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Ecclesiological Aspects in the Theology of Father Justin Popovitch

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Abstract

In this study I have tried to show that Father Justin’s ecclesiological reflections are concretized in the theological meditations of the Christ-Saviour, the head of the Church, where the Church has its being from, which determined it to affirm the identity between the Church and the dead and resurrected Christ, elevated to heaven; in accord with the patristic choir of Church Tradition, the Serbian dogmatist speaks of the Church as the Body and icon of Christ and interprets the theandric nature of the Church in analogy with the divine and human beings of the incarnate Lord. In his ecclesiological meditations, we discover a preeminence of the divine nature of the Church towards its understanding as a sociological reality of the people gathered in the same faith, the external structures of the Church playing an almost inconsistent role in Father Justin’s ecclesiology. We then emphasized that the relationship of people with Christ is central to the thinking of the Serbian theologian, because in the ecclesial Body of the Incarnate Lord, people are saved through the sacramental and pneumatical life of the Church. It continues the soteriological work of Christ in history through the deifying work of the Spirit, its living members participating in the being of the Church through the mysterious incorporation in Christ, which is identical to the ecclesial incorporation, Christians becoming christophors.

Keywords

Ecclesiology, theandric, incorporation, Holy Spirit

*Ecclesiological Aspects in the Theology of Father Justin Popovitch***I. Jesus Christ, the God-Man, and the Church**

In the fourth volume of his Dogmatics (the French version) dedicated to the Church as “*The Mystery of Christ*”, the Father Justin emphasizes the idea that the Mystery of the Church is the result of the union of the mystery of God that enters in our historical temporality and the mystery of man, because the God-Man is the Church and “*all divine powers have become forever the powers of the Church,*” Christ-Lord becoming everlasting Hypostasis of it¹: “*The Church is the extraordinary and unrepeatable entity in all the worlds; the Church is the God-Man Christ in all the fullness of all His properties and His divine-human perfections ... it is the mystery of the sacraments, the holy of holies, the gospel of the Gospels (светојна - svetajna, свесветнија - svesvetinja, светлавоост - sveblagovest), mystery hidden from God because of our sins and death, and now revealed by Christ to His saints ... The Church is the divine purpose and meaning of all worlds and beings ... the temple of God and the divine dwelling of the Most Holy Trinity, ‘the Body of the Trinity’, in which all of them live by the Father through the Son in the Spirit Holy*”².

The plenitude of the divine-human Body of the Church lives through the vivifying and eternal powers of the incarnate Logos through whose death, resurrection and ascension to the heavens the eternal purpose of the Trinity was achieved through the Church. It becomes thus the purpose and the whole and unique meaning of existence, because in it God truly blessed us “*with all spiritual blessing*” (Eph 1, 3) and in it Christ has made all human beings to conform Him, to live in the Spirit, becoming pneumatofore and to remain in the communion of trinitarian love, because in this ineffable mystery of the Church, “*time stands in the place and the interruption of earthly life by death does not interrupt the living relationship of generations*”³.

¹ Père Justin Popovitch, *Philosophie orthodoxe de la vérité. Dogmatique de L’Eglise Orthodoxe*, traduit du Serbe par Jean-Louis Palierne, préface de Monseigneur Athanase Jevtitch, introduction de P. Patric Ranson, Tome quatrieme, collection *La Lumière du Thabor*, Ed. L’Age d’Homme, Paris, 1995, p. 4.

² Arhim. Justin Popovitch, *Ecclesiological Chapters 43*, in “Omul și Dumnezeul-Om. Abisurile și culmile filozofiei / Man and God-Man. The holes and the heights of philosophy”, Editura Deisis, Sibiu, 1997, p. 196.

³ George Florovsky, *Ocav Dom*, in “Hriscanski Zivot”, 1925, p. 358, apud Justin Popovitch, *Valoarea supremă și criteriul ultim în Ortodoxie / The supreme value and*

Undoubtedly, for the Serbian dogmatist, the Orthodox Church preserves the integrity of the divine-human truth of Revelation, guarding it intact by “*the theandrical methodology of the Apostles and the ecumenical synods*”, and especially because “*the God-Man is left in the world, as the Church, Himself, the Church being nothing but God-Man prolonged in all ages*”⁴. In this sense, the mysterious space of the Church becomes a “*divine-human workshop*” in which people, incorporated in Christ through the Sacrament of Baptism and by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, through the sacraments and evangelical virtues, are called “*to divine-humanized, in the love of God by grace ... because Christ is in the Church by the Holy Spirit and the Church is in Christ through the same Holy Spirit*”⁵. At Pentecost, Christ “*baptized*” the Church with His Spirit, for now, the new community, in love, to permanently create the work of Christ through the work of the Spirit upon those who are to be incorporated into it by faith and by the pnevmatological water of Baptism; also, through the sacramental celebration of the Eucharist, the dead and resurrected Lord extends His pnevmatized Body and builds up in the souls of the faithful, in the divine-human body of His Church, thus discovering the “*Eucharistic nature of the Church*”, and at the same time that “*the body of the incarnate Lord, taken from the Most Holy Mother and from the Holy Spirit, His Eucharistic Body, and His Mystical Body, the Church, is a unique and omnipotent Body*”⁶.

In ecclesiological thought of Father Justin, life in the Church is a trinitarian communion with the Father, through the Son, in the Holy Spirit, the Church being trinitarian both in its being and in its ministry, and because of this trinitarian, “*every member of the Church lives in grace the trinitarian life ... because the Church is the place of the Holy Trinity ... by continually*

ultimate criterion in Orthodoxy, in “*Omul și Dumnezeu-Om...*”, p. 131.

⁴ Justin Popovitch, *Philosophie orthodoxe de la vérité...*, tome quatrième, p. 7.

⁵ Justin Popovitch, *Biserica ortodoxă și ecumenismul / Orthodox Church and Ecumenism*, trad. by Adrian Tănăsescu, editura Sophia/Fundația Iustin Pârnu, Mănăstirea Sfinții Arhangheli - Petru Vodă, 2012, p. 8, 12. Father Justin keeps this balance of alterity in the ecclesial space, of the personal-catholic work of its members, in the chalcedonian christological key, because in the Church „*it is perfected both the individual through the community and the community through the individual, outside the Church there is neither real community nor true people; in the Church all are catholic, but they are all personal, each lives in all and everyone in each*”, cf. arhim. Justin Popovitch, *Ecclesiological Chapters 31, 33*, in “*Omul și Dumnezeu-Om...*”, pp. 189, 190.

⁶ Justin Popovitch, *Biserica ortodoxă și ecumenismul*, p. 34.

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*trinitarianing us through the grace of the holy Mysteries and the sacred virtues of the Church, because the tremendousness is the measure of ecclesiastical, the seal, and its character*⁷. This communion in love with the Trinitarian Persons is effected in the Church through the gifts and mutual relations of believers, used to service all, through the “*divine-human powers of the Church of Christ, which sanctify and dignify us*”, that is, *grace as the trinitarian energy coming from the Father through the Son in the Holy Spirit*”. In the Church, we live the life of the Saviour in its fullness, in its fullness; the church life is the participation in this catholic prayer, “*together with all the saints*” and to this communion also participates the creation, called to be church (cf. Co 1, 18)⁸. For the Serbian theologian, life in the Church is a communion life of all visible and intelligible beings, and there is no separation between the “*unseen and the seen Church*” as in the dogmatic textbooks of school: “*In the catholic life of the Church interweave the life of the angels and men, to those who repent and sinners, to the righteous and to the unjust, to those who died and to those who live on the earth, because we all grow together to become a holy place in Lord (Eph 2, 21), being partakers of one and the same divine-human life of the Church*”⁹. Therefore, the true mission of the Church is to grow us spiritually to the “*stature of the perfect man*” (Eph 4,13), christomorphizing us through the work of the Spirit, and avoiding “*conforming to the spirit of the age, but adapting it to the spirit of Christ’s eternity, the supreme value and the infallible measure of all things*”¹⁰.

As regards the attributes of the Church, its uniqueness is a natural consequence of the unity and uniqueness of the Person of Christ, and in it all beings, “*whole and untouched, are united in an organic and graced form, in one God-human body, under one Head, God-Man, Christ, through one grace of the Holy Spirit and through the intercession of the Holy Mys-*

⁷ Justin Popovitch, *Ecclesiological Chapters* 57, in “Omul și Dumnezeu-Om...”, p. 205.

⁸ Justin Popovitch, *Ecclesiological Chapters* 39, in “Omul și Dumnezeu-Om...”, p. 194.

⁹ Justin Popovitch, *Biserica ortodoxă și ecumenismul*, p. 26. The ecclesial unity of those embodied in the incarnate Son of God is given by our bodily quality of Christ, and so we live through the „*holy and catholic faith of the Church through its holy and compassionate mind through the holy and courageous will and conscience of the Church ... being organically linked with the holy apostles, martyrs, confessors, and all the angelic powers of heaven*”, p. 27.

¹⁰ Iustin Popovitch, *Valoarea supremă și criteriul ultim în Ortodoxie*, in “Omul și Dumnezeu-Om...”, p. 139.

teries and the holy good deeds”¹¹; in the same sense, Saint Maximus the Confessor states that in the Church, under the providential leadership of the Trinity, all people become as one nature, as one will, through the unity of the Spirit. The being unity of the Church is also given by the fact that it represents the totality of the gifts that Christ offers to its members, because *“the ontology of their faith is also the ontology of the Church”*, being one of its divine-human, but simultaneous, multiple in terms of its members, in the image and the trinitarian resemblance.

As a *“divine-human workshop of sanctification of men”*, the Church is nothing else but Christ, becoming a Church by His incarnation, dedicating the Church through His Passion, Resurrection and Ascension, in other words, through all His theandric economy. Father Justin emphasizes that *“the divine-human nature of the Church itself is Catholic and universal in itself ... and in its theandric body, every believer lives in full his own personality, as a living cell, in the image of the Trinity ... and lives theandric after grace”*¹². In fact, the divine-human catholicity of the Church represents an incessant christomorphizing of man by grace of deifying and virtue, for *“the divine-human person of Christ is the soul of the Church’s catholicity, which always preserves the divine-human balance between divinity and humanity in catholic life of the Church, too full of Christ ... this catholicity is expressed by the holy apostles, the holy Fathers and the holy ecumenical and local synods”*¹³.

The question of Catholicity is defining and central to Christianity, where nothing is secondary, because in the liturgical and sacramental cult of the Church, the authentic Christian does not find any superficial and inappropriate word or gesture, even if they are repetitive; even the word *“catholicity”*, which is found in the Symbol of Faith and is repeated, *“remains mysterious and contains the absolute truth of faith”*. The Serbian dogmatist emphasizes the Trinitarian aspect of Church Catholicity, for the Holy Trinity *“represents at the same time the ideal and perfection of Catholicity, perfectly realized”*; if the first eight articles of the Creed speak of the Persons of the Holy Trinity, the ninth is ecclesiological, because the Church is *“the image and likeness of the Holy Trinity on earth, its terrestrial aspect”*. Although Catholicity is often *“geographized”*, in Orthodox

¹¹ Justin Popovitch, *Philosophie orthodoxe de la vérité...*, tome quatrième, p. 179.

¹² Justin Popovitch, *Biserica ortodoxă și ecumenismul*, p. 39.

¹³ Justin Popovitch, *Philosophie orthodoxe de la vérité...*, tome quatrième, p. 183.

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conception, it is not a topographic or geographic concept, but it has inner connotations, fullness of completeness based on the total confession of faith in the ontological unity of the Church, a holy and apostolic unity¹⁴. Father Justin also speaks of a “*praying Catholic*” because in the divine-human Body of the Church, all believers who are embodied in Christ by the work of the Spirit are a heart in the theandrical chorus of the confession of faith through the sacraments and sacred virtues. Every believer has this sense of Catholicity, because he always feels the holiness of the Body and the Head of Christ; the mysteries and virtues and, above all, prayer that “*unites man with the God of virtues, His Mother and all the saints and every cell of the divine-human Body of the Church, and this catholic life in and through prayer prolongs without cessation through the theandric life of the Church. The life in prayer of the Church is constantly flowing through the Synod of Angels and Archangels, through the Synod of the Apostles and the Holy Fathers, through the Synod of all saints and Orthodox believers*”¹⁵. Moreover, Father Justin considers that time itself is imprinted with catholicity, because in the Church the time of the apostles is as lively and present as our time, as all the epochs that have succeeded from the Apostolic to the present remain alive and current in the Tradition of the Church: “*in the Church, all time and all ages incorporate us and vivify us for eternity, because of divine-humanity that represents the being of the Church and all that is ecclesial; in fact, we are the heirs of all the epochs and moments that followed us ... the time in the Church of Christ is an ever-present past that is heading for the future to be accomplished in eternity*”¹⁶.

In the opinion of the Serbian dogmatist, the self-consciousness of the Church of Christ is always fundamentally Catholic because it manifests itself in the category of divinity-humanity, the incarnate Lord being the guarantee of the unity and uniqueness of this self-consciousness as its Head and , moreover, this integral catholicity finds its divine expression in the ecumenical Councils, expressing “*the whole divine-human and trinitarian Truth of the Church*”; the same catholicity is also expressed in the canons of the Church, considered “*the holy guardians of the holy dogmas, of the holy mysteries of divine-human Orthodox faith, being indispens-*

¹⁴ Justin Popovitch, *Philosophie orthodoxe de la vérité...*, tome quatrieme, p. 187.

¹⁵ Justin Popovitch, *Philosophie orthodoxe de la vérité...*, tome quatrieme, p. 189.

¹⁶ Justin Popovitch, *Philosophie orthodoxe de la vérité...*, tome quatrieme, p. 192.

able for the being of the Church”; in the Church of Christ, we always live with “*all the saints*” (Eph 3, 15) and everything that belongs to us is transformed into the divine-human catholic body of the Church, living in the apostolic and patristic life, and so are all “*embedded in Christ... each Christian becoming a divine-human conscious being*”¹⁷.

Referring to the apostolicity of the Church, Father Justin emphasizes the connection and graceful continuity between Christ and His apostles, who extend through their life and activity the divine-human life of the Master. This theandrical apostolicity is passed on to successors of Christ in His Church, for “*by the holy Fathers the holy apostles extend with all divine-human riches ... having a permanent apostolic action, as private divine-human personalities as bishops of local Churches and as members of the holy ecumenical and local councils*”¹⁸. The Serbian theologian considers the Fathers of the Church “*the keepers of the Apostolic Tradition ... witnesses of the One Truth, God-Man ... the golden mouths of God-the Word*”. The apostolic succession is from the beginning to end the divine-human, and the inheritance that the apostles leave to their descendants is no other than “*the God-Man with all the eternal riches of His Person, and if it does not, be an apostolic succession and there would be no Tradition, Hierarchy and Apostolic Church*”¹⁹. For Father Justin, the Apostolic Divine Tradition is the very Gospel of Christ, which the Holy Ghost perpetuates in the soul of every believer and the whole Church, the life of Christ in its fullness in the life of Christians embedded in the Church through the pneumatical work of the Spirit through the holy Mysteries through the

¹⁷ Justin Popovitch, *Philosophie orthodoxe de la vérité...*, tome quatrième, p. 199.

¹⁸ Justin Popovitch, *Biserica ortodoxă și ecumenismul*, p. 41. In this sense, Father Justin remembers St. John Damascene, who attests to the recognition of the apostolic tradition of ecclesial tradition when he states that „*everything that has been passed to us through the Law and prophets, as well as by the apostles and evangelists, we receive them, we also recognize them we honor more than all, and we do not want anything else; we will delight in them and preserve them, without moving the boundaries of the old ones or damaging the Divine Tradition*”, cf. *De fide I, 1*, in PG 94, 792 A. The same John Damascene addresses all Orthodox when he says: „*this is why, my brothers, to stand on the stone of faith and in the Tradition of the Church, without moving the boundaries set by our holy Fathers, nor letting those who they want to introduce innovations and ruin the edifice of the holy, universal and apostolic Church of God; for if every one goes according to his will, little by little, the whole body of the Church will be broken*”, cf. *De imaginibus orationes tres III, 41*, in PG 94, 1365 CD.

¹⁹ Justin Popovitch, *Philosophie orthodoxe de la vérité...*, tome quatrième, p. 202.

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holy divine virtues. The Apostles are the most convincing witnesses of the divine Truth, the apostolic mission being a divine-human gift, which consists in receiving from God all the theandrical powers of all the divine iconomy (cf. Ga 1, 6-9); the apostolate is always “*the seal of the apostle in the Lord*” (1Co 9, 2), as St. Maxim the Confessor confesses, “*whoever receives the apostles receives Christ and the God Who sent Him*”, the apostolate whom the holy Fathers appropriated in their life and mission, for all “*apostolic acts form the soul of their soul*”.

In the ecclesiological approach to Father Justin’s theology, we find impressive pages about the “*praying theology of the Church*”, where the Serbian theologian points out that prayer marks the attitude and language used by the Church in the presence of the Trinitarian God Who reveals itself through the Incarnate Logos; in the ecclesial mysterious space, inexhaustible in concepts, the man, oriented towards God, adopts an attitude of prayer and repentance, a peace of soul, for “*theology in prayer reveals to us the All-true Truth, incarnate in the Eucharist, as the fullness of the Church, Christ The living, Who is divine-humanization and our treimification*”²⁰.

The Serbian dogmatist emphasizes the necessity of each christian’s ecclesial existence for his evangelical life, because Christ is in it through his theandrical work and through sanctified remedies against sin; that is why for the erudite theologian there is no christian life outside the Body of Christ, Who is at the same time God-Man with the body in heaven and in His Body, the Church, on earth, this being the greatest mystery of all existence (cf. Eph 5,32); its unique purpose is to incorporate and orient itself towards a total logosic unity, churching (**уцркви и оцркви**), and divino-humanizing (**уборочовечи и оборочовени**) creation in its fullness²¹. In fact, everything was created to become a Church in which everything comes and exists from its Head, God-Man, the Church being the fullness of Himself, as the incarnate Logos is its accomplishment: “*God-Man is the total plenitude that remains in a lasting way in his divine-human Body, the Church ... and this fullness feels every member of the Church as his,*

²⁰ Justin Popovitch, *Philosophie orthodoxe de la vérité...*, tome quatrieme, p. 219.

²¹ Speaking of the logical finality of creation, Father Justin shows that since the incarnation of the Son of God and the foundation of the Church as His Mystical Body, the mystery of the whole existence, which has become the Church, in which there is “the logosic unity and the universal logosic purpose, first of all those of God and of man, and then of all things that are in heaven and on earth”, Justin Popovitch, *Philosophie orthodoxe de la vérité...*, tome quatrieme, p. 37.

for eternal life ... it is a living reality at the same time divine and human, heavenly and earthly”²². But to live this mysterious ecclesial fullness, Father Justin insists on the ascetic realization of our purified senses, when “our mind is co-incarnated in the divine-human reason of the Church, to be sanctified and transfigured, and to come to the absolute certainty that in the Church are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Co 2, 3), concerning God, life, the world and eternity”²³.

This is what the Serbian dogmatist explains why the Church is not a simple human society in which its members are united in a certain manner but is a divine-human organism, a living body in which people are conebodied, united by the deifying work of Holy Spirit and in them there is only “one love and one eternity ... in which men become the beneficiaries of the divine promises made in Christ (2 Co 1, 20)”. This is achievable, because in the Church everything is divine-human: first and foremost God, and then man, who could not live an evangelical life without and could not progress in it without the graceful support of the treimic divine work; “the Holy Spirit is, confesses Father Justin, who offers to the believers the blessed powers necessary to be able to live perseveringly in Christ through His Gospel, and to raise the inner man in Christ’s eternal image, to think, to advance and to accomplish all salvation works through Him”²⁴. At the same time, the Serbian theologian expresses the fact that, in the theandrical space of the Church, we acquire spiritual knowledge on the ineffable Lord’s iconomy only in communion with “all the saints” and by acquiring the quality of pneumatophor; in this way, “in progressive union with God-Man, through the grace and through the sacred virtues, the theophors come to live and know what is Christ’s only by the Catholic spirit of the Church, feeling the catholic heart of the Church and living in its Catholic life”²⁵. In this holy communion, we are partakers of the Body and Blood of Christ in the Holy Eucharist, becoming, through this con-corporality and consanguinity, participants in the divine-human life of the Lord; this communion is necessary, because salvation consists in “the unceasing living of the Lord, through the holy virtues, through the sacred Mysteries, and above all through the Baptism, through which we are incorporated and

²² Justin Popovitch, *Philosophie orthodoxe de la vérité...*, tome quatrieme, p. 40.

²³ Justin Popovitch, *Philosophie orthodoxe de la vérité...*, tome quatrieme, p. 53.

²⁴ Justin Popovitch, *Philosophie orthodoxe de la vérité...*, tome quatrieme, p. 96.

²⁵ Justin Popovitch, *Philosophie orthodoxe de la vérité...*, tome quatrieme, p. 100.

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assimilated into the Church (*уцрквљује и оцрквљује*), making us constituent parts of the divine-human body of the Lord²⁶. Recognizing Christ by experiencing life in Him in the space of the Church, we live the power of our death and resurrection, the Lord sharing ourselves with them; being a Christian and an authentic member of the Church means, according to Father Justin, to know Christ, in order to be able to become a partaker of his whole saving and sanctifying iconomy: “we can not recognize the saving power of the sufferings of Christ (cf. Fil 3, 10) than if we live in them, if we take part in them and preserve the communion with them, these being indispensable and of infinite importance for the iconomy of salvation ... because only in the Church we can fully live Christ; in one word, christianity is an incessant experience of Christ’s life from the beginning to the end ... our hristification”²⁷.

In this sense, the serbian theologian develops the so-called “*philosophy after Christ*”, which is the impress in our Christian existence the divine-human traits of the Lord, who took the image in the us since Baptism through our ecclesial incorporation in the Holy Spirit; through God-Word, our thinking is logosic, living “*the nostalgia of heaven*”, being the first and only happiness of man, because “*Christ revealed the whole divine mystery of human thought, which is essentially the first good original (прваблабовест) and the protoevangelia (првоеванђеље)*”²⁸; therefore, for Father Justin divine-humanizing man by hristomorphizing his life and “*treimifying*” the entire existence is the effect of the ascetic and mystagogical work of Christ and the Spirit in the theandrical space of the Church upon those who are living through evangelical deeds and holy virtues. In the Church, the Christians restored and recapitulated in their head, Christ the Lord, teach the incessant prayer (cf. 1 Tes 5, 17), “*which flows from the Church’s prayer, prayer which involves first of all, the participation of all beings to the communal prayer with all the saints; by acquiring this*

²⁶ Justin Popovitch, *Philosophie orthodoxe de la vérité...*, tome quatrieme, p. 121.

²⁷ Justin Popovitch, *Philosophie orthodoxe de la vérité...*, tome quatrieme, pp. 133, 147: „if a man is a Christian, Father Justinus confesses, he searches for what Christ possesses and distributes to His disciples, which means that the man must do all that the Lord has given us as God-Man, becoming a Church ... because He wants all that is His to become yours”.

²⁸ Justin Popovitch, *Philosophie orthodoxe de la vérité...*, tome quatrieme, p. 150.

predisposition of prayer, all members acquire an evangelical experience in relationship with one another"²⁹.

For Father Justin, this spiritual state made by man through the "divine partnership" with the Spirit is possible by identifying the Body of Christ with the Church; through His incarnation, God-Man became the Church and the full Truth for the whole of existence, "in order to logosificate, to divine-humanize and to deify in Himself and through Himself man and the Church; from His incarnation and His coming to earth, He is present through and within us in his divine-human plenitude, in theandrical Body of the Church, as in us, who as participants of this Body live this fullness, a lesser or greater measure, according to our endeavour in faith and in all other holy evangelical virtues ... for the Body of Christ assumed by the Virgin, His Eucharistic Body, as well as His Divine-Human Body, the Church, is ultimately analysis, one Body, unique and saving"³⁰.

The ecclesiological reflections of Father Justin so far analyzed show that he depicts the Church in an ideal form, emphasizing only its divine-human aspect which is the essence of its ecclesiology, which determines us to observe that a concrete form of Church structure does not play a special role for the erudite Serbian theologian. The christocentrism of his ecclesiological meditations and the soteriology's emphasis on the Church's being are decisive for Father Justin, that any question about the Church's hierarchy, its social organization, and the Mysteries remains for him of secondary importance.

Ecclesiology of Father Justin contains isolated observations about the Church, not describing in any way the social or historical structures of the Church, but merely gives us only the spiritual perspective of his christocentric theology on the Church, which influences not only ecclesiology but is decisive for the whole theology of the Serbian dogmatist. What can easily be observed in the christological-ecclesiological approach of the Serbian dogmatist is the similarity that he makes between Christ and the Church, underlining the fact that "the Church is God-the Christ man prolonged through all ages and for all eternity ... the Second Hypostasis of the Most Holy Trinity, the Hypostasis God-Word, becoming Man, remained in our earthly world and in all worlds as the God-Man = the Church"³¹. If

²⁹ Justin Popovitch, *Philosophie orthodoxe de la vérité...*, tome quatrième, p. 164.

³⁰ Justin Popovitch, *Philosophie orthodoxe de la vérité...*, tome quatrième, p. 166.

³¹ Justin Popovitch, *Biserica ortodoxă și ecumenismul*, p. 5.

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the Church is identical to Christ, then this identity is a consequence of the incarnation of the Son of God, and Father Justin does not lay the act of salvation by God-Man in the foreground, but, to some extent, the concrete realization of this salvation through and in the Church. This means that, in the ecclesiological view of the erudite professor, the Church obtains salvation in the same way as Jesus Christ, since the Church is understood to be the presence of Christ in the world after His death, resurrection, and ascension. The Church is not only a “*instrumentum salutis*”, a soteriological means, but it is the God-Man as an embodiment of salvation itself, because, according to Father Justin, “*the Lord is not simply present in the Church but He is the Church in the extent to which the new humanity can only be the divine-humanity of Christ*”³².

When he speaks of the Church in analogy with the Saviour, Father Justin emphasizes the connection between the divine and human nature of the Saviour, and as they are united in the Person of Christ, so also the nature of the Church is divine-human and thus the identity between the Church and God-Man refers to the two natures, which has a natural consequence for the Church: it becomes the most perfect, most valuable and most important being in all worlds. This causes the German theologian Thomas Bremer to assert that “*Popovitch sees the Church in an ideal form and describes it in analogy with the God-Man, having little interest in the real appearance and reality of it; a presentation about the Church founded by Christ involves the Church as a phenomenon in an absolute ideal form, an ecclesiology that would understand the Church as a community of people, should more emphasize the reality of the human community, but Popovitch treats the reality of the Church always only in the context of his divine-human being*”³³. The German author points out that this vision corresponds totally to Orthodox traditional ecclesiology, in which the Church’s description emphasizes its divine nature in particular, that the Church is understood as the Sacrament founded by its Savior.

Since the Church has in itself all the delivering deeds of its Founder, Jesus Christ, the incarnate Lord, we can easily understand the incarnate of the Son of God and the intercession of Christ between God and men (“*for*

³² Thomas Bremer, *Ekklesiale Struktur und Ekklesiologie in der Serbischen Orthodoxen Kirche im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, Östliches Christentum N.F. 41, Würzburg, 1992, p. 176.

³³ Thomas Bremer, *Ekklesiale Struktur...*, p. 178.

one is God, one is the mediator between God men: the man Jesus Christ”, cf. 1 Tim 2, 5) only in ecclesiological perspective, especially with reference to the soteriological aspect. Applying the word of God-Man to the Church has the consequence that Father Justin attributes to the Church the attributes and characteristics that he binds to Christ, the God-Man, Who applies His saving iconomy through the Cross and Resurrection to the Church, the continuation of His soteriological work. Therefore, the erudite dogmatist proposes understanding the Church in two respects, namely as the Body of Christ and the Image of Christ.

II. The Church - Body of Christ

The name of the Church as *“the Body of Christ”*, profoundly imprinted by the Pauline theology (*“and He has given over all the Head of the Church that is His Body, the fullness of Him who in all fulfilments them”*, cf Eph 1: 22-23; *“... in my flesh I fulfil the lacks of Christ’s tribulations for His Body, that is, the Church”* Col 1, 24), must be seen in close connection with the term *“God-Man”*, which Father Justin uses with priority. *“The Body of Christ”*, as the name of the Church, is the concretization of the understanding of the Church as God-Man, although it sometimes appears in Father Justin’s ecclesiology and the meaning of the Church as a community of believers, without indicating the way and structure of this community. The clear boundaries between the two notions are often clear: *“The body of God-Man is the Church”*, or *“through the Church, His theandric body, the Lord united all angelic beings, all men, all creation into an everlasting living organism”* denotes that both names used by the Serbian theologian to describe the Church must be understood as complementary and not excluding each other, for he expresses through them an organic understanding of the Church. Through the expression *“God-Man”*, Father Justin wants to describe the being of the Church as a prolongation of incarnation, and the phrase *“the Body of Christ”* emphasizes rather than the participation of believers in the divine nature of the Church, and the existence of the Church in its human nature , in the concrete community of believers. The phrase *“Christ’s Body”* emphasizes people’s connection with Christ and not the form of organization of the Church, underlining the principle of the unity of the members of the Church between them and Christ, the Head of

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the Ecclesial Body. There is a relationship of mutual dependence between the Ecclesial Body and its members, a relationship maintained and vivified by the divine work of the Holy Spirit, “*the soul and the Architect of the Church of Christ*”.

Another aspect of understanding the Church as the Body of Christ is the indissoluble relationship with the Holy Eucharist, as Father Justin recalls from the perspective of the pauline text in 1 Co 10, 16: “*the cup of blessing which we bless, is not the communion with the blood of Christ? The bread we share, is not the communion with the Body of Christ?*” For the Serbian dogmatist, the Eucharist and the Church are inseparable, although he does not thoroughly reflect on the way this relationship is, nor does we find a “*eucharistic ecclesiology*” of his own as we observe in the tradition of Russian emigration theology³⁴. Emphasizing the soteriological role of Christ in his ecclesial body, Father Justin concludes that the Eucharist is the Mystery that connects people together with Christ and thus creates the Church: “*the Holy Eucharist is the culmination of God-human realism, for from His incarnation, God-Word, Christ became the most obvious reality ... and the most convincing witness of this is the Church, the God-human Body of Christ; the Church is the Body of Christ, the Eucharist is the Body of Christ. Identity of essence: the Church in the Eucharist and the Eucharist in the Church, for where there is no God-Man, there is no Church, and where there is no Church, there is no Eucharist*”³⁵. By creating this “*equation*”: “*The Church is the Body of Christ, the Eucharist is the Body of Christ*”, Father Justin inevitably comes to the conclusion that “*there is no difference but full identity between the Christ historian, the Christ Eucharist and the ecclesial Christ*”³⁶. Father Justin describes the Church as the persistence and continuity of the Eucharistic episode of

³⁴ This close connection plays an important role in Eastern theology with reference to “*Eucharistic ecclesiology*” developed by Russian theologian Afanasiev, who had the merit of conceiving a uniform, homogeneous, relational and unanimous image of a teaching on Eucharistic ecclesiology with a typical emphasis in the neorussian ecclesiastical tradition, while his predecessors converge in Russian theology to the idea of the Eucharist as the Mystery of the Church.

³⁵ Justin Popovitch, *Biserica ortodoxă și ecumenismul*, p. 52.

³⁶ Ciprian-Iulian Toroczka, *Tradiția patristică în modernitate / Patristic tradition in modernity. Ecleziologia părintelui Georges V. Florovsky (1893-1979) în contextul mișcării neopatrstice contemporane / Ecclesiology of Father Georges V. Florovsky (1893-1979) in the Context of Contemporary Neopatristic Movement*, Editura Andreiană, Sibiu, 2012, p. 371.

the Last divine Supper, and since the new Eucharistic connection unites people not only with God but also among themselves, it gives birth to the Church, because the Eucharist forms the Church, the Eucharist that exists through the Church. But we do not find the Serbian theologian an concretization of the Eucharist, in the sense that we meet it in Eucharistic ecclesiology where the Church is always realized where the Eucharist is celebrated. Father Justin speaks only of the fact that the Eucharist incorporates believers into the Church by which they unite with Christ's Eucharist and receive the forgiveness of sins and the eternal life³⁷. Father Justin puts the Church and the Eucharist on the same position when he confesses that "*the Eucharist is the Church as the Body of Christ, and the Church is the Eucharist as the Body of Christ, for in and through it we are in perfect unity with all the saints*"³⁸. Such a way of speaking makes us understand that Father Justin refers to the unity that is mediated to believers by participating in the Church as the Body of Christ, understood as the God-Man.

However, if we meet in the writings of Father Justin expressions of the Eucharist understood as the Body of Christ, he never understands it as eucharistic synax, as a divine-human celebration and assembly of the Eucharist, but always as a means of incorporating the men into the Church of Christ.

III. The Church as the image of Christ

The way to speak about the Church as the face/image of Christ, which Father Justin uses quite often, takes it from the Patristic Tradition, which calls the Church as a type and an icon; the Church is a theandric body³⁹, which is described as the Body of Christ, and this perspective of the Church is related to the realism that can be observed in the equivalence of the Church with the Body of Christ, because by using this phrase of "*image / form*" is excluded a real identity between the Church and Christ; rather, the name

³⁷ Thomas Bremer, *Ekklesiale Struktur...*, p. 184.

³⁸ Justin Popovitch, *Philosophie orthodoxe de la vérité...*, tome quatrieme, p. 259.

³⁹ Father Justin quotes from St. Athanasius the Great, who speaks of the Church as *týpos kai eikón* of Christ, in *Orationes aduersus Arianos*, in PG 26, 316 B, and Saint Irenaeus of Lyon, *Aduersus haereses* IV, 33 quotes him, pointing out that the Church is created in accordance with the appearance / form of Christ (ustrojena saobraynoliku Sina Božija).

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of the Church as the image of Christ supports and strengthens or confirms the relationship between the Church and Christ, which is implicit for the Church by using the notions of “*God-Man*” and “*the Body of Christ*”. The Church as God’s image does not mean here only an outward resemblance and equality, but also a certain reality and a real presence of those described, Father Justin emphasizing the common work of the Original / Model and the copy / image. The identity between the Church and Christ is presented here as a soteriological identity, which is accomplished by Christ and received in the Church; without expressly saying, Father Justin understands the text of Saint Maxim the Confessor in the sense of an iconic theology, which means that the Church as a type and icon of Christ-God is not just a likeness to God, but the Lord Himself is present in and through the Church. However, the presentation of the Church as a icon of Christ cannot be separated from the likeness of the Church with God-Man or the Body of Christ, for Father Justin is of overwhelming importance the unity of the two beings in God-Man.

We can see that for Father Justin, “*hristology and pneumatology are not two competing principles, but two complementary principles of the Church*”⁴⁰. In this sense, the erudite dogmatist speaks of God-Man as a living principle of the Church, for its existence and being are essentially imprinted through the Sun of God incarnate, His Head, and the Holy Spirit is considered as the principle of the Church’s life, regulates the life of the members of the Church in relation to Christ and the relationship of the believers with each other in the ecclesiastical theandric space. This role of the Spirit is expressed in particular by the fact that He embodies people in the Church in the Body of Christ, making them integral parts of this Body: that is why, for the Serbian theologian, the expressions “*life in the Church*” and “*life in Christ*” describe the same reality, which means that Father Justin “*does not understand the Spirit in relation to Christ as an autonomous and additional element in the Church and in the salvation of men, but as a complementary factor that always remains as the Spirit of Christ in an inseparable relationship with God-Man*”⁴¹. The Serbian Dogmatist understands the divine action of the Spirit as a dynamic event that has lasting consequences for life in Christ because He makes people hope for the incorporation into Christ in the Church, where its members receive

⁴⁰ Thomas Bremer, *Ekklesiale Struktur...*, p. 197.

⁴¹ Thomas Bremer, *Ekklesiale Struktur...*, p. 202.

salvation through the incarnate, dead and resurrected Lord and the Holy Spirit reveals Him in the intimacy of our being.

IV. Conclusions

As I have been able to observe, the ecclesiological reflections of Father Justin are concretized in the theological meditations of the Christ-Saviour from which the Church has its being imprinted by her Head, which made him affirm the identity between the Church and Christ the dead and resurrected, in Heaven, but also “*remained with you until the end of the ages*” (Mt 29, 20); in accord with the patristic choir of Church Tradition, the Serbian dogmatist speaks of the Church as the Body and icon of Christ and interprets the theandrical nature of the Church in analogy with the divine and human beings of the incarnate Lord. However, we observe in his ecclesiological meditations a projection of the divine nature of the Church to its understanding as a sociological reality of the people gathered in the same faith, the external structures of the Church playing an almost inconsistent role in Father Justin’s ecclesiology; the relationship of people with Christ is central to the thinking of the Serbian theologian, being the cause of the union of the peoples in the Church. The interest of the erudite Serbian theologian focuses on the mystical way in which the theandrical beings of the Church are impressed. Of particular importance, for the erudite dogmatist, is the connection between the Church and salvation, because in the ecclesial body of the Incarnate Lord, men are saved through the sacramental and pneumatical life of the Church. It continues the soteriological work of Christ in history through the deifying work of the Holy Spirit, its living members participating in the being of the Church through the mysterious incorporation in Christ, which is identical to the ecclesial incorporation, Christians becoming christophors. By the incarnation of the Son of God, the human nature in Christ is deified, and in the Church this spiritual process of the deification of its members is accomplished. That is why Father Justin understands the Church as humanity restored and deified by the death and resurrection of Christ, present on earth as God-Man.