PNEUMATOLOGY, SPIRITUALITY AND ECCLESIOLOGY IN THE ORTHODOX TRADITION

Introduction

It is true that while the document of the Faith and Order Commission "The Church. Towards a Common Vision" (No. 214) refers to the Church as "The Church of the Triune God" (Chapter II), pointing to the Trinitarian foundation and constitution of the Church as communion, it does not sufficiently develop the special contribution of the Holy Spirit to the performance of the salvific work of the Church in the world. As a result, the relationship between Ecclesiology and Pneumatology is not clearly and emphatically reflected in the document. It is precisely for this reason that the aim of this paper is to present the Orthodox position on the relationship between Ecclesiology and Pneumatology, believing that this presentation, as certainly the presentation of other confessional positions on this issue, can enrich theological reflection and help to achieve as much as possible the desired convergence in the framework of the ecumenical dialogue.

Furthermore, clarifying the concept of spirituality from a theological and especially from an orthodox point of view is absolutely necessary, because it can not only help to eliminate some misunderstandings due to a diffuse anthropocentric
understanding of spirituality, but also to highlight its relation to both Pneumatology and Ecclesiology.

1. Ecclesiology and Pneumatology

Ecclesiology in the Orthodox Tradition is inextricably linked to Pneumatology. And that is not only because the Holy Spirit has played a leading role in the foundation of the Church on the Day of Pentecost, but also because the whole Church as the "body of Christ" is constituted and maintained over time by the active presence and energy of the Holy Spirit, who, living within the members of this body makes them "the temple of God". So as St. John Chrysostom has noted in the present case, "if the Spirit was not present, the Church would not be constituted, but if the Church is constituted, it is obvious that the Spirit is present". In other words, it is the Holy Spirit who "constitutes the whole institution of the Church", as it is chanted in a hymn of the Vespers of Pentecost. It is He who acts in various ways within the Church, distributing the various gifts and ministries, and "allots to each one individually just as he chooses", so that the whole "institution of the Church" is constituted. It is He who, through the variety of his gifts, creatively contributes to the institutional organization of the Church and to the building and safeguarding of its unity as the "body of Christ".

This truth is particularly pointed out by the apostle Paul in his first Letter to the Corinthians, when he considers the Church as a charismatic body, as the "body of Christ" composed of members who are adorned by the various gifts of the Holy Spirit, among which are also the various ecclesiastical ministries. That is

---

1 See I. Cor. 3, 16; 6, 19.
2 Homily in Pentecost, PG 50, 459.
3 Πεντηκοστάριον, ed. Αποστολική Διακονία τῆς Ἑκκλησίας τῆς Ἑλλάδος, Athens 1959, p. 200.
4 I Cor. 12, 11.
5 See I Cor. 12, 27; Ephes. 1, 23; 4, 12; 5, 30; Col. 1, 24.
why the unity that the Church has as a charismatic body is according to the apostle Paul charismatic and functional. The variety of gifts that adorn the members of this body is not a cause of their breakdown, but (on the contrary) it constitutes a basic and necessary condition for the achievement of a functional communion and relationship among them, in order to build and safeguard the charismatic unity of this body. None of the members of this charismatic body operates autonomously and independently of the others nor, is it considered as unnecessary or useless, but all of them without exception and with their own personal peculiarity are carriers of the gifts of the Holy Spirit and they accomplish their particular functional role for the building and safeguarding of the ecclesial unity. In this way the "institution of the Church" is constituted as a charismatic body.

In this sense, as we can see, dialectics between institution and charism within the framework of Orthodox Ecclesiology has no place. Not only the Church as an institution, but also all the various individual institutions and gifts within the Church that derive from the general institution of the Church, are the fruit of the active presence and energy of the Holy Spirit.

This does not mean, however, that the Church should be understood solely as the work of the Holy Spirit, or solely as a communion of the Holy Spirit, as some Slavophiles of the 19th century led by A. Khomiakov and also N. Afanassieff in the 20th century characterized her, being led in this way in an idiosyncratic pneumatomonism due to reaction to the occult christomonism of Western ecclesiology. That is why G. Florovsky

---


rightly opposed Khomiakov’s position, highlighting the Christological basis of ecclesiology, and pointing out that Khomiakov’s characterization of the Church simply as a "communion of the Holy Spirit" gives a sociological dimension to the Church, underestimating the history. Other orthodox theologians, like Vl. Lossky, N. Nisiotis, B. Bobrinskoy and others, in reaction to Florovsky, more emphasized the pneumatological dimension of Orthodox Ecclesiology.

However, we should not lose sight of the fact that the Church is also understood to be the "body of Christ" who "loved the church and gave himself up for her, in order to make her holy by cleansing her with the washing of water by the word, so as to present the Church to himself in splendour, without a spot or wrinkle or anything of the kind, so that she may be holy and without blemish". Christ is the one who, according to his promise, sent the Paraclete to his disciples on the day of the Pentecost, and founded the Church as His Body, becoming its "head". And as Christ is the "head" of the Church, so the Holy Spirit is, according to the Fathers of the Church and some contemporary Orthodox

---


9 Ephes. 5, 25-27.
theologians, the soul of the Church that animates her body, the “body of Christ”, and connects her members with the head and with one another.\footnote{See John Chrysostom, Homily in Ephesians 9, 3, PG 62, 72; Homily in Colossians 1, 3, PG 62, 303. Cf. Gregory of Nazianzus, Homily 32, Περὶ τῆς ἐν διαλέξειν εὐταξίας, καὶ ὅτι οὐ παντὸς ἀνθρώπου οὕτε παντὸς καροῦ τὸ περὶ Θεοῦ διαλέγεσθαι, 11, PG 36, 185 D – 188 B. Βλ. καὶ J. Karmiris, Ἡ ἐκκλησιολογία τῶν τριῶν Ἱεραρχῶν, Athens 1962, pp. 64 f.; Vl. Lossky, Essai sur la théologie mystique de L’Église d’Orient, Ed. Aubier, Paris 1944, pp. 81 ff.} Therefore, Pneumatology should not be understood as detached from Christology in the context of Ecclesiology.

On the other hand, the Holy Spirit, according to the orthodox patristic tradition, not only in the Church but also throughout the divine economy, never acts detachedly and independently of the Son. All three divine persons act together in the divine economy, because the active presence and energy of the Holy Trinity, manifested in the creation and history, is one. However, each person has a special role to play in the manifestation of their common action: the Father as the source and cause of every divine energy manifested in the divine economy performs the preliminary work, expressing in this regard his will to establish the Church in His Son for the salvation of the world; the Son as the creative cause of everything, "through whom everything was done", creatively realizes the will of the Father, undertaking this salvific work by His Incarnation, Crucifixion, Resurrection and establishing the Church through the Holy Spirit; the Holy Spirit, in His turn, as the perfective cause of everything completes the work of the Son, contributing to the moral and spiritual perfection, sanctification and deification of the faithful through his active presence and inspiration in the Church.\footnote{See Basil of Casarea, Περὶ Ἀγίου Πνεύματος 38, PG 32, 136 BC. Gregory of Nazianzus, Homily 34, Εἰς τοὺς Ἀιγύπτου ἐπιδημήσαντας, 8, PG 36, 249 A: Gregory of Nyssa, Περὶ τοῦ μὴ εἶναι τρεῖς Θεοῦς. Πρὸς}
As the Metropolitan of Pergamon, John Zizioulas, observes in this regard, deploying the above patristic position in more detail, the Church is a reality that originates from the Holy Trinity, from the Triune God Himself. It is the result of the will of the Father - a will that is common to the other two persons of the Holy Trinity - and is realized through the economy of God, in which all three persons of the Holy Trinity are involved. However, there is a particular contribution of every person of the Holy Trinity to the realization of the Church. As everything in the divine economy begins with the Father and returns to the Father, so the Church has its cause in the Father's primary will. The Father expressed His good will (ηὐδόκησε) to establish the Church. He wanted in other words to unite the world He created with Himself, so that the world can live coming into communion with Him. And this union of the world with Him is attained in the person of His Only Begotten Son. The Son co-wills (συνευδοκεῖ), i.e. consents freely to the will of the Father, becoming the person in whom this union of created and uncreated will take place. The Holy Spirit also has His own special contribution to the foundation of the Church: to make it possible for the creation to be incorporated into the Son by offering through His presence the opportunity to the creation to go out of its boundaries in order to enable it to be incorporated into the Son and in this way to achieve its deification. This is because creation, not only because of its fall to sin but mainly because of its finite ontological limits, cannot be incorporated into the Son by itself and come in communion with God. It has to overcome its limits, so that it can, as a finite being, get into the uncreated and infinite God and communicate with Him. And that is what happens through the special contribution of the Holy Spirit. In short, the Church is part of this Trinitarian plan, according to which the Father "deigns" for its foundation: the Son offers himself for the incorporation of creation and its communion with God and the Holy Spirit delivers the creation from the limits and boundaries of its nature in order

to achieve its incorporation into the Son and its communion with God that is necessary for its deification. For this reason, we believe that it is not at all accidental that in every Eucharistic gathering the Holy Spirit is invoked by the bishop or the presbyter, in order to descend and change the offered bread and wine into body and blood of Christ, so that the faithful who share them may be incorporated into Christ and become living members of his body, i.e. the Church.

At this point, one important clarification needs to be highlighted: according to the Orthodox theology, this invocation does not refer to the descent and effect of the Holy Spirit only on the offered gifts of bread and wine (as if their change into body and blood of Christ was achieved, so to speak, in a magical way, i.e. independently of the spiritual participation of the faithful). On the contrary, in this invocation there is also reference to the descent and effect of the Holy Spirit to all members of the local Eucharistic gathering. And this is absolutely reasonable, because the Holy Spirit is the one who enables the faithful through the sanctification and the change of bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ, as well as through His coming to them, to be eucharistically incorporated into Christ and thus to become Church. For this reason, both the decisive contribution of the Holy Spirit and the decisive importance of the Divine Eucharist are strongly emphasized in the Orthodox theology of the constitution.

---

13 See «Ἡ Θεία Λειτουργία τοῦ ἁγίου Ἰωάννου τοῦ Χρυσοστόμου», in: http://www.chiesaortodossa-firenze.org/materials/LitourgiaStJohnGR.pdf, pp. 10 ff: «παρακαλοῦμεν σε καὶ δεόμεθα καὶ ἰκετεύομεν κατάπεμψον τὸ Πνεῦμά σου τῷ Ἁγίῳ τῷ ἴπτε, ἥμις καὶ ἐπὶ τὰ προχείμενα δῶρα ταῦτα. Καὶ ποίησον τὸν μὲν ἄρτον τοῦτον τίμιον σῶμα τοῦ Χριστοῦ σου. Ἀμήν. Τὸ δὲ ἐν τῷ ποτηρίῳ τοῦτῳ τίμιον αἷμα τοῦ Χριστοῦ σου. Ἀμήν. Μεταβαλῶν τῷ Πνεύματι σου τῷ Ἁγίῳ. Ἀμήν Ἀμήν Ἀμήν. Ὡστε γενέσθαι τοῖς μεταλαμβάνοισιν... εἰς κοινωνίαν τοῦ Ἁγίου σου Πνεύματος...». 
of the Church, especially in the context of the so-called "Eucharistic Ecclesiology"\textsuperscript{14}.

Therefore, the Church is not the work of only one divine person, but of all three persons of the Holy Trinity. That is why, we cannot speak of Ecclesiology, from an orthodox point of view, without referring to Trinitarian Theology, and especially to the communion and contribution of the persons of the Holy Trinity to the performance of the plan of the divine economy. Besides, we should not forget that both in the biblical and the patristic tradition not only the image of the Church as the body of Christ, but also the communion of the persons of the Holy Trinity in general are the models of the Church as a communion of the faithful\textsuperscript{15}. As Fr. G. Dragas notes in this case, «The Holy Trinity is the ultimate basis and source of the Church’s existence and, as such, the Church is in the image and likeness of God. This being in the image of the blessed Trinity constitutes the mode of the Church’s existence, which, in fact, reveals her nature. Being in God, the Church reflects on earth God’s unity in Trinity. What is natural to God is given to the Church by grace»\textsuperscript{16}.

2. Orthodox Ecclesiology and Spirituality

Before referring to the relationship between Orthodox Ecclesiology and spirituality, we must clarify the meaning of "spirituality" from an orthodox point of view, as this term is multifaceted and is used by philosophy, theology, psychology, as well as by social and cultural sciences in a totally different sense,


\textsuperscript{15} See John 17, 20-21; Ignatius of Antioch, Μαγνησεῦσιν 7, PG 5, 668 B; 13, PG 5, 673 A; Σμυρναίοις 8, PG 5, 713 B; Athanasius of Alexandria, Κατά Αρειανῶν 3, 21, PG 26, 365 C – 368 A; 22, PG 26, 368 C – 369 B; 23, PG 26, 372 ABC.

in such a way as to create enormous confusion in its use. Often, even among theologians, the term "spirituality" is perceived in an ideological-philosophical meaning, referring to a way of life that is different or contrary to the materialistic way, as if it relates only to the human spirit and not to the Spirit of God.

Such an understanding, as we perceive, alienates spirituality from the source and cause of the spiritual life, which, in the biblical and patristic tradition, is the Holy Spirit. Thus, from a purely orthodox point of view, the term "spirituality" means the holy-spiritual experience and life of the faithful within the Church. It is an experience and life characterized by the fruits of the Holy Spirit, "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faith, gentleness, temperance", as the apostle Paul describes briefly in his letter to Galatians.\(^\text{17}\) They are the fruits that express the life and experience of deification in the Church, in which, according to St. Maximus the Confessor and St. Gregory Palamas, man as a member of the body of Christ becomes true god, having by grace what God has by nature "without the identity of essence".\(^\text{18}\) In this sense, the Orthodox spirituality as closely related to the presence of the Holy Spirit within the Church and the Holy Spirit’s life and experience of the Church is inextricably linked to Orthodox Ecclesiology.

In order to better understand the relationship between Orthodox Ecclesiology and Spirituality, we must take into account the general relationship observed in the Orthodox tradition between Spirituality and Theology, one aspect of which is Ecclesiology. Theology is so closely connected with Spirituality in Orthodox tradition, that we cannot understand the one independently of the other. They are two sides of the same reality that the incarnation of God Logos inaugurated in the history. We could say that Orthodox Theology is the theoretical expression of

\(^{17}\) Gal. 5, 22.

\(^{18}\) See Maximus Confessor, Πρὸς Θαλάσσιον, Περὶ τῶν διαφόρων ἀπόρων τῆς θείας Γραφῆς, 22, PG 90, 320 A; Gregory Palamas, Θεοφάνης ἢ Περὶ θεότητος καὶ τοῦ κατ’ αὐτὴν ἀμεθέκτου καὶ μεθεκτοῦ, PG 150, 936 C.
Orthodox Spirituality, just as Orthodox Spirituality is the practical experience of the content of Orthodox Theology. Thus, theory and practice, theology and spiritual experience and life, or, in other words, doctrine and ethos, are inextricably linked within the Orthodox tradition. This is precisely why any attempt of the heretics appearing in the history to alter the content of Orthodox Theology was considered by the Fathers of the Church as an attempt to alter the spiritual experience and life of the Church. But also any attempt of the Fathers of the Church to formulate the Orthodox doctrine, so that to exclude any heretical counterfeiting ultimately aims at safeguarding the spiritual experience and life of the Church. This becomes clearer when we consider that the Fathers faced both the Trinitarian and the Christological heresies, noting first and foremost the negative consequences they had for the realization of the salvation and deification of man. In other words, the main interest of the Fathers of the Church, both in facing the various heresies and in the development and formulation of their doctrinal teachings, was to ensure the reality of salvation and deification of man. If the Incarnation of the Word of God is the beginning and the basis of the new reality in Christ, the deification of man is its end and its purpose. It is precisely this basic truth that St. Athanasius of Alexandria originally and uniquely emphasizes when he says: "He (that is, the Word of God) ... has been incarnated, so that we may be deified"\(^1\)\(^9\). As the incarnation of God's Word is the center of Orthodox Theology, so the deification of man is the center of Orthodox Spirituality. This is precisely why the close relationship that exists between the incarnation of God's Word and the deification of man does not only emphasize the close relationship between Christology and Soteriology in the Orthodox tradition, but it also highlights the close and functional relationship that exists between Orthodox Theology and Orthodox Spirituality. Throughout the patristic tradition this relationship remains indissoluble.

On the basis of these facts, we understand that Orthodox Spirituality, having as its center the spiritual experience of the

\(^ {19}\) Athanasius of Alexandria, *Περὶ τῆς ἐνανθρωπῆσεως τοῦ Λόγου* 54, PG 25, 192 B.
deification of man, is inextricably and functionally connected with Orthodox Ecclesiology, since, as we have emphasized above, the deification of man takes place within the Church through Christ in the Holy Spirit. It is for this very reason that St. Gregory Palamas characterizes the Church as a "communion of deification". Thus, the Orthodox Spirituality is ultimately nothing more than a lived and living Ecclesiology with all mentioned aspects and parameters of Orthodox Theology.

**Conclusion**

Based on the above, it becomes clear that, as Ecclesiology in the Orthodox Tradition is not conceived independently of Christology, it also cannot be understood independently of Pneumatology. This is because the basis of Orthodox Ecclesiology is ultimately Trinitarian, since all three persons of the Holy Trinity participate together and each one with his personal contribution to the foundation and the salvific work of the Church.

Furthermore, the Orthodox Spirituality, having as its center the deification of man, has not an ideological-philosophical content but is in direct and functional relation to the active presence and energy of the Holy Spirit within the Church, and this fact points to its inextricable link both with Orthodox Pneumatology and Orthodox Ecclesiology. In this sense, Spirituality, Pneumatology and Ecclesiology in spite of the difference in their meaning, they constitute an inseparable whole, expressing in general the inextricable and functional relationship between Theology and Spirituality in Orthodox tradition.

---
