

**THE DEFINITION OF CHALCEDON.  
CONSIDERATIONS ON THE RELEVANCE  
OF THE CHRISTOLOGICAL DOGMA TODAY**

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**ABSTRACT**

Unul dintre cele mai importante Sinoade Ecumenice a fost, fără îndoială, cel ținut la Calcedon în anul 451. El a fost convocat de către împăratul Marcian pentru a se clarifica învățătura eretică a lui Eutihie. Acest sinod s-a bucurat de o prezență numeroasă, peste 500 de episcopi, majoritatea din Răsărit.

Problema principală ce s-a dezbătut a fost cea referitoare la cele două firi (divină și umană) din unica Persoană a Mântuitorului Hristos, unite în chip neschimbat, neamestecat, neîmpărțit și nedespărțit. Era foarte important să se stabilească corect înțelegerea dogmei Întropării Fiului lui Dumnezeu, întrucât de această înțelegere depinde viața noastră religioasă-morală, care trebuie să se identifice cu viața liturgică, iar centrul vieții liturgice este Sfânta Euharistie.

Pentru oamenii zilelor noastre a nu fi integrat liturgic înseamnă pierderea legăturii nemijlocite cu Hristos, fapt care îngreunează menținerea noastră pe calea mântuirii sau chiar îndepărtarea de la această cale adevărată a vieții.

The Fourth Ecumenical Council was held in the city of Chalcedon in Asia Minor, nearly opposite Byzantium. It was convoked by the Emperor Marcian to deal with the Eutychian heresy. At the first meeting, held on 8<sup>th</sup> of October 451, were present more than 500 bishops, most of them from East. Except two bishops from the province of Africa and two Papal legates. The decisions of the Latrocinium (449) were annulled and Euthyhes was condemned. The Council then drew up a statement of faith, the so-called Chalcedonian Definition, which was accepted by the both Churches, Eastern and Western<sup>1</sup>. The main conception of the Chalcedonian Definition is the existence of Two Natures in One Person, Jesus Christ, Son of God and our Saviour, which are *united unconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly and inseparably*.

There is no culture or religion that has not received and does not express a „visitation of the Word”. Maximus the Confessor distinguishes three degrees in the „embodiment“ of the Word<sup>2</sup>. In the first place, the very existence of the cosmos, understood as a theophany; this symbolism is

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<sup>1</sup> „The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church“, Edited by F.L. Cross, Oxford University Press, 1958, p. 259.

<sup>2</sup> Maximus the Confessor, *Ambigua*, P.G. t. 91, 1285-1288.

the foundation of the ancient religions, which see in it the means to the deepest spiritual understanding. Secondly, the revelation of the personal God, who engendered history, and the embodying of the Word in the Law, in a sacred Scripture; Judaism and Islam are obvious examples. Finally, the personal incarnation of the Word who gives full meaning to his cosmic and scriptural embodiments, freeing the former from the temptation to absorb the divine „Self“ in an impersonal divine essence, and the latter from the temptation to separate God and humanity, leaving no possibility of communion between them. For in Christ, to quote the Fourth Ecumenical Council, God and man are united „without confusion or change“, but also „without division or separation“. And the divine energies, reflected by creatures and objects, do not lead to anonymous divinity but to the face of the transfigured Christ<sup>3</sup>.

The purpose of the incarnation is to establish full communion between God and humanity so that in Christ humanity may find adoption and immortality, often called „deification“ by the Fathers: not by emptying human nature but by fulfilling it in the divine life, since only in God is human nature truly itself. St. Irenaeus of Lyon said: „How could the human race go to God if God had not come to us? How should we free ourselves from our birth into death if we had not been born again according to faith by a new birth generously given by God, thanks to that which came about from the Virgin’s womb?“<sup>4</sup>.

And it must be so. There must be someone in this world –which rejected God and, in this rejection, in this blasphemy, became a chaos of darkness- there must be someone to stand in its centre, and to discern, to see it again as full of divine riches, as the cup full of life and joy, as beauty and wisdom, and to thank God for it. This „someone“ is Christ, the new Adam who restores that „eucharistic life“ which I, the old Adam, have rejected and lost; who makes me again what I am, and restores the world to me. And if the Church *is in Christ*, its initial act is always this act of thanksgiving, of returning the world to God<sup>5</sup>.

The very being of the Church is eucharistic. By the Eucharist the community is integrated into the body of Christ. And the body is inseparable from the head. St. John Chrysostom says: „Just as the head and the body constitute a single human being, so Christ and the Church constitute a single whole. This union is effected through the food that he has given us in his desire to show

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<sup>3</sup> Olivier Clement, *The Roots of Christian Mysticism*, London, 1997, p. 35.

<sup>4</sup> Irenaeus of Lyon, *Against Heresies*, IV, 33, 4, SC 100 bis, pp. 810-812.

<sup>5</sup> Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*, Crestwood, 1995, pp. 60-61.

the love he has for us. For this reason, he united himself intimately with us, he blended his body with ours like leaven, so that we should become one single entity, as the body is joined to the head“<sup>6</sup>.

The early Church saw this unity as analogous to the unity of bread or wine that is made up of many grains of wheat or many grapes, each of which must be crushed, like the ascetical overcoming of the egocentric self in baptism. „When the Lord calls his body bread, made from the collection of a large number of grains, he is pointing to the unity of our people. And when he calls his blood wine, which is pressed from a large number of clusters of grapes to form a single liquid, he signifies that our flock is made up of a multitude gathered into unity“<sup>7</sup>. as St. Cyprian of Carthage says.

The „sacrament of the altar“ is reflected and extended in the „sacrament of our brother“, as St. John Chrysostom repeats continually<sup>8</sup>. That means no one can receive God’s pardon and peace in the Eucharist without also becoming a person of pardon and peace. No one take part in the Eucharistic feast without becoming a person prepared to share. The Eucharist not only establishes the existence of the Church and the communion of Christians among themselves, but determines the manner in which these are present in the world. For everyone is called „o give thanks in all circumstances“ (I Thessalonians 5,18 ), to become a „eucharistic person“. Making the Eucharist part of oneself, especially by the invocation of the name of Jesus, is one of the fundamental themes of Christian spirituality. The Eucharistic celebration is an apprenticeship in new relations among people, and between people and things; it cannot but have a prophetic dimension.

From its very beginning Christianity has been the proclamation of joy, of the only possible joy on earth. It rendered impossible all joy we usually think of as possible. But within this impossibility, at the very bottom of this darkness, it announced and conveyed a new all-embracing joy, and with this joy it transformed the End into a Beginning. Without the proclamation of this joy Christianity is incomprehensible. It is only as joy that the Church was victorious in the world, and it lost the world when it lost the joy, and ceased to be a credible witness to it. So, we must recover the meaning of this great joy. We must, if possible, partake of it. Before we discuss anything else – programs and missions, projects and techniques.

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<sup>6</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homily on I Corinthians*, 30, I (P.G. t. 61, 279); *Homily on John*, 46,3 P.G. t. 59, 260.

<sup>7</sup> St. Cyprian of Carthage, *Correspondence*, Belles Letters, vol. II.

<sup>8</sup> Olivier Clement, *The Roots of...*, p. 119.

Joy, however, is not something one can define or analyse. One enters into joy. „Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord“ ( Mt 25, 21 ). And we have no other means of entering into that joy, no way of understanding it, except through the one action which from the beginning has been for the Church both the source and the fulfilment of joy, the very sacrament of joy, the Eucharist.

The Eucharist is a liturgy. And who says „liturgy“ today is likely to get involved in a controversy. For to some – the „liturgically minded“ – of all the activities of the Church, liturgy is the most important, if not the only one. To others, liturgy is esthetic and spiritual deviation from the real task of the Church. There exist today „liturgical“ and „non-liturgical“ Churches and Christians. But this controversy is unnecessary for it has its roots in one basic misunderstanding – the „liturgical“ understanding of liturgy. This is the reduction of the liturgy to „cultic“ categories, its definition is a sacred act of worship, different as such not only from the “profane” area of life, but even from all other activities of the Church itself. But this is not the original meaning of the Greek word *leitourgia*. It meant an action by which a group of people become something corporately which they had not been as a mere collection of individuals – a whole greater than the sum of its parts. It meant also a function or „ministry“ of a man or of a group on behalf of and in the interest of the whole community. Thus, the *leitourgia* of ancient Israel was the corporate work of a chosen few to prepare the world for the coming of the Messiah. And in this very act of preparation, they became what they were called to be, the Israel of God, the chosen instrument of His purpose<sup>9</sup>.

Thus, the Church itself is a *leitourgia*, a ministry, a calling to act in this world after the fashion of Christ, to bear testimony to Him and His kingdom. The Eucharistic liturgy, therefore, must not be approached and understood in „liturgical“ or „cultic“ terms alone. Just as Christianity can – and must – be considered the end of religion, so the Christian liturgy in general, and the Eucharist in particular, are indeed the end of cult, of the „sacred“ religious act isolated from, and opposed to, the „profane“ life of the community. The first condition for the understanding of liturgy is to forget about any specific „liturgical piety“.

The Eucharist is a sacrament. But who says sacrament also gets involved in a controversy. If we speak of sacrament, where is the Word? Are we not leading ourselves into the dangers of „sacramentalism“ and „magic“, into a betrayal of the spiritual character of Christianity? To these questions no answer can be given at this point. For the whole purpose of this essay is to show that

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<sup>9</sup> Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life...*, pp. 24-25.

the context within which such questions are being asked is not the only possible one. At this stage we shall say only this: the Eucharist is the entrance of the Church into the joy of its Lord. And the enter into that joy, so as to be a witness to it in the world, is indeed the very calling of the Church, its essential *leitourgia*, the sacrament by which it „becomes what it is“.

The liturgy of the Eucharist is best understood as a journey or procession. It is the journey of the Church into the dimension of the Kingdom. We use this word „dimension“ because it seems the best way to indicate the manner of our sacramental entrance into the risen life of Christ.

The journey begins when Christians leave their homes and beds. They leave, indeed, their life in this present and concrete world, and whether they have to drive some miles or walk a few blocks, a sacramental act is already taking place, an act which is the very condition of everything else that is to happen. For they are now on their way *to constitute the Church*, or to be more exact, to be transformed into the Church of God. They have been individuals, some poor, some rich, some workers, some intellectuals, they have been the „natural“ world and a natural community. And now they have been called to „come together in one place“, to bring their lives, their very „world“ with them and to be more than what they were: a *new* community with a new life. We are already far beyond the categories of common worship and prayer. The purpose of this “coming together“ is not simply to add a religious dimension to the natural community, to make it „better“ – more responsible, more Christian. The purpose is to *fulfil the Church*, and that means to make present the One in whom all things are at their *end*, and all things are at their *beginning*.

The liturgy begins then as a real separation from the world. In our attempt to make Christianity appeal to the man on the street, we often minimized, or even completely forgotten, this necessary separation. We always want to make Christianity „understandable“ and „acceptable“ to this mythical „modern“ man on the street. And we forget that the Christ of whom we speak is „not of this world“, and that after His resurrection He was not recognized even by His own disciples. Mary Magdalene thought that He is a gardener. When two of His disciples were going to Emmaus, „Jesus himself drew near and went with them“, and they did not know Him before „He took bread, and blessed it, and brake, and gave it to them“ (Luke 24; 15-16, 30). He appeared to the twelve, „the doors being shut“. It was apparently no longer sufficient simply to know that He was the son of Mary. There was no physical imperative to recognize Him. He was, in other words, no longer a „part“ of this world, of its reality, and to recognize Him, to enter to the joy of His presence, to be with Him, meant a conversion to another reality. The Lord’s glorification

does not have the compelling, objective evidence of His humiliation and cross. His glorification is known only through the mysterious death in the baptismal font, through anointing of the Holy Ghost. It is known only in the fullness of the Church, as she gathers to meet the Lord and to share in His risen life.

The early Christians realized that in order to become the temple of the Holy Ghost they must *ascend to heaven* where Christ has ascended. They realized also that this ascension was the very condition of their mission in the world, of their ministry to the world. For there – in heaven – they were immersed in the new life of the Kingdom; and when, after this „liturgy of ascension“, they returned into the world, their faces reflected the light, the „joy and peace“ of that Kingdom and they were truly its witnesses. They brought no programs and no theories; but wherever they went, the seeds of the Kingdom sprouted, faith was kindled, life was transfigured, things impossible were made possible. They were witnesses, and were they were asked, „Whence shines this light, where is the source of this power?“ they what to answer and where to lead men. In church today, we so often find we meet only the same old world, not Christ and His Kingdom. We do not realize that we never get anywhere because we never leave any place behind us.

To leave, to come, This is the *beginning*, the starting point of the sacrament, the condition of its transforming power and reality. The Orthodox liturgy begins with the solemn doxology: „Blessed is the Kingdom of the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost, now and ever, and unto the ages of ages“. From the beginning the destination is announced: the journey is to the Kingdom. This is where we are going – and not symbolically, but really. In the language of the Holy Scripture, which is the language of the Church, to bless the Kingdom is not simply to acclaim it. It is to declare it to be the goal, the end of all our desires and interests, of our whole life, the supreme and ultimate value of all that exists.

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As a conclusion, it is a historical fact which no one can deny that the Christian East has remained aloof from the great changes which have occurred in the West . From the ninth to the fifteenth century Byzantium went on developing and living according to the great tradition of the Fathers, their theology, spirituality, and above all their sacramental conception of the Church. It deliberately refused to identify itself with any particular synthesis of philosophical thought and

Revelation such as the Scholastic system, and preferred to remain faithful to patristic thought. Its theology, and particularly its doctrine on the sacraments and the Church, were never formulated in accordance with the dictates and terminology of a given philosophical system, and the constitution of the Orthodox Church was never thought of solely in terms of the laws by which a law-dominated institution was governed. Its God remained a living, acting God, the God of the Holy Scripture, the God of Abraham Isaac and Jacob; He was never transformed into the God of philosophers. As a matter of fact, the Church never provided itself with a complete system of canon law: the canons of those councils which it acknowledged as authentic were regarded merely as an expression of the Church's nature under certain concrete circumstances, a kind of „jurisprudence of the Holy Ghost“, as it were, reflecting the eternal *order* of the Body of Christ<sup>10</sup>. They were never transformed into a kind of juridical super government and were never looked upon as a means by which to exercise an effective control over all members of the Church, centrally or from above.

Therefore, the ecumenical task of Orthodoxy, in its discussions with both Catholics and Protestants, should be to question the appropriateness of certain formulas handed down from the Latin Middle Ages and the period of the Counter-Reformation, without, however, giving the impression of wishing to deny the traditional doctrines which they are intended to express; and to urge Roman Catholics on the one hand fraternally to return to the common sources, and Protestants on the other to be more receptive to the idea of Tradition.

The Orthodox presence in the West is a rather new phenomenon. Following the two world wars and the falling of communism large numbers of emigrants from Eastern Europe sought new homes in Western Europe. The social and religious consequences of this migration are not yet clearly discernible, but we may venture to say that it will certainly be regarded as of great importance in the history of Christianity. The Orthodox Church has now ceased to be an exclusively Eastern Church. This fact can readily be observed in Western Europe, where several millions of the faithful have largely adopted the languages, culture and ways of thought of their new countries, while at the same time remaining faithful to the Church of their forefathers. To some extent, they have even succeeded in breathing into the latter a new missionary spirit and in imbuing it with a new zeal for organization such as it has never known before.

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<sup>10</sup> John Meyendorff, *The Orthodox Church – Its Past and Its Role in the World Today*, London, 1962, pp. 228-229.

By surmounting national differences inherited from the past, by training a clergy that can cope with the new conditions in which the Church finds itself, and by their skill in reconciling a faithfulness to tradition with the needs of the modern world, the Western Orthodoxy can give an entirely new meaning to their witness to the faith. This is the task to which their Church calls them, a Church which claims to be the true Church of Christ, and it is by this standard that they will be judged by history, by their Christian brothers, and finally by God himself.

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