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## Experiencing living in God through uncreated divine energy

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**Abstract.** The transcendence of God requires that human spirituality seeks to experience it, through accessible, intelligible means, but constantly aware of the fact that the inexpressible cannot be expressed. The correct relation of the human to the divine transcendence is the foundation of what we call apophatic theology, the theology that defines God as being beyond the human capacity for knowledge.

**Keywords.** transcendence, immanence, God, man, energy

The knowledge of the mystery of God can only be achieved by following those who have reached the state of deification by grace, a state that allows the human nature to know, as far as possible, from the work of God, Him, in His being, being inaccessible to human rationality. This expression is supported by Saint Dionysius the Areopagite who says: "If we call the mystery above being God or life, or being, or light or word, by this we do not understand anything other than the powers that pour out from Her towards us, giving -ne deification, existence, life or wisdom. We strive currently to grasp this mystery itself, laying aside all the power of our minds because we see no deification or life or existence that perfectly resembles the utterly transcendent cause of all things"<sup>1</sup>.

Although God in His being will remain a mystery completely inaccessible to human rationality, nevertheless, the Creator's love does not allow man, the crown of creation, to remain without a personal relationship with Him, a fact for which God Himself discovers Himself, reveals Himself as a Trinity of Persons who have the same single undivided being. By receiving the revealed truth, that is, the knowledge of God to the extent of our reason, man knows the Creator through the uncreated divine energies, thus the relationship between the Uncreated and the created being outlined through a correct reporting of the creature to the Creator.

This reporting is based on the perfect revelation brought to the world by the incarnate Son of God "at the fullness of time" (Galatians 4, 4). He, the Supreme High Priest, who came into the world to elevate human nature to the first state, to the state of obedience to the Father, through His unique sacrifice, brings to the world the full truth about God's will and fulfills through Himself the reconciliation between God and humanity. Christ becomes our brother, apart from sin, through the human nature assumed in His Hypostasis, and His divine work

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<sup>1</sup> **Saint Dionysius the Areopagite**, *On Mystical Theology*, translated by Rev. Prof. Dr. Dumitru Stăniloae, Paideia Publishing House, Bucharest, 1996, p.247.

directly touches the human nature. After the incarnation of the Son of God, through the appropriation of our nature, the mystery of God becomes accessible to our nature, not in the sense that we know the divine Essence, but in the sense that humanity can relate correctly to the Creator, and through this relationship it can know God through of His uncreated energies, that is, he becomes living in grace, thus tending to deification.

Through Christ, God is no longer a Subject of knowledge for man, but a Subject of the personal relationship that can be realized between the Divine and the human. In this personal relationship we come to discover all the secrets of divinity, because in Christ there is "the unspoken and incomprehensible union of divinity and humanity in one hypostasis, and in Him the secret hidden from the Gentiles is revealed to us"<sup>2</sup>.

The relationship between God and man is made possible by the fact that man bears within himself the Image of the Creator, and the relationship between the Divine and human is a living, personal one. Through the Image of God implanted in man through the creative act, he can perceive the uncreated divine energies that belong to God and through which man approaches God. The effect of the relationship between the Creator and man is that man tends to deification by grace, thus knowing God in a totally different way than the sensory, rational one.

### **I. Collaboration with divine grace is the premise of the subjunctivization of the fruits of objective salvation**

Starting from God's work in the world, man knows the Creator more and more by experiencing living in Him, by grace. Deification by grace is the final goal towards which man is constantly striving. The Biblical account of the Creation clearly highlights the fact that man is created "in the Image of God", because only if man has this Image in himself, he can give birth in himself "the will from the Spirit and receive the likeness brought by keeping the divine commandment"<sup>3</sup>, so man being able to be at the same time God's creature and God by grace.

The importance of the deification of man according to grace is evident in all the saving acts performed by the Son of God, precisely so that man can rise from the state of limitation imposed by sin to the state of dynamism that implies permanent work to obtain the desired results.

Saint Maximus the Confessor points out that the Son of God, beginning with the act of incarnation, comes in maximum proximity to man, becoming our brother according to humanity, "to heal nature and bring it back to the ancient grace of incorruption"<sup>4</sup>. Of course, this healing of the nature first requires its liberation from sin, so that later, through the Spirit, it is strengthened in the natural state of doing good.

From this it follows that the uncreated divine grace, which comes from the Father through the Son in the Spirit, therefore the working energy of the Holy Trinity, represents the power that man absolutely needs in the process of perfection, because one cannot reach sanctification without correcting and living in "the new life in Christ" (Gal. 3, 27). This living in the new life that the Holy Apostle Paul speaks about is achieved after man has tasted grace through Holy Baptism, without which no one can enter the Kingdom of God. That is why the

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<sup>2</sup> Saint Maxim the Confessor, *Answers to Thalasiaus*, in *Philokalia* 60, trans. Rev. Prof. Dr. Dumitru Stăniloae, Harisma Publishing House, Bucharest, 1994, p. 330.

<sup>3</sup> Saint Maxim the Confessor, *Ambigua*, IBMBOR Publishing House, translated by Fr. Dumitru Stăniloae, 2006, p. 294.

<sup>4</sup> Saint Maxim the Confessor, *Ambigua...*, p. 275.

Scripture clearly says when it presents the dialogue between the Son of God and Nicodemus: "Unless one is born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God" (John 3, 5).

It is true that the salvation of man is the gift of God<sup>5</sup>, but God does not force human nature to receive this gift. Without man's free collaboration with divine grace, salvation is impossible. In other words, man, through his freedom, can accept or refuse collaboration with grace, and the result of any choice depends only on human will<sup>6</sup>.

The beginning of salvation also depends on this choice to collaborate or not with grace. Man cannot be saved by his own powers alone, a fact proven by the entire history of the Old Testament, therefore the acceptance of grace is a necessary condition for starting the process of man's sanctification. Therefore, man cannot initiate the process of deification by grace, "if God is not with him" as Nicodemus said (John 3, 2). Without the work of grace through which Christ Himself works through the Holy Spirit, within the Church, man cannot access life in Christ and in His Church.

Man's importance stems from his being made in such a special way by God. If he did everything through the word, in the case of man, God advises, and then man is shaped by the Creator, Who gives him His Image and implicitly the natural power to receive and collaborate with divine grace, so, man, through creation he receives as a gift certain powers, which in the absence of sin are visible and really working, and these natural powers, natural to man, define him as the Image of God, able to cooperate with divine energies, that is, with grace.

After sin, of course, man's nature experienced a fall, but this was never absolute, man manifesting the desire to return to God by obtaining divine forgiveness. This desire is evident throughout human history, among all peoples, as they all performed sacrifices dedicated to the divinity.

Fallen into sin and unable to rise by his own powers, man is permanently aware of the need to rise to God, and this impossibility becomes possible through the incarnation, sacrifice and resurrection of Christ, true God, and full Man. Through Christ human nature is ontologically restored, and now the impossibility of participating in grace becomes possible. Moreover, in the hypostasis of the Son of God, the assumed human nature is raised to the highest level of living in God, this being proof for us today that man can rise by collaborating with grace.

After the entire activity of the Logos in history ends factually with the glorious resurrection, He, the Son of God continues to work today through the Holy Spirit in His Church, offering all those who come to Him, divine grace through the Holy Mysteries<sup>7</sup>.

The synergy between divine grace and human will is therefore the condition for man to dare to advance on the road leading to deification. The reconciliation between the Divine and the human achieved through the work of the Son of God can bear fruit in every person, because in the development of the work, not only God participated, but also the human nature assumed by Christ. In other words, if our nature could participate in the Person of Christ in all the acts that brought forgiveness, it follows that even today human nature can ascend to God by collaborating with God through uncreated divine energies.

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<sup>5</sup> **W. Beinert**, *Das Neue Gottsvolk als Sakrament des Heils, in Mysterium Salutis, herausgegeben von Johane Feiner und Magnus Löhrer*, Zürich, Köln, Benzinger Verlag, 1972, p. 289.

<sup>6</sup> **Saint Gregory of Nyssa**, *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, translated by Rev. Prof. D. Stăniloae and Rev. Ioan Buga, Bucharest, 1982, p. 269.

<sup>7</sup> **Ioan I. Ică**, *Erroneous theological concepts on the relationship between nature and grace*, in *Orthodoxy*, no. 4, 1960, p. 548.

The fruits of the sacrifice on Golgotha, a sacrifice in which Christ offers the possibility of objective salvation to everyone, must be subjectivized by each person by collaborating with grace to live in Christ and perform works of faith (Jacob 2, 17; Eph. 2, 8-10)<sup>8</sup>.

The beauty of the act of salvation consists precisely in the cooperation between man and God (I Cor. 3, 9), "subjective salvation not being outside of us, but within ourselves, consisting of our righting in Christ... In this way we reach the purpose of creation if we become sons of God by grace"<sup>9</sup>.

## **II. Grace, the objective condition of man's deification**

The entire historical activity of the Son of God, activity that culminates in the sacrifice on the cross and the glorious resurrection, represents the supreme gift that God gives to man. This gift is called objective salvation<sup>10</sup>. Although this gift is objectively offered to all, it does not follow that all are saved. Only by working with divine grace, man makes the objective fruits subjective and implicitly bringing salvation.

The apostle to the Gentiles, the great Paul, explains this to those in Rome when he says: "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; Turning to the gift with His grace, through the redemption in Christ Jesus" (3, 23-24). Starting from objective salvation, or rather from its fruits, man can experience a spiritual, spiritual elevation with the help of grace, experiencing living in Christ as a new creature. That is why Paul says: "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things have passed away, behold, all things have become new" (II Cor. 5, 17), so now each person has the potential to appropriate the fruits of objective salvation, thus walking on the road that leads to sanctification.

The fundamental idea that must be remembered is that the fruits of objective salvation cannot be subjectivized by man without grace, this being the objective condition of human deification. Without collaboration with divine grace, man refuses collaboration with God, because He is the One who raises human nature to deification, precisely through these uncreated divine energies, that is precisely through grace.

According to the Holy Scriptures, man has a threefold work that begins with the call "No one can come to Me, unless the Father draws him, and I will raise him up on the last day" (John 6, 44), then correction or salvation follows, and the third work is deification. To reach deification by grace, man must go through the first two stages of the path, of course being helped by divine grace.

Without the collaboration between grace and man, the deification of man is impossible, because, even if the original sin is forgiven through Baptism, its consequences and implicitly the desire to commit sin remain in human nature. That is why the struggle of man alone cannot be successful, but with the help of divine grace, by which the spiritual powers in man increase, man can keep on the path of holiness that leads to Christ.

If the forgiveness of ancestral sin is achieved strictly through the work of grace through Baptism, raising the will of man above sin is a process that belongs to man, and the duration of this process is long, lasting the whole life.

In his confession, Dositei highlighted that man, being created good, good is inherent in his nature, so he can do it, if the will chooses to work permanently for moral good<sup>11</sup>. To work

<sup>8</sup> **Rev. Prof. Dr. Dumitru Radu**, *Salvation in and through the Church*, in the Metropolis of Oltenia, no. 7-8, 1983, p. 478.

<sup>9</sup> **Bishop Vasile Coman**, *Salvation in Jesus Christ through the Church*, in Orthodoxy, no. 2, 1985, p. 350.

<sup>10</sup> **Rev. Prof. Dr. Dumitru Radu**, *Salvation in and through the Church...*, p. 465.

<sup>11</sup> **Hristu Andrutso**, *Simbolica*, translated by Prof. Iustin Moisesescu, Craiova, 1955, p. 187.

for spiritual good, the intervention of grace is imperatively necessary, which we could say paves the way that leads to Christ.

### **Conclusions**

The collaboration between man and grace has effects over time, because through grace man gets to change ontologically, the work of good becoming natural work, and the inclination to evil decreasing in intensity. From this it follows that grace is an absolute condition, inextricably linked to the deification of man. Without the cooperation of the human will and the uncreated divine energies, through which God Himself works with man, the latter cannot renounce sin and rise to the natural state of his nature, that of being permanently desirous of the likeness of God. The positive response that man's gives before God by accepting grace is manifested through faith and good works. This objective connection between man and grace is maintained by man's active participation in the Holy Mysteries realized in the Church of Christ. From this it follows that the salvation of man is possible only through the work of grace, but always in accordance with the human will, over which even grace cannot pass.

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