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Baptism and its ecclesial-existential implications in the post-modern world¹

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Abstract

This study highlights the theological-ecclesial-existential implications of the sacrament of baptism as they are perceived and realised in the Christians life in contemporary society. Three manifestations contrary to the ethos of our church experienced in the sacraments were identified, namely idolatry, the privatisation of faith and individualism along with their existential implications. There are also indicated some remedies for these issues, concentrated as following: the reality of the person being in communion, the awareness of Christ's presence in our inside through Baptism and other sacraments and the limits of today's world often confused with absolute and sole reality. The study ends by pointing some co-ordinates of the Church meeting the thinking and challenges of post-modern society and how Christians will have to manifest in this world constantly updating the Baptism gifts and thus imprinting Christ in the consciousness of post-modern world.

Key words:

Sacrament of Baptism, post-modernity, idolatry, individualism, ecclesial-existential implications

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According to the Church teaching, Baptism is the beginning of our mystical union with Christ and our dressing with Him; it is the event that marks our death for the sin and the ontological restoration of our genuine dignity. The Church believes that this Sacrament cannot be reduced to a simple symbol or purification, or a rigid ritual. That is because beyond that and assimilated to Christ's death and resurrection, man is recreated in the integrity of his being thus becoming a "new creation" with new opportunities and possibilities on the road to perfection. "And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus" said St. Paul (1 Cor.6:11). Through Holy Baptism we become from "sons of fallen Adam," "sons of God", from "children of wrath", "children of love", from "sons of darkness", "children of light", bearing a treasure in earthen vessels. Through Baptism we are placed in a new dignity that delimits us from the "old lump", idolatry and devil's work. Union with Christ in baptism means undressing the old man who was subject to sin and death and clothing the new rebuilt man in Christ.

"What a wonderful thing. You stand naked before all and are not ashamed! Indeed, you are like the first Adam, who was naked in heaven, and not ashamed. Then, as you stand naked you were anointed with the holy oil from the head to toe. So you have come to share the good olive tree - Jesus Christ. You have been cut from the wild olive tree, have been grafted into the good olive tree and share the fat of the true olive tree"².

For St. Cyril of Jerusalem, baptism as descending in water of the one being baptized restores Christ's route when He descended in a rock tomb. As Christ rises from this grave the baptized person rises out of the water rises to a new life³. Baptism not only re-establishes man in a new condition, but also gives him a new responsibility. Man is freely made to

² St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Cateheze mistagogice*, II, 2-3, trad. Pr. Prof. Dumitru Fecioru, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 2003, p. 347-348.

³ Idem, *Cateheze*, III, 12, p. 45-46. See also *Cateheze mistagogice*, II, 4, p. 348. "At the same moment you died, but you were born too: and the saving water was your tomb and mother" (4, p 349).

choose between Jesus Christ and the polytheism of the world, between the old man and the new man, between a life in death or a life in Christ, the conqueror of death and hell, between freedom and slavery, between Truth and lie, between life and death. Nicholas Cabasilas did a sacramental synthesis in Eastern and referred to the mystical theme “leather garments” that had fundamental existential and mystical connotations and a double meaning: relativization of the fall and punishment for disobedience. The anthropological and cosmological character of “leather garments” is placed in an ecclesial-sacramental context. On the one hand they are understood as a consequence of sin and on the other hand as a gift of God, which made the fall relative and stopped the eternal dominion of death.

“As for us, stripping us of these leather coats to get back to full nudity, do something else than Adam did, meaning by this that we go back to *the royal robe*, we had at first. In other words, we get right to the first point and the way that Adam turned and fell so low. For you to uncover what’s human in you, signifies to go to the true light without taking something of yours with you. Only the shadow of death, and all that make souls missing the divine rays, just like clothes, put a veil between light and bodies.”⁴

From this perspective, the exclusive service of “leather jackets” is a ministry of “death” rather than of resurrection and “life” in the in which these events have in our church ethos. The Church professes human restoration of the beginning “light clothes” through its sacraments. Man is re-clothed in Christ, re-consecrated in Christ, re-lighted in Christ and he unites with Christ and reconfigures the image of Christ in himself. He receives the pledge of the Spirit and the denial of sin clothes that requires continuous conversion from glory to glory, in a lighter and lighter garment to the final transfiguration.⁵

⁴ Nicolae Cabasila, *Despre viața în Hristos*, I, trad. Pr. Prof. Dr. Teodor Bodogae, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1997, p. 56.

⁵ Cristinel Ioja, *Homo economicus. Iisus Hristos sensul creației și insuficiențele purului biologism*, Editura Marineasa, Timișoara, 2010. Leather clothes “is not the body (soma) of man but they are” biological death “(nekrotes), regarded by the Church Fathers” like second nature after the fall of man. Panayotis Nellas exceptionally highlights the biblical and patristic tradition, showing that “leather garments were added after the fall of man and so they are not a natural constituent of his. What empirical observation called the “naturalness” of man, for biblical and patristic teaching it is a

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However this *materiality* can be transfigured, the man reaching in Christ the first state or even above and acquiring “grace upon grace” in Christ (Jn 1, 16). Christ re-builds and re-dressed man with the first glory and with light coat and man experiences this reality in the church sacraments beginning with Baptism. In the Sacrament of Baptism, the man asks God, by the mouth of the priest: “Vouchsafe unto me a robe of light, O thou who clothest thyself with light as with a garment”. The white garments of Baptism indicate the possibility man receives in Christ to return to the real state of the light body and glory of the Creator, the body that is actually the true nature of man. The distinction between darkness and light, life and death is embodied in the Sacrament of Baptism and continued in the other sacraments of the Church with reference to man and all creation. In Baptism the image and shape of the Godhead imprints on our lives as “we sink into the water just as a helpless and shapeless matter, but when we get out there, go out dressed in a form of unsurpassed beauty”⁶. For the Fathers of the Church, Baptism is a *gift*⁷, but also a *covenant* that requires union with the Giver Who becomes life of our life. If the gift of baptism is perfect, the one who receives it is still not perfect but through synergy - not autonomously - can achieve perfection. The baptized in Christ is called to perfection to give his *work* that he received *power* for and see the *revelation* of Him that dwells within him⁸.

The Fathers likened the baptized to a *temple* as holy sanctuary of body and soul and the *altar* is the table of hope placed in this temple. On it the mind brings and sacrifices the first born thought of each event. This temple, that is man, has a place in the inside of the veil, where Christ entered as the forerunner and he lives in since Baptism. St. Mark the Ascetic shows that this place is “the inner room of the heart, the innermost and most sincere place”. If it does not open we cannot know Him lives in it - Christ⁹.

future state after the fall and not his original and therefore true nature. (See: Panayotis Nellas, *Omul – animal îndumnezeit. Perspective pentru o antropologie ortodoxă*, ed. a II-a, trad. Diac. Ioan I. Ică jr., Editura Deisis, Sibiu, 1999, p. 85-87).

⁶ Nicolae Cabasila, *op. cit.* II, p. 60, 64.

⁷ Sfântul Marcu Ascetul, *Despre Botez*, Filocalia vol. I, trad. Pr. Prof. Dumitru Stăniloae, Editura Harisma, București, 1992, p. 361.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 362.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 354.

Christ's grace given since his baptism and dwelling secretly in the heart in synergy with man's will banishes the "ugly" thoughts. It discovers what man loves "labours because of grace, or thoughts because of pleasure"¹⁰. Heart becomes an area of decanting thoughts and of spiritual ascent of man through Christ's presence in it by baptism. Real Presence of Christ in the baptized also shows that man acquires perfection not alone or on its own, but in synergy, working freely with the *power* given him by baptism. Awareness of the real presence of Christ in us by baptism makes man continue in his heart thinking about the end of life and thus to perfect his life. Mark the Ascetic describes ascetic-mystical movement of the mind in unity with the heart, where Christ dwells through Baptism movement that involves perfection of the human person in synergy with Christ in it. The presence of Christ in the heart called the baptized to Christ's perfect love, identified by "the inner opening of the heart" where Christ entered¹¹. In order to have this experience we need to avoid spreading of thoughts and bodily pleasures. The mind must watch over heart trying to break into its inner cellars where Christ meets, cellars that are the "house of Christ" and which do not receive anything like "the empty things of this world"¹².

To achieve this ultimate goal, the promises of Baptism have to become the rhythm of our daily lives, that we may turn difficult situations of existence in as many events that have at their centre the Resurrection as new life in Christ. The sacraments of Baptism, Chrismation and the Eucharist enable us to leave behind our past life and the multiple variants of idolatry, of individualism and egocentrism that mean so many passionate reporting either to us or the people around us, or to the whole creation. Given this intimate relation between God and man made in the Sacrament of Baptism, and the other sacraments of the Church, idolatry is considered an act of fornication, a rupture of communion proclaimed and deepen in the sacraments of the Church. It is a violation of the covenant of life in which we were integrated and a wilful abandonment of this covenant, such as leaving the communion of the Church and the individualism are considered acts that dilute and even dissolve the Orthodox Christian identity of the human person called to the communion of the Church and perfection by baptism and the other sacraments.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 357.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 366.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 373.

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The situation of the Church in the modern world and contemporary shows a relativization and a growing alienation of these mysterious realities in the consciousness and life of the baptized in the name of the Holy Trinity. So it came as today the ontological implications of Baptism remain irrelevant even though they should take priority in our lives through the continuous incarnation: “birth” - “revival”. Some Christians never discover them or receive them as a simple ceremony or even superstition. Rediscovering the “powers” and the existential meaning given in Baptism to the man is an essential requirement of every Christian who wants perfection. Firstly is required to continually rediscover the meaning of eternal life given to us in Christ through Baptism, human vocation to remain in eternal communion with Christ and the power of man to overcome the wickedness of the world. At the same time in our lives we affirm and confirm the same true God, contrary to the false and ephemeral “gods” of today’s world. Faith received in Baptism is not only of the person, but is primarily the faith of community and of the Church, of the person in the community. Its continuous affirmation means to remain in communion in the Church.

However, not a few Christians are assailed by contrary trends to the ecclesial-existential rhythms they have been absorbed by Sacraments and consciously or unconsciously practice idolatry in their lives, the privatization of faith and individualism. They all are perceived as natural and even life forms proposed in which could reach perfection, understood as self-realization of man on earth.

2.1 Idolatry

Especially the modern era and obviously the contemporary one generate a paradox: the flowering of idolatry in the middle of Christianity. Thus, Christians are challenged to choose again, this time between Jesus Christ and idols of modernity or, more refined, between Jesus Christ and idols of postmodernism. Today most Christians develop a split personality, a kind of duplicitous life, practicing a new kind of polytheism, other than that practiced by pagan nations. That is they both worship the Trinitarian God and the gods created by modern and post-modern world that have

their centre individualism, the thirst for wealth, sexuality in its various aspects, over-technicization of life, the challenges of the information age and the challenges of new religious and spiritual movements¹³.

In the sacraments of the Church, idolatry is disavowed man promising denial of satan and all his work, that is idolatry denial by union with Christ. In the sacramental reality of the Church, man passes from death to life, from darkness to light, leaving behind idolatry as something lifeless, without perspective. The idol is a dead god, a god who did not conquer death and therefore he cannot guarantee life.

Consciousness of union with Christ and denying Satan in the sacraments of the Church begins to relativize today and its relativization results that the majority of Christians no longer note the presence and work of the devil in the world and therefore do not feel the need to abandon his things and work. Furthermore, Christians have forgotten that idol worship is the worship of demons, that Christ freed us from (I Cor. 10, 20-21). Therefore, today, idolatry is not just a result of ignorance or primitivism of some people, but an almost continuous aspect of Christian's life who receive in Christ by Baptism the freedom from idolatry and the power to reject and disavow the practice of idolatry. This is because, being accustomed to the idea that Christianity is part of the world and not including and transforming the world and that the church is not only the expression of religious land values, we no longer notice the obvious idolatry, which determines, directs and submits our whole life, even more than the concrete idolatry of old paganism¹⁴.

Alexander Schmemmann shows that the first Christians lived in a pagan world whose existence was steeped in idolatry, and through sacraments of the Church they give up and renounce all the works of Satan. In modern times, however, the notion of tension or even conflict between Christian faith and the idolatrous world faded into Christian's consciousness. So many Christians are convinced that there is nothing fundamentally negative in our world and it is perfectly possible to accept its way of life, its values and priorities, simultaneously fulfilling religious duties of the Christian¹⁵. In other words, some Christians "censes" both God and the

¹³ Cristinel Ioja, *Homo adorans. Între Iisus Hristos și politeismul lumii contemporane*, Editura Universității „Aurel Vlaicu” Arad, 2008, p. 61.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 84.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 50-51.

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devil, worshipping the Triune God in the Church and the gods created by modern world or, more recently, by neo-paganism with its more refined idols proposed by the new religious movements and the consumer society. In this context the very worship of Christ as “true God from true God” begins to suffer from formalism, exteriorism, and the influences of mysticism and secularization. This attitude is nothing but a new kind of polytheism, a polytheism which this time involves even those who were “born” by abandoning polytheism and denying it, i.e. Christians.

If once in a pagan world, Athens was a city “full of idols” (Acts 17.16) today in “Christian” a world is again a city full of idols, from the idols of objects, riches and things of the world to the idols of ideas, passions and deceit. Somewhere in the outskirts of the city, there is still an altar of “the unknown God” (Acts 17.23), which paradoxically is the God of the Christians, of those baptized in the name of Christ, but who do not know Christ or have forgotten Him through thickets of postmodern idolatry. Moreover, if we analyze the decay of the pagan world pictured by St. Paul in the Epistle to the Romans, we can state without exaggeration the similarity between the behaviour and actions of today’s Christians and pagans of those times, the idolaters, of whom we say did not know Christ:

“...And even as they did not like to retain God in *their* knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient; Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, Backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, Without understanding, covenant breakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful” (Rom., 1: 28-31).

Therefore we are witnessing a new kind of polytheism, a resurgent neo-paganism inside Christianity, in which not only the idols of the nations are silver and gold, but of Christians too.

The idols of the heathen world of yesteryear returned to human life, but this time in a Christian context. The immediate consequence of this reality is that most Christians live a “complex” life which combines in a borderless syncretism Christian life with pagan life, actually leading to nonsense, to a *Christian-pagan life* or a *pagan - Christian life*. However if in polytheism the coexistence of gods was possible, in Christianity things

are quite different: there is no agreement between Christ and Belial that generates and supports idolatry, between Christ and the idols of modernity and post-modernity.

What would be the remedy against idolatry and polytheism which manifests so virulently inside Christianity? The first remedy is the rediscovery of the ecclesial conscience of Christians in the liturgical-sacramental, mystical and ascetic rhythm, meaning to rediscover their spiritual and cultural identity, to the extent they consciously integrate the depth of Church of Christ life. A struggle with the polytheism of contemporary world off the forces which communion of the Church gives us - and we received through the sacraments - is a very difficult battle and often is lost. This is because it is not done in communion with other Christians, as a unifying force in and through Christ, but is done in isolation as an expression of their own views on the strength and experience of the Christian faith in a world of idolatry.

The rediscovery of the ecclesial conscience also means acquiring knowledge that, in Christ, man can have access to the true and ultimate meaning of existence. Without Him man can never escape from the dialectic of death and corruption which so enthusiastically he serves under the influences of consumer society. To remain in idolatry means to remain servant of "leather clothes" servant of the fallen creation and not of the Creator who made us kings over creation. The idolatry and polytheism of contemporary man cannot be defeated only by speeches or intellectualist reflections on them, but by an ecclesiastical life, structured in Christ without idolatry. No remedy against idolatry in its various and refined forms will bring tangible outcomes than the lifestyle of the new reborn in the Church of Christ, life from the Church Life, and known around the world as life in Christ. This awareness does not mean blocking within the walls of the Church in strict separation from the idolatry contemporary society. This consciousness means responsibility towards the contemporary society amidst which Christians are called to ecclesiastically integrate, to assert and confirm their way of life in Christ and so revealing Christ as the true God. Only in this way can we live in the world without becoming its slaves. It is the only way we will manage to show the world the weakness of its "gods" and the life of our God imprinted in our hearts, thoughts, gestures, attitudes, words and deeds.

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2.2. The privatization of faith

Another aspect that we find in the attitudes of many Christians is the so-called privatization of faith. Through an intensive process of privatization of faith as an extension of the religious space of individualism, more than modernity, post-modernity created in the parishes the mental and behavioural frameworks of Christianity without the Church. That means God - Yes, but the Church / hierarchy - no. A new type of Christian appears in addition to the idolatrous that leads a life of duplicity between the Church and the world. He is a Christian who says he believes in God and prays to God, but denies the fundamental role of the Church and its importance of making God present in the world and human life for perfection. Here, we read the Bible, even pray occasionally; we pay the financial obligations for the Church. Let the church pray for us - says many Christians - but you know, we do not go to church, we do not have time or are not interested. Life is organized by the spirit of secular and consumerist society.

Even the Sacrament of Baptism, from a solemn event of the Church, became a sort of private ceremony, lost somewhere in the “penumbra of a corner of the nave”, which of course leaves traces in a register or on a video tape, but never in living memory of the community and by extension in time of the baptized. Moreover, the responsible choice of godparents together with the priest, became today - in many cases - “a purely family affair”, in which event there is no a spiritual dimension or is put on the second place¹⁶. They are godparents who do not even know the symbol of faith, who probably come to church only on major feasts and who spend their lives in fidelity to “other values” than the life of the Church – idolatrous values. The consequences of this situation are: secularization - the phenomenon of Christians without Church – de-sacralisation of Christian life and “re-sacralisation” of life by different esoteric practices and experiences.

The awareness of the multiple implications of the Sacrament of Baptism and of the other sacraments of the Church is closely linked to the way of the authentic Christian living which is strictly delimited from the idolatrous, heretical and schismatic way of life. To privatize faith means

¹⁶ Alexander Schmemmann, *Din apă și din Duh. Studiu liturgic al botezului*, trad. Pr. Prof. Ion Buga, Editura Symbol, 1992, p. 28-33, 58-60, note 4.

to conceive it to our own individualistic and subjective principles and not to the Church norm founded on revelation in Scripture and Tradition. St. Cyril of Alexandria points out that those baptized in the name of the Holy Trinity must tear down any idolatrous reference of their conscience: “You know that those who crossed the Jordan have to abolish the shrines and temples and to demolish the idols and pillars (with their columns) without delay?”¹⁷. The privatization of faith is a consequence of a lack of understanding of the sacraments meaning in personal and community life, a lack of understanding of community and spiritual ethos of the Church. We must know we have the faith to the extent to which we participate to the faith and community experience of the Church. Faith understood otherwise leads to individualism that is contrary - as we see – to the way of ecclesial existence and confession. In this respect, it is necessary to show even those present in the church during divine services that their faith should not act solely personal but equally communitarian, that is personal and communitarian. A faith manifested only personally and not integrated and manifested in the community could become devoid of strength and credibility and could skid at any time to schism or heresy, pietism or secularization. A faith confessed just in the community may cancel the personal implications of confession, the human responsibility and perfection.

The privatization of faith can be overcome by rediscovering authentic manifestation of the person in the community. A person who alienates from the communion of the Church, risks not only to become individual, but also to end in loneliness, a prey of his own views on faith and about how we should relate to faith. Only the reality of the person in communion can give the necessary strength to Church to regain the public territories and turn them into a territory in which Christ is present, alive and active. Baptism gives communion meaning to every human integrated in the Church and the awareness, deployment and dynamic expression of its truth in the world means equipping the world with the meaning of life in Christ, which is actually its meaning given by creation and restoration.

¹⁷ St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Închinarea și slujirea în Duh și Adevăr*, VI, în „Scrieri”, partea I, PSB vol. 38, trad. Pr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru Stăniloae, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1991, p. 181.

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2.3 Individualism

Individualism seconded by selfishness and combined with narcissism and hedonism is an essential feature of post-modern world¹⁸. Through its structure and contents Baptism does not promote, individualism, but communion. It does not promote nor selfishness, narcissism, hedonism or other aspects of fallen man, but asceticism and responsibility for a life in Christ and for the other's lives, created in God's image. However individualism leads to loneliness, and loneliness to the human lack of sense. It gives birth to the monstrosities of human actions in the world and many contemporary tragedies of the man. This is the postmodern human condition that streamlines all the actions of the material life but forgets the spiritual life, the reality and transcendent meaning hidden in creation as God's presence in things.

The sacrament of Baptism deeply acknowledged as sacrament of love and as communion of the Holy Trinity and the baptized can be a remedy against individualism and then against the various passions and irresponsible actions of the contemporary man. Therefore, it is necessary to be aware more and more of the mystery and ecclesial-communion aspect of the sacrament and of *the gifts and the powers* that it gives man united in Christ with the Holy Trinity.

By understanding the gifts and powers that are hidden in this Sacrament - and other alike - people today and especially Christians will realize they are not alone and neither can perfect alone, although postmodern society competes in offers for perfection. People cannot reach perfection through the force of their own individualism and egocentrism that can build a whole world but cannot save it from death and decay. Christians, living in the postmodern world are incorporated by Baptism into the life of the ecclesial community and are called to continue deepening their communion with Christ and with others within that community, which differs from the structure of society composed of individuals. The ecclesial community highlights the value of the person in communion by attending the same truth that transforms and unites people with God and each other. The human community that has not the Truth as essential principle but a lot of truths expressed in egocentric and individualist actions that divide

¹⁸ Dumont Louis, *Essais sur l'individualisme. Une perspective anthropologique sur l'ideologie moderne*, Seuil, Paris, 1983.

people cannot experience profound, inner-lasting and genuine harmony. The model of such unity achieved in Christ is the model of the Saints' unity in Christ. Our Church communities should aim this model, being formed of people called to continually exceed the individualistic and self-centred tendencies.

“Only those who live in Christ and have Christ in them through the Holy Spirit, that is the saints, can build authentic interpersonal relationships creating a unity and a stable and unwavering symphony. This is the miracle of the unity of all the saints, even if they do not know each other even if they live in different times and places. Their inner unity with Christ in the Holy Spirit achieves unity, symphony and consensus among them. Therefore those who fight the saints' fight can reach a true unity and together constitute members of the same body. This unit has in mind the parish life. Individuals who are transformed in persons in Christ constitute a community because by suppressing their individuality they suppress their mass coexistence too. Therefore the parish community (church) is different in its nature from any other human community. The known forms of political regimes (oligarchy, dictatorship, absolutism, etc.) are based on mass coexistence mechanism. Individuals are subject to other individuals exactly as in the jungle empire. The functioning of these companies is expressed by suppression (direct or indirect) of the individual will, by routing up through ideological consciousness and an individual and social behaviour impersonally regulated. The societies working in this way individuals are moved by individual interest. Therefore their usual end is sapping and mutual destruction, even if supporting and serving the same ideology. For as has been said, their shallow and fragile unity cannot overcome individuality and its instinctual and animalistic demands. On the contrary the person cannot submit himself to any regime because by giving himself to the Truth, he participates to the Truth and becomes himself the Truth by grace, making truth and turning his conscience and relations into Christ's conscience and relations”¹⁹.

¹⁹ Gheorghios D. Metallinos, *Parohia – Hristos în mijlocul nostru*, trad. Pr. Prof. Ioan I Ică, Editura Deisis, Sibiu, 2004, p. 42-43.

*Baptism and its ecclesial-existential implications...***3. Church in post-modernity - the confessing attitude of Christians as a baptismal updating**

One of the key aspects of post-modernity is that perfection is individualistically sought outside the personalist-communitarian space of the Church that requires interpersonal relationships between people and between people and God on the one hand. On the other hand, perfection is autonomously sought and sustained by an appeal to some pantheistic and syncretistic practices in the sphere of oriental religions. But one danger propagated by exacerbating the individualism and egocentrism is the attitude of some Christians who regularly attend church but remain individualistic in their manifestations. They talk about communion but remain individualistic or participate in the communion of the Church and even partake the sacraments but remain individualistic outside the place of worship, closed in themselves and unwilling to fellowship and to show the world the mystery of Christ's love and of the undivided Trinity. Over all these individualistic and autonomous trends comes the seeking of human perfection through science and technology, through consumerism or an impassioned exaltation of the body in various idolatrous manifestations and forms.

In this context, the Church continues to become more and more "mysterious" for post-modernism and the post-modernism for the Church, if the former - the Church - will not be able to assert her immortal vision in the heart of post-modernity and thus to decisively and continuously contribute to the healing of the world. Of course we do not understand this healing of the world only by internal positions, as strengthening inside the worship walls and through a "mechanical" observation of the liturgical services, but in an extension of the Church ethos in the world, in the name and with the power of Christ's Resurrection present in the Church and made present through the Church in the world. In this sense, the Church is called to continually affirm who she is and what is her mission in the world and her essential "contributions" *for the life of the world*.²⁰

The meeting between Church and post-modernity happens only in the parish. From here, the Church intensifies her mission to the world.

²⁰ See also Cristinel Ioja, *Homo economicus. Iisus Hristos sensul creației și insuficiențele purului biologism*, p. 177-183.

The parish is the pulse of the post-modernity influences enhanced into the world through individualism, autonomy, idolatry, syncretism or relativism. The problem that concerns the Church in her mission is the way and the conditions many people return to a confused religiousness - some even received Christian baptism - and the rediscovery of religious experience through a process of re-spelling the world as a response of reconsideration the un-spelling of the world specific to modernity. You know, there is one God, many Christians confess; is only God of the Church and of the Bible true? Or: we can worship anywhere because God is everywhere! This is correct, God is everywhere but He is the Truth, and this is the fundamental criterion for we can say that we serve God.

If Orthodoxy failed to win the encounter with modernity because historical conditioning, the last one decisively influencing the mindset and lives of many Christians, it is imperative to mobilize the spiritual and material forces for a constructive dialogue with post-modernity. Why? Because if modernity failed to eliminate religion from the private sphere and eliminated it only from the public places gradually influencing its perception, through more subtle actions, post-modernity makes a caricature of religion, by a relativizing it through syncretism, and by depersonalization its autonomy, through immanent and idolatrous principles.

This dialogue with post-modernity must mean a real encounter of the Church with post-modernity and its challenges. It must be a descending of the Church in the "hell" of post-modernity, dehumanization and idolatry, like Christ descended into hell. It should be a resurrection of the people living this epoch, modelled on Christ's Resurrection present in the Church. The sufferings of post-modern world have not only be signalled by the Church, but also assumed and cured, after the pattern of Christ Who assumed human suffering and healed them. And also following the Christ's model, in post-modernity the Church is called to get out and seek the lost "sheep" in the relative conditionings of history and not wait passively her disappearance.

All this does not mean that the Church is called to give economic and political solutions to the world or replace them, but to inspire them in the spirit and values of Christ's Gospel. The Church does not replace social, political or economic organization, but neither remains impassively to their visions on this organization when they only aim the immanent. Church will be in post-modernity and in all ages, the incarnation of God's

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Kingdom on earth emphasizing eschatological meaning and purpose of all creation in Christ.

“The Church cannot and is not intended to fill all the gaps or voids society. It should not be set up as a political institution to give answers to political problems, nor as a cultural or educational institution that would replace the competent institutions or a legal, economic, social, institution etc., providing unique solutions for these areas. What the Church can and must do is to inspire, not to dominate, to bless creativity and to heal the wounds of personal and collective sins, through the rediscovery of man’s relationship with God as the fundamental relationship of human life and society. So we can say that *the Church should not substitute any social and political institutions, but cannot be replaced with anything as well*. For in everyday life it is the heavenly ligament that gives ultimate meaning to all of our activities; it maintains and cultivates the heavenly light in our earthly life, light that helps us not absolutize anything that is relatively”²¹.

But the Church is not something abstract, but - as said Father Dumitru Stăniloae – the resurrected Body of Christ extended in history and each are members of this Body and go and we are gradually transfigured, in communion with the Holy Trinity, through the sacraments. So the church is a living and dynamic organism. Or, the Church going out in a post-modern world to heal and reintegrate it in the Spirit of Christ means Christians going out in the world, proclaiming to the world the true light and the true faith of the undivided Trinity. This output of Christians into the world with the prospect of the Resurrection imprinted in their lives and being is not only a witness to call the world to Christ, but also the onset of a new awareness of the world towards its purpose, life, limits and joys. This output does not mean geographical expansion or military, but the proclamation of the true life in Christ from the towers of cities’ of the contemporary world. Any conversion which is done after this action will mean indirectly “expansion” of the life of the Church towards universal coverage of the earth.

²¹ IPS Dr. Daniel Ciobotea *Dăruire și dăinuire. Raze și chipuri de lumină din istoria și spiritualitatea românilor*, Editura Trinitas, Iași, 2005, p. 350-351.

Post-modernity is tough and its negative manifestations will overcome and heal not only by words, as skilfully as they are, but mainly through life. Post-modern man is tired of words that do not move anyone anymore. He is thirsty for life, seeks it, but almost doesn't find it any longer to satisfy his personal and communitarian interrogations of existence. His existence is made artificial through ideologies of modernity and post-modernity and in the formalism of community life regularly indexed with a lot of projects that have not the verticality of the human condition. For example, searching for religious experiences, especially among young people, is nothing else than the search for meaning in a world that increasingly loses its meaning. But unfortunately, most of them end up in the net of syncretistic or individualistic esoterism that throws youth into a greater existential confusion, often ending with the suicide. Why? Because these experiences highlight just human nature itself, without any appeal to a distinct personal transcendence, but not separated from His creation.

The background of the experiences that invaded the "market" in the post-modern world is not man's communion with a personal and transcendent God, immanent to the creation. It is the balanced development of the individual in himself, of the mind through meditation, of the senses through psycho-techniques, and of the human being through the discovery of "God" inside man, understood as a process of self-deification. Could not the Church replace these experiences with the experiences of her Saints of all time, their lives, their asceticism and mysticism and especially the experiences of contemporary "Saints"? Of course they are not spectacular and miraculous, in the objectified sense the today world looks for mystery, perfection and God, but they are authentic, real, healthy, edifying and saving.

I think the time will come when people will ask us - as the first Christians, living in a pagan world - where is your God? Show us your God! And an abstract painting in words of our God's image will not be enough. The difference will be painting the image of God, so how can it be painted, in our lives and in our person created in God's image and called to an endless likeness to Him in grace. I think the difference will be made by our lives and our way of life in Him we believe in! Not simply words, but the confession life; not simply a confession from the top lip or the top of the theological science mountains, but only unified with life this is what will bear fruit worthy of salvation.

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The Church is called to affirm the will and plan of God to the world not only in words but also in practice, showing the world the value of the human person in communion and the fundamental soteriological value of human communion with God by reconciling power of Christ's Incarnation, Cross and Resurrection. Even in the post-modern world or especially now, through her Trinitarian life model the Church becomes the premise of any genuine anthropology that understands the human purpose into a historical-eschatological unity, as being created in God's image and called to an endless likeness in grace.

In post-modernity - as in every historical epoch - the Church must enter into an intense process of understanding the world and this requires consultation, cooperation and dialogue with scientists and literate men. She must dialogue with those who "are building" the going of the modern world conceptually and materially, or at least with those close to the Church, who can talk to us about the expectations of the world, its complexity and vulnerability. They will help us to find a suitable language for the Church to speak to the world about Christ as the Way, Truth and Life. This "partnership" between the Church and Society is not something abstract, but should function in each parish. This requires a continuous responsibility of the laity of each parish, a responsibility for the Church's mission in the world, that everyone is called to do in society at the height of his position, the confession of each person counting equally.

It's about mutual accountability so that parish, as a space of mission of the Church in the world to become a place of meeting of the Church with the world and the world with the Church, avoiding separation, confusion or dissolution. The only witness of Christ in the Church is not sufficient nor the dissolution Christ's testimony in the world without the Church is not desirable, but we should start from the Church as presence and living of the Trinity to the world, so the world can experience Christ's Sacrifice and Resurrection for its transfiguration. At Liturgy the bishop or priest pray not only for their parish or diocese, but their prayers have an opening and universal coverage, they pray for the life of the world.

The answer to these challenges will not be given from an abstract and difficult doctrinarism, but from the positions of a living testimonies and quality of life in Christ. The Church, her life and tradition should be embodied in living and concrete examples open to the dialogue with the people of the 21st century and the current cultures, religions, societies and

conceptions of life, in an existential and contextual language with universal implications.

It requires a continuous self-definition, integrated in the inner life, a self-definition centred in the authentic apostolic tradition that experiences and presents Christ as true God and man. We need to show the world that our faith in Jesus Christ is all that man can experience better here on earth, beyond ideologies and experiences proposed by various religions of modernity and post-modernity. We also have to show the world that we feel that in Christ we do not die with each passing day, but we live, we are built and renewed in our inner man to eternal life.