

The Holy Spirit and the Sanctification and Transfiguration of Man and the Cosmos

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Introduction

Orthodox theology is “perichoretic.” The term “perichoresis” is a theological expression which is used to describe the ‘inter-penetrating’ relationship between the persons of the Trinity, but I feel that it is also an appropriate term to use when discussing Orthodox theology in general. All aspects of Orthodox theology inter-penetrate one another; it is impossible to talk about one area of Orthodox theology without divorcing it from the other areas. Everything from its Triadology, anthropology, to its eschatology is intimately and organically united to one another while at the same time they all serve to mutually illumine one another. It is important to note this before heading into the topic at hand, the role of the Holy Spirit in the sanctification of man and the transfiguration of the cosmos. Even these two subjects themselves are intimately united to another, which I will endeavor to show by the end of this paper, and one cannot properly understand these eschatological subjects within understanding Orthodox anthropology and cosmology; at the same time we cannot properly understand Orthodox anthropology and cosmology without understanding Orthodox eschatology and these must also be read in unison with Orthodox Triadology, Christology, and pneumatology. The purpose of this paper will be to put the conversation about the sanctification of man and the transfiguration of the cosmos by the Holy Spirit

within the framework of the teachings of the Church which serve to illuminate the discussion at hand.

The ‘Uniqueness’ and ‘Unity’ in the activities of the Divine Persons

The first place we must look at is the relationship between the Three Persons of the Holy Trinity. It is important to note both the unity of the work of the Divine Persons in all things along with the unique roles of the Three Persons in their unified operations. The unity within the Trinity in their actions can be displayed with clarity when examining the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed: “I believe in One God, the Father Almighty, *Maker* of heaven and earth... and in One Lord Jesus Christ... by Whom all things were *made*... and in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the *Giver of life*” (emphasis added). All Three Persons of the Holy Trinity take part in the act of creation and in all things the Persons of the Trinity are united in what they do. St. Athanasius the Great tells us that “the Father creates all things through the Word in the [Holy] Spirit; for where the Word is, there is the Spirit also, and the things which are created through the Word have their vital strength out of the Spirit from the Word. Thus it is written in the thirty-second Psalm: ‘By the Word of the Lord the heavens were established, and by the Spirit of his mouth is all their power’.”¹ When speaking specifically about the activities of the Holy Spirit, St. Basil the Great says: “In everything the Holy Spirit is indivisibly and inseparably joined to the Father and the Son.”² Alongside the unity of the Triune operations we are able to note the unique roles of the Persons when we turn once more to St. Basil the Great: “When you consider creation I advise you to think first of Him who is the first cause of everything that exists: namely, the Father, and then of the Son, who is the creator, and then the Holy Spirit, the perfecter.”³ According to St. Basil we can distinguish these unique roles within the Persons of the Trinity according to their unified activities: the Father is the ‘first cause,’ the

¹ St. Athanasius, *The Letters of Saint Athanasius Concerning the Holy Spirit*. London: The Epworth Press, 1951, p. 174.

² St. Basil the Great, *On the Holy Spirit*, New York: St. Vladimir Seminary Press, 1980, p. 60.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

Son is the ‘operating cause,’ and the Spirit is the ‘perfecting cause.’ When recognizing these unique roles of the Persons it must not be understood that the work of any of the Persons is imperfect without the work of the other Persons; here again St. Basil is helpful: “The Father’s work is in no way imperfect , since He accomplished all in all, nor is the Son’s work deficient if it is not completed by the Spirit.”⁴ It is necessary for us to understand the unity and uniqueness in the activities of the Holy Trinity when discussing the role of the Holy Spirit in the place of the sanctification of man and the transfiguration of the cosmos. While on the one hand we can affirm alongside St. Basil that “the Spirit is the essence of life and divine sanctification,”⁵ we must also affirm that this work of the Holy Spirit in bringing created beings (both man and the cosmos) towards perfection is work done in unity with the Father and the Son; we can never separate the operations of the Holy Spirit from the unity of the Holy Trinity.

The Trinity in Creation

Having highlighted both the unity and the uniqueness in the activities of the Holy Trinity we must now briefly look at the Trinity in the work of creation itself. What is most important for us at this moment is to build upon the last section with a look at the role of the “Uncreated Energies” in the work of creation by the Holy Trinity. It must first be established that the ‘Uncreated Energies’ are, according to Vladimir Lossky, “that mode of existence of the Trinity which is outside of its inaccessible essence.”⁶ The act of creation is not an outpouring (or ‘procession’) of God’s own essence or persons. If we would have a ‘personal procession’ coming from the Father, such as in the case of the Son and the Spirit, we would simply have new persons within the Godhead, while if it is a ‘natural procession,’ such as the case of the ‘Energies,’ what we have is also God in the mode of existence outside of His Essence. Creation therefore is not a procession of either persons or

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid., p. 73.

⁶ Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*. New York: St. Vladimir Seminary Press, 1997, p. 73.

nature but is a product of the will of God. In their creative roles the persons of the Trinity create according to their will by means of the energies, as St. Cyril of Alexandria says, “Creation is the task of energy.”⁷ These Energies, both in creation and economy, are uniquely communicated by the Holy Spirit, though they have their origin in the Father and are given through the Son. God creates by His Energies according to His ‘Divine Ideas,’ which is articulated by St. John of Damascus, “God creates by His thought which immediately becomes a work.”⁸ St. John of Damascus defines the ‘Divine Ideas’ of God as the, “pre-temporal and unchangeable counsel of God, in which everything is given its distinctive character before its being, everything which is preordained by God in advance and then brought into existence.”⁹ The Divine Ideas are the models, patterns, and prototypes of all created things and it is, “by them that all things have been determined and are created by the supersubstantial God,”¹⁰ as taught by Dionysius the Areopagite. The relationship between God’s will, His Energies, and His Ideas in creation is explained by Fr. Georges Florovsky, “the totality of the Divine Energies constitutes His pre-temporal will, His design – His good pleasure – concerning the ‘other,’ His Eternal Counsel.”¹¹ These Ideas (Designs, Good Pleasure, Eternal Counsel; all these are synonymous terms), are, “uncreated expressions of divine life,”¹² as Fr. John Meyendorff defines them; though they exist eternally in a different manner than the eternity of the Divine Nature. St. Athanasius argues that, “to create, for God, is secondary; and to beget, primary.”¹³ The begetting and proceeding of the Son and the Spirit is antecedent to the expression of the common will of the Trinity; the Divine Ideas exist in eternity through the expression of the will, but not co-eternally with the Divine Nature). Since the Divine ideas are

⁷ Quoted in Lossky, p. 73.

⁸ Quoted in Lossky, p. 94.

⁹ Georges Florovsky, *Creation and Redemption*. Belmont, MA: Norland Press, 1976, p. 60.

¹⁰ Quoted in Lossky, p. 95.

¹¹ Florovsky, pp. 68-69.

¹² John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology: Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes*. New York: Fordham University Press, 1999, p. 131.

¹³ Quoted in Florovsky, pg. 58.

uncreated expressions of the divine life through the divine will they find their place within the Uncreated Energies. It is important for us to establish and clarify these aspects of Orthodox doctrine regarding creation by the Energies as the expression of the Divine Will according to the Divine Ideas to be able to understand the nature of creation and its '*telos*' (fulfilment) in Christ through the Spirit, all of which is also necessary in understanding the relationship between man, Grace, and the Holy Spirit in the roles of soteriology and eschatology, which will become more evident as we move on through the essay.

The Nature of Creation

As we have seen in the previous section, the act of creation is carried out by the Energies; which are intimately linked both with the Divine Will as well as the Divine Ideas. This act of creation by God is carried out in complete freedom; God could have chosen not to create without any detraction from Himself. According to Fr. Georges Florovsky, "God creates out of the absolute superabundance of His mercies and goodness, and herein His good pleasure and freedom are manifest."¹⁴ The manner of creation is '*ex nihilo*;' out of nothing. God takes that which is non-being and brings it into being. This gives nature a certain dynamic quality to it; an ontology of change, of becoming, "The very transition from non-entity to existence is a change, non-existence being changed by the Divine power into being,"¹⁵ according to St. Gregory of Nyssa. The very nature of creation is an ontology of becoming through the Energies of God; the Energies as the principle, cause, and sustainers of created being. Created being is the realization of the Divine Ideas. The Divine Ideas also establish "different modes according to which created beings participate in the creative energies,"¹⁶ according to Vladimir Lossky. All of creation is called according to the Divine Ideas to participate in the Energies of God to come into the fulfilment of their pre-existent patterns. While it is true that the initial

¹⁴ Florovsky, p. 57.

¹⁵ Quoted in Florovsky, p. 43.

¹⁶ Lossky, p. 95.

creation existed in a perfected state, through its participation in the Energies, it was a perfection of ‘potential;’ a dynamic state where the creation was called to assimilate into the life of the Trinity; and since the Trinity is infinite this assimilation is an ever onward ascent through participation of the energies, which transforms and transfigures the cosmos into greater degrees of perfection according to the Divine Ideas; as St. Gregory of Nyssa notes, “perfection consists in our never stopping in our growth, never circumscribing our perfection by any limitation.”¹⁷ Thus created being was at once both perfect and possesses potential for greater perfection; it is ‘teleological’ by design. It is integral to the Orthodox understanding of the sanctification of man and cosmos to recognize the dynamic nature of creation as it will show us that sanctification is nothing more than the ontological fulfilment of creation.

Man, Micro-theos, Microcosm, and Mediator

Within this coming to perfection of the cosmos there is a unique position in regards to the role that man plays. The church fathers make a special note in recognizing the fact that man is created last after the creation of everything else. St. Gregory of Nyssa explains that it was “for this reason man was brought into the world last after the creation, not being rejected to the last as worthless, but as one whom it behooved to be king over his subjects at his very birth.”¹⁸ Man himself was the crown and glory of all creation and was placed by God within the creation as a king. What set man above the rest of creation was that he was not simply created by Divine command, as was the rest of creation, but that he was created according to Divine Counsel by the hands of God (the Son and the Spirit according to St. Irenaeus of Lyons) Himself and was made in the ‘image of God’ (Gen. 1:27); a “portrait to resemble His own beauty,”¹⁹ in the words of St. Gregory of Nyssa.

¹⁷ St. Gregory of Nyssa, *Perf.* (Gregorii Nysseni Opera 8.1, ed. Jaeger et al., pp. 213-14) quoted in Dale C. Allison, *Studies in Matthew: Interpretation Past and Present*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, pp. 127-128.

¹⁸ St. Gregory of Nyssa, “On the Making of Man,” II, 2. Available at New Advent: <<http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/2914.htm>>.

¹⁹ St. Gregory of Nyssa, “On the Making of Man,” V, 1.

Being made in the image of God means more than can be comprehended and can not be limited to one explanation alone (since a searching of the Fathers on this subject brings about a wide variety of responses), but we can speak of elements of what it means for man to be made in the image of God that pertains to our discussion. “The ‘according to the image’,” notes St. John of Damascus, “is manifest in intelligence and free will.”²⁰ God, being entirely free from any constraint in His existence, creates man with a free will that he might co-operate with the Divine Will of God and through his reason have the knowledge of God and manifest Him to the rest of creation. Another element of being in the image of God is man’s spiritual faculty: “man exists in the image of God because, having a soul akin to God, he tends towards God and finds himself in living relationship with Him,”²¹ so says Fr. Dimitru Staniloae. Since God breathed the breath of life into man (Gen. 2:7), he has a natural kinship with God. Along with this is recognizing that man is a relational, personal being, since he is made in the image of the God who is Persons in communion, the Holy Trinity. While the Fathers recognize that the glory of man resides with being made in the image of God, and that in, “the image [man] finds its resemblance to the Archetype,”²² as Gregory of Nyssa teaches, they also recognize that by the fact that he is also created from the dust of the earth (Gen. 2:7) that man is also a “microcosm.” Regarding this fact we can turn again to St. Gregory of Nyssa:

Man is a miniature cosmos and contains all the elements of the great cosmos. And the orderly arrangement of the universe... just as in a fragment of insignificant glass it is possible to see the whole circle of the sun reflected in the gleaming part, as in a mirror, as though the smallness of what is gleaming

²⁰ Andrew Louth, *Introducing Eastern Orthodox Theology*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013, p. 85.

²¹ Dimitru Staniloae, *The Experience of God: Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, vol. 2. *The World: Creation and Deification*. Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, p. 85.

²² St. Gregory of Nyssa, “On the Making of Man,” XVI, 10.

contains it, so also all the music perceived in the universe is seen in the miniature cosmos, I mean in human nature.²³

The whole of created nature is contained within man who then in fact stands as a point of connected between the created and the Uncreated; as being made in the image of God a 'micro-theos' and as containing the universe within himself a 'microcosm.' Within himself he unites all of the cosmos to God that, "he may be [the] the mediator of the Spirit of God to the whole of nature and priest of the entire cosmos,"²⁴ according to Fr. Dimitru Staniloae. Here we can now look at the fact that man is called to attain to the 'likeness' of God. St. John of Damascus notes that "the expression 'according to the likeness' denotes assimilation through virtue, in as far as this is possible."²⁵ Having laid down the foundation of man being a micro-theos, a microcosm, and a mediator we can now look at the role he plays in the sanctification of the cosmos. First, we must briefly note the way in which God relates to mankind, according to St. Basil the Great, "when we consider the abundant blessings He [the Father] has given us...we acknowledge that this grace works for us through Him [the Son] and in Him [the Spirit]."²⁶ Once again we see the unity and the uniqueness in the operations of the Trinity, especially in His relations with mankind. We can also bring to mind the fact that the perfecting of creation is carried out by the Spirit, Who communicates the Uncreated Energies in His creative and economic role. Creation has a natural affinity to be in communion with God the Father in Christ through the Spirit by means of the Energies since it was the Energies of God that brought creation from non-existence into being according to the Divine Ideas in which creation is based on and towards which it is to find its fulfilment, and since the Divine Ideas find their place within

²³ Quotation by Matthew Baker in his "Music and Mediation in St Gregory of Nyssa's Commentary 'On the Inscriptions of the Psalms'," <<http://myocn.net/music-mediation-st-gregory-nyssas-commentary-inscriptions-psalms/>>.

²⁴ Staniloae, p. 85.

²⁵ Hilarion Alfeyev, *The Mystery of Faith: An Introduction to the Teaching and Spirituality of the Orthodox Church*. New York: St. Vladimir Seminary Press, 2004, p. 61.

²⁶ St. Basil the Great, p. 33.

the Energies of God, creation finds its fulfilment in God Himself; which is a process of 'becoming' since creation has a dynamic nature. Having established all this we have a larger context of understanding what it means for man to attain to the 'likeness' of God. Man was created with a dynamic nature by the Energies of God so that by the free offering of himself in co-operation with the Divine Will he might be transformed by the Holy Spirit ever more into the 'likeness' of God. The personal transfiguration that results from the synergy between man and God affects the transfiguration of the cosmos. Since man contains the cosmos within himself, as well as paradise, as he is transformed by the Energies of God through the Holy Spirit so the cosmos within him is transformed ever more into paradise, and then by "constantly bearing paradise within himself, being in ceaseless communion with God, he would be able to transform the whole earth into paradise,"²⁷ as Vladimir Lossky derives this point from the teaching of St. Maximus the Confessor. Here we see the role of the Spirit in the sanctification of man and the cosmos. Man is to work together in a synergistic union with the will of God and to be transformed by the Spirit which in turn transforms the cosmos through man as the mediator. Man was created to be in communion with God, his fellow man, and all creation; to hold within himself the very life of his fellow created beings (man and cosmos) and to unite it to the Grace of God within himself, but the relationship between man and God took a sharp and sudden turn which cut him off from God, took him off the track of both the personal and cosmic transfiguration, and placed both himself and the cosmos in an autonomy on the path of disintegration.

From Deification to Disintegration: the Fall

The task of paradisaic man was to offer his will freely in co-operation with the will of God and to be transformed by the Grace of the Holy Spirit into the likeness of God, or as St. Irenaeus of Lyons puts it, "it was necessary for him to reach full development," because, "man was a young child, not yet having a perfect

²⁷ Lossky, p. 109.

deliberation.”²⁸ By reaching his full development man would not only be deified himself but would “grant the state of deification to the whole creation.”²⁹ After the creation of man God gave him a commandment because,

knowing again that free choice of human beings could turn either way, he secured beforehand, by a law and a set place, the grace given. For bringing them into His own paradise, He gave them a law, so that if they guarded the grace and remained good, they might have the life of paradise...but if they were to transgress and turning away become wicked, they would know themselves the corruption of death according to nature, and no longer live in paradise, but thereafter dying outside of it, would remain in death and in corruption.³⁰

The unfortunate story is that due to being a young child and having not yet a perfect deliberation he was, as St. Irenaeus puts it, “easily deceived by the seducer,”³¹ the devil. Through the transgression of the commandment by the misuse of his will man separated himself from God and has placed himself in “a condition against nature,” which leads to the “disintegration of the being of man, which dissolves finally into death...man has obstructed the faculty in himself for communion with God,”³² explains Vladimir Lossky. Since man is no longer filled with the Grace of God, he enters into a mode of existence, which consists of returning to that from which he was made; nothingness. He also becomes “deaf, blind, naked, insensitive to the good things from which he had fallen away,”³³ as St. Symeon the New Theologian puts it. Through the darkening of his mind man no longer knows what is good naturally, as he did before the fall, by nature of being created good by God, and by the illumination of the Holy Spirit. By damaging of his faculty to will (known as the ‘gnomic will’ in the teaching of St. Maximus the Confessor) man has a certain pre-disposition towards sin, “for once the eyes of his

²⁸ St. Irenaeus of Lyons, *On the Apostolic Preaching*. New York: St. Vladimir Seminary Press, 1997, p. 47.

²⁹ Lossky, p. 109.

³⁰ St. Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*. New York: St. Vladimir Seminary Press, p. 57.

³¹ St. Irenaeus of Lyons, p. 47.

³² Lossky, p. 132.

³³ Quoted in Alfeyev, p. 69.

soul were blinded he began to see with the eyes of his flesh,”³⁴ in the words of St. Symeon the New Theologian. The original harmony of man is disrupted, his soul is blinded, his faculty of willing is harmed, and he is decaying both spiritually and physically, and this condition of mortality and corruption is passed on to the subsequent human race that comes from Adam. As St. Cyril of Alexandria notes, “from the root, the sickness proceeded to the rest of the tree, Adam being the root who had suffered corruption,”³⁵ but it was not mankind only that suffered. Metropolitan Hilarion Alfeyev explains that

not only humanity but also the entire world changed as a result of the Fall. The original harmony between people and nature had been broken...all creation would be subject to the ‘bondage of decay.’ Together with humanity it would now ‘wait for freedom’ from this bondage, since it did not submit to sin voluntarily but through the fault of mankind.”³⁶

Instead of transfiguring the cosmos man ended up disfiguring it and plunging it into disorder and decay. Man now lived in a self-existing autonomy, which put him in conflict with the rest of creation, seeing it as either a means towards self-gratification or as something that existed in opposition towards him. It is important to understand the depths that man and creation fell into, due to the Fall, for us to have a proper understanding for the context of sanctification. For pre-fallen man sanctification would have no negative context; he did not need to be sanctified and purified of sin and death, but rather sanctification through the Holy Spirit would simply be the continual ascent and transformation of his already good condition. For us living in the post-fallen existence, sanctification takes on a negative connotation: it involves our purification of sin and deliverance from death. It is necessary for man’s will to co-operate with the Divine will for his nature

³⁴ Quoted in Alfeyev, p. 70.

³⁵ Quoted by Tenny Thomas in his “Original Sin,” available at <http://www.neamericandiocese.org/orthodoxy/original-sin.aspx>.

³⁶ Alfeyev, p. 70.

and creation to be deified, but now his will was harmed and he was not able to return to the Kingdom from which he fell.

We must now turn to the economy of Christ to see how mankind is put back on track towards deification by receiving the Holy Spirit and being made members of the Church as a result of the economy of Christ. Within the context of the Church, where man is united to the humanity of Christ, which is reunited to God, and has overcome sin and death, we will then have set up all the walls necessary to view the Orthodox doctrine on sanctification of man and cosmos.

The Economy of Christ

Man, who had been created to co-operate with the Grace of the Holy Spirit to attain to the likeness of God, was now in separation from God. His will had been damaged, his mind darkened, and he was plunged into mortality, and in this condition of disintegration, ignorance, and infirmity of choice, he took upon himself an inclination towards sin which he could not free himself from. In this condition the Spirit of God could not abide within him (see Gen. 6:3), and he was destined to return to the dust from whence he came, but in the words of St. Athanasius, “it was improper that what had once been rational and partakers on the Word should perish, and once again return to non-being through corruption.”³⁷ He Who was the ‘operative cause’ in the creation of man became the ‘operative cause’ in the recreation of man. The Word of God entered into the human condition to ‘recapitulate’ mankind. By means of His Incarnation, Christ reunites human nature to the divine nature in His person and bridges the separation between man and God. In His Incarnation Christ assumed the entirety of human nature; He possessed a human mind, soul, will, operation, body, and nature. For if there is any part of man that was not assumed by the Incarnation it would remain outside of the salvific economy, as St. Gregory the Theologian

³⁷ St. Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, p. 63.

(Nazianzus) notes “that which He has not assumed He has not healed.”³⁸ In the Incarnation of the entirety of human nature is healed, transformed, and deified by means of the ‘hypostatic union’, but outside of the Person of Christ the rest of humanity was still enslaved in the fallen condition, so the life and ministry, the economy, of Christ is that of bringing creation back to God in Himself. The entirety of His life was a co-operation between His divine will and His human will, thus restoring the human will into a synergistic relationship with God. Through His life of teaching and performing miracles, He revealed to men the knowledge of God; as St. Athanasius wrote: “rightly wishing to help human beings, He sojourned as a human being, taking to Himself a body like theirs and from below – I mean through the works of the body – that those not wishing to know Him from His providence and governance of the universe, from the works done through the body might know the Word of God in the body, and through Him the Father.”³⁹ Christ fulfills man’s original call to manifest God as being made in the image of God and, since He is *the* Image according to which man was created, He restores the image within man. All that Christ undertook in His economy was done freely out of love. In taking on the human nature He assumed all humanity, and all creation, in Himself. Through His entire life of submitting His human will to His divine will (though this was done freely on the part of His human will) He becomes an offering of love to God, offering all of creation in Himself to God; fulfilling the paradisaical vocation of man to be the priest of all creation. This self-offering of love found its pinnacle in His crucifixion. In His life He perfectly fulfilled the law that he might free men from the curse of the law by being the spotless lamb who by hanging on a tree takes the curse upon Himself. At once He is both the priest who offers on behalf of all creation as well as He becomes the sacrifice on behalf of all. Being entirely free from sin His death serves to cleanse humanity, and through them all of creation, by means of the human nature that He assumed in the Incarnation. As the Lamb of God He takes away the sins of the world and purifies human nature from the sin it had been stained with. By cleansing man from sin He

³⁸ St. Gregory of Nazianzus, “Critique of Apollinarius and Apollinarianism,” part of his Epistle 101. Available at Early Church Texts
<http://www.earlychurchtexts.com/public/gregoryofnaz_critique_of_apollinarianism.htm>.

³⁹ St. Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, p. 81.

also accomplishes a cosmic purification. Fr. Georges Florovsky wrote that Christ affected “the cleansing of the cosmos through the cleansing of the Microcosm.”⁴⁰ The Divine blood that was shed for the purification of sins transforms the entire cosmos, in the words of St. Gregory the Theologian, “one drop of His blood recreates the whole creation.”⁴¹ The final barrier between creation and God was the last enemy, death. Christ by virtue of assuming a pre-fallen human nature was not subject to death by necessity but rather voluntarily willed to enter into death. Being Life Himself His death conquers death and on the third day He rises from the dead in the Glory of His transfigured body. In Christ the objective salvation and transfiguration of man and the cosmos was completed. He reunited the cosmos in Himself, cleansed it from sin, freed in from death, and in His ascension set it into the Kingdom of Heaven at the right hand of the Father. Through Christ man is once again set on the path towards actualizing the transformation accomplished in Christ. Man can once again be reunited to God, unite his will to the divine will, and through the Grace of the Holy Spirit be transformed and share in the cosmic transfiguration. It is integral to understand what was accomplished in the economy of Christ is we wish to understand what it means for mankind to acquire sanctification through the Holy Spirit in our current condition. It is only possible for us to be sanctified due to Christ recapitulating our human nature and setting it back on the path towards deification so that we are able to be indwelt by the Holy Spirit, Who is the source of our sanctification.

The Role of the Holy Spirit: Church, Mysteries, Synergy, and Eschatology

“The goal and purpose of all of Christ’s work of salvation for us what that believers should receive the Holy Spirit”⁴² – this statement by St. Symeon the New

⁴⁰ Florovsky, p. 134.

⁴¹ St. Gregory the Theologian, Oration 45, XXIX . Available at New Advent <<http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/310245.htm>>.

⁴² [St.] Symeon the New Theologian, *The Discourses*. Discourse 38. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1980.

Theologian is echoed by many of the Fathers. It shows us that the fulfillment of the economy of Christ is given on the day of Pentecost with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Through the Spirit, men and woman are able to be united to the body of Christ and once again be set on the track that humanity was created for; deification. The work of salvation is indeed accomplished by Christ, Who liberated human nature from the separation, sin, and death that had engulfed it, but this work of salvation must be accomplished within the unique persons of mankind by the Holy Spirit; Who, as we have seen, is the 'perfecting cause' in regards to the economic roles of the Trinity.

The context in which the sanctification of man and creation takes place is the life of the Church and her participation in the Holy Mysteries. The Church and the Mysteries are the foundation and source of the sanctification of man and creation because the Grace of the Holy Spirit is communicated to mankind within the Church and through the Mysteries. Since mankind was created to be in communion with God, each other, and creation to reach his vocation of attaining to the 'likeness' of God – the life that paradisaical man experienced in Paradise – then it is first necessary for there to be a restoration of this paradisaical condition of communion in which mankind can reach his potential. The Church is the restoration of Paradise on Earth in which mankind is reunited to God, in Christ through the Holy Spirit, and through the same Holy Spirit in communion with one another, and through the material elements used within the liturgical life of the Church, creation once again becomes a means of communicating the Grace of the Holy Spirit. Thus in the Church the life of the age to come is experienced in part, and it is this life within the Church that sanctifies her human members and all of creation; the Church is the place in which man can be sanctified. The heart of the life of the Church is found within the Holy Mysteries. Through baptism men are freed from ancestral sin, liberated from the enslavement to sin, regenerated according to the Image they were created in, and made members of the body of Christ. All of this is accomplished by the Spirit, Who comes down upon the waters, making the waters truly life giving, and by our acceptance of this gift through participating in the baptismal rite. Baptism is our own mystical participation in the death and resurrection of Christ and is effected by the Holy Spirit. Here begins the

life of sanctification, as St. Paul teaches: “but you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God” (1 Cor. 6:11). Following baptism we are sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit in the Mystery of Chrismation, which is our own personal participation in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. As the Spirit is invoked during the rite of the Chrismation it is He Who is given to the newly baptized as they are anointed with the consecrated oil. Through these Mysteries we are given the fullness of Grace necessary for our sanctification, as St. Mark the Monk explains, “everyone who has been baptized in an orthodox manner has received the fullness of Grace.”⁴³ The Grace given in baptism and Chrismation renews man and energizes him so that he may participate in the Mystery par-excellence of the Holy Eucharist. Through the descent on the Holy Spirit upon the offering of bread and wine it becomes the very body and blood of Christ and is our mystical participation in the wedding banquet of the Lamb in the Kingdom of Heaven. The Mysteries are the revelation of the sanctification of the cosmos by the Holy Spirit through man. As man offers the created elements – be it water, oil, bread, or wine – to God, fulfilling his vocation as the priest of creation, the Holy Spirit descends upon the gifts and transforms them and fills them with Grace. Thus the Church and the Mysteries are the foundation of sanctification, because without the Grace of God man cannot become deified, as St. Paul explains: “for by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God” (Ephesians 2:8).

The work of sanctification within the life of the Church is founded upon the Grace of God but does not exclude human co-operation. As we have seen man was created by means of God’s Grace (His Uncreated Energies) and possesses free will. He was created to unite his will to God’s and thereby co-operate with Grace to attain to the likeness of God. It is important now for us to understand exactly what the Church means when she speaks about our sanctification. St. Paul’s words quoted above, “you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in

⁴³ Quoted by Daniel Townsend in his essay “Evangelical Christianity Compared and Contrasted with Orthodox Christianity: Part III,” <<http://www.examiner.com/article/evangelical-christianity-compared-and-contrasted-with-orthodox-christianity-part-iii>>

the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Cor 6:11), offers us an understanding about how sanctification is something that we have received in baptism (along with justification) by the Holy Spirit, yet elsewhere in Holy Scripture sanctification is spoken of in present, ongoing, terms, “the sanctifying work of the Spirit” (1Thess. 2:13), which involves our participation: “Let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness [holiness is “hagiōsynēn;” the Greek for ‘sanctification’ is “hagiasmos”] out of reverence for God” (1 Cor. 7:1). This sanctification, which is both given to us and ongoing, is completed at the resurrection when we will be perfected by the Spirit and made to be like Christ: “what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:2). “The bodies of the righteous [will] be glorified through the ineffable light – the power of the Spirit – that is already present within them,”⁴⁴ as St. Macarius the Great explains. Sanctification is past, present, and future. In the Orthodox Church, the biblical terms of justification, sanctification, and salvation are inter-changeable terms and it is entirely appropriate to understand the ongoing work of salvation as the being synonymous with the ongoing work of sanctification. As we have seen the beginning of sanctification is in baptism but the ongoing work of sanctification consists of an outworking of that baptism, a life of continually dying and rising with Christ. The Orthodox doctrine of sanctification is understood as ‘synergy.’ We appropriate the Grace given to us in the Church through the Mysteries by obeying the commandments of Christ, as St. Mark the Monk says, “it [the Grace of the Holy Spirit] is revealed and manifests itself to us increasingly, in proportion to our fulfillment of the commandments.”⁴⁵ This is also known as the ‘acquisition of the Holy Spirit’ in Orthodox theology. Sanctification is the continual struggle to be filled with the Holy Spirit to the point that we are constantly, consciously aware of His continual presence within us. As we obey the commandments and repent of our sins it is by the Grace of the Spirit that we have the strength to do so as well as it is He Who sanctifies us through our obedience

⁴⁴ St. Macarius the Great, *The Philokalia*, Vol. 3, compiled by St. Nikodimos of the Holy Mountain and St. Makarios of Corinth. London: Faber and Faber, 1979, p. 311.

⁴⁵ Quoted in Townsend.

and repentance. Through turning our wills away from the commandments and towards God it is possible to quench the Spirit. According to St. Gregory of Sinai, when we sin “the gift which we have received from Jesus Christ in Holy Baptism is not destroyed, but it is buried as a treasure in the ground.”⁴⁶ We do not lose the Spirit through sin, as St. Seraphim of Sarov boldly claims, but “this grace is so great, so necessary and life-giving, that it is never withdrawn: even the lapsed retain it until death.”⁴⁷ Unlike paradisaical man we are no longer in danger of such a separation from God by our sin as mankind was plunged into due to the original sin but the reality is that when we sin after our baptism we close ourselves to the sanctifying activity of the Holy Spirit because, according to St. Theophan the Recluse, the Holy Spirit only “works together with the free actions of each individual.”⁴⁸ The Church then gives the Christian who has fallen into sin and buried the Grace of the Holy Spirit underneath his sins the Mystery of Confession, as known as “Repentance,” which restores him to his original baptismal purity and the Grace of the Holy Spirit is once again uncovered, and it “gives him a taste of all the sweetness of the Divine, as abundantly and intensely as those who have achieved perfection experience it,”⁴⁹ according to St. Theophan the Recluse. In all this we see that the work of sanctification is begun by the Holy Spirit in the Church through the Mysteries and is carried along by the Holy Spirit in accordance to our repentance of sins and obedience of the commandments. As the members of the Church continually co-operate with the Grace of the Holy Spirit to purify themselves of sin that they may be filled with the Holy Spirit it is not only themselves that are transformed, but they share in the cosmic transfiguration effected by the economy of Christ, as Metropolitan Kallistos Ware writes, “because man is microcosm and mediator of creation, his own salvation involves also the reconciliation and transfiguration of the whole animate and inanimate creation

⁴⁶ Quoted in an unpublished essay by Fr. Anthony Estabrooks, “Co-operating With the Grace of God Received in the Holy Mysteries of Baptism, Chrismation, and Eucharist: A Foundation for Spiritual Growth Among Orthodox Laity,” p. 9.

⁴⁷ Valentine Zander, *St. Seraphim of Sarov*. New York: St. Vladimir Seminary Press, p. 89.

⁴⁸ St. Theophan the Recluse in *The Art of Prayer: An Orthodox Anthology*, compiled by Igumen Chariton. London: Faber and Faber, 1997, pp. 173-174.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 171.

around him.”⁵⁰ Ultimately it will be the Holy Spirit Who brings this sanctification to perfection at the Second Coming of Christ where He will sanctify completely the members of the Church and transfigure all creation.

“I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come, amen” – these are the final words of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed and teach us what the fulfilment of the work of the Holy Spirit will be. As we have seen the work of sanctification (or salvation) is understood in past, present, and future tenses; and we have looked at the past tense as well as the present/on-going tense. The future tense of the finality of sanctification, both personal and cosmic, will occur at the Second Coming of Christ. At the Second Coming of Christ every single person will be resurrected from the dead by the Holy Spirit. St. Paul says in Romans 8:11 that “if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit which dwells in you.” The Holy Spirit will raise all flesh, some to the resurrection of life and others to the resurrection of condemnation. Christ will come in the Glory He manifested at the Transfiguration and as St. John the Theologian says in 1 John 3:2 that “when He shall appear, we shall be like Him.” This Glory will in fact fill all of creation, as St. John reveals in Revelation 21:23, “and the city has no need of sun or moon to shine upon it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb.” This Glory is the Uncreated Light of the Trinity which will fill all of creation and God will be all in all. Those who are raised up to the resurrection of life will be fully animated by the Spirit, as St. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:44 that we shall be raised as a, “spiritual body.” This eschatological mode of life is the full acquisition of the Holy Spirit, Who at the resurrection will complete His role as the perfecting cause in the economic operations of the Trinity by transforming those who are in Christ into the full likeness of Christ. Here we see the fulfilment of what man was created for; as he was created according to the Divine Ideas to participate in the Grace of the Holy Spirit to progress unto the full likeness of God. Those who are raised and transformed will be completely filled with the Grace of God, enjoying perfect

⁵⁰ Kallistos Ware, *The Orthodox Way*. New York: St. Vladimir Seminary Press, 1995, pp. 136-137.

communion and union, deification, with the Trinity through the full acquisition of the Holy Spirit. As we have seen that the Glory of God (Grace, Uncreated Light, Energies; these are all synonymous terms) fills all creation we see in the Revelation 21:1 that there will be, “a new heaven and a new earth.” The entire cosmos will be transfigured by the Holy Spirit Who, in Psalm 104:30, “renew[s] the face of the earth.” The Holy Spirit Who has been present in the cosmos since the day of Pentecost will bring the work of cosmic transfiguration to completion, as Fr. Sergei Bulgakov notes, “Pentecost’s fiery tongues become the flame of the world fire, not consuming but transmuting the world.”⁵¹ The entire cosmos will be transparent in the Spirit and will reflect the Uncreated Light to all. The image of the burning bush is in fact an eschatological image as Metropolitan Kallistos Ware writes, “the entire cosmos is one vast burning bush, permeated by the fire of the divine power and glory.”⁵² The Eschaton will be nothing other than the ‘Churchification’ of all creation since the Church in the present experiences the life of communion with the Trinity through the Grace of the Holy Spirit. Through the Church, man and cosmos are already being transformed and deified by the Grace of the Holy Spirit. The Eschaton will be the finalization and the full realization across the entire cosmos of the interior life of the Church.

Conclusion

Though our topic was specifically about the role of the Holy Spirit in the sanctification of man and the transfiguration of the cosmos it is impossible in Orthodox theology to fully understand any point of doctrine without looking at it in light of the rest of Orthodox doctrine. We have had to look at the Church’s doctrine about the Trinity, Creation, Man, Fall, Christ, Church, Mysteries, and Eschatology to provide the context for our discussion. Just as the disciple of St. Seraphim of Sarov was able to see the Saint transfigured in the Uncreated Light

⁵¹ Quoted in Louth, p. 148.

⁵² Kallistos Ware, “Through Creation to the Creator,” in *Towards an Ecology of Transfiguration: Orthodox Christian Perspectives on Environment, Nature, and Creation*, edited by John Chryssavgis and Bruce V. Foltz. New York: Fordham University Press, 2013, p. 90.

because he too was in the Light so we are only able to see the full picture of Orthodox doctrine when it is illuminated by all points of the Church's doctrine.

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