

# **THE SOTERIOLOGICAL CHARACTER OF THE DEATH AND RESURRECTION OF SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST**

*– SUMMARY OF PhD THESIS –*

## ***Introduction***

The contemporary society raises numerous challenges to the religious life, in general, and to Christianity, in particular. We mention in this aspect the globalization, the technologies, issues related to bioethics (in-vitro fecundation, organ transplant, euthanasia etc.) or the ecological crisis. Even on a religious level, the “new offer” is marked by pluralism, relativism and syncretism. As it was said, the apparition of the postmodern society, characterized by the utopist optimism of technology and by the searching of prosperity through any means, doubled by the refusal of tradition and of transcendence, caused that the place of “to be” is taken by “to have”, “to do”. Questioning or even denying the faith truths confessed by the traditional Christology represent an exemplary symptom of the crisis in which nowadays Christianity is in. In fact, we are dealing with a reopening, in other terms, of the historical Jesus quest. The dissociation between the “Christ of faith” and the “Jesus of history” was enacted together with the promotion of historical-critical method in New Testament research.

The phenomenon is felt even in the current cultural and religious context in Romania. First of all, as we may easily observe, the attack of the secular conceptions on Christianity, in general, and on the Orthodox Church, in particular, dramatically increased their numbers. It is the duty of every Christian and especially of every theologian to express clearly and loudly his quality of member of the mystical Body of Christ, the Church. Any attack on the Church represents an attack on the saving Person and work of our Lord, Jesus Christ. Along with these “direct” attacks, the Orthodox Church also suffers many other types of “indirect” attacks, which are more subtle and more dangerous. We are talking about the falsification of the truths of faith within the various Christian sects and denominations, which grew increasingly and intensified their proselytism after the year 1990. Thus, the faithful of the Romanian Orthodox Church are deceived with the pretended presentation of a Jesus who is

portrayed as He would be the same with the One preached by Orthodoxy – in reality, though, it is just a deformed image of the true Person of the Incarnated Son of God.

The main objective of our work is to emphasize the central role that the sacrifice and the resurrection of the Lord have in the divine economy. They were prepared by God as key moments in the moving process of the creation towards theosis, as the Holy Scripture and the theology of the Holy Fathers teach us. Therefore, even if the fall had not occurred, the incarnation of the Logos, followed by His death and resurrections, would still have taken place, on a mystical level, as the creation had to follow its movement towards the final rest in God. In the same time, though, we must notice that the sin offered the humanized Logos' death and resurrection a supplementary connotation. The death on the cross of the Son of God acquired a redemptory and redeeming character, while His resurrection became a victory over death. In consequence, our thesis will focus on both the analysis of the redemptory and redeeming character of the Lord's death and resurrection, in the context of our forefathers' sin, and on emphasizing their importance within the divine plan, prepared for the creation "before the making of the world". In order to fulfill this objective, our research is targeted not only to the historical events in themselves, but firstly on the mystery of death and resurrection, which traverses, as red wire, the history of salvation, from the moment of the creation to the second coming of Christ and the inauguration of new manner of existence.

Therefore, the division of ages between movement and rest, which we find in the Holy Scripture and mentioned in the works of Saint Maximus the Confessor, concerns the dimension of the creation towards sacrifice and resurrection. According to the teaching of the Scripture, God created the world after an "all good and unspoken plan", prepared before the ages of the ages. In the first part of the thesis we made a synthesis of the descending ages of the Son of God, while in the last part a synthesis of the ascending and resting ages of man to God. The middle part, identified as the meeting point of these ages, in Christ, is focused on the death on the cross, which ends the descending ages; the resurrection and the ascension open the ascending and resting ages. Although for Himself "there is no beginning, no final end and no moving interval between these two, as one who is not developing towards anything, being unlimited from ages, the Son of God becomes for the world an action that intercedes between beginning and final target", from within as an "efficient power" and from outside, as an "attracting target", all being in this manner "linked together through Him". That is why we may assert that looking towards this final target God created everything through His Word. This means that their meaning of fullness is only connected with the same Word I

the ages when they are able to fulfill their work. The sitting at the Father's right of the incarnated Son shows that the Father gave the Son "the first place in leading the world to theosis, in the work of bringing the world to the union with God, to its filling with the divine infinity in an eternal loving relationship with God".

Besides the emphasis on the dogmatic aspects concerning the soteriological role of the death and resurrection of Christ, our work also aims to have a missionary and apologetic character, fighting – according to our powers – against the falsifications of faith. In the same time, we wish to bring into the light the value of the human being, who has to appreciate more his own existence and his fellows, by correctly understanding several fundamental truth, such life and death, the reality of the resurrection and of the eternal life. We aimed, in our doctoral thesis, to emphasize, on the basis of the patristic and theological Orthodox writings: 1) the eternal salvation plan of humanity, established even since the creation; 2) the deviation from this plan, because of the forefathers' disobedience; 3) the preparation of humanity for the coming of the Messiah; 4) the Incarnation or the coming of the promised Savior; 5) the soteriological work of Jesus Christ, through Sacrifice, Resurrection and Ascension; 6) the possibility for every man to take his share from the fruits of the saving work of Jesus Christ, Who came into the world, suffered, died, resurrected and ascended with His body to the Heaven, not because of an internal necessity, but "for us men and for our salvation".

### ***Chapter I - Creation and Redemption into the Mystery of Death and Resurrection***

The first chapter of our work is centered on the divine plan that served as the basis for the creation and according to which the existence of man carries on. We aimed in this chapter to show that, according to the divine economy, the created world has a well established trajectory and within this trajectory the incarnation of the Son of God, followed by His death and resurrection, occupies a central place. In order to emphasize these essential truths, we started from the teaching concerning the division of the centuries between movement and rest, fundamental for the argumentation in this work, and showed that the entire creation, including man, however had the perspective of death and resurrection. The sin was only the element that interrupted the true vocation of man, conferring death and resurrection the redemptory and redeeming connotations that we mentioned.

The Holy Fathers emphasized that the world is intrinsically connected to time. Thus, Saint Maximus the Confessor wrote that "the time is counted from the creation of the heaven

and earth”. Blessed Augustine asserted that “it is most probable that time started from the creation and not from the creation in time; both have their beginning from God”; and also, that “the world was not created ‘in time’, but ‘together with time’”. By postulating the idea of the creation of the world by God in time, the Christian doctrine on creation centered on three aspects: 1) the contingency of all creatures; 2) the freedom of God and 3) His transcendence from the creation, respectively the absolute ontological distance between Creator and creation, including that of spiritual nature. He who brought a decisive contribution to the crystallization of the Orthodox teaching on creation was Saint Athanasius the Great. In his view, there is a gap, a total *hiatus* between the absolute being of God and the contingent existence of the world; they are two radically different and totally non resembling ways of existence – on the one hand, the eternal, immutable, immortal and “incorruptible” divine being and, on the other hand, the flux of the world, intrinsically “changing” and “mortal”, subject to transformation and “corruption”.

Nevertheless, the created man was given, initially, a natural impulse towards the Creator. The change in sense of this natural movement produces death within man, along with the nostalgia of the lost things, an impossibility of continuing this path to the end. By his movement against the nature, man leaves his mission as a mediator in creation or, at least, he gives his movement a bad sense, that is the separation from the eternal God. The hiding of the first humans from the face of God evidently shows a separation from the “natural movement” and a stitching to the “contrary movement”. Leaving this movement, the first humans separate from the “sole sweetest fruit of God’ contemplation” with which they had been feeding themselves, the sole fruit that offered them “life uninterrupted by death”. This way they chose out of their free will a change of target, of the purpose they were created for. Just like Satan, man himself wanted to take the place of God, beginning to consume for life not the nourishment of God that “holds everything”, but the dying nourishment of the animals, which, no matter the quantity, leads towards death. This “autonomization through which man voluntarily takes off the garment made by God” to put on “the clothes of skin” inevitably leads to death, to a fall from the theological to the biological being, in which the rational nature lives and feeds in an inferior manner, similar to the non rational animals. The regress of man towards the biological being, his descent and stop to the sensitive beauty of the world, the stop of the natural way towards the day of rest do not change this trajectory, but complicate it, bringing the cross and the suffering to cleanse it. Although the initial divine plan concerning man remains intact, the way in which it can be fulfilled is changing.

Similar to a loving father, God willed to fulfill the mystery of the human restoration through the incarnation of His Son, the only one capable to comprise “in a godly manner all the ages and times and all those being in ages and in time”. Through Him he could share to the created sons all the beauties given to His only uncreated Son. But in a contrary sense, through this very incarnated Son, man discovers what does really mean to love God the Father as a true son. That is why the birth of Christ does not only mean directing and bringing back all to “the state in which they were from the beginning”, but moreover, to show the created brothers “the icon of a godly form living”. The majority of the fathers consider the act of creation and the continuous ascent of the human being towards theosis “in the light of the incarnation”. Only through the incarnation of the Son of God man can reach the immutability that overcomes any ages and moving beings, any processes of composition and decomposition that end with death. Should this phase of incarnation have not existed, the final phase of theosis and eternal kingdom would have not existed either. In this case, we could have said that our earthly life was useless. The very entire creation would have been useless or, worse, God Himself would have proven His weakness before the devil or would have proved Himself without goodness, leaving His work to perish. Because it would have been totally not understandable that those created once as rational beings and that shared the Word to be lost and returned to nonexistence through decay. In order to truly defeat death, the Son of God had to take the mortal body without which the resurrection would have been impossible. Only through incarnation He could destroy the wall that made it impossible for man to reach theosis, because of His created nature and through crucifixion He destroyed the wall that also stopped the theosis of man because of sin.

Thus, His incarnation and death become a way through which Christ firstly fulfills a law that should have been fulfilled by the entire being. For father D. Stăniloae, the incarnation establish the basis for the recollection of the entire humanity in a kingdom of love through the identity it creates this event between the hypostatic center of the human nature and the hypostatic center of godhead. This identity has the role to reposition the work of the human nature through its enhypostasis in the hypostasis of the Son on the line of manifestation of a plenary intimacy with God, along with the maximal activation of intentionality after the communion with the fellows. The freedom of the human nature in Jesus Christ it is not limited, but it is neither manifested in a contrary sense to the will of the unique divine-humane hypostasis of the Savior. Besides, in accordance to the genuine Orthodox doctrine concerning the existence of the two natures, wills and works in Christ, such a unilateral manifestation of

will it is totally excluded. Being a Person *par excellence*, the incarnated Son of God manifests Himself in a unitary, uniform and homogenous manner. In these conditions, we must note that the interpersonal relations on the human level are mostly based on the fact that all humans are in a natural union that the inter-human relations have to strengthen through the progressive passage from the image of God to the resemblance to Him. By assuming the human nature, the Logos transfers to all the human hypostases His absolute communicational availability – coming from the archetypal Person – through the nature assumed by Him. Therefore, in Christ we deal with the full realization of the union between the human nature and God, because of love as the availability to communion, which is distributed to the human nature in His hypostasis and protects it from the selfishness that crumbles its unity. In Christ, the human nature becomes a receptacle for the divine love, because of the unity of the hypostasis that centers in it both the divine and the human nature, without the danger that the human nature will manifest contrary to the will of God.

The economical work of God, for the restoration of the human nature in personal communion with Himself is fulfilled through the death, resurrection and ascension of Christ with His body to the heaven. The priestly ministry of Christ has a holistic character, comprising in its work all the realities that are destined to be in communion as full realization of their existence rationale. Thus, Father is the One Who initiates the saving work by sending His Son into the world but, in the same time, is the One Who receives Christ as a sacrifice of restoring the divine-human community lost because of the Sin. The human nature is assumed by the Person of the Son and, through this, potentially all people are brought into maximal communion with Father in the Holy Ghost. And through the human nature the entire creation fulfills its rationale of being by unifying into the humanity reaching theosis. The ontological dimension of the Christ's sacrifice proves that, in an Orthodox view, the sacrifice has both an inner and an outer content. The outer content points to the reestablishment of the communion between God and man, while the inner content signifies a total dedication of Christ as man to the Father, motivated by His total compassion for the humanity. The sacrifice is the renouncement to any egoism, as a form of sin. It is a total submission to the Father. And only Christ was able to bring Himself as such a sacrifice. He brought Himself to the Father as clean sacrifice for us, in order to realize in Himself this state of total submission to the Father, for this state to attract us like a magnet. And this was done because we cannot enter to the Father unless we are in a state of clean sacrifice. That is why, by accepting the state of clean sacrifice to the Father, Christ also introduces us together in Himself to the Father.

But the full communion of Christ as human with God the Father, therefore the maximal personalization of humanity, is not only accomplished through the sacrificial death on the cross. This stage of the “liturgy of the reconciliation of man and God” acquires its true soteriological importance only if it is seen in connection to the other steps of the Christic economy: the resurrection and the bodily ascension to the heaven. “Christ accepts as human the death, out of full trust in God that He will resurrect Him through the full communion with Him, realized by the total renunciation to Himself, to the establishment in Himself. But He can do this because He has the human nature in His divine hypostasis, which is inseparable from the Hypostasis of the Father”. The resurrection comes as a consequence of the trust that the tight relation between Father and Son makes impossible for the former to remain in death, therefore in a solitude imposed by the sin of breaking the communion with God. On the ground of the relation existing between the hypostases of the Holy Trinity, in the circuit of which the human nature was included through the incarnation, it was impossible for the incarnated Son to remain in a state of separation from God, also because within Him there was no sin that could cause a vitiation of communion and a decreasing in a being a person.

## ***Chapter II - The Soteriological Character of the Sacrifice and Resurrection of Christ the Savior***

This second chapter of the thesis actually represents the nucleus of the work, because within it we tackled the sacrifice and resurrection of Christ as historical events – with both historical and supra-historical consequences –, using both exegetical and dogmatic exegetical instruments. Firstly, we reproduces sever exemplifying texts from the Old Testament concerning the anticipation of the sacrificial and saving work of the Messiah, emphasizing the fact that these foreshadowings are in themselves part of the divine plan for the salvation of the world. Then, our attention focused on the sacrifice in itself, this being the way through which the world was redeemed and sanctified, following the common work of divine and human in the person of Jesus Christ. In the following subchapter we presented the role of the Holy Cross and of the resurrection both in the plan of the history in genera and in the collective and individual existences of the faithful. Our intention was to emphasize the main themes found in the biblical and patristic texts on the soteriological relevance of the sacrifice and resurrection of our Savior Jesus Christ: the full, doxological confession, made by Jesus on the Cross as a full sacrifice brought to the Father, the overcoming of death through Resurrection, the restoration of the human fallen nature, the cleansing effect of the Cross and Resurrection,

which extends in and through the Church to all the people and in the entire cosmos or, briefly said, “by exorcizing the power of evil, visible during the defamation, the Cross make possible the celebration of the love communion”.

To better understand the historical person of our Savior Jesus Christ, it is necessary an analysis of the prophecies that foretold and prepared His coming into the world. The messianic idea represents the religious substance of the Old Testament, having as a purpose the preparation of man for the coming into the world of the Son of God. The beginning of this messianism stands in closed link to the fall of the first humans into the sin of disobedience, followed by the promise of a Savior. This proves, on the one hand, the immeasurable and limitless goodness of God, Who did not leave man when he slipped into sin, but promised him a redeemer who would raise him from the darkness of sin and reconcile him with his Creator. Bringing back man in good relations with God was only possible from God’s part, by someone alien to the humanity, which is the Messiah, Who crushed the bold of sin and reestablished the ancient link between man and God. This messianic idea took shape after the fall into sin of the first humans and was kept during the Old Testament history, until the incarnation of the Son of God. Because of this idea, that forms the religious fundament of the Old Testament, the connection between the two testaments it is made, and the messianism from the first part of the Holy Scripture is manifested even from the first book of Moses. Generally speaking, by messianism we understand all the prophecies concerning the person and kingdom of the Messiah, which are to be fulfilled in the person of Christ the Savior. Many of the prophecies of the Old Testament concerned the coming of an exceptional person, who could have been a prince or an ideal king, the representative of God on earth and the person through whom the salvation of people will be accomplished. This special person does not appear under a particular name in the first messianic prophecies. Later on will receive the name of *Messiah*, such as it is noted in the canonical books of the Old Testament (1 Kings 2:10; Psalms 2:2). According to their nature, the Old Testament prophecies are of two kinds: 1) those foretelling the coming of a kingdom of God on earth or messianic prophecies in a broad sense and 2) those concerning the coming of Messiah as the representative of God and the ruler of the world or prophecies in a narrow sense.

Among the most important prophets of the Old Testament it is found the prophet Isaiah, in whose work the Holy Fathers always saw a clear exposition of the person of Christ. Reading his book, you seem to be in front of an ocular witness of the life and activity of Lord Jesus Christ, beginning with His birth and to His crucifixion. But in the center of the



messianic prophecies it is the “image of *Ebed-Iahve* – the slave of God” (from the passages 42:1-4; 49:4-9; 50:4-9; 52:13; 53), this showing the special features of His mission, being the mediator of a *new covenant*, His divine mission being recognized by all the peoples to whom He brings reconciliation with God (Isaiah 42:1-4). The Holy Father unanimously recognize that Isaiah 53 it is a clear prediction of the saving work and of the passions of the Savior. This chapter represents a culmination of the Old Testament prophecies and their fulfillment in the Person of Lord Christ. For the fact that Isaiah foretold with such clarity the coming of the Messiah and the instauration of his kingdom, the Holy Fathers and the ecclesiastical writers called Him “the Evangelist of the Old Testament”.

The foreshadowing of the sacrifice of the Messiah, in the writing of prophet Isaiah, it is not the only foreshadowing of the soteriological work that the Son of God would do. Jesus Himself, in a dialog with His contemporaries, refers to a well know biblical writing to the Jews, namely the book of Jonah, emphasizing a connection that seems now evident between the experience of the Old Testament hero and the reality of the sacrifice and resurrection of Christ. The sign of Jonah that Jesus offered to the skeptical Jews and, by extension, to the whole world, it is not a simple confirmation of the things foreshadowed through the experience of the prophet Jonah. The sign of Jonah has, in a Christological and soteriological perspective, an indestructible connection to the crucifixion, with the Holy Cross. And this is not only because the crucifixion of Jesus, as an historical event, precedes His burial and resurrection, but because the Cross is truly the means of realizing the soteriological sacrifice. In this relation between Christ, the Cross and the Creation, the mystical significance of the death and resurrection of Christ makes known the reason for which God created everything from the beginning. “Even without sin the world was destined to a incarnation of the Logos, to a death and resurrection of the humanity of the Logos and of the world within it. But the sin gave this incarnation its character of extreme kenosis, the cross its bloody and redemptory character and the resurrection its character of victory over death”. Without sin there would have been mystical incarnation, cross and resurrection, where the created event if it would have reached the state of not suffering, still had to welcome within it God in a full manner (the incarnation), to rest from his activities (death) and to resurrect to an exclusively divine activity (theosis).

The economy of God or His divine plan concerning the world consists in the theosis of the created world, which, following the sin, also involves salvation. The fact that the incarnation of the Son of God did not came as an exclusive response to the drama of the

human fall, but as a fulfillment of the divine plan, established before the ages, it can be emphasized from the iconic character of the human person and from the Christological perspective from which it can be evaluated. The Saint Apostle Paul emphasizes this aspect, speaking in his Epistle to the Colossians about the “image of the unseen God” firstly born before all creation, through which and for which everything in heaven and earth was built. Therefore, this seal named “image” does not involve only a relation of communication between man and God, but also a discovery of the essential data written since the beginning in the human being, as well as a natural continuation through the act of incarnation of the trajectory of this being to the perfecting and union with its model. In other words, man has to show in himself the image of the heavenly man – namely Christ’s image – as much as possible, the archetype that discovers best his origin and final destination. The placement of man in this great plan is essential for the salvation of the world, as all created things find their sense in man. This not only that gives man an immense value within the creation, but it also gives the responsibility of leading the world to God. His trajectory in history it is also the trajectory of the creation walking together with him before God. As a person, man is “in front of” the world that goes and stands “face to face” with God. That is why death has more comprising consequences, not only reduced to the so called “little world”, i.e. man, but referring to the whole cosmos. It appears to man as a being created according to the image of God, an unnatural element causing more fear and pain than over his own being. Man feels that “his being is made for immortality”. That is why he continues to look for it event even he got accustomed somewhat with the thought of death because of sin and incapacity.

God’s link with the Jewish people had the purpose of raising some kind of sensitivity for the value of man and along with it the character of death as a phenomenon that can be defeated. The failure of Adam, reverberated over the entire human nature, was asking for a new covenant. But the link with God is impossible to restore without sacrifice. Such as the old covenant was established through blood, the new covenant also asked for its blood. The sacrifice of the animal was a surrogate, a substitution of the human sacrifice. Through the animal, man gave something from his own things, defeating his egoism and, in the same time, avoiding giving himself. But God wants man in himself, as an act of total submission, a thing that man was incapable of doing, because of the sin. Even though man had have made such a gesture, el would have died at most for himself, as a consequence of sin and his sacrifice would not have been clean. This thing only Christ was able to do, the only One Who chose to die, although He had no sin, giving away His life for us. Being without, any sin, Christ did not

have to pay like a debtor and He chose death out of His freedom, putting His soul for us, out of love, and giving us the power of the sacrificial state. With his gift of prophecy, Saint John the Baptist uncovers the character and mission of Jesus in a short definition: “Behold, the Lamb of God, who take away the sins of the world”.

In this case, the Cross is the supreme sacrifice, because the High Priest is the same with the sacrifice, which is brought to the Father, together with the entire assumed humankind: the initiative of the Son is an answer to the initiative of the Father, together representing the fulfillment, the eternal counsel of the Father and the Son, in the Holy Ghost and the association of the human being makes the answer of Christ to be also a human one, welcoming the initiative of the Father. By Him the death itself suffers a direction change, from punishment for sin into a means of raising the humanity. By descending into Hell, the bodily resurrection, the ascension to the heaven and the sitting at the right hand of the Father, Christ raises our humanity to plenitude full of glory, at the right hand of the Father. By this ascension, Father gives the incarnated Son the first place in leading the world towards theosis in the union with Him. In this context, the Incarnation, the Cross and the Resurrection are a single reality. In the resurrection Christ is not an object, resulted from a Father’s decree, but a subject; more precisely, by vehemently opposing with arguments the opinions of Karl Barth or Hans Urs von Balthasar, who asserted that the “raising” from the dead is just a result of a Father’s sentence, father Stăniloae affirms that the alternative assignment of the resurrection to the Father and to the Son proves a cooperation of Them, which also includes an intense joint work of the Holy Ghost. The descent to Hell it is a moment in which the imperial dignity of the Savior is manifested in plenitude, because He did not renounce to His godhead, making death powerless. Father Stăniloae says that “Jesus, submitting Himself to this death to the very end, was seen in the first instance of His incorporeal existence in Hell. But in the same moment, the power of His soul, not chained by the sin accumulated during the bodily existence and intensified by the union with godhead broke forth into a plenitude of life and, through this fact, He was not a citizen submitted to the Hell for any moment, descended in the deficiency and spiritual abnormality in which those belonging to it live”. The same thing is also said in the Church chants that show Christ in the same time “in tomb with the body, in Hell with the soul, like a God, in Heaven with the thief and on the chair with the Father and the Spirit You were, Christ, everything filling, You, Who are incomprehensible”.

In the Church, all the faithful share the fruits of the Sacrifice on the Cross of the Savior. From now on, we may say that the power of man comes from inside, without a risk to

lose this benefit again, such as Adam did. By His divine hypostasis, He could bring “a stability of nature” that cancels the instability that passed from the first man to all nature. Unlike the one who fed nature with death, He feeds it with life for eternity. Through Him, the Apostle says, like through a second Adam “the old things passed” (2 Cor. 5:17) and were made new and the first Adam became “a new being” brought again to incorruptibility. But this does not mean a change or an abolition of the human nature, but an assumption of the work through which the work of the divine nature can be communicated. That is why we can conclude the idea that at the extreme limit of the Savior’s kenosis “the very Cross is transfigured”. The entire cosmos is marked by the Cross and must be considered as a gift, as a means of attracting man in a love dialog. This “gift” has both an indicative aspect, of revelation of love and divine providence, and an imperative one, of call, of response to the initiative of God. The intention of the gift is that, in itself, must be continuously transcended; the world has a transparency, a dynamics determined by the kingdom of God that works and is exerted here and now in the form of the Church. The responsibility of the Christian aims the unceasing tension of overcoming the imperfections of the history, a prophetic role in the anticipated realization of the eschatological realities. It is manifested in the relations with the fellows also, in the understanding of the sense and in the active, not passive support of the suffering and evils, because the Cross is the “sign of the Son of Man”, having a supreme value as a proof of love, both God's and man's, love beyond everything. The joint responsibility makes that the existential proof to which I am constantly exposed to be a reality impossible to avoid, that is a moral constraint that is unavoidable. I have to always answer the call of God for everything that I have, for everything existing around me, for myself, I have to bring back to God everything he gave me as a gift; I have to return or to give myself in a free way. The cross shows us, therefore, the eschatological path, it is the spring of the divine uncreated energies from the assumed humanity, sanctified and raised of Jesus Christ, as grace linked to the divine plan of man's salvation and theosis. The incarnation of the Son of God gave an exceptional value to humanity in general, including the body that has to be transfigured and spiritualized in Eschaton.

### ***Chapter III – The New Creation, Fulfilled through the Death and Resurrection of the Savior in the Church through the Holy Sacraments***

In the third chapter of the thesis, I presented the manner in which the death and resurrection of Christ is manifested in the Church, after the event of the Pentecost. Given the

fact that the Sacraments are the ecclesio-sacramental prolongation of some events in the earthly life of the Lord in the life of the Church. We also emphasized the role of the Church and of the Holy Sacraments as intermediary means, where the connection between history and eschaton is made, through the foretaste of the life prepared by God for the creation at the end of the ages. In this context, the Sacraments that reflect best the status of new creation of the Church are Baptism and Eucharist, the first being the gate of entrance into the Church and the second the direct communion of the fruits of the resurrection of the sacrificed Christ. Both actualize the dynamics incarnation-death-resurrection, because in both Sacraments we receive God inside us, die together with Christ and raise together with Him.

One of the most important teachings of the Holy Fathers for the revelation of the salvation of man is the one about the first Adam and the second Adam. The fall of Adam brought bad consequences on the spiritual and physical level that only a second Adam, a second man (accomplished) could cancel, repeating the temptation, but in a triumphalistic key, managing this way to open a new chapter in the history of humankind, the redemption of first Adam and of all of us together with Him. But a significant fact is also that the second Adam is born from the second Eve, the Mother of God. Moreover, just like the first Adam was the historical and natural representative of humankind, the second Adam, Lord Jesus Christ, is the eschatological representative of the humanity. Through the incarnation of the second Adam, “the first Adam exits the terror of history”, being established, through the sacrifice of Christ in another ontological reality. The way to theosis, which was proposed to the first man, was not possible before the triumph of the human nature on the sin and death. In order to reach again the union with God, man had to overcome three major barriers: the corruption entered in his nature, sin and death. But this being impossible because of the human incapacity, the only solution was that God to take the initiative of redemption. The symbol of faith shows us that the purpose of the incarnation and work of Christ was for us, humans, and for our salvation. But this salvation is made through the dwelling of Christ in us with His body, crucified and resurrected, ascended to the heaven and fully spiritualized, full of Holy Spirit. This dwelling produces the Church, an icon of the Holy Trinity in creation. The descent of the Holy Spirit is thus the act of passing from the saving work of Jesus Christ in His humanity to the expansion of this work in other persons. The Son of God didn't become man for Himself, but for the fact that through His body the salvation as divine life to be expanded into us. This divine life expanded from His body is the Church.

But to this idea it is tightly connected the definition of Church as mystical Body of Christ. This reflects the profoundly Christological character, emphasized by His Eminence Acad. Prof. Univ. Irineu, our scientific supervisor, in his reference work *Iisus Hristos este același, ieri și azi și în veac* (Craiova, 2013). We also showed in our thesis the most important aspects concerning the relation of the Church with its Head, Savior Jesus Christ, also emphasizing in the same time that this profoundly Christological character of the Church does not exclude, but assumes the pneumatological character and, finally, the Trinitarian character of the ecclesial community. Savior Jesus Christ is the One who founded the Church, by sending the Holy Spirit in the day of Pentecost over the Saint Apostles, but He is also the One Who remains for ever present in the Church, united in a real manner with His Body. The purpose of this presence is to make us, the members of the Church, to grow “in all in Him ... until we all will reach the state of perfect man, at the state of age of plenitude of Christ (Ephesians 4:8-10)”. This is the very purpose of the growth: to share the fruits of the Resurrection, to become member more and more perfect of the Body of Christ, the Church (see Romans 12:5; 1 Corinthians 12, 13, 27). Just as the incarnation of the Son was established “in order for all to be united in Christ” (Eph. 1:10), in the same way the eternal counsel established the foundation of the Church as a medium where this act take place. That is why the growth of every member of the Church is not merely individual, but in a close connection with others. On the one hand, the faithful are living stones who make the Body to grow and to be built; on the other hand, every individual faithful performs the evangelical struggle of personal realization of this work. We are dealing, thus, with two aspects, a personal one and a communitarian one, of the same work, aspects that are not in a contradiction – “we all grow towards the heaven through Church and each of us grows through all and all through everyone”, as Father Justin Popovici emphasizes.

Returning to the rapport between Christ (Head) and Church (Body), we must note that between the two there is no risk of confusion, because the unity between Christ and Church does not mean the transformation of Church in Christ. Although the purpose is that “Christ to take shape in us or, in other words, to give us the shape of the Church, His Body, that all people are called to form”, the union will be made according to grace and not according nature or hypostasis. The uncreated divine energies, the “bridge of diamonds” (after Lossky) between Creator and creature, do not totally abolish the distance between created and Uncreated. The Church, the laboratory of Resurrection, has a theandrical constitution and makes the entire world transparent, through the grace of the Holy Spirit, Who introduces the

divine energies into the creation. Just like, in the bosom of the Holy Trinity, the Holy Spirit rests since eternity into the Son, after the incarnation He continues to rest “for the personal humanity of Christ and then over all those united through faith with Christ”. Our communion with Christ, until we reach the stature of “accomplished man” it is also a work of the Spirit because, although He does not possess a human nature, He “is infused as hypostasis in our hypostases, becoming a sort of hypostasis of our persons”. Started even since life, this work of the grace of the Holy Spirit will be fully actualized in the Eschaton – these gifts of the Spirit do not imply only a divine work, but also an “act of acceptance from the part of man, a predilection for that gift and an effort to develop this predilection with the help of the Spirit”. Each member works in the Church according to his powers, contributing this way to the consolidation of the community. This way the church becomes an organism in which all the divine and human mysteries, all the divine and human powers form a sole body: the Mystical Body of Christ, in the Holy Spirit. In this perspective, the Church is the end of the saving action started through Incarnation.

In the Church, the death and resurrection of Christ are manifested, through their fruits, in the Holy Sacraments also. Thus, the entrance of the Christians into this new creation that is the Church is made through a new birth, out of water and Spirit. Preceded by the *metanoia*, the Baptism is conducted in the name of the Holy Trinity – an absolute necessary condition for the validity and efficiency of the Sacrament – because outside the Trinitarian faith it is impossible to know Christ, to recognize in Jesus the Incarnated Lord, One of the Holy Trinity. Thus, although the symbolism of the Holy Baptism is complex and varies, father Florovsky shows that, before everything, it is a symbolism of the death and resurrection of Christ (Romans 6:3-4) or, in other words, “a sacramental resurrection with Christ, through the participation to His death, a resurrection with Him and in Him to a new and eternal life (Col. 2:12; Philip. 3:10)”. In the Baptism, the death on the Cross and the resurrection of Christ are mirrored like in a mystical and living icon. Baptism is both a death and a resurrection, “a time of death and a time of birth” (Saint Cyril of Jerusalem) through which the faithful is called to grow to the age of fullness of Christ. This thing is, in fact, true for all the Sacraments, because they were instituted to give the possibility to the members of the Church to participate to the redemptory death of Christ and, this way, to acquire the grace of His resurrection.

As far as Eucharist is concerned, it is the Sacrament of the unity of the Church *par excellence*, the myriads having both a role of thankfulness and intercession, of connection between the triumphal Church and the fighting Church. In the Proskomedia the mystical and

ecclesiological senses are shown, being mentioned both the living and the dead, headed by the Mother of God and the angels and saints. The community of the Church is realized progressively and prospectively, for the purpose of accomplishment in Eschaton, because “in Liturgy we find the in prayer the seen and unseen Church of Christ, all the members of His mystical Body, who are praying together with their Head”. Unlike the physical feeding, through which the aliments are transformed into our body and blood, in the Eucharist the transformation continues, without His body and blood stop being His personal ones. “Through this, the power of the mystical death of the body of Christ and of His Resurrection and incorruptibility are deepened through our body and blood in our soul, like some powers able to rebuild our resurrected and incorruptible body at the universal resurrection”. This power will extend at the Resurrection not just over our body, but over the entire material world, making transparent all its rations, spiritualizing it in full. By receiving the same body and blood of Christ even since now, we receive, in fact, that divine power and leaven called by the Holy Fathers the medicine of immortality, which has to grow to the state of accomplishment. The use for Eucharist of the same bread that is used in the day by day feeding is more than a simple sign of the true incarnation. The Eucharist becomes the mystery that not only that actualizes the life of Christ and gives it to us to contemplate, but it is also the moment and place in which the deified humanity of Christ becomes our humanity. Thus, the union in the Church becomes an icon of the Trinitarian unity, the Church itself being an icon of the Holy Trinity in Creation, an icon of the coming ages. The Liturgy is a sign that shows us not only that the kingdom of God exists, but also that we can step there. That is why the Eucharist occupies a central place in the realization and manifestation of the transparence of the Church for Christ, as well as of the transparence of the Christians for Christ and between them, through the sharing of the Eucharistic Christ. Because the Eucharist places in the deep of man the icon of the future life, totally crossed by the grace of the Holy Spirit.

#### ***Chapter IV - Glory and Parousia through the Sacrifice of the Cross and the Joy of Resurrection***

The last chapter of our doctoral thesis tackles the mechanism of the sacrifice and resurrection from an eschatological perspective. In order to understand the effects that the death and resurrection of Christ causes on the level of human existence, oriented towards the eternal life, we have done, first of all, an endeavor of clarifying the meanings of death in the Christian teaching, starting from the biblical sources and the patristic interpretations. We



underlined, mainly, the character of passing that death has, because, by virtue of this character, the passage from the life under the sign of the fall to the life in the perspective of fulfilling of the divine plan is possible. Then, we moved the accent on the subsequent events to this passage, namely the Particular Judgment, respectively the Universal Judgment, the event that immediately precedes the entrance of the creation into the rest for which it was built by God and towards which it is going.

In the Orthodox view, death (gr. *thanatos*, lat. *mors* = limit of existence, teasing of being) it is understood as the destruction of the unity body-soul, by the return of the body into the elements it was created from: “dust you are and into dust you will return” (Gen. 3:19). The word “death” was spoken for the first time by God Himself, when He said to the first humans, referring to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil: “in the day you will eat from it, you will surely die!” (Gen. 2:17). The commandment not to eat from this tree must be understood as a real fulfillment of the human being, by the joint work of the human will and divine grace, of the accomplishment that Adam and Eve were given as potential. The syntagma “according to the image and resemblance” of God refers to the fact that the first man represented a perfectible whole, a perfect mix of body and soul, both immortal; there was no contradiction between them. By the disobedience of the sole divine commandment, although it was told the consequences of this disobedience, man fell from immortality, being thus punished by death. His body, though, continued to remain immortal. The feeling of fear felt by man in front of the death comes from its very punitive character, following the sin of Adam. It is felt as something unnatural, contrary to the true destiny of man.

Besides this negative aspect, we must assert a positive aspect, which makes, paradoxically, that death to appear as a necessary and universal event. Viewed from an eschatological perspective, death is a necessary and full of sense moment on the trajectory of life, started at birth, making our earthly life to pass into the eschatological phase. The character of passage of death is conclusively reflected in the martyrs’ experience, followed by the ascetic and monastic experience. Starting from the writings of Saint John Cassian, His Eminence Irineu, the Metropolitan of Oltenia, talks about the eschatological experience of the monk. Even since the text in Heb. 11:31, it was pointed that the anachorete, such as patriarch Abraham, his forefather in faith, is stranger and passenger on earth. Such as prophets Elijah and Hosea, the true monks live in this world like pilgrims, being aliens to the world and preparing for the Promised Land, that is for the Kingdom of Heavens. By fulfilling the words of the Saint Apostle Paul, the monks take their crosses and die for Christ every day. The

model they follow is Saint Anthony the Great, as well as Saint Pachomius the Great. And all those who have followed the path of this great ascetes had in their minds to follow Christ the Savior, following His commandments. Therefore, the monks were considered the masters of the holy art, beautiful wise men, who found the way of a true spiritual living in Christ. Of course, in this perspective death lost its scary character; for the advanced monks, to die was a profit – an occasion to enter a communion with Jesus Christ, the One who was present in their lives, through prayer and the communion with the Holy Sacraments of the Church.

The incarnation of the Savior implied, besides the reestablishment of the man according to the image of God, the defeat of death in humanity also (the two poles of economy), of the universal death. In the death and resurrection of the Lord, the nature itself trembles, showing through this not only solidarity of the cosmos with the man Christ, but also the supreme tension of the nothingness to throw the entire cosmos in the chaos from before the creation. In the name of the humankind, Jesus confronted this pressure and pain, earning a victory that He shares with us. It is a mutation that it produces in humanity by the reentrance in connection with God through Christ, Who transformed death from punishment into means of raising the humanity. The participation to the sacrifice and death of Christ opens not only a gate to the full life for the believers, but also represents a power of those being in Christ. After the incarnation, death is the decisive event of the earthly life. This moment triggers the divine judgment also. Through the Cross, through His Resurrection and Ascension, Christ raised the first fruits of humanity to the climax of humanization. He received the power of judging because He has the quality of guide and helper; the dignity given to Him is, in the same time, a dignity given to man. Christ, the decisive lighthouse of our eternal fate, is glorified not only as God, but also as one of us, as He is the maximum reached by man. We also can, through our collaboration, to reach this stage. The judgment has its criterion something real, possible to reach, and not an unfair limit established through a divine decree. At the judgment, Christ uses the conscience of man as a testimony that the judgment was right. This is the moral rule even since this life and will even more convict the sinful man or it will give peace and rest to the righteous, at that moment, because after the death it will be especially illuminated by God and will earn an extraordinary power of understanding and judging. As a first witness, man will then be face to face with his conscience in a manner in which he had never been before. If during this life the conscience torments the sinful and rewards the righteous only to a certain degree, after death this state of

happiness or unhappiness will dramatically increase. The judgment of Christ is not separated, therefore, from the judgment of our own consciences.

Simultaneously with the second coming of Christ (*Parousia*) it will take place the transformation of the image of this world and the resurrection of the dead. According to the words of Saint Apostle Paul, the current determinations of the body will be replaced by other determinations, of spiritual character; if the current bodies are weak, natural or psychical, corruptible, mortal, earthly and covered by dishonor, that bodies will be full of power, spiritual, incorruptible, immortal, heavenly and dressed in glory (1 Cor. 15:42-52). This does not mean that the bodies will still have only the shape, but not the substance of this life (as Origen maintained). The resurrected body will not be entirely new, but it will also have a material content, be it even only a small part of the matter that passed through it in life. The personal identity make that every resurrected person to keep his own body, in which are printed his personal characters; these bodies will be, though, spiritualized, the matter will be overwhelmed by the Spirit. This new life is not a subsequent phase of the historical one, which follows it naturally. This new reality of resurrection is the exclusive work of God, Who intervenes within history to give a new direction and sense. The Universal Judgment will show the sense of the human history, will show the end that the human life on earth should have followed and to what degree it really followed. This day will mean a full uncovering of human and angelic thoughts and facts, the evil being completely uncovered and the good extracted from under the covering. The final judgment, as seen from above and in the great light of reason and faith it is this: the plan of divine wisdom that is fully uncovered before the universal gathering of all the created beings, angels and humans.

### ***Conclusions***

The sacrifice on the Cross and the Resurrection of Savior Jesus Christ occupy a central role in the divine economy, being prepared by God as historical and supra-historical events, essential in His divine plan concerning the creation. Besides, the incarnation in itself is an element of this divine plan, which leads the world from the moment of the creation to the theosis. In the divine economy, the ages have a well determined division between movement and rest, between the trajectory of the creation towards God and the eternal life close to Him. Both in the Holy Scripture and in the writings of the Holy Fathers, this divine plane is asserted and detailed. Therefore, the incarnation of the Son of God, followed by His death and Resurrection appear as independent elements, with respect to causality, from the fall of man

into sin. In other words, as we have shown in our thesis, the sin was not the reason for what God sent His Son into the world, because the world was, anyway, prepared by the Creator to be the beneficiary of the incarnation of the Logos. Should the incarnation, death and resurrection of the Son of God not have happened, the creation would have been unable to follow its natural movement towards God.

In the same time, it is true that the death and resurrection of Christ, although causally independent from the fall into sin, also had a redemptory role. They happened in the conditions of a reality that was outlined, to a great degree, by the consequences of the fall, such that humankind needed the salvation eventually brought by the sacrifice and resurrection of the Lord. We showed, in our work, that the death and resurrection of Christ uncover their true soteriological significance only if we understand them correctly, in their double character, namely as key moments of the eternal plan of God and, respectively, as saving and redemptory events, which remove the obstacles generated by the fall into sin and defeat the resistance of death against the natural movement of the creation towards the Creator. The meaning of death changed after its defeat by Christ, by the resurrection from the third day. Followed by the Particular Judgment and, at the end of ages, by the Universal Judgment, death became a gate to resurrection. Moreover, the sacrifice and resurrection of the Lord also have effects on the level of the faithful's lives, being present in the Church and fulfilling the new creation through the Holy Sacraments.