

THE KENOTIC CHARACTER OF THEOLOGY AS ULTIMATE GLORIFICATION OF GOD AND MAN*

Archbishop Stylianos (Harkianakis)

The impasse, and almost general incredibility, of contemporary theology should not be regarded as a result principally of the given confessional division of all Christian theology in our time, but rather as a symptom of the loss of the essential centre of that *theandric* endeavour which is called theology and quite often characteristically confused with philosophy. And what is most unfortunate is that many theologians are apparently unaware of the loss of this value.¹ Yet the confusion between philosophy and theology becomes still more unjustified and fatal, since each of these corresponds to one of two *a priori* entirely opposed fundamental attitudes of the human spirit. For while philosophy begins with the Platonic wonder - which, as Descartes would later prove, signifies more a questioning of all values than a thankful admiration - genuine theology always has its essential starting-point in the free acceptance of certain given holy values, the uniqueness and transcendence of which lie precisely in the fact that they exceed the theologising subject to an infinite degree. The transcendence and precedence of these values should not be interpreted in such a manner as to undermine in any way the dignity of the human person. On the contrary, the noble nature of man is only discovered and secured when the transcendence of such values is acknowledged in free responsibility and gratitude. One could otherwise formulate what has been said in the following sentence. Each crisis and adulteration of theology, in the final analysis, is based on a double sin: *hubris* and *disbelief*. Yet one should realise that in fact, although these two sins are basically closely related, they are by no means identical. *Hubris* and *disbelief* may quite often exist in a casual relationship, but this does not exclude the fact that in certain cases it is possible for *hubris* and belief or humility and *disbelief* to coexist. Bearing in mind that *hubris* and *disbelief* further imply both a moral and gnosiological aspect, one could state that here we are confronted with a fatal correlation. The double evil of *hubris* and *disbelief* relate to theology in the form of a contradiction in terms (*contradictio in adjecto*). However, since at all times under the rubric of "Theology" much is thought and said which would simply have been inconceivable without *hubris* and *disbelief*, one must examine the relevant problem under the three following paragraphs:

- (a) "Original sin" in the definition of Church and Theology.
- (b) The principle of *kenosis* throughout the entire divine economy.
- (c) Prayer as *kenosis* and root of all Theology.

If theology is basically a function of the Church and can be practised only within the Church, it is clear that before any definition or evaluation of the stand of theology one must undertake a closer examination of the notion and understanding of the Church.

* Article translated from the German, originally printed in *Weisheit Gottes - Weisheit der Welt, Band I (Festschrift für Joseph Kardinal Ratzinger)* EOS VERLAG, St Ottilien 198 W. Germany, 1987. Reprinted with kind permission of the publishers.

I. "Original Sin" in the Definition of Church and Theology

Traditional ecclesiology² tried, as is known, to underline the idea of *communio* among the various images of the Church derived mainly from the New Testament, and it is precisely this concept which was accordingly projected. This *communio* is understood on the one hand as fellowship of the various members of the Church among themselves, and on the other hand as fellowship of the created with their Creator. This is why there are in the Church both a horizontal and a vertical communion.

The element which characterises this communion in a particular way is divine *grace*. The fellowship called "Church" is a communion full of grace, consisting of the earthly and the heavenly members of God's family. It is not any kind of *natural* relationship of the creatures which could understandably and necessarily lead to communion with their Creator. The gap between Creator and created, which is expressed through the creation out of nothing (*ex nihilo*) would be bridged by no power other than the Creator alone, and this only out of an entirely free benevolence.

The article of faith that God has created the world out of nothing was never regarded in the Church as a particular truth of faith alongside many others but rather as the principal truth of faith, and even as the indispensable presupposition of all orthodoxy and theology worthy of God. Thus one would correctly insist that almost all modern heresies, which apparently derive from a gnostic or manichean materialism, result from the fact that man rejects tacitly the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*, or at least is not prepared to accept this doctrine in all its deep implications.

The theological significance of this article of faith is already implicitly given in the fact that from the very act of creation out of nothing one may conclude both the essence of the Creator and that of the creatures. The absolute *freedom* with which God created the world (since no pre-existing matter could have been the cause of creation) guarantees that God has acted out of absolute *love*, which is in reality the only definition of God's essence given in revelation (cf. I John 4:18).

Now what does *absolute love* mean? And why should precisely this love characterise the essence of God as the only valid attribute given to God in revelation? Absolute love is only the entirely un presupposed, namely the entirely moral order, a form of righteousness, which is by no means able to express "the absolute otherness" of God, the abyss of His sovereignty and His absolute unknowability. A love which would have even the slightest presupposition on the part of the loved necessarily places lover and loved on the same level. Such a love would not be entirely a free gift, not grace as *gratia*, and thus would even throw a strange light on the very essence of God.

The doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* indicates still more dramatically the essence of the creatures which is established in a rather contradicting manner, on the one hand in absolute nothingness and transience, and on the other hand in a sacredness and indestructibility guaranteed by grace: what is out of nothing must necessarily, sooner or later, return to nothing. This is the meaning of nothingness, yet when such a being owes its existence to the love and grace of its Creator, it is quite obvious that in the end it does not perish but will rather be transfigured, a fact which reveals the sacredness of being.

If love as the unearned grace of the Creator is constitutive for all things created, it becomes evident that this absolute quality on both sides, namely of Creator and created, must find its analogous expression in the Church and in theology. With this we have already struck the central nerve of the problem: does our definition of Church and theology actually correspond, on the one hand, to the dimension of God's grace, and, on the other hand, to the sacredness of all created as known to us from revelation; or else do we also have here a kind of *anthropomorphism*, which bears in itself the same consequences as original sin? It truly appears that the enclosure of man within himself (*incurvatio hominis in se* was the formulation of the Reformation), which renders it impossible for him to partake in the beatitude of God, is also the fatal reason for the insufficiency of his theologising in modern times, irrespective of whether he thinks or speaks of God, of Church and creation, or of himself. It is really sad to ascertain that it is precisely this which is the main symptom of all pathology in contemporary theologising. One need only glance at a handbook of dogmatics - regardless of whether Orthodox, Catholic or Protestant - and see the definitions of Church and theology given by various authors in order to certify with surprise, if not with deep despair, that the omnipresence of God is tacitly replaced by the omnipresence of man.

The primacy of man in creation, offered by God and accordingly testified in manifold ways throughout the entire divine economy, was unfortunately interpreted in such a way that it was believed that man could, from the moment of his creation, represent God Himself and even manipulate Him. Under the pretentious excuse of conscientiousness and responsibility, man endeavours to render decisive for both Church and theology his will and initiative, instead of convening and integrating in humility the entire creation of God into a "cosmic liturgy". Perhaps the late K. Rahner also wanted to signify this same sinful stand of contemporary theology, when he distinguished between a "sitting" and a "kneeling" theology!

However, in order to become still more intensely aware of this shameful situation in our concepts and definitions of Church and theology, we must adopt certain concrete examples. The recent celebration of the twentieth anniversary of the Second Vatican Council gives me the fine opportunity to assume this Council as an example in order to verify my unpleasant observations, which should by no means be disregarded as pessimistic. To begin with, it was in various ways

confessed by all Christians that the Second Vatican Council constituted the ecclesiological Council *par excellence* in the entire history of Christendom. There can certainly be no doubt that no other Christian council attempted to examine the theme "Church" in such a careful and systematic manner as Vatican II. All its lengthy Constitutions, Decrees and other official Declarations had as their unique point of orientation the goal of conceiving again in a creative manner both the visible and the mystical dimensions of the Church so that, in the end, through the sanctification of the whole world (*consecratio mundi*) achieved after so many efforts, only the name of God is glorified. Is there, for the Christian, a more praiseworthy endeavour, a holier duty, a more pious ambition? Yet, this programme of the Roman Church, so admirable in its spirituality, could, in spite of this, not overcome the "human, all too human" in the Church to the degree expected after so many promising signs. With this, we naturally imply not only, or not primarily, the place of the Pope within the visible structure of the whole Church. Our remarks concern rather the deeper and more general, and therefore more spiritual, weakness of the Synodical texts.³

If one wanted to attempt a summary of all the ecclesiological theses of this Council in one definition of the Church, then there would again result such a concept of the Church which could in no way comply with the "fulness" (*pleroma*) of all created realities. This is, for example, already evident in the fact that, as "happy end" of the Christian adventure in world history, one does not await a kind of *apokatastasis*⁴ but precisely a *consecration* of the world. This consecration would not, of course, be a false ambition, since man is truly the only celebrant of nature, especially according to the repeated command of God.⁵ However, since man dragged with him, through his fall, the rest of creation not only in the agony of the distance from God (cf. Rom. 8:22), and was able to deny her, directly or indirectly, even elementary rights of existence, one would secure the necessary correction for man's sinful activism - which often in our concepts of the Church is expressed as anthropomorphism - through the fact that man would be reminded of the original sacredness and virginity of creation as a whole. For man must quite simply face the terrible truth that it was only for him that the rest of creation was deprived of peace with God, and it is only in this way that it was prevented from following its providential way towards transfiguration. In any case, we in the age of the atom should be in a better position to hear the voice and the reason of irrational nature than previous times perhaps could. Of course one would never expect from contemporary theology in East and West the readiness for prayer and the theological genius of one such as Maximus the Confessor, Bonaventura or even Gregory Palamas, but one is justified in demanding from every Christian theology an elementary and basic attitude which is less scholastic, intellectualistic, speculative, and more contemplative, mystical and liturgical. It is precisely due to this fundamental attitude that the simple Desert Fathers of the *Philokalia* are more appropriate, authentic and also more credible for theologising than famous theological scholars of our time. A Church which - despite all

contradictory claims - is still primarily conceived as "society" and not as a truly all-embracing "communion" of grace cannot be the Body of the Lord who, as "Logos" in the root of every individual thing, constitutes from the beginning the value and hope of all creatures, as this is most clearly expressed in the Prologue of John's Gospel and was developed most wonderfully by Maximus the Confessor. For this reason, one could perhaps propose the following general definition of the Church for an ecclesiology worthy of God: *The Church is a communion grounded in grace of created and uncreated, which remain with each other unconfusedly and undividedly.*

There is no doubt that a concept of the Church in the said direction would dictate an analogous definition of theology. For the two notions are in mutual interaction so that, in the form of a vicious circle, theology defines the concept of Church, and the concept of Church defines theology.

II. The Principle of "Kenosis" throughout the Entire Divine Economy

The above expressed, or at least implied, dissatisfaction towards professional theology and ecclesiology will be more deeply and more painfully experienced if one were to follow with "purified senses", at least through the main soteriological facts, the way in which the principle of *kenosis* is at work throughout the whole divine economy for the glorification of God and the salvation of the world.

First and foremost one should remember that even the free act of God, through which the variegated world was created out of nothing with a concrete goal, constitutes the first and most mysterious case of God's *kenosis*. The absolute Sovereign, whose essence cannot in the least be expressed by any name or concept, is through the act of creation somehow bound to a "programme". God hereby expresses an interest, namely an interest directed towards concrete aims, for His defined creation, which is a limited one. Although God remained unchangeable in this according to His essence, yet one cannot overlook the fact that now the action of the Holy Trinity assumes a new direction (*ad extra*), which is called providence. On the basis of this providence God "undertakes" some measures which betray not only benevolence but a real lowering, even humiliation, for His creation. As first elementary and general such measures, one should consider the so-called *natural laws*. Although natural laws could be understood to a certain degree as a blind discipline of nature, yet on the other hand they may be conceived from a certain viewpoint as an *emancipation* of the creatures in general. The fact that the Creator, on the basis of the natural laws, does not need to interfere directly and constantly in the process of development of creation, is evidence that God bows before His creation: in so doing, God has in a moving way entrusted to nature its own route. Is this not a certain self-sufficiency of creation which must be considered an honour and in no way as a lack of interest on behalf of the Creator in the sense of Aristotelianism? The degree to which the laws of nature

are a real benefaction of God, especially for man, may perhaps be ascertained if one considers that without the laws of nature each forthcoming moment of our life would constitute a limitless anguish before the entirely unknown, which sometimes would sever nature from our only hospice and render it a completely inhospitable place.

Under the general natural laws there is the law of biological transplantation of life, particularly the law of the multiplication of kind and species, above all of the animal creatures, which means a further step in this *kenosis* of God. Yet what by far exceeds all that has been said to this point is the creation of man in the image and likeness of God. Through this, a new element arises in nature, which though the most miraculous, yet may at any moment jeopardise the whole order of the world. This lies in the fact that man is a person, namely that we are basically dealing with the freedom of conscience. From now on, one cannot in world history foretell anything with absolute certainty, much less so prejudge anything. The human person is unpredictable. The omniscient God knows in advance everything that men can do on the basis of his freedom of conscience, but not even He can "predestinate", otherwise there would not be freedom of conscience in man. To be a person among creatures is a presupposition, and even a challenge for new steps in God's *kenosis*. Revelation as self-disclosure of God at the same time implies His self-confinement within certain "possibilities". When God must "speak", regardless of whether in ordinary (*revelatio naturalis*) or extraordinary (*revelatio supernaturalis*) manner, so that He may be heard by the creatures which have reason, He certainly experiences a degradation, at least formally, for the sake of nature. And although in so doing His essence remains unaltered, the communication of His will - which is of course an expression of His essence - constitutes an "impoverishment" of the Infinite, which must be identified with finite forms in time and space.

The new order in the world which arises from the abovementioned "personal" presuppositions between Creator and creature is now called the *moral order*. This order lies, as is known, in the fact that every act of personal thinking, willing and acting possesses a degree of responsibility proportional to the degree of freedom presupposed. *Freedom* and *responsibility*, then, constitute the two key concepts from which *kenosis* must be seen.

It is on the basis of these two concepts that the idea and realisation of the Testament take place, constituting the most solemn form of the moral relations between Creator and creatures. Yet, revelation and testament, in the sense of the Old Testament, are very "primitive" forms of *kenosis* when compared with the unheard will of God's Incarnation. Incarnation and cross must, however, be seen as an undivided act of God for the sake of His creature, and even as the climax of His love and *kenosis*. The patristic formula for this is at once laconic and enlightening: "God became man so that man might become God".⁶

In the mystery of this undivided act of the Incarnation - understood according to the doctrine of two natures of the hypostatic union - one should see also the real foundation of the Church as "Body of the Lord".⁷ It is precisely here, in the absolutely sacramental field of the Church, that we experience the principle of *kenosis* in its most developed variety and in its most mysterious depth. Here for the first time does it become clear that this principle signifies glorification, because it is based on the mutual love between Creator and creature. In the life of the Church everything in one way or another constitutes a tremendous manifestation of this love and glorification, which is able to transcend death by death.

The tension between history and eschatology, which the Church is called to live until the parousia puts an end to this state of the *already* and the *not yet*, is the mysterious area wherein the *kenosis* of God and man brings about glorification in a variety of ways. That God allows His Kingdom to grow among so fragile and curious conditions surely constitutes a *kenosis* that bears witness to His boundless love. However, the fact that man, in spite of his existence among so many uncertainties and disappointments of everyday life, believes that he is in the Kingdom of God, this also constitutes a no less admirable *kenosis*! The four known attributes of the Church ("one", "holy" "catholic" and "apostolic"), which are experienced gifts and at the same time ideals yet to be achieved, constitute a paradoxical ambivalence that appears as consequence and expansion of the theandric principle founded on the hypostatic union.

In the same theandric field of tension one must understand also the sacraments in general. If sacrament in general is a visible sign that renders an invisible grace, then one must also recognise here an unheard *kenosis* of God who allows His uncreated and infinite grace to dwell in created, finite and fragile elements. In the Old Testament, God did not wish to allow His Spirit to remain for a while even in the human body (cf. Gen. 6:3), whereas now, namely in the sacraments of the New Testament, He combines His Grace in the deepest way with all elements of creation, so that every creature may with and through man, advance to the final glorification.

In all the above-mentioned soteriological data of divine economy, it is primarily the *kenosis* of God that is underlined, something which is correct since He first loved us (cf 1 John 4:19), but this in no way would imply that we are hereby overlooking the analogous *kenosis* of the faithful man. In fact, from a certain aspect one could perhaps say that human *kenosis* should be especially emphasised, precisely because man does not have the omnipotence of God. If, for instance, it is a point of particular *kenosis* for God that He allows the bread and wine to be transformed into the Body and Blood of His Incarnate Son, yet on the other hand it is also no simple matter for man to believe that, beneath the fragile forms of the daily bread and wine, he encounters, and even eats, God Himself!

Thus one may, from what has been said above, see that the principle of *kenosis* which throughout the whole divine economy is the main motive of divine action, constitutes at the same time a strong motive of man acting in faith, and seeks not only the salvation of man but also the glorification of God.

III. Prayer as “Kenosis” and Root of all Theology

If divine revelation in all its stages and individual events is God’s unheard “endeavour” to be united with man and the entire creation, as if, in such an “ecstatic” manifestation of His will, He had entirely overlooked the infinity and ineffability of His essence, so also prayer in general is the analogous response by man to such an ecstatic manifestation of will. In prayer, man endeavours, in the diametrically opposite direction, to transcend his finitude and to be “ineffably” united with His infinite and inaccessible Creator. Hence prayer is neither monologue nor dialogue; prayer is “synousia”! Although the abysmal distance and difference of essence between Creator and creature would forbid such a concept, still only familiar in the area of sexuality, nearly all mystics of the Eastern Church almost always prefer precisely this term in order to express the deepest and fullest union of God and man in prayer. And when one takes into consideration the fact that genuine prayer is always accompanied by tears, and that this is why the great Neptic Fathers would as their first petition ask for tears from God, then one better understands the characterisation of prayer as “synousia”. For in physiology it is evident that there is a direct and deep relationship between tears and the sexual function.⁸

From these introductory remarks about the nature and purpose of prayer, it becomes clear that such a function requires the whole of man in order to change him entirely. Thus, prayer in the Christian sense is not simply the wish to present to God certain concrete needs in the form of petitions, but the inclusion of oneself within the rhythm of the universe for the glory of God. This is why such a demanding spiritual enterprise cannot be idle talk. It is not without significance that the Lord Himself instructed His disciples not only concerning the content and order of petitions in prayer, but He “dictated” everything to the very last detail as if He was thereby sending a “telegram” of His own to His heavenly Father!

One shall be able to understand more deeply the broader relation of all problems addressed here, if one firstly analyses the content and order of petitions in the Lord’s Prayer.

Even at first glance it is obvious that, besides the petition concerning daily bread which arises around the middle of the text, all other petitions are of deeply moral-theological significance. This is the reason why so many Church Fathers throughout the centuries have written extensive commentaries on the Lord’s Prayer. The address “Our Father” which stands at the beginning is immediately qualified by the explanatory phrase “who art in heaven”, so that the difference in essence between Creator and creature may first and foremost be kept. “Heaven” and

“earth” are, in the language of Scripture, a sufficient indication of this difference in essence. Thereupon follow three consequential petitions which have as content only the honour and glorification of God: His name, His will, His Kingdom. All three are identical, and define His glorification. Only after having invoked and praised this glory is man also able to show interest for his own moral state and seek God’s assistance.

If the Lord’s Prayer as a model defines the basic intention for all Christian prayer, then one need not say much to prove that prayer is the supremely kenotic attitude of man. One perhaps acquires a still more expressive image of this kenotic character of Christian prayer if one considers that monks, who *ex officio* ought to be those who pray most, describe their entire life as *ascesis* and *metanoia*, which signifies a constant *kenosis* of man before God.⁹

From all that is said above, one could well appreciate why in the title of this section prayer was purposely characterised not as *presupposition* but as “root” of all theology. For presupposition may also mean simply a momentary starting-point, while root implies an unceasing life-force which facilitates an unintervalled and continual interaction.

Theology, like prayer, demands the entire man, not as an independent individual but in his deeper union with God and creation understood and appreciated as Church, namely as Body of the Lord. It is precisely because both prayer and theology in this way signify the deepest commotion of all man’s faculties that for the Church Fathers of all times, and in particular for the mystics, it was almost self-evident that prayer and theology are nearly identical.¹⁰ And since the entire Church, together with all creatures, praises the Creator, it is again the entire Church that participates in theology in one way or another as the praying creation, if theology is truly a genuine glorification of God and of man who in himself as “microcosm” praises the whole creation.

In this sense, one should accordingly give the definition of theology as follows: *Theology is the deeper breathing of the entire Body of the Church which has prayer as its driving force, and the methodical doctrine concerning the truths of faith as its expression, according to the variety of gifts of the Holy Spirit and the needs of each era, to the glory of God and salvation of the world.*

Despite, however, what has been said thus far, both prayer and theology would remain empty words if the supreme purpose of both the theandric enterprises was not defined precisely. This purpose is none other than *theosis*, which is so highly venerated in Patristic terminology.

For according to the conviction of the Fathers, man does not, either as praying or as theologising person, achieve his goal if he does not terminate in God, in order to “suffer the divine”, as Maximus the Confessor characteristically says. *Prayer - Theology - Theosis* is a closed trilogy, without which the doctrine concerning the distinction in God between “essence” and “energy” would be entirely nonsense, if not blasphemy. And since this doctrine is not an invention of St Gregory Palamas in the fourteenth century but was originally taught by the

Fathers, especially by the Cappadocians, as a substantially integral part of the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*, no one is permitted as Christian to ignore it, otherwise the entire Christian soteriology is rendered questionable and a perplexity of cosmic extent.

Conclusion

The endeavour undertaken here, to prove the principle of *kenosis* as the heart of all theology and spirituality in the Christian Church, had the humble ambition to emphasise once more for contemporary theological discussion the validity of certain basic truths of faith in their mysterious interrelations. The whole creation must, for the Christian at least, be respected in its boundless sacredness, and theology be practised with awe and in its existential relation to God. Thus all created realities beside man will on the one hand find another evaluation and a just place in the Church, while theologising will on the other hand reacquire its rhythm of prayer through which alone is it proved credible and legitimate. For if one overlooks the fundamental truth that creation and revelation signify God's *kenosis* for man's glorification, while prayer and theology signify man's *kenosis* for God's glory, then it is no wonder that modern theologians still allow themselves to present as theology the products of their imagination in the form of "edifying novels". On the contrary, genuine theology was always sung in the Church as a doxological acclamation,¹¹ even as resurrection theology, and this is precisely why the hymnology of the eastern Church to this day may be described as "chanted dogmatics".

NOTES

- 1 Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger anxiously tries in his publications, particularly in the last fifteen years, to show aspects of a kind of pathology in theology; of course, his interest is mainly confined to the Roman Catholic field, especially from the time he became President of the Congregatio Fidei.
- 2 It is known that the Church Fathers and great traditional theologians did not develop a systematic doctrine of the Church. Rather, they endeavoured to describe the church in various images as the "original sacrament" (*Ursakrament*) - to use the so striking characterisation of O. Semmelroth (cf Hugo Rahner, *Symbole der Kirche. Die Ekklesiologie der Vater*, (Salzburg, 1964), and in doing so they appear as fascinated admirers and not as rational thinkers. This is why with the above-mentioned "traditional ecclesiology" we understand what has to this day been written systematically by the most representative professional theologians of each Christian denomination in the twentieth century, in the so-called "century of the Church".
- 3 All nations and cultures are evaluated in these documents in a more positive way than ever in the past. Yet despite this most positive opening towards the "world", the created as such was not yet given its correct place according to its principal rights. A characteristic example of this is the fact that one may, after the Second Vatican Council, offer in a merely symbolical gesture fruits of all kind (including bread and wine) in the Roman Liturgy, yet one is still not ready to replace the host with the real daily bread. If one compares this with the liturgical place that everything created has in the eastern Church (bread, wine, oil, flowers, wheat, eggs, grapes etc), then one certifies a dangerous idealism that may easily lead to an atheistic humanism. This is precisely why the modern Greek writer and painter N. G. Pentzikis has correctly claimed that he would prefer paganism out of awe for the created than an atheistic idealism.
- 4 I know of course that this notion, from Origen onwards, has been theologically loaded, even spoiled, and yet I believe that one could not properly evaluate created reality in a theological manner without presenting such a notion which must be understood as a restoration of the sacredness of all created, namely a sacredness which is primarily not so much dependent on the action of the redeemed human person but is rather derived from the original act of creation *ex nihilo* by God. If the contemporary Christian relearns to evaluate creation in this its originality, then it will become self-evident that through this he will not only present a more just theoretical cosmology, but the terrible problems of pollution, ecology and the likes will also be more easily removed.
- 5 In patristic cosmology, especially in the all-embracing theological vision of Maximus the Confessor who characterises man as "microcosm" and the universe as "macroanthropos", this central place and responsibility of man in the world is as obvious as his basic features in anatomy.
- 6 This doctrine was especially developed by Irenaeus, but more effectively by Athanasius.
- 7 There are of course the different initial phases of the existence of the Church, primarily as "people of God", before the Incarnation (cf John Karmiris, *Orthodox Ecclesiology*, in Greek (Athens, 1973)), but the full reality of the Church as graceful communion of created and uncreated, unconfusedly and undividedly "was possible only with the Incarnation of Christ". I dared to present such a thesis in my dissertation (*On the Infallibility of the Church in Orthodox Theology*, in Greek (Athens, 1965) pp 24ff) at a time when all Orthodox theologians used to characterise Pentecost as the "dies natalis" of the Church. This is why I saw with pleasure that my friend Prof. C. Yannaras could much later develop this thesis of mine into an entire book (cf his book *Truth and Unity of the Church*, in Greek (Athens, 1977)).

- 8 There is a moving and true story that I would with pleasure add as a commentary to what was said above: Fr Paisios, who is still living on Mt Athos, used to frequent the nuns at Souroti (Chalkidiki) as their spiritual elder. One day he arrived at the monastery and found the nuns worried and busy carrying water in buckets to the neighbouring villages in order to help the poor villagers that long suffered in the drought. Totally surprised he said to the sisters: "How many villagers would you be able to help in this way? Do you not know that the entire peninsula of Chalkidiki is suffering from the drought for weeks now? If you cannot ask God with tears to rain for the whole peninsula, then you are not nuns. For the monk is the one who has sacrificed to God everything, absolutely everything, so that he may afterwards as a small child, ask everything from God!" Thus here we again find the depth and "omnipotence" of monastic prayer, as it was also described by Isaac the Syrian in that unique text where, with warm tears, he prays even for the devil:
- "Καί τι ἐστὶ καρδιά ἐλεήμων; καὶ σὺς καρδίας ὑπὲρ πάσης τῆς κτίσεως, ὑπὲρ τῶν ἀνθρώπων, καὶ τῶν ὄρνέων, καὶ τῶν ζώων, καὶ τῶν δαιμόνων, καὶ ὑπὲρ παντός κτίσματος. Καὶ ἐκ τῆς μνήμης αὐτῶν καὶ τῆς θεωρίας αὐτῶν ρέουσιν οἱ ὀφθαλμοὶ αὐτοῦ δάκρυα. Ἐκ τῆς πολλῆς καὶ σφοδρᾶς ἐλεημοσύνης τῆς συνεχούσης τὴν καρδίαν, καὶ ἐκ τῆς πολλῆς καρτερίας σμικρύνεται ἡ καρδιά αὐτοῦ, καὶ οὐ δύναται βαστάζει, ἢ ἀκοῦσαι, ἢ ἰδεῖν βλάβην τινὰ ἢ λύπην μικράν ἐν τῇ κτίσει γινομένη. Καὶ διὰ τοῦτο καὶ ὑπὲρ τῶν ἀλόγων, καὶ ὑπὲρ τῶν ἐχθρῶν τῆς ἀληθείας, καὶ ὑπὲρ τῶν βλαπτόντων αὐτὸν ἐν πάσῃ ὥρᾳ εὐχὴν μετὰ δακρῶν προσφέρει, τοῦ φυλαχθῆναι αὐτοὺς καὶ ἰλασθῆναι αὐτοῖς ὁμοίως καὶ ὑπὲρ τῆς φύσεως τῶν ἔρπετῶν ἐκ τῆς πολλῆς αὐτοῦ ἐλεημοσύνης τῆς κινουμένης ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ αὐτοῦ ἀμέτρως καθ' ὁμοιότητα τοῦ Θεοῦ" (ΓΣΑΑΚ τοῦ Σύρου, Τὰ εὐρεθέντα ἀσκητικά, Λόγος ΠΑ).
- 9 Ratzinger also correctly observes: "The Christian confession is not a neutral statement; it is prayer, and only in prayer does it reveal itself" (J. Cardinal Ratzinger, *Schauen auf den Durchbohrten* (Einsiedeln, 1984) p.18).
- 10 So Gregory Nazianzus, Evagrius Ponticus, Maximus the Confessor and others.
- 11 How could it be otherwise, since God whom theology is called to confess and preach is, both as Father and as Son and as Holy Spirit, in the New Testament accompanied by "doxa" as the definition of His essence? (cf Eph. 1:7, Heb. 1:3 and 1 Peter 4:14)