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The Holy Sacraments - Means of Renewing the Life of Believers

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Abstract

The Sacraments are Christ's unseen works, committed as seen acts, which form the Church as the Mystical Body of Lord. In view of the Orthodox faith, there are seven important works in the life of the Church, called Mysteries or Sacraments, which correspond to the different needs of people's lives. The Mysteries highlight the different forms and degrees of relationship between the believer and Jesus Christ. Faith is a premise for the Sacraments effective work in believers and the renewal of their personal life, but the power present and working in them is the power of the Holy Spirit, present in the Church since Pentecost. The renewing work of the Sacraments has significance not only for the life of Christians, but also for the life of the world.

Key words

Church, Sacraments, renewing, pneumatological, ecclesiological, soteriological dimension

I. General considerations

When talking about the Holy Sacraments, we cannot do this unilaterally and separately from the framework or context in which they were performed and express their work, i.e. the Church, and in spite of those for whom they are meant for, that is the people. This is reflected with particu-

lar clarity from the testimonies of the Holy Scripture and the Apostolic Tradition which generally display them as holy deed instituted by Jesus Christ Himself. They transmit people the divine life in order to be re-born to the new life in Christ, to grow in this life, to renew their personal lives when life's circumstances push them towards peripheral realities of existence and make them fall back under the rule of the old Adam. From this state they can rise through the regenerative Sacraments of the Church which empower people to different works or missions in family life, in society and in the Church.

Having a renewing and regenerating purpose, the Holy Sacraments are at the same time works that contribute to the faithful's salvation, as members of the living Body of Christ - the Church. In view of the Orthodox faith, there are seven important works in the life of the Church, called Mysteries or Sacraments, which correspond to the different needs of people's lives. At the same time, they meet the aspirations of man in the full communion of love with God, with others and to all creation in terms of special concern, as work of omnipotence, goodness and wisdom of God.

The Holy Sacraments are means of sanctification and renewal of people in permanent dynamics as opposed to the static dimension of life that moves somehow in a closed circle, and prevents people from seeing the new, fresh and alive things. Thus, Sacraments cast out people from this platitude, hopelessness and monotony of life, opening them new horizons of perception, light and hope.

On the other hand, when the Sacraments of the Church are taken seriously by its members, they substantially contribute to improving the social climate between people and to their permanent humanization according to Christ's humanity (cf. Eph. 4, 13). Hence their importance is clear not only from a Christian, religious or theological viewpoint, but also from a social or human one in general.

Deepening their Christian identity and sharing the living fountain of Jesus Christ's grace, all the believers of our crucified and risen Lord can meet the roots of the same Christ in their own Christian identity. This will draw each other nearer and will make them want to confess to each other their experience of communion with the same Christ's gracious loving.

The Holy Trinity is present and working in all Sacraments as communion of life, love and divine joy that all people need both for the earthly life and for the eternal one. In other words, they are effective in both the immanent and the transcendental; they concern both time and eternity.

II. Christological, ecclesiological and pneumatological aspects of the Holy Sacraments

The fundamental basis of the Sacraments is the union of God with His creation through man, who is tasked by his psycho-physical structure to come forward with the creation to its perpetuation in God.¹

As St. Maximus the Confessor says, the whole creation has an internal rationality, which finds its explanation through the man endowed with rational capacity to apprehend and understand the reasons of created things. We should understand Son of God's Incarnation in this context which highlights the value of the human body that found its "tent" in the humanity assumed through Incarnation. "The Son of God was incarnated to make closer the mystery of link between creation, man and God, for the rationality of creation and the human reason meet the supreme divine Reason in Him".²

The Sacraments are Christ's unseen works, committed as seen acts, which form the Church as the Mystical Body of Lord. Through the Holy Sacraments the sanctifying, saving and renewing grace of Christ is partaken to all who want to be saved and to come to knowledge of the Truth (cf. I Tim. 2: 4). But grace is Christ's work, the true commitment of Mysteries. The Mysteries take into account the link between body and soul and the soul's openness towards God. In Christ this openness of humanity to God has reached the maximum level. Through His work Christ touches our body, but this touch deeps into our soul. Christ works over our body through His full powered body... imparting us not only his clean human sensitivity, but also the clean sensitivity of His soul and the divine power in Him."³

Because Jesus Christ assumed our humanity through Incarnation, that is the divine Logos was united with humanity, Christ became

"the sacramental mystery par excellence and beyond Him and through Him, the Church and the Eucharist too. Through Christ-Mystery God wanted to raise the visible nature in order to unite

¹ Dumitru Popescu, *Iisus Hristos Pantocrator*; Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române (EIBMBOR), București 2005, p. 301.

² D. Popescu, *Iisus Hristos Pantocrator*, p. 102.

³ Dumitru Stăniloae, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, (TDO), 3rd edition, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române (EIBMBOR), București 2003, vol. III, p. 18.

the whole human race and the universe to Himself in a sacramental way. God condescended to dwell humanly in Christ all the divine fullness (cf. Col. 1: 19; 2, 9), however remaining a mystery.”⁴

Jesus Christ as Mystery remains forever the original mystery and the secret and hidden foundation from everlasting of our meeting with God and of our salvation. Highlighting Son of God’s descent to people St. Maximus the Confessor says: „This is the true and perfect incarnation of Son of God, who joined our nature to Himself after hypostasis in an undivided and unmixed way and joined us to Him, through His Holy Flesh taken from us and endowed with rational soul. He fixed this flesh in himself as the first fruits and made it worthy to be one and the same with Him through His Incarnation as man.”⁵

The Mysteries highlight the different forms and degrees of relationship between the believer and Jesus Christ, which were established by Christ Himself. On the other hand,

“the presence and work of Christ in the Sacraments is involved in that the grace of Mysteries is Christ’s uncreated energy. With every Sacrament He lives again and radiates living and power of other states in every faithful, by which He raised His humanity to its full height and deification”.⁶

Thus, through Christ’s work in the Sacraments, He constantly configures His Mystical Body - the Church in history, which is both the premise and result of Mysteries.⁷ Christ Himself extends and develops the life of the Church through all the Mysteries, which are performed by the priest only in a visible way, but by Christ Himself in an unseen way. The Church is not only the extension of Christ’s mystery, but is full of Christ’s mystery.

⁴ Dumitru Radu, *Despre înnoirea și îndumnezeirea omului în Hristos*, Editura Mitropoliei Olteniei, Craiova 2007, p. 82.

⁵ *Ambigua*, P.G. 91, col. 1097 BC.

⁶ D. Stăniloae, *TDO*, III, p. 27.

⁷ E. Schlink says in this respect: „Durch die Taufe und durch den Heiligen Geist wird der Glaubende zum Glied der Kirche. Wie die Kirche nicht dadurch entstanden ist, dass Menschen sich zusammengeschlossen und durch dieses Ihr Tun die Kirche gegründet hätten, so steht es zu keiner Zeit in des Menschen Macht, Glied der Kirche zu werden. Die Kirche heisst - Kirche Gottes – nicht weil die Menschen bei ihrem Zusammenschluss sich diese Bezeichnung zugelegt hätte, sondern weil Gott hier Menschen gesammelt und zusammengeschlossen hat” (*Ökumenische Dogmatik*, Vandenhoeck - Rupprecht, Göttingen 1983, S. 485- 486).

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The ecclesiological dimension of the Sacraments “arises from the fact that neither the mystery of the Church is separated from the mystery of Christ, nor the mystery of Christ is separated from the mystery of the Church. The church is the extension of the mystery of Christ and filled with mystery of Christ”.⁸ Between Christ and His Church there is a dialectical connection; on the one hand, the Church is full of Christ; on the other hand, she is always in the position of praying and ministering to Him, so she is not identical to Him. It is the body not the head, although you cannot join the head, without getting united the body too.⁹

The Sacraments are those works that expand and strengthen the Church, but they are simultaneously conditioned by Church because she “is built” through them for people to share more and more the work of God present in them. Christ’s work through the Sacraments is explained by the fact that He established them, passing them His renewing strength. Thus Christ strengthens and develops His Mystical Body - the Church, as her Head, remaining in the midst of the faithful to the end of time (cf. Matthew 28, 20).

For Christ to work in His Sacraments and people receive His gifts, they must believe in Him and His saving power. Thus the faith becomes a premise for the Sacraments effective work in believers, on the one hand, and the renewal of their personal life on the other side. Therefore, the mystery is a

“decisive and unique event in man’s life that comes to faith and continues to believe, as words are not simple. The sacramental gestures of the priest and of the bishop are committed in the name of the Church and with her authority, so with the authority of Christ that works in them, effectively fulfil the intentional work, because Christ himself fulfils it unseen and the Church fulfils it seen in these gestures”.¹⁰

So we can talk about an interrelation between Christ and the Church present in the work of the Sacraments as well, but also about a direct link of the Church members to their profession of faith, so that they can receive their renewing power. We should not omit that the power present and working in the Sacraments is the power of the Holy Spirit, present in

⁸ D. Popescu, *Iisus Hristos Pantocrator*, p. 304.

⁹ D. Stăniloae, *TDO*, III, p. 25.

¹⁰ D. Stăniloae, *TDO*, III, p. 29.

the Church since Pentecost. The Holy Spirit is renewing and sanctifying, and gives us God's infinite riches, made accessible to people through Jesus Christ.

III. The regenerative, renewing and soteriological dimension of the Holy Sacraments.

Through the specifics of its work each Mystery achieved some form of regeneration and renewal of existence in its manifestation. The clearest form of renewal or rebirth of man takes place through the Holy Baptism, the Sacrament of human birth to a new life and its advancement on the path of a permanent renewal. Through Baptism the image of God in man, dark and tainted by sin, is restored.

“By restoring the image of God in man, he receives the divine life without death. The image of Christ is a real bright coat or rather it is Christ Himself. „For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.” (Gal. 3, 27). This coat does not stay only on the surface of the body, such as regular clothes, but prints in our whole being. It is Christ Himself, addressing everyone, but at the same time it is a special, personal and unique relationship to each believer. Therefore, in Baptism man receives a personal name and when he is called by name he knows that it concerns him entirely and as such he must respond with his whole being.”¹¹

¹¹ D. Popescu, *Iisus Hristos Pantocrator*, p. 313. In this respect the following aspects are relevant: „Mit der Taufe wurde nach der apostolischen Tradition die durch Christus verwirklichte Gnadentat Gottes dem einzelnen zugeeignet. Er hat fortan an ihr teil, und sein Leben hat damit einen neuen Seinsgrund erhalten. Er ist, wie Paulus in Röm. 6, 3-11 ausführt, der Macht der Sünde und der alten vergänglichen Wirklichkeit entnommen. Allerdings, lebt er noch unter den Bedingungen der irdischen Welt, weswegen er als Mitgekreuzigter den Tod Jesu allezeit an seinem Leib umhertragen muss (II Kor. 4, 10) und er der Auferweckung erst noch entgegengeht (Phil. 3, 10) (Ferdinand Hahn, *Die Sakramente der Kirche in der Confessio Augustana auf dem Grund der apostolischen Tradition*, in: Beiheft zur Ökumenischen Rundschau, 43, Die Sakramente der Kirche in der Confessio Augustana und in den Lehrbekenntnissen des 16-17 Jahrhunderts. Eine Dokumentation über das 2 Theologische Gespräch mit der Rumänischen Orthodoxen Kirche in Jassy 1980, Verlag Otto Lembeck, Frankfurt am Main, 1982, p. 35.)

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Baptism reconfigures the image of God in man, in Christ's image likeness, which is equal to a new life transmitted by the Holy Spirit to the baptized person. St. Apostle Paul says „if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him” (Rom. 6, 8). Referring to the same aspect of Baptism, St. Gregory of Nazianzus says the following:

“Therefore let us give all our members that are on earth to God and devote all to Him... Let bring ourselves whole to God as understanding burnt and perfect sacrifice. For this is the way you get clean: you give yourself to God and gain your salvation as sacrifice.”¹²

In other words, receiving Baptism means dedication to God and to people with your whole life; it means preserving the gift of life sacredness and of a permanent renewal through the personal effort of the believer, who feels he is under the pressure of the gifts received in Baptism that invite him to a permanent dynamism of his life.

Sensing this outpouring of spiritual gifts upon him the believer does not live this experience alone, but he feels communion with all who in turn received these gifts become living members of Christ's Body - the Church. Through the work of baptism, believers are born again and they are sealed with the “seal of the Holy Spirit gift” in the Mystery of Unction. Thus, believers have imprinted in their being not only the state of born again as Christ was born from the Virgin, but they also receive the outpouring of the Holy Spirit as a seal of this re-birth, and as a print in their being of Christ the anointed with the Holy Spirit at his baptism in Jordan. Anointing with the Holy Chrism gives the baptized the power to continuous growth in this new life in Jesus Christ, to reach “unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ” (cf. Ephesians 4, 13).

With the receipt of Baptism and Unction, those who receive them deepen their relationship with crucified and risen Christ, by partaking Christ in the Sacrament of the Eucharist, so that they can reach full communion with Him. By binding to each other, the three mentioned Sacraments: Baptism, Chrismation and then Eucharist have one common work, in addition to their specific one: to deepen and develop communion with Christ to those who receive them. They also reinforce the unity of the ecclesial Body of Christ. Through these three mysteries, the faithful enjoy their communion with Christ, but at the same time they enjoy the increas-

¹² Sf. Grigorie de Nazianz, *In Sanct. Bapt.* 29, P.G. 36, col 417.

ing communion between them, which stimulates the Holy Spirit, as Spirit of love and communion.

“Realizing full communion of men with Christ as members of His Body, and the unity of all Christians in Christ and to one another, the Eucharist achieves the Body of Christ from those baptized and sealed with the Spirit of Christ that is the Church and the communion of men with God”.¹³

In this context, we notice the universal dimension of these Sacraments to every believer, in addition to the personal one. This is not only in the sense that some are called to direct, vivid and renewing communion with Christ, but all people are called to it, because Jesus Christ was incarnated, died and resurrected for them.

Another work that realizes the freshening of faithful life is the Mystery of Penance or Confession after they failed to keep their bright clothes of Baptism lifelong. The loss of the Christian identity bright image is not a fatality for humans, but they simply can profoundly renew their life by the act of Penance, as a practice of Christian virtues in the way of good and the renewal of Baptism made by the Sacrament of Confession or Penance. Not coincidentally, the Sacrament of Confession was called the Mystery of “baptism renewal” or “the second baptism” because of the complex existential process which accompanies the stages of this Mystery. The need for a life renewal is required by the human condition itself which is subject to objective limitations. Because of these limitations, man cannot stay permanently on a higher plane of life, continually expressing a humanism inspired by Christ’s perfect humanity. Failing this, he comes into a state of bodily and spiritual suffering and he cannot fully release from it by himself but needs help beyond him and above him. The simple help from other people, his peers, would be human as well, with limits he cannot pass. He must receive a unique and invaluable help that responds to his direct needs and deepest aspirations.

This special aid comes to the faithful through the Sacraments, and explicitly and directly by the Sacrament of Confession. The personal mistakes or sins chill, crook or break the present communion with Christ that salvation depends on. But at the same time, man’s deeds mastered by selfishness and wickedness in its various facets, alter the interpersonal relationships between people too. Thus, the life of a small or large community

¹³ D. Radu, *Despre înnoirea și îndumnezeirea omului în Hristos*, p. 93.

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has much to suffer if it does not see the reality of personal and community life degradation as a consequence of the people's carrying-off from the values of Jesus Christ's Gospel. So there is a chance to overcome, heal and renew the life of the faithful, through the means Jesus Christ left for all people in this regard, that is these holy works of the Lord. Therefore, believers have to resort to these works committed by the ordained ministers of the Church: bishops and priests, who have a mission in this regard, that of bringing the faithful to new life. The power to build this new life is not theirs, but His that chose them and sent them and gave them the power to work for men salvation - Lord's apostles and their successors.

The same renewing work of God is present in other Sacraments of the Church: the Marriage and the Holy Unction. In the Sacrament of Marriage, the grace of divine love is transmitted to the two young groom and bride, that sanctifies, renews and strengthens the love between them, raising it to the height of the link between Jesus Christ and His Church (see: Ephesians chapter 5). Thus marriage

“is the true alive mystery of duality or of dual unity starting to feel and to be achieved since the two unite in marriage, or even before, and which updates its virtualities throughout their lives by preventing them to be bored of one another. An important role in this gradual spiritualization of the link between them is exercised and increased by the responsibility for each other. Love grows from the exercise of mutual accountability and responsibility grows out of love”.¹⁴

Therefore, the love poured out by God in the Sacrament of Marriage is not static and does not have the same form, but it is renewed by the fact that God sent them in this mystery and by the Christians spouses' aspiration for as much love and mutual responsibility. By exercising that responsibility, man acquires his true existential dimension receiving the mark of seriousness and dignity. As such, “the mystery of the indissoluble union between a man and a woman as a union which is spiritualized in a deepening communion is the Sacrament in Christ. Their union in Christ is a small church or a part of the Church, as St. John Chrysostom says”.¹⁵ A lot of gifts spring from the grace of Marriage that enrich the Christian family and give it verticality, stability and perspective.

¹⁴ D. Stăniloae, *TDO, III*, p. 193; see also D. Radu, *Despre înnoirea și îndumnezeirea omului în Hristos*, pp. 59-60.

¹⁵ D. Stăniloae, *TDO, III*, p. 195.

In the Sacrament of Unction there is an exchange of feelings and desires between man and God, on the one hand and between people of faith, on the other hand. Nowhere the human desire for God's help is the most dramatic than in the Sacrament of Unction. Often when science, ingenuity and doctors' generosity show their limits, the believer turns with great human warmth and hope to the final source of healing - God. Christ the Lord provides this help to the sick man through the Sacrament of Unction, as the mystery of bodily and spiritual healing. By anointing with holy oil and the priests' prayers, the ill believer partakes the grace of bodily healing or pain relief, spiritual strengthening and forgiveness of sins remained after confession.¹⁶

The Sacraments of the Church do not leave the faithful people where they are, but they are kind of wings of the Holy Spirit, which exalt them, clean them, and make them powerful for a fruitful work in the Church or in society. They constantly renew them by their gifts, so that, ultimately, they are in a personal work of salvation, as living members of the Church of Christ.

IV. The renewal and change of faithful life through the Sacraments - a premise of their spiritual life development and of promoting unity of the Church and of the world

The old man of sin, selfishness and all human existential lacks is an outdated being, incapable of a creative and renewing dynamism of life. Therefore, the Mysteries are the basis for man's renewing in particular and human society in general. Baptism means only the first stage of man's ascent towards God, that is the destruction of "the old man" on the ruins of which appears "the new man" in Christ. „The divine grace is received at Baptism as earnest and as a seed that will grow in man and will manifest itself in different ways throughout his life, as long as he stays turned to Christ, lives in the Church and fulfils the commandments.”¹⁷

¹⁶ See more detail about all this at: D. Popescu, *Iisus Hristos Pantocrator*, pp. 378-380; D. Radu, *Despre înnoirea și îndumnezeirea omului*, p. 106 u.; Ion Bria, *Tratat de Teologie Dogmatică și Ecumenică*, Editura România creștină, București 1999, pp. 189-190; D. Stăniloae, *TDO, III*, pp. 211 u.

¹⁷ Ilarion Alfeyev, Mitropolit de Volokolamsk, *Taina credinței. Introducere în teologia dogmatică ortodoxă*, Editura Doxologia, Iași 2014, p. 219.

Through Baptism the spiritual prison walls of man crumble and he “comes into the circuit of God’s endless love manifested in the communion of the Church. Now the Spirit of Christ was introduced intimately into the human subject with his work and he feels turning toward union with Christ in love and toward deeds from love as a starting of his own. Now a new life starts in man, directed to avoid committing sins and to do good deeds or the will of Christ, an advancing along with Christ in the endless love”.¹⁸

By Chrismation, the believer receives the renewing gift of the Holy Spirit that has to be received actively and not passively, i.e. turning it into inspiration and concrete action on the path of fulfilling God’s commandments. Working the good deeds of loving God, other people and the world, the faithful raised with them those that such acts are done for. We receive the divine Spirit as a deposit, and then we have to win Him, to get Him to work with us and allow ourselves be seized by Him. The Holy Spirit must bring forth in us. St. Ap. Paul underlines the proof of this opportunity for the Holy Spirit to bring forth in the hearts of men, by continuously renewing them, when he says: “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance... If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit”(Gal. 5, 22-25).

The believers receive the crowning of life renewing gift through the Holy Eucharist, which crowns both Baptism and Chrismation. The Eucharist has the power of full death to the separate existence from God, begun in Baptism and developed by Chrismation.

“The Eucharist planted in us the power to totally surrender our lives to God and to receive a life filled with His eternal life, like resurrected Christ. The Eucharist is not meant especially for the renewed life on earth, according to Christ’s life on earth, but for eternal life.”¹⁹

¹⁸ D. Stăniloae, *TDO*, III, pp. 359-360.

¹⁹ D. Stăniloae, *TDO*, III, pp. 84-85. In this context, it should be stressed that the plan of eternal life is not only a parallel plan to earthly life, but these two plans intersect and mutually influence. „Eternal life, or Christ with His eternal life not only strengthens the movement of our earthly life to it as perspective, but as a deposit, thereby supporting the life renewal in purity and virtues. Therefore Eucharist supports our earthly life to forward to eternal life” (D. Stăniloae, *TDO*, III, p. 86).

With this awareness, Christians will seek communion in Christ with those who feel the same awareness of their adherence to Christ. Through the Sacraments in general and the Eucharist in particular the Trinitarian life and the divine light are transmitted to the faithful.

“Above all we should describe (and not only define) the Church continuity in these terms of fullness and of spiritual and sacramental living, along with the live tradition, the golden chain of Holy Spirit’s elected persons over time and the abundance of Holy Spirit fruits in Christian communities”.²⁰

Thus there opens a perspective full of hope, knowledge, approach and dialogue between Christians, who are not yet in full ecclesial communion, that is, not share the same chalice, the Eucharistic Christ. Therefore in this context we do not recommend a defensive attitude on the part of Christians who are in a theological dialogue, and “much less one of exclusivity or condemnation of the exterior traditions from Orthodoxy. Rather than give verdicts and exclude, would it not be preferable to describe, to confess our very lives in the Church, to show what is orthodox, i.e. what is true, catholic, therefore universal and permanent, to distinguish what is positive and genuine in any ecclesiological action even outside the Orthodox communion? To want the union means to want to be “orthodox” and “catholic”.²¹ As such, the Christian mission must be a permanent testimony of the power of Jesus Christ, crucified and risen, Who gives Himself permanently in the Word of the Gospel and the Sacraments of the Church, for the renewal and salvation of believers.

From these Sacraments of Christian initiation or integration into the ecclesial body and the other Sacraments, a wide open field follows for a permanent renewal of Christian life, breaking the walls that close them in a superficial, monotonous and poor spiritual life. Thus there is an inexhaustible potential for Christians ready to be continuously exploited by deepening the meaning of faith and the message of the Sacraments and the Gospel. In this way they will long for fullest union with Jesus Christ, the good Shepherd, who wants permanently to be “one flock and one shepherd” (cf. John chap. 10), being in the unity for which He prayed Father before the Passion, Death and Resurrection.

²⁰ Boris Bobrinskoy, *Împărtășirea Sfântului Duh*, EIBMBOR, București 1999, p. 416.

²¹ Nikos Nissiotis, *Témoignage et service de l'Eglise une par l'Orthodoxie*, în: *Contacts*, 38-39, (1962), p. 201, apud: B. Bobrinskoy, *Împărtășirea Sfântului Duh*, p. 416.

By this innovating power the Christians receive through the Sacraments, they gain a broad perspective of a more profound understanding on the innovator ethos which is inspired and sustained by the grace of God, on the one hand, but which must employ their will to these permanent innovations, on the other hand. In doing so, Christians will be able to notice signs of renewal and deepening of their faith to other Christians beyond the ecclesial canonical boundaries. They will have new experiences and connections to Jesus that will meet other people's feelings, eager to move forward in the life of love and communion with Jesus Christ. In this way, all who believe and affirm that the Logos' Father is the foundation of all created being and wants to save all people and bring them to know the truth (cf. I Tim. 2: 4), using the gifts left by Christ in His Church, all will be found in a growing unity between them, on one hand and between them and Jesus Christ, on the other hand, because they have the same reference point of faith, love and confession: Jesus Christ who is the same yesterday, today and forever" (cf. Hebrew 13: 8).

V. Conclusions

1. Human renewal issue has preoccupied Christian faithful thinking since the beginning of the Church, based on the word of the Gospel, the Apostles and the whole ethos of the new teachings about God, but also the salvation accomplished by the Incarnate Son of God, to lift people to a life of communion with Him, in a dynamic and permanent renewal of human existence.

2. Human renewal process is not only a gift that God offers man as a possibility, but it is also his permanent need because man cannot live in a continuous existential monotony and superficiality. So the renewal God gives meets the believer's aspiration to a deeper life, a spiritual light and communion with God and with others.

3. Christians have a great chance because God gives those means and ways for their wish to renew their life, by which they might renew constantly, and these means are the Sacraments of the Church, the "gates of grace" or "the gates of heaven". This renovating work is available to all the faithful, especially through the Sacraments of Christian initiation so-called by the Orthodox teaching: Baptism, Chrismation and Eucharist.

4. In the life of the Orthodox Church besides the three Sacraments that put human renewal foundation, there are other sacred works, still called Mysteries, which correspond to different needs and ministries in the Church, in the family and society. Through them the faithful climb a spiritual scale in a continuous process of renewal of their lives, working out their own salvation.

5. In this context, the Sacraments have a Trinitarian, Christology, pneumatological, ecclesiological and soteriological dimension. Through them the life of communion and love of the Holy Trinity is shared to the faithful. It was brought to the world through the Incarnation and redemptive work of God's Word, who is present in the world until the end of time, under the form or shape of the church as His Body. Therefore this ecclesial reality has an ecumenical or even universal and cosmic dimension, which prepares "the new heaven and earth" of Jerusalem above (cf. Revelation 21: 1-2).

6. The renewing work of the Sacraments has significance not only for the life of Christians, but also for the life of the world because people who are continually renewed through the Sacraments, become a leaven of renewal for the life of the world in general. Through their life and responsible attitude Christians become a cause for progress on multiple levels. They show a dynamic work in terms of people's lives quality for the good of people, expanding the renewal of their lives to all those they work with, or to whom they talk on multiple levels.

7. Through their renewed lives as Christians, they contribute to deepening their unity in the same Christ faith, who calls all who believe in Him to achieve that unity for which He prayed on the eve of His Passion "that they all may be one; as thou, Father, *art* in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me" (John 17, 21). Today more than ever the actuality of the Christians renewal issue is an imperative in a world that refuses to renew and is hostile to Christ's call to „life renewal" in the love and light of the Gospel and His teaching.