

Paul Evdokimov, *The Mystery of Love. The Holiness of Marital Union in the Light of the Orthodox Tradition*, București, Sophia Printing House, 2016, 247p.

Paul Evdokimov wrote these pages thinking about an approach to the mystery of the marital union from a sacramental point of view, thus the book presented here being the first one of the two books “The Mystery of Love” and “The Woman and the Salvation of the World”- as it is announced in the preface by Olivier Clément.

Even from the very beginning of the book, the author brings about the idea that above all the rules and social practices existing along the history of mankind, Christianity was able to bring about a balance in the relationship between man and woman, as a pair, that is why in the part named “little history”, the ideas, that have freedom within a legal context as a foundation are emphasized, but they ignore the value of man as a dual person, where the soul may become too “physical”.

In the past, the woman’s condition depended on a special morality, which imposed rules that the society was used to, but which removed the role “destined” to the woman in the salvation of mankind, keeping her away from the primordial order of “growth”, valid even after the “fall”. Two meanings are remembered here, meanings that are connected to the woman’s role, being partner in procreation, respectively a way of marital life where the original sin leaves a mark in the physiological. “The Myths” show that there was always existed a conflict which hasn’t ended and which spoiled a love that has never ever been understood. The woman is in reality receptive at the call to save the world. Mother and wife, ready to suffer and work within the realm of grace, willing to live a life of privation, like the monastic life.

At meetind God, the woman is maternal and beseeching, ready to settle the lost man’s century old conflict, having the intuition of winning and eliminating the evil. Man’s ascension towards God brings about a new

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dignity in “the mystery of love”, which can take the shape of a continuous reciprocal cognition, of pure union, pushing the couple toward a new phase of an era that represents a new beginning.

“Anthropology”, unveiled through divine “philantropy” brings into discussion the human person in God’s own image, coparticipant to the act of elevation, through to free will towards God-Man, in a period of time in which even failure may be possible. But Christ achieves the restoration of the fallen nature, The Holy Spirit gives us a strength and enlightens us and The Sacraments nourish and provide for us up to eternity. This could be the vocational way destined for us. A liturgical life legitimates us and directs us towards Him, because the Church is “mystagogical”.

In the part entitled “Marriage and the Monachal State”, the author compares the two ways of life, but he considers them to be very closely related because of the final purpose they aim at. The way is narrow for all, judgement will be passed on all of us, according to what each of us has chosen consciously and with a vow. Getting to know life as it is, with its ups and downs, comes with time, as long as we shed our selfishness and we suffer under new circumstances, which we may have not anticipated, at the beginning.

There are some names of people recalled, people who were models and advisors, and who had left in history good teachings connected with man’s work with Grace, in practicing virtues: The Saints Antonie, Pahomie, Ioan Scărarul, Maxim Mărturisitorul, Grigorie de Nyssa. They speak about an ascetism for each of us, possible only when we want to live “a life in Jesus Christ” (N. Cabasila), with his rules.

In “The Imperial Priesthood of the Believers”, Paul Evdokimov attracts the attention upon the fact that the participation at Christ’s Priesthood belongs to the baptized, who sacrifice themselves through a life led according to the christic pattern. This dignity is under the seal of the Holy Grace, it is full of Grace and Christ at the same time, therefore imperial, priestly and prophetic, that is, after the three major directions of activities in the world done by Jesus Christ.

A vocation - in which the man has freedom at his disposal and he consents to a together- working with God, in a pastoral way, not running away from the “necessary” imperfections, finding suitable solutions and accepting sometimes, the fall, the temptations- is a theme elaborated through real moral conclusions, with examples from the domains that study the

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soul: theology psychology and philosophy. Till the end, we all are searching knowledge, but as we can find in the teachings of the Biblical texts, it will have to be a holz, superior and useful one for our redemption. And the salvation cannot be achieved with our own powers, but always having God and our fellow men in mind, in a “transparancy of self-sacrifice”.

In “Love and Love’s Mystery”, a larger space is conferred to some meanings and conclusions of man and woman’s harmonious living together. Tey are taken from the works and thoughts of different authors, philologists, philosophers, theologists like: Plato, Shakespeare, Ramuz, Gabriel Marcel, Gogol, Dostoievski. The suffering of loneliness, in a world in wich God has brought to life a conjugal human being, “curious” about the other, creates an onthological break. The whole approach under the spirit of Christ towards an optimal reciprocal comprehension has already happened, and the icon of The Holy Trinity reflects the married man in the best way. Marriage strengthens this meanings of the communion as a “reminiscence” of life in Heaven, by anamnesis, up to Jesus Christ, and as a reintegration in the moral law, after the Ascension, by the monogamic state. The presence of Christ is considered to be the presence of the Church in each family, and the family is a little Church itself. Love in this family has two dimensions: love for for God and for each other, joyful in Grace.

In several pages, there is a presentation of the Marriage “ritual”, in the Byzantine rite, followed by a commentary which might be the teaching word for this sermon, and which express- to the bride and bridegroom, Godfather and Godmother and to the people present-, the importance of this unique act and the dignity and confiance the two get, by wearing the imperial garlands and by beginning a new missionary life, a life of apostolate and testimony so as to promote faith.

The last but not least part brings about the problem of sexuality and chastity in the family. In a few sentences, Paul Evdokimov explains the meaning of some ideas belonging to some essential theologists, regarding the evangelical text, in connection with any kind of imoral attitude exercised by the wedded couple. An exaggerated disregard, a hostile rigour shown by some people versus the sin, whether consented or not, makes us judge our peer, more than Christ had, which is a very blamable, noteducational thing. Any way of thinking is not perfect in this discussion, because, as viewed from the outside, we are not able to perceive the cleanliness or piety of the marial couple. Like in monahism, in the married laic life,

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a virtuous life can be led, even in our present days. Imagination versus awakening in prayer and in the presence of grace, lust versus abstinence are presented through the angle of the presence of a consciousness which draws the attention not to “travel” having unclean thoughts.

In the delicate problem of controlling and limiting child birth, the conclusion is a recommendation, not easy at all, having moral implications; it refers to mastering and accepting the religiosity state, specific for our level of human beings endowed with consciousness and free will.

The book ends with some canonic data, which are important for the matrimonial legislation, in agreement with the old dogmas and decisions of the synods or of some canonists of the Church, data referring to divorce, restrictions, remarriage.

It is worthwhile for the author to draw a conclusion here, one taken from a series of meditation, a principle of indissolubility: “In the laws of marriage, the mutual well-being is more important than the personal one”.

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