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## A FUNDAMENTAL LANDMARK OF ESCHATOLOGY: THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN THE UNCREATED AND CREATED, EXCEPT INCOMPATIBILITY OF THEIR COMMUNION

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### ABSTRACT

*Orthodox eschatology is based, on the one hand, on the affirmation of the clear distinction between the uncreated nature of God and the created nature of His creatures, and, on the other hand, on the possibility of their union through divine Grace. Towards this eschatological union creation is called ontologically, through the divine reasons based on Reason-Christ, Who draws to Himself man and the universe, because He is at the same time Cause and Target, Alpha and Omega. The Church is working and preparing for the Feast of the Great Union, which will take place at the Second Coming of the Lord.*

**Keywords:** Orthodox Eschatology; Uncreated; Created; Church;

### INTRODUCTION

Orthodox eschatology cannot be reduced to an annexation of Dogmatics that describes the "last events", because it represents a "theological space" in which all the other articles on our doctrine of faith intersect<sup>1</sup>. It is necessary, therefore, to admit the validity of the concept of *inchoate eschatology*<sup>2</sup>, meaning it is about to be realised, because it fully indicates the reality that is happening in the Church and in the world, linking the three events of human history, the Creation, the Incarnation and the Parousia, in the Same Christ. Redesigning the way of creation to the Kingdom through His entire economy, Christ, even ascended to Heaven, is still the man's fellow-traveler to the Jerusalem Above<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> George Florovsky, *Biserica, Scriptura, Tradiția [Bible, Church, Tradition]*, Editura Platytera, București, 2005, p. 159; Nikolai Berdiaev, *Essai de métaphysique eschatologique*, Aubier, Paris, 1946, p. 6; Petre, Pr. dr. Mădălin Ștefan, *Eshatologia ortodoxă. Raportul dintre eshatologia inaugurată la Cincizecime, eshatologia incoativă și eshatologia finală sau realizată a Cetății ce va să fie [Orthodox eschatology. The relationship between the eschatology inaugurated at Pentecost, the inchoate eschatology and the final or accomplished eschatology of the City that will be]*, Editura Mitropolia Olteniei, Craiova, 2019, pp. 130-131. See the misunderstanding of the term *eschatology* at Henry George Little, Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexikon*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1996, p. 699

<sup>2</sup> Henri-Irenée Marrou, *Theologie de l'histoire*, Cerf, Paris, 2006, pp. 81-83

<sup>3</sup> „Eschatology means finality, meaning, but also a dynamic teleological relationship between the beginning and the end of creation” (Assistant PhD. Mădălin Ștefan Petre, „The Actuality of Deism. An Analysis from the Perspective of orthodox eschatological Theology”, in *International Journal of Theology, Philosophy and Science*, No. 7, Year 4/2020, p. 108)

If eschatology "facilitates our mystical knowledge on the first and last things"<sup>4</sup>, thus rendering a complete vision of this subject, we can speak of eschatology even from the dawn of creation or from the moment when the Holy Trinity calls all flesh from nothingness into existence, a calling that stays ontologically active throughout the entire creation and which is constantly updated through Revelation and Church until the end of the centuries. Indeed, "the Holy Scripture begins with the creation of the world and ends with the promise of a new creation. Thus we can feel the dynamic tension between these two moments, between the first divine '*fiat*' and the one to come"<sup>5</sup>. It is noteworthy here that God also wanted a human *fiat*, the one pronounced by the Blessed Virgin Mary, to occur between His two *fiat*-s, as an expression of the will of the entire humanity ("Let it be to me according to Your word"). In this regard, the various studies of theology that have appeared in the last decades, highlighting the relationship between the books of *Genesis* and *Revelation*<sup>6</sup>, are explainable not only at typological level or from the prospect of there being an absolutely natural teleological process that links the two moments in the history of creation, but also from the one that brings to light the ontological and eschatological dynamism of creation in Christ-Logos, as the one "Who is, Who was and Who is to come" (Revelation 1:4), "the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End" (Revelation 21:6).

Eschatology or the mystery of the creation's pathway to its fulfilment in the Holy Trinity therefore implies the mystery of the relationship between God and man and all the visible creation. From ancient times to the present day, man understood and defined this relationship not uprightly according to the truth. The prophets in the Old Testament and particularly the Holy Apostles and the Fathers of the Church were confronted with some erroneous points of view. The main misconceptions in this regard manifested in three ways: the first consisted of God's impersonality which consequently meant falling into the absolute immanentism of divinity, thus in pantheism, the second one was (and is still) based on the deistic vision, so on the absolute transcendentality of God, in the absence of any communication with the creation, and the third one refers to the relationship of God, the individual and the world, through His being. All those misconceptions of man were due to the confusion and the lack of a clear demarcation of what represents, on the one hand, the absolute distinction between the created and the uncreated, and, on the other hand, the being of God, His works and His will.

## 1. THE RELATIONSHIP AND ESCHATOLOGICAL TENSION BETWEEN THE UNCREATED AND THE CREATED

These issues listed above have been cleared up from the very beginning of the Holy Scripture, which describes how God created man and the entire world. The first Bible verse settles matters from the outset: "In the beginning God made the heaven and the earth"<sup>7</sup>; Therefore, the distinction Moses feels like he has to do it *ab initio* is that the heaven and the earth are *created*, which means they are made by *Someone*, and God is the One who creates, so, in other words, He is the *uncreated* One. The difference between the uncreated and the

<sup>4</sup>Paul Evdokimov, *Ortodoxia [Orthodoxy]*, traducere de Dr. Irineu Ioan Popa, Arhiereu vicar, Ed. IBMBOR, București, 1996, p. 64.

<sup>5</sup>Georges Florovsky, *Biserica, Scriptura, Tradiția* p. 159.

<sup>6</sup>See chapter II, *Genesis and Revelation*, written by Father Ioannis Skiadareisis, in *Apocalipsa Sfântului Ioan Teologul. Cele dintâi și cele de pe urmă în dialog [The first and last in Dialogue]*, traducere de Nicolae Burăș, Doxologia, Iași, 2014, pp. 91-141.

<sup>7</sup>*Genesis* 1:1.

created indicates, first of all, the creature's dependence on its Creator, so the ontological, natural limits of creation, from which stems a full range of other characteristics. The fact that the Hebrew and Christian tradition of the Bible testify the creation of the world from nothing, and not from a preexisting material, is crucial in asserting this distinction between God and creation. The Church Fathers have always argued before the heathen philosophy that creating the world from something would indicate a weakness of God, so it would still place Him in the area of the creatures defined by limits. However, to create from nothing means not being conditioned, being out of any constraint, so being out of the created or, in other words, being *uncreated*. God shapes man from dust not because He is powerless, but to show that man is *bound to this material environment by the nature of his body, and, by the breath of God, he rises over this materiality and sets his mind on the things above*.

Therefore, the creation can never, in its essence, by its nature, be like the Creator. "There is absolutely no resemblance between God and creation. So, when we say the created differs from the uncreated, we are not talking about a scientific or philosophical difference (that is, concerning a certain particular difference), but about an absolute difference"<sup>8</sup>. We tend to believe that we can circumscribe God with our mind, that we understand Him, but, in fact, we lower Him, by our judgements, to our level. Even the Bible teachings are *lowered, adapted* to the level of the created being, which is bounded by limits of all kinds. Thus, "all the meanings that Scripture uses, without exception, are taken from what was created, from the world, as subject to limit. There is not even a created reality that is not circumscribed"<sup>9</sup>. The paradox is that it is precisely those who personally know God, namely the saints, are those who assert this, because "when someone reaches the experience of deification, he notes that God has *no name!*"<sup>10</sup>.

In the Fathers' theology, regarding the relationship between the two natures, a balance has been maintained between the assertion of a total difference or gap between them and the possibility of their communication and union. For instance, Saint Gregory of Nyssa speaks clearly about the obvious difference of the two natures: "Everything that exists is divided into two: in what is created and in what is uncreated, and the uncreated nature is stable and unchanging, and the created one is unstable and changeable"<sup>11</sup>. The same is stated by Saint Basil, except that he shows, at the same time, the possibility for the nature created to share from the energy of the uncreated: "We say that there are two things: divinity and creation, domination and service, sanctifying power and what is sanctified, what is virtuous-natured and what is headed, by free choice, towards it"<sup>12</sup>.

By creating the visible world, God did not want it to be foreign to Him, but He decided, in His love for humans, that the distance between the created nature and Him would gradually become as small as possible and blur. This purpose was not attained by the early man, but by the incarnation of the Word, the antinomy between the two natures was converted into a symphony, as Saint Maximus asserts: "Even before all ages, God pondered

<sup>8</sup> Pr. Prof. Ioannis Romanidis, *Teologia patristică [Patristic Theology]*, traducere de pr. Dr. Gabriel Mândrilă, Editura Metafrază, București, 2011, p. 150.

<sup>9</sup> Ibidem, p. 151.

<sup>10</sup> Ibidem, p. 151.

<sup>11</sup> Sfântul Grigorie de Nyssa, *Despre suflet și înviere [About Soul and Resurrection]*, traducere de pr. Grigore Teodorescu, Ed. Herald, București, p. 197

<sup>12</sup> Sfântul Vasile cel Mare, *Împotriva lui Eunomie* (PSB 4, serie nouă), în *Scrieri dogmatice și exegetice*, traducere de pr. Dumitru Fecioru și revizuită de ierom. Policarp Pîrvuloiu, Ed. Basilica, București, 2011, p. 174.

and appointed the union between what is limited (definite) and unlimited (indefinite), measurable and unmeasurable, bound and boundless, stable and mobile, between the Creator and the creature. And this mystery was fulfilled in Christ, Who was finally revealed over time, bringing with it the fulfillment of the former judgment of God"<sup>13</sup>.

With regard to the second issue, that is the distinction between the four notions concerning God: person, being, will and work, it must be said that such a correct distinction is absolutely necessary to outline or describe God's relationship with the world created by Him. In the book of Genesis we have strong indications for mankind to intuit both truths about the One who created him and the environment of his whole existence, as well as the about way in which he can connect with his Creator.

The fact that God *says* and *does* in the first chapter of *Genesis*, then He *consults* before creating man and, finally, He *talks* to him, is as clear as possible that God is a *Person*, and He confers this personal character to man as well, with whom He *communicates*. Therefore, God cannot be identified with any impersonal energy of the Universe, nor with any of the material ones, but with *Someone* who communicates, so He *responds* to the man who worships Him and calls Him in prayer. In idolatrous, pantheistic religions, this answer of God did not exist, because there was not a conscious *Person* who would listen to man and answer him. Thus, the various signs of nature or history were interpreted as a response to false divinity precisely because of man's need to be heard, understood, to be answered, not to feel alone. Man, even if he were surrounded by an infinite amount of other people with whom he can communicate, deep inside his being it is a space dedicated exclusively to God. Without filling it with the personal presence of the real God, the soul of man, even surrounded by thousands of people, as I said, feels alone.

Regarding the being or nature of God, the Holy Fathers emphasized, based on the biblical revelation, but also on their own spiritual experience, the transcendentality of the divine being or the impossibility of man to know what God represents in His nature. So, there can be no relationship between God and the world created through His divine nature, but through the works of His grace and through His will. Consequently, the created world does not originate from the being of God, because it would be like God, it would have the attributes of an uncreated being, but it is the result of His creative word and will. Everything is born and sustained through the will of God and through the uncreated work or energies of His grace. Therefore, the teaching about the creation of the world *from nothing* is crucial, because there are a lot of distorted visions deriving from it, that ultimately impede man's actual relationship with God. This is also the reason why "the basic condition of the whole life and thought of the early Church is the biblical teaching on the creation of the world from nothing, in accordance with the absolutely positive and fully free work of God"<sup>14</sup>: "First of all, believe that there is only One God, the One who created all things and framed and made all things out of nothing, the One who is able to contain the whole, but Himself cannot be contained"<sup>15</sup>. This pedagogy of preaching Christ in the first centuries was aimed at breaking the shell in which the human mind was imprisoned by the distorted perception of the

<sup>13</sup>Sf. Maxim Mărturisitorul, *Răspunsuri către Talasie*, in *Filocalia*, Volume III (electronic edition), Apologeticum, 2005, pp. 358-359.

<sup>14</sup> Pr. Prof. Ioannis Romanidis, *Păcatul strămoșesc [Ancestral Sin]*, traducere de protoprezbiter dr. Gabriel Mândrilă, Ed. Sophia/Metafrază, București, 2017, p. 57.

<sup>15</sup> „Păstorul lui Herma” [„The Shepherd of Hermas”], Porunca I, in *Scrierile Părinților Apostolici*, PSB vol. 1, traducere de Pr. Dumitru Fecioru, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1979

relationship between God and man. Firstly, there was a clear boundary between Creator and creation, considering that God is separated from the creation and not immanent in it, eliminating from the outset the perspective of absolutising the creation. Secondly, it was revealed the unique and personal character of God, because He alone, by His will, meaning He did want so, without a necessity, created everything from nothing. Creating the world and man by His will, so by an outpouring of His love, the same God, the tripersonal Love Itself, wants man and the world to be restored in the condition and communion with their Creator through Jesus Christ, God created by *His will and power*, Man while remaining God. In this way, through the connection between Creation and Son's Humanisation, the Apostles laid a path for accepting Christ, as a legitimate God, which is not an invention of man like all the other gods. Therefore, they also connected the Resurrection of Christ with the Father, generically called God, teaching that "God raised Him from the dead"<sup>16</sup>.

The creation of the world from nothing, as well as the confession of Christ, as a *mediator* between Creator and creation, indicates the same impossibility of uniting man and the material world with God through His being. However, the gap between man and God given by the intangibility of the divine being is overcome, by the will of God and by his loving condescension, only with the help of divine energies, which raises man to a familiar dialogue with his Creator. The reality of this creative, sustaining and deifying energy is seen only by the saints or the deified, which appears to them as an ineffable light. So, between the uncreated and the created, there is this light of divinity that penetrates the whole creation, and only in this respect can we understand the expression "God is everywhere" or "heaven and earth are filled with Your glory"<sup>17</sup>. This deifying light now seen only by the pure ones will fully reveal its work on the Second Coming of the Lord. On the other hand, the deified body of Christ became that "ring of connection"<sup>18</sup> between creation and God-Trinity, the Fathers always confessing that Christ is "consubstantial with the Father according to the Godhead, and consubstantial with us according to the Manhood; in all things like unto us, without sin; begotten before all ages of the Father according to the Godhead, and in these latter days, born of the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, according to the Manhood"<sup>19</sup>.

This connection between the Creation of the world and the Incarnation of the Son made by the early Church and then by the Fathers for the purpose shown above is deeply eschatological, because they opened, by default, the horizon into which man and the rest of creation may *fulfill*, so they let the others sense Christ as their only way of salvation, because if He created us, became man, suffered, died, rose, ascended to heaven and sent the Holy Spirit into the world for us, then only in Him we can find our fulfillment as beings created in His image. Therefore, seeing Him as a deified and ascended man to heaven, it means that we must also become like Him and get where He is, but only with His help. Man can achieve deification by grace, not by essence. In other words, "although time and, in general, material phenomena have begun, by the grace of God, they can gradually become endless. Only God is immortal by nature. The created things become immortal not by ascending above matter

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<sup>16</sup> "Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, *even* by him doth this man stand here before you whole" (Acts, 4:10)

<sup>17</sup> Ioannis Romanidis, *Teologia patristică*, p. 147

<sup>18</sup> Pr. Prof. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Teologia dogmatică ortodoxă [Orthodox Dogmatic Theology]*, vol. II, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 2003, p. 215

<sup>19</sup> The definition on the two natures of Christ, at the Fourth Ecumenical Council-Chalcedon, in Dumitru Stăniloae, *Teologia dogmatică ortodoxă*, vol. II, p. 36

and time, but by putting on the imperishable, through the grace of God"<sup>20</sup>. So, according to the role model of Christ, man deifies not by removing or obliterating time and matter, but by gaining this immortality and turning into grace within these created conditions open to the reception of the uncreated divine power and energies. This is, actually, the Church of Christ, the one in which the union between the uncreated and the created is dynamically maintained, with the purpose of deifying the latter. This theandric nature of the Church is defined by a strong eschatological character, as Father and Professor Dumitru Staniloae also shows: "The church is the union of all that exists, or is meant to encompass all that exists: God and creation. It is the fulfillment of God's eternal plan: all-unity. In the Church we find the eternal and the temporal, the latter - destined to be overwhelmed by eternity; the uncreated and the created, the latter - destined to be overwhelmed by the uncreated, to deify; the spiritual of all categories and the matter, the latter - destined for spiritualisation; the sky and the earth penetrated by the sky; the non-spatial and the spatial; *me* and *you*, *me* and *us*, *us* and *you*, united in the divine 'You', or in direct dialogical relationship with Him. *The church is a human me communal in Christ as You, but at the same time its self is Christ*. The church is the self of the prayer of all conscious beings: the humans, angels and saints, the prayer effectively having a great unifying role"<sup>21</sup>.

Speaking of the Church, we cannot fail to refer to the Day of Pentecost, so to the work of the Holy Spirit, which fits together and, actually, unites the members of the Church into a mystical body with the Head-Christ. From now on, Christ the humble and hidden in the earthly life under the veil of human nature and under the patience of powerlessness and death, is revealed by His Spirit as God consubstantial with the Creator and the Father Almighty. The Spirit draws people to the Kingdom opened by Christ and, in order to enter where He is, the same Spirit turns or makes people become like unto Christ, because otherwise, that is, remaining only flesh and blood, without the Spirit, no one can be in the Kingdom of God, which "is not food and drink, but justice and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit"<sup>22</sup>. Moreover, Pentecost discovers in advance the transfiguration of the world that will occur at the end of the age. The descent of the Holy Spirit on the head of each apostle shows His will that through man God may work on the transfiguration, the entry of grace into the entire universe<sup>23</sup>. In this way, the Day of Pentecost also links Genesis, when the Spirit was hovering over the waters, with the meta-event of the renewal of creation, when "there will be new heaven and new earth"<sup>24</sup>. More precisely, like Christ, the Spirit does not descend to the world to build an "enduring city"<sup>25</sup> for it, but to help it see the true eschatological City.

The church is not the Kingdom itself, but only its image or environment in which we breath the fragrance of God's Kingdom and which draws us, by this fragrance of the Spirit, to its springs. In the Church we have all the Truth, all the abundance of grace and all the Revelation and we need nothing more, because the economy of the Holy Trinity has been perfect, so God has done everything for us, so we could, after Pentecost, do something for us in order to share of His gift. This means that "**the history of the Church, from Pentecost, is**

<sup>20</sup> Pr. Prof. Ioannis Romanidis, *Păcatul strămoșesc*, p. 73

<sup>21</sup> Pr. Prof. Dumitru Stăniloae *Teologia dogmatică ortodoxă*, p. 214.

<sup>22</sup> Romans 14:17.

<sup>23</sup> See the inspiring icon of the Descent of the Holy Spirit, at the base of which the Universe, symbolically painted as a human being, is waiting for the communion of the Holy Ghost through people, "for the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed" (Romans 8:19).

<sup>24</sup> Revelation 21:1.

<sup>25</sup> Hebrews 13:14.

already the last age, the eschatology inaugurated (highlight belongs to the author)<sup>26</sup> or, as another Russian theologian asserts elsewhere, "if the Old Testament was headed towards Messiah, after the Day of Pentecost the ecclesial time changed in the direction of those parusial **novissima**, leading man to the perfection of the **new creature** - a real novelty, for God Himself becomes new Man - **ecce Homo**, absolute Man - being followed the whole world"<sup>27</sup>.

## CONCLUSION

Therefore, after fulfilling the entire work made for us through Christ, God humanised, the work whose highlight is the birth of the Church at Pentecost, we could say that the world and man are coming in a straight line to their endless End. In the Church of Christ, which has maintained unchanged the truth of faith and the fullness of grace from the Day of Pentecost, one experiences under various aspects and in different intensities that antinomian reality expressed in a prayer at the Divine Liturgy: "And You granted us Your Kingdom which is to come". Thus, the presence of the Church in the world is a delicate but firm testimony to the truth of the invisible, perfect world, in which man is called to find rest after his troubled existence, full of contradictions, experiences of failure and, generically speaking, full of the inadequacy of life in our world diverted from its original ideal. In the Church, so in a life in Christ, man finds his "home" because he finds his Father, who leads man. This is why Paul Evdokimov states, in a very appropriate manner, that "knowing God means *recognising Him*", that is, seeing again a loved and long-lost person, but whose memory you keep in the depths of your soul.

However, man has always wandered in different directions, and yet so far away from that "home"! And today man is presented with an infinity of paths that would lead him to fulfillment, but, we must say, there is only one way, the way the apostles of the first centuries pointed to the pagan world, which is on the same line with the Creation, the Incarnation, the Pentecost, the Second coming of the *Same* Lord, who, arriving, will recognise as His Bride only the one who has been faithful to Him, throughout the history, in teaching, in faith and in living. Thus, if in the old parable Peter asked Christ: *Quo vadis, Domine?*, today, it is necessary to ask otherwise: *QUO VADIS, HOMINE?*

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<sup>26</sup> Paul Evdokimov, *Ortodoxia*, p. 333.

<sup>27</sup> Paul Evdokimov, *Iubirea nebună a lui Dumnezeu [L'amour fou de Dieu]*, [*The foolish Love of God*], traducere de Teodor Bakonsky, Editura Anastasia, București, 1999, p. 69.

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