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THE CENTRALITY OF CHRIST IN ORTHODOX THEOLOGY

The problem of christocentrism becomes more and more important in contemporary theological way of thinking. Both Catholic and Protestant theologians are now writing quite a lot about christocentrism or "christological concentration". Orthodox theologians are speaking more and more too about the centrality of Christ not only in theological thinking, but also in Christian spirituality. Thus the problem of christocentrism seems to have an important significance for the ecumenical dialogue between various Christian denominations. The central theme of the Vth General Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Nairobi (Nov. 23—Dec. 10, 1975) was: *Jesus Christ frees and unites*. Section I discussed the problem of *Confessing Christ Today*.

Lately, Orthodox theologians gave more attention to the problem of christocentricity during their consultation at the monastery of Cernica, near Bucarest (June 4—8, 1974), whose aim was to prepare Orthodox participation in the Fifth Assembly of the World Council of Churches. In their report they stated that the problem of the centrality of Christ in the life of the Church was closely linked to the topic "Confessing Christ Today". In Christian faith, Christ occupies the central place in the very act of confessing; more than that, He is the dynamic factor of the Christian confession of faith in the world¹.

Contemporary tendencies in the Western Christianity to so-called theological concentration find, on the whole, a positive appraisal on the part of Orthodox theology. Many Orthodox theologians have observed, however, that these tendencies, no matter how beneficial and fruitful, might nevertheless be exposed to the danger of one-

¹ See Report No. 1: *The Centrality of Christ in Orthodox Theology*, St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly 18 (1974) 195—197.

-sidedness and lack of real connection with the doctrine of the Trinity, and especially of the Holy Spirit.

The present paper tries to analyze some of the most outstanding features of the Orthodox idea of christocentricity, its connections with pneumatology, and at the same time, to point out to some dangers, which in the opinion of the Orthodox threaten a christomonistic theology.

I. Christocentric Character of Orthodox Thinking

Not very distant is the time, when many Orthodox thinkers blamed the Catholicism for the lack of a deep feeling of the presence of Christ in the human history. Some of them appealed for the restoration of "the full Christological view", characterizing the many hundred years old tradition of the Orthodox Church².

One has in fact to admit, that the Christian East has always been proud of its christocentricity and possessed a deep consciousness of the central place of Christ in the whole of Christian knowledge. For a long time Orthodox thinking has distinguished itself by its emphatic christocentrism. The Orthodox willingly refer to the fact, that the christocentric orientation was characteristic of the whole of theological thinking of the Early Church. Christology was in the very centre of reflection of the Church Fathers since IVth century. This christocentricity, being the common ethos of the ancient Church, continues to remain one of the leading principles in Orthodox theology³. As "the Church of the first seven councils", Orthodoxy has retained in her thinking a living consciousness of the central place of Christ in the Christian doctrine of man, which deals with his relation to God, his destiny and his connection with the entire cosmos. Though the Orthodox Church recognizes the authority of all seven ecumenical councils, still she celebrates in her liturgy in a particular way the feast of the Council of Nicaea (325), Chalcedon (451) and Nicaea II (787)⁴. The Orthodox theologians have attached a very special significance to the dogma of the Council of Chalcedon. Many Russian theologians considered it to be the

² See G. Florovsky, *Problematika 'khristianskogo vossoyedinienia* (Problems of Christian Reunion), Put' 9 (1933) no. 37, Supplement p. 12.

³ G. Florovsky, *The Ethos of the Orthodox Church*, *The Ecumenical Review* 12 (1960) 183—198, esp. 192—197; P. Bratsiotis, *The Fundamental Principles and Main Characteristics of the Orthodox Church*, *The Ecumenical Review* 12 (1960) 154—163, esp. 157—158.

⁴ See Y. Congar, *La primauté des quatre premiers conciles oecuméniques. Origine, destin, sens et portée d'un thème traditionnel*, in: *Le concile et les conciles*, Paris 1960, 75—109, esp. 107—108; S. Salaville, *La fête du concile de Chalcédoine dans le rite byzantin*, in: *Das Konzil von Chalkedon. Geschichte und Gegenwart*, vol. II, Würzburg 1953, 677—695.

highest expression of the theology of the Fathers. According to the others, this conciliar definition can be made more and more explicit (P. Sviatlov) and explained in the light of sophiology and kenotic christology (S. Boulgakov)⁵.

Orthodox theologians make rather rarely use of such terms as "christocentrism" or "christological concentration". Nevertheless the idea of christocentrism is very familiar to them. It results from the very nature of Orthodox christology and its undeniable originality. Orthodox theologians treat rather with distrust the christology, understood as a closed and isolated dogmatic treatise, in which one looks for an answer to the following questions: who is Christ, how to comprehend His two natures, what is the aim of His incarnation and His saving mission in the world. The originality of Orthodox christology has not found its expression in this sort of systematic elaborations. It was revealed above all in a creative research of some theologians and religious philosophers, especially Russian ones, who emphasized a predominant significance of the christological dogma in the whole of religious thinking. They taught for instance, that the christological dogma had been the source of inspiration for christological anthropology and ecclesiology, the foundation for an integral conception of culture and human creativity. The cosmic dimensions of the christology of the Greek Fathers (especially of St. Irenaeus, St. Maximus the Confessor, and St. John of Damascus), dwelt upon with predilection by a number of Orthodox thinkers, show the dynamic presence of the risen Christ not only in the sacramental life of the Church, but also in the whole world.

Many outstanding Russian thinkers, such as P. Sviatlov, V. Soloviev, N. Berdyaev and S. Boulgakov taught, that Christ was the centre of the universe, and His incarnation had been the purpose of creation, and not only a soteriological act (*propter nos et propter nostram salutem*)⁶. It seems, that this conviction is, at least to some extent, the result of viewing the mystery of the incarnation in close relationship to the doctrine of creation. The mystery of Christ is considered by some Orthodox theologians to be the starting point, the aim and climax of faith and theological thinking⁷. This central importance of the doctrine of incarnation results above all from the fact, that Christ both reveals God (the mystery of the Holy Trinity), and manifests true dimensions of man and his destiny.

⁵ See B. Schultze, *Probleme der orthodoxen Theologie*, in: *Handbuch der Ostkirchenkunde*, Düsseldorf 1971, 156—157.

⁶ See for instance S. Boulgakov, *Du Verbe Incarné (Agnus Dei)*, Paris 1943, 95—98.

⁷ G. Florovsky, *The Ethos of the Orthodox Church*, 193—194.

Christocentrism is also one of the most characteristic features of Orthodox ethics and moral theology. The Orthodox unanimously emphasize with N. Cabasilas (+ 1371), that Christian life is "the life in Christ", and can be fully realized only in the Church⁸. No wonder, that according to some Orthodox theologians the christological dogma is at the same time "a symptomatic test to judge the spirituality of each epoch"⁹.

The fact is that nearly all great syntheses arrived at by the most creative representatives of Orthodox tradition have more or less distinct christocentric character. For instance, all theological works of A. M. Boukharev (1822—1871) are permeated by the idea of dynamic presence of Christ in the whole temporal human activity; His humanity recapitulates all dimensions of life. According to Boukharev, the Chalcedonian dogma is a continuous appeal for creativity and participation in the redeeming work of Christ. The entire human culture embodies in itself a hidden christological and theandric dimension¹⁰. It is only natural that in opposition to a negative evaluation of Boukharev's views in 19th century, some contemporary Orthodox have fully rehabilitated him. They regard him, thanks to his bold and creative idea of christocentricity, as a prophetic figure and the initiator of Orthodox theology of culture¹¹.

Boukharev's views are but an example of christocentric thinking, which found its expression mainly in the area of anthropology and theology of culture; its repercussions can be traced later in great religious syntheses of some Orthodox, predominantly Russian, thinkers. This kind of christocentrism is to be found above all in an original and bold doctrine of "God-humanity" or "God-manhood" (*Bogočelovečestvo*), which subsequently became the basis for a number of attempts at "christological concentration" in anthropology, theology of history and the whole human creativity¹².

⁸ The treatise written by Cabasilas on the sacraments has the title: *Zoe en Christo* (Life in Christ). Several hundred years later Father John Sergiev (1828—1908) of Kronstadt left behind his meditations entitled *My Life in Christ*. See an abbreviated English translation published by E. E. Goulaeff, London 1897. A good introduction to this topic is given by N. Mladin, *Die Grundzüge der orthodoxen Ethik*, Zeichen der Zeit (Berlin) 22 (1968) no. 9, 324—331.

⁹ P. Evdokimov, *Le Christ dans la pensée russe*, Paris 1970, 55.

¹⁰ See Boukharev's main works *O pravoslavii v otnoshenii k sovriemennosti*, St.-Petersburg 1860, 2nd ed. 1906, and *O sovriemennykh doukhovnykh potrebnostiakh mysli i zhyznii, osobenno rousskoy*, Moscow 1865.

¹¹ See P. Evdokimov, *Le Christ...* 85—89; E. Behr-Sigel, *Un prophète orthodoxe: Alexandre Boukharev (1822—1871)*, *Contacts* 25 (1973) no. 82, 93—111. See also W. Hryniewicz, „*Boska liturgia życia*” (*The Divine Liturgy of Life*), A. M. Boukharev, *Więź* 18 (1975) no. 1, 67—79.

¹² See N. Berdyaev, *Smysl tvorчества*, Moscow 1916 (French transl. *Le sens de la création*, Paris 1955); S. Bulgakov, *Die christliche Anthropologie*, in: *Kirche, Staat und Mensch*, Genf 1937, 209—255.

According to the remark of P. Evdokimov, theologians have spoken a lot about God and Godman, but "very little about man in Christ". For this reason, he adds, one of the most important problems is nowadays "the anthropology in the light of christology" or "christological anthropology"¹³. A number of prominent Orthodox theologians and religious thinkers have developed precisely this sort of christological anthropology, which could be termed as "christology of the human being"¹⁴. In this respect it is worth recalling some profound anthropological insights of V. Nesmelov (1863—1937), N. Berdyaev, S. Boulgakov and B. Zenkovsky, closely linked to the chalcedonian dogma¹⁵.

Under the influence of V. Soloviev, who tried to explain christology by means of sophiology, the idea of God-humanity found a large-scale reception in the works of many other, mostly Russian, thinkers, as one of the leading trends in their religious world-view¹⁶. This idea is a result of reinterpretation of the basic intuition of the chalcedonian dogma in relation to man and to the whole of human history. For S. Boulgakov, the chalcedonian definition is not only the basic norm of christology, but also the fundamental principle of ontology in general. The apophatic form of the dogma (expressed in four negative formulas) contains in fact something positive, namely the affirmation of God-humanity, the central idea of Christianity, which shows a dynamic relationship between the incarnation and the whole of the human history¹⁷. The idea of God-humanity does not, of course, predicate in the same sense of the Church and human history, as it does of Christ Himself. It is only an analogical concept, which can be applied, with all due distinctions and proportions, to the individual human being as well to the Church and the human history. In conformity with the definition of the Council of Chalcedon one should stress the uniqueness of the mystery of Godmanhood in Christ Himself, based upon the fullness of His divinity and humanity. God-humanity cannot be understood in the sense of one God-human nature or being. One

¹³ P. Evdokimov, *Le Christ...*, 55.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 55, 136, 143, 163, 167.

¹⁵ See V. Nesmelov, *Naouka o cheloveke*, vol. II, Kazan 1906 (2nd ed.); N. Berdyaev, *Problema cheloveka. K postroenyu khristianskoy antropologii*, Put' 12 (1936) no. 50, 3—26; B. Zenkovsky, *Grundlagen der christlichen Anthropologie aus der Sicht orthodoxer Theologie und Religionsphilosophie*, in: *Das Bild des Menschen im Lichte der orthodoxen Anthropologie*, Marburg/Lahn 1969, 6—22.

¹⁶ See V. Soloviev, *Lectures on Godmanhood*, London 1948. See also a detailed analysis in my study *Hermeneutyczne znaczenie idei bogocztowieczeństwa w świetle antropologii prawosławnej* (The Hermeneutic Significance of the Idea of Godmanhood in the Light of Orthodox Anthropology), *Studia Theologica Varsaviensia* 12 (1974) no. 1, 263—272.

¹⁷ S. Boulgakov, *Die christliche Anthropologie*, 250.

must not forget, that between the Creator and the creatures there always exists an untraversable ontological dividing line. Perhaps some advocates of the doctrine of God-humanity did not succeed in avoiding the consequences of an inclination to some kind of monophysitism or pantheism, perceptible above all in philosophical system of Soloviev and his idea of "all-unity" (*vseiedinstvo*)¹⁸. This is probably one of the reasons why the christocentrism of some Russian thinkers seems to have a metaphysical and cosmic character, rather than concrete and historical¹⁹. It is necessary to admit, however, that the idea of God-humanity, properly understood and developed, contains some undeniable values. The Orthodox thinkers have rightly understood the need of a closer link between the chalcedonian definition and anthropology, and have raised a number of questions, which still have no adequate answers. The mystery of man does take on light only in the mystery of Christ, the incarnate Word.

The above-mentioned report, drafted by the Consultation of Orthodox theologians in Cernica (1974) explains, that the basis of the central place of Christ in the whole economy of salvation is the incarnation of the Logos, who through the Holy Spirit has renewed and regenerated the human being. Through His incarnation, the Logos has introduced himself more intimately in the world and in human history, and thus has revealed the meaning of all things. In Christ the whole human being has been restored to the fulfillment of his original destiny. The Orthodox document emphasizes also the inter-personal function of the incarnate Logos. Christ as "man par excellence", "the centre of creation", "the central man who relates to all" communicates to man the power to liberate himself from his egotism, enables him to understand others and to enter into communion with them and with God. Christ overcomes thus evil and sin, which are at the root of all divisions, and becomes therefore the unifying basis for the entire humanity. Orthodox theologians stress very strongly, that the confessing of the central place of Christ in the whole of creation and manifesting "the Truth of Christ as the personal pivot of history" are one of the most essential tasks of the Church in the modern world. Christ's creative presence extends to the whole cosmos and leads all of history towards final fulfillment in Him. This cosmic presence of the Logos, calls at the same time all Christians to make their contribution to the development and the progress of the world. At present, Christians have a special mission to help people to understand the

¹⁸ See B. Zenkovsky, *Sudba khalkidonskikh opredelenii*, *Pravoslavnaia Mysl* 9 (1953) 51—64, esp. 54.

¹⁹ See B. Schultze, *Christozentrik im russischen Gedanken*, *Ostkirchliche Studien* 8 (1959) 105—126, esp. 125.

insufficiency of the achievements of human intellect, and to discover "the personal origin of reason", which is to be found precisely in the incarnate Logos²⁰.

II. Danger of Christomonistic Approach to Theology

There is no doubt that most of contemporary Orthodox theologians appreciate a present-day tendency towards christocentric interpretation of various theological questions. They regard it as a good promise of further development of theology, and of the ecumenical advance. However, according to them this wide-spread tendency might also lead to some less desired results. In the light of Orthodox tradition, christocentric theology is meaningful only then, when it does not lose its close relationship with the entire doctrine of the Trinity; otherwise christocentrism can easily turn into christomonism.

Some Orthodox theologians detect the traces of monistic christocentrism in the history of traditional Western theology, both Roman-Catholic and Protestant. According to them, it appears to be, in both cases, first of all a result of the separation of christology from pneumatology. The Christian West as a whole has not yet overcome, they think, the problem of "filioquism", and continues to be exposed to its dangerous consequences. Some theologians, among others O. Clément and N. A. Nissiotis, perceive at the root of breaking down of the Christian orthodoxy in the West a tendency towards subordination of the Holy Spirit to the Son. They stress some far-reaching consequences of filioquism, especially in the area of ecclesiology. If the Son is the principle of procession of the Holy Spirit (*Filioque*), then christological sacramentalism prevails over pneumatological prophetism, the Church hierarchy gains the upper hand of freedom, the Petrine ministry in the Church dominates over Pauline ministry, the common good, objectified in juridical terms, surpasses the absolute value of human person. Thus filioquistic problems brought about the decrease of the importance of pneumatological aspect of the Church. Precisely in this obliteration of the whole pneumatological dimension of the Church the Orthodox discern not only one of the main theological causes of the schism between the Christian East and West, but also one of the basic reasons of schism within the Western Church in 16th century²¹.

²⁰ See footnote 1.

²¹ For instance N. A. Nissiotis, *Die Theologie der Ostkirche im ökumenischen Dialog*, Stuttgart 1968, 65; O. Clément, *Ecclesiologie orthodoxe et dialogue oecuménique*, *Contacts* 15 (1963) no. 42, 89—106, esp. 97.

Orthodox historiosophers detect two phenomena in the drama of the Reformation: on the one hand the research for a personal fullness of life in the Holy Spirit (= the vertical apostolicity of the Church), and on the other a partial paralyzing of this research through filioquistic problems, in which the Reformers remained in spite of all entangled. The Reformation has in fact failed to appreciate a mutual relationship between the Church as a christological institution and the Church as a pneumatological event. As a result of this, the Reformers were inclined to reduce the person to the individual, and by doing so they had impoverished the very idea of the Church as a theandric reality on behalf of a purely existential faith. From Orthodox point of view, this tendency still manifests itself not only in "subjectivizing" the mystery of the Eucharist on the level of an existential faith, but also in stressing a subjective character of the encounter with God and of the miracle of conversion (especially in the doctrine of predestination)²².

In Orthodox view it is precisely this entanglement of the Christian West in filioquistic problems, which has produced some fatal after-effects. Since then the West as a whole has been exposed to the danger of losing a true theological balance. This situation gave finally rise to two contrary forms of christomonism in the Catholic and Protestant theology.

From Orthodox point of view, traditional Catholic ecclesiology was too much institutional and hierarchical; it lacked profound Trinitarian foundations, and first of all pneumatology. That is why the Orthodox often have the impression that the role of the Holy Spirit has been to some extent subordinated to the Church as an institution. Whereas the function of the whole community of the Church was reduced to its minimum, a prominent role was assigned to the magisterium as an external criterion of certainty in matters of faith. Some Orthodox theologians think, that the lack of profound and consistent pneumatology is a weak point of the ecclesiology of Vatican II as well. It is true that the Council documents mention several times the Holy Spirit. The Orthodox are of the opinion, however, that this is not enough for the acknowledgement of the full role of the Holy Spirit in ecclesiology²³. The fact is, nevertheless, that some of them were pleased with the Council's idea of a supernatural sense of the faith, imprinted by the Holy Spirit, on the hearts of the faithful who in their universal agreement cannot err in matters of belief (cf. *Lumen gentium*, 12). At least in this point

²² O. Clément, *Ecclesiologie orthodoxe...*, 103.

²³ See N. A. Nissiotis, *Was bedeutet das Zweite Vatikanische Konzil für uns Orthodoxe?*, in: *Was bedeutet das II. Vatikanische Konzil für uns...?*, Basel 1966, 157—188, esp. 163—164; id., *Die Theologie der Ostkirche*, 66—67.

the Council drew near to a traditional Orthodox doctrine²⁴. The future possibility of mutual understanding remains therefore open.

Better understanding of the reasons of critical attitude of many Orthodox theologians towards Catholic doctrine would require a detailed presentation of the main points of Orthodox ecclesiology. All we can do in this paper is just to draw attention to some specific aspects of this question. According to some Orthodox theologians, a christomonistic tendency manifests itself in Catholic theology above all in the approach to the question of the criterion of truth in the Church. They think, that precisely here the danger of one-sided christocentric interpretation of some ecclesiological truths becomes clearly noticeable. In the light of Orthodox tradition, the problem of truth in the Church involves first of all the whole theology of the Holy Spirit. As a matter of fact, this is one of the most important problems of the ecumenical dialogue between Orthodoxy and Catholicism. Many Orthodox theologians believe, that in Roman-Catholic doctrine the ultimate criterion of truth is identified too much with the intervention of the Teaching Office of the Church or with papal definition. The elements of preliminary consultation and agreement on the part of the community of the Church appear here only before the proclamation of definition. From Orthodox point of view, the entire Western approach to the problem of the Holy Spirit is determined by the categories of Latin theology, and does not sufficiently take into account the Eastern tradition. In the light of this tradition, the bishops have the authority to express the teaching of the Church, but this authority is limited by the agreement of the Church as a whole. All proclamation of truth by the magisterium takes always place within the *sensus ecclesiae* and synodal structure of the Church. The sense of the faith of the Church should preserve the possibility of manifesting itself not only before the proclamation of a definition, but also after it. It is clear, that the proclamation of truth belongs exclusively to the hierarchical magisterium of the Church. Nevertheless the charisma of truth (*charisma veritatis*), belonging to the magisterium of the bishops is only then active, when the truth is really at stake. The mere fulfillment of canonical conditions of the proclamation of truth does not yet constitute an authentic guarantee of the truth. Only the process of reception, which involves the entire Church allows to properly recognize the truth²⁵.

²⁴ For instance K. T. Ware, *Primacy, Collegiality, and the People of God*, *Eastern Churches Review* 3 (1970) 18—29, esp. 28; O. Clément, *Après Vatican II: Vers un dialogue théologique entre catholiques et orthodoxes*, *La pensée orthodoxe* 13 (1968) 39—52, esp. 45.

²⁵ See O. Clément, *Ecclésiologie orthodoxe*, 93, 102.

It is undeniable, that in spite of many debates on the question of reception, Orthodox theologians have not yet arrived at a unanimous interpretation of this complex ecclesiastical reality. There are still serious differences in this matter to be dealt with²⁶. Nevertheless, many of them agree, that the doctrinal definitions require the reception of the Church as a whole, in order to be considered as a true expression of the apostolic Tradition. The proclamation of truth by the bishops, especially at a Council, must then be verified by the consensus of the People of God. This happens in the life itself of the Church community. The criterion of truth in the Church can only be a free consensus of personal consciousness of the faithful, open to the action of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit has been given to the Church as a whole. Each member of the People of God becomes "pneumatophoros" thanks to the pneumatological nature of the sacraments of initiation. Although the promulgation of doctrinal definitions belongs to the charisma of the bishops, the People of God as a whole has also the mission to protect and defend the truth²⁷.

In the light of the above remarks it becomes clear, why the Orthodox treat with mistrust all external criteria of certainty, as contrary to an authentic understanding of the action of the Holy Spirit in the Church. They believe that the ultimate criterion of truth is God himself, Christ, and the Holy Spirit. All other criteria serve only a false certainty, and obscure the true faith. According to J. Meyendorff, the entire Western ecclesiological problem, since the sixteenth century, turned around the opposition of two criteria, two references of doctrinal security (*Sola Scriptura* on the one hand, the infallible magisterium on the other). "In Orthodoxy, he goes on, no need for, or necessity of, such a security was ever really felt, for the simple reason that the living Truth is its own criterion"²⁸. In Orthodox view, the certainty of faith is attained only in mutual interacting of constant interpretation of the Gospel, and of the life of the Church community, guided by the Holy Spirit.

To sum up, one can say that in the light of Orthodox theology the principle of monistic christocentrism is altogether insufficient, and most of all in the area of ecclesiology. Christocentrism is considered to be in itself an inadequate principle of interpretation also in Orthodox teaching about man, grace, deification (theosis), Tradition, worship etc. Orthodox theologians insist that christo-

²⁶ See my article: *Die ekklesiale Rezeption in der Sicht der orthodoxen Theologie*, *Theologie und Glaube* 65 (1975) no. 4, 250—266.

²⁷ See the Encyclical Letter of the Eastern Patriarchs, addressed to the pope Pius IX in 1848 (Mansi 40, 378).

²⁸ J. Meyendorff, *The Meaning of Tradition*, in: *Scripture and Ecumenism*, Pittsburgh Pa. 1965, 51; i d. *Rome and Orthodoxy*, 143—145.

centric interpretation be always confronted with pneumatology and the entire doctrine of the Trinity.

According to Orthodox theologians, the danger of monistic christocentrism has also been apparent in Protestant ecclesiology, which tends to undervalue the importance of the Church as an institution, and emphasizes the invisibility of the Church as an event. This christomonistic tendency manifests itself there above all in docetic and spiritualistic understanding of Christ's presence in the Church, beyond any institution. The unity in Christ is supposed to be realized thanks to the personal faith and not require any institutional form of expression within a historical community. Everything seems to be based directly on Christ himself. The role of the Holy Spirit is in fact reduced to acting for the sake of personal salvation of the individual faithful. The Orthodox think, that this kind of emancipation of the individual leads ultimately to the destruction of the Church unity and deprives of any ecclesiological pneumatology. That is why in present-day ecumenical discussions they often ask the reformed Christians the question, whether they take with all seriousness into account the theandric reality of the Church²⁹.

From this point of view, Orthodox theologians judge very severely the attempt at christological concentration, undertaken on Protestant side by so-called "God-is-dead" theology. They see in it "a kind of christomonistic natural theology", which confines itself to a general affirmation of Christ's presence in the world, but does not try to understand it in connection with the whole mystery of the incarnation. This theology has also denied the very existence of the Church as the permanent presence of Christ in human history; it shows no sign of pneumatological dimension. Christology has been humanized in a new monophysitic way, contrary to the spirit of the ancient monophysitism. Christ is considered here only as a perfect man, who approves the aspirations of humanity for liberation and development. According to some Orthodox theologians, this christomonistic inclination is characteristic of the whole orientation of so-called new, or radical theology, which is in fact a kind of "pan-christology"³⁰.

Thus we have come to the conclusion that every type of monistic christocentrism constitutes for Orthodox consciousness a very serious problem indeed. In the two above mentioned forms of chri-

²⁹ See N. Nissiotis, *Die Theologie der Ostkirche*, 65, 67, 71; O. Clément, *Ecclésiologie orthodoxe*, 104.

³⁰ N. Nissiotis, *Die Theologie der Ostkirche*, 67, 70—71, S. S. Harakas, *An Orthodox Evaluation of the 'New Theology'*, *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 12 (1967) 340—368; T. Stylianopoulos, *New Theology and the Orthodox Tradition*, *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 14 (1970) 136—154.

stocentrism, Orthodox theologians discern first of all the lack of ecclesiological pneumatology and of its visible expression in the charismatic structure of the Church. They think that the danger of christomonism can only be avoided through serious taking into account the properly understood theology of the Holy Trinity. It is not enough to devote to each divine Person a special chapter. This sort of schematic doctrine of the Trinity does not yet provide a sufficient basis for theology, and particularly for ecclesiology. From theological point of view one must distinguish the work of the three divine Persons, and ask the question of how the divine plan of salvation has been fulfilled in time. Still one should maintain the unity of all three Persons and not to separate the action of one of them from the working of two other Persons.

III. Towards Christocentric and Pneumatological Theology

According to Orthodox tradition, a christocentric orientation of theological thinking requires at the same time a pneumatological, and in consequence, a fully trinitarian approach. This results from the very nature of Orthodox understanding of pneumatology and of its role in the whole of Christian theology. The doctrine of the Holy Spirit is not to be understood as an isolated treatise or chapter in Orthodox dogmatics. It is rather "a comment to the whole revelation of the Trinity"³¹. It explains the trinitarian activity of God, the life of the Church, her worship and the mystery of man, regenerated in Christ. In this respect, pneumatology belongs to the very centre of Christian theology; it cannot be reduced to a certain amount of formulas, or to any particular dogma. Theology as a whole is, by its very nature, a pneumatological theology. Christ's mystery becomes real in man and manifests itself only by the acting of the Holy Spirit. Pneumatology, understood in this way, is in consequence an interpretation of the whole revelation of the Trinity; it points constantly out to the presence of increated divine energies, bringing about the salvation of mankind.

It is worth noting that the already mentioned Orthodox report from Cernica (1974), which deals with the question of centrality of Christ, talks at once about the work of the Holy Spirit in the entire world. The report lays a particular emphasis on the role of the Holy Spirit in the incarnation of the Logos, and in the process of spiritual transformation and regeneration of man by Christ. It recalls that a new relationship between the Creator and man, established by the Logos comes to its perfection through 'the

³¹ N. A. Nissiotis, *Pneumatologie orthodoxe*, in: *Le Saint-Esprit*, Genève 1963, 86; i d., *Die Theologie der Ostkirche*, 64—65.

energies of God", effected by the Holy Spirit. Orthodox theologians drew also attention to the role of the Spirit in establishing the community of the Church, in sensitizing us for union among Christians and between Christians and the others. The Holy Spirit opens the human being to God and to „the mystery of the brother"; it is He who makes us sensitive to hear those who suffer and are oppressed, and who penetrates the entire material cosmos. Confessing Christ today, Christians call all people to become sensitive to the work of the Holy Spirit in the entire world. The Church already anticipates the eschatological era, for she participates in the first-fruits of the Spirit, which are the source of hope and the power for advancing the whole of humanity towards the coming Kingdom of God³².

No wonder that some Orthodox theologians not only develop the theology of the Holy Spirit within the frame of the doctrine of the Trinity, but also a "pneumatological christology", "pneumatological ecclesiology", "pneumatology of worship", and "pneumatological anthropology"³³. This means, that for the Orthodox consciousness the pneumatological approach is equally important way of interpreting the Revelation as christological interpretation. In accordance with the whole of Eastern tradition, Orthodox theologians are not inclined to accept unnecessary delimitations and divisions. Orthodox thinking seems to be more comprehensive and synthetic. In most cases it does not know those oppositions and distinctions, which are frequently in the use of Western theologians.

Now let us come back once again to some ecclesiological problems, especially to those which are the most controversial among Christians, in order to become more familiar with Orthodox understanding of relationship between christological and pneumatological interpretation. In Orthodox tradition the doctrine of the Trinity is considered to be a clue of equilibrium between the idea of the Church as sacramental hierarchical institution (the Body of Christ) and the concept of the Church as prophetic freedom in the Holy Spirit (the Church of the Holy Spirit). For if the Father is the only source (*archè*) of divinity, the eternal generation of the Son and the procession of the Holy Spirit are inseparable and related to each other. Analogically, a christological and ministerial aspect of the Church, and her pneumatological, personal and prophetic dimension are mutually linked with each other, in similar way as christology is inseparable from pneumatology. The Church is in fact one and the same mystery of 'spiritual body' (*soma pneumatikòn*) of Christ, i.e. the entire humanity permeated through the

³² See footnote 1.

³³ See N. Nissiotis, *Die Theologie der Ostkirche*, 64—85; id., *Pneumatologie orthodoxe*, 91—105.

energies of the Holy Spirit. The Church exists by the power of redemptive act of Christ, but unceasingly actualised in time by the Holy Spirit³⁴.

The whole of ecclesiology cannot be reduced therefore to the christological aspect of the Church. Orthodox ecclesiological tradition is characterized by its epicletic approach, noticeable above all in some Church Fathers, St. Gregory Palamas and in so-called *Philokalia*. The emphasis is laid there on the experience of, and the prayer for, the coming of the Holy Spirit. The hierarchical and institutional aspect of the Church is viewed by the Orthodox both in christological and pneumatological perspective. The Church as the Body of Christ is at the same time the eternal Pentecost³⁵.

It seems that V. Lossky was the first among Orthodox theologians, who initiated this sort of "dialectic ecclesiology", in which the economy of Christ and the economy of the Holy Spirit are organically connected with each other. According to him, the Church has two inseparable aspects, i.e. christological and pneumatological, organic and personal. The unity of the Church results from the very essence of the action of Christ, who has deified the human nature as such. On the other hand, the Holy Spirit is the author of divinization of every human person thanks to a particular relationship to the plurality of these persons. In this respect, the structural, necessary and static dimension of the Church should be a christological one, whereas the personal, free and dynamic dimension ought to be pneumatological. Under the influence of critical reception of his ideas, Lossky was compelled to modify his opinion. He removed then the opposition between the aspect of necessity or stability in the work of Christ, and the aspect of dynamic freedom in the economy of the Holy Spirit. He also explained, that the Church in her christological aspect had manifested herself as the continuation of the humanity of Christ. Besides the economy of the Son of God, who has recapitulated in Himself the unity of human nature there is also in the Church the economy of the Holy Spirit, who addresses himself to each free human person. This dimension determines in consequence a pentecostal or pneumatological aspect of the Church. Thanks to the unity of human nature and the plurality of human persons the Church is the mystery in the image of the Trinity³⁶.

³⁴ O. Clément, *Ecclésiologie orthodoxe*, 95—96.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 91.

³⁶ V. Lossky, *Theologie mystique de l'Eglise de l'Orient*, Paris 1944, 2nd ed. 1960, 131—169, 171—192; *id.*, *La conscience catholique. Implications anthropologiques du dogme de l'Eglise*, *Contacts* 15 (1963) no. 42, 80—85. See also some critical remarks of G. Florovsky, *Le Corps du Christ vivant. Une interprétation orthodoxe de l'Eglise*, in: *La Sainte Eglise universelle*, Neuchâtel 1948, 9—57, *id.*,

This basic insight found later acceptance among such theologians as O. Clément and N. A. Nissiotis. They warn of the danger of unilaterally christocentric approach to theological problems in general, and ecclesiological in particular. In their view, the christological interpretation does not reflect the entire reality of the Church. One of the main ecumenical problems concerning ecclesiology is considered to be the question of the relationship of reciprocity between the Son and the Holy Spirit, in order to overcome the unilateral subordination. Christology and pneumatology cannot be opposed to each other; although they are to be distinguished, nevertheless they remain mutually subordinated. Pneumatology cannot be absorbed by christology and vice versa. The christological aspect of the Church (the presence of the risen Christ in the 'mysteries' as witnessed to by the apostolic succession of the episcopate) always remains inseparable from her pneumatological dimension (freedom, event, prophecy)³⁷.

It is precisely in this sort of "pneumatological christology" that Orthodox theologians see an effective remedy both for christomonism and "pneumatomonism". A pneumatological christology does not allow to introduce any division within one personal God. It admits only the difference in power, way of acting, and manifestation of the grace of God through Christ in the Holy Spirit. All comes from the Father, who is the source, power and purpose of all, but is realized through the action of the two other Persons.

The idea of the centrality of Christ has been very popular among Orthodox theologians. On the one hand, they acknowledge its great value, and all bold syntheses of Orthodox thought referred to in the first part of our study give evidence thereof. On the other hand, however, many Orthodox theologians firmly believe that an integral interpretation of faith can never be an exclusively christological interpretation. This results from the conviction, that the whole economy of salvation is by its very nature the economy of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Many Orthodox theologians object to accepting the principle of an exclusive christocentrism. While they appreciate a christological orientation of contemporary theology, the emphasis is laid at the same time on the constant confrontation with pneumatological and trinitarian principles. In this consists the originality of the idea of christocentrism in Orthodox theology.

In our study we tried to draw a particular attention to ecclesiology, which remains the most controversial issue among Christian denominations. It seems that Orthodox appeal for overcoming

Christ and His Church, Suggestions and Comments, in: *L'Eglise et les Eglises*, Chevetogne 1955, vol. II, 159—170.

³⁷ N. Nissiotis, *Die Theologie der Ostkirche*, 74—75; O. Clément, *Ecclesiology orthodoxe*, 95—97, 103; id., *Après Vatican II...*, 47.

christomonism and taking equally into account pneumatological aspects of the truths of faith has in present ecumenical situation very positive significance. No doubt that the task of full integration of these two aspects belongs to the future generations of theologians, open in higher degree to the richness of theological tradition of other Christian denominations.