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The Divine Liturgy and the Ontological Healing of Being: A Stănilocean Approach to the Restoration of the Image of Fallen Man through the Eucharist

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Abstract

This paper explores how St. Dumitru Staniloae's theology allows us to conceive of believers' being ontologically healed through participation in the Divine Liturgy. Salvation is understood not as the juridical forgiveness of sins, but as real union with Christ and full communion with the Persons of the Holy Trinity. The study addresses four conditions for such communion: cleansing of the affections, overcoming of determinism through freedom in God, healing of love through the Eucharistic sacrifice, the living of eternity and the healing of the suffering that attends life in the fallen world. Liturgical healing brings man back to his potential for divinization according to the Trinitarian model.

Keywords:

salvation, communion, Liturgy, Stăniloae, trauma, healing, divinization, time, love, freedom.

1. Introduction

The purpose of human life is salvation. This means not just forgiveness of sins, but intimate communion with the Persons of the Holy Trinity. This is because our Savior Jesus Christ did not restore us to the original state of Adam in paradise, but to our anticipated eschatological state in the Kingdom of God, to man's sitting on the throne together with God. On the throne of the divinity, there beats a human heart: It belongs to humanity as united by having become christified, united 'body and soul' with Christ, as in a substantial unity that nevertheless, in keeping with the model of the Holy Trinity, preserves the personal characteristics of each human person. This eschatological restoration therefore implies a healing of human nature, returning it to its true potential of divinization. Forgiveness of sins thus involves a cleansing of human nature from mistaken notions that have distorted its true functionality. In our present state, we do not know the human nature that had been created by God as "very good" (Gen 1:31); we only know that nature as distorted by sin and death. Forgiveness implies not so much the juridical act of obliterating human sin through Divine mercy, but the revelation of



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the distorted character of the human mind and existence, and its reshaping in terms of God's intention of having man enter into loving communion with the Persons of the Holy Trinity.

An important part of the published work of St. Dumitru Stăniloae, "the greatest contemporary Orthodox theologian"¹, has addressed these three aspects: His *Orthodox Dogmatics* emphasize the original Divine intentions, ; his *Orthodox Ascetics and Mysticism* present the path of repentance that man must follow, and his *Spirituality and Communion in the Orthodox Liturgy* describe the deepest union that comes about through communion with Christ as entrance into the communion of the Holy Trinity.

In this text we will focus on the third aspect, i.e., how human healing takes place in the Eucharistic liturgical framework: First, we analyze the emergence of the affections, that is, the complex interplay of desires, inclinations, and emotional movements of the heart: We examine how prayer, and especially the liturgy, helps to cleanse them. Then we turn to how in liturgy the ontological barrier of human determinism is overcome, and true freedom is found through relationship with God. A third section analyzes how love is healed through the liturgical actualization of the Savior's sacrifice on the cross. And finally we draw conclusions about the importance of framing one's life in the here and now in anticipation of living in the eternal presence of the Holy Trinity.

The text operates at the intersection of dogmatic theology, ascetical anthropology, and contemporary psychology. Its interdisciplinary framework is intentionally integrative, placing dogmatic theology and ascetical anthropology in dialogue with selected psychological insights, not as empirical claims, but as heuristic supports for theological reflection.

2. Healing the emotions through Holy Liturgy

The consequences of sin and the implied human subjection to the power of death, as departure from God as the source and fountain of life, have become so interwoven with human nature and its Divinely intended functionality, that in this fallen world, even before we are born, certain cells begin to die. This does not happen because of external factors, but as ingredient in the process of apoptosis, i.e. a programmed cell death necessary for the remodeling of organs needed for life in the world after birth. Already within his mother's womb, man experiences death as a condition for life in the world outside the womb, just as, spiritually, man must learn to die to this world in order to live in eternity.² In fact, most of the functioning

¹ Olivier Clément in: Stăniloae 2003, p. 13.

² The assertion that human existence already involves processes associated with "death" prior to birth should be understood on three distinct but related levels that must not be conflated. At the biological level, it refers to empirically observable processes such as apoptosis, a form of programmed cell death that occurs during prenatal development and is necessary for the differentiation and formation of organs required for postnatal life. At the psychological level, it points to developmental transitions in which earlier modes of existence are relinquished to enable adaptation to new stages of life (for example, the transition from intrauterine life to birth, and later from childhood to adolescence and adulthood). Here, the language of "death" functions metaphorically to describe processes of transformation and discontinuity within personal development. At the theological level, the formulation acquires an analogical meaning. It gestures toward the spiritual principle that human beings must "die" to a former mode of existence, understood as life oriented toward this world, in order to attain eternal life in communion with God. This theological claim is not derived from biological or psychological observations but is illuminated by them in an analogical manner.



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of bodily organs, as well as of the soul, anticipates life in a fallen world. For example, the emotions accompanying natural passions like hunger, thirst, cold (i.e. as distinguished from the sinful passions like pride, vainglory, gluttony, etc.), are part of the 'skin garments' man was clothed in as a result of sin. St. Dumitru calls such 'passions according to nature' affections; "they serve to preserve the nature."³

But in this fallen world their role is ambivalent. On the one hand, as a result of sin, they indicate distance from God and are close to sin. For example, fear, as a natural passion, alerts us to a possibly life-threatening problem, and here life refers not so much to biological life as sustained by air or food, but even more to life as a loving relationship with other human persons and ultimately with God, for "Life stands or shows itself in perfect love and the joy of it"⁴. In this sense, fear can preserve both bodily life and the conditions of personal, relational life. On the other hand, as daughters of sin, the affections are wounds of sin: They are scars that distort man's natural functioning and understanding, i.e., scars the devil can use to poison the soul and tempt it to sin. Anxiety can cause, for example, compulsive eating, as an unconscious protection against physical death, but also the development of adipose tissue, like a psychological shield against the attacks of others, serving as a cushioning buffer against such attacks. In this perspective, the disgraceful deformation of the body reveals that there is a deep problem underneath, but it can also prevent the fulfillment of the lust of fornication, as gluttony is deeply intertwined with fornication.

The relationship between sin and the emotions is the same as the relationship between sin and sickness, pain and death. This is outlined by St. Paul in the well-known verse: "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, because of which all have sinned" (Rom. 5:12). Thus we can add "out of fear": Because out of fear of death man is tempted to sin, either by hoarding and seeking provisions to sustain life in this world, or by giving up all hope for a life beyond this world and giving himself over to the pleasures of sin, convinced that, ultimately, sin or no-sin makes no difference. Paraphrasing St. Maxim the Confessor, St. Dumitru Stăniloae says that "what leads man forward to rolling down the slope of sins is a hidden fear of death."⁵

Paul Ekman, an American psychologist with pioneering research on emotions, including the idea of "universal basic emotions," speaks of six main universal emotions that underlie all experiences of the soul: joy, sadness, fear, disgust, anger, curiosity.⁶ Theologically, their appearance could be understood in this way: Created in the image of God Who lives eternally in apatheia, man also was originally free of passions. He had a state of peace proper to the divine nature, untouched by exalted joys or fear, even fear of God. Once Eve began to talk to the devil, she began to turn away from God, and by doing so, she had already begun to die. Approaching death, fear began to take root in her. In general, the demonic presence is associated with an existential fear, because it represents the approach of nothingness. Turning her face away from God, Eve could only encounter the devil. Fear arose, both, as a result of losing contact with God, as the essential person through whom she exists, but also through her proximity to the devil, to nothingness, to the possibility of non-existence from which she

³ Stăniloae 2019, p. 119.

⁴ Stăniloae 2016, p. 328.

⁵ Stăniloae 2019, p. 120.

⁶ This is an example of a system of basic emotions, as presented in LeDoux 1999, pp. 112ff.



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came. Fear alerted Eve to the danger she was in. Through fear, she sensed that something was wrong and that she was in danger, even though she did not know the nature of this danger.

In this state of alertness, the devil tempts the immature woman precisely through the words of God. On the one hand, the devil presents himself as a knower of God, of what is happening, as one who can reveal truths to her. On the other hand, by accepting his truth over and above the truth of the Divine warning, Eve familiarizes herself with the one who discloses that alternative truth to her, as with one who would wish her well, thus attaching herself to him. Just as a duckling is programmed to attach itself to any other lifeform in order to survive, so also man, being in his nature "after the image of God", has in himself the essential need for attachment in order to reach the development for which he was created. The devil makes use of this primary human need and tempts Eve by the appearance of intellectual competence and care. Thus, trusting in this being who appears both to possess knowledge of God and to act in her interest, Eve's initial fear begins to subside, giving way to curiosity and openness toward this new form of encounter. From a theological and phenomenological perspective, this moment may be described as the beginning of an inner reorientation: a movement from vigilance to receptivity toward an alien suggestion.

The patristic tradition often interprets such moments as the subtle inception of the passions, in which an external suggestion gradually acquires an internal foothold. To render this dynamic more intelligible in contemporary terms, one might cautiously employ an analogy with the mechanisms of addictive attachment. Much like an initial experience that appears to offer relief, reassurance, or even a sense of heightened insight, the encounter presents itself as benign or beneficial, while gradually fostering a form of dependence that diminishes freedom. This comparison is not intended to impose modern clinical categories onto the biblical text, but rather to illuminate, on a strictly analogical level, the progressive nature of attachment, the weakening of discernment, and the eventual loss of inner freedom described in ascetical theology⁷. By arousing her curiosity, the devil further poisons Eve with claims which, taken at face value, sound true, but, adopted in the spirit and distorted logic by which he renders them, become misleading. What the devil instilled in Eve was the distorted idea that God holds something hidden from her, that he did not want to share with her the divinity for which she was created. Through this new "revelation", however, Eve again felt fear like an avalanche, because her existence, as designed towards likeness to God, was jeopardized. After that she felt sadness, because what she had hitherto believed had fallen apart, she was disappointed of God, God's love had become questionable for her. She was probably also disgusted that God would lend himself to such a thing, that he would be capable of such a thing, that he would deceive her in this way. Eve's response can be understood as a movement of resistance toward the distorted image of God suggested by the tempter, namely, that God unjustly withholds something essential. This inner shift may involve interconnected emotions such as the triad of fear, sadness, and anger, which often appear together, though not in a fixed or universal pattern.

⁷ At the theological level, these dynamics correspond to the patristic analysis of temptation and the development of the passions, where an initially neutral or seemingly beneficial encounter can, through repeated assent, lead to increasing inner compulsion and alienation from God.



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From an ascetical-theological perspective, these affective movements are not sin in themselves, but expressions of a disturbed inner condition. The patristic tradition distinguishes clearly between the arising of such impulses and the person's assent to them: They belong to man's fallen condition, yet become sinful only when embraced or wrongly directed.⁸ When they occur, however, they signal sin⁹. Through them one senses the sin that the other is about to commit, or one's own sinful way of thinking about the other's impending action. Acting instinctively, these emotions are the gates through which the devil works in the human mind, distorting a person's perception of relationships. Reflected upon, these same movements of the soul can become weapons by which a person turns away from sin and limits the spread of his own or his neighbor's sin in the world.

The ascetical literature generally speaks of lust and anger as already sins, involving a sinful processing of primary affections. This corresponds to the implied differentiation that St. Maximus makes when he says: "An impassioned conceptual image is a thought compounded of passion and a conceptual image. If we separate the passion from the conceptual image, what remains is the passion-free thought. We can make this separation by means of spiritual love and self-control, if only we have the will."¹⁰ Here St. Maximus treats what we call 'an emotion' as a natural passion, called thought, that has spread through the whole body and soul to become a state: fear or anger as a state of alertness, which mobilizes all the powers of soul and body to save oneself or to fight against sin.

In the Holy Liturgy, this separation happens by presenting the whole human being as a sacrifice to God. St. Dumitru Stăniloae says that

by bringing our thoughts about things to Christ, we return them gratefully and cleanly to Him from Whom all the reasons of things proceed, uniting them anew with Him and, together with them, with ourselves: Thine own from Thine own.¹¹

Through prayer, the believer is called to sacrifice everything to God. This sacrifice is nothing other than the lifting up of every thought to God. Since God is the true God and the reason of all things, "the heavenly Archpriest receives the first-born thoughts of the mind and burns them in the divine fire"¹², thereby exposing at once any sinful thought as coming from the devil, as being illogical, in fact as "not being". After this holocaust of thoughts there remains

⁸ This is because primary emotions never appear alone and "most basic emotions theorists assume that there are nonbasic emotions that are the result of blends or mixes of the more basic ones" (LeDoux 1999, p. 113).

⁹ The formulation does not intend to equate these affective states with sin itself, but to describe them as consequences and indicators of the fallen condition. As we have shown, analogous to the bodily passions, which are not in themselves sin, yet arise as a result of sin, these feelings are understood as wounds of sin: they emerge from it and, in turn, signal its presence, whether within oneself or in a relational context. For example, sadness may indicate not only the pain caused by another's wrongdoing, but also the inner resonance of one's own sinful attachment to what has been lost. In this sense, the emotion signal either a sin expressed by another, a disorder within oneself, or both. In this sense, emotions can function as indicators of a wounded state of human nature and as occasions for spiritual discernment. However, they do not constitute sin unless they are freely appropriated, intensified, or directed contrary to their proper purpose. At the same time, the ascetical tradition affirms that these very movements are capable of transformation (e.g., fear becoming reverence, anger becoming zeal for the good), thereby underscoring that the domain of the passions is not only one of distortion, but also of potential transfiguration.

¹⁰ St. Maximus the Confessor 2010, p. 89.

¹¹ Stăniloae 2004, p. 39.

¹² Stăniloae 2004, p. 38.



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only that which is of God. Here man makes himself transparent to God and sees God transparent in his heart. Where God is, there is no place for the devil. Thus, by concentrating on prayer and by continually placing one's thoughts before God, He will show us whether they reflect Him or not. Thus God comes to dwell in the believer's heart. In this way, the believer's heart actually becomes heaven, becomes the dwelling place of God. St. Dumitru Stăniloae interprets the ladders that Christ goes to prepare (cf. In. 14:2) as "the interiors of believers filled with the presence of the Father and the Son"¹³. This happens in prayer, but especially in Holy Liturgy, where we surrender "ourselves and each other and all our life" to God.

3. Healing from codependency

In an addiction, a person has a strong and uncontrollable craving to use a substance or repeat a behavior, accompanied by a loss of control over the use. Tolerance develops, i.e. the need for increasing doses, experience of withdrawal syndromes, as well as the tendency to neglect other important activities and to continue submitting to the craving despite negative consequences. The same phenomena occur in codependence, where each partner depends on the other. In this case, the codependent person has a compulsive need to remain in an unbalanced relationship, despite suffering and neglect of his own needs while satisfying needs and desires of the other person. The codependent person develops a tolerance for suffering; he cannot break the relationship for fear of rejection. His relationship to the addicted partner becomes the center of his life, replacing activities and other healthy relationships.¹⁴

To the unknowing, those in a codependent relationship appear admirable as patient people, full of compassionate self-denying and sacrificial love for the sinner. Although outwardly it is often impossible to distinguish true sacrificial love from codependence, it is essential to keep in mind: The one who sacrifices himself does so in freedom and out of love for his neighbor; the codependent, in contrast, does the same without freedom, being determined by an inner conflict, without knowing true freedom and love and thus without growing spiritually.

St. Dumitru Stăniloae places great emphasis on the revealed "necessity" of tripersonal existence within the Holy Trinity as the supreme structure of love. God as love has been revealed to us as a Divine person in relation to two other equally Divine persons: This is how we are instructed to conclude: Just as a father cannot exist without having a son, so God the Father "cannot" (humanly speaking!) exist without being both Son and Holy Spirit. This

¹³ Stăniloae 2016, p. 313.

¹⁴ Unfortunately, such relationships can also occur in the spiritual realm. Morbid spiritualities develop, when a "spiritual father," perhaps out of certain narcissistic tendencies and without having been raised in a truly spiritual manner, merely seeks followers whom he keeps in a state of emotional dependence. They will live or manifest themselves only through him, unable to maintain their separate personality. The freedom of such people is often curtailed in the name of an obedience that distorts its meaning and role in the growth towards true spiritual freedom. In the words of Mantzaridis: "The true Christian does not simply respect the freedom of the other but prefers and supports it. The undermining of freedom, which can also be observed in the church, grossly violates the Christian spirit." (2017, p. 14). This is why it is important to understand the right relationship with God and the essential role of freedom.



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relationship between the Persons of the Holy Trinity does not allow for any dependence (as happens among human persons), i.e., as an inferiority of one in relation to the other, for then there would no longer be a Divine Trinity. Rather, the relationship between the Divine persons can be (humanly speaking!) conceived as interdependence, as equality in manifesting the same eternal love. The Trinitarian Self-revelation of God leads us to conclude that only through the existence of the three divine Persons can that love be extended to created human beings, as to a multitude of persons who are invited to participate in the intra-Trinitarian love. "The reciprocal interiority between the Persons of the Holy Trinity will also extend into human persons, without leaving them passive."¹⁵

Though created and thus dependent on the Divine will, man is called to participate in the inner-Trinitarian love, not in terms of his dependence on God, but out of free will. This is because "God conquers by love, by goodness, by a power in which greatness and gentleness are not in opposition."¹⁶

As the incarnation of the Son has revealed to us, this invitation into the Divine love is realized through the person of the Son Who is both framed in the eternal love of the Holy Trinity and united with human nature. Therefore, by uniting himself to Christ, man participates in the eternal life of the Holy Trinity:

*The Son loves the Father by being in us, as one of us, and the Father comes into us, loving the Son who is in us. [...] the love between them is a love in us, becoming also love between us. [...] We will make ourselves a common dwelling place for the Father and the Son. It is a new affirmation of mutual interiority.*¹⁷

It is precisely this Sacrament of man's participation in the eternal life of the Trinity through the incorporation of Christ into his personal being that takes place in the Holy Liturgy. As man prepares to incorporate Christ within himself, Christ "succeeds," in proportion to humans' freely offered response, in integrating them into the life of the Holy Trinity. And this does not occur through disintegration and annihilation of man, but through enhancement of his capacity to become "like" God, i.e., of participating, by grace, in all the attributes of divinity, even in uncreatedness: "Saint Gregory Palamas, quoting Saint Maximus, also says that the deified becomes 'without beginning' and 'without end'."¹⁸

*Love, and thus the undivided love between the Father and the Son, gives power to the undivided love and unity between us humans, which is also our love for the Father and the Son and our union with them, without being confused with them.*¹⁹

Chalcedon's dogma of the hypostatic union is essential for understanding the deification of man, without his being annihilated in an amorphous mass of divinity, disintegrated by the latter's inexpressible grandeur. This is also symbolized by the transformation of bread and wine into the Lord's Body and Blood. Although their transformation is real, "the bread and wine in this world and for the life of this world remain bread and wine, their presence is not

¹⁵ Stăniloae 2016, p. 324.

¹⁶ Stăniloae 2004, pp. 242-243.

¹⁷ Stăniloae 2016, p. 327.

¹⁸ Stăniloae 2018a, p. 183.

¹⁹ Stăniloae 2016, p. 326.



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physical but metaphysical, hidden from this world."²⁰ Man is thus conscious that the divinity will not annihilate him as a man, as a person, but will remain with his human structure, cleansed only from the infestation of sin.

4. The Cross and the healing of love

We saw in the biblical story of the fall that Eve was convinced by the devil that God would not really love her. For what else would it mean that he did not share something, that he kept the divinity for Him alone? God did everything to correct this heresy induced in man by the devil. In the words of the anaphora of St. John Chrysostom: "when we fell, you raised us up again, and did not depart from all things, until you took us up to heaven and gave us your kingdom to come".²¹ And the anaphora of St. Basil the Great describes at length the economy of Salvation, which culminates in the descent into hell, with God depicted as: "if you have doubted, Adam, that I love you, behold, I lay down my life for you!" The Savior's sacrifice represents the supreme love that He himself preached: "Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his soul for his friends (τῶν φίλων those he loves)" (Joh. 15,13). In the perfect world of the Holy Trinity, mutual love means mutual self-giving to one another without domination, loss or dissolution. In this fallen world, this love is sacrifice; it is mixed with pain and suffering as consequences of sin. That is why St. Cyril also insists that we cannot enter the Kingdom of God except in a state of sacrifice.²² The liturgy is the actualization of this eternal reality of Christ's sacrifice, but it is also the training of man in this sacrificial love, after the model of Christ:

*The Eucharist gives us not only the power to die to sin and surrender ourselves to God, but also to receive real death when it comes, as Christ received it as a gift offered to the Father, without any fear or doubt about our eternal existence. It gives us the power to die when we must [...] United with Christ in the Eucharist, we no longer fear death, for we carry within us the body of the risen Christ as the cure or doctrine of immortality, or of eternal uncorruption, as the Holy Fathers call the Eucharist.*²³

During the Divine Liturgy, man brings his sacrifice to the altar to be transformed into the Body and Blood of the Lord, from which he will then partake. Through the transformation of the Gifts, man's offering becomes God's offering. Moreover, man gives himself to Christ, he dies to himself, so that through communion Christ may live in him. Seeing the Savior's sacrifice for him, he has the example and the power to follow him freely: "He who has received the gift feels the impulse to give himself in turn to the one who has given the gift or sacrifice. It is the dialog of love perfected by sacrifice."²⁴ It is not a question of emotional pressure, inducing man to feel obligated to do for Christ what He did for us, as unfortunately affirmed in distorted spiritualities. It is the model of true love which can only be expressed

²⁰ Sergei Bulgakov, quoted by St. Dumitru Stăniloae (2012, p. 835).

²¹ This is poetically expressed in the service of the Lamentations with the words: "You came to earth/ To save Adam./ And not finding him there, You descended below;/ Down to Hades, my Lord, You searched for him." *The Lamentations of the Lord* I,25.

²² Stăniloae 2004, p. 36.

²³ Stăniloae 2018b, p. 87.

²⁴ Stăniloae 2004, p. 486.



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through the cross. Therefore, "St. Cyril of Alexandria says that it is only through our pure sacrifice that we can enter the Father. But it cannot be pure unless it is joined by Christ to His own sacrifice."²⁵ Man communes with Christ and thus identifies himself with His sacrifice.

Moreover, with the body of man becoming the body of Christ, man becomes the church of Christ. He becomes a member of the Church as the mystical body of Christ, through whom God manifests Himself in the world. Father Dumitru Stăniloae says that:

*By bringing our offering together with Christ, we have immersed ourselves—through the transformation accomplished upon our gifts by the Holy Spirit—into Christ, so that we may, together with Christ, immerse ourselves into the Father, in order to be healed of our selfishness, which takes on a different form in each person and at every moment.*²⁶

It is the relationship of love between man and Christ that reveals to him, and motivates him, to find himself. When the child learns to walk, the mother moves a little away from him and then calls him to her. The child, loving his mother and seeing the love in her eyes and hearing her call, approaches her. His love for her and her love for him motivate him to discover strengths that he does not even know he has, becoming what he is meant to be. In the same way, the believer sees in the liturgical anamnesis the Savior's love and hears how he is called to communion: "With fear of God, with faith and love draw near!" Out of love for God and seeing His love for man, man prepares himself as best he can, trains his spiritual organs to be able to walk towards and share in God, and then strengthens himself to continue and develop further. "Our love toward Him is nourished by His love toward us."²⁷ It is not the perfect man, or the one convinced of his worthiness, who draws near to the Holy Gifts, but man in the state in which he is and who, though a sinner, does all his sinful state allows him to draw near to God. Accomplishing all that is in his power to cleanse himself, he does not allow his limitations to distance him from Christ.

This training of love takes place in the Holy Liturgy, at which the Christian should receive daily communion, as we actually ask for in the Lord's Prayer. If this cannot happen today, the desire should still be constant, materializing as often as possible. This is because "perfection must be lived in advance or continually foretasted anew, while at the same time remaining an ever-attractive goal for the human person."²⁸

5. Living eternity and healing the experience of time

Man was created in time and apparently lives in time. As the one called to have the life of God, however, divinized man lives outside of time, participating by grace in the attribute of

²⁵ Stăniloae 2004, p. 421.

²⁶ Stăniloae 2004, p. 486.

²⁷ Stăniloae 2016, p. 337.

²⁸ Stăniloae 2018b, p. 84.



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God's Own un-creation and existence outside of time.²⁹ This is because "Time is not of the creature's being,"³⁰ but is the interval between coming into existence and the fulfillment of true existence. Like God, man can live only in the present. The mind, however, can receive past imaginings or future possibilities which may, more or less, reflect reality. Even if man seems to have memories, experiences of the past which he relives in his mind, these are in fact actual experiences³¹ of what the person has experienced in a personal and particular way and what is fragmented in the past. Memory is not the actual information of a past reality, but a current experience that the brain associates with a known event in order to control it.³² The brain needs a thought system, which is the interpretation it gives to its personal and particular perception of reality. The brain will rather accept a false system of thinking than put up with not knowing, with no system. A thought system, even a mistaken one, gives us a sense of control that calms our fear. Memory is therefore formed by the particular perception of reality organized by its particular interpretation, according to the degree of intellectual and emotional maturity of the person. This perception is inscribed in the living flesh of the brain, but also of the body in general, by the bio-chemical and spiritual imprint with which it marks (more or less) man's entire psychosomatic organism. The state of the person receiving the information distorts both the perception of reality and its re/memorization. Each recollection of an event modifies the memory according to the current bio-chemical and spiritual imprint, so that, mostly, with the passage of time, the memory has ever less to do with the past reality. It represents the current state of man interpreting past reality.

Speaking from the perception of pathology, we may think of traumatic experiences that affect a patient while seemingly recalling in great detail what happened in the past. In such cases, especially with regard to symptoms called "flash-backs", a person in the here and now identifies with himself in the then and there; he not only remembers, but actually relives

²⁹ In this context, St. Dumitru Stăniloae quotes St. Gregory of Nyssa: the man who partakes of grace "changes from being mortal to being immortal, from being stained to being clean, from being ephemeral to being everlasting and from being human, to being fully God". Cuv. 7 la Fericiri, PG 44, col. 1280 C in Dumitru 2018a, p. 184.

³⁰ Stăniloae 2018a, p. 188.

³¹ "Memories occur when elements of the present experience and the stored past experiences are identical or at least similar, because the processing of the present stimuli occurs preferentially along the pathways that were selectively reinforced in the course of the previous experiences and their storage, whereby it is to be expected that the neuronal activity is again synchronized. [...] The synchronized activity within the network that stores a previous experience is the memory of what happened at that time. The past has been relived in the present." (Deneke 2013, p. 146).

³² „Because all current experiences link up with related memory networks, if those networks contained unprocessed material, and if it those physical sensations are still there, the emotions that arise are not new emotions, per se, but a reactivation of affects stored from the earlier event. [...] Even early experience is still hot, it is going to generate that heat in the present.” (Shapiro 2003, p. 201). Also from a theological perspective, man's resembling God by living in a continuous present serves to prepare himself for the fullness of this experience of everything as an eternal “now”. Of course, in this life there exists tension between the “already” and the “not yet.” Still, all dimensions of one's own life, as well as of one's salvific events, will not be experienced as events recalled from the past, but as an eternal now.



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here and now what happened then and there.³³ This lack of differentiation completely distorts the human experience and seriously distorts his perception of reality.

Another similar, but less obvious phenomenon, although very frequent and often at least as incapacitating, especially if not recognized, is regression. In this case, current situations transpose a person, on an emotional and logical level, to previous states of his psycho-emotional and spiritual evolution. In such critical situations, man regresses to past states and feels himself, for example, like a helpless little child, often behaving as such, without realizing it. Such states need to be healed of their destructive impact. In the course of such healing, one's childhood will no longer be associated with a negative state of powerlessness, ignorance, unimportance, but with the state of being a child of God. Each stage in humans' psycho-somatic and spiritual development has an eternal meaning that must be cleansed from the negative aspects imposed by this fallen world.

The awareness of and life in God's eternal present is fully realized in the Holy Liturgy. Through the initial blessing, the faithful is helped to realize the time of the liturgy as the time of the eternal manifestation of God's love:

By the power of the liturgical mystery, time opens up and we are projected onto the plane where eternity intersects with time, and we become in the Liturgy actual contemporaries of the biblical events from Genesis to the Second Coming; we live them concretely as their eyewitnesses.³⁴

The evolving form of the liturgy, both through its historical development and through its symbolic enrichment, helps the believer to understand the abiding presence of God, both behind every liturgical act and behind every experience of our existence, culminating in both the abiding awareness of God's presence and the abiding of man's positive response to the call of God's love. This permanence is in fact the realized living of eternity:

We must at all times offer our sacrifice to the Father, just as Christ, who is always in a state of sacrifice on the high altar before the Father. This is our 'service', latría, our constant sacrifice together with Christ's.³⁵

In the words of St. Dumitru Stăniloae, who devotes an entire chapter in his *Dogmatics* to the relationship between eternity and time, time is "the interval between God's call and our response."³⁶ In the perfect love of the Holy Trinity, this interval does not exist, because the response of the perfect love of each person to the other is perfect and instantaneous. It needs no interval, no gradual growth, no gradual trials and pendulums between love and self-care. Instead, in the Holy Trinity we envisage an instantaneous response of perfect love in self-giving. Therefore, in God there is no time, but the eternity of perfect love: "In God, the

³³ „During reliving, consciousness of one's past self (memory) becomes stronger than consciousness of the present self (i.e., awareness of the present environment) such that the past self seems as if it is the present self.” (Frewen 2015, p. 99).

³⁴ Stăniloae 2004, p. 299.

³⁵ Stăniloae 2004, p. 319.

³⁶ Stăniloae 2018a, p. 188.



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duration of waiting is reduced to zero, for the love between divine Subjects is simultaneous in all its perfection."³⁷

Just as in the therapeutic process of imagery rescripting, when a savior is introduced into traumatic memories or recurring nightmares, changing the content of these traumatizing flashbacks, so also in the Holy Liturgy, the therapeutic process does not engage the imagination. Instead, we are trained in the awareness of the real and loving presence of God, as the true Savior, in every stage and moment of human life, beyond all the traumatizing miseries of the sins of the world. Through this is realized what St. Dumitru says: "The Eucharist sows in us the strength to surrender our whole existence to God, in order to receive it filled with his eternal life, Christ-like, through the resurrection."³⁸

6. Conclusion

The ontological healing of the human being is not an external or purely moral process, but a profound, fundamental reality which is accomplished in the Holy Liturgy through union with the sacrificed and risen Christ. This union does not annul the person but restores and places one in the loving communion of the Holy Trinity, in accordance with the purpose of creation. Through the cleansing of the affections, the assumption of freedom in the face of determinism, the healing of love in the Eucharistic sacrifice, and the living of eternity as the permanence of the loving response to God, man is freed from selfishness and restored to his true identity: that of being the image and likeness of God. In this perspective, the Divine Liturgy is not merely an act of worship, but an act of healing and deification, a real anticipation of the Kingdom of God in which transfigured humanity, united in being with Christ, participates in the communion of eternal love within the Holy Trinity.

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³⁷ Stăniloae 2018a, p. 190.

³⁸ Stăniloae 2018b, p. 85.



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