges? How could we apply the new technologies so as not to steer away from our vocation from God to be the "guardians" of His creation?

If technologies and biotechnologies are increasingly used to serve and promote certain ideologies that consider the "economic market" of consumer society as the only priority criterion of social equilibrium, it is more than certain that this orientation will have a nihilist and destructuring effect on moral life. This fact can already be noticed on most mass-media channels that celebrate sexual emancipation, hedonism and libertinism, and the abandon of spiritual, moral and cultural traditions. The new cultural production, which has become, in its turn, an "object" of consumption "in-forms" and markedly shapes the behavior of the new generations. Advertising is a decisive resource of the cultural sector and it

represents, symbolically, the life-style promoted by the new cultural "industry". By means of the new technologies, through seduction and aggressive publicity, increasingly subtle messages are being sent, that promise access to pleasure and happiness through "purchase" and "consumption" of cultural values. The purchase of an object endorsed by a "super-star" whose image is printed on it represents not just an emotional relation with a certain model but also the aspiration to attain his or her experience and way of living, the sometimes subconscious desire to acquire power, popularity and, obviously, much money. Paradoxically, this space of consumption, that promises autonomy, freedom and meaning, leads to a certain dependence on the "objects" consumed and continuously relaunched on the market by advertising.

Some researchers see one of the real cracks of capitalist society in this vicious circle: capital creation through a value that is continuously added has a creative meaning when the purpose of capital is the common good but, at the same time, it can be destructive because it can enslave man and breed two other major temptations in the soul, apart from the temptation of capital, namely: the temptation of power or of the will for power, and the temptation for pleasure. These temptations are, of course, present in the undergrounds of everybody's consciousness, yet when they are supported through increasingly subtle manipulation channels, "man becomes wolf for man" (*homo, homini lupus*).

In the face of these challenges, theology, in general, and Christian Ethics, in particular, are called to react. Obviously, the theologians' reaction cannot be dictatorial and constraining, nor relativist and indifferent. According to the Gospel, any theological reaction to a social phenomenon must observe every human person's liberty and dignity, but at the same time it must firmly express the fact that liberty does not identify with the vain and aggressive libertinism of isolated individuals, and also, human dignity can only be preserved and promoted in their relation with the divine and human dignity of the embodied Son of God.

III.3. Man's deification: a way to transfigure human life and overcome biotechnological determinism

The notion of deification or, in other translations, "divinization", is the Latin expression of the Greek notion "theosis", used by the Eastern Holy Fathers to express man's ultimate dignity and vocation, i.e. his "likeness" with God, discovered through the saving embodiment of the Logos or of the Son of God and carried out through the work of the Holy Spirit.

Although this is not a biblical notion, being taken over from ancient philosophy, it acquired, in time, a normative content for the entire Christian theology and spirituality, up to the 12th century, when Western Christian theology was concentrated more on a doctrine of grace, marginalizing and sometimes giving a different interpretation to the theology of divinization in the period the undivided Church.

The ethical dimension of divinization was especially highlighted by Saint Maxim the Confessor who, in the 7th century, made a theological and normative synthesis on man's deification, based on the entire theological reflection of his forerunners and stressing the idea that man's deification was the purpose of the embodiment of the Son of God.

III.3.1. Deification as ecclesial experience

a) Church is God's House

The Church is called the "House of God" by Saint Apostle Paul. In the First Epistle to Timothy he addresses the latter as follows: "These things I write unto thee (...) But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the Church of the God" (I Tim. 3, 14-15)

In the same epistle, Saint Paul calls God "the King of kings, and Lord of Lords; Who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see: to whom be honor and power everlasting" (I Tim. 6, 15-16).

This verse is known to be a liturgical hymn that was uttered in "Churches" as early as the apostolic age and was inspired by the Judaic Tradition, from which other elements were taken over in the Christian cult as well.

During the Pascal Judaic dinner, the following words used to be said: "Blessed is our God. Blessed are You, King of the Universe".

So God is the King of the universe, lives in the light that is not close, but, at the same time, he discovers His glory in a certain time, the liturgical time, and in a certain space, the sacred space.

Genesis talks about such a space, planted by God Himself in Eden, towards the East, where He "put the man whom he had formed" (Genesis 2, 8). In this space God walked "in the cool of the day", and man heard His steps.

Holy Fathers used a specific method of interpretation, the "typological" method (Buhler 1996: 235), and they saw in the garden planted in Eden a prefiguration (προτυπωσεις) of the Church as a dwelling place sanctified by the presence of God. In the middle of the garden, the Tree of Life prefigures Christ, and the four rivers prefigure the four Gospels (Saint Irenaeus, apud Lubac 1952: 150).

Apart from the garden of Eden, the Holy Fathers also pondered over other prefigurations of the Church as sacred space, such as: Noe's Arch, the Holy Tent, Solomon's Temple and, finally, the Christian Church that represents, above all, a space that is organized and "consecrated" to God-Trinity.

If for the Jews, the Temple was the only place in which God's glory would reveal Itself and consequently, each Jew had to make a pilgrimage to the temple, for Christians, the church will no longer be circumscribed geographically, but only spatially. Each space that is "consecrated" and sanctified through the invocation of the Holy Spirit will become Church, site of Christ's presence and of the communion with Him.

The Savior makes this clear in His dialogue with the Samaritan woman: "Woman, believe Me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father (...). the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth (i.e. in the Holy Spirit and in Christ): for the Father seeketh such to worship Him" (John 4, 21-23).

Christian Churches, therefore, are not geographical centers but spiritual centers, icons of the transfigured cosmos and of the eschatological Kingdom of God-Trinity.

In Christian Tradition it is not the Temple but Golgotha that represents the liturgical center of creation, because according to Origen, the cross was erected on the site where Adam's tomb used to be (Origen, apud Evdokimov 1965: 211).

In the Church, Golgotha is represented by the altar on which Christ is always present as sacrifice in the image of Eucharistic bread and wine. In the center of the altar, the holy table is set on the relics of saints, which anticipate, in time, the spiritualized bodies of the future Passover. This idea, in fact, is taken over from the Revelations. When the slain Lamb, in other words Christ in a state of sacrifice, opened the "fifth seal", the angel saw "under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held" (Revel. 6, 9).

Nicolae Cabasila, starting from this image, will state that the true altar is not the stone, but the Saints' relics. This is why, if there are no holy relics, no altar can be sanctified in the Orthodox Church and no Eucharist can be celebrated. This does not mean that the Eucharist is dependent on the Saints, but that the Saint became holy through the Eucharist.

Eucharist is, therefore, the sacrament that fundamentally constitutes the Church and through it, the community of believers as Church.

b) The ecclesial community as Church

Obviously, the Church understood as "House of God-the King" can never be separated from the community of the believers who gather in it. The community of the believers gathered around the Chalice, in the Holy Liturgy, is the Church itself. The Greek term *ἐκκλησία* used by the first Christians to define their community expresses this idea quite clearly. *Εκκλησία* comes from the verb *ἐκκαλεῖν*, which means "I summon".

So the Church, in its meaning of community of believers, is not a simple sociological gathering, a collective with a religious creed, but a gathering summoned by Christ, in His House, to participate in the Mystic Supper. Christ Himself offers His Self to the believers as food and drink and thus, the Eucharistic

community becomes a nation of God, "a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation" (1 Peter 2, 9).

The Eucharistic community in the Church was already prefigured in the Old Testament through the cult community of Israel. The Hebrew correspondent of the Greek word *ἐκκλησία* was *qahal*, which means the gathering of the people of Israel, constituted through the calling of God and which turned the chosen people into an organic unity.

The same will be valid, however, at another level, for the Christian community. No one can be Christian through himself, as an isolated individual, but only "incorporated" in the ecclesial community. In the beginning, this community was identified with the apostolic community. This is why the communion with the Apostles was fundamental for the primary Church, because they represented both the 12 generations of Israel and the image of the New Israel, which was the Christian community.

Christian community is a "Christophoros" and "pneumatophoros" community, constituted through "initiation" sacraments: baptism, unction and Eucharist, but, at the same time, it is a community that is eschatologically oriented towards the Kingdom of God. Its constitution, as such, can only be done in the "House" in which Christ is present as pure sacrifice.

Christ's presence in the ecclesial community and in the building of the Church, as well as their eschatological orientation, are suggested in Orthodoxy both by Church architecture and painting and by the liturgical acts performed within its space.

Each man that is born as "biological" hypostasis in a Christian family is "reborn" as "ecclesial hypostasis" in the Church, understood both as a space of veneration and as Eucharistic community gathered in Christ through the Holy Spirit.

In the sacramental tradition of Orthodoxy, unction is part of the sacrament of baptism, which highlights the connection and profound unity between Christ's work and the work of the Holy Spirit in the Church, or, in other words, the intimate link between Christology and pneumatology. These first two sacraments are celebrated in the vestibule of the Church,

which symbolizes our world, the created time and space in which we are circumscribed as biological and spiritual beings. This is why, in the Church vestibule, according to Byzantine Erminia, the calendar is painted, so as to mark liturgical time, beginning with September (Birth of the Mother of God) and ending with August (Beheading of Saint John the Baptist). The celebration of baptism and unction in the vestibule signifies, therefore, our birth as well as our rebirth in a time already marked by the icons of Saints and eschatologically oriented towards the Kingdom of God, as kingdom of perfect communion.

After the celebration of the two sacraments, the newly baptized person is led by his Godparents (spiritual parents) to the altar, passing through the Church's pronave and nave. The pronave signifies the historic time of the Church, as well as the time of a Christian's becoming, this is why scenes from church history are painted on it. The nave symbolizes the deification of historical time through its opening to the eschatological eon. This is why, Christ the Savior is painted on the nave ceiling, blessing the world.

Access in the altar is made through two side doors on which Archangel Michael and Archangel Gabriel are painted, the former with a fire sword, as a suggestion to the Paradise lost through sin, and the latter with lilies in his hand, as a suggestion to the Paradise regained in Christ. The central entrance to the altar, through the royal doors on which the icon of the Annunciation is painted, suggests that through the Mother of God, the Gates to the New Heaven, where Christ is awaiting for us, were opened again.

The newly baptized child received the Holy Communion - Christ's Body and Blood - in front of the royal doors, as a foretaste now, in historical time, of the joy of eschatological communion, while the passage from the pronave, where the sacraments of Baptism and Unction are celebrated, to the altar, symbolizes his ascension from historical time and space to deification. This ascension is also suggested by the fact that in Orthodox Churches one usually ascends step by step, from the pronave to the altar on which the Eucharistic Christ always stands.

As a Christian proceeds in his spiritual life towards deification, he experiences the fact that, since he is inside the church, he is inside Christ's cross, or inside the sacrificed Christ who embraces us all, or of Christ who, though he is resurrected, always walks for us the way of sacrifice or of the cross towards resurrection.

c) The Liturgy of the Church and the Christians' personal deification

As we have already mentioned above, the Church as "House of God-the King", is the place where Christ is mystically present and from which His love for the ecclesial community irradiates permanently. This is why the Holy Fathers laid special emphasis on the deep relationship that must exist between the Liturgy celebrated in the Church and its continuity in the actual life of the ecclesial community and of each individual believer.

Eucharistic liturgy is a mystagogy of faith, which orients the community of believers towards the eschatological future of communion with God, and also prepares it in a concrete way for this communion, by orienting it towards what Saint John Chrysostomos called, in the 4th century, "the liturgy of the brother" or the communion with one's fellows.

This is why the Eucharistic altar is a source of deifying power for the whole Christian existence. Saint Mark the Ascete and Saint Maxim the Confessor wrote extensively about this. They both stated that, beginning with baptism, Christ lies in the depth of a Christian's "heart", just like he lies mystically on the church altar and in the hearts of the other believers. The heart thus becomes a "Church-heart", and the priest of this Church must be the mind, which sets on its altar all pure thoughts, as sacrifice to Christ.

Those who experienced this path and actualized their own Christophoric being as Church were the great spiritual advisors of Christian communities. Being very familiar with the kingdom of man's soul, full of shadows as it may sometimes be, they also established certain conditions that are necessary to actualize the Church quality of their own Christ-bearing being, thus becoming persons that are permanently

open to communion towards deification, i.e. towards God and one's fellows.

III.3.2. Ethical and existential conditions of divinization

a) Ascetic experience

The notion of "ascesis" comes from Greek, from the noun σκησις and it initially meant processing raw materials in order to turn them into useful objects or works of art. So, etymologically, this notion means neither privation, nor austerity, but it makes us think first of a creative act that requires effort and perseverance from man (Lalande 1932: 67).

Origen and later Clement the Alexandrine were the first to lend the notion of "ascesis" a Christian sense and content by naming "ascetic" all those who practiced continence and led an austere life with a view to moral perfection or deification (Pourrat 1931: 54).

In time, the terms "ascesis" and "ascetic" received monastic overtones in the Christian East. Monasteries were called asketerion, while "ascetes" were monks who would withdraw from the world and strive permanently, by observing the Savior's commandments, to be purified of sins as forms of non-freedom and to elevate themselves towards an ever fuller communion with God by practicing the virtues that lead to deification.

Starting from the above statements, we can say that within the horizon of Christian life, the notion of deification is not understood as man's simple volunteer effort or as a simple spiritual practice, based on certain spiritualization techniques, but it is an existential reality that is inserted in the mystic space of the encounter with Christ in His Church.

More precisely, in Christian life, deification means free and conscious answer to Christ's call and sacrificing love, and not the observance of formal and constraining rules. This is why it is not accomplished inside a system of logical and discursive thought, but in the dynamism of historical existence elevated to a "site" of encounter with Christ in the Holy Spirit.

This spiritual dynamism has at its center the entire richness and beauty comprised in the Biblical notion of "heart". The heart, in its biblical and theological meaning, does not coincide with the emotional center of modern psychology, but it represents the metaphysical center of the human person that is open towards communion with God. For this purpose, according to Saint Maxim the Confessor: "God set the wish for Him in man's heart" (Evdokimov 1964: 114; 1965: 23).

In the experience of deification, the heart that the Holy Fathers write about, in full agreement with the Holy Scripture, is a reality that engages all faculties of the soul: thinking, will and feeling. Therefore, deification becomes an act of the conversion (*metanoia*) of the entire human being, so that through it Christ's presence should be felt in the world [If "to talk about God is a big thing, to purify one's self for God is even bigger"] (Saint Gregory of Nazianz, *apud* Evdokimov 1965: 33). This is why its beginning is not in a simple ethical renunciation, but in an ontological change that occurs inside the Christian person through his secret participation to Christ's death and resurrection. In a virtual way, this change occurs when receiving the Sacrament of the Holy Baptism.

Through baptism the Christian person becomes a new man in the image of the resurrected Christ. This means that he is no longer a servant of sin but has received the power to be triumphant over it through his own effort. Saint Apostle Paul places special emphasis on this idea. On the one hand he states that Christ lives in us, that the old man was crucified with; on the other hand, he urges us to "put off the old man" and "put on the new man" in Our Lord Jesus Christ" (Gal. 3,27; Rom. 8,10; II Cor. 13,14; Efes. 4,24; Col. 3,10). In other words sin died in us through baptism, but we must also die to sin through our own effort. Seen from this perspective, divinization means the permanent actualization of the Sacrament of Baptism, a "conscious epiclesis" (Evdokimov 1965: 23), that gradually transforms man into a bearer of Christ.

This means that divinization as personal experience does not involve the regulation of one's ethical behavior only, by subjecting one's will to moral imperatives, but it also involves, first of all, an integrated dynamism of the human being set off

by the overwhelming feeling of God's presence. Of course, the voluntary effort is necessary and it belongs to the Christian, but it does not designate moral, voluntary actions only, in order to improve a surface aspect of the soul. It requires total confidence in Christ Who, out of boundless love for man, has given himself to death, separation and the inferno.

Death, separation and the inferno are consequences of sin, of man's estrangement from God. When Christ, the Son of God, assumed them through sacrifice on the cross, He cracked man's infernal autonomy, thus opening the painful path of his divinization. Thus, Christ's cross has become the paradigm of the effort towards divinization in Christian life. It may be summarized in the following words of the Savior: "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me" (Luke 9, 23; Mt. 16, 24; Mark 8, 34).

b) Ascesis of the body

The body is a constituent element of the human being and this is why it cannot be ignored in the experience of divinization. Although it is a natural element of this world, and it observes the laws of time and of space, however it does not represent for man a simple natural element, because it can never be totally objectified, like the other elements that are external to it. The body is an intermediary between man and the world. Through it man discovers himself as an individual being who exists in the world, and it is also through it that the entire nature is assimilated to human existence. Due to the real unity between the soul and the body, man feels that he is alive in the world, but not so as to be assimilated to it but to overcome it. In Christian life this overcoming is possible through the experience of divinization.

Of course, the first reality that man is connected to through the five senses of the body and whose impressions he keeps in his soul is sensitive reality. In case man fails to overcome the sensitive reality there is the risk that the latter would become an exclusive center of preoccupation, an opaque, single-sided and poor reality, a simple object of consumption. Man jumps on it as on a prey and separates it from any economy of God's grace. This is the actual beginning

of man's spiritual drama, the beginning of sin. This is why some Holy Fathers interpreted Adam's sin as greed, gluttony being the first bodily passion and the source of all other passions that "vampirizes" God's creation, to quote a contemporary theologian (Clément 1969: 210).

The Holy Fathers consider that ascesis, in its concrete manifestation as fasting, is absolutely necessary in order for him to overcome this single-sided orientation in the middle of creation and in order to guide him towards the body's deification. In the Eastern ascetic Tradition especially, fasting has a well defined place.

As an expression of the ascesis of the body, periodic fasting means overcoming a possessive and aggressive attitude towards the world (Clément 1976: 74). Through its implicit renunciation to nutritious elements which are also symbolic elements, connected to the very sources of life, fasting is a permanent remembrance that our life, as well as the entire creation, do not belong to us completely. They are gifts of God and are inserted in a horizon that is open to communion with Him. Through this fundamental experience, that is consciously assumed, the Christian is protected from the danger of confusing creation with the Creator, as well as from the danger to overestimate his biological needs to the detriment of his spiritual needs and values.

The Holy Fathers, and Saint Maxim the Confessor in particular, made a subtle analysis of ascetic experience in the body. They pointed out the fact that the ascesis of the body must be lived as participation to Christ's sacrifice. Just like Christ's cross is not a denial of the body but the painful path to His transfiguration, similarly ascesis is not the denial of nature's irreproachable affects, such as: appetite for food and the ensuing pleasure of consuming food, the fear of pain and of death, certain manifestations of the instinct to preserve the body etc., but their conversion and transfiguration in the perspective of a deep joy that originates from participating to Christ's sacrifice and resurrection and from waiting for the final encounter with Him.

c) Ascesis of the soul

According to the teachings of the Holy Fathers, man's soul, which is one in essence, has three main faculties: mind as source of all acts of knowing and thinking; appetite or desire as source of desires and aspirations and anger as source of acts of courage (Stăniloae 1981: 71).

We should emphasize that although the Holy Fathers reject the Platonic idea of the separation between mind and soul, i.e. the idea of the pre-existence of the mind, however, they admit an essential distinction between the mind and the other faculties of the soul. The mind represents, in their outlook, the rational part of the soul, while appetite and anger, together with other vital functions, represent the irrational part that must obey the rational part. These distinctions are thus specified by Saint John Damascene: "We need to know that by nature, the rational rules over the irrational. The powers of the soul are divided into rational power and irrational power. The irrational power has two parts: one that does not listen to reason, namely it does not obey reason, and the other that listens and obeys it. The part that disobeys reason is divided in: the vital function which is called the vital function [...], the seminal function, i.e. birth, and the vegetative or nutritive function. It obeys nature and not reason. The part that obeys and depends on reason is divided into anger and desire" (Saint John Damascene, transl. Fecioru 1943: 103).

This way of understanding human nature does not contradict modern psychology and psychoanalysis, which talk about the existence of the human unconscious and subconscious that store memories and hide countless forces and aspirations that we are unaware of.

Christian ethics does not exclude from its concerns the reality of the unconscious and of the subconscious, in which all thoughts full of light and all dark thoughts that breed negative passions are suppressed but, apart from this area of the subconscious, it also accepts an area of the transconscious or the supraconscious, that the Holy Fathers call "the depth of the mind", where dwells the grace of the Holy Spirit received at baptism.

When oblivion of God seizes the soul or when faith in His existence weakens, this depth of the soul opens up, the communion with God is interrupted, the ontological memory is faded, attention is lax and the soul easily receives negative influences and suggestions. They begin to dwell in him. This is why the great spiritual fathers and advisers have pointed out that the ascesis of the soul presupposes, first of all, the mind's alertness and its defense from thoughts, images and fake representations on the world. This is so because the world, in all the variety of its sensitive realities, represents a permanent source of attraction for man. The soul enters in relation with the world through the body's senses, which offer the mind the representation of sensitive reality and seek to preserve it within their horizon. If the mind stops here and it does not pursue any further, so as to know the reasons and senses of sensible realities, it breeds passionate thoughts that pervert the ideas or reasons of sensitive things. Passionate thoughts represent a limitation of the noetic horizon, the shaping of one's mind according to fake images and representations, that distance man from genuine knowledge and help him claim to be the selfish and manipulating master of God's creation.

Overcoming this close horizon and opening towards deification - consider the Holy Fathers - can only be achieved through ascesis, which sets the soul in a state of kenosis, humility, by renunciation to one's selfish and egocentric spirit and by opening himself to God, having Christ Himself, the Son of God, as model and source of power.

Prayer is the most concrete expression of the ascesis of the soul. This is why the Church Fathers consider that we can only approach God by ceaseless prayer. Saint Mark the Ascete, for instance, urges us to turn our heart into an altar on which we should not bring Christ things from the outside, but our pure thoughts, that then determine the accomplishment of all our external actions. Prayer is, therefore, an inner liturgy through which the soul preserves itself in a state of purity by feeling the presence of Christ inside, and thus becoming a man who bears Christ (Christophoros) or bearer of God (Theophoros), i.e. a deified man.

By way of conclusions

What we have mentioned so far could raise the following questions in the mind of someone who looks at the experience of divinization from the outside: Could it be that by pursuing his meeting with God through deification the Christian ends up to be disinterested in the world and his fellows? Could it be that selfishness find its home here? This is why a few final conclusions beg to be stated.

1. Deification is a fundamental reality in Christian life and it implies man's co-working with God, to which both the body and the soul participate with the three essential faculties: reason, will and feeling.

2. On man's side, deification supposes giving up one's selfish self, taking on the cross, i.e. using one's creative gifts, and following Christ, i.e. translating one's love for God and the world into actual deeds.

3. The virtue of love for God and for fellow humans is the peak towards which the experience of divinization tends, since love in Christian ethics belongs to the mystery of interpersonal communion between man and God, between man and man. Love discovers the absolute value of the person as it breeds the yearning to save her from death.

4. So, Christian deification supposes a personal and communitarian experience. If God is Trinity, then He is love, and man can only understand himself and his purpose in this world by being love, in his turn. "To choose for a person in the depth and authenticity of his being means to accept love as supreme value" (Dumas 1962: 301). This way could be liberating for the contemporary man, who is so deeply marked by the 20th century technological and biotechnological determinism.

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