

Jesus Christ - The Redeemer of the world. Orthodox Dogmatic Theology Synthesis

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ABSTRACT

The present article highlights in a synthesis of Dogmatic Theology the activity of Christ, the world's Redeemer. The person and the work of the world's Saviour, Jesus Christ, is the center of the teaching of faith, as He is the One Who accomplishes the whole work redeeming mankind and man from the slavery of sin and of death. The teaching on Jesus Christ the Embodied Son and Word of God (John 1:14; Hebrews 4:15), as it was formulated and preached by the Church in the ecumenical synods, maintains the unity of the Church, and, by the Church, of the whole world.

Keywords: Jesus Christ, Redeemer, Orthodox, Dogmatic, Theology

Introduction

The entire redeeming activity of our Saviour is defined by the term redemption – deliverance, salvation. The redeeming work realized for the whole human nature by means of the sacrifice on the cross, is called objective redemption, which becomes asset of the subjective man, by the appropriation, in grace, of the fruits of Christ's sacrifice; it is called subjective salvation or simply salvation, theosis.

Salvation consists, on the one hand, in the deliverance of man from sin, and, on the other hand, in the restauration of the communion with God and of the human nature. The connection between Christ's Person and the work achieved by Him for our salvation is inseparable. The Person is not a simple, abstract notion; it is a real and dynamic subject, always struggling and acting towards communion.

1. The need of Christ's embodiment

By his fall into sin, man got under the dominion of sin and of the devil, losing his community by grace with God; he entered spiritual death. But God did not want man to be lost for eternity, because it is not for this reason that man has been created. Therefore, in His infinite goodness and love for mankind, He found, by His wisdom, the best means of keeping man safe from harm, deciding the embodiment of Jesus Christ's Son, for the world's redemption (Ephesians 2:4-5; Titus 3:4-5). God's Son's descent through the embodiment for man's salvation was conceived by God since eternity (Acts 2:23; 1 Peter 1:20). God, knowing since eternity about man's fall, "before the foundation of the world" (1 Peter 1:20), decided the Embodiment of His Son, "mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure" (Ephesians 1:9), the mystery hidden since eternity (Ephesians 3:9) and the gift given for our salvation (2 Timothy 1:9; 1 Corinthians 2:7).

2. The preparation of the pagans and of the Jews for receiving our Redeemer

The preparation of mankind for receiving Christ occurred both **positively** by means of the Supernatural Revelation, and **negatively** by means of the natural revelation, and its aim was to kindle the awareness of the Saviour's coming, announced (prophesied) by the

first good news (Protoevangel Genesis 3:15), which God has given to our forefathers after their fall into sin, as a means of comfort and prevailance in the fight against the slavery of sin. The promise about the coming of the Messiah is always accentuated and expressed increasingly clearly by the prophets, starting with the patriarchs: Abraham (Genesis 26:4), Jacob (Genesis 28:14), to whom God reveals that, out of the loins of his son Judah, the Saviour will be born (Genesis 49:10); Daniel, who describes the time of Messiah's coming (Daniel 9:24-27); Micah, who shows the place of the birth – Bethlehem (Micah 5:1); Isaiah, who reveals that the Redeemer will be born of a Virgin: “*The Virgin will conceive and give birth to a Son and will call Him Immanuel*” (Isaiah 7:14); and also other prophecies related to our Redeemer's entire activity.

3. The possibility of man's salvation

If God has prepared the world, pagans and Jews, for salvation from death, it means that the salvation of the fallen man is possible. The basis of the possibility of redemption is the fact that the ancestral sin (of Adam and Eve) does not constitute a radical fall, like that of the bad angels. The bad angels fell into sin out of their own initiative and by themselves, without any temptation from outside their being; man, however, did not fall only by himself, but being deceived by the devil; with man, the corrupt will is accompanied by the sensual lust from outside him, which leads to the darkening of the mind.

Man cannot redeem himself because of the gravity of his fall and state of sin.

The reason of Christ's embodiment

The Holy Fathers, speaking about the Embodiment of the Logos, emphasize rather man's restauration and renewal, and for this reason the central goal of the Son's humanization is **the redemption of man**, who has been created in His image and after His likeness, by man's relation with grace.

According to the Holy Fathers, in general, and especially according to Saint Athanasius, one can talk about a series of causes, which necessarily mean the embodiment of the Word, out of which we shall enumerate a few:

- ❖ The main aim of the embodiment of the Logos is to lift man from the slavery of death, accomplished out of our Creator's great love and good will: “*it is necessary that, speaking about the Word's appearance to us, we should also talk about people's beginning, for you to know that we have been the reason of His descent, and our disobedience made the Word's love for the people, namely the Lord, come to us*” [1], bringing our salvation and redemption, lifting by grace the human nation to what He is by nature.
- ❖ The human person has been created by God as means of relation, who is finding himself and perfecting himself by participation to his Creator, as man has been created as partner of dialogue of the divinity. For this reason, since the beginning, there has been a calling (ἀνάκλησις) by which the whole creation is connected to the divine Logos, a connection realized by man, as he is a sort of “*shaddow of the Word*” [2] by whom it [namely the whole creation] participates to the divine love.
- ❖ Man has not been brought into existence out of God's necessity, but out of His great love, clothing man in happiness and cleanliness. By the fall into sin, death enters the clean nature, following the divine commandment; consequently, to defeat it, God's embodiment was necessary. Nobody else could have changed the death, given as a law, into immortality, and restore man's image, except for God's Logos, Who has life in Himself (αὐτοζωή), and Who, by taking on man's body and by His sacrifice, lifts man from under the jurisdiction of sin.

- ❖ Man, a rational being, created after the image of Christ, receives in the likeness the ultimate goal that he has to reach, as well. The aim for which man was created, had man been destroyed by sin, would have diminished the divine goodness and allperfection: *“God’s skillfulness revealed in people’s being would have demonstrated weakness”* [3].
- ❖ The immensity of the resurrection of the Logos is the important factor of human life, being accentuated by the Holy Fathers, because, by Him, man is established in the true existence, having virtue as a means towards likeness.

The reason of the sending of our Savior is the divine love: *“for this is how God loved the world: He gave His one and only Son that everyone who believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life”* (John 3:16). Thus, by Christ, the whole creation receives once again its lost rationality. In Christ’s divine-human person, it is not the whole Holy Trinity that is embodied, but the whole nature of the divinity fully possessed by the Hypostasis of the Son, which gets truly united with the entire human nature, and not with just a part of it, because Christ has not assumed in himself the human nature condensed in the species, but the one condensed in the individual, in His body living in a bodily manner the whole fullness of the divinity (Colossians 2:9). Yet, based on the community of being of the persons of the Holy Trinity, partakers are also: *“The Father and the Holy Spirit at the Embodiment of God’s Word by good will and will. We say, therefore, that the whole being of God got united with the entire human nature”* [4].

The Holy Fathers explain in detail the reasons why, for man’s salvation, Christ, the second person of the Holy Trinity, takes on a human body. In their thinking, we find eloquent conclusions, which can be summed up as follows:

1) According to Saint John Damascene, it was necessary for God’s Son to take on a human body, in order for the property of Son to be preserved: *“The Father is a Father and not a Son; the Son is a Son and not a Father... This is why the Son of God becomes Son of Man, so that this feature may remain unchanged”* [5].

2) The Logos or the Son is precisely God’s Word: *“The Way, the Truth and the Life”* (John 14:6), this is why He makes Himself accessible to the people, to reconnect man with his Creator.

3) The entire creation is the work of the Son, this is why it was convenient for the One Who has made it to remake it, as well (John 1:3), because: *“The Almighty... did not send to the people a servant or an angel, but the Master and Creator of the universe Himself”* [6].

4) The salvation brought by Christ means the resettlement of man in grace and the restauration of the image of man, who is made in God’s image in order to attain His likeness.

4. The fullness of time or the time of Christ’s coming in the world

According to the Holy Scripture, the Embodiment took place at **“the fullness of time”**, a time included in the divine plan by which the Creator’s will is made manifest to men: *“But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those who were under law”* (Galatians 4:4).

Obviously, God could have achieved redemption differently, and the Son could have been embodied and could have saved man immediately after Adam’s fall into sin. But this would have meant redeeming man without taking into account his will. This would have been impossible because the free man fell into sin without being forced; this is why he could not have been redeemed any other way except in freedom.

For man to get to want his salvation, a long time had to pass, so that:

- a) people may know out of experience and get fully convinced of the gravity of sin and of the moral incapacity of getting free from the slavery of sin only by his own powers;
- b) religious errance and moral decay had to attain their maximum level so that evil may be driven away along with its roots and once and for all;
- c) the Redeemer's coming, the time, the place and the circumstances in which He was to come as well as data on His life and activity had to be known as well as possible and by as many people as possible so that salvation may become an asset of the entire mankind;
- d) mankind had to have the time needed to get ready to appropriate the divine teaching that the Redeemer was to reveal to it.

Accordingly, it has been so necessary to prepare mankind, for it to be able to receive the infinite spiritual goods sanctifying it. The perfect cleanliness of the human nature assumed by Christ also makes it absolutely necessary for Him to get born out of the clean nature of the Virgin Mary, in whom the existence of the ancestral sin, although present, is reduced to a *"purely inactive possibility, by whose cleanliness and holiness the Word of God may be received among people"* [7].

5. Christ's supernatural birth

Christ took on a human body and was born out of the Virgin Mary not according to the order of nature, but supernaturally. The conception took place by the work of the Holy Spirit, and Christ's birth did not affect the Theotokos' virginity. The Theotokos was a Virgin before birth and remained a Virgin during birth and after birth, forever. This dogma, about the ever-virginity of the Theotokos, relies on numerous places from the Holy Scripture and the Holy Tradition (Isaiah 7:14; Luke 1:27-37; Matthew 1:18-24).

Mary's virginity is possible by the allmightiness of God, according to the analogy of the bush which was burning without being consumed and to the appearance of the Saviour after the Resurrection, through the locked doors; virginity also appears in the vision of prophet Ezechiel 44:1-2 concerning the *"temple door which is to remain locked and no one will go through it, it will not open, and the Lord of Israel came through it and it will be closed"*.

6. The hypostatic union

Jesus Christ is true God and true man, man-God having two natures, one divine and one human, united in a single Person or hypostasis. This is what the Church teaches, saying: *"In one Person, Jesus Christ is true God and true man"* (Marturisirea Ortodoxă /The Orthodox Confession, I, 38): *"We believe that Jesus Christ Son of God took upon Himself, in His own hypostasis, a human body (human nature), conceived of the Holy Spirit in the Ever Virgin Mary and became man"* (Dositheus' Confession, 7th Decree).

The union between God's Word and the human nature, called hypostatic union (ένωσις ύποστατική). The dogma of the hypostatic union has been formulated by the Holy Church at the 3rd, 4th and 6th Ecumenical Synods. The definition of the 4th Ecumenical Synod, Chalcedon (451), fighting against monophysitism, shows that in Christ the Lord there are two natures: divine and human; in one hypostasis, united *"not in a mixed way, unchanged, undivided, unseparated, without annulling through the union the difference between natures, but each of them keeping its characteristic features"*, and the 6th Synod, refuting the Monothelites' heresy, shows that each nature of Christ has its own will and work, while *"the human will submits to His divine and allmighty will"* [8].

The duality of natures and the unity of Christ's Person is expressed by Saint John Damascene by the term "reciprocal inhabitation", interpenetration or perichoresis: "*The Word appropriates the human aspects, for all the things belonging to His Holy body are His, He makes the body partake of what is His Own, according to the model of feature communication (ἀντίδοσις ιδιωμάτων) because of mutual interpenetration*" [9]. Thus, the human nature receives divine characteristics, and the divine nature, human characteristics, because Christ is a complete man and a complete God, communicating to the human nature the divine powers "*He Who has come down from heaven, the Son of Man, is in heaven*" (John 3:13). By the communication of the features, there is no communication of the natures. Our Saviour's works are theandric, because He wills and works in both of the two forms of His nature, each being unseparated from the other.

The Orthodox Church teaches us that the hypostatic union, beginning with the moment of the conception, remains forever unseparated. The body taken on by the Word of God at the moment of His conception from the Virgin (Isaiah 7:14; Luke 1:31-35) remains united for eternity with the divine nature.

7. Consequences of the hypostatic union

Communication of features. Christ transmits to his human nature the features of His divine nature. Thus, His divine nature communicates holiness to His human nature.

The deification of the human nature in Christ is realized progressively, and the affects (passiveness) characterizing the human nature do not influence at all His divinity because: "*we need to say that God did suffer in the body, yet, by no means [was] the divinity [suffering],... while the body was suffering, the divinity was united with it, yet, nevertheless, it remained impassive and committed the redeeming things*" [10].

The theosis of the human nature, by Christ, brings in it the transfiguring gifts, at the same time reinforcing man's will by grace, without changing its nature "*because out of the natures, one has deified and another one has been deified... has been made in the likeness of God ... And this [happened] not by the transformation of the nature, but by the union with a view of the embodiment, namely according to the hypostasis, by which the body has been united, without separation, with God the Word and by the interpenetration of the natures, one with the other, the way we talk about the iron becoming incandescent into fire*" [11]. The embodiment of God's Logos resettles man in his connection with the divinity, communicating to him, by the faith in Him, the divinity, because Christ ascends to the Father, with the humanity assumed, restoring in this way our kinship with the Father, Christ being the earnest of our reconstruction and the leaven leavening the whole lump of dough (1 Cor. 15:47-49).

Christ's sinlessness. Sinlessness in the sphere of will and action corresponds to lack of error in the domain of knowledge; it is only in knowledge that one can conceive a progress, yet a moral progress in Christ is unimaginable because of the union of natures in the person of the Logos. The Holy Scripture testifies Christ's sinlessness, calling Him Saint even since before He was born (free from the ancestral sin Luke 1:35; but also from our personal sins John 8:46; 14:30; 1 John 3:5; 1 Peter 2:12).

A single worship of Christ. Out of the hypostatic union, it results that a single worship ought to be given to Christ, namely adoration both according to his divinity and according to his humanity: "*Everybody ought to worship the Son as they worship the Father. Whoever does not glorify the Son, does not glorify the Father Who has sent Him*" (John 5:22-23; Revelation 5:11-13; Matthew 28:17; Hebrews 1:6).

The Virgin Mary is Theotokos. Of the Virgin Mary was born God's Son Himself, as person of the human nature. Birth is a feature of the person and not of nature, this is why the Virgin Mary is Theotokos, because the One born from her is the true God Jesus Christ. The Virgin Mary is honored by being called "*Theotokos*", not *Anthropotokos*, because God-the Son took a Body, for Himself, of her. At the 4th Ecumenical Synod, from Ephesus, of the year 431, the Virgin Mary has been "officially" recognized as "Theotokos".

In relation to the corrupt state of man's fallen nature, the Redeemer's activity appears under a threefold aspect: as a prophet, as a high priest and as a king.

The prophetic calling concerns the illumination of the mind, or metanoia, the transformation of the mind in Christ, "*the Way, the Truth and the Life ... the light of the world*" (John 14:6; 8:12) who illuminates every man by His teaching, as He is the prophet of prophets, master (rabbi), and great prophet, powerful in acts and in words (Hebrews 1:2; Luke 2:19); [this] calling [is] realized in the Church by the holiness given by the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:20), to the apostles and their followers.

The service of High Priest of our Saviour represents the supreme and central act of the redeeming activity, because by His sacrifice has been and is worked man's reconciliation with God "*for His life was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of the people was He stricken*" (Isaiah 53:4-8), because "*the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many*" (Matthew 20:28), as He is the offering for our sins and for the sins of the whole world (1 John 2:2). His sacrifice represents the means of redemption of the human nature from the slavery of sin, which is permanently updated until the end of the centuries, according to the Saviour's commandment: "*do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes*" (1 Corinthians 11:25-26).

The kingly dignity of Christ highlights the majesty and glory of the man-God, compared to the prophetic calling and the priestly service in which one can see rather the state of humility and kenosis. Christ is "*the King of kings and Lord of lords*" (1 Timothy 6:15), a dignity which He shows perfectly by the miracles made and by His resurrection; a defeater of death and a Judge of the world, He has lifted the human nature on the right side of the Father in the heavenly glory. Patristic theology, regarding the redeeming sacrifice and the acts by which human nature is resettled into grace, has formulated a series of theories which the Orthodoxy resumes taking into account the three aspects of redemption, namely: **the aspect of sacrifice, the ontological aspect and the resuming aspect.**

The aspect of sacrifice of Salvation is manifested in two directions, one towards God, by perfect submission to the point of death on the cross (Philippians 2:6-8), because by "*the blood of Christ, Who has brought Himself as a spotless sacrifice to God*" (Hebrews 9:14), the Creator is glorified. And another one towards man, which concerns the lifting of the punishment for sin "*Christ becoming a curse for us*" (Galatians 3:13), by Him nature being delivered from death and resettled in the state of relation [with God]: "*because Christ is redemption, giving Himself as a ransom for us, as Saint Gregory of Nyssa says, by this we understand that giving to us immortality as a special honor for every soul in turn, He has made out of all those whom He has ransomed, by His life, from death, an asset of His own..., thus, just as when we were under the dominion of death, the law of sin was settled in us, similarly, now, when we are under the dominion of life, we have the duty to harmonize ourselves with the way of being of the One Who is our master*" [12]. The Lord's submission and death, suffered for our sins, have turned, in Him, from just death

(because it was connected to nature), into unjust death, because He was sinless and consequently death was defeated, by life-giving death. **The ontological aspect of Salvation** highlights the reality of the body taken on by Christ, contradicting the appearance of the heretical Docetists, and shows that its subject is not an apparent Logos, because otherwise salvation would be something apparent, as well. Christ's work has an ontological efficiency reflected on His person, which comprises the whole mankind.

The resuming aspect Redemption. In Christ's Person is resumed the whole human nature, in truth, but this nature includes us as well virtually, this virtuality becoming actual by the faith in Christ, in which we can appropriate the fruits of the sacrifice on the cross; this thing is very clearly shown by the Holy Apostle Paul who says: "*and [God] raised us up with Him and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus*" (Ephesians 2:6).

The humanity of Christ is the model by which one can see the perfect purity given by the presence of the divinity, as He is the Archetype in Whose image Adam's image was created, and just as "*in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive*" (1 Corinthians 15:22). The new Adam includes us all; taking the earthly image of the old Adam, breathing on it the life-giving Spirit, for death to be swallowed by life (2 Corinthians 5:4), Christ makes man like his Creator. "*Our Savior was the first of all and the only one Who has shown us in His being the image of a true and blameless man*" [13]. Only in Christ, Who made himself subject of the body, is radically extirpated the presence of any form of sin.

Conclusions

Redemption is the eternal work and giving of life, by the Son, to permanently reinforce the relation and the communion with the source of life - God the Father -, a relation by which man receives the divine goodness, shared by the Holy Spirit through the deified humanity of the Son, embodied, sacrificed and resurrected for the world to have eternal life.

Thus, the aim of God's Son's Embodiment has been the realization of God's Kingdom and the salvation of man and of mankind.

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