

## NATURE AND GRACE IN THE LITURGICAL CONSCIENCE OF ORTHODOXY ★

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The pair of notions, "nature and grace" - and especially in a more or less antithetical spirit, as it appears in the history of Christian theology in general - both objectively as well as from the viewpoint of the history of culture, belongs to a typically Western problematic. Along with similar pairs of notions - such as "*analogia entis* and *analogia fidei*", "freedom and predestination", "faith and works", "reason and revelation" etc - the distinction between nature and grace does not simply relate to the concrete historical church conditions of Western Christendom, but perhaps also characterises its peculiarity in theologising in comparison with the East.

Here, in the first instance, we do not refer primarily to the dialectic element in theology, which in fact has the East as its place of origin, but rather to an intellectual optimism of the West, which believes that through closed intellectual systems it will be possible to conceive reality purely conceptually and without contradictions.

Although it is axiomatic that this peculiarity of Western theology is alien to Orthodox theological thought - frequently being unreservedly characterised by the latter as myopic rationalism - it must be confessed that it is often only through the deviating, or even erroneous, ways of such theological thought that it is possible to reveal close profound dimensions of fundamental theological problems which decisively contributed to the genuine development of Christian theology in general.

Who can deny, for example, that through the significant analyses which resulted from the polemics between Protestants and Roman Catholics - on the ground defined by the conceptual pairs mentioned above - would derive knowledge so deeply interesting for the Christian conscience, and as such constitute a common theological treasure for all Christians? To ignore this, to pass over it in silence, would be the most dangerous form of myopia.

In any case, one should not forget that, as the work of systematic theology in the last decades has proved, both from the Protestant and the Roman Catholic viewpoint the previously prevailing partiality and spiteful disposition has long ago been overcome, and little by little the opponents have once again approached one another in a kind of "unity in theology". In this respect, one only has to remember the pioneering endeavours of H.U. von Balthasar as the conversant of K. Barth, or the work of G. Söhngen, K. Rahner, J. Ratzinger, H. Küng, to find an attempt on the Roman Catholic side to evaluate the corrective criticism of dialectic theology relating to such subjects as *theologia naturalis* or *analogia entis*.

It is perhaps, therefore, now the time for Orthodox theology, - which, as is well known, has not dealt in detail with similar subjects - to offer its own witness in this respect; the more so as this is expected of it by both of the Western sides. Such an engagement by Orthodox

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theology would be received as a welcome voice in the ecumenical dialogue of our times.<sup>1</sup>

The present brief contribution should be considered in the context of such a participation. Yet it is obvious that, in the limited space of a short essay, it is not possible to risk even a simple general Orthodox encounter with the problematic concerning nature and grace as it developed in the West. Rather, we will attempt here, in an experimental way, to indicate the fundamental features of the subject, which, we hope, is already obvious and fully expressed by the wording of the title.

### (i) Stating the problem

For the theologian, who takes seriously into consideration the main dogmas of Christianity, the problem set by the pair of terms *nature* and *grace* cannot possibly lie in the fact that a distinction or relationship between the two must be theologically founded. Such a distinction and relationship is, at the same time, categorically entailed by virtue of the fact that God created the world *ex nihilo*, and also the fact that man was created *in God's image*.

A dual reality is expressed in these fundamental truths of Faith: both the boundless difference, in respect of the essence of the Creator in relation to His creation, as well as His boundless, and for this reason unobligated, love towards it.

Since these fundamental presuppositions of the faith concerning creation are obvious for theological thought, it is certain that the identity or mutual supporting of nature and grace is thus *a priori* excluded. These two possibilities would be excluded even if the original fall had not occurred. In this way, therefore and equally axiomatically, is excluded every form of naive naturalistic optimism, Marxist eschatologism, as well as existentialist chiliasm.<sup>2</sup>

This being the case, however, the question arises: Where, then, is the problem of nature and grace to be found for the theologian? To this question, at least from an Orthodox viewpoint, we should answer very simply in the following manner. The main theological problem at this dogmatic level cannot possibly be *whether* there exists between the two terms any difference or relationship, but only *how* the connection between them may be defined. Precisely here is the central theological problem to be found, and every other aspect, as a marginal question, should be left to the philosophers.

Here, perhaps, the objection could be raised that a theology which continues, to this day, to think and to question in this manner is dogmatic and apodeictic, and no longer able to assist contemporary man, who is accustomed to doubt everything. Yet here again we should answer that, in view of the confusion caused by modern ideologies and mentalities, the primary duty of the Christian is none other than to preserve his "identity", if he wishes to be of any significance for his fellow-man. For, in the final analysis, the Christian cannot question in a way that might suggest that he had never heard and believed the word of Revelation.

Nonetheless, it is precisely when we invoke with confidence the word of Revelation, as our unique and definitive authority, that perhaps we tend to provoke questions such as the following: Should we not admit that the problem of nature and grace actually arose within Christianity in the acutest possible way, even if it also arose as a general question? Is it not perhaps true that it is precisely those theologians, who more than anyone else wished to respect the word of Revelation, who believed that they ought to characterise the problem of nature and grace as the most burning matter of Christian thought? Still more drastically and more concretely: Can it really be one and the same Apostle Paul whose texts are invoked by both Roman Catholics and Protestants by preference; so that the former may be able to preserve "the rights of nature", while the latter may defend the fully presupposed aspect of divine grace?

How, then, are we to understand this truly curious situation? Could one perhaps suppose that the disagreement between Roman Catholics and Protestants is not so much due to differences of interpretation, but rather has its source in the very texts of St Paul, and in the word of Revelation more generally? This, however, would surely contradict the apocalyptic character of these biblical texts.

In order to respond, to a certain degree, to these justifiable questions, we should basically say the following: The problem in relation to nature and grace could indeed arise so acutely only in Christianity, for the faith concerning the Trinity, which is rightfully regarded as the *differentia specifica* of Christianity, also indicated a radically new anthropology and cosmology, where *freedom* and *communion*, namely the central categories of personal essence, should be defined anew. It was largely this which led to an appreciation of the mysterious character of the problem in question. In reference to the Pauline texts, which were used during the dispute between Roman Catholics and Protestants, it should be observed that each side not only started from a different viewpoint, which in the majority of cases resulted in an entirely different interpretation, but also that attention was not always given to the proper relations of the problem. But to prove this matter with concrete examples would surely lead us very far and would demand a special chapter of biblico-theological research.

If it is permissible to expound the reason for the classic dispute between Roman Catholics and Protestants concerning the relation between nature and grace in a somewhat general way, we would say that this lies in the different starting-point: The former examine the problem from the viewpoint of the *teaching concerning justification* - in which case Soteriology cannot be formulated in its real dimensions - while the latter approach the problem from the viewpoint of the *teaching concerning creation*, in such a way that this teaching on creation becomes acceptable rather in the sense of a created ontology than of a Christology in development.<sup>3</sup>

The fact that the second approach, namely the teaching concerning creation, is theologically more legitimate (and for this reason more promising) is obvious, given, of course, the presupposition that the main

weight be placed on Soteriology. But since in reality this is not always the case, the soteriological approach should be projected to the forefront; which has the additional advantage that the opposing sides, with their different interests, are both taken into consideration.

Consequently, it becomes clear that a purely theological problematic, in reference to the relation of nature and grace, should have Soteriology as its starting-point. If this is indeed the case, then the *liturgical* character of the relationship in question automatically results. It is precisely in this order that we will endeavour to approach the problem from an Orthodox viewpoint.

## (ii) The Soteriological Approach to the Problem

Speaking about Soteriology, we usually have in mind almost exclusively what God did after man's fall, in order to bring back to His bosom both him and the entire creation that fell with him, with a view to salvation.

Initially, of course, such an understanding of Soteriology is in no way erroneous - especially since in the final analysis it finds itself in full agreement with the divine Economy, as is witnessed by Scripture - so long as it is basically understood according to its concrete data, and not according to their soteriological meaning. In addition, the fact should be taken into account that "salvation" always presupposes something that threatens sinful man from which one is saved; namely, in this case, death.

Yet, no matter how correct this understanding of Soteriology is from the aspect of the concrete data of divine Economy, it should be observed that if one does not keep in mind the entire extent of the relation between Creator and creature, as in place from the very act of creation, it will not be possible, given such an omission, to say anything concerning the qualitative aspect of the relation in question. In other words: If the interest of the Creator for His creature is considered as only being in relation to sin, and as defined only by it, the creature would no longer be able to respond to God's absolute love, as manifested in the creation *ex nihilo*; in which case, it is impossible to understand how salvation is to keep the character of an absolutely free and non-reciprocal action. For we should not deny that even a purely negative dictation of salvation as salvation from sin still constitutes a presupposition and condition, which does not necessarily permit the expression of the absolute non-reciprocal character of divine love.

Precisely in order to avoid such a mutilation with its dogmatic consequences, one should not understand Soteriology as denoting the concrete facts of divine Economy, and much less as constituting the teaching concerning justification, but rather consider it in its global fulness as denoting the entire divine Economy. In any case, salvation surely should not be taken to mean only deliverance of the creature from sin and death but long before this, and still more deeply, deliverance from finitude, since it is finitude which characterises the creature precisely in terms of its own createdness. Only thus does the essence of God

become truly open before our eyes as absolute love toward His creation.

But if the divine essence remains unchangeable before all the changes of creation, then we are able, surely, to conclude from this that divine love constitutes the decisive element in the relationship between God and creation. In other words, since divine love knows the creature from the start and *a priori* in all its possible changes, which He unceasingly follows, it is precisely for this reason that this love is the decisive factor as far as the qualitative aspect of the relationship in question is concerned.

Despite this, the qualitative value of this Absolute is uniquely expressed only when from the outset, in the etymology of these terms, one recognises equally clearly both qualitative aspects of the relationship: namely, the goodwill of the Creator, as well as the non-reciprocal element of such goodwill. In other words, in these terms we find the best expression of the particular characteristic of Grace which J. Auervery aptly, described as "the giftly character of grace".<sup>4</sup>

Thus the teaching concerning Grace is proved to be the inner side of Soteriology. This deep relationship, which constitutes something self-understood in the order of divine Economy, would be inconceivable on the level of the order of the created; it would, especially, be a heretical thought if here the same person of God the Logos were not also the hidden bond between nature and grace.

As is well known, the prologue of the Gospel according to John constitutes the point of crystallisation for all the evidence of Scripture in reference to the Christocentric creation of all created things. The fact that everything created was created through God the Logos basically signifies two things: on the one hand, that particular beings by nature have their ultimate cause not in themselves; and, on the other hand, that the hidden reason for their existence cannot possibly be a blind life principle.

Particular beings, therefore, cannot possibly be enclosed in this finite and limited aspect of their nature, because such ontological desertion would bring, sooner or later, only death. But the transcendence also of this finite aspect cannot be taken as a meaningless movement, which as such would not lead to a clear and concrete purpose.

By virtue of the fact that all particular beings have their ultimate cause in God the Logos, their interrelationship, as well as the ultimate purpose of their movement, is fundamentally predetermined in, so to speak, a "charismatic" way. In any case, the Greek term *logos* derives, as is well known, from the verb *lego*, which originally meant to *collect*! The deepest thirst, therefore, of all particular beings is by nature a gathering into union, a transcendence of their own finite character. All the variety of the order in creation is so imbued by such a teleology that the Greek Fathers do not hesitate to see in the course of the created world a kind of "liturgy".<sup>5</sup> Within this cosmic order there is such a correspondence between man, on the one hand, and the rest of creation, on the other, that Maximus Confessor, for instance, calls man "microcosm" and the world "macroanthropos"!

Once this interconnectedness and correspondence is recognised,

then the fact is no longer surprising that together with man the rest of the creation either falls or stands, especially the non-rational creation, about which St Paul speaks so dramatically.<sup>6</sup> It is precisely this fact that gives the key to a correct understanding of the relationship between nature and grace. The said correspondence between man and the world, and the co-suffering of the latter with fallen man, cannot be ascribed to an affinity of being, because it seems to be excluded when one takes into consideration the difference between rational and non-rational, spiritual and material. We should rather interpret this solidarity by some mystical law of communication, that serves a more general conservational plan of God.

The intercommunication of the created beings, which by stages is developed into communion, reaching its consummation in the cosmic liturgy, presupposes a will of grace on the part of God, on the basis of which nothing created can find rest in itself.

However, when we understand nature in general in this manner, then it becomes clear that Grace does not constitute a static definition of *essence*, but a supremely dynamic concept of *relationship*. In any case, God did not create the world in such a way that it might develop into perfection apart from, and independently of, Him, but that the free spirit, that is in ontological solidarity with the world, might become a partaker of divine life.<sup>7</sup>

Now such participation in divine life, which in the language of the Greek Fathers is also called *theosis*, cannot possibly be understood according to essence, but only according to grace, and this constitutes a self-implied consequence of creation *ex nihilo*. Divine nature *per se* remains uncommunicable, even in the *theosis* of the created being. Consequently, it is of the highest soteriological significance that a distinction be made between essence and uncreated energies in God, as it is basically taught by the Cappadocians and further developed later by Gregory Palamas against Western Theology. It is not the place here, however, to say more on this subject, especially since Roman Catholic theology appears to have lately acquired more understanding of this significant distinction.<sup>8</sup>

From what has been said thus far, it is clear that the relationship between nature and grace has, from the start, had an entirely "liturgical" character, which has once for all been placed indelibly in the Christological foundation of theology. This fact renders the entire creation an especially eschatological formation, which cannot possibly be understood in any way in terms of the temporary stages and phases of its development, but only from the definitive *eschaton*. It is not, therefore, curious at all that the key to the eschatological understanding of the whole of creation is so impressively and convincingly given in no book of the written Revelation more than in that of the Apocalypse of John. The entire book of Revelation speaks in purely liturgical language about the relationship of the whole of creation to God, but the most central point, in which the liturgical character of the relationship in question is founded, is concisely found in the characterisation of God the Logos as the lamb slain from the foundation of the world.<sup>9</sup> But let

us think a little on what this means cosmologically and soteriologically. The fact that the slaughter of the lamb coincides with the creation and foundation of the world makes it clear that here we do not simply have a prophetic prefigurement of the sacrifice that will be fulfilled historically at Golgotha. Of course it is this too, but surely not only this. Rather, we have here expressed in a unique way the fact that the Christological foundation of creation - as the first *kenosis* of the divinity in the act of creation - lays the foundation for a truly liturgical relationship between God and creation, which already from the start alludes to the boundless love of the Creator. And this love is not any less active and living in creation than in the sacrifice of Golgotha.

Thus it can truly be said that the Cross is directly consequential to the act of creation, which again allows us to conclude that the incarnation of the Logos would have been realised even had the fall not occurred. Precisely for this reason, Origen so characteristically named the Christological foundation of the world "incarnate economy", in order to underline the deepest relationship between creation and incarnation.<sup>10</sup>

But, in speaking about the original fall, we have already touched the heart of the problem concerning nature and grace, as it has become known from the polemics between Roman Catholics and Protestants. As for nature and grace before the fall, even Protestants are in absolute agreement in relation to the Christological structure of creation, which means of course that they accept the sacredness of nature without any hesitation. In this sense we must consider, for instance, the following words of R. Bultmann: "In Jesus no light appeared than that which always already shined in creation. Man then is not taught in the salvific revelation to understand himself in any other way than that in which he should have always understood himself, already in the revelation of creation. Creation and Salvation are found to be in continuity".<sup>11</sup> Such an understanding of creation refers to some paradisiac reality, so to speak, which for Protestantism has been irreparably lost. Man's fall has not simply shaken the relationship between Creator and creature; it has fully broken it, so that nature can no longer offer a point of connection with grace.

Protestantism claims that such a teaching is entirely biblical and, to be more precise, constitutes the heart of Pauline Soteriology. Yet is it really so? Does Paul indeed speak so explicitly in so negative, and even contemptible, a manner concerning nature as it appears in the state of divine Economy, namely after man's fall? J. Ratzinger managed to prove, on the basis of a significant analysis of the texts, that neither Scripture *per se*, nor Paul more specifically, recognise a unified or one-sided notion of nature.<sup>12</sup> Having managed, after such an analysis, to ascertain at least three concepts of the term "nature" in Paul, Ratzinger summarises the conclusion of his research as follows:

If we try to formulate in summary the Pauline teaching on this question, we ascertain that Paul undoubtedly recognises in nature a character of direction, and for this reason it does

not take the place of a single and absolute rule. Man does not receive the deciphering of his nature from "nature", but from his encounter in faith with Christ.<sup>13</sup>

If this interpretation of Paul's teaching on nature constituted the representative aspect of Roman theology, then surely almost no difference would possibly exist between the Roman Catholics and the Orthodox on this so fundamental a subject. However, we know that the classic Roman understanding sees fallen nature with much greater "optimism", an optimism which could not exclude the dangers of a semi-pelagianism. consequently we have here in reality a deceiving conclusion. If we examine more carefully the classic Roman teaching concerning nature - which tries to characterise the nature of fallen man by the term "remnant", while, on the other hand, considering the *dona superaddita* as the only loss of human nature through sin - then we should confess that there is here no talk about incorruptibility, but rather about the mutilation of the human image. If the term "remnant", through its clearly quantitative aspect, renders obvious the mutilation in question, the theory about the *dona superaddita* also points no less in the same direction. But if man in his fall lost only the *dona superaddita*, then we cannot see how he could sin as a single being, namely how he would be entirely affected by sin. Also in this case it would not be possible to see how the whole creation would have fallen together with man.

We see, therefore, that both the Protestant as well as the Thomist Roman teaching on the fall are found lacking owing to this fragmentary, iconoclastic, evaluation of man. The former because it absolutises the fall and scorns nature; the latter, because it presents the fall as something external and thus breaks nature from its most inner ontological bond. These are both avoided only if we see man in his liturgical relationship, not only with the Creator, but also with the entire creation, as we said above.

When we see man in this liturgical relationship, then it becomes clear that at the fall his whole essence was affected, so that whatever he wills and does after the fall cannot be indifferent as long as he is in conflict with his innermost essence. His relationship to the Creator, which passes always through the creation, is not fully interrupted, but degenerates towards the demonic; which explains why he can so easily pass from nature to idolatry, of which Romans 1:25 speaks. Man can escape from this contradiction only through the Cross. For this reason, Maximus the Confessor categorically says that "all phenomena are in need of the Cross".<sup>14</sup>

But just as in man, and together with man, the entire creation fell, similarly the entire creation will again be delivered, and will be united again with the life of grace, only in man and with man.

This recapitulation of the entire creation through the incarnation of God the Logos in no way means the dissolution of the personal element of man into a more general cosmic relationship with the universe. For this reason the distinction between *grace* and *gracing*, which was more perfectly developed by Gregory Palamas, is of the highest significance. Precisely in the spirit of Palamas, J. Willing writes on this



point:

The order of grace and the order of gracing is not the same thing for the creature on account of the created freedom. About gracing we mainly speak when the creature is related to Jesus Christ in the sense of salvation, not only on account of its not lost relation from its createdness to a world that belongs to Christ.<sup>16</sup>

Since Jesus Christ is the model, cause and source of grace and gracing,<sup>17</sup> His mission should also be considered in the unbreakable unity of Cross and Resurrection, of *Kenosis* and Glory: He alone is at the same time the lamb of God and the King of all.

But if the nature of man was affected in its entirety by the fall, as we said above, it must also be assumed in its entirety by God the Logos, a truth that was best expressed by Gregory of Nazianzus with the well known soteriological axiom "the unassumed is unhealed".<sup>18</sup>

Thus, the body of the Lord becomes the definite place in which nature and grace are absolutely integrated, because, through the hypostatic union, divine and created were inseparably united. One can therefore say together with Willing:

In the created essence of Jesus Christ "nature and grace" are found so indissolubly bound, and interpenetrate one another in such a way, that Jesus Christ alone in one graced created essence can be God's grace, and only by being such can He also be the Logos in the structure of creation. "Supernatural", therefore, is not contradictory to createdness, but the expression that the coexistence of God and the created is the divine will, to the extent that Jesus Christ, as God of presence and as the self-revelation of God, willed to be the grace of God for the whole creation.<sup>19</sup>

From what has been said above, however, one cannot conclude through the possibility opened to people by virtue of the hypostatic union, that the created being could hope to come into one union of *essence* with the divine. The hypostatic union must not be considered as a precedent, that could be repeated in any way. Such a possibility for the created being had been excluded already before the fall, on account of the creation *ex nihilo*, and this limitation could not be erased by the incarnation of the Logos. The "once for all" of the Cross is, therefore, preceded by an "once for all" of the hypostatic union. For such self-denial, as assumed by the Son of God in absolute agreement with the will of the Father, could not possibly be achieved by a created being. Precisely herein lies the uniqueness and decisiveness of the only Mediator Jesus Christ, as it is described doxologically by St Paul:

He humbled himself, becoming obedient unto death, even the death on the Cross. For this reason God lifted Him and granted him the name above every name, so that in the name of Jesus every knee should bend, both in heaven and on earth and below the earth, and every tongue should confess that

Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father (Phil. 2:8-11).<sup>20</sup>

From these words of the Apostle a dual truth results, which absolutely illumines the liturgical character of the relationship between nature and grace: the true "liturgy", namely the concelebration "of all in heaven and on earth and below the earth", could be realised completely only by the incarnation of the Logos, and precisely for this reason only the body of the Lord constitutes the place of full revelation of God's glory, as well as the full and definitive "eucharist", the deserving expression of thanksgiving of creation towards the Creator, which alone can be analogous to the boundless love of the Creator.

Consequently, the participation in the body of the Lord constitutes the only possibility that remains for every created being for the fulfilment of its liturgical service to the glory of God. Only thus is it possible, from the idolatry brought about by the fall, to have again a true worship of God, which for the order of the present world is not possible in any other way than the sacramental.<sup>21</sup>

### (iii) Nature and grace in the liturgical life of the Church

Although the liturgical life of the Church is unfolded in the order of space and time, we should not conclude from this that man dedicates only a part of his daily time to God, so that after the fulfilment of some ritual duties he may be free to devote the rest of his time as he feels. This would be a magic understanding of religious life, which has no relation at all with the spirituality of the Christian message.

The liturgical life of the Church was organically developed from the Eucharist, and constitutes an endeavour for the whole creation, and the entire time in the world, to be incorporated in a sacramental relationship with the Eucharistic sacrifice, so that the "new life", which is characterised by the Cross and the Resurrection of the Lord, may be lived by the whole creation in a general doxology.

The eucharistic postulate for such a totality, which is expressed in unique beauty and fullness in the Paschal Canon of the Byzantine liturgy, defines and silently runs through the liturgical order down to its last details, as well as through all kind of sacred art in the Orthodox Church; an art which knows well how to form space and time liturgically in such a way that in everything the signs of the New Age become visible.

The same axiom of totality also explains how it is that a multitude of mysteries in the Church came to be generated from the one Mystery of the Eucharist. The deep relationship between the Eucharist and the other Mysteries is recognised also by the fact that all the Mysteries derive their strength and validity from the Eucharist, while everything leads back again to it.

Since the Mysteries, according to the general Christian understanding, constitute "signs that grant grace", it is obvious that such grace is closely connected with the Eucharist and results from it alone. In this, it is especially noteworthy that, even etymologically, within the Greek term, "Eucharist", the other Greek term "grace" (*charis*), is liter-

ally found, which is not the case with the name for any other sacrament.

It is precisely this central place of the Eucharist among the Mysteries, together with the grace-granting character of all the Sacraments in the general liturgical life of the Church, that gives us the right to examine here the relationship between nature and grace mainly from a position which is purely sacramental.

First it must be clear, in our study, that the *number* of the Sacraments - which, in any case, up to the twelfth century was fluctuating - cannot play any axiomatic role in the problematic in question. For this reason, it is not necessary for the deciphering of our problem to refer to all seven Sacraments, it is sufficient to limit ourselves to the essence of Mysterialogy. In reference to the data of Mysterialogy, which has *a priori* particular significance for our problematic, it is clear that we must distinguish between *matter* and *form* in the Sacrament.

How far this distinction is theologically able to handle the relationship between nature and grace - to the extent necessary, for instance, to do justice to Thomas Aquinas' beliefs<sup>22</sup> - is a subject that does not primarily interest us. It would be more significant to ascertain the meaning of the distinction in question *per se*, because from it we can at least conclude that it is not even possible to imagine a Mystery in the Church without some kind of matter. It is precisely this conviction that the Roman theology also wants to express with the well known scholastic axiom: *Gratia praesupponit naturam*.<sup>23</sup>

Here, then, we could ask: What is the deeper meaning of this indispensable presupposition? At first, we could perhaps say on this point that since Christianity to a great extent owes its liturgical rites to Judaism, it would be more correct to seek the initial meaning of these liturgical rites within the context in which they originated, and not in Christianity.

Yet such an answer, which rather evades the main problem, could in the best case satisfy only the scholar of Religious Studies, and perhaps not even him. For, on the one hand, we cannot understand how it would have been possible for Christianity to accept elements which were not in full agreement with the Gospel and, on the other hand, the fact is widely known that Christianity, by giving new meaning to them, by far transcended all received elements.

The radical differentiation, caused by the transcendence of the received liturgical rites, occurs in the Eucharist; this Mystery of all Mysteries. *Bread* and *wine* are no longer, as in Judaism, simply two concrete gifts of sacrifice from the boundless multitude of the created Kingdom, but from the moment that they represent the Body and Blood of the Lord they receive the dimensions of the whole of creation. Under these two kinds, the entire created universe is liturgically present. For this reason, in the present time of the world, there will never be any Mystery of the Church in which the material element will not partake, in some way, as representative of the whole creation.

This sacramental presupposition is indispensable, not only because man has a material body, not only because he is taken seriously by the love of the Creator - which follows after him precisely in his concrete

historicity - but also because the entire creation transcends its estrangement only in the Eucharist and in doxology; wherein it is united with its Lord, enjoying the glory that results from grace. The scholastic axiom *Gratia praesupponit naturam* could therefore be formulated as *Gratia quaerens naturam*.

If the above-mentioned totalitarian character of the Eucharist is correctly understood, then in its light are clearly understood not only the main specification and prerequisites of the liturgical order concerning the Sacraments, but even some of their details (which at first sight might perhaps, seem insignificant) are also differently evaluated. For instance, it is known that the liturgical tradition of the West prescribes unleavened bread for the Eucharist, while the Eastern Church even today does not want to approve this custom. The fact that this Western practice goes back to the Jewish tradition is obvious and, up to a certain point, legitimate. Consequently, no unbiased Orthodox theologian would think of doubting the legitimacy of the Mystery only on account of this custom. But if one understands correctly the meaning of what has been said so far, one should admit that the unleavened bread corresponds less to the wholistic character of the Eucharist than the leavened bread. The unleavened bread is the liturgical bread of the Jewish people, the chosen people of the old covenant, and thus the bread of only one segment of humanity, which is eaten at a strictly set time. It is not the bread of the whole of humanity and of all time. While, on the contrary, the leavened bread is the usual bread eaten by all people and in all times, and therefore it should be the bread of the new people, which consists of both Jews and non-Jews!

The same occurs with the Sacrament of Baptism. The East, as is well known, is accustomed to the full immersion in water of the baptised while the West only pours or sprinkles water. Again, of course, from an Orthodox perspective, no one should have serious reservations about the validity and efficacy of the Sacrament, but it is clear that the latter way does not sufficiently express the wholistic character of Sacramental renewal.

A third, and very characteristic, example of this could be taken from the Orthodox rite of the Sacrament of Chrismation. According to the festive preparation of Holy Chrism, numerous aromatic essences are used,<sup>24</sup> in order to present the aroma of all the gifts of the Holy Spirit. This rich plurality of material essences is yet another clear proof that here again creation is lovingly sought in its concrete variety, namely in as full as possible a natural totality, in order to be incorporated in the liturgical-sacramental bond!

All these above mentioned examples have not of course been presented in a polemical spirit - as if it were a case here of serious theological differences between the Confessions - but in the desire to show more clearly the wholistic character of the sacramental relationship from the various details, as this relationship is explicitly found in all the liturgical texts of the Church.<sup>25</sup> And when the principle of totality is so movingly expressed on a purely sacramental level in the very details of ritual, how much more should one suppose that even the number seven

of the Sacraments - which we usually interpret as arising from major needs of the ecclesiastically structured Christianity - perhaps in some way aims at expressing this same wholistic character of the Soteriological interest of the Church. In any case, it is known that the holy number seven, in symbolical language, signifies the full measure of created space and time, while the eschatological reality of "the eighth day" forms the crown and transformation of creation, of which the Church Sacraments seek precisely to offer a foretaste.

Whatever the case may be, it is characteristic, in relation to this matter, that the Church, without wishing to surpass the number seven for the Sacraments, sought to spread widen its grace-giving action over the whole of creation through the so-called *sacramentalia*. This deep Soteriological interest of the Church transformed - through the unceasing services on Mt Athos and their organic development in every gesture of daily life - almost all natural and biological life into a purely liturgical life.<sup>26</sup>

In view of this data, one is provoked to ask: What, then, does all this mean? What is the meaning of this strange cosmic alchemy in relation to the problem of grace and nature? When the Church, through the wholistic character of its liturgical-sacramental life, attaches such great significance to the purely material element, so that no sacrament may be conceived without some matter, does it perhaps thereby overlook the fact that this matter constitutes part of fallen nature?

On this we should respond: On the contrary! Precisely because the Church accepts the wholistic - and not the absolute! - character of the fall, is it also unable to ignore even the slightest detail of matter. The above-mentioned monastic life of Mt Athos is perhaps the best example of this. Athonite asceticism, which precisely due to the fall demands full denial of everything created, is at the same time, in this liturgical relationship, also the fullest and most decisive acceptance of everything created! In other words, this means that only in the liturgical relationship is it possible for nature to be taken seriously into consideration, something which presupposes the continual invocation of divine Grace. This is why the attitude of nature before grace cannot be but one of unceasing "epiclesis". The Paraclete, therefore, must also be conceived as the Epiclest! This is the meaning of the long petitions of the Orthodox, with the constant repetition of the words: "Again and again in peace let us pray to the Lord". But what can express both the Orthodox liturgical ethos, in general, as well as the Orthodox understanding of the relationship between nature and grace, is perhaps the following central formula of the Anaphora in the Byzantine Liturgy: "Thine own from thine own we offer to thee for all and through all".

Thus concluding we may say that if the Protestants, in order to emphasise the non-reciprocal aspect of grace, move from nature to a full and absolute denial, and if the Roman Catholics feel the need to preserve the necessary basis of grace through their scholastic axiom *Gratia praesupponit naturam*, perhaps we Orthodox constitute, in this also, the golden middle way, through the direct reversal of this scholastic axiom, so that it reads: *Natura praesupponit gratiam*. If one further takes

into account that the truth formulated in this way, about nature and grace, holds not only after the fall but even prior to it, then from an Orthodox perspective one must again declare that: "*Natura praesupponit gratiam*"!

## NOTES

- 1 Both the central aim and the basic thematics, which, *a priori*, define the ecumenical dialogue in relation to the problem of nature and grace, were correctly perceived by K. Rahner, who presented them in the following clear, even if somewhat generalised, words: "the fact that the attitude of our times must act provocatively upon theology, it is not necessary to state at length. We seek a uniform concept of man, a synthesis of the distinguished reality. Today we think 'existentially'". Thus one tries to experience the reality of grace ... as a force and power of a particular existence. By analogy also with other trends in today's conscience about time, one does not desire to see grace simply as a prerequisite or content of individual salvation, but strives more than ever before to consider the ecclesiological aspects of the doctrine on grace, grace in divine economy, beyond and outside ecclesiastically structured Christianity, the possibility of grace and its finest developments in the world of religions outside of Christianity". Cf. K. Rahner, "Natur and Gnade", in *Fragen der Theologie Heute*, ed. J. Feiner, J. Trütsch, F. Böckle (Einsiedeln, 1958) pp. 216-217.
- 2 J. Ratzinger correctly saw these three spiritual currents as the main manifestations of the crisis from which the Christian conscience today suffers in relation to the subject of nature and grace. Cf. his *Dogma und Verkündigung* (Münich, 1973) p. 162.
- 3 Cf. Söhngen, *Die Einheit in der Theologie* (München, 1952) p. 244.
- 4 J. Auer, "Das Evangelium der Gnade", in J. Auer and J. Ratzinger, *Kleine Katholische Dogmatik, Bd. V* (Regensburg, 1970) p. 190.
- 5 The Father with whom this vision of the whole universe in its Christological foundation and perspective is most intimately associated is Maximus the Confessor, and so it was highly perceptive of the significant authority on this Church Father, H.U. von Balthasar, to name the whole image of the world in the Confessor as "cosmic liturgy". Cf. H.U. von Balthasar, *Kosmische Liturgie. Das Weltbild Maximus' des Bekenners* (Einsiedeln, 1961).
- 6 Rom. 8:22.
- 7 Cf. Maximus the Confessor, *Theological Chapters in Philokalia*, vol. 2, (Athens, 1958) p. 98 ff.
- 8 As the best and most exhaustive endeavour in this direction, we should cite the work by I. Willig, *Geschaffene und ungeschaffene Gnade. Bibeltheologische fundierung und systematische Fröerung* (Münster I.W., 1964). But as the source for a new direction in the Roman teaching on grace, in the above mentioned sense, in terms of the magisterium of the Church, K. Rahner believes that one may consider the Encyclical "Mystici Corporis", at least in an embryonic way: "if (as Pius XII emphasises) Grace and glory constitute two stages of one and the same theosis of man, if classical theology always underlined that in glory is realised a self-manifestation of God to the graced created spirit, which is not objectively the generative cause of a created quality or being different from God, but a way of divine revelation of morphological cause to man, then this thought may certainly be applied also to Grace, and much more explicitly than normally in theology to date. So the uncreated Grace can no longer be considered a mere consequence of the creation of a "poured out" static Grace as if from a "natural accident", but would rather have to be considered as the main centre in Grace (which explains much better the strictly mysterious character of Grace, since a purely created being strictly speaking can never be an absolute mystery). This very God informs man in his own reality. This is the mystery and the fulfilment of Grace. And from it the bridge to the mystery of the Incarnation and the Holy Trinity is found more easily". Op. cit. (note 1) pp. 217-218.

- 9 Rev. 23:8.
- 10 That Western theological thought can also be liberated towards such a genuine biblical-patristic view, is not impossible, once it is prepared to transcend the legalistic concept of the "satisfaction" of Christ's sacrifice. This could be paralleled with the vigilant opinions of K. Rahner on this subject. Cf. op. cit. (note 1) pp. 218-219.
- 11 Mentioned by I. Willig (note 8) p. 27, n. 49.
- 12 Cf. J. Ratzinger, op. cit. (note 2) p. 174-177.
- 13 Ibid., p. 177.
- 14 Maximus the Confessor, *Theological Chapters*, op. cit. (note 7) p. 62.
- 15 Cf. his work *On Divine Participation*, in Gregory Palamas, *Works*, ed. P. Chrestou, vol. II (Thessalonika, 1966) p. 137 ff.
- 16 I. Willig, op. cit. (note 8) p. 236.
- 17 Cf. also John 1:16 in relation to Is. 11:1.
- 18 PG 37:181C.
- 19 I. Willig, op. cit. (note 8) p. 233.
- 20 Phil. 2:8-11.
- 21 John 3:5.
- 22 Cf. J. Auer, op. cit. (note 4) p. 161 ff.
- 23 Cf. J. Ratzinger, op. cit. (note 2) p. 161 ff.
- 24 Cf. Archim. P. Menevisoglou, *Holy Chrism in the Eastern Orthodox Church* (Thessalonika, 1972).
- 25 Typical, among others, is the Orthodox prayer of "tonsure" of the baptised, which reminds us of the moving truth expressed in Luke 12:7.
- 26 Cf. S. Harkianakis, "Mönchtum und Spiritualität", *Internationale Katholische Zeitschrift*, I, 1974, pp. 326-336.