

Dimitrios Tselenghidis, *Grace and Freedom in The Patristic Tradition of the 14th Century*, translated by Prof. Daniel Pupăză PhD, Doxologia Publishing House, Iași, 2015, 171pp.

The author, professor at the “Aristotle” University in Thessalonica and associate professor at several European universities, teaching Dogmatica, especially soteriological, ecclesiological and spirituality problems, visited our country, lecturing in some theological schools, having great respect for the Romanians, having worked with many students and teachers during some programmes of post-university studies.

The content of this present work was conceived in three parts, having an introduction, an actual main body and an epilogue, with a consistently added bibliography representing titles of works written by the Holy Fathers and religious writers, then some books and recent studies- even contemporary ones- translations from German and Romanian and also having a general and scriptural reference index.

The introduction announces a later developed theme, that is the relationship between grace and freedom, a relation that “has not preoccupied, in a synodal manner, the Orthodox Church”, for the 14th century this problem bore the mark of the western theology and humanism which tended toward secularism, by separating theology from anthropology which was speaking about a liberating autonomy. Only an objective reference upon the unitary patristic research can shed a light upon the problem which is present even today in the world we live; even so, it is God’s world in which His Son was sent, that is why the author refers to “Christ’s Life” and to some ideas belonging to Nicholas Cabasilas, especially on the reality of the unification of Christ’s Church members, during both the synergic act present at the liturgical participation and the process of hisiastic palamitic deification.

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In the first chapter called “Onthology of Divine Grace and of Human Freedom” it is about divine grace and the manifestation of human freedom within this frame, firstly in its patristic significance found in the Old Testament, referring to Moses and Elijah and to the graceful “light”, then referring to the beginnings of the Christian era, through the incarnation of the Word- both Testaments remaining in a liturgical connection, filled with a “bounty” of grace. As a matter of fact, the language, the patristic terminology of the 14th century uses many expressions which show the gradual revelation of grace, as if coming from an infinite spring but expressing only the attributes of grace and not its essence, as uncreated energy that connects God with the deified humanity. He reveals Himself where there exists a pastoral opening. Freedom is, from the beginning, a characteristic feature of the human being, a way of existence owed to the connection with the Creator, through “image”. Free will is onthological for man, as given, and the choice reason does in any situation shows the connection between mind and will, hence we speak about responsibility and reward. St. Gregory Palamas shows that man remains with God only when he has “his will untied from any necessity” and that any negative influence challanging man wins only by deception or slyness. Our Holy Mother of Jesus was able to show a unique force of reason and will therefore God could work through her and she accepted His will.

In the second chapter the theme of man’s enslavement and onthological liberation is treated, that is, the characteristic features of the charismatic disenslavement within the Church. Sin degrades our nature, as Cabasilas says, preparing an end. By accepting a sinful state, living in sin, we dehumanize, we even get to be demonized which is an extreme form of enslavement. This deviation withdraws us from God. We cannot have grace in us and apprehend death as being nothing but a passage. Grace does not leave us but it is left behind when we speak about death as being “the only one, last and eternal”. Liberation comes from Christ. The Word has asumed the sinful nature and made it “sinless”. As Palamas says, He didn’t use His power brutally, tyrannically but with humbleness and justice. All the events in Jesus Christ’s earthly life have a clear direction: man’s salvation. Charismatic adoption is onthological and, actually, is a rebirth by communion with their whole complete being. The character of the charismatic liberty refers to asuming the uncreated energies, to the necessity of them being present in the life of a consenting man and this

represents life in and within Christs. Since Baptism we integrate ourselves in the mystical Body and since then we live a reality of liberty according to which we will be judged. Her is an escatological perspective of working in freedom with the divine grace.

The last chapter presents in five subpoints the participation of the man- set free to the divine grace and touches the theme of the following consequences in order to reach a state of deification. The sacraments give grace, the efficiency of these “vehicles” of grace are diverse and specific.

The initiation sacraments, the Baptism, the Anointing and the Eucharist express a dynamic of expiation, conferring life, motion and spiritual existence. The man liberated from sin must be framed on a different reality, from now on he “breathes” with the help of these renovating powers, even when he is only an infant in the case of children’s christening.

The beginning of working with grace takes place in the context in which man’s pure heart is consenting, restraining himself, living virtuously, receiving abundantly and usefully what comes from God. That is why, it is a personal participation. It has had its beginnings since ever but now it is from Christ through the Holy Spirit. What about us? Do we take part at the whole uncreated godly Grace? No, we do not. Only Christ has got this capacity. This experience is explained by Palamas, exemplifyind with the solar ray that that we enjoy, sensing its warmth without being burnt. Certainly it is not a usual relationship and feeling because it happens only in a supernatural way and only to the worthy. They became temples, lively bodies, that is both elements receive the Holy Grace and the care to remain in this state must have priority.

In the last subchapter of this last part we are revealed the last step of working together and the effects of unification with the divine grace, that is, the deification. The key to grow up to this stage is love- in prayer, in action, in any deed and thought. Transcending the initiation phase in life with grace brings about new experiences in our life, therefore, speaking about the prayer that calls for the uncreated light, Palamas says that the mind is “charismatically united with God” appreciating it but not being able to express it so as to be understood. It surpasses any reason. Thus, unity with God is only possible for us through the uncreated grace. In this sense, St. Maxim the Confessor says that deification is “enipostatic illumination”.

In the end of the work, it is concluded that the deified man, reaching this spiritual stage, may be called “uncreated” for the uncreated grace within him, like Melchizedek, the one “without a beginning of days, without an end of life”, surpassing time. They will be receptacles of grace even in the future life.

The epilogue contemplates the fact that the Holy Fathers in the 14th century expressed “a model of teandric humanism” and an “uncreated perspective” for the chance given to the free man to work together with the divine grace.

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