

Anthropo-theological Fragility: Soteriological Excursion and Dogmatic Consequences

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Abstract: *The temptation of prosperity and immediate success at any price, that which intrinsically contains a demonic influence, often always gives man the capacity to be autonomous, selfish, envious and unable to open up to people. Meditating on how to escape this temptation and aspiring to offer an adequate response, we've compiled the present book, in which we aim to navigate through the important chapters of Christian dogmatics including: hriology, pneumatology, mariology, soteriology and eschatology. Thus, discovering four elements: the relationship of fragility with grace, the necessity of fragility awareness and its activation for salvation, the positive and negative risks of fragility awareness, and the future face of pneumatized fragility. The work is conceived from the perspective of a theology of exception concept, for only existential exceptions can reveal the things that come thereafter, as well as the edges of the road leading to them. They tend to reveal what is usually not seen, while placing everything in crisis, under the divine judgment that is to be, and constitute the only space of a possible Christian esotericism.*

Keywords: *human fragility, anthropology, transfigured body, eschatology, repentance.*

1. Introduction

The present paper aims to address the notion of fragility from the theological, anthropological and social points of view, each being dimensions experienced and enhanced by the movement into the North American space. Contemporary man lives as if he would never die. The idea of death is camouflaged. In the age of carelessness about our eternal future, the author reveals to us that it is necessary to reconsider our fragility in order to begin the road to salvation.

Some theologians have tried to say that man is a micro cosmos within a macro cosmos¹, believing that by doing so they can exhaust the mystery of man created by God, yet the great mystery of man lies in his fragility. When we come face to face with our fragility, we can hardly fully assume it, which is perhaps why today we talk more about power in all its forms, desperately trying to hide our fragility or camouflage it with various forms of activism. For example, Adam and Eve hid themselves from God among the trees of the Garden of Eden, both walked in the evening breeze through the Garden of Eden, because of their failure to embrace fragility. Seeing that they were nowhere to be found, God calls out to Adam, who timidly replies, "I heard your voice in heaven and was afraid, for I am naked, and I hid myself" (Genesis 3:10). Adam does not recognize his own fragility and blames Eve, his wife. Eve, in turn, blames the serpent. But regardless of man's fatal mistake, God

¹ Vladimir Lossky, *Teologia mistică a Bisericii de Răsărit*, traducere de Vasile Răducă, Colecția Religie, Humanitas, București 2010, p. 113.

sought out Adam as he was and seeks us out in the midst of our fragility. In this manner, God, in his gentleness, opens for us a path of permanent descent into the depths of our hearts, that sacrosanct sanctuary of fragility in which his presence, itself infinitely fragile, is fully manifested, for the great mystery is not that man stands in the proximity of God, but that God enters *sui generis* into dialogue with man's soul: "know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, for he who was rich made himself poor for you, that you through his poverty might become rich" (2 Corinthians 8:9).

According to the defining dictionary of the Romanian language, the adjective *fragil*² means "something that breaks easily, breaks under the action of external stresses, internal tensions, delicate, fragile, delicate, soft". Theological fragility means the very ontological awareness of the human being, in man's ability to see himself as God created him recalling that "this gift does not come from us but is the gift of God" as a mixture of the mundane and the angelic (Ephesians 2:8). If man would remember his worldly side in his search for the angelic, his sins and shortcomings, he would learn to be more frail. And by identifying his own fragility man opens himself to the divine grace and to the expectant ascent to the holy Kingdom. Therefore, under the image of fragility we seek to unify all these meanings as ontologically planted by God in the human soul. By discovering them, man naturally sets out on his journey towards the Kingdom of God.

Fragility allows for that dwelling together in which one no longer feels that words are necessary, nor justificatory claims, nor justifications for actions. This is why the first dialogue captured in the Book of Acts between God and Adam occurred only after Adam had fallen into sin. Falling into sin, man clothed himself in the garments of skin³, which express biological mortality, an attempt by the frailty of man to create in himself, the attributes of God autonomously, as such "without God, before God and not after God" an exclusive characteristic of God, i.e. life itself⁴. That original fragility was greatly deteriorated with the fall of Adam, who drags the whole cosmos after him, so that St. Paul speaks to the Romans about the cosmic dimension of salvation: "For the flesh waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. For the flesh has been subjected to vanity - not of its own will, but because of him who subjected it - with hope. For the flesh itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of wickedness, that it may be partaker of the liberty of the greatness of the sons of God. For we know that all flesh sighs together and is in pain together until now" (Romans 8:19-22). Hence the popular saying: man sanctifies the place, or, on the contrary, demonizes the place.

² <https://dexonline.ro/intrare/fragil/21783>

³ Panayotis Nellas, *Omul – animal îndumnezeit. Perspective pentru o antropologie ortodoxă*, traducere de Ioan I. Ică jr., ediția a IV-a, Editura Deisis, Sibiu, 2009, p. 26.

⁴ Ștefan Buchiș, *Manual de Teologie Dogmatică*, Vol. 1, Editura Basilica, București, 2017, p. 412.

In order for man to enjoy eternity, he needs to (re)consider his fragility, for (re)awareness of fragility is the sine qua non of entering the Kingdom. Man became aware of his fragility only when he found himself in the midst of real problems: epidemics, the death of loved ones, deadly diseases, etc. Material wealth, fame and the desire for affirmation made this feeling almost non-existent. For example, the theme of the fragility of the human being was often addressed by Italian artists of the 17th century, affected by the black plague epidemic that had ravaged more than 1.7 million of their compatriots, thus Italian painter Salvator Rosa (1615-1673), an important representative of the Baroque style, painted an oil painting called "Human Fragility" ("L'Umana Fragilita"). Having recently experienced the global Covid-19 pandemic we are reminded how fragile man is in the face of illness.

Contemporary man lives as if he will never die. The idea of death is camouflaged. In an age of disregard for our eternal future, of mockery of the Church, of the loss of Christian values, Christ shows us that it is necessary to reconsider our fragility in order to begin the road to salvation. By becoming man, He shows us that the starting point of our de-humanisation is our fragile nature.

That is why in the next chapter we aim to meditate on the following themes:

- I. Christology: the Incarnation of the Lord - deity in its "fragility"
- II. Mariology: the Mother of God became full of grace precisely because she was full of fragility.
- III. Pneumatology: the Holy Spirit, who dwells only in fragility and has Himself the face of fragility, for He cannot abide in human folly and ignorance.
- IV. Eschatology: the path that human fragility has towards its eschatological becoming.

Christology: the Incarnation of the Lord - deity in its "fragility"

"And he begat his Son, the only-begotten, and wrapped him up and laid him in a manger, for there was no place for them to stay." (Luke 2:7). Understanding this nuance, Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite gives the incarnation and even the human being of the Son the name of "philanthropy" (love of man)⁵. Hence the close relationship between triadological dogma and Christological dogma. The triadic dogma imbues the Christological dogma with deep meaning and significance, and the Christological dogma validates in its essence the Trinitarian dogma. In the Trinitarian dogma we have unity of being and hypostatic multiplicity, while in the Christological dogma the situation is exactly the opposite: we have one hypostasis in the person of the Saviour Christ and two beings/natures: the

⁵ Vladimir Lossky, *Teologia mistică a Bisericii de Răsărit*, p. 149.

divine and the human. There is an inversion between the fundamental ontological operators. What does this mean? The divine being expands and encompasses all humanity. Love has expansive and creative power, and God wishes to extend his intra-trinitarian (ad intra) love to all of humanity.

The purpose of creation is the love of God, who wants love and light to expand. Love has expansive power, it wants to be participated in by as many beings as possible, to be an endlessness of expansion, therefore, a definition of love would be: to enjoy the joy of the other.

The union of creation, the union of God with man, is independent of Adam's fall. There is the famous statement by St. Maximus Confessor: would the Logos have become incarnate if man had not fallen? The answer is yes, as God since eternity decided to unite through the incarnation of the Logos: the infinite with the finite, the uncreated with the created, heaven with earth, the sensible with the intelligible. It is a logic of expansion of love and the Trinity in the world.

God created Adam by touch. To some extent, metaphorically speaking, the creation of man was the work of pottery⁶. Through touch, God gives man beauty and, at the same time, a special fragility. When God created the world, by word he set all things in their right place: by word he made light, by word he made the sky, by word he made the angels, by word he made all the birds, all the fish, all the wild animals, but only man he shaped and fashioned, giving him a unique meaning through His touch. We are born through the touch of our parents, and immediately after birth we are held and kissed by our parents, after which the priest carries us on his arms and makes us members of the Church through the Holy Baptism. Through touch we express our feelings and sometimes our words, for through touching, we express a state of our soul which transcends from our body into his body through the touch exchanged between us, and from his body passing into his soul, and thus through the touch between two bodies the two souls communicate, and at the end of life we are extinguished in the hands of our loved ones and receive their final kiss.

The Incarnate Word heals the human flesh in Christ Jesus, by touching it. This particularly elegant formulation will have important Christological consequences in the future, firstly because it

⁶ Theodor Damian (coordonator), Mihai Octavian Groza, Maxim (Iuliu-Marius) Morariu, Răzvan-Mihai Neagu, Cosmin-Constantin Galdău, Alexandru Lazăr, *Istorie și Teologie, valori și modele pentru societatea contemporană*, Editura Limes, Cluj-Napoca, 2022, p. 66.

implies a certain similarity between the assumed hu-manity of Christ and our own humanity⁷, and secondly because salvation is equated with healing⁸.

Man, when he thought himself stronger, dropped a grain of weight on his soul and broke like a porcelain dish⁹. From here began the newness of God who goes in search of the fragile man until his becoming God-Man. God becomes one with the earth so that we may understand what heaven is. Thus we marvel, says St. Maximus, at seeing how the small and the boundless - realities that repel one another and cannot mix - are found united in Him and mutually reveal themselves in one another. Christ assumes not only human nature, but also that which was contrary to nature, the consequences of sin. He embraced all human fragility as it was after the fall.

Speaking of the Incarnation, St. John Damascene mentions four divine attributes that are manifested at the coming (σάρκοις) of the Son of God. By putting on the garment of the body, God shows us at the same time His goodness, wisdom, justice and power. Goodness, because he did not overlook the fragility of his creature, but took pity on the fallen one and stretched out his hand. Righteousness, because man being conquered, does not allow anyone else but man to conquer the tyrant, and does not take man by force from death, but he whom death had once subdued by sin, the Good and Just One made him victorious again and saved the like through the like One. Wisdom, because she has found the most suitable unraveling of this impossible thing. The power of God which descends by bending the heavens, that is, humbling without humbling His unmerited height, descends to His servants by an inex-pressible and incomprehensible descent¹⁰.

In addition to the four divine attributes which are manifested at the incarnation of the Son of God, as emphasized by St. John Damascene, God's "fragility" is also manifested, in our opinion, the

⁷ An interesting insight in this regard is offered by Professor Hrysostomos Stamoulis who, recalling this expression of St. Gregory the Theologian, develops a teaching on the necessity of frequent communion with the Holy Eucharist, which constitutes an open invitation to all the baptized to share in the body of the Incarnate Logos. See the material published online on the Pemptousia website at link:

https://docs.google.com/document/d/13w7N3jOgnmHmGTJfeXqBcRR2JJ199zzc_jN6WGhsy8M/edit?fbclid=IwAR3VhYCs_nchASB9av-epb3q_enYvcF8kkE6BHhkPTrljOONZeHXMDWuOA

⁸ This aspect is recapitulated when speaking of the Holy Eucharist, considered to be the medicine of immortality (pharmakon tes athanasias), because "participation in the risen Body of the Lord heals and unites the one who receives Him in faith with the risen One, the Eucharist is the medicine of immortality". See Karl Christian Felmy, *De la Cina cea de Taină la Dumnezeiasca Liturghie a Bisericii Ortodoxe*, un comentariu istoric, Deisis Publishing House, Sibiu, 2008, p. 18. Saint Ephrem presents the Incarnation of the Saviour as a healing brought by the grace of God: "Blessed be the Doctor who came down, cut without pain and healed wounds with gentle healing! His own begotten became the Healer who had mercy on sinners. Blessed be He who came down in the womb and here made Himself a palace to dwell in, a temple to dwell in, a garment to shine with, and a weapon to conquer with" (cf. Sf Efreim Sirianul, *Imnele Nașterii și Arătării Domnului*, p. 35).

⁹ Ernest Bernea, *Îndemn la simplitate*, Editura Anastasia, București, 1995, p. 49.

¹⁰ Sf Ioan Damaschin, *Dogmatica*, Editura Scripta, București, 1993, p. 82

capacity of the divine being not only to "deny Himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men, and being in appearance like a man" (Philippians 2:7), but also to allow Himself to be "frail", "helpless", "within the reach of man" and "dependent on man".

The point of maximum fragility of the Godhead is shown at the moment of the Incarnation of the Son of God. We know that the Archangel Gabriel announces to the Virgin Mary that she will give birth to the Son of God, and that this birth will be of the Spirit: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will fill you" (Luke 1:35). God shows his great fragility in a 2 millimetre embryo. He who brought the world from non-being to being and is praised by cherubim and seraphim concentrates the whole of God's being in a fragile embryo. How much God offers in such a tiny form and "blessed is he who will not be humbled in him" (Matthew 11:6).

God also shows immense fragility at His birth. Fragility that matures from birth to the cross. God chooses to show Himself to people in the guise of a child, where He also includes the flesh-like parents. It was not a tragic evening for the Holy family, though they wandered with nowhere to stay. God changes things that settle into a spirit of the world understood as a jungle where the biggest eats the smallest, and the strongest sits at the top of the food chain. This is why God placed at the beginning of his divine iconomy this fragility of the infant who, without care, and without help, dies. Just as now and then people were pursuing their own interest, their own gain, Christ shows himself to the world as a child in order to awaken in people a sense of fragility. Few were those who understood the mystery of the fragility of the Son of God, for to be able to understand fragility one must be simple and pure at heart, in a word: to be human. You have to be human to understand the God-Man. These include the Magi in the conception of St. Matthew the Evangelist (Chapter 2) and the shepherds in the account of St. Luke the Evangelist (Chapter 2).

Contemplating the fragility of Christ, we awaken to the joy of being loved with a love that is beyond ourselves. Encountering Christ does not arrive by looking for meaning in ourselves, but by looking to the other. Encountering God is going from joy to higher joy to endless joy, finding the face of God, and through God finding all our loved ones. This is encountering eternity. There we find that our small family becomes so large that we become family with all creation, with all the people we have never met in our life, because with God all is light.

We will have trials and anxieties until we come to see ourselves with the same eyes that God sees us with. Christ Himself was born and revealed Himself in the form of an infant who looks at those around him. When an infant looks into your eyes it enters your heart, so that you don't understand what is happening, you simply feel the love that floods your heart - it is love for the fragility and

innocence of the baby. It is terrible to stand before a baby who will become the harsh judge of the eshaton. In His fragility, Christ shows us that we can overcome the world's foolishness.

Meditating further on what happened at Christ's birth, we will learn what enormous confidence the Savior had to surrender to a hostile world. Christ teaches us to read the world through the eyes of a child in Bethlehem. How much trust did Christ have in us to allow himself to be so fragile?

Pride also manifests itself in this way: not trusting the other person. If pride means not trusting, then humility means trusting the other completely. Doesn't this mean that Christ has infinite trust in us? How can He leave Himself like a baby in our hands? An infant who has no strength at all to take care of himself, an infant who lets himself be carried by another, an infant who cannot feed himself, who cannot change his dirty diapers.

Only an all-powerful God can leave himself fragile. We humans, not being all-powerful, seek by all possible and impossible means to control situations so that the end result is favourable to us. Only when we contemplate on these matters have we set ourselves on our own path to salvation. This, then, is the joy we seek, the joy that the Christ child came to bring us: the ability to leave oneself fragile.

Bethlehem in Hebrew means house of bread. Christ is born in the house of bread and offers himself to man in the Holy Eucharist as the Bread of Eternal Life. But then, in Bethlehem, as now, in the Divine Liturgy, man has before him and in his hands a fragile God who makes himself accessible to humanity. Christ was born in Bethle-hem, the birthplace of the birthless, at the most tragic point of humanity's intersection having fallen into hedonism, epicureanism and idolatry, a place where few people have experienced the mystery of his Incarnation. Today, Christ is born at every liturgy, but few are those who feel the mystery of the liturgy and, for reasons of unworthiness, miss the encounter with a God who made himself worthy of our fragility, so that by tasting his Body and Blood our fragility might be clothed.

Fragility, if one wants to understand it and embody it, one has to look at the fragility of others, just as Christ made himself fragile for us and for our salvation.

Pneumatology: the Holy Spirit - kenosis and fragility

It is well known that Christian spirituality unanimously affirms that the main goal of the human being is to become human. All human powers were originally directed towards the attainment of perfection, towards God. Following the fall into sin this natural orientation was distorted and the

direction of these powers was reoriented towards man and the world. A "conflict of interests" was thus created between the original human nature and the nature of fallen man. The symbiosis between archetypal fragility and will is the only way of restoration¹¹.

With man's separation from God, the Spirit did not cease to sustain men and to work with them in bringing forth the next men. For without the Spirit nothing can be born. But they are now born primarily of the "body" and bear in it the imprint of the "body", that is, of the unending and continually ascending being of life in the Spirit¹².

Since the fall, man's relationship with the Spirit has no longer been an inward relationship, the Holy Spirit remaining alien to the human heart. Although deification is the fruit of grace, man has been endowed with the power to assimilate it. Human nature is endowed with the necessary power to turn towards God for the purpose of union. It is dynamically oriented towards this destined end¹³.

In this sense Vladimir Lossky tells us: "From the fall until Pentecost, divine energy (uncreated and deifying grace) remained foreign to human nature and worked on it only from the outside"¹⁴. This explains the fact that although we can observe an action of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament, this action remains foreign to the heart and has only immediate effect, aiming at a precise purpose.

It took the Incarnation of the Saviour and His immersion in human nature and thus in water, so that we, immersing ourselves in baptismal water, might also immerse ourselves in His divine life, in His Holy Spirit¹⁵.

The communication of the Holy Spirit in His personal coming is quite another. The Spirit imparts Himself to persons, marking each member of the Church with a seal of one's personal relationship with the Holy Trinity, becoming present in each person. God is therefore the different, the altogether other. But at the same time - a paradox, the cross of revelation - this totally other reveals himself, crosses the distance of difference. This work remains a mystery of the descent, a mystery which Vladimir Lossky describes as the mystery of the kenosis of the Spirit, the only theologian to attribute to the Spirit the expression used in reference to the Son of God.

All the authors speak more of the kenosis of the Son than of the kenosis of the Spirit. It is not only the Son who left himself fragile for man's salvation, but also the Spirit. The Holy Spirit in His

¹¹ Alexandru Lazăr, „Redescoperirea valorilor ascetice în contemporaneitate”, în *Astra Salvensis*, Vol. XI (2023), No. 21, p. 51.

¹² Dumitru Stăniloae, *Teologia dogmatică ortodoxă*, vol. 3, Institutul Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1997, p. 39.

¹³ Jean-Claude Larchet, *Inconștientul spiritual sau Adâncul neștiut al inimii*, Editura Sophia, București, 2009, p. 23.

¹⁴ V. Lossky, *Teologia Mistică a Bisericii Ortodoxe de Răsărit*, p. 161.

¹⁵ D. Stăniloae, *Teologia dogmatică ortodoxă*, vol. 3, p. 39.

coming makes Christ revealed and reveals the common nature of the Trinity, but leaves His person hidden under the deity. "In Him the will of God is no longer external to us. It gives us grace from within, showing himself in our very person, as long as our human will remains in accordance with the Divine will and cooperates with grace by making it ours"(Lossky 2010, p. 163). "The Spirit also comes to the help of our weakness, for we do not know how to pray properly, but the Spirit Himself prays for us with unceasing sighs" (Romans 8:26). The Spirit's discretion, which insinuates itself into the world disguised as a breeze, is answered by the dance of the step of the one committed to following it - in a counterpoint to the perceptive attention directed towards the reception of signs. Trying to give a name to this counterpoint, it is wonder that might embodies spiritual experience. So wondrously does the Holy Spirit leaves himself fragile for us and for our salvation¹⁶. A pedagogy of fragility becomes necessary in order to see in the visible aspects of the world the unseen traces of the Spirit.

The goal of the Christian life thus becomes the acquisition of the Holy Spirit. The doxological movement of the believer and the Church is in a continuous dynamic evolution. It is a continuous movement from glory to glory: "And we all, with un-veiled faces, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are likewise transformed from glory to glory, as from the Spirit of the Lord" (II Corinthians 3:18). Spiritual experience leads, through gestures, words, texts or springs, to the apophatic presence of the Spirit, all-powerful but fragile, present but unapparent, like a "gentle breath of wind" (III Kings 19:11-12). The boundary will clearly remain the divine being. Man is not to touch it. He does not partake of God's being, but is elevated and ennobled by the radiance of God's glory, of divine energies. What we call deification is participation in the energy (grace), the glory, and not in the being of God.

The ascetic fathers teach us that the grace of the Holy Spirit is easy to obtain, so we find in the Patericon the following words: "If anyone wishes, from morning till evening he will acquire the Holy Spirit". Our problem is not that we don't end up acquiring the Holy Spirit, but as soon as we receive the Holy Spirit, we squander it. From this point of view, the Spirit Himself is characterized by amazing fragility. The Holy Spirit does not dwell in crudeness, in cheap jokes, or in pride, but rather the Spirit dwells in fragility: "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness. So I will rejoice in my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may dwell in me" (2 Corinthians 12:9)

Saint Siluan Athonite is a telling example of this. His experiences in the Spirit of God, the acquisition and loss of divine grace, are well known: "My soul yearns for God and seeks him with tears. How could I not seek you? You found me first and gave me the delight of Your Holy Spirit,

¹⁶ https://dilemaveche.ro/sectiune/societate/cum-vine-duhul-pe-furis-andre-scrima-621045.html#google_vignette, accessed at 3 mai 2024.

and my soul loved You. Merciful Lord, You see my fall and sorrow, but with humility I ask for Your mercy: pour out on me, the sinner, the grace of Your Holy Spirit. The remembrance of it draws the mind to find Your mercy again. Lord, give me the spirit of your humility, that I may not lose your grace again and weep for it as Adam wept for heaven and God"¹⁷.

Founded on the co-working of God and man, life in Christ - which is nothing other than life in the Holy Spirit - is presented to us as a three-step, spiral movement. The first step is the free gift of grace; the second step is the loss of grace (its fragility) and the heartbreaking trial of the feeling that God has abandoned man. The third step is the regaining of grace, after you have gone through the ascetic battle against the passions and learned the lesson of humility. The three moments vary in length¹⁸.

Today, many impostors boast that they have the Spirit of God in them, some of whom insinuate that they have the gift of sight, deceiving believers. By the methodology outlined above we can easily identify such people. The principle is absolutely simple: the more man displays and boasts about the various gifts of the Spirit, the less grace is in that man. The more man tries to hide the gifts of the Holy Spirit, the more they will shine and grow in potency. Paradoxically, the presence of the Spirit implies not in the potentiation of a manifestation, but its diminishment, its attenuation in order to meet man on the latter's ground, in the context of the finitude, faltering and fragility that runs through creation.

The Patericon refers to an important detail in the life of a saint. Avva John Kolovos said that a spiritual father became a hermit and became known in the city, having much glory. He was informed that one of his brothers was dying, in order to say goodbye to him. The spiritual father thought that if he went out during the day, people would run around him and he would lose peace. So he thought he would go out at night. At night, God sent him two angels with candles to give him light. So the whole city ran to him, seeing his glory. And the more he thought of hiding his glory, the more he was glorified.

Those who become receivers of glory radiate a transfiguring radiance around them. Only those glorified by God's grace can truly glorify God, being themselves bearers of God's glory. The glorification of God is not something that is done by the human mind and human will alone; it is achieved by the power and breath of the Spirit in the Church. We also read in the Patericon an example

¹⁷ Cuviosul Siluan Athonitul, *Între iadul deznădejdi și iadul smereniei*, traducere de diac. Ioan I. Ică jr., Editura Deisis, Sibiu, 2001, p. 53.

¹⁸ Maxime Egger, *Să ne rugăm 15 zile cu Sfântul Siluan*, traducere de Dora Mezdrea, Editura Sophia, București, 2010, p. 40.

in this way: For three years, Avva Pamvo prayed to God, saying not to glorify Him on earth. And so much did God glorify him that no one could look him in the face because of the glory shining on his face.

Mariology: The Mother of God - full of grace (κεχαριτωμένη)

The Gospel of St. Luke begins with two pieces of good news. The first good news is addressed to the priest Zechariah, of the priestly band of Abia, and the second, which follows the first, is the Good News addressed to the Virgin Mary. Both actions have the Archangel Gabriel as protagonist. As similar as they are in action, they differ in depth and meaning. Reading the Gospel text, we can easily see the important theological nuances. The Archangel Gabriel appears to Zechariah standing to the right of the altar of incense, while the Virgin Mary appears to him in the house. As harsh as the consequences of the first news are, because Zechariah will remain mute until the day the child is born because of his unbelief, so blessed will be the consequences of the second news to the Mother of God. As tough and concise as Archangel Gabriel was when he met Zechariah, he was as fragile when he met the Virgin Mary. The Archangel Gabriel, in his emotionalism, cries out from afar to the Virgin Mary: "Rejoice, you who are full of grace (κεχαριτωμένη), the Lord is with you!" (Luke 1:28).

The Archangel, who is only a messenger (as the interpretation of the word ἄγγελος = sent) says, has emotions in front of the Mother of God. The Archangel who, in the Old Testament, "at midnight struck all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh, who sat on the throne, to the firstborn of the slave, who is in prison, and the firstborn -born of the cattle" (Exodus 12, 29) is afraid of disturbing the Virgin. He sees in the youth and fragility of the Mother of God the beginning of the salvation of the human race, the first sensitive premise of the deification of man, as the tropic of the feast of the Annunciation also testifies: "Today is the beginning of our salvation and the revelation of the eternal mystery. The Son of God, the Son of the Virgin is made and Gabriel the Grace announces him well. For this reason we also cry out with Him: Rejoice, full of grace, the Lord is with you!".

Archangel Gabriel suggests to us that the Mother of God is full of grace and fragility, or, in other words, grace dwells and remains only where there is fragility. Thus, the Mother of God becomes κεχαριτωμένη, the one who reverberates grace over the whole creature. Through her total receptivity to God, she received in her the Archetype of archetypes, the Paradigm of all paradigms, therefore the Mother of God is at the limit of the created cosmos, both intelligible and sensible, surpassing the angelic hierarchies and being the highest hypostatic image of the receptacle cosmic and of the Church.

The Mother of God through her fragility becomes a receptacle of deification. It is at the active beginning of the Christological work on the human plane. Through that word: "Fiat mihi secundum verbum tuum" the very history of humanity is changed and from the fragility of the Mother of God is born the Fragility Itself that will save the world from gross sin.

We understand from the verses how frightening the word addressed to the Virgin Mary can be. Like any man who learns that he is going to have a child, in the soul of the Virgin there were many feelings: Will he be healthy? How easy is it to raise Him? The Virgin Mary was still a child, you can imagine how much she was shaken to hear such news, but nevertheless this child is not a child like all others, but will be a king, who will reign over the house of Jacob, and will not be only a temporary kingdom, but His Kingdom will have no end. Many mothers of that time hoped to give birth to the Messiah, and the Messiah was expected as one who would reign over the house of Jacob, but not necessarily forever, but in the sense that he would free them from the Romans, and the Virgin Mary hears that the Kingdom of her Son will have no end.

At the same time, being of the Jewish descent Mary also had faith that God would send the Messiah who would save them from the oppression of the Gentiles, a political Messiah who would ensure peace from a military, economic and social point of view. And this Messiah will be born from a royal family, under very special conditions, not from a poor family, marginalized by society. God chooses "the weakest of the world" (1 Corinthians 1, 27), thereby showing that the fragility is in simple people, the neglected, even the despised and marginalized. Mary brings to the temple as thanksgiving the sacrifice that poor families were entitled to: if a family can afford it, "let them bring a lamb as a sacrifice, and if the family is poor let them bring two pigeons" (Leviticus 12, 8). The Virgin Mary and the righteous Joseph brought two pigeons, which denotes that they were very poor. This is the environment in which Christ was born. He, who is the Emperor, was born into a family so poor that they could not afford the maximum level of the law that required bringing a sacrificial lamb.

And the angel said to Mary: "The Holy Spirit will descend upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you (καὶ δύνάμεις Ὑψίστου ἐπισκιάσει σοι). Therefore, the Saint who will be born from you will be called the Son of God (Ἰῶς Θεοῦ)" (Luke 1,35). The nouns "glory" and "cloud" lead us to think of the Holy Spirit. In the tradition of the older prophets, this becomes much clearer. The cloud that carried the Jews into the desert is, in fact, the Holy Spirit. Saint Demetrius of Rostov affirmed in this regard: "We can ask ourselves why the Word of God delays to de-scend on earth and become incarnate for the salvation of fallen humanity. But before the middle of the 6th millennium after Adam's sin, no virgin was found on earth who was pure not only in body, but also

in soul. There was only one such creature, unique in its spiritual and bodily purity, who was worthy to become the Church and Temple of the Holy Spirit"¹⁹.

The fragility of the Virgin becomes the link between humanity and grace. The verb to overshadow (*σκιάζω*) is used for the first time in the New Testament as re-ferring to an action of the Holy Spirit on man and refers to the resting of the Spirit on the Virgin Mary at the time of the Annunciation. What is happening is a parallel process: between the Annunciation and the consecration of the temple in Jerusalem. We have many Old Testament texts that talk about the idea of God descending and overshadowing. Namely, the 3rd Book of Kings, chapter 8, in which King Solomon brings the ark of the law to Jerusalem, to the temple he has just built. The priests entered the Holy of Holies with the ark of the law, and after leaving the ark there, they came out, because "a cloud filled the temple of the Lord and the priests could not sit for the service, because the glory of the Lord had filled the temple of the Lord" (III Kings, 8, 10-11). The verb to shadow (*σκιάζω*) is also used in other scriptural passages in the New Testament. Thus, we have the event of the Lord's Transfiguration, where it is written: While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them (*νεφέλη λένητῇ ἐπεσκίασεν αὐτούς*) and behold a voice from the cloud saying: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am pleased; listen to Him". (Matthew 17,5). Likewise, after the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, the Spirit penetrates human nature and gives the apostles the opportunity to perform miracles, thus, Peter's shadow has thaumaturgical powers: "The people took the sick into the streets and put them on beds and on stretchers, that when Peter came, at least his shadow (*ἢ σκιά ἐπισκίαση πινὶ αὐτῶν*) would overshadow one of them (Acts 5, 15). However, we see that the Mother of God virtually receives the Holy Spirit before the Apostles, who have the first virtual contact with the Holy Spirit after the Resurrection of Christ: "Peace be with you! As the Father sent Me, I also send you. And saying this, he breathed on them and said to them: Receive the Holy Spirit" (John 20, 21-22), following that both the Virgin Mary and the Apostles will receive the current grace at Pentecost. Through this aspect we observe that the fragility and purity of the Mother of God, practiced and enhanced throughout her life, become epicletic acts. At the temple, the righteous Simeon met her and said to the Virgin Mary: "Behold, this is set for the fall and for the rise of many in Israel and as a sign that will arouse opposition. And a sword will pass through your soul, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed" (Luke, 2, 34-34). These are very heavy words that come as a surprise, in an episode

¹⁹ Vladimir Lossky, *Teologia Mistică a Bisericii de Răsărit*, p. 141.

where Simeon finds your release. We who are parents, carnal or spiritual, rather want to suffer ourselves than our children.

These words: "a sword will pass through your soul" (Luke 2, 51) refer to the fact that Christ was born, was blessed, but was also taken out of the temple and crucified. Well, the Mother of God carried the mystery of the wonderful birth in her heart. She also kept in her heart the meeting with the Archangel, the words of the righteous Simeon, the wedding in Cana with direct but discreet intervention, the way she positioned herself in the crowd, following her Son and suffering in silence. When Christ's preaching met the opposition of the Pharisees, Mary was the first to be hurt by the harsh words: "This Man works with the lord of demons" (Mark 3, 22), this feeling being argued by the close union existing between the Virgin and the Son, a union that goes until identification. We can easily understand why the "Mater Dolorosa" painting does not predominate in the Orthodox Church.

In our iconography she is not the Sorrowful Mother at all, but is always depicted with the infant Son in her arms. The Mother hides her tears, as any mother weeps secretly, and when she turns to her children she smiles, and we see the smile and not the tear. That is why, if we read the text of Scripture, we find that the Apostles did not see her tears. John the Evangelist looked at the Cross and saw the Savior, but Mary remained strong because she hid her tear for our sake. She was aware at every moment who the Son is and what power He has, therefore, from then until the end of the world, her name will be glorified throughout the nation.

Compared to other women in those lands, the Mother of God has an atypical attitude. In that area, women are loud, extroverted, express themselves extremely voluble and, according to Jewish traditions, accompany their words with broad and symbolic gestures, for reasons of persuasion. In accordance with this, perhaps it was a natural gesture for the Mother to tear her clothes and curse those who crucified her Son, but she remains fragile and dignified, silently consuming the last moments of Christ's passion²⁰.

The great challenge is to endure all the trials and tribulations that the Mother of God also went through and, nevertheless, to remain fragile. It is a great struggle to remain calm, dignified and not to lose your faith when your son suffers unjustly, when your off-spring is challenged by humanity despite trying to give them His goodness. That is why the Mother of God remains a model for the fragile being.

²⁰ Protosinghel Maxim (Iuliu-Marius) Morariu, *Maica Domnului – Taina discretei Însotiri*, Editura Renașterea, Cluj-Napoca, 2022, p. 57.

Eschatology and Fragility – the future face of pneumatic fragility

Eschatology opens the way to the transcendent God, overturning any false modern view of the non-existence of life after death. So the origin of everything that exists is God, and the end is all God. Eschatology it preserves human identity, giving it a new meaning. The kingdom of God puts an end to the power, autonomy, and self-sufficiency of human fragility. The kingdom meets all human beings and gathers them into an unspeakable communion. Beauty comes from the fact that in this infinity, each one is unique and unrepeatable. Eschatology brings justice and affirms the particular, it affirms justice, as it affirms the crucified person, and affirms love²¹.

If the Kingdom is redemption, then Hell is the meeting place of all violence and evil, being a kingdom of all that is not desired, in fact, where the very glory of God is associated with the torment of not receiving it by the souls of sinners: "Hell is the experience to the divine glory not as beauty, but as formless sublimity; it is the re-jection of any analogical fragility, the isolation of the self (or the cosmos) in an univocal singularity, the upheaval of creation as original violence"²².

Although God's glory penetrates here too, it is rejected, causing harm to those in Hell²³. From the sublime, the glory becomes the chaotic sublime. Here there is an eternal refusal to communicate with God, to receive Him, to participate in His un-speakable beauty. Hell refuses glory, refuses the sight of God, accepts muteness, accepts exteriority. Hell deepens loneliness, loses the outer world, loses light, loses delight, accepts eternal superficiality. Hell refuses to become fragile and will turn into a Hell of missed fragility.

The resurrection of Christ is also felt by sinners, because God loves them too. The bodies of the unrighteous, therefore, will rise, but they will not necessarily share in the glory, like the righteous, but the body will be clothed in negative fragility. Nesmelov, a theologian of Russian origin, shows that God resurrects the whole of human nature. Therefore, they also become partakers of eternity, just as the righteous after Adam also became partakers of death. So the resurrection becomes law. And more,

²¹ Alexandru Lazăr, „The Problem of Eternal Life – Some Anti-Universalist Landmarks”, în *International Journal of Religion*, Volume 5, No. 8, 2024, p. 709.

²² David Bentley Hart, *Frumusețea infinitului. Estetica adevărului creștin*, coll. Plural Religie, Editura Polirom, Iași, 2013, p. 483.

²³ Alexandru Lazăr, „The Eschatological Vision of Dumitru Stăniloae: A Counter-Argument on the Puralist-Universalist Vision of John Hick”, în *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies*, Vol 23, Issue 67, Spring 2024, p. 9; Alexandru Lazăr, „Salvarea Universală. Noi Opinii în Teologia Contemporană”, în *Astra Salvensis*, Vol. VIII, No. 16, p. 255; Alexandru Lazăr, „Actualitatea apocatastazei. Între iubirea lui Dumnezeu și libertatea omului”, în *Astra Salvensis*, Vol. IX, No. 17, p. 177; Alexandru Lazăr, „The Politico-Dogmatic Stage of the Apocatastasis' Condemnation. Post-synodal Perspectives”, în *Teologia*, Vol. 92, Issue 3/2022, p.154; Alexandru Lazăr, „Maran Atha and the Soteriological Consequence of the Eshaton”, în *Research & Science Today*, Vol. 26, Issue 2/2023, p. 89; Alexandru Lazăr, „Orthodox Response to Christian Universalism: The Theological Perspective of Pavel Florensky”, în *Khazānah Theologia*, Vol. 5, No. 3, 2023, pp. 169-178.

through Christ a dignity was given to everyone that could not otherwise be obtained by one's own being, or by one's own efforts. Simply put, human nature became one with Christ, not by Being, obviously, but by grace. But God's grace is also received on the basis of the recipient. If it's good, it abounds, if not, it will be lacking.

After His Resurrection, man receives eternity, not because he is by nature one with God, but because he is of the nature immortalized by Christ. Only sinners will not receive payment at the resurrection, but punishment according to their deeds. Or it can be said that they receive a reward, but directly proportional to what they have done. Only because of the universality of the resurrection do they also receive resurrection and eternal nature. So Christ is the cause for which the world is resurrected together with the cosmos. For Adam brought death, and Christ brought life. Christ brings, therefore, another existence, another "meaning" for man: that fragility will be eternally in communion with the Fragile.

Resurrection for sinners exists, but it does not mean that happiness is also attributed to it. "Happiness is a matter of personal decision of each one for communion with Christ. Christ does not have in Himself all human persons, but all human nature. If He had in Himself all persons, He would be a plurality of persons and a plurality of liberties"²⁴. But this does not mean that salvation is also guaranteed, only eternity. Because their own freedom was used unfavorably for salvation, they will now be aware and will have received what they wanted: a life without God.

Christ extends to all, but not in all alike, but as each one desires. For the good and faithful, the resurrection will be an act of kinship with God. It is an extraordinary fact! Christ has us all, since He became man like all; we are all His. Only the reward will be given justly, but only to the extent that people have realized their own fragility and cultivated it.

Instead of conclusion: "God, I have no man!" or struggle with the current infragility

In the liturgical period after the Feast of the Savior, the Church commemorates several encounters between Christ and man. As a rule, the evangelical pericopes are reproduced from the Gospel according to John, because this evangelist has the great gift of presenting the events in the spirit of the Resurrection of Christ. Thus, on the 4th Sunday after Easter, the Church commemorates the healing of the sick man from Vitezda or the Sunday of the diseased that met God. Not just a simple illness, but a long lasting one. After 38 years of illness, you can say that you are exhausted and

²⁴ Dumitru Stăniloae, *Teologia dogmatică ortodoxă*, vol. 3, p. 289.

become at most a being waiting for death, without the joy of life, without the joy of man, without the joy of simple and essential things.

The Vitezda bathhouse was the place where, from time to time, a miracle happened, "because an angel of the Lord would descend at the right time into the bathhouse and disturb the water, and whoever entered first, after the disturbance of the water, became healthy, from whatever disease he had land" (John 5:4). If we sit carefully to meditate, that place was not only a healing place, but also a place of infragility, of human wickedness, the place where sickness does not make you better, the place of selfishness or "car-car-car", where everyone she was attentive if the water was troubled, after which the malice began in its outbreak, the selfishness began, without taking an interest in the other, or what disease and since when he has suffered. In that place, a 38-year-old man was sitting on an old mattress, without anyone taking an interest in him. He was brought there by others promising him that somehow he would get better. Hence another form of malice, a typology of social life, in which we believe that a social system cares about man, because it is one thing to care and another to pass!

The poor man waited in his thoughts, in his pains, in his loneliness. He waits in the selfishness and indifference of his fragile fellows, having the impression that God himself has forgotten him, because, many times, people through their own interest, apoliticalness and perversity instill in us the idea that God himself has forgotten us. The patient lost all his dreams, all hope, all longing in the 38 years. The 38 years were summed up in a few minutes in which Christ enters into dialogue with the human soul.

Very often we observe in this wickedness the people who have lost the image of God in them. But God came and told him to take his bed. We do not know what brought more joy to the sick man: the fact that another Man enters into dialogue with him, the offended and marginalized, affirming and recognizing him as a person, as a being in prosoponic dialogue, or the fact that he receives healing. We could say that the dialogue with the marginalized gave him the power to take his own bed and walk and, implicitly, the forgiveness of his sins. But because he had nowhere to go, because the piece of land at the edge of the bath was his home, his family, and his meaning, he goes to the temple to thank God. In the temple, this man encounters rigid typiconalism, a dry liturgism. They ask him: "It is Saturday and you are not allowed to take your bed. Who is the man who said to you: 'Take up your bed and walk?'" (John 5, 11-12). Certainly, by the time the sick man became aware of his condition, Christ had disappeared into the crowd. His joy was opposed by the canonical acrivia and typical prescriptions of the Pharisees. No one looked at the sick person in the face to see his immeasurable

joy, but they were interested in the canonical rigorism, preparing the due punishment: "It is Saturday and you are not allowed to take your bed" (John 5,10) .

In a world full of infirmity, Christ meets the human soul and smiles on it with grace. He, the Crucified and Rejected, removed from earthly life as a social outcast, will seek out, identify with, and suffer with the frail. People have waited for years on this bed of infirmity, refusing to see Christ beside their suffering. He left, the poor sick man, rejected by the society that had condemned him, because he carried a bed, but happy to have met God. Regardless of whether people will categorize you as wearing a mat, regardless of what it means, let joy with Christ be a constant way of life. He, who understood the mystery of fragility so much that he became one with it, in order to seek man in his non-fragility and save him, offered us a lesson on how man should relate to his peers.

Break down your walls of infirmity and expand your hearts! There are so many people who need Man!